Teaching K-8 Literature with Trade Books

Rosemary Lee Potter

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Rosemary Lee Potter is a reading specialist and a classroom teaching veteran of 37 years. She has spent the past 15 years integrating children’s literature into all aspects of the K-8 curriculum. She has personally designed and implemented the interactive, cross-curricular children’s literature infusion of trade books, which is the subject of this fastback.

Potter also is a university instructor, an education consultant, a newspaper columnist, and a freelance writer. She writes for professional journals, has authored two textbooks, and has co-authored numerous educational materials. This is her fifth fastback. Her most recent previous fastback was 456 Technical Reading in the Middle School.

Potter is a longtime member of the Clearwater-St. Petersburg Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa International and is a Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation Author Seminar Lecturer. She dedicates this fastback to her husband, Peter Hamann, for his patience and support.

She extends appreciation to the students, teachers, and administrators of West Tampa Elementary School, Tampa, Florida; Del Rio Elementary School, Del Rio, Tennessee; Coachman Fundamental Middle School, Clearwater, Florida; Safety Harbor Middle School, Safety Harbor, Florida, and to the students in her children’s literature classes at Saint Leo University, Saint Leo and Seminole, Florida; University of Tennessee, Oneida campus, Tennessee; and Maryville College, Maryville, Tennessee. She also appreciates the cogent reflections of Casey B. Cusack, Carole E. Popaden, Kenyon D. Potter, and Robert E. Potter II.

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by

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Introduction

Trade books for children are rapidly becoming a mainstay in classroom cross-curricular instruction and reading motivation. Never in history have so many high-quality trade books been designed, produced, or marketed for young people. Trade books are becoming a common, valuable academic connection supporting lifelong reading prowess. This fastback is drawn from my recent experiences teaching with trade books in two elementary schools and two middle schools.

Major issues driving the popular classroom implementation of trade books are curricular limitations of textbook content scope and selection, trade book timeliness versus that of standard literature text subject matter, and the textbook budget. Juvenile trade books appear to offer some educational remedies, as well as creative opportunities.

Trade Book Levels. The book titles mentioned in this fastback are noted by level of intended reading: P for kindergarten-primary, I for intermediate, or M for middle school. Even if a book is noted P, readers should understand that aspects of the book also can be used with a higher or lower level, depending on specific lesson
objectives. The ratings are based on my experience, and so levels may differ from grade-level reading labels or lexile levels employed in such independent reading programs as Reading Counts and Accelerated Reader.

Titles with potential for teaching children's literature across grades K-8 are indicated by AG for all grades. Such books should not be overlooked as too long, too short, or too young in appearance for a particular group or goal. Witness that a number of books that most thought to be designed solely for young children, such as many Dr. Seuss titles, are quite appropriate for older students, even adults.

An AG example is the 2003 Caldecott Medal winner, My Friend Rabbit, by Eric Rohmann. This book was written for younger children and can be noted P. It certainly is enjoyed immensely by K-3 students, at first just for its storyline in a read-to situation. Afterward, children enjoy reflecting on the artwork and the funny things the artist features particular animals doing. A fifth-grade class listened to the story and eagerly spent 15 minutes talking about the ways and reasons that the art and book layout fit together well. Finally, eighth-graders, having been read the story, discussed the effort and detail it took to create the award-winning book. Therefore readers should consider all titles' designations as suggestions and be guided by lesson objectives.

Since the recent emergence of the idea that picture books also should be designed for, read by, and analyzed with older readers, there really are no "baby" picture books. However, a note that using trade books the other way around is cautionary. Some of the picture
books directed at older children have become edgier in content than is appropriate for use with primary youngsters. Examples include graphic novels and manga.
The Trade Book Approach

The trade book approach — using children’s literature published in a non-educational commercial market — shows promise in helping solve several serious curriculum and information access problems in a creative, educational manner. Among the pluses for trade books:

- They can be found to match a variety of cognitive and affective learning styles.
- They respond in timely fashion to events and trends.
- Material is available in all genres.
- They can be linked to Internet support to extend lessons.
- Most are priced reasonably, making multiple uses for multiple users cost-effective.
- They are attractive and often less intimidating than textbooks.
- Most titles are readily available from publishers and in bookstores and libraries.
• The best titles are reissued and thus available for many years.
• They present the work of top-quality writers and illustrators.
• The selection of trade books is enormous and growing.
• They tend to be better motivators than are textbooks.

Content Scope and Selection

Teaching K-8 literature has long been supported with textbooks; however, the high cost of textbooks in most states usually limits their adoption to once a decade. Publishing school textbooks is a big, expensive business, directly related to the material included in the texts. However, what is not included in the content scope and selection of pieces in literature anthologies may be more significant when it comes to choosing trade books to use instead of or supplemental to textbooks. Textbook publishers and adopters often are constrained by rigid guidelines regarding subject matter and language, which can limit textbook usefulness.

Such careful filtering and scrutinizing may amount to censorship. Does this mean that some textbooks lack depth or fail to present serious issues, conflicts, and situations? Yes, sometimes it does. Worse yet, it sometimes means that textbook publishers rush books to press that are biased or inaccurate, which has been noted especially in the fields of math and science.

