Integrating curriculum through thematic units for first grade

Terry L. Gotreau

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California State University
San Bernardino

INTEGRATING CURRICULUM THROUGH THEMATIC UNITS
FOR FIRST GRADE

A Project Submitted to
The Faculty of the School of Education
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the
Degree of
Master of Arts
in
Education: Reading Option

By

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1990
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INTEGRATING CURRICULUM THROUGH LITERATURE
FOR FIRST GRADE

Terry L. Gotreau, M. A.
California State University, San Bernardino, 1990

Statement of the Problem
Reading at the first grade level has been taught almost exclusively through use of the basal for the last seventy years. The promise that using the basal and mastering skills would make readers of all children was one that has never been fulfilled.

By adopting the English-Language Arts Framework, the State of California has committed to a literature based program in which students are encouraged to read and write. Current research indicates that the use of a strong literature based language arts program that can be integrated throughout the curriculum will be beneficial to children as they learn to read and write. Thematic units is one way of integrating literature across the curriculum.

Procedure
This project is based on a whole language philosophy of the teaching of language arts through the use of thematic units. Thematic units help to provide students with memorable experiences with the literature. At the same time, it provides an interdisciplinary experience which encompasses
all focuses of curriculum. Students work individually, in small groups, and as a whole class in utilizing literature to learn new math concepts, social values, scientific concepts and procedures, and other integrated curricular objectives. In addition, students are actively engaged in reading and writing about literature throughout the project.

The thematic units in this project utilize the Into, Through, and Beyond format. Children are introduced to the topic in a number of ways. Then, the children read and discuss the literature. Finally, they are actively involved in a variety of activities that help in creating a memorable experience with the theme.

Results

The purpose of this project is to encourage children in their reading and writing as they explore a theme using quality literature. An integrated curriculum will help to provide children with an enjoyable and hopefully unforgettable learning experience.
Dedicated with love to my husband, Bob, and my three children, Scott, Tammy, and Monica, without whose love and patience this project would never have been possible.
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INTRODUCTION

For nearly seventy years reading at the first grade level has involved the mastery of one skill after another while learning to read stories with controlled vocabulary from the basal reader. Teachers have been lead to believe that if they follow the basal manual as it is written, students will become readers. Furthermore, teachers have been told that if they follow the manual, just as it is written, and students fail to learn to read, the fault lies not with the teacher but with the students (Goodman, Shannon, Freeman, & Murphy, 1987).

Unfortunately, the use of basals has done little to improve the literacy level of the children in our schools. Because the basal brings with it a wealth of extraneous materials in the form of workbooks and skill sheets, very little time is spent in actual reading. Research indicates that children spend an average of seven or eight minutes a day in silent reading (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1984). As a result, many children have graduated from the school system and never really learned how to read or write.

Use of the basal does not allow teachers to make professional decisions about the procedures and materials needed to meet specific student needs. Many districts and school-site administrators have been mandating that teachers use the scripted lesson from the basal manual to teach reading. Smith (1981) questions this:

The decision to be made is whether responsibility for teaching children to write and read should rest with people or programs, with
teachers or technology. This is not a matter of selecting among alternative methods of teaching children the same things...The issue concerns who is to be in control of classrooms, the people in the classrooms (teachers and children) or the people elsewhere who develop programs. Different answers will have different consequences (p. 635).

By adopting the **English Language Arts Framework** (1987) the state of California has made a commitment to put control of the classroom back into the hands of teachers and students. This framework speaks of "revitalizing English-language arts instruction through a literature-based curriculum" (p. v). A literature based program does not contain the scripted lesson of the basal. Nor does it include workbooks and mastery tests that must be completed by every child. It provides the teacher the opportunity to use literature in order to promote listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the classroom (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1984).

Several authorities concur that literature should be used with a language arts program. Goodman (1986b) suggests that the basal program is quite inadequate. He feels that basal readers are organized around a controlled vocabulary. This makes learning to read really the act of learning to recognize words. Goodman cites this as only one of many reasons for moving towards a literature based language arts curriculum. Routman (1988) speaks of the success of children who have participated in literature based programs. Typically, two out of five of her low ability first graders tested as high ability readers by the end of the year. Two would test
as average ability, and only one remained as a low ability reader. Many professionals have shown strong support for the use of literature in the last twenty-five years (Koeller, 1981). These people sense that literature provides children with a wide range of reading experiences that cannot be found in a basal. Children's enthusiasm for learning to read becomes more pronounced when literature is used instead of the basal (Rhodes, 1981).

A literature-based language arts curriculum focuses on integrating the reading of literature with listening, speaking, and writing. Children are exposed to print in a wide variety of contexts, as well as an assortment of genres. Children are actively involved with the use of language and are exposed to critical thinking and problem solving (Jensen & Roser, 1987).

Integration of the language arts program with literature is only the beginning. Literature can and should be used to integrate all subject areas across the curriculum. Trachtenburg and Feruggia (1989) note: "Science, math, consumer awareness, and critical thinking are frequently neglected in first grade because priority is given to teaching reading. Integrating these subjects with the literature saves time and provides the meaningful context necessary for retention and transfer" (p. 287). The use of thematic units provides the springboard for implementing literature across the curriculum. Children experience the theme throughout the day in all aspects of learning. Retention of the ideas imparted through the theme are retained and stored for future use.

Through thematic units developed by the Into, Through, and Beyond format children can learn how literature can be used in all aspects of curriculum. For this project, the Into explores what the readers already
know about the subject. It looks at the background experience students bring to the topic. The purpose is to lay the foundation so that students will have meaningful encounter with the literature. The Through involves that actual reading of the literature and a thorough discussion as the reading takes place. The purpose of the Beyond is to provide students with a deeper understanding of what has been read. At the same time, it allows students to apply some of the new found knowledge.

Honig (1988) argues in favor of thematic units which follow the Into, Through, and Beyond format.

A powerful reading program must attempt to involve students in the excitement of learning. It must offer them an avenue through which they can move into, through, and beyond what they are reading to a new understanding of themselves and the world around them. Emphasizing reading and literature in our schools can increase students' success in all academic areas, as well as increase their success in becoming effective and creative citizens (p. 236).

The need for using Into, Through, and Beyond lessons should not focus solely on language arts. These lessons can be used to move literature throughout the curriculum. Goodman, Smith, Meredith and Goodman (1987) propose that literacy will develop as it is used, and teachers need to provide opportunities for growth throughout the curriculum.

First grade is that magical year when most children realize for the first time that they are able to read. Children at this age need to be exposed to a wealth of literature, some of which can be read on their own while other literature is to be read to them by older children and adults. First
Grades need the opportunity to experience the literature so that they can develop a love for it, as well as a working knowledge of how language and literature works. Providing opportunities for children to read, write, listen, and speak about literature by means of plays, through music, problem solving, and learning about history and geography will enable these children to become literate at an early age.
As I have proceeded through the courses in the Masters in Reading Program, I have seen a change in my personal philosophy in the teaching of reading. One and a half years ago when I was asked to state my position on the Reading Theories Continuum, I found myself somewhere between skills and a whole language teacher. How I had been taught to read was deeply ingrained in my memory. I felt a definite need to teach those same skills that I had been taught and that had helped to make me a successful reader. However, as I worked with children, it became evident that they needed more than skills to become real readers. Some children knew the sounds for all of the letters and many of the rules governing reading, yet they could not pick up a book from the shelf and read it. Some children were capable of quoting spelling and grammar rules, yet they were unable to write as they were too concerned about breaking one of the rules.

