

Student Choice: Empowering Students With Tools for Reading

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INTRODUCTION

The intention of this unit is to guide students to an understanding of how individuals become proficient readers. Students naturally select books that they like, but are often unaware of their reasons. My intention is to provide a structure for student reading and to expose students to choices from a variety of texts and genres. The study of genre will include biography/non-fiction, historical fiction, mystery, poetry, realistic fiction, and science fiction/fantasy. Students should be making informed decisions about what they will read and why.

This sixth grade curriculum unit presents four approaches to reading, called “tools,” intended to empower students with essential academic skills. *Distinguishing genre* is the first of these four approaches that students will add to their reading repertoire. This topic will introduce students to a variety of genres and guide students to choose the genre that interests them most. *How to choose a book* is the next approach presented. This topic will assist students in understanding their interests. It combines recommendations from peers and teachers, as well as an individual interest inventory to identify a genre and specific book that a given student will enjoy reading. *Silent reading* is the third addition to the “toolbox.” Silent reading gives students the opportunity to have uninterrupted time to read at their leisure. The final topic, *Documentation*, assists students in developing concrete records of individual reading and responses. This will help students see what they’ve accomplished in terms of reading.

DISTINGUISHING GENRE

This unit will provide students with background knowledge about types of text and will support basic library skills. For example, middle school students should be able to distinguish fiction from non-fiction. Students should also be challenged to find their preferred genres in the library. This topic will cover the distinguishing characteristics that separate books into respective genres and will assist students in discovering the genre each of them prefers most and will equip them with the resources necessary to find these genres in any library.

For the purpose of this unit, the term genre will consist of the following six categories: biography/non-fiction, historical fiction, mystery, poetry, realistic fiction, and science fiction/fantasy. Of course there are more categories available in choice of genre. This is far from being an all-inclusive list of genres. However, there does come a point where a student can feel overly saturated with information. This unit is designed to expose students to a variety of genres in order to assess which genre is preferred by each

student. This unit is focused on middle school students, and therefore the texts chosen are appropriate for this level. If this unit is being taught at a lower grade level, then, of course, the teacher has discretion to minimize the number of genres as well as to modify the selected books as appropriate for a student's abilities. Conversely, if this unit is being taught at a higher grade level, then the reverse is true, and more genres and alternate books can be added. A complete definition of each genre is provided in the lesson plans below.

The role of the teacher becomes very crucial here because it falls on the teacher's shoulders to present an interesting and worthwhile mix of each of the genres. The students cannot know what genre they are drawn to until they have had exposure to all varieties. This unit will ask the teacher to spend time reading aloud to the class from each genre. The choice of books and material will ultimately be up to the discretion and preference of the teacher. However, several recommendations will be given to assist those teachers who need a starting point. Each teacher knows the general interest and reading level of his or her class and, therefore, will ultimately make the decision regarding the text. Remember, the goal of the unit is to expose students to enough of a variety of texts that they feel they have ownership of their reading choice.

For biography/non-fiction, *Woodson* by Gary Paulsen would be a good start. Paulsen writes this autobiography about his adventures in dog sledding. *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank is also a very good book to use as an introduction to autobiography. The students will find the emotional writing quite touching. *The Life and Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.* by Ira Peck is great for introducing Martin Luther King, Jr. Also, *Malcolm X: By Any Means Necessary* by Walter Dean Myers is a wonderful introduction to a controversial yet important figure. For a collection of biographies, I suggest the *Lives of...* series by Kathleen Krull. There are a series of these books describing the lives of various artists, athletes, extraordinary women, musicians, Presidents, and writers. These books contain witty and insightful profiles of highlighted individuals with a full color caricature for each. Current events should also be included in this category for non-fiction. For current events, *Junior Scholastic* is an excellent resource. Teachers can order class sets so that each student can put his hands on one. The news is written in language students can understand. There are also quizzes and other activities for students to enjoy. There should also be a young adult section published once a week in the local paper, such as Thursday's *Yo! Houston* section in the *Houston Chronicle*, which is great for students to read. Any teen-based magazine or newspaper that a teacher can put into the hands of students is great. Students are usually lacking exposure when it comes to current events and news articles.

For historical fiction *Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis is recommended. This is the Newbery Medal winner for 2000. The setting is Michigan in 1936. The main character is a motherless ten-year-old boy who is in search of his father. *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry is also a favorite among students. It is set in Copenhagen in 1943. Anne-Marie must protect her Jewish best friend from the Nazis who are in strict control

of Denmark. Newbery Medal-winning *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor is the story of an African American family facing the hardships of racism, illness and poverty. The setting is the Deep South of 1930.

