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A Curriculum to Increase Interest in Reading Using Children's Literature

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A CURRICULUM TO INCREASE INTEREST IN READING
USING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

A thesis submitted for partial fulfillment
of the Master's of Education Degree

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Problem Statement

The purpose of this project is to develop a resource of techniques using children's literature which will increase interest in reading for students who have met the minimum standards of reading for their grade level. The completed curriculum is to be used in grades kindergarten through six, with a flexible time limit of thirty to forty-five minutes per day, for fifteen school days.
Rationale

Give a man a taste for reading and the means of gratifying it, and you cannot fail to make him happy as well as a better man. You place him in contact with the best minds in every period of history, with the wisest and the Wittiest, the tenderest and the bravest, those who really adorned humanity. You make him a citizen of all nations and a contemporary of all ages. 9

One objective of the elementary school is to teach children to read. Minimum standards are set by school board administrators. The job of the teacher is to help students meet these standards. Once a student meets these standards, that student may not receive the same attention from the teacher as a student who has not met the minimum standards.

Teachers of reading can verify the amount of paperwork required by a reading series, as can the students. A ten page story may have three worksheets in one reading level, while a ten page story in a higher level may have eight to ten worksheets. To complete the task in the allotted time, the higher level student sometimes reads just enough to answer the questions and stops at that point. The student associates reading and worksheets. The association of reading and interest disappears. The student becomes a low-interest reader. When the student loses interest in reading, the student ceases to seek out reading as a desirable
activity. Just because a student meets the minimum standards in reading, there is no indication that the student has an interest in reading.

Much of the research done on using literature to increase interest in reading has been directed to helping the student who is not meeting the minimum standards. A reading series usually makes provisions for the lower level students by offering numerous workbooks, kits, supplementary books, ditto masters and games to increase interest in reading and reinforce skills. It is widely accepted that increased interest in reading contributes to improvement in reading. Little research has been directed to increasing the interest in reading of higher level readers.

The purpose of this curriculum is to provide the classroom teacher with a resource of techniques to use with students who have met minimum standards, but do not show an interest in reading. These techniques can be adapted to any grade level and any number of students.
Review of Literature

Reading levels on standardized reading tests are norm-referenced rather than criterion-referenced. A score of grade level four indicates that the student reads at the same level as the average fourth grader. There is no indication of the difficulty level of the material.

In a study of literacy rates, Fisher (ED 151 170) reported that 50 percent of the total U.S. population entering 12th grade will score at grade level 12, and about 87 percent will score above grade level eight.6

In 1973, 5,000 people selected at random were surveyed as to their reading behavior for the Adult Functional Reading Study. Results of this study showed that adults read an average of 29 minutes per day. The most common reading activity was reading the newspaper. Seventy percent of the group read the newspaper for an average of 35 minutes per day. A study conducted by the Illinois Reading Council Journal in 1977 found the average readability level of wire service articles at 11th grade level, and nonwire articles at 10th grade level.6

Judging by these results, Americans are learning how to read, but not reading. Charlotte S. Huck states:

If we teach a child to read, yet develop not the taste for reading, all our teaching is for naught. We shall have produced a nation of "illiterate literates" -- those who know how to read but do not read.4
Huck states further that interest in reading is developed by participation in a number of reading related activities. The activities she suggests are: (1) listening to stories, (2) a reading environment, (3) watching significant adult models read, (4) selecting of books to be read or heard, and (5) having time for books. Literature has its own rewards. Literature develops imagination, gives vicarious experiences, provides insight into human behavior, presents the universality of experience and provides enjoyment. In 1967, Shnayer concluded that high interest levels resulted in significantly greater comprehension and enabled students to read beyond their reading ability level.

Literature is generally and accepted subject in the secondary curriculum, but not in the elementary curriculum. Literature is taught for many reasons. Five reasons for teaching literature in the elementary school are: (1) literature helps develop imagination, (2) literature gives vicarious experiences, (3) literature provides insight into human behavior, (4) literature presents the universality of experience, and (5) literature provides enjoyment.

