

Workshop 2

Looking at Literature

“Literature to me has always meant a gateway into a world that has been created by people who have thought deeply about many different issues. It has meant a chance to explore issues...and to try to understand how I can become a better person.”

—Bileni Teklu, Fifth-Grade Teacher, Fair Oaks School, Marietta, Georgia

Introduction

Language arts teachers are often those who initially came to the profession because of their own deeply felt love of literature. Novice or maestro, they typically enter their classrooms seeking to transfer that passion to their students.

In this workshop session, you will listen to eight such teachers, passionate about literature and about conveying that passion to their students. They share their understandings of the deep human and social values literature offers them and their students. They discuss how they choose books to tempt reluctant readers or find ways to fill their classroom shelves with books to appeal to all their students. They discuss the importance of story and suggest ways they use picture books and basal readers in their literature programs.

They recognize that their task is not always easy. Class demographics, mandated curricula, and entrenched pedagogical cultures can present even the most energetic and well-meaning professional with seemingly insurmountable challenges. Still, the mission is intrinsically worthy, and the challenges can be met—as evidenced by the many passionate voices of their students.

Key Points

Literature offers readers opportunities to:

- gain personal insights and knowledge,
- broaden their global understandings,
- appreciate and value differences,
- explore personal options, develop social awareness, and
- learn to read and write better.

When choosing texts for students, teachers consider:

- richness of language,
- thematic significance,
- the interests and needs of their specific student populations,
- the potential for powerful student engagement and rich conversation,
- their own passions for an author or title, and
- a particular pedagogical purpose.

Other key points include:

- A teacher’s passion for literature provides a model for students that opens the way for their own literary enthusiasms.
- Students often follow the lead of their peers when choosing something to read and are even willing to struggle with difficult texts to experience literature recommended by classmates.
- It is important for students to have choices and a sense of ownership about what they read.
- Some students choose thin books because they know they can finish them.
- Picture books can remain positive choices for students at many reading levels, although less proficient readers are often reluctant to choose them.
- Teachers often make picture book reading a whole-class activity in order to acknowledge their literary value publicly.
- Effective envisionment-building classrooms offer students a wide range of literature selections that vary in subjects and levels of difficulty.
- Read-alouds and buddy reading are ways teachers can support less proficient readers who are having difficulty with a particular selection.
- Teachers can gather many texts on a single topic and make them available for students reading at different levels.
- Teachers can demonstrate to students the factors that influence their own text selections as they help students become aware of their text selections.
- Literature helps students learn to make personal connections with fictional characters and themes, enabling their own growth and enriching their understandings of the world.
- Envisionment-building teachers find creative ways such as second-hand sales, discount stores, and book clubs to enrich their classroom libraries.
- Professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English, the International Reading Association, and the American Library Association provide annotated listings of literature titles to help teachers find appropriate selections for students.
- Librarians can be extremely helpful when teachers are seeking titles on a particular topic or to suit a particular group of students.
- The Internet is an excellent source of materials and suggestions for both students and teachers.
- The appreciation of story—both their own and those they encounter in literature—is a central factor in students’ literary development.
- Basal texts can be used effectively in envisionment-building classrooms.
- Read-alouds allow teachers to share their own passions about literature while introducing particular themes or new authors as a background for classroom conversations.
- Read-alouds also help teachers engage reluctant readers and create a community of readers.
- Teachers can help students value reading a book more than once.
- Helping students learn to love literature may be the most important goal in an envisionment-building classroom.

Learning Objectives

After participating in this session, you will be able to:

- Identify a number of ways in which literary encounters enrich human lives.
- Apply a range of criteria for choosing texts appropriate for an individual student or for an entire class.
- Determine several additional sources of literature to develop your classroom library.
- Consider ways in which to incorporate students' stories into your literature instruction.
- Effectively integrate picture books and basal readers into your literature program.
- Include read-alouds as an integral part of your literature program.

Background Reading

In preparation for Workshop 2, read "Literary Thought and Literate Mind" in Dr. Judith Langer's *Envisioning Literature* from the Teachers College Press, 1995.

For additional online resources, visit the *Envisioning Literature* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature, select *Engaging With Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 3–5*, and look under Additional Reading for Workshop 2.

Workshop Session (On-Site)

Getting Ready (30 minutes)

Think about some of the ways in which you and your students value literature. How does it help you understand yourself? Your place in the world? What texts have been particularly meaningful to you? Why? How might you share your feelings with your own students?

Discuss:

Discuss the following questions:

- What were some of your favorite books as a youngster? What made them so appealing?
- How do you make choices about what you want to read? Do you ask friends for suggestions? Read reviews? Browse in bookstores?
- What thrifty ways to obtain books for your classroom library have you found?
- How do you use classroom libraries?