This is not to say that trade books have no flaws or inaccuracies. Some receive specific, strong content criti-
cism. There certainly are challenges to trade book titles. Even so, there are now so many trade books from which to choose, other than challenged titles, that the selection is far greater than textbook publishers can manage.

Genres

One facet of literature that children must learn to recognize is genre. To appreciate and really understand print, children need both recreational and instructional exposure to the many different established forms: realistic fiction, historical fiction, biography, drama, poetry, science fiction, fantasy, folktales, nonfiction, and others. Textbooks typically lean heavily on traditional poetry, stories, folklore, and excerpts from historical nonfiction and juvenile novels. Drama on a limited scale and, admittedly, more nonfiction recently have been included.

Offsetting publishers’ recent content-diversity efforts are budget-driven school plans that limit students’ exposure to various genres. For example, one large Florida middle school’s literature teachers divided the content of a beautiful, newly adopted, expensive, heavy literature anthology in order to avoid buying multiple titles. By their plan, sixth-graders focused primarily on the textbook’s fiction sections, while seventh-graders studied only the nonfiction selections. Much of the remaining content was unused.

Students need to explore all of the literary genres, and one way to guarantee them multiple opportunities is to supplement a standard textbook with trade
books. The huge variety and number of trade books now being published provide titles in every genre appropriate to every age level.

Nonfiction

The use of one genre in particular, nonfiction trade books, is growing. A current review of education journals shows that use of nonfiction books has increased at both primary and intermediate grade levels. Three reasons predominate:

*Short text.* Not only are both younger and older students enjoying the diversity of treatments, styles, and imagination that today's nonfiction trade books offer, but educators are using them as short texts, sometimes selecting only certain brilliant, brief passages to read aloud. Such brevity and bright writing, often with high-quality graphics, photography, or art, illuminate the regular textbook and subject matter being studied. Using trade books in this manner also teaches that it is all right to refer to small portions of a work as one way to learn from references. This technique is especially helpful as an ESOL or inclusion strategy.

*Reference features.* When teachers want to demonstrate reference features that will support students' research, nonfiction trade books are a convenient resource. One intermediate teacher brings in five or six nonfiction trade books on the same topic and challenges students to pick just three of the books as the "best" ones to support their research assignments. She encourages the students to look at each book's features, such as indices, contents, bibliography, illustra-
tions, maps, keys, legends, and author background. Trade books offer opportunities for quick analyses of features in a comparative setting, something that the standard textbook cannot do.

Cross-curricular studies. Today’s trade books lend themselves to cross-curricular studies because many storylines, even in fiction, are based on nonfiction and include factual information. A good example is *Stellaluna* (P, I), by Janell Cannon. In this appealing trade book, after the author tells the story of a bat’s humorous adventures, she presents factual information about bats.

**Literary Elements**

Even very young readers can “see” and learn literary features in trade books. Of course, traditional literature texts also offer opportunities to examine character, plot, theme, setting, point of view, style, and tone. The use of trade books offers an efficient way to recognize and discuss these elements many, many times and to make detailed analyses often, even at lower grade levels. Analyzing the plot and setting of Doreen Cronin’s popular *Click, Clack Moo Cows That Type* (P) offers an example of point of view as students note the logic in both the animals’ capers and the farmer’s responses.

**Illustrative Elements**

Trade books offer opportunities to recognize and appreciate illustration as a literary device. Picture books, no longer designed and used by only the youngest students, now are used at all levels. In the primary grades, teachers are using trade books to point out the text
design (artwork, photos, color, font selection), helping students consider how ideas and language are represented with visuals and how illustration may amplify, change, or tell the story. For older students, the relationship between idea and visual statement becomes a fascinating analytic challenge that they truly enjoy.

Immediacy

In K-8 reading, literature, and other subject areas, educator concern is growing for timely and efficient instructional and supplemental materials to meet both traditional learning goals and rapidly changing 21st century curricular mandates. Textbooks are still a mainstay, but they cannot offer timely delivery of emerging conceptual and cultural information. Trade books are published more often and can reflect new trends and information more immediately than do commonly used textbooks.

High Quality

Sustained silent reading (SSR) plans, book clubs, literature circles, chapter-book discussions, and individualized reading programs have long depended on trade books to match children’s preferences to age-appropriate texts, to extend experience, and to motivate reading. The field of juvenile literature has benefited from this professional attention. Increased use of trade books, coupled with prominent awards and increased financial rewards, are making the publication of such books increasingly attractive to authors, illustrators, and publishers. As a result, many trade books are high
quality, offering substantive, authoritative content. More than 150 awards and medals are now given annually in the field of children's literature by prestigious libraries, foundations, institutions, publishers, and professional associations. There also are yearly lists of exceptional trade books that children's librarians nominate and students vote to recognize. Readers can locate a number of websites listing details of U.S. and international trade book awards by searching the Internet using the keywords, "children's book awards."