First, literature helps develop imagination. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the fantasy of escape and adventure are presented in the journey through Narnia. Narnia is the empire of the White Witch who makes it always winter. The children over-
throw her with the aid of a giant talking lion named Aslan. The fantasy concludes with the children becoming kings and queens at Cair Paravel.\(^5\) Dr. Seuss has created creatures of fantasy in his works. He gives animals distinct personalities. In "Yertle the Turtle", Yertle, king of the pond and all he sees, decides he wishes to see more. He commands his citizen turtles to form a stack and he climbs to power. Eventually, King Yertle is toppled by a single turtle at the bottom of the stack.\(^4\)

Fantasy such as this encourages children to imagine.

Second, literature gives vicarious experiences. A child may never be stranded on an island, but can experience the feelings of Karana in *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. Karana is fearful of living on the island with only her younger brother, she is filled with grief when he is killed by a pack of wild dogs. Out of loneliness and frustration she attempts to leave the island, but her canoe cannot withstand the pressure of the ocean.\(^8\) In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, it is a very emotional moment when the mighty Aslan loses his life at the hands of the White Witch.\(^5\)

Third, literature can give insight into human behavior. A story written from the viewpoint of a child may explain reasons for actions. In *Ramona and Her Father*, seven year old Ramona's action of replacing her father's cigarettes with rolled up paper messages is explained by Ramona's fear that her father's lungs are turning black from smoking cigarettes.\(^1\)
Fourth, literature presents the universality of experience. There are some children who may benefit from identification with a character or situation in literature. The character of Ramona in Ramona and Her Father is a little girl who does not understand the changes in her family. The situation of her father being unemployed forces the family to give up many things they had taken for granted. Ramona constantly wishes for things that she dares not ask for, and tries to hide her feelings. ¹

Finally, literature provides enjoyment. It can be a leisure time activity almost anywhere. The only equipment needed is the literature (written, recorded, live or filmed), and the only prerequisite is interest.

The most widely used method for teaching literature is requiring the student to read literature. Within this method are several techniques.

First, the teacher may select the material. The teacher assigns the story, poem or play, and the student reads. There may be worksheets, tests or discussions following the reading. The reading itself may be independent (silent) or an oral reading group setting. In the case of independent reading, time may be provided in class or the reading may be assigned as homework.

The second technique in this method of teaching literature is to allow the student to select the material. The teacher may
control selection by providing a list of titles from which the student will choose a given number. This technique is sometimes followed by independent assignments (critiques, book reports or tests). A variation of this technique is to allow students to select any material to read. An independent reading time can be provided in class. Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading is based on this technique. USSR was introduced in 1970 for this purpose.

The rules of USSR are as follows: (1) individuals select their reading material, (2) everyone (including the teacher) reads silently for a pre-determined amount of time, (3) the amount of time is gradually increased over a period of weeks, (begin with ten minutes per day and increase time by five minutes per week,) and (4) no follow up activities. In a survey of students, most thought reading was important and that time should be provided in school for reading outside of assignments. One author noted that reading was a skill requiring 20 per cent instruction time and 80 per cent practice time. The opinion of two studies was that after only ten years of USSR, more research is needed to determine its effect on reading improvement.7 11

Another method of teaching literature is to present the material in different forms. Literature can be read, heard or viewed as a performance (live, puppet, filmed or animated).
A fourth method of teaching literature is for students to read or hear the literature and perform it themselves. This can be done by role-playing, puppets or pantomime. Many stories lend themselves well to this purpose. Albert Cullum's Shake Hands With Shakespeare was written for elementary students to perform. Carole Cox has used the book successfully with fifth graders. The task of producing the play develops confidence, self awareness, the ability to think critically and co-operate with others.

A fifth method of teaching literature is using material written by the student as literature. This method requires the student to have experience in writing. In several states, secondary students write interviews with people of interest in the community. The written interviews become reading material for lower level readers.

