

Developing Children's Literacy Workshop

The Benefits of Books



Introduction

Books can be used in the classroom to open up new worlds to children. They can stimulate the imagination, foster vocabulary building and enhance critical thinking.

Books with illustrations also can be used to familiarize children with shapes, colour and textures.

In this workshop, I would like to discuss the many ways in which books can stimulate learning. Hopefully, it will also work to spark some new ideas as to how books can be used as learning tools in the classroom.

This workshop will be interactive and will require your participation as well as your input. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have as we go along.

Benefits of Reading Aloud

Reading aloud can be a fun for both the reader and listeners. By reading stories aloud in the class, teachers can build students' vocabulary, develop listening skills and nurture a passion for the written word.

Additional Specific Benefits of Reading Aloud

1) Vocabulary Building – creating Word Banks

While reading aloud, teachers can take note of words that they think may be new or difficult for the class. The teacher can then write the word on the board and ask the students if anyone knows the meaning of the word. It is important to see if the children can derive the meaning of the word in the context of the sentence or paragraph.

If the meaning is not known, the teacher can define the word. This will help the students to learn and understand new words when they are spoken or read.

It may also be possible to use this process to make a 'word bank' where new words are 'stored' or written on a section of the board or on flash cards. This process will keep the words fresh in the students' minds.

2) Developing Listening Skills

Reading aloud will also help students to develop their listening skills and improve their overall attentiveness. As the teacher reads aloud to the students, their desire to hear the story will improve their ability to listen.

By developing their listening skills, students will be able to easily come up with their own ideas because they can easily listen to what is being read, comprehend and then apply what was heard.

3) Order

Reading aloud to children will help them to learn how things are placed in order. By listening to a story, children will learn that stories have a logical course of events.

4) Grammar

Reading aloud will help students to learn grammar. Also, hearing complete sentences will increase students' overall understanding of grammar and word use.

5) Creativity

Reading aloud also enhances creativity. Children will visualize while listening to a story and this visualization process will help to enhance their creative skills. Teachers can make this process easier by telling students to “close their eyes and open their imaginations”, while the story is being read.

Reading and Classroom Activities

1) Building Word Banks (see above description)

2) The Buddy Reading System – The teacher can pair off a strong reader with a student who does not have very strong reading skills. The strong reader can help the other reader with difficult passages or challenging vocabulary. The pair can work together by taking turns reading to each other.

3) Classroom Discussion – *textual content* – The teacher can simulate class discussion around the plot, character and story setting. Questions can be asked such as why they believe a certain character took a particular course of action. Or what they learned from the story (especially if there is a moral to the story). Classroom discussion can promote critical thinking and get children to open up about personal thoughts and feelings.

4) Classroom Discussion – *photos or pictures* – Teachers can read aloud from books with illustrations to teach children about shapes, colour, textures, etc.

5) Brainstorming – What I know, What I would like to know and What I know now - Teachers can select a topic or theme from a (non-fiction) book that they are reading and initiate a brainstorming session with the class. The teacher will start off by asking the class what they know about a particular topic or theme and write the ideas or words on the board. For example, asking, “What do you know about birds?” The teacher may also participate by adding their own ideas. The teacher would then ask the class what they would like to know about the subject. Finally, the teacher can read the book to the class and ask the students what they now know about the topic.

Benefits:

- To discuss what the students already know or perceive about a particular topic
- To expand prior knowledge

- To encourage students to justify their decisions

6) Fill in the blanks: written – Teachers may use books in the class to do a fill-in-the-blanks exercise. During a fill-in-the-blanks exercise, a piece of writing is used and certain selected words are omitted. The students can use context clues to predict what words are missing from the sentences or paragraphs. The possible choices can be discussed during the exercise and more than one word may be acceptable for each blank.

Example: The ___ girl sat on the step.

Example: The eg_ was cracked.

Benefits:

- To increase reading comprehension
- To encourage the use of context clues for predicting and confirming
- To expand vocabulary through discussion

7) Oral Retells – The teacher or a student can read a short story or a chapter of a book to the rest of the students in the class. The student or teacher leading the session can then ask the class open-ended questions such as “What event happened first and what happened next?” Another idea would be to have the story read aloud and then have each student contribute to the retelling of the events of the story, describing the events as they happened in sequence.

Oral retells can also be done in partners as one student reads and then asks questions of the other student.

Benefits:

- To develop listening skills
- To enhance reading comprehension
- To help students retain details

8) Silent Reading – The teacher and the students can both select books and read them silently for an allotted time period. Silent reading can be held at the same time once a week or daily.

Benefits:

- Students will get the opportunity to read books of their own choosing
- Encourages independent reading
- Enables the teacher to model the joy of reading

9) Oral Book Reports – Students can be assigned to read a book and give an oral (or written) report to a small group or the remainder of the class.

The teacher could also record any interesting ideas from the report on the board. Book reports could also have a set format where the teacher asks the student to report on the following:

1. What happened in the book?
2. Who was in the book?
3. Why they enjoyed or didn't enjoy the book

4. Would they recommend the book to others and why or why not
5. Try to relate the events in the book to a personal experience

Benefits:

- This can help to develop an appreciation for books
- To help students to develop their summary as well as oral presentation skills
- To promote books that other students may enjoy

10) Developing Poetry from Books – Teachers can get students to develop simple acrostics (line poems) or cinquains (five-line poems) about story characters or main elements in the story.

Acrostic (line poem) Example:

BOOKS

Bringing new ideas
Opening up new worlds
Opportunities to find understanding
Key to learning
Special tools of knowledge

Cinquain (Five-line poem) Format

Line 1 – one word for the title
Line 2 – two words describing the title
Line 3 – three words that express actions
Line 4 – four words which express feelings or a four-word description
Line 5 – one word that repeats line one or relates to the word in line one

Cinquain (Five-line poem) Example:

Rain
Wet drops
Soaking, Splashing, Falling
Tears from the sky
Rain

Benefits:

- Introduces poetic forms to students
- Extends students' awareness of different forms of expression
- Fosters creative expression and imagination
- Promotes the creative use of words

11) Drama and Role-Play – Teachers and students can assume roles of the characters in books. This activity is a fun way to blend dramatic creativity and literacy.

Benefits:

- Helps students to explore various emotions and situations
- Encourages creative expression

- Encourages cooperation in group storytelling through drama

12) Drama and Storytelling – Teachers can read a book aloud and students can echo-read aloud along with the teacher. As teachers read, they can stress intonation. Teachers can also place the students in pairs and have them read simple passages to each other in a dramatic manner.

Benefits:

- Improves confidence in oral expression
- Improves listening skills
- Helps develop a sense of story
- Increases reading comprehension

13) Dramatic Reading – This activity can be done by having teachers read selections from a book in a dramatic voice, writing the selection on the chalk board and then having children follow along on the chalkboard. The selection should be re-read several times to encourage all children to join in with the reading. Dramatic readings can also incorporate simple actions and facial expressions.

Benefits:

- Fosters reading enthusiasm
- Improves oral reading (expression, diction, fluency)
- Models intonation, expression and language phrasing
- Brings more meaning to the text

Wrap-up and Q&A period