As I became a "kid watcher" I began to see my attitude change. Goodman (1986) sees whole language teachers as those who will alter their plans based on kid-watching. Risk-taking became easier as I allowed the students the opportunities to make decisions about their reading and writing. Those books on the shelf that the students had been unable to read were dusted off and I began to read them with the children. They became excited about reading a real book rather than another story from the basal. Reading was no longer that dreaded time of day, but a time that we all looked forward to eagerly.

Before I became a first grade teacher, I questioned the kindergarten
teachers about what I might expect if I asked my students to start writing on the first day of school. I was told that they would cry and be frustrated as they were not prepared to do this. Throwing caution to the wind, I went ahead and tried it. Several of the children were upset at first until we discussed how using pictures could be a way of writing a story. We looked at wordless picture books and they learned how to tell stories from them. Then they set about writing their stories. Imagine my surprise when a few of my students were able to produce not only well illustrated stories, but also some text using inventive spelling. Needless to say, writing is now an everyday occurrence in my classroom.

Although I am still in transition, I feel that I am coming closer to the whole language model everyday as I continue to experience new aspects of it with my students. Like Routman (1988),

I don't always use thematic units; I occasionally teach from part to whole; I am still struggling hard to integrate more areas of curriculum with the language arts—an idea that is very difficult to attain. I anticipate that this struggle will go on for years (p. 26).

The project that I have designed reflects my theoretical model. Students were encouraged to take an active role in determining the topic for the project through a classroom vote. Throughout the project, students will be given choices. The small group each child participates in will be determined by what that child would like to know more about on the topic. Children will be given the opportunity to explore the topic through a wide range of activities from all areas of the curriculum.

Children will be working on whole class, small group, and
individual activities as they read, write, speak, and listen to the topic. The classroom environment will be such that children will be encouraged to take risks. Goodman (1986) states that all "learning involves risk." The students will be encouraged to become risk takers as they explore a wide variety of materials. They will be evaluating their own work in an effort to be responsible for their own learning.

Rich (1985) sees a whole language classroom as being a place where a teacher cares. I will be a "kid-watcher" so that I can determine what changes might need to be made. I will be conferencing with children as they read and write. My classroom will be child-centered rather than teacher-directed. I hope that this will help to provide a setting where children can learn all they want to know about birds and bunnies.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Current research indicates that a strong connection exists between the reading and writing processes. Children who are good readers tend to be good writers. Children who write well, tend to read well (Goodman, 1986a). Reading and writing are enhanced through literature which is the base for a good literature program according to researchers. Literature provides children with the opportunities to experience a number of different authors, styles, characters, and genres. Research suggests that literature can and should be integrated across the curriculum. One method of integrating literature is through the use of thematic units which utilize the Into, Through, and Beyond lesson format.

READING AND WRITING

Calkins (1983) researched writing at the primary level. She wished only to concern herself with writing as much research had already been conducted on children and reading. It soon became apparent to Calkins that reading and writing could not be separated. It was impossible to watch children writing without observing them reading. In order to write, children needed to experience the sounds of what they had written. This was accomplished by reading what had been written.

While writing, children often need to read what they have written in order to give themselves a sense of where they are going with the piece. They need to edit. Sometimes they read simply to avoid having to continue to write. Many children read their writing to share with others what they
have worked so hard to produce.

Calkins noted that students were using skills that had always been identified with reading in producing their writing. As they went through the steps of writing, rewriting, and conferencing, children were looking for main ideas, organizing details, and sequencing ideas. Questions students would ask of themselves or each other always involved the use of a skill that was designated as a reading skill.

Calkins concluded:

Yes, I was wrong to view the two processes of reading and writing as separate. Wrong because writing involves reading, and because it reinforces and develops skills traditionally viewed as reading skills. And I was also wrong because writing can generate a stance toward reading which, regretfully, is rarely conveyed in reading programs. When children are makers of reading, they gain a sense of ownership over their reading (p. 155).

DeFord (1983) recognized reading and writing as supportive and integrated processes that are not isolated skills. Traditionally, reading and writing have been thought of as separate processes which can be broken down into numerous subskills. They are taught and learned in isolation until all of the skills have been mastered.

DeFord conducted a longitudinal study in order to observe how different language environments affect the development of reading and writing strategies. One classroom emphasized phonics, one used a skills approach, and a third used a whole language approach. Children in the phonics classroom were drilled on letter sounds. The skills classroom used
a traditional basal and emphasized the learning of sight words followed by workbook activities to insure that vocabulary was mastered. Activities in the whole language classroom were based on language experience as it related to children's literature. Writing by the children was integrated with the reading. This was the only room in which writing was used to help teach reading.

The results of the study were not surprising. They indicated that the types of materials used in the classroom had a significant effect on the students' writing. DeFord noted that children from the phonics classroom relied heavily on decoding strategies in order to determine unknown words. The children from the skills classroom continually omitted words that they did not know. Children from the whole language classroom worked on language experience activities as well as a children's literature program. Writing was integrated with the reading program. These children were able to read for meaning as they used meaningful substitutions based on experience.

The results of DeFord's study showed that the children in the whole language classroom were moving towards becoming literate by using language in a variety of ways and through many different experiences. The comprehension of the children in the phonics and skills classrooms was not nearly as great as that of the children from the whole language classroom.

Goodman and Goodman (1983) note the interrelationships between reading and writing. They observed that children "use in writing what they observe in reading." Goodman and Goodman suggested that writing
tasks for children should be practical, such as making out shopping lists. This practice allows children to use personal experiences for writing purposes. The writing takes on more meaning when it serves a practical purpose for the author. Activities in which reading and writing take place at the same time help children to realize how important one process is to the other.

In an effort to establish a relationship between reading and writing, Stotsky (1983) examined the findings of several researchers. Stotsky noted that Schonell (1942), Loban (1963), and Fischco (1966) found a high correlation between reading and writing, especially among upper elementary and intermediate school children. The findings suggested that better writers tend to be better readers especially of their own material as well as of other reading material. The research also indicated that children who write well, often read more than poorer writers. Better readers tend to produce more mature writing than poorer readers.

Stotsky (1983) cites studies in which research was conducted to determine how useful writing activities are in improving reading comprehension. The results of these studies showed that in most cases where writing activities were used to improve reading comprehension, significant gains took place. Studies in which the aim was to improve writing through reading experiences instead of by studying the skills of grammar proved to be very beneficial to the students. Finally, studies that used literary models indicated significant gains in writing.