In conclusion, the reasons and methods for teaching literature are varied. Results of studies show that American adults can read, but show little interest in reading.
Problem Delimitation

This curriculum is designed for use with students in a group of 12 or less. The activities are designed in sequence from dependent to independent levels, as well as individual tasks and group tasks.
Procedures

1. Determine student and teacher needs.

An interest in reading is necessary for progress in reading. Lower level readers' interest can be stimulated by reading series supplements. There are few interest activities developed for higher level readers, and fewer still that do not require teacher direction.

2. Search related literature.

Literature related to reading interest and children's literature was reviewed to find information on teaching techniques, interest levels and reading levels.

3. Develop instrument to determine interest level.

An instrument was developed to determine the interest level of the participant before and after the unit of study.

4. State goal and objectives.

Goal and objectives stated to increase interest in reading by exposure to children's literature.

5. Sequence procedures.

The curriculum was planned to serve third grade non Title I students. The objectives and activities are sequenced from dependent to independent levels.
Pilot Test

1. Introduction of unit

   Step One: Administer Interest Inventory.

   Step Two: Begin using techniques.
   A. Students listen to literature.
   B. Students read literature.
   C. Teacher establishes classroom library with a representative sample of children's literature.
   D. Students select a minimum of two library books to add to the classroom library.
   E. Students view performances of literature.
   F. Students write literature.

   Step Three: Establish individual record keeping.

   Step Four: Follow lesson plans for activities for 15 consecutive school days.

   Step Five: Readminister Interest Inventory.

   Step Six: Evaluate unit on the basis of increases in score of interest inventory, and the acceptability of the unit by the classroom teacher.

2. Conclusion of unit

   Step One: Base conclusions on the evaluation of the unit.

   Step Two: Make recommendations for use of the unit.
Goal and Objectives

Goal Statement

To increase interest in reading of non Title I third grade students by interaction with children's literature.

Objectives

1. For the student to listen to children's literature.
2. For the student to read children's literature.
3. For the student to view performances of children's literature (live, filmed or animated).
4. For the student to perform children's literature (through role-play, puppetry, or pantomime).
5. For the student to write literature for children.
6. For the student to present literature to the group.
Interest Inventory

Circle yes or no for each question.

1. Are you a good reader? ________________ YES NO
2. Do you like to read? ________________ YES NO
3. Do you read every day? ________________ YES NO
4. Do you read at home? ________________ YES NO
5. Do you read because you want to read? ______ YES NO
6. Is reading fun? ________________ YES NO
7. Is reading boring? ________________ YES NO
8. Is reading hard work? ________________ YES NO
9. Do you like reading dittoes? ________________ YES NO

10. Choose one of the subjects. Circle your choice.
    a. Reading or Math
    b. Reading or P.E.
    c. Reading or Music
    d. Reading or Art
Lesson Plans

This curriculum was designed for use with any grade level from kindergarten through grade six. The grade level of the activities depends upon the selection of materials by the teacher.

Lesson Plan One

Objective: Student will listen to literature and read it independently.

Presentation: Select five to seven different types of books from the classroom collection. Read an excerpt from each book. Establish rules for silent reading and allow students to read for the remainder of the thirty minute period.

Evaluation: Student participation.

Rules for Silent Reading

1. Select one or two books to read.
2. Find a comfortable place in the classroom.
3. Read silently without interrupting others.
Lesson Plan Two

Objective: Student will read literature and illustrate something that was read.

Presentation: Review silent reading rules. Explain to students that they will read silently for twenty minutes. The remaining ten minutes will be used to illustrate something they read today. Allow time to share illustrations.

Evaluation: Completion of activity.

Lesson Plan Three

Objective: Student will read silently with a partner or small group.

Presentation: Ask students to read silently for twenty minutes. The last ten minutes will be used for discussion of the books.

Evaluation: Teacher observation of student participation.

Lesson Plan Four

Objective: Student will listen to a recorded version of Pinochio and read along in a booklet.

Presentation: Hand out booklets to students. Use a recording that does not indicate when the page is to be turned.

Evaluation: The group may discuss the story. If time allows, the students may illustrate a part
allows, the students may illustrate a part of the story and arrange pictures in the form of a mural.

