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Magician with a Mission

Catch the Reading Bug



Classroom photo by Rich Sofranko

STUDY GUIDE

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Artists on Tour

The arts can help students improve their reading skills by enhancing their ability to analyze what they're reading. Here are some suggested activities.

1. Using a story the students have read:
 - a. Select a scene and have students act it out.
 - i. Analyze dialogue: what are the emotions of the characters?
 - ii. How do they think the character would walk or talk? What would their facial expressions be?
 - b. Have students act out the scene without words, by movement only.
 - c. Have students design and create a puppet for one of the characters.
 - d. Have students draw a picture of the scenery for the story. What does the house, school, forest etc. look like?
 - e. Have students create a storyboard of the story.
 - f. Have students design costumes for one of the characters.
2. Create a play from scratch.
 - a. Write a play.
 - b. Design the sets and costumes or puppets.
 - c. Act out the play.
3. Have students think about what music would match a story (or scene of a story).
 - a. Ask whether the music should be fast/slow, soft/loud etc.
 - b. Have them hum or imitate music they feel is appropriate.
 - c. Play 2 or 3 selections of music and have them pick which one they think matches the story. (Can they explain why?)
4. Watch a show or film and have students pay attention to the background music; then discuss the style of music and how it affected the story.
5. If the students see a play or film of a story they have read, have them discuss how the story changed.
 - a. Was there more focus on the dialogue?
 - b. Compare seeing the scenery versus reading a description of it. Did the play/film depict it how they imagined it would be?
 - c. Were the costumes what they thought they would be?
 - d. How did the background music affect the story?
6. Have students create a story for a math, science, social studies etc. unit of study, e.g. have them create a story to explain fractions.

The following activities are from Teaching and Learning through Multiple Intelligences 2nd edition by Linda Campbell, Bruce Campbell, and Dee Dickinson (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999)

DEVELOPING A CLASSROOM LIBRARY (p. 19)

- Work closely with school librarians and media specialists
- Involve parents in recommending and donating books
- Form liaisons with education directors of area newspapers
- Meet with paperback book distributors to work out special price reductions
- Create a review group of students
- Ask other faculty members to suggest appropriate reading materials
- Conduct community “scavenger hunts” for good reading materials from such sources as garage sales
- Introduce students to electronic databases or the Internet in order to access current information on topics they find interesting

Even with large classes, it is important for teachers to identify the developmental levels and interests of individual students. Reluctant readers may perk up when they have opportunities to read books related to specific interests such as their heroes, hobbies, pets, inventions, scientific discoveries, favorite sports, music groups, or foreign countries. Every attempt should be made to have resources at hand to capitalize on their interests with reading materials that are appropriate for their diverse developmental levels.

STUDENTS AS STORYTELLERS (p. 13-14)

Some students will enthusiastically volunteer for opportunities to tell stories to their peers. Others will find the idea daunting. Yet listening to stories involves numerous listening skills, while telling stories requires linguistic stretches. Storytelling, both an entertaining and powerful form of linguistic communication, teaches students about the rhythm, pitch, and nuances of language. Educators interested in encouraging storytelling in their classrooms might want to consider the following guidelines:

1. Model storytelling yourself.
2. Identify local storytellers to visit your classroom.
3. Help students find stories—from class content, dreams, family or schools events, stories they already know, anthologies, or interviews with senior citizens.
4. Teach students some of the skills of storytelling such as:
 - a. beginning with an interesting opening
 - b. keeping the number of characters manageable
 - c. making sure the story contains images that listeners can “see” or imagine
 - d. encouraging the use of simile and metaphor
 - e. animating key points in the story with sound effects, voice, hands and body movements
 - f. keeping the voice clear, expressive, and well-paced
 - g. making eye contact with the audience
 - h. considering whether or not there will be audience participation
5. Practice storytelling with the whole class. The teacher can select one story and read it part by part to the class, asking students to suggest embellishments to make the story vivid and entertaining. The whole class could divide into groups. Each group could be assigned a section of the story to learn and then tell in sequence.
6. For beginning storytellers, anxiety can be relieved when students tell their stories to small groups of four or five peers rather than to the whole class. Students who volunteer may tell their stories to larger groups. Also, telling stories to younger children often relieves unnecessary tension.

TEACHING READING MUSICALLY (p. 142-3)

1. Encourage children to sing on a daily basis. Elementary classrooms teachers might identify songs that children will enjoy and teach these as part of each day's activities. Songs that are selected should ideally be a part of the children's experience or environment or ones that the students compose.
2. Once children are familiar with the words of a song, they are ready to see the lyrics in print. These can be transcribed onto the blackboard or a large chart. Usually, when reading the lyrics for the first time, there is great excitement among the students. Their musical familiarity with the words eases the transition to reading.
3. Students may next progress to reading individual words from a song chart. Students might volunteer to point out individual words written on the blackboard or they might locate words that appear more than once in the song. Additionally, teachers might provide students with words or phrases written on pieces of tagboard which are the same size as the words on the chart. The children might then match their cards with the chart by actually placing their piece of tagboard on the appropriate spot.
4. Students might be given a song booklet to help them learn the lyrics. To enhance sight reading skills, students can point to words they are singing, read (or sing) the lyrics with a friend, read (or sing) them to someone who doesn't know the song, or point out the words as they listen to someone else sing the song. Using their song books as reference, students might also become words detectives, locating words in the song in other printed texts.
5. When children have sung and read a favorite song many times, they may be able to write from memory at least part of the lyrics. Nursery rhymes work well for this activity. Students should be encouraged to problem-solve, such as use invented spellings, and the teacher and classmates should accept and value all efforts at initial song writing without undue attention to correctness or completeness.