Rowe and Harste (1986) observed pre-school age children as they wrote. They discovered that children of this age react to literacy in the
same way that adults do. Writing involves a certain amount of reading, and reading involves an audience, either the reader listening to himself or another individual or individuals listening to the reader. Children, like adults, are capable of creating meaning as they write even though the casual observer sees the writing as no more than a series of pictures or scribbles. The child is capable of taking ownership of the literacy process by becoming an author.

Rowe and Harste described an Author Cycle in which authors shift from reader to writer to artist to speaker. Authoring is viewed as a process which has no ending point. What is written today may help in solving tomorrow's dilemmas.

Franklin (1988) observed that as children read and write they create meaning. As children become involved in their writing, they learn more about themselves and the real world in which they function. As Franklin worked with kindergarten and first grade Hispanic bilingual children, she noted how these children created personal meaning in art and language experience activities.

In observing the migrant children, Franklin discovered that many brought personal feelings to a story. After listening to "The Gingerbread Boy," one child depicted the loneliness of the old man and old woman after the gingerbread boy ran away. Another child drew a picture of the wolf as he gobbled up the gingerbread boy. This child was amused by the fact that the wolf got the prize and not the old man or woman. Both children convey through drawings the feelings they have as a result of listening to the story.

According to Franklin, some children are enamored by the theme,
while others are more involved with a particular character or perhaps the use of language in a story. These children apply what appeals most to them in their own writing.

Franklin sees that children are able to learn about the functions, process, and conventions of literacy as they read and write stories. By giving children a say in the designing of curriculum, they are allowed to pursue those areas and interests they might have about life. The reading and writing lets them explore their interest areas in depth.

The California English-Language Arts Framework suggests that a relationship exists between reading and writing. "Just as writing is a part of learning to read from the beginning, reading is a part of learning to write" (p. 28). It is important that a language arts curriculum for all school children from kindergarten through high school include numerous opportunities for students to read and write in meaningful contexts. Time should not be wasted on learning skills in isolation or filling in pages of workbooks. It is through an effective language arts program that literacy can be attained.

In summary, research indicates that a strong relationship exists between the processes of reading and writing. Researchers have discovered time and again that children who are better readers are better writers. Children who write well will have a tendency to read well. Children involved in programs that provide numerous opportunities for reading and writing will be the literate adults of tomorrow. Since research indicates a need for children to spend time reading and writing, it is important to look at what is available for this purpose.
Literature Versus Basal Readers

The basal reader has been the cornerstone for the teaching of reading for nearly seventy years. The basal is an all inclusive set of instructional materials designed to teach all children. It is not dependent on a teacher's ability nor is it dependent on a child's capability. It is a carefully designed program based on the learning of skills and carefully controlled vocabulary. It includes all the materials and instructions necessary for producing literacy among children. Although this is the promise of the basal, it has fallen short of its commitment to produce children who can read and write (Goodman, Shannon, Freeman, & Murphy, 1987).

These authors feel that teachers should be given alternatives over using the basal text. They contend that meaningful material, such as real books, should be the focus of a language arts program. They cite how children in other English speaking countries have learned to read and write without using basals from the first day of their schooling.

The current basal textbooks continue to be based solely on skills and phonics. Routman (1988) suggests that the newer basals are only fancier and updated versions of the old ones. The stories are still as dull as ever and the publishers are continuing to use the same controlled vocabulary. These so-called "literature programs" continue to offer numerous worksheets to go along with each chapter in the book. This kind of a program does nothing to make literature enjoyable to children.

Routman contends that the newer basals continue to demean both teachers and students. Teachers are still told exactly how to teach the program. Students are given watered-down or adapted versions of
literature.

Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the key elements in a language arts program according to Routman. These are best accomplished by using a variety of reading materials and genres which can include Big Books, poems, and favorite stories. It also includes various writing experiences such as journals, letters between students, and the composing of stories.

Quality language arts programs involve all uses of language throughout the entire day. Children are given opportunities to use oral and written language as frequently as listening and reading. Since reading is functional, it should include environmental materials such as newspapers, magazines, labels, and directions for games. Weak programs neglect communication and focus on "studying about rather than using language" (Jensen & Roser, 1987).

Since the basal has been the basis of most reading programs for so long, a number of researchers have worked towards determining its worth in the teaching of reading. Some have also explored how writing is affected by reading from the basal.

Basals discourage risk-taking by students. They emphasize aspects of language rather than language as a whole. Basals break reading up into a sequence of skills to be mastered. Reading is isolated from the other aspects of the language process. The amount of time given to actual reading is minimized as time must be spent on learning skills, completing workbook pages, and testing for skill mastery (Goodman, 1986).

In order to determine the value of the basal text, Durkin (1987)
examined the history of the basal. She voiced a concern that professional educators of the 1980s expressed, namely that testing was the mainstay of reading instruction. Assessment procedures indicated in basal manuals were being used to replace reading instruction.

The teaching of reading comprehension became the focus of Durkin's research. Durkin's observations of thirty-nine teachers indicated that less than one per cent of the reading time was actually focused on comprehension. Out of the five basal series reviewed by Durkin, all suggested that their program's chief focus was facilitating, teaching, reviewing, and assessing comprehension. Durkin concluded that using a basal program will do little to improve a student's ability to read.

Since reading and writing are such an integral part of a language arts program, Brown and Briggs (1987) examined the effects of basals on student writing. They noted that many elementary children wrote mechanically as though they were parroting the structure found in the basal.

Brown and Briggs replicated a study of Smith (1982) in which two groups of second grade students used two different basals. One of the basals focused on sentences while the other was more story-oriented. Children who read from the sentence-focused basal used fewer complex sentences when writing, while those reading in the story-oriented basal wrote more realistic stories. The type of reading materials used by children will have a direct influence on the child's writing.

Research indicates that the use of a literature program supports the writing process. Children who are taught to write in a literature based
program reflect a more complex writing style than those who are taught from a basal. Critical thinking and communication skills are enhanced by a literature program.

Using a variety of literature from which children are allowed to pick and choose will help children to develop effective writing concluded Brown and Briggs (1987). Exposure to various types of literature will aid children in broadening their story knowledge.

A study similar to that of Smith (1982) was conducted by Eckhoff (1983). Two different basals were examined. One used the simplified text common to most basal series, while the other used a style similar to literary prose. Like Smith, Eckhoff found that basals affect children's writing style, as they spend more time reading these books than any other kind of book. The writing of the children tended to reflect the type of writing exhibited in the basal they read. The simplified text that is being used by many basal publishers underestimates the capabilities of children. Children need to be exposed to good literary prose so that they have quality examples to emulate in their own writing.