Lesson Plan Five

Objective: Student will view literature.

Presentation: Students view the filmstrip The Juniper Tree and listen to a recorded version of the story.

Evaluation: Group discussion of the story with volunteers to role play the characters.

Lesson Plan Six

Objective: Students will view literature on film (not animated.) Students will view literature on film (animated.)

Presentation: Show The Dragon, an animated film. Then show The Winter of the Witch.

Evaluation: Students will present a play based on one of the films. Puppets may be used.

Lesson Plan Seven

Objective: Students will design a play based on one of the films.

Presentation: Give students materials to make puppets or costumes.

Evaluation: Students practice plays.
Lesson Plan Eight

Objective: Students will present play to group.

Presentation: Each group will present a play to the other students and invited guests.

Evaluation: Students participate.

Lesson Plan Nine

Objective: Student will view the filmstrip The Selfish Giant.

Presentation: Students will watch The Selfish Giant and listen to a recorded version of the story.

Evaluation: Students may choose to illustrate or role play the story.

Lesson Plan Ten

Objective: Students will listen to a recorded story of Helen Keller and read along in a booklet.

Presentation: Have students close their eyes and be as quiet as possible. Select a volunteer to move around the room while blindfolded. Have students perform normal tasks or identify common objects while blindfolded. Hand out Helen Keller booklets. Use a recording that does not indicate when the page is to be turned.
Lesson Plan Eleven

Objective: Student will read selectively to choose a story.

Presentation: Using a common story, allow the group to make a "slide" show using art paper. Explain that each person will make a slide show for the group to see. They may use a story from a book in the classroom collection or create an original story.

Evaluation: Student chooses a story.

Lesson Plan Twelve

Objective: Student will condense a story and divide it into segments for presentation as a slide show.

Presentation: Each student is given a ditto of ten two by two inch squares in which to write and illustrate a story in ten segments or less.

Evaluation: Student participation.
Lesson Plan Thirteen

Objective: Student will illustrate story segments.

Presentation: Students use number two pencils to write story and illustrations on the ditto of ten two by two inch squares.

Evaluation: Participation by the student.

At this point, the teacher uses a thermofax machine to make a transparency of the students' work.

Lesson Plan Fourteen

Objective: Student will complete presentation.

Presentation: Give students felt tip pens to color or rewrite words on transparency.

Evaluation: Participation and completion of transparency.

Lesson Plan Fifteen

Objective: Student will present a story to the group.

Presentation: The student may present the story using the entire transparency on an overhead projector or cut out individual squares and mount them in slide frames.

Evaluation: Student reads or tells story while showing illustrations to the group.

At this time, readminister the interest inventory.
Results of Pilot Test

This curriculum was pilot tested with twelve third grade students who were ineligible for the Title I Reading Program. The interest inventory was given one day prior to the first day of activities. The suggested schedule was followed, although extra time was given to complete the playwrighting activities.

The pilot test is described in sequential steps.

Step one: Interest inventory was administered.

Step two: Students selected two or three books each from the school library to form the classroom collection.

Step three: Lesson plans were followed for 15 days. During the playwrighting activities, the time limit was extended to 45 minutes per day.

Step four: Students kept individual records of activities.

Step five: Interest inventory was readministered on the last day of the curriculum.

Step six: The curriculum was evaluated on the basis of three criteria: changes in response to the interest inventory, classroom observation by the teacher, and acceptability of the activities to the classroom teacher.
Evaluation of Curriculum

This curriculum was to be evaluated on the basis of changes in response to the interest inventory, classroom observation by the teacher, and the acceptability of the activities to the classroom teacher.