**Low Cost and Multiple Users**

When the teacher uses a trade book to read aloud, the cost is limited to the price of a single book. Even that copy may be borrowed from a library. Library copies also can be shared among several students to keep the cost of purchasing trade books down. In those cases where teachers buy class sets of trade books, say juvenile novels for whole-class study or chapter books for smaller cooperative groups and learning circles, the per student costs are low compared to the price of literature textbooks. Trade book costs also are low when wear and tear and occasional replacements are included in the calculation. Paperbacks are especially low cost, but even trade books with a more durable "library" binding are a cost-effective alternative or supplement to traditional textbooks.
Eight Ways to Use Trade Books Today

Literally anything educationally sound that a teacher does with a well-chosen trade book is likely to help students better understand their studies, encourage thinking, and, best of all, encourage reading. Following are 10 suggestions to get teachers started immediately:

1. Use trade books to enhance and motivate reading. Reading aloud to students is one way, and it should not be restricted to the early grades. Providing read-alone time for students is another way. And reading aloud together — in unison or in parts — is yet another enjoyable experience. Fifth-graders with whom I worked asked for this last activity often, using the books of Mary Ann Hoberman, for example, You Read to Me I’ll Read to You: Very Short Stories to Read Together (P, I).

2. Use trade books to increase higher-order thinking. Students can be led to focus on preparation for discussion, rereading, focused listening, book club, and “grand” analytic conversation about plot, characters, setting, and point of view.

3. Use trade books to parallel a textbook. Trade books
can be read and shared in a supplementary fashion to support and expand concepts introduced through textbooks or class lessons.

4. Use trade books as embedded text to amplify a study topic. Trade books, or portions of books, can be read during longer textbook-based lessons to provide a different or newer view, to clarify a concept, or to provide information for deeper understanding.

5. Use trade books for research or application in a cooperative learning group. Trade books can provide information that is readily accessible to a cooperative learning group.

6. Use trade books to introduce other literature producers. Trade books can be used to expand children's knowledge of authors or illustrators and their works.

7. Use multiple trade books to explore a single topic. A variety of trade books in different genres, including both fiction and nonfiction books, poetry, and biography, can be used to connect information on a single study topic.

8. Use trade books to tie in current or local events. Connect reading to everyday life, something that is hard if not impossible to do with textbooks. For example, just days after the loss of the space shuttle Columbia, fifth-, sixth-, and seventh-graders were read the trade book by Linda Granville, *High Flight: A Story of World War II* (I, M), the story of James Gillespie Magee Jr., the 19-year old pilot who wrote the poem, "High Flight," which often was quoted after the tragedy.

Not just any trade book will do, of course. The selections should be based on identified purposes. Teachers
should consult with school and public librarians, read children’s book lists and reviews, and search online.
Developing Trade Book-Based Lesson Plans

Formats of lesson plans vary, many requiring reference to national, state, or local standards. The lesson plan outline in the next section is a generic one that I used during weekly 40-minute visits with kindergartners through fifth-graders in two schools and with sixth- through eighth-graders in two schools. The lessons, which are shown in the Appendix, aimed at three program goals:

1. Decide the main idea of each trade book.
2. Examine each title from a literary viewpoint.
3. Integrate children's literature through trade books into the life and studies of students.

As the year progressed, the children became less timid about discussing literature. And as they had more and regular trade book experiences from which to draw comparisons, they gave evidence that many more learn-
ing goals were being addressed than merely those stated. Students, regardless of grade level, made numerous connections between the trade books read to them and their regular studies, current events, and other books. The higher-order thoughts they expressed went far beyond their teachers’ or my expectations.

Lesson Plan Outline

Each lesson plan includes several standard components:

*Connection* includes the genre or type of book, the reason for teaching this trade book, and the learning goal for the lesson. Examples: reading a contemporary picture book; determining the main idea; coinciding with the first day of school.

*Book* gives the title of the chosen book with careful consideration of the stated connection.

*Opportunities offered by lesson* identifies the various avenues that the lesson offers for study.

*Prior to reading* refers to discussions and preparation for reading. Discussion will get students thinking about a topic related to the reading, and students should be aware of what will be required for lesson assignments.

*After reading* refers to activities that follow, such as completing a writing assignment based on a prompt given prior to reading.

*Extending the lesson* includes plans for follow-up after the reading and assignment are completed.

*Evaluation* refers to assessing the effectiveness of the lesson, including discussion by students about how well they listened, how their discussion went, and
how well they completed the assignments. As this is a routine element, it is not specifically stated in each of the sample lessons in the Appendix.

**Trade Book-Based Lessons**

Each trade book that I used was an exciting and pleasant read, integral to an important initial lesson for each 40-minute session. The titles were selected to connect with an appropriate curriculum moment, for example, the opening of school, a historical event, or an emerging societal problem. Sometimes read-to titles were selected for contrast. Most titles were selected from lists of award-winning books, including lists chosen by children.

The lessons in the Appendix are a practical reference model — the first two lessons in detail, the rest somewhat abbreviated. After each visit, I left the books we read with the classes to provide the regular teacher with time to extend students’ responsive experiences and to allow students to reflect on various aspects of the books and discussions.

Most of the books used in these lessons were short enough to be read and discussed in one 40-minute period. Some books required more time. One title, for example, proved to be an exception to the one-session visit. *The Dinosaurs of Waterhouse Hawkins* (I, M), by Barbara Kerley, has such intriguing art and story complexity that it required not one but three visits in order to read the book and to allow for the high-interest, extended discussions it evoked.

While the selected titles are not all picture books,
most are well illustrated and could be enjoyed by the whole class when the pages were displayed in the traditional read-to manner. A focus on lengthier trade books and more advanced applications, especially with older students, are discussed in the next section.

