

Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

Contact: Amy Goodman
Middle School Literacy Support
907-267-0221
goodman_amy@asdk12.org
www.asdk12.org/MiddleLink/LA/

Tip #25: To, By, and With

These three prepositions are an easy reminder of what should be included in a comprehensive reading program. Students should be read **to**, students should read **by** themselves, and teachers should read **with** students.

Last week's email tip addressed building time into your weekly schedule for students to read recreationally **by** themselves. This week's tip will focus on reading **to** students, and next week I will finish the sequence with tips on reading **with** students.

When I think about reading to my students, images of read aloud after recess are conjured up in my mind. Having taught elementary school for 14 years, I know the power and the pleasure of reading aloud to a captive audience right after lunch. With the right book, it is so easy to hold the kids' attention. The depth of instruction seems endless when all students have heard the same piece of literature. Moving to middle school 8 years ago brought the challenge of finding a way of infusing this into the "45 minute period" and dealing with the mixed reactions from my colleagues and the students.

Middle school students need to be read to for many reasons. Instead of trying to come up with a persuasive, research based paragraph of my own, I would like you to read the following article from Carol Hurst's web site. Her web site is chock full of amazing

literature related links not to be missed. You should really bookmark it, but first read her persuasive article below.

<http://www.carolhurst.com>

Why Read Aloud?

It's fun. It builds community and a sense of belonging. It strengthens vocabulary, language, grammar and writing. It makes us aware of other places and other lives. It creates life-long readers. There is a great deal of research that shows it to be the most effective part of any reading program.

We're talking about reading aloud of course. And, with effects like those above, you'd think that teacher's reading aloud to students would be front and center in every classroom, at least from kindergarten through 8th grade. But it isn't. Too many teachers feel "the basics" have crowded reading aloud out of their classrooms. Far too many administrators these days are discouraging such "frills." It's hard to believe, but there are actually superintendents and supervisors out there who say either directly or in effect, "If it isn't on the test, don't teach it." And, as far as we know, reading aloud is not on any of those tests. However, its results are in those test results.

Perhaps the best way to refute the narrow view is to point out that the read-aloud



program can and should be pointing the way to almost any area of study. Name a topic and there's a good literary work that can take you and your students there full of motivation and ready to delve into the research and activities. Also, think about your own school days. We'll put money on the fact that, if you ever had a teacher who read to you consistently, you have never forgotten it. His or her well-thought out, challenging and carefully planned lessons are probably long since forgotten, but the story read aloud and the feelings and knowledge it created in you are still there at the edge of memory.

Now, having convinced all but the most recalcitrant of you that reading aloud is necessary, we've still got a ways to go because not just any book will do for our read aloud programs. That program must be as carefully thought out as any other part of the curriculum. The aim is to find the perfect book to read aloud at any given moment. A whole year's choices will very much depend on your curriculum; for us to outline it here would be presumptuous and too lengthy. We can, however, suggest some start up read aloud choices for each grade level and maybe insert a caution or two about your future choices.

So, it's September again and you've got a bunch of eager, slightly frightened, kids in front of you. They're not sure what you expect of them and so they're carefully watching every move you make, every expression on your face. You're not too sure about them either. Every class is different. You don't know what they expect of you. So you're carefully watching every move they make, every expression on their faces. You want to show them that reading is an essential part of learning in your classroom. What do you do? You pick up a book and begin to read aloud.

Challenge #1 - Finding the time...

Reading aloud to students doesn't necessarily have to take the same format all the time. You don't need to carve out 10 - 20 minutes a day in order to do this although periodically I think you should. Instead infuse into your schedule mini read alouds: a poem of the day, a quote of the day, excerpts from Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul and other self-help books, a current event from the paper you found interesting, a paragraph from a non-fiction book which relates to a topic of study in social studies/science, weird factoids from the Guinness Book of World Records, etc. Convince your teammates of the importance of reading aloud by forwarding onto them Carol Hurst's article so they can offer up some academic time, too. There is wonderful literature, which supports math, science, and social studies content, and any librarian would be happy to get them started off with some suggestions. (Another friendly reminder that we are all teachers of literacy!)

Get creative with your scheduling as I mentioned last week. My former social studies partner, Chad Sant, used to alternate read alouds with me. I would begin the year with a chapter book reading 10 - 20 minutes a day to set the stage for this part of reading program and why our team embraced the philosophy. When I got completely done, he would read the next book during social studies. I then had my regular schedule back for intense skill instruction. (In the perfect world, your math teacher might follow suit and then your science teacher.) One of my all time favorite creative schedules came with our reading aloud of Flipped by Wendelin Van Draanen. This unique book alternates the point of view of a female character and a male character chapter by chapter. We opened our wall (an architectural advantage at Goldenview) and combined our two classes. Yes, sixty 8th graders sat quietly for 30 - 40



minutes as Chad read aloud chapter 1 (the male point of view) and I followed with chapter 2 (the female point of view). After 7 days, we were done with the novel.

It is imperative to understand why reading aloud is important, and it is equally important to find just the right piece of literature.

Always remember to read the entire piece of literature in advance so you are comfortable with your selection.

Challenge #2 - The Right Piece of Literature...

I wish I had the perfect list of read alouds for middle school students, but it just doesn't work that way, as you know. What I like is not necessarily something you are going to like. I depend on recommendations from literature web sites, professional organizations, school librarians, other teachers at my grade level, and friends who enjoy young adult literature as much as I do. I usually try to find a book with short chapters, a plot which moves quickly and has a lot of dialogue, characters who are 12 - 14, and the limited use of teenage angst. With that said, I can't resist but to include some titles I love reading aloud. Notice they are mostly fiction. Non-fiction is an area I know I need to improve in. (An * means I have only had a chance to read some of the book aloud, I have only read it to myself and think it might make a good read aloud, or I have only read excerpts from the whole book.) Do a book search at <http://www.amazon.com> to find out more about any of these titles. Then use the [ASD Web Cat](#) to locate the books in our school libraries.

Tuck Everlasting

Freak the Mighty

The Giver

Among the Hidden

Holes

Flipped (better at 8th grade)

*The Graduation of Jake Moon

The Outsiders (better at 8th grade)

Crash

*Oddballs

Short stories by Paul Jennings (Australian author)

Poetry by Sara Holbrook

*A Long Way from Chicago

Because of Winn Dixie

*The Watsons Go to Birmingham

*Harris and Me

Maniac McGee

Stargirl (better at 8th grade)

*Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul

*How Angel Peterson Got His Name: And Other Outrageous Tales of Extreme Sports