Use of literature in the classroom is the answer to the growing concern over the inadequacies of the basal according to Goodman (1986b). The language in the materials used to teach reading should be both real and comprehensible. Such material will do away with the need to teach phonics and grammar since children will learn these as they make sense of the print. Reading programs should include all types of environmental print. They must demonstrate to children how this print can be used effectively in day to day life both for pleasure and for business.
In summary, research indicates that literature is a vital key to a quality language arts program. Children need to be exposed to good literature as they read and listen. Since research indicates that children tend to write in the same style as the material they read, it is important that they be exposed to good literature. Use of a literature based program will help children in developing critical thinking and communication skills. Children will begin to develop a love for reading when allowed to choose literature instead of the basal.

Is integrating literature across the curriculum an important issue? Is literature best kept as part of a language arts program or can it be used effectively in the teaching of other subject areas? Research involving the use of literature in all areas of the curriculum indicates that it can and should be used in the content areas and mathematics.

Integrated Curriculum

This section will discuss research dealing with the use of literature across the curriculum. Brozo and Tomlinson (1986) found that use of literature in conjunction with a content area text will make a subject more memorable and comprehensible to children. Literature will help in developing children's interest in the subject, which in turn will increase the amount of learning.

Many children can be good readers, but are often faced with difficulty when having to read from a content area text (Brozo & Tomlinson, 1986). This can be due to the fact that these books are usually low interest and non-motivating. Storybooks should continue to be used as children are motivated to read and learn from creative literature.
There are two ways that trade books can be used effectively in the teaching of content area subjects according to Brozo and Tomlinson. The trade books can be read before the text in order to provide the students with the schema for the subject and at the same time to help build interest. The other method of using the trade books would be as a follow up after reading the text in order to elaborate and extend the concepts of the text.

While conducting research on literature, Hennings (1982) noted that many children's books reflect the basic concepts of the social sciences. Some of the children's picture books are developed around themes that relate directly to basic social studies concepts, such as change, justice, and values.

The advantages of using literature to teach social studies includes the fact that children are interested in good stories and can learn the concepts quickly. Stories often provide a new perspective on the concept. Another factor favoring literature is that the messages of stories are often quite subtle. This forces children to form their own conclusions that go beyond the text.

Smardo (1982) cautions that while children's literature can be used effectively in the teaching of science, it should not become a substitute for direct science experiences. Storybooks can be used to arouse interest in a topic. This cannot be accomplished with a factual book. Children's books that deal with scientific concepts can help children distinguish between what is real and what is imaginary. A number of scientific topics which can be explored effectively through literature include animal changes, shadows, insect changes, the moon, plants, seasons, and the weather.
When young children are learning math, they need to learn concepts and relationships through concrete experiences rather than by abstract ideas comments Radebaugh (1981). From the concrete, math should move to the picture stage. Literature can play an important role in this level of math development. Many children's books provide colorful illustrations for learning concepts such as shapes, size, and the counting of objects. Learning the sequence of a story helps prepare children for learning the meaning of ordinal numbers.

Franklin (1988) feels that as children begin to develop meaning about a subject, they often use features from a variety of texts to support their beliefs. These texts include both fictional and nonfictional material. Children can use nonfictional texts to support their expository writing while using fictional stories to create fantasy. Both types of material allow children to explore and create personal meaning.

Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1984) suggest that the idea that reading instruction and subject matter instruction should be integrated is not a new one. However, they note that this type of integration appears in very few classrooms.

One method of integrating literature throughout the curriculum is through use of thematic units. A thematic unit is based on one theme or idea. It includes a number of lessons which use listening, speaking, reading, and writing about the theme in math, literature, and the content areas.

Use of language across the curriculum is not hard to achieve according to Goodman (1986a). Language can be used effectively in the
content areas and math, as well as in a reading or English class. Reading and writing can be integrated across the curriculum through use of thematic units. Units provide the basis for use of language, inquiry, and cognitive development. A thematic unit includes children in the planning of the curriculum and allows them choices of relevant activities.

The integrating of reading and writing into the total day's curriculum will help to facilitate literacy development according to Weaver (1988). This integration is easily facilitated through the use of thematic units. Thematic units can be based on science or social studies themes. Such units can include keeping records, making charts to record information, and learning how to use information resources.

Thematic units can focus on literature. Once a theme has been established a bibliography that includes books about the theme should be established. This type of a unit will provide students with an excellent opportunity for critical reading. Furthermore, concludes Weaver, children can be allowed to compare the quality of a range of books and stories.

A Theme Cycle allows students and teachers to use reading and writing in learning and developing different units of study states Harste, Short, and Burke (1988). Students are encouraged to use what they already know to extend learning into the unknown. Both student and teacher share what they know about a topic. Together they negotiate how they will learn more about this topic.

In summary, evidence for research supports the integration of literature throughout the content areas and math. Children are more interested in learning from literature than from the text. They tend to
remember material better when they have experienced it through literature. Thematic units provide the opportunity for students and teachers to determine the topic for curriculum study. It gives students the chance to make choices in how they will learn more about the topic.

THEMATIC UNIT OVERVIEW

Since reading and writing are such an important part of a language arts program, the thematic units that are included in this project will provide students with numerous opportunities to do both. Children will listen to some stories, read some by themselves, and read others with partners. Choices of what children would like to read will be offered in many instances.

Children will be writing about what they have read as well as what is read to them. They will be writing about how it might feel to be an animal at a certain time of the year or how it might feel to fly like a bird. Children will keep logs as they acquire new knowledge about birds and bunnies.

Literature will be the focus for the thematic units. Children will have the opportunity to work with both factual and fictional materials as well as poetry as they explore the themes. They will use literature as the basis for keeping logs and writing stories. Children will make use of print as they read directions on how to play a game and read a recipe. Children will have the chance to interact with literature as they learn.

The thematic units will be integrated across the curriculum. They will include lessons in reading, writing, speaking, and listening to literature which are the components of a good language arts program.
Math and the content areas will be taught through the literature.

Children will be involved in art projects, musical numbers, and dance steps as they explore the world of birds and bunnies. The integration of the subject areas with a single theme will help to insure that students will learn more about the theme than they will by simply reading a textbook or solving a math problem.
EVALUATION

Evaluation should be an on-going process that involves both formal and informal means of assessment. Formal evaluation includes standardized tests and tests that are designed to determine whether or not a child can use certain skills. Nonformal testing includes "kidwatching," anecdotal records, and collecting samples of work.

One method of formal testing is the standardized test which is useful in determining a child's strengths and weaknesses (Goodman, 1986a). The major drawback to this type of testing is the fact that it focuses on skills used in isolation. Goodman emphasizes that this type of evaluation is very limited as it does not give an adequate picture of how children use skills in the context of a story.

The Report of the Commission on Reading questions the purpose of testing isolated skills. It is believed that if children are capable of comprehending what they read and get meaning form their reading, it is not important whether or not they are capable of testing well on isolated skills. Testing small chunks of information will not help children in achieving meaning which is the reason for reading (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1984).

The California English Language Arts Framework (1987) states that using computers to score tests has reduced evaluation to no more than assigning a number to a child. The Framework calls for a new method of assessment. Tests must reflect the purposes of the curriculum; they must integrate all aspects of language arts including reading, writing, speaking,
and listening. "Good assessment practices will include informal daily activities in which students commend each other for their strengths, teachers create environments in which students can succeed, and parents support their children's progress as part of evaluation" (p. 33).