While most of the books selected and read during the lessons are closely related to social studies or science, art and music also are represented. Emphasis on genre, literary elements, and language are repeated themes. Also, there are quality trade books in fiction, poetry, and folklore related to math that offer strong, clever, often humorous, and culturally diverse opportunities to enhance understanding of math in real-life situations. For example, two trade books that may help students learn math are *Math Curse*, by Jon Scieszka and illustrated by Lane Smith (I, M), and *One Hundred Hungry Ants*, by Elinor J. Pinezes and illustrated by Bonnie MacKain (P, I).

In addition to curriculum correlation, the various trade books related to the school calendar, its seasonal and social links. Student interest, unexpectedly, often broadened and deepened these connections, improving on any ongoing analysis. The teachers and I saw this outcome as a sign that regular integration of trade books was a sound strategy for evoking higher-order thought. We noted that lively discussion points also made fine writing prompts for simple one-line responses and more complex forms, such as letters, questions, sayings, and short scripts.

As I had hoped, discussions one week began to lead to more informed discussions in the following weeks.
Students' enthusiasm and growth in analytic sophistication was obvious. This phenomenon was most notable when a second or third book by the same author was read later or when several books of the same genre were presented. Comparisons that students made between titles often were surprising and clever.

Students' reflections seemed mature. We used a listening rubric that included focus, silent thought about topics to come, speaker eye contact, and minimizing distraction. The rubric was reviewed at the beginning and end of each visit, and students used it well consistently.

During my last visit, students talked about their favorite parts of the read-to visits. They gave very favorable responses when asked to share ideas about books and mentioned without being prompted their enjoyment of the written and shared responses that followed each reading.
Most of the instructional ideas used in the read-to lessons in the Appendix are applicable with middle school students as well, particularly when the titles are of more mature interest. For example, seventh- and eighth-graders who experienced read-to lessons insisted on examining more closely *The Spider and the Fly* (I, M), by Tony DiTerlizzi, in order to address in great detail its graphic, dramatic art and macabre storyline. Some later visited the author’s website to learn more about the book. In another example, these students evinced serious interest in the sobering implications of the death of the young pilot of *High Flight* in juxtaposition with the then recent space shuttle *Columbia* tragedy. Eighth-graders asked several times to read again the “duet” or tandem selections in *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices* (I, M), by Paul Fleischman, an interactive, class-wide instructional “tour de force,” according to one of their teachers. They tried writing poems and prose in a similar format.

Older students can be expected to enjoy regular lit-
erary read-to experiences when they are invited to experience well-chosen trade book literature in an online fashion. According to Leu and others in a remarkable article in *The Reading Teacher* (November 2004), there are now many opportunities online for both students and teachers to connect with trade books and their authors and to chat with other children about the books in joint online curriculum exchange projects. I began using such projects with middle school students in 1989. Students read trade books by Roald Dahl and Paula Danziger and then discussed them online with students who also had read them in England and Russia. The experience was a motivational success. Such an empowering strategy awaits an enterprising, computer-savvy teacher. Global students can jointly read and discuss the popular and numerous survivor-themed works of Gary Paulsen or the fantastic adventure series books by Lemony Snicket.

**Match-Up and Mentoring**

During the course of the school read-to visits, one student, a fifth-grader and frequent absentee, expressed great interest in responding to various titles almost every week. Sometimes the response was a story or a poem modeled on one she heard, or it might be a letter. Her teacher reported that these self-initiated responses often took precedence over her regular class work. With the permission of her teacher, I met with the student for eight weeks in the school media center with the idea of mentoring her in creative writing, for which she was exhibiting high interest and a definite flair.
Immediately after each of the read-to class sessions, she remained so that she might reflect on some of the in-session responses.

After discussing *Stone Soup* (P, I), retold by Heather Forest, for example, she revealed that she loved to cook and talked about special dishes she could make. I shared my copy of *Everything on a Waffle* (I), by Peggy Horvath. A Newbery Honor Book 2002, the book is an easy read about an independent girl near this student’s age who in every chapter is involved with food. The book includes an authentic, short, humorously written recipe at the end of each chapter. This student became quite involved with reading the book and tried some of the recipes, reporting funny results.

As the school year ended, so did the mentoring; but the student announced that she would keep up her creative writing in a journal over the summer. I gave her a copy of the book we had enjoyed together. She said that the book was her “very first one” ever completed.
Conclusion

Using distinguished juvenile trade books to teach children’s literature and to enhance the rest of the K-8 curriculum is already well accepted as a teaching strategy. Students who learn to read and enjoy a large variety of books, authors, illustrators, styles, and subjects can only benefit.

The use of trade books as replacements for the textbook or as enriching supplemental reading is a win-win education strategy. Trade books, unlike most textbooks, usually do not require a long approval period or committee deliberations, especially if they are simply checked out of the school library.

Never before has the selection of trade books been so great and access to them so convenient. There is a trade book for just about any reading level and subject area. Thus subject area teachers who use trade-book strategies can enhance their content instruction while improving student literacy with greater ease and efficacy than in the past. Many teachers can work with their school librarians, who are experienced in teacher and student book “matches.”

Reading teaches reading. The more the student reads,
the better; and trade books are an excellent vehicle to increase reading frequency and so to build reading skill.
Resources


Appendix

Lesson 1

*Connection*: Contemporary picture book; determining main idea; opening of school.