Changes in response to the interest inventory are shown in the table below. In items one through six, "yes" was considered to be an indication of higher interest, while in items seven through nine, "no" was considered to be an indication of higher interest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are you a good reader?</td>
<td>11 yes</td>
<td>9 yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like to read?</td>
<td>2 yes</td>
<td>9 yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you read every day? (on your own?)</td>
<td>8 yes</td>
<td>8 yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you read because you want to read?</td>
<td>11 yes</td>
<td>8 yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is reading fun?</td>
<td>10 yes</td>
<td>8 yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is reading boring?</td>
<td>8 no</td>
<td>8 no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is reading hard work?</td>
<td>9 no</td>
<td>11 no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like reading dittoes?</td>
<td>11 no</td>
<td>7 no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interpretation of Item Response

The results of the pilot test indicate that the curriculum was successful in two areas; (1) increasing the number of students who read every day on their own, and (2) decreasing the number of students who thought reading was hard work.

There was no change in three items; item two, "Do you like to read?", item four, "Do you read at home?", and item seven, "Is reading boring?"

In item one, "Are you a good reader?", eleven students answered "yes" on the pre-inventory while only nine students answered "yes" on the post-inventory. This change could be an indication of a challenge presented by the difficulty levels of the classroom collection. This theory was supported by teacher observation of students choosing books on their frustration level.

In item five, "Do you read because you want to read?" eleven students answered "yes" on the pre-inventory while only eight students answered "yes" on the post-inventory. This item was intended to measure the same thing as item three. In item three, "Do you read every day on your own?" the responses indicated that two students read every day on their own on the pre-inventory and nine students read every day on their own on the post-inventory. Teacher observation supported the data in item three. Students requested reading time and specific books every day. Most students had selected a favorite reading spot in the room.
In item six, "Is reading fun?" ten students answered "yes" on the pre-inventory while eight students answered "yes" on the post-inventory. A possible explanation for this response could be that the reading itself was more difficult. This also supports the response to item one.

In item eight, "Is reading hard work?" nine students agreed that reading was not hard work on the pre-inventory and eleven students did not think that reading was hard work on the post-inventory. This could indicate that the students considered the reading material to be difficult, but not the task of reading and illustration or discussion.

In item nine, "Do you like reading dittoes?" eleven students responded "no" on the pre-inventory and seven students responded "no" on the post inventory. This change may be a result of the students only using reading dittoes for regular reading groups, with the exception of the slide making activity.
Teacher Observation

The second criteria of evaluation of this curriculum was observation of students by the classroom teacher. These observations are listed in sequence.

1. The students were very excited about the classroom collection. They did not want to wait to begin or stop when the allotted time was up.

2. The students heard *Alexander and the terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day*. This was intended to be an excerpt, but enthusiasm encouraged the story to be read aloud several times during the curriculum.

3. Students are enthusiastic participants in silent reading and illustration.

4. Reading in groups can not be called silent. The students read quietly, but discussion is constant.

5. "Pinochio is hard to draw." "It was easier to listen than it is to draw him." "Is this a true story?"

6. *The Juniper Tree* was inappropriate for this group. The murder of the boy by his stepmother disturbed several children.

7. *The Winter of the Witch* was a good choice. The students are speechless while watching it.
8. Role playing would probably be a better choice than rewriting the story for a play. The plot is too long and complex for third graders to write.

9. The Selfish Giant is a well received filmstrip. The book is in the classroom collection, and the group is passing it around.

10. The read along about Helen Keller and the follow up games led to two students asking to add a book about Helen Keller to the classroom collection.

11. Most of the students are having trouble choosing one story to use for a slide show. Only one decided to write an original story.

12. Condensing a story into ten segments is difficult, but no one is giving up.

13. The students can not wait to see their pictures on a transparency.

14. The only thing these students enjoyed more than drawing the pictures is coloring them with felt tip pens.

15. The final product is colorful and unique.

During the length of the curriculum, the group has requested extra silent reading time. Several students are rushing through their seatwork assignments to have extra time for reading. Many of the students are choosing books on their frustration level, but they are reading the books. There is
also more enthusiasm for regular reading groups. Students come to the groups quickly and complete reading work correctly.

Acceptability

The third criteria for evaluation of this curriculum is the acceptability of the unit by the classroom teacher. This unit was tailored to the needs and abilities of twelve third graders. It is easily adapted to any grade level. The only change would be in the selection of materials.