Site Leader: Use the questions below to spark discussion before viewing the workshop program. Participants may write answers to the questions in their workshop journals, as time permits. You may use all of the questions or select only a few. If you have Internet access, display the companion Web site to this workshop at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature, making participants aware of online resources and interactive opportunities.

Reflect in Workshop Journals:

Respond to the following in your workshop journal:

- Why is it important to offer students positive experiences with a wide range of literary texts?

Keep your responses to these questions in mind as you listen to the comments offered by the teachers in this workshop video.

Watch the Workshop Video (60 minutes)

Watch and Discuss:

Pause at the title card "Selecting Text."

- What impact has literature had on your life?
- What impact does it have on your students' lives? What impact might it have?
- How do your students respond when you read aloud to them?
- What titles have you found especially powerful for reading aloud?
- In what ways do you communicate your own feelings for literature to your students?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Site Leader: If you are watching on videocassette, you may pause at the segments indicated below to give participants opportunities to discuss, reflect, and interact with the program. If needed, rewind and replay segments of the program so that viewers can thoughtfully examine all pertinent information. If you are watching a real-time broadcast, ask participants to consider the questions as they view the program, and discuss them later.

You may select any or all of the questions below to discuss, as time permits and according to the interests of your participants.

Workshop Session (On-Site), cont'd.

Pause at the title card "Looking for Literature."

- How do you choose texts to use with your students?
- How do you help your students choose their own texts?
- What do you do when students want to read something that you think is either too easy or too hard for them?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Pause at the title card "Story Surrounds Us."

- What sources have you found helpful as you seek out literature titles to use in your classroom?
- How do you add to your classroom library?
- What strategies do you use for managing your classroom library and keeping track of your books?
- How have you used the Internet to supplement or enrich your literature instruction?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Pause at the title card "Picture Books and Basal Readers."

- How do you help students share and appreciate their own stories?
- How do you help students connect their own stories with the stories they encounter in literature?
- How do you help students develop their stories, either orally or in writing?
- How have you used poetry or music to help students appreciate stories?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

View program until the end.

- How do your students respond to picture books?
- How have you used picture books effectively with older students?
- What are some picture books that you have found especially useful with your students?
- How do you deal with peer pressure as you help students find literature that is appropriate for them?
- How have you used read-alouds in your literature instruction? What titles have you found particularly effective?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Going Further (30 minutes)

Discuss:

Form groups by grade level and identify several ways you might help students make personal connections with literature. Share your list with the entire group. Record key ideas in your workshop journal for future reference.

Between Sessions (On Your Own)

Homework Assignment

Journal:

Respond to the following in your workshop journal:

- How might you give your students a greater sense of ownership in what they read? What additional strategies might you incorporate into your literature program to enhance student engagement?

Reading:

In preparation for Workshop 3, read “Building Envisionments” in Dr. Judith Langer’s *Envisioning Literature* from the Teachers College Press, 1995.

Ongoing Activity

Channel-Talk:

You are encouraged to participate in an email discussion list called Channel-Talk. Send comments and questions regarding the workshop to other participants around the country. Comments can also be viewed on the Web site. Go to www.learner.org/envisioningliterature, select *Engaging With Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 3–5*, and click on Channel-Talk.

Extension: Classroom Connection

Student Activities:

Try these activities with your students.

- Have students choose a book and a partner with whom to read together. Refer to the Teacher Tool Book Buddy Reading found in the Appendix of this guide for help organizing this project.
- Do a series of book talks in which you describe six to 10 different titles. Ask the class to choose one for the next read-aloud.
- Offer students a choice of four to five titles and have them read and discuss the title of their choice in book clubs groups. You may want to use Choosing a Good Book: Modeling Text Choices found in the Appendix of this guide if students need help learning how to make good choices.
- Assemble a number of picture books on a similar theme or by the same author. Have students spend several days reading them, independently or with a buddy. In groups of four to five students, have them prepare a report for the class on their experiences as readers. You may want to use some of the discussion activities from Appreciating Stories (found in the Appendix of this guide) to prepare students.

Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner:

Make a list of ways in which you might share your appreciation of literature with your students, and ways in which they might share their enjoyment with one another.

Additional Reading

Bamford, Rosemary and Janice V. Kristo, eds. *Making Facts Come Alive: Choosing Quality Nonfiction Literature K–8*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon, 1998.

Benedict, Susan and Lenore Carlisle, eds. *Beyond Words: Picture Books for Older Readers and Writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992.

Carlsen, G. Robert and Anne Sherrill. *Voices of Readers: How We Come To Love Books*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1988.

Cullinan, Bernice E., ed. *Invitation To Read: More Children’s Literature in the Reading Program*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1992.

Hahn, Mary Lee. *Reconsidering Read-Aloud*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2002.

Hansen-Krening, Nancy, Elaine Aoki, and Donald Mizokawa, eds. *Kaleidoscope: A Multicultural Booklist for Grades K–8*. 4th ed. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2001.