*Opportunities offered by lesson:*

- Review appropriate standard English greetings.
- Practice determining main idea: making friends/brotherhood.
- Link with social procedure of making friends.
- Discuss style, art, contemporary realistic fiction genre.
- Model reading aloud. (This opportunity exists in every read-to lesson.)

*Prior to reading*: Discuss how new friends often are made and that the author used only 31 words to tell his story. Tell students that, after listening, they will be asked to write about two topics: 1) the main idea and 2) the book’s art and language.

*After reading*: Students each write two lines with prompts: 1) Tell about the book, its art, and its language; and 2) State
the main idea of this book. Ask at least three students to volunteer their written responses to the prompts.

*Extending the lesson:* Discuss comparable, recent real-life experiences in making friends.

*Evaluation:* Review with students how well they listened, wrote, and discussed. Decide with students what behaviors can be improved next time.

(Note: I left this book with the fifth-grade teacher, who later told me that several students reread the book and discussed it again independently during the next week.)

**Lesson 2**

*Connection:* Determining main idea; making inferences; farm setting.


*Opportunities offered by lesson:*

- Develop concept of typewriter, farm, animals, farm products and terms.
- Practice in determining main idea: sometimes people compromise.
- Practice in making inferences: last page shows duck diving off swimming pool board.
- Discuss style, layout, picture book, fantasy genre, animals, writing, etc.

*Prior to reading:* Explore and identify “typewriter” and “farm,” farm animals, “Old McDonald,” and farm products. Discuss what would happen if farm animals did not provide milk and eggs. Tell students they will be asked to discuss the book after listening. Give prompts.
After reading: Students listen and then discuss two lines with prompts: 1) Tell about the book — its illustrations, parts liked best, language, font; and 2) Share the main idea, compromise, as well as the inferential idea found on the last page. Ask at least three students to share on each topic.

Extending the lesson: Discuss the possible sequel (define term) to this book. Tell how children writing letters to the author motivated her to write Giggle, Giggle, Quack? Have students predict the storyline of the sequel.

Evaluation: Discuss with students how well they listened and discussed. Decide with them what can be improved next time. Leave both books with teachers.

(Note: The following week, teachers reported some heated debates had taken place in their classes about the read-to book. They’d suggested that students take sides, some defending the farmer, others agreeing that the negotiations depicted were funny, but fair. Students loved it.)

Lesson 3

Connection: Celebrating Patriots’ Day; historical nonfiction.


Opportunities offered by lesson:

• Learn flag history on Patriot’s Day.
• Practice determining main idea: how and why flags develop.
• Connect with the actual use and meaning of the flag.
• Discuss comparison of the two authors’ versions of the story.
• Examine layout, illustrations of nonfiction genre books.

Prior to reading: Observe the number and variety of books about the flag. Discuss why learning about the flag is important. Discuss why reading about the flag this particular day is a good idea.

Remind students that, after the reading, they will be asked to discuss or write about five topics: 1) the main idea; 2) nonfiction features; 3) illustrations, favorite parts, language, and printing; 4) information new to them; and 5) why these are good books for Patriots’ Day.

After reading: Students discuss or write about the five topics above, perhaps listing information on a chart or board. Volunteers share written responses.

Extend the lesson: Talk about other books about the United States that might interest students.

Lesson 4

Connection: Considering other cultures — Alaskan/Middle Eastern.


Opportunities offered by lesson:

• Learn about two more unique cultures; global families.
• Practice determining main idea: family love.
• Discuss comparison of the two selected authors’ views of culture, family.
• Examine layout, format, and illustrations.
• Consider fantasy elements.

Prior to reading: Observe the cover of the first book and identify story's culture, repeat for second book. Consider possible main idea of each book and, if at all, shared by both books. Discuss why reading about the people of other cultures is important today. Tell students that, after the reading, they will be asked to discuss five topics: 1) the main idea; 2) book features — illustrations, language, print, format, size; 3) fictional segments; 4) new learning about other cultures, similarities of these two, and differences; and 5) favorite book and why.

After reading: Students discuss or write about the five topics. Volunteers share written responses.

Extend the lesson: Students were invited to draw or write about their own cultures, each response to include a human relationship similar to the ones in the two books read.

Lesson 5

Connection: The genre of folktales; idea of sharing.

Opportunities offered by lesson:
• Learn about folktales, concept of sharing.
• Practice determining main idea: cooperative sharing = greater success.
• Discuss the literary notion of version.
• Examine layout, format, and illustrations of a European story in the folktale style.
Prior to reading: Observe the cover of the book, attempting to predict storyline. Decide the possible main idea. Discuss the concept of the folktale genre. Clue students to expect to discuss or write about four topics after the reading: 1) the main idea; 2) the book features — illustrations, language, print, format, size, and type of paper; 3) the reality of the story, if any; and 4) how the story might be retold some other way, a different version.

After reading: Students discuss or write about the four topics. Volunteers share written responses.

Extend the lesson: Read the preface of the book in which other versions of the story are mentioned and the recipe for the soup printed in the back. Ask for student responses. Discuss the possible origin of the phrase “pot-luck.” Ask if it might be connected with this or similar “soup-starter” type folktales.