Goodman (1986a) sees kid-watching as the most reliable means of informal evaluation in a whole language program. Teachers can evaluate as they watch students interact with one another and with the literature.

Another important aspect of on-going evaluation should be the collecting of work samples. This will help the teacher to monitor the progress of individual children. Such collections prove beneficial when conferencing with parents.

Teacher observations are effectively noted by means of anecdotal records kept on each child. This is a helpful means of evaluating student progress.

The most important means of evaluation is not made by the teacher, but a self-evaluation made by each individual student. Self-evaluation allows the child to monitor his or her own progress. Children who are involved in self-assessment will tend to be more conscientious about their work.

Evaluation will be an on-going process throughout this project. The emphasis of the evaluation in the project will be informally based on the feedback provided by each child as s/he explores the theme.

Individual children will conference with the teacher frequently about their reading and writing. The teacher will keep anecdotal records on each of the children. Students will be responsible for evaluating their peers as
they work in groups and help to edit each other's work. Students will also be responsible for evaluating their own work and their participation effort in the project.

The success of the project itself will be evaluated by looking at the enthusiasm generated by the students as they participate in the various activities. Involvement of the students throughout the unit will be assessed by the teacher to determine which parts of the project work and which need more work to be effective.

GOALS

The purpose of this program is to have children acquire a love for quality literature as they explore a theme by means of a variety of learning experiences. The literature will be the motivator for children's writing and the reading of related literature. Another goal will be for children to study scientific and social issues through the literature. Math, physical education, and art will be used as they apply the theme.

OBJECTIVES

1. To provide enjoyable and meaningful experiences with literature.
2. To provide opportunities to use literature in all areas of the curriculum.
3. To provide numerous opportunities to listen, speak, read, and write with literature.
4. To learn content areas through literature.
LIMITATIONS

A major limitation of this project will be access to the literature needed to complete it. As this unit is not based on a core literature list, teachers will need to have access to monies with which to order the materials or to a library which includes all the described materials.

A second possible limitation of the project might be that all of the children in a classroom might not be interested in learning about birds or bunnies. Since this program is designed to motivate children to read and write across the curriculum, it is hoped that each and every child will find some aspect of the project enjoyable.

Both teacher and students will need to be risk takers as they venture forth reading and writing across the curriculum. Teachers will need to learn how to cope with the noise generated by some of the activities. Students will need to interact with literature in ways they may never before have experienced.

Since this project is based on a whole language model, there will be no drilling of skills. Children will learn how to apply the skills by reading and writing about the literature. Children will be evaluated on the knowledge they acquire by demonstrating what they have learned as they write, give oral talks, and participate in different activities.

Teachers and students must be willing to make changes in order to reap the full benefits of this project. In so doing, they will all learn to appreciate and enjoy literature as this is so much more motivational than any basal program. The result will be an increase in reading
comprehension and improved writing that is more complex than that found in the basal.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX
A thematic unit can provide a strong motivation for students in their reading and writing endeavors. It becomes even more motivating for the students when they are allowed to have a say in the selection of the theme to be used throughout the unit. This project, designed for first grade children, consists of two themes. I chose the theme of birds and my students voted on and selected bunnies as a topic of interest to them.

This project has been designed so that all aspects of the curriculum can be explored with literature as the base. Children will read and write about the theme. Science projects and P.E. activities will be developed around the theme. The lessons have been designed using the Into, Through, and Beyond format.

The Birds Unit explores a number of different fictional and non-fictional books, as well as poems, about birds of every type. The focus is not only on one book, but rather on a number of books which are used to develop the concepts about birds across the curriculum.

The Bunnies Unit is based exclusively on the book, The Velveteen Rabbit. Many other fictional and non-fictional books and poems about bunnies are used to extend the story of The Velveteen Rabbit and the theme of bunnies across the curriculum.

All of the children, regardless of ability level, will be capable of actively participating in this project. There will be several opportunities for success for all as they work cooperatively toward learning more about birds and bunnies.
GOALS

Many of the first literary experiences of young children are through animal stories. Some of these stories are realistic portrayals of the animals, while others provide glimpses of fictional animals exhibiting human traits. This unit will familiarize students with different types of birds, answer questions about the unique traits of birds, and help children to develop a sense of respect for birds.

OBJECTIVES

1. To enjoy listening to stories about birds.
2. To read and write about birds.
3. To discover different types, sizes, and colors of birds.
4. To distinguish between factual and fictional materials about birds.
5. To learn about why birds have feathers and why they migrate.
**MATH**
- Writing addition and subtraction problems
- Graphing
- More and less

**LANGUAGE ARTS**
- *READING*: Additional books on birds; poems
- *WRITING*: Keeping logs; make crossword puzzle; write a description of a bird; write stories; write a conversation between birds; write a play
- *LISTENING*: Listen to stories; listen to nonfictional articles; listen to other students
- *SPEAKING*: Predicting; orally describe an art print of a bird; comparing and contrasting birds.

**SCIENCE**
- Predicting
- Demonstrate how a bird’s wing works
- Collect bird feathers

**VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**
- Finger play
- Make a collage of birds
- Sing “The Speckled Bird”
- Charades
- Watch the video “The Runaway Duck”
- Pantomime
- Act out play
- Make props and sets
- Create a mural
- Make bird puppets or masks

**SOCIAL STUDIES**
- Map studies of where different birds are located
- Trace the route of a robin
- Field trip to Mission

**PHYSICAL EDUCATION**
- Make up a dance step to move like a bird
- Game—Some students represent weather conditions, others are birds

**BIRDS**
LESSON 1

SYNOPSIS OF THE STORY:

*Birdsong* by G. Haley

The beautifully illustrated story of an orphan girl called Birdsong who is taken in by the wicked Jorinella. Jorinella has Birdsong play her pipes to attract the birds which Jorinella then captures and sells. Birdsong sets the birds free and is then saved by the birds when Jorinella threatens her life.

INTO

Students will:

1. Make a class list of everything that they know about birds. As new facts are discovered, they will be added to the list.
2. Watch the film *Birds* to learn about how birds nest, care for their young, fly, and move on the ground.
3. Learn the finger play, "Five Baby Birds".
4. Write some addition and subtraction sentences based on the finger play in small group. They will then exchange problems with another group to solve.