Hart-Hewins, Linda, and Jan Wells. *Real Books for Reading: Learning To Read With Children’s Literature*. Markham, ONT: Penbroke, 1990.

Holland, Kathleen E., Rachael A. Hungerford, and Shirley B. Ernst, eds. *Journeying: Children Responding to Literature*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993.

Jenkins, Carol Brennan. *The Allure of Authors: Author Studies in the Elementary Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999.

Jody, Marilyn and Marianne Saccardi. *Using Computers To Teach Literature: A Teacher’s Guide*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1998.

Langer, Judith A. *Envisioning Literature: Literary Understanding and Literature Instruction*. New York: Teachers’ College Press, 1995.

Moss, Joy F. *Literary Discussion in the Elementary School*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2002.

National Council of Teachers of English. *Teaching Reading and Literature in Early Elementary Grades*. Standards Consensus Series. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1997.

National Council of Teachers of English. *Teaching Reading and Literature, Grades 4-6*. Standards Consensus Series. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1996.

Pierce, Kathryn Mitchell, et al., eds. *Adventuring With Books: A Booklist for PreK–Grade 6*. 12th ed. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2000.

Rasinski, Timothy V., et al. *Motivating Recreational Reading and Promoting Home-School Connections: Strategies from The Reading Teacher*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2000.

Russell, David L. *Literature for Children: A Short Introduction*. New York: Longman, 1991.

Schmidt, Patricia Ruggiano and Ann Watts Pailliotet, eds. *Exploring Values Through Literature, Multimedia, and Literacy Events: Making Connections*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2001.

Sorensen, Marilou R. and Barbara A. Lehman, eds. *Teaching With Children’s Books: Paths to Literature-Based Instruction*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1995.

Stewig, John Warren and Sam Leaton Sebesta, eds. *Using Literature in the Elementary Classroom*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1989.

Short, Kathy G. *Literature as a Way of Knowing*. York, ME: Stenhouse, 1997.

Short, Kathy G. and Kathryn Mitchell Pierce. *Talking About Books: Literature Discussion Groups in K–8 Classrooms*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998.

Additional Reading, cont'd.

Sutton, Wendy K., ed. *Adventuring With Books: A Booklist for Pre-K–Grade 6—1997 Edition*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1997.

Tiedt, Iris McClellan. *Tiger Lilies, Toadstools, and Thunderbolts: Engaging K–8 Students With Poetry*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2002.

Trelease, Jim. *The Read-Aloud Handbook*. New York: Penguin Books, 1995.

Yokota, Junko, ed. *Kaleidoscope: A Multicultural Booklist for Grades K–8*, 3rd ed. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2001.

Zarnowski, Myra, Richard M. Kerper, and Julie M. Jensen, eds. *The Best in Children's Nonfiction: Reading, Writing and Teaching Orbis Pictus Award Books*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2001.

Professional journals about literature instruction:

CELA Newsletter: The National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement, State University of New York, Albany, publishes a newsletter in the fall, winter, and spring addressing a wide range of issues concerning literacy.

The National Council of Teachers of English Journals: NCTE publishes many subscription journals including *Language Arts* for the elementary school level.

The *Reading Teacher* from the International Reading Association typically includes excellent articles about literature instruction as well as regular reviews of new children's literature titles.

Texts mentioned by teachers in this workshop program:

Souder by William Howard Armstrong

The Big Bike Race by Lucy Jane Bledsoe

Grossology: The Science of Really Gross Things by Sylvia Branzei

The Wall by Eve Bunting

"Get Help Now" in *Chicken Soup for the Kid's Soul*, edited by Jack Canfield et al.

Ramona Quimby by Beverly Cleary

The Jacket by Andrew Clements

Counting on Frank by Rod Clements

Matilda by Roald Dahl

The Breadwinner by Deborah Ellis

The Half-a-Moon Inn by Paul Fleischman

The Patchwork Quilt by Valerie Floranoy

The Diary of Anne Frank by Anne Frank

Just Juice by Karen Hesse

Out of the Dust by Karen Hesse

The Color of Words by Lynn Joseph

Baseball Saved Us by Ken Mochizuki

Hatchet by Gary Paulson

Nightjohn by Gary Paulson

Pink and Say by Patricia Polacco

"A Good Cry" and "Things" in *Hey You! C'Mere: A Poetry Slam* by Elizabeth Swados

Blitz Cat by Robert Westall

Charlotte's Web by E. B. White

Behind the Bedroom Wall by Laura E. Williams

Crow Boy by Taro Yashima

Child of the Owl by Laurence Yep

Dragonwings by Laurence Yep

Owl Moon by Jane Yolen

Additional Reading, cont'd.

Series books mentioned by teachers in this workshop program:

- The Tribes of Redwall series by Brian Jacques
- The Captain Underpants series by Dav Pilkey
- The Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling
- The Magic Schoolbus series by Ann Schreiber
- The Goosebumps series by R. L. Stine

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Notes