Lesson 6

Connection: Continuing folktale, concept of version, and main idea.


Opportunities offered by lesson:

- Learn about the folktale genre, point of view, and version.
- Practice determining the main idea: the pigs tell a “different” story.
- Chance to tell the original story, group-style, with sequencing, etc.; examine layout as amplification of the story.

Prior to reading: Retell the original version with children’s
help. Examine the cover of the book, both front and back, discussing observations. Predict the storyline. Discuss concept of folktale.

Remind students that, after the reading, they will be asked to discuss or write about four topics: 1) the differences between this storyline and the more commonly heard version, 2) how the illustrations helped tell the story, 3) why this story is considered a folktale, and 4) how this story might be retold some other way, still another version. 

After reading: Students discuss or write about story, perhaps draw a different version.

Extend the lesson: Read the book jacket flaps to the students. Discuss how the author won the same award for another book in 1992. Tell them that they will examine this other book later in the year. Ask them to predict what the book might be like. Record and retain the predictions.

(Note: During the following week, students who elected to write their own versions of this story became extraordinarily involved, turning in some remarkably well-written and exciting spin-offs. This was particularly interesting in that these students exhibiting clever cognitive and language skills were often not at all interested in most regular school assignments.)

Lesson 7

Connection: Seasonal, science-related fiction and nonfiction combination.


Opportunities offered by lesson:

• Learn about the genre of fiction based on fact, contrast.
• Practice determining the main idea: the "essence" of friendship.
• Examine art as amplification of this Reading Rainbow book.
• Discuss facts about the natures of birds and bats.
• Recognize and enjoy humor in writing.

Prior to reading: Discuss flying animals, such as squirrels, birds, bats. Use the KWL strategy — What do we Know; what do we Want to know, what have we Learned; similarities, differences of these animals; other things students want to find out about them; observations of the cover of the book, back and front; possibility of predicting the storyline at this time; the main idea; the concept of fiction based on fact. Tell students to anticipate that they will be asked, after the reading, to discuss or write about five topics: 1) facts learned about bats and birds from this fiction book, 2) the main idea, 3) the humor and how it was provided, 4) a possible sequel, and 5) why this book is primarily considered fiction.

After reading: Students discuss or write about the five topics. Volunteers share written responses.

Extend the lesson: Read the nonfiction back matter to students and also the author information on the book jacket. Discuss her purpose in writing this book.

Lessons 8, 9, and 10

Connection: Offers art amplification of a science biography topic: dinosaurs. (Requires more than one lesson.)

Opportunities offered by lesson:

- Learn about the biography genre.
- Practice determining the main idea: life work and dream of the artist who first showed us dinosaurs.
- Discuss facts about dinosaurs and scientific art.
- Examine the art amplification of an art/science biography.

Prior to reading: Discuss dinosaurs and who first discovered them, person who first told us how they looked, possibility of determining the main idea from the covers, the concept of the biography genre. Tell students that after listening to the book, they will be asked to discuss or write about four topics: 1) main idea, 2) facts learned about dinosaurs, 3) facts learned about Waterhouse Hawkins, and 4) predicting topic of the author’s next book.

After reading: Students discuss or write about the four topics. Volunteers share written responses.

Extend the lesson: Read the book jacket about the book, author, and illustrator. Encourage students to write and send letters to the author and illustrator. Compare the creative art of Waterhouse Hawkins with the artwork of the book’s illustrator, Brian Selznick. Discuss inspiration and influence.

Lesson 11

Connection: Consideration of a song lyric title in the picture book genre.


Opportunities offered by lesson:

- Learn about the song lyric picture-book genre.
- Practice in determining the main idea: how an artist has put a song into a story, thus making “something from nothing.”
Discuss how song lyrics are usually a storyline; inspiration.
Examine the creative, culturally diverse, art amplification of a song, including the die-cut format.

Prior to reading: Discuss concepts of song lyrics and picture books, why lyrics may suggest drawings, and possibility of determining the main idea from the book covers. Tell students that after the reading, they will be asked to discuss or write about five topics: 1) the main idea — something from nothing, 2) song lyrics, 3) the author/illustrator, 4) prediction of type and title of another book by author, and 5) another culture or time.

After reading: Students discuss and write about the five topics. Volunteers share written responses.

Extend the lesson: Read the book jacket about the book’s author and illustrator. Share the trade book versions of other old songs, such as “Bingo,” “I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly,” “Old McDonald Had a Farm,” “She’ll Be Comin’ Around the Mountain When She Comes,” or “This Old Man.” These trade books with folksy lyrics and lively illustrations provide interesting cultural and historical notes and, in the latter case, a great (P) counting book.

(Note: The following week teachers and students arrived with three responsive products: several hand “die-cut” original stories, four original stories where something becomes nothing and nothing becomes something, and two stories illustrating other old, well-known songs.)

Lesson 12

Connection: Examination of picture book and fantasy genre.
Opportunities offered by lesson:

- Learn about the picture book fantasy genre.
- Practice in determining the main idea: child-like believing keeps a memory alive and dynamic; related to theme concept.
- Discuss how art amplifies the storyline.