THROUGH

Students will:

1. Listen to the story of *Birdsong*. They will make predictions as the story is read.
2. Read *Birdsong*. 
BEYOND

Students will:

1. Keep a log in which to record all new information that is learned about birds throughout the unit.
2. Share the information in the logs with other students in the class.
3. Work in groups of three to create a dance or movement to show how Birdsong was able to enchant the birds. Each group will then teach their dance step to the rest of the class.
4. Make a collage of birds to show that birds come in a variety of sizes and colors.
5. Make a plaster cast of a bird’s footprint which may be found in sand or mud.
6. Additional books that children can read with a partner include:
   - *Flocks of Birds* by Charlotte Zolotow
   - *The Scared One* by Dennis Haseley
   - *Junior Science Book of Bird Life* by G. Pierce
   - *Prince Sparrow* by Mordecai Gerstein
   - *Birds* by Woods Palmer, Jr.
LESSON 2

INTO

Students will:

1. List as many different birds as they are able to think of.
2. Write a description of a favorite bird. They are not to include the name of the bird. Then they will exchange their description with a partner and the partner will try to decide what bird is being described.
3. Describe coloring, size, and unique characteristics of a bird print from Audobon's Birds of America.

THROUGH

Students will learn about a number of different birds by choosing to read five of the following poems from The Random House Book of Poetry for Children edited by Jack Prelutsky:

"The Sandpiper" by Witter Bynner
"Sea Gull" by Elizabeth Coatsworth
"The Duck" by Richard Digance
"The Hen" by Lord Alfred Douglas
"The Hummingbird" by Michael Flanders
"The Night Heron" by Frances Frost
"The Sparrow Hawk" by Russell Hoban
"The Canary" by Ogden Nash
"The Eagle" by Alfred Tennyson
"The Blackbird" by Humbert Wolfe
BEYOND

Students will:

1. Draw a picture to depict the bird described in each of the poems s/he chose to read.
2. Compare the two poems about sandpipers.
3. Read the article "It's Great to Be Gross" from Ranger Rick. Then they will compare the silly vulture from the poem "The Vulture" to the one described in the article.
4. Learn the song entitled "The Speckled Bird", a lively tune from Ecuador.
5. Play charades in which they act as a particular type of bird while others try to guess.
6. Learn to imitate some of the sounds made by birds by listening to recordings of bird calls.
7. Use a map to locate some of the areas where various birds live. They will discuss the characteristics which might make the bird an inhabitant of a specific area of the world.
8. Continue to add new information to their logs.
9. Read some additional books or articles about birds from around the world.

The Ugly Duckling by Hans C. Andersen
Penguins by Jennifer Coldrey
Arnold of the Ducks by Mordecai Gerstein
Make Way for Ducklings by Robert McCloskey
Have You Seen Birds? by Joanne Oppenheim
America's Bald Eagle by Hope Ryden
Kookaburra by Vincent Serventry
Birds by Brian Wildsmith
The Little Wood Duck by Brian Wildsmith
The Owl and the Woodpecker by Brian Wildsmith
Owl Moon by Jane Yolen
"A Project for the Birds" from National Geographic World
"Owls" from Zoo Books
LESSON 3

SYNOPSIS OF THE BOOK:

*How Birds Fly* by Russell Freedman

A nonfictional book that identifies the different types of feathers that birds have. It also describes how a bird is able to fly and land by using its wings and feathers.

INTO

Students will:

1. Compare and contrast a bird and an airplane.
2. Write a story in which they assume the role of a bird. They are to include details on how it would feel to soar through the sky and what would happen if they were to injure a wing.
3. Preview the book *How Birds Fly*. They are to look at the illustrations and predict what new ideas they will be learning about birds.

THROUGH

Students will listen to and read *How Birds Fly* by Russell Freedman.

BEYOND

Students will:

1. Work in groups to make a crossword puzzle which will use some of the new vocabulary words introduced in this book. The crossword puzzle will be exchanged with another group so that each group can solve one.
2. Demonstrate how a bird's wing is lifted in order for it to take off and fly. Each student will hold a sheet of paper by one edge, so the loose end drops to the floor. Students will note how air presses against it from all sides. Then students will blow over the top of the paper noting what happens. Students will determine what happens if the paper is blown harder or softer.

3. Record the results of the experiment in their logs.

4. Take a walking tour of the school and collect bird feathers. They will attempt to identify the type of feather.

5. Make Indian headbands from the bird feathers.

6. Make a graph to compare the flight speeds of the two birds shown in the book *How Birds Fly*.

7. Be free to learn more about birds' feathers from the following books:
   - *A Bird's Body* by Joanna Cole
   - *When Birds Change Their Feathers* by Roma Gans
   - *The Spooky Tail of Prewitt Peacock* by Bill Peet
SYNOPSIS OF THE STORY:

Song of the Swallow by Leo Politi

This is the story of Juan, a young boy, who plants a garden in hopes that the swallows will nest there when they return to San Juan Capistrano on their yearly migration trip. Juan is not disappointed when the swallows return on the feast of St. Joseph.

INTO

Students will:

1. Watch the video entitled The Runaway Duck. This video deals with the migration of ducks and geese as they head southward for the winter.
2. Discuss the meaning of "migration" after viewing the video.
3. Be asked to imagine what it would be like if they were to take a long trip away from home. The method of transportation would be by foot. Students will describe how they would feel. Students will describe how they might feel if they discovered in a few months that they must repeat this journey and return home.
4. Write about the trip mentioned above and tell whether or not they would want to make such a journey.
THROUGH

Students will read the book *Song of the Swallows*. The following questions can be used to discuss the story.

1. Why did the story of the mission always seem new to Juan?
2. Why do you think that the swallows flew away from the mission late in the summer?
3. Do you agree with Julian when he said that "God has given the swallows the most freedom and happiness"? Why or why not?
4. Who is the main character in this story? What kind of a person is he?
5. Are there any other important characters in the story? How are they important to the story?
6. How did Juan feel at the beginning of the story? In the middle? At the end?
7. What would the story have been like, if the swallows had not returned to the mission?
8. Could this story really happen? Why or why not?
9. What if Juan was a little boy who did not like birds? How would this change the story?
10. Did the story end the way that you thought it would? Were you prepared for the birds to come back? What did the author do to prepare you?
11. Can you think of any new facts that you learned from this story?
12. Where does the story take place? Is this important to the story? Why or why not?
BEYOND

Students will:

1. Listen to the story, *The Restless Robin* by Marjorie Flack, in which a robin migrates northward for the spring to find a home and start a family.

2. Trace the route of the robin as described in *The Restless Robin*.

3. Write a conversation they think might take place among a group of birds that are migrating southward for the winter.

4. Arrange a pantomime—a scene in which they portray themselves as migrating birds. The pantomime should include a look at some of the problems that migrating birds have to face.

5. Choose either to be in a group which will write and stage a play based on the migrating of birds or in a group that will construct a mural depicting a group of migrating birds. Those working on the play will design props and masks for the characters. Those working on the mural can include pictures from magazines as well as the original drawings of the students.

6. Play a game similar to tag. Some students will represent the elements of weather—snow, storms, etc. The other students will be birds. The birds will try to run past the children representing the weather. The weather children will try to tag the birds. This will help the children to understand that many of the migrating birds often do not survive the rough conditions that they must face.

7. Take a field trip to Mission San Juan Capistrano to see the place where the swallows return annually.
8. Make a bird feeder to help feed the wild birds. Coat a pine cone with peanut butter. Sprinkle the peanut butter with wild bird seed. Put string on the end and hang the feeder in a place where the birds can get to it.

