

Literacy Tips



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

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Tip #31: Teen Read Week

Finding a topic for this week's tip was easy. Just in the last week, two teachers have written to me about the power of poetry in their curriculum, so I knew I had to address this issue right away. I used to save up all of my poetry instruction for one major unit in the spring. After all, spring with 8th graders can be extremely challenging. I tried to save the best for last always rationalizing that it fit in best during National Poetry Month, which is in April. Teens absolutely love expressing themselves poetically and enjoy figuring out the deeper meaning in poems. So why not infuse poetry throughout the year and take advantage of it instructionally?

Jan Littlebear (Clark) has a favorite saying that she likes to refer to although she is not quite sure of its origin.

“Poetry does for struggling older readers what nursery rhymes do for emerging younger readers.”

Is poetry in our standards? You bet! And depending on what you do with the poetry, I am sure you can cover many other standards at the very same time.

R7.2 Understand the elements of literature and nonfiction. Student will demonstrate knowledge of author's craft by recognizing and understanding word choice, figurative language, and poetic devices in poetry.

R8.6 Understand the structure of a variety of literary genres and techniques used in these genres.

Student will read a variety of genres (poetry, short stories, novels, nonfiction, and drama). Student will read with the rhythm, punctuation, and line breaks in poetry.

1. How about reading a poem a day to your class? You should look at the web site for Poetry 180. Billy Collins, poet laureate, selected 180 of his favorite poems for high school students in order to cover an entire school year. Also on this site are tips for “how” to read a poem aloud.

<http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/p180-howtoread.html>

2. Jump into poetry in conjunction with Teen Read Week, October 19 – 25. Yes, there is still time to get involved with this. The American Library Association sponsors this event, and this year's theme is **Slammin!**

http://www.ala.org/Content/NavigationMenu/YALSA/Teen_Reading/Teen_Reading.htm

Of particular interest to you will be their link of resources. I found several links that were not active, but the ones



that did open provided me with lots of new ideas. I especially liked the list of adolescent novels in poetry form. This is quickly becoming an exciting new genre for authors, and what a great way to get students hooked on poetry!

3. Jan Littlebear suggests using "a-poem-a-week" and completing short tasks with it each day in an effort to increase student fluency. At the end of the week, students should copy the poem and add it to their writer's notebook or portfolio. Imagine the wealth of material they will have by the end of the year. Need some possible daily tasks to do with the poem? Consider the following:

Read the poem to the class. Then read the poem again and ask them how it makes them feel. (This kind of question is easier for students than asking them what the poem means.) This could be done as a written response or in partners using "think-pair-share."

Read the poem chorally. Use the poet's organization to determine how to best read it. Stanza by stanza? Line by line? Or refer back to email Tip #18 where I described "pointed reading." (You can find these email tips in the new teacher binders at your school.) This is my all-time favorite way of reading poetry together. It encourages students to pick out words/phrases that carry meaning for them. This moves the students to interpretation, not just reading for enjoyment.

Use the poem to highlight new vocabulary. If you are using a Word Wall in your class, this is a natural way

to add to it. (More about Word Walls in a future email tip. In the meantime, try to read a professional book by Janet Allen. She has some excellent secondary strategies to use with Word Walls.)

Find examples of literary devices (simile, metaphor, personification, allusion, onomatopoeia, etc.) within the poem and teach a mini-lesson.

Use the poem as a springboard for a quickwrite. Ask students to borrow a line from the poem and let the line lead their thinking, or choose a line for your students to use. More on this next week.

So...

Don't wait for April to begin your poetry unit. Figure out a way to use poetry every day in your program. Because of its length, it makes the perfect text from which to teach.