Prior to reading: Discuss the fantasy genre and why fantasy might inspire artists, the possibility of determining the main idea from the book covers, and the concept of Santa Claus — as a child’s belief. Tell students that, after the reading, they will be asked to discuss or write about five topics: 1) the main idea, 2) the fantasy genre, 3) the fantasy world shown, 4) the author and illustrator, and 5) prediction about another book the author might write and illustrate.

After reading: Students discuss or write about the five topics. Volunteers share written responses.


Lesson 13

Connection: Contemporary realistic fiction with photographic art.


Opportunities offered by lesson:

- Learn about contemporary realistic fiction/photographic essay.
• Practice determining the main idea: the heart of childhood and wildlife.
• Discuss how photography amplifies the storyline.

Prior to reading: Discuss contemporary realistic fiction; why the genre might attract authors/illustrators; snowman as a custom or character. Remind students that, after the reading, they will be asked to discuss or write about four topics: 1) the main idea, 2) the contemporary realistic fiction genre, 3) facts about the husband-wife author team and their family, and 4) what other book about the woods these authors might create.

After reading: Students discuss or write about the four topics.

Extend the lesson: Read the book jacket, including the back and what reviewers said. Invite diverse responses to this book — letters, drawings, flow charts, and mapping.

Lesson 14

Connection: Contemporary American biography in civil rights.


Opportunities offered by lesson:

• Learn about contemporary American biography.
• Learn about American history.
• Discuss how images and collages amplify a story.
• Practice in determining the main idea: the story of civil rights, pacifist leadership.

Prior to reading: Discuss contemporary American biography
and why it might attract authors and readers. Is it possible to determine the main idea of the book from its front or back cover? Discuss the life of Martin Luther King Jr. Remind students that, after the reading, they will be asked to discuss four topics: 1) the main idea, 2) contemporary biography genre, 3) facts about the author and illustrator, and 4) reasons why the book won important awards.

*After reading:* Students discuss or write about the four topics. Volunteers share written responses.

*Extend the lesson:* Read the book jacket. Rather than one-line written reactions, invite diverse responses to the book.

**Lesson 15**

*Connection:* American historical fiction and nonfiction.

*Opportunities offered by lesson:*

- Learn about earlier settler days on farms and mountains.
- Learn about American history through fiction and nonfiction.
- Discuss how circumstances shape work, tools, and life.
- Practice in determining the main idea: the closeness and inventiveness of pioneer life.

*Prior to reading:* Discuss fiction and nonfiction genres, the role that illustrations have in these works, and how, while listening to a story read, a person can decide the main idea. Remind students that, after listening, they will
be asked to discuss five topics: 1) the main idea, 2) historical fiction, 3) old sayings as nonfiction, 4) facts about the authors and illustrators, and 5) possible reasons why this book won the Caldecott Honor Book Award.

After reading: Students discuss or write about the five topics. Volunteers share written responses.

Extend the lesson: Ask students if they can think of any other old sayings or customs. Invite other responses to the books — drawings, models, and scripts.

(Note: Once begun, the discussion of old sayings proved hilarious both in that session and, according to their teachers, when students returned to their classrooms.)

Lesson 16

Connection: Folktale genre and Hawaiian culture.


Opportunities offered by lesson:

- Hear a Hawaiian folktale; experience folktale genre.
- Learn about Hawaii's volcanic environment; specific science and Hawaiian vocabulary.
- Consider cultural diversity.
- Practice in determining the main idea: facts of Hawaiian cultural and physical environment.
- Awareness of a book designed to honor national parks and rangers.

Prior to reading: Discuss folktale and folklore genre; discuss Hawaii and compare with own environment; possibility while listening to determine the main idea; the role illustrations have in this story, if any. Remind students that,
after listening, they will be asked to discuss or write about four topics: 1) elements that make this a folktale and elements that are nonfiction, 2) the main idea, 3) new vocabulary, and 4) reasons why the author and illustrator dedicated the book to the National Park Service and rangers.

After reading: Students discuss and write about the four topics. Volunteers share responses.

Extend the lesson: Ask students if there are any other stories where an older or wiser animal or person came to the rescue.

Lesson 17

Connection: Poetry and biography genre; response to Columbia disaster.


Opportunities offered by lesson:

- Learn about the poem and its poet in a World War II setting.
- Examine the biography genre featuring a poet.
- How poetry is written, its purpose, perhaps use at times of grief.

Prior to reading: Observe the cover of the book. Decide possible main idea. Discuss biography and poetry genres. Tell students that, after the reading, they will be asked to discuss or write about four topics: 1) James Gillespie Magee Jr.; 2) the history of the poem; 3) the use of the poem — the famous two lines beginning, "slipped the surly bonds of earth" — during the war and after the Challenger and Columbia disasters; and 4) how young people can work toward their dreams.
After reading: Students discuss or write about the four topics. Volunteers share their written responses.

Extend the lesson: Reread the poem. Challenge students to memorize the entire poem, rather than just the most famous lines.

Lesson 18

Connection: Experience with contemporary humor and art.


Opportunities offered by lesson:

- Enjoy the genre of literary humor.
- Discuss the inspiration for a funny book, its art.
- Examine language and how we interpret or misinterpret it.
- Contrast with books about serious matters.

Prior to reading: Talk about the book from external observation: cover, pictures, etc. Decide possible main idea. Discuss humor genre. Read the dedication in the book. Tell students they will be asked to discuss or write about four topics: 1) the main idea, 2) the humor genre in contrast with other genres, 3) how this book might be used besides just reading it, and 4) author inspiration.