9. Record all new information in their logs.
CULMINATING ACTIVITY

The culminating activity will be a Bird Day. Students will be given time in class to prepare for this special event. On the day of the event, each child will bring a real bird, a bird kite, a bird puppet, a bird mask, or some other bird representation. The representation must be patterned after a species of bird of the child’s choosing. Each child will be responsible for writing either a poem or a story about the bird they have chosen to represent. This day will be spent in sharing both the representation or real bird and the child’s writing. Those with real birds will share the animal. Those with kites will take the class outside for a demonstration. Those with puppets or masks will perform for the rest of the class.
EVALUATION

Evaluation for this unit will take many different forms. All of the students’ writing will be placed in each individual child’s log. Throughout the thirteen days, conference with each child several times. Discuss how the written work is progressing and make note of the child’s strengths and weaknesses.

For many of the activities, students will work with a partner. Several copies of the form below will be included in the log. Each child will be responsible for completing one each time s/he does an activity with a partner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: ____________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s Name: ____________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project: ____________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Did I do my share of the work?

😊😊

Did my partner share in the work?

😊😊

Group projects will be evaluated by each child who participated in the group. These forms will also be included in the log.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: ____________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Project: ______________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My part in the project was:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Did I do my share of the work in the project?

😊😊

I was happy with our project. 😊😊
Oral discussions, P. E. activities, singing, science experiments, and similar activities will be evaluated by the teacher. These grades will be based solely on participation and effort.

The culminating project will be evaluated both by the participating child and the teacher. They will conference after the child has shared the final project. They will discuss how well the child has used what s/he has learned from the unit in putting together the final project.
REFERENCES


BUNNIES

GOALS
The goals of this unit will be to develop a concept of self. Literature will be used in order that children may learn about feelings and values. They will be asked to apply what they learn to their own personal lives.

OBJECTIVES
1. To provide enjoyable and meaningful experiences with literature.
2. To compare and contrast diverse tales about rabbits.
3. To read a fictional story and relate it to real life situations.
4. To discuss feelings and values.
5. To read and write about bunnies.
6. To read related literature about bunnies.
7. To use art, music, math, drama, social sciences, and science in learning more about bunnies.
MATH
- Measure ingredients for cookies
- Estimate weight of stuffed animals
- Measure size of stuffed animal

LANGUAGE ARTS
- Reading: Additional books on bunnies; poems; directions for making cookies
- Writing: Create a newspaper ad; compare Velveteen Rabbit and a bunny from another story; write a new adventure for a bunny; write a story where Velveteen Rabbit becomes Easter bunny; make a bunny book; script a Readers’ Theatre
- Listening: Watch and listen to video cassette of The Velveteen Rabbit; listen to bunny stories and poems
- Speaking: Retell story from point of view of the boy; describe partner as a bunny from a story

SCIENCE
- Discuss seasons
- What does a rabbit eat? Compare to what you eat
- Discuss similarities and differences in types of rabbits
- Compare what the Velveteen Rabbit would eat to what Brer Rabbit would eat

SOCIAL STUDIES
- Create “Me” book
- Discuss lessons bunnies learned
- Write an advice column to a bunny on how to stay out of trouble
- Learn the history of the African Negro

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS
- Dramatize The Velveteen Rabbit
- Make puppets
- Draw a three-part picture
- Illustrate a non-illustrated page of the story
- Dramatize a new ending for the story
- Dramatize another bunny as taking the place of the Velveteen Rabbit
- Draw a cartoon depicting favorite bunny story
- Sing “Here Comes Peter Cottontail”
- Create an Easter bonnet
- Design an Easter egg
- Perform a Reader’s Theatre
- Create a mural
- Create a bunnies bulletin board

PHYSICAL EDUCATION
- Make a dance step like the Velveteen Rabbit danced
- Do the bunny hop
- Parade in Easter bonnet
SYNOPSIS OF THE STORY


This is the story of a stuffed toy rabbit who is given to a little boy for Christmas. The boy plays with the rabbit for a short time and then carelessly tosses it in the toy closet. The Skin Horse, another animal in the toy closet, tells the rabbit that if a child loves a toy for a long time, it becomes real. One night the rabbit is brought to sleep with the boy. This is the beginning of a beautiful friendship which leads the boy to drag the rabbit wherever he goes. To the boy who dearly loves the rabbit, he is real. The rabbit discovers that he is not real when he is carelessly left in the woods and found by a group of real rabbits who make fun of the toy rabbit. One day, the boy becomes quite ill with scarlet fever. All of his things are set out to be burned including the rabbit. A fairy appears to the Velveteen Rabbit and using some of her magic, she makes him real. In the end, the Velveteen Rabbit brings his family to see the boy who helped to make him real.
INTO

Students will:

1. Brainstorm a list of everything they already know about rabbits or bunnies.
2. Observe a live bunny in order to learn about some of its characteristics, mannerisms, and eating habits.
3. Bring a favorite stuffed animal to school and discuss why it is treasured.
4. Make a "skinny" book displaying pictures of both real and stuffed toy rabbits.
5. Discuss how it might feel to be a stuffed toy rather than a real person.
THROUGH

Students will read The Velveteen Rabbit. The following questions can be used to discuss the story.

1. What lesson does the Velveteen Rabbit learn?
2. At what point do you think the Velveteen Rabbit became real? Why?
3. Who is the most important character in this story? Why?
4. Could this story really happen? If not, why?
5. How does the author get you to think about how it might feel to be a stuffed animal?
6. What are some of the feelings of the Velveteen Rabbit in this story?
7. What words did the author use to describe the Velveteen Rabbit?
8. Why do you think that the author did not give the boy a name?
9. Did this story end the way that you thought it would?
10. Can you think of another ending for the story? Would anything in the story have to change in order for it to end this way?
11. What do you think the real rabbits would have done to the Velveteen Rabbit if the boy had not scared them away?
12. What do you think would have happened to the Velveteen Rabbit if the boy had not gotten sick?
13. Do you think the boy forgot about the Velveteen Rabbit when he got well? Why or why not?
14. Can toys become real if you wish hard enough? Why or why not?
15. Did your feelings change as you read the story? What happened to make them change?
16. Do the illustrations help add meaning to the story? Why or why not?
17. What do you think the author means when he says, "By the time a toy is Real, most of its hair has been loved off"?
18. Does this story remind you of any other stories or characters that you know?
19. What ideas do you think the author was trying to share?
BEYOND

Students will:

1. Create and perform a dance step like one that you think the Velveteen Rabbit would have done when he discovered that he was real.

2. Make cookies in the shape of the Velveteen Rabbit. Students will be responsible for reading the directions and measuring all of the ingredients used in making the cookies.

3. Choose to participate in a group which will dramatize the story or one which will produce a puppet show of the story. Those involved in the dramatization will design and make the necessary costumes, sets, and props. Those involved in the puppet show will also design and make the necessary puppets and sets.