The curriculum was designed to fit into a thirty to forty-five minute period. The activities could be divided into fifteen minute segments if time was unavailable. The curriculum was graduated from dependent to independent activities. Students desiring more direction were able to consult the teacher when necessary. Those who did not require more direction were on their own.

The curriculum was not difficult or time consuming when the pilot test was conducted. The students were responsible for their own record keeping. No grades were given. Participation was required during the three week period. The majority of the group expressed enthusiasm in participation.

The independent activities gave the teacher time to observe or give special attention to those students needing it.
Conclusions

In conclusion, the curriculum did increase students' interest in reading. This was more apparent through direct observation than by changes in response to the interest inventory. The unit was acceptable to the classroom teacher. It required minimal paperwork and planning time. Students kept their own individual records and no grades were given.

There were two minor problems in using the curriculum. First, students wanted more time to spend doing the activities. The playwrighting activity was greeted with enthusiasm but needed at least a week to complete. Second, the curriculum should be extended for a grading period or even a semester. This time would allow students to satisfy their increased interest in reading. Several students asked to repeat activities. Silent reading time was a frequent request.

Both of these problems could be eliminated if a longer time frame was used when teaching the curriculum. The thirty to forty-five minutes per day is ample time for third graders though it may be too long for a lower grade level. Additional days are needed to allow for individual differences among students.
Recommendations

1. Allow students to participate on a volunteer basis to continue the curriculum.

2. To make slide ditto, draw two by two inch squares on a ditto master. Students should use heavy pencil when drawing. Use a thermofax machine to transfer designs to a transparency. These can be cut apart and mounted on slide frames or shown altogether on an overhead projector.

3. Puppets can be made from paper, nuvon, fabric, paper bags, paper plates, or socks. These are easy to decorate with crayon, paint, markers or needle and thread.

4. Murals can be made by one student or a group. Crayon and colored chalk work well on art paper. This activity can be expanded to using stitchery to make a wall hanging.

5. Old filmstrips can be substituted for the slide making activity. The filmstrips can be cleaned by immersion in chlorine bleach and immediate washing with mild soap and drying with a soft cloth. Students can draw directly on the filmstrip. Every four holes equals one frame.

6. This curriculum should be expanded with repeated activities and additional silent reading time for one full grading period. The curriculum should then be continued for interested students.
Suggested Titles

The following list of titles were some of the favorites of the pilot test group of third graders.

1. Alexander and the terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day by Judith Viorst.
2. The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis.
3. Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Hound of the Baskervilles by A. Conan Doyle.
4. The Poor Old Troll by Alvin Granowsky and Morton Botel.
5. Ghosts Who Went to School by Judith Spearing.
8. Freckle Juice by Judy Blume.
10. The Hundred Dresses by Eleanor Estes.
11. Captain Furface and the Giant Broink by James M. Ellis.
12. Stormy Misty's Foal by Marguerite Henry.
15. Encyclopedia Brown Finds the Clues by Donald J. Sobol.
16. Ramona and Her Father by Beverly Cleary.
17. The Velveteen Rabbit by Margery Williams.
18. The Boy Who Didn't Believe In Spring by Lucille Clifton.
19. **Puss in Boots** by Jean Craig.
20. **On Jungle Trails** by Frank Buck.
21. **Blubber** by Judy Blume.
22. **The Little Leftover Witch** by Florence Laughlin.
23. **Just So Stories** by Rudyard Kipling.
24. **The Case of the Condemned Cat** by E.W. Hildick.
25. **Island of the Blue Dolphins** by Scott O'Dell.
27. **Take Me to the Moon** by Sal Murdocca.
28. **Dr. Dick** by Dorothy Kunhardt.
   By Charles M. Schulz
29. **What Next, Charlie Brown?**
30. **Here Comes Charlie Brown!**
31. **They're Playing You Song, Charlie Brown.**
32. **Let's Face It, Charlie Brown!**
33. **Good Ol' Snoopy.**
34. **We're On Your Side Charlie Brown.**
35. **You've Got To Be Kidding, Snoopy.**
36. **You'll Flip Charlie Brown.**
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