After reading: Students discuss or read about the four topics. Volunteers share written responses.

Extend the lesson: Reread book to enjoy, anticipating the cleverness of the language.
Lesson 19

Connection: Contemporary realistic fiction; elder issue.


Opportunities offered by lesson:

- Enjoy the genre of contemporary realistic fiction.
- Discuss social situation of the elderly alone.
- Discuss value of illustration to amplify book text.
- Determine the main idea.

Prior to reading: Talk about external points — cover embellishment, style of art, etc. Discuss other books Rylant has written, including *Missing May*. Discuss what a big city is like. Discuss “elderly” — what is it? Discuss contemporary realistic fiction. Tell students that, after they listen, they will be asked questions and will discuss various topics. Tell the main idea. Describe the contemporary realistic fiction genre. Discuss how a writer gets his or her ideas. Discuss the main character: Solomon Singer.

After reading: Students discuss or write about the four topics. Volunteers share written responses.

Extend the lesson: Invite students to design and write greeting cards for a nursing facility.

Lesson 20

Connection: Poetry genre and art amplification.

Opportunities offered by lesson:

- Examine the genre of historic poetry in relation to amplification with art.
- Determine a main idea as “cautionary,” or with a moral.
- A look at award-winning illustration.

Prior to reading: Discuss the book’s unusual external appearance, why the poet originally wrote the poem, characteristics of spiders and flies, features of narrative poems. Tell students that, after they listen, they will be asked to discuss or write about four topics: 1) the main idea, 2) the poetry genre, 3) artist’s rendition of the poem, and 4) reasons why this title was named a 2003 ALA Caldecott Honor Book.

After reading: Students discuss or write about the four topics. Volunteers share written responses.

Extend the lesson: Invite students to read aloud their favorite page. Read and discuss the clever warning letter at the end of the book, written to the readers by the spider. Also read and discuss the biographical data on both authors.

Lesson 21

Connections: The science fiction genre and art amplification.


Opportunities offered by lesson:

- Examine the genre of science fiction set in a contemporary student world.
- Extrapolate from science fair projects to imaginative projects.
- Looking again at an award-winning author/artist’s amplification of text through illustration.
- Determine main idea.
• Discuss text design and font — watercolor, Bulmer, the typography-style, arrangement, appearance of printed matter.

Prior to reading: Reexamine the work of David Wiesner in this second of his works to be read. Look at students' predictions based on prior Wiesner book. Discuss the science-fiction genre; also which aspects are true and which probably never will be true. Discuss the term sci-fi. Talk about the book, basing ideas on its cover. Predict the main idea of the story. Review literary elements, such as plot, character, theme, point of view, etc. Discuss the standard characteristics of science projects. Tell students that, after the reading, they will be asked to discuss or write about four topics: 1) the main idea; 2) the art of David Wiesner, its inspiration, its surprise, its text amplification; 3) the science fiction genre; and 4) any of the literary elements, such as plot, character, and point of view.

After reading: Students discuss or write about the four topics. Volunteers share written responses.

Extend the lesson: Invite students to find out more about David Wiesner and his books. Suggest they check at the library in author sources, as well as on the Internet by author name. Have students reread aloud their favorite page or show it if the page has no words, explaining their reasons for selection.

(Note: Students were delighted to reexamine earlier predictions, a few of which were very close to reality, particularly where they had guessed there would be unusual artwork with odd points-of-view and surprises. No students guessed the actual storyline, though one girl said she had read the book at the library and knew; but, laughing, she said, “I decided not to tell you [her classmates] the plot!”)
Lessons 22 and 23

*Connection:* Fantasy genre and nonfiction genre.


*Opportunities offered by lesson:*

- Examine the genre of fantasy.
- Use a reference book in music history.
- Discuss award-winning author/artist’s amplification of text through illustration, aspects of friendship, skills and love of music.
- Determine the main idea.

*Prior to reading:* Discuss the books: 1) compare and contrast them — genre, appearance, use; 2) the main idea of each; 3) values of music, friendship, art in book illustration; and 4) the 2003 Caldecott winner. Remind students that they will be asked to discuss or write about those four topics.

*After reading:* Students discuss and write about the four topics.


(Note: During the two weeks and following, several teachers reported they were having what we would call extended grand conversations in their classrooms regarding these and other books considered earlier in the year and prompted by students.)
Lesson 24

Connections: Poetry genre, science, and humorous style.

Opportunities offered by lesson:

- Examine a choral reading/tandem reading style, poetry genre.
- Enjoy interactive literature.
- Discuss humor, science, and insects as poetry inspiration.
- Model variation on reading aloud, read-to.
- Determine the main idea.

Prior to reading: Discuss the poetry genre and award, humor inspired by science, and format for reading poetry as a duet. Remind students that, after the reading, they will be asked to discuss or write about four topics: 1) this poetry book, 2) the range of books shared throughout this year, 3) a favorite book and why, and 4) the value of reading trade books, that is, students’ term “library books.”

After reading: Students discuss or write about the four topics. Volunteers share written responses and reflections.

Extend the lesson: Discuss genre and subject matter opportunities for summer reading, as well as recreational and reading program goals.
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