4. Watch the video cassette of the story. Afterwards, compare the movie to the book.

5. Bring stuffed animals to school. Working in small groups, children will estimate how many jelly beans are needed to weigh as much as a stuffed animal. They will check their answers by using a balancing scale.

6. Create a newspaper ad in which you will sell your stuffed bunny or animal.

7. Estimate and then measure the length of your stuffed animal by using a variety of objects to do the measuring. For example, you can measure with jelly beans, paper clips, pencils, and any of a number of other objects. Afterwards, make a graph to compare the sizes of
various children's stuffed animals.

8. Draw a three-part picture depicting the story. Draw the Velveteen Rabbit as he was at the beginning of the story, in the middle, and at the end.

9. Write and then dramatize a new ending to the story.

10. Work in small groups and retell the story from the point of view of the boy.

11. Make a "Me" book. Design a cover that reflects you. Tell about yourself—what you like to do, what you like to eat, your favorite colors, and anything else you can about yourself. Share some of your feelings as the Velveteen Rabbit did in his story. Tell about what makes you feel real.

12. Draw an illustration for a page from the story that does not have an illustration.

13. Read or listen to one or more of the following factual books about rabbits:
   - Freckles the Rabbit by J. Burton
   - Rabbits: All about Them by A. Silverstein and V. Silverstein
   - The Life Cycle of a Rabbit by J. Williams
   - The Wonder Book of Cottontails and Other Rabbits by Cynthia and Alvin Koehler

14. Discuss the seasons of the year and learn about how rabbits survive the seasonal changes.

15. Learn about what foods a rabbit eats. Compare your diet to that of a rabbit. Decide if you both need to eat the same things to stay healthy.
16. Look at pictures of different types of rabbit and hares. Discuss their similarities and differences. Discuss how these differences help the rabbits to adjust to where they live.

17. Think about the Velveteen Rabbit as a stuffed toy and compare him to a real rabbit. Write a story in which you will be either a toy rabbit or a real rabbit. Be ready to tell why you chose what you did.

18. Read or listen to some stories about bunnies that teach or learn a lesson.
   - *The Hare and the Tortoise* by J. LaFontaine
   - *The Runaway Bunny* by M. Brown
   - *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter
   - *The Very Bad Bunny* by Marilyn Sadler
   - *It's Not Easy Being a Bunny* by Marilyn Sadler
   - *Bunny Trouble* by Hans Wilhelm

19. Discuss the lesson each bunny learned or taught in these stories in small groups with those who read them.

20. Dramatize a story in which one of the bunnies in these stories would change places with the Velveteen Rabbit. For example, what would the story be like if the Runaway Bunny or Peter Rabbit was the main character in *The Velveteen Rabbit*?

21. In small groups, write a new adventure for a bunny from your favorite story.

22. Write an advice column in which you tell the bunny from your favorite story how to stay out of trouble.

23. Draw a cartoon depicting your favorite bunny story.
24. Read or listen to some poems and stories about bunnies and their relationships with others.

Fuzzy Rabbit and the Little Brother Problem by R. Billam
Rabbit Travels by J. McCormack
The Random House Book of Poetry for Children selected by Jack Prelutsky
"The Rabbit" by Elizabeth Roberts
"Washington" by Nancy Turner
"Spring" by Karla Kuskin
"What in the World?" by Eve Merriam
"Patience" by Bobbi Katz
Little Rabbit's Baby Brother by Lucy Bates
Little Rabbit's Loose Tooth by Lucy Bates
Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present by Charlotte Zolotow
The ABC Bunny by Wanda Gág

25. Choose a partner. Introduce your partner as a character from one of these stories or from The Velveteen Rabbit. Describe the character. Be sure to tell about those characteristics that make him a good friend.

26. Learn and do the bunny hop.

27. Listen to a tape or a reading in dialect of "De Tar Baby" and other Brer Rabbit stories from Walt Disney's Uncle Remus Stories.

28. As a class, listen to the history of how these legends originated with the African Negro and have been told through the ages. Discuss how these stories compare to other legends you may have heard.

29. In small groups, discuss how the characters of Brer Rabbit and the
Velveteen Rabbit are the same and how they differ.

30. Choose a favorite Brer Rabbit story to script and then perform as a Reader's Theater.

31. Make a list of foods you think that the Velveteen Rabbit might eat and compare it to a list of foods that Brer Rabbit might eat.

32. Write an adventure story about a meeting between the Velveteen Rabbit and Brer Rabbit. Decide whether or not Brer Rabbit will be able to outwit the Velveteen Rabbit like he outsmarted Brer Bear and Brer Fox.

33. Join with other students who would like to create a mural of your favorite Brer Rabbit story.

34. Read or listen to one or more of the following stories about Easter bunnies.

- Everything about Easter Rabbits by W. Roser
- The Big Bunny and the Easter Eggs by S. Kroll
- The Bunny Who Found Easter by Charlotte Zolotow
- The Chocolate Rabbit by M. Claret
- The Easter Bunny That Overslept by P. & O. Friedrich
- Peter Cottontail

35. Write a story in which the Velveteen Rabbit becomes the Easter bunny.

36. Learn the words and sing the song "Here Comes Peter Cottontail".

37. Create an Easter bonnet. Wear it in an Easter parade with your classmates.

38. Make a bunny book using a bunny as the pattern for the cover and pages of the book. Write your own bunny adventure in the book.
39. Create your own special design for an Easter egg.

40. Help to create a bulletin board that includes pictures and stories of the bunnies you have read and written about.
CULMINATING ACTIVITY

As a final event, each child will be asked to dress as his/her favorite bunny. Some time and thought should be given to this as the bunny should represent the child the way he views himself. Each child will then do something special to demonstrate how this bunny exemplifies his own personal life. Some examples might be to read a self-authored poem, to act out a favorite scene from one of the bunny stories, to draw a self-portrait as the bunny character, or to sing a self-authored song. This activity should allow the teacher to see what story the child enjoyed as well as a little about how they perceive themselves at the completion of the project.
EVALUATION

Evaluation at the first grade level should be an ongoing process. It should include both teacher and self evaluation, as well as peer evaluation. The evaluation will focus on the process rather than the product.

Anecdotal records should be kept throughout the project. These should include teacher observations as children work individually, in small groups, and in whole class activities. The teacher should also take notes of what occurs in student-teacher conferences. Portfolios should be kept of the student’s writing and other activities.

Students will be responsible for working with their peers on many of the activities. It will be necessary for the students to evaluate one another. This can be done orally to the teacher, tape recorded, or in written form by the student making the report.

Finally, students will be responsible for evaluating their own progress throughout the project. This, too, can take any of the forms used in peer evaluation. The following simple self-evaluation format can be used by the students.

1. I enjoyed the story. 😊 😞
2. I was able to read and write about the story. 😊 😞
3. I did my part in all of the group work. 😊 😞
4. I learned something new as I read and wrote about the story. 😊 😞

The anecdotal record should also include notations by the teacher when it is observed that the students are picking up and reading more books because they have become excited about learning something new.
REFERENCES