For mystery, *Nancy Drew* or *The Hardy Boys* will forever be timeless classics for this genre. If the teacher is looking for something newer, then *A Series of Unfortunate Events* by Lemony Snicket is a good choice. There are about nine in the series so far, and Snicket doesn't look like he's stopping soon. The books contain adventures of the Baudelaire children, who seem to have an unlucky time. The writing is somewhat sinister but hilarious and will keep the reader intrigued. *The Face on the Milk Carton* by Caroline B. Cooney is also a great pick for this genre. A young girl sees a picture of herself on a milk carton and is hit with the realization that perhaps she was kidnapped at a very young age. There are also two more stories continuing this tale: *Whatever Happened to Janie?* and *The Voice on the Radio*. For this age, the authors Joan Lowry Nixon and Lois Duncan are quite popular. Each author has written numerous mysteries that are age appropriate for middle school students. Any mystery novel by one of these authors will surely get students hooked.

For poetry, the easiest choice would be books by Shel Silverstein such as *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, *Falling Up* or *A Light In the Attic*. These poems are written on the student level and are usually humorous. If, however, the students already know these poems or the teacher would like to expose the students to fresh poetry then *A Child's Garden of Verses* by Robert Louis Stevenson is another collection of one author's poetry. This book has great layout and pictures to help students engross themselves in the reading. For more works by specific authors, the teacher may look into Douglas Florian, Bruce Lansky or Jack Prelutsky. *The Random House Book of Poetry for Children* is another great recommendation. This book contains over 500 poems of all types by many famous authors such as Emily Dickinson, Robert Louis Stevenson, Robert Frost and Langston Hughes. The book will definitely provide a rich diversity to the genre of poetry. Another notable book of poetry is *The Oxford Book of Poetry for Children*. This is also a collection of poetry from various authors that students will enjoy.

For realistic fiction, there are countless great books to choose from. A brief list includes *Are You There God? It's Me Margaret* by Judy Blume, *Dear Mr. Henshaw* by Beverly Cleary, *Maniac Magee* by Jerry Spinelli, and *Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis. Since this category is the most widely know and the one from which most students choose books, to attempt to put all the favorites here would be impossible. The titles mentioned are just a start, but the genre is so wide that the teacher should have no problem choosing several books to use.

For science fiction/fantasy, there are several books from which to choose. The *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling is a definite favorite. I have yet to find a student who doesn't like this continuing series. *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis are possibilities for this genre. *The Golden Compass* trilogy by Philip Pullman is a recent

favorite among fantasy readers. *The Redwall* series by Brian Jacques is very popular. There are over ten books and counting in the series and once a student reads one, they are definitely hooked. *The Giver* by Lois Lowry is a great pick for this genre, though some reluctant readers might find it to be too confusing or too challenging in its concepts. Classics for this category include *Charlotte's Web* by E. B. White, *Indian in the Cupboard* by Lynne Reid Banks, and *The BFG* by Roald Dahl.

The above suggestions for each genre are just that, suggestions. Every teacher has a different opinion on what is a good book for his or her class. The above suggestions are merely stated to give a starting point and in no way are a necessity for completing the unit properly. Any book that fits into the respective genre could be used if the teacher has a favorite or two that was not mentioned above. The books suggested above were compiled from a variety of sources and from my knowledge of what students have enjoyed in my classes. In addition, I received assistance from the following book lists: *Bowker Annual Library and Book Trade Almanac*, *Choosing Books for Children*, *The New York Times Parent's Guide to the Best Books for Children*, *Survey of Children's Literature*, *Valerie and Walter's Best Books For Children*. I also found information through various searches on Amazon.com. Each source is fully cited in the bibliography attached.

As stated above, the individual development of the ability of a student to find his/her preferred genre in the library is a goal of this unit. The teacher should start with the school library as a base. This is the library that will be most frequented by the students. The hope is that once the student is familiar with general library set-up, then he or she will be able to visit any library and be able to quickly find the genre desired.

The first step comes after the teacher has exposed the students to the designated genres. The teacher should also have small conferences with students to get an idea of what they are leaning toward with regard to genre preference. At this time, the teacher and student can also discuss the interest inventory. By the end of the one-on-one conference, the teacher and student should agree on one specific title, genre or author the student plans on checking out from the library. Once this has been established, the teacher can allocate the appropriate time to the various sections in the library.

Many students may feel they know how the library is set up and therefore feel this is a waste of time. Remember though, that after the students are exposed to the new genres they might not know where to find these new types of books in the library. In essence, the students are going to need to be "retrained" as to how to use the library in order to locate all the newfound interests they have developed.

The teacher should first arrange with the school librarian to set up an orientation. The teacher and librarian should work together to have the most productivity come from the library orientation. The teacher should ensure that the librarian knows the purpose of the orientation and the specific genres that are being targeted for location. In the orientation

the students should be taught where each genre is generally located as well as how the books are organized, i.e. by author, title or subject. The student should come to the library equipped with an idea of what book or, at the least, what genre he or she is interested in exploring and perhaps checking out.

Once the students have been oriented to the library and have a good idea of where they can locate specific books and genres of books, the teacher should allow enough time for the students to locate specific books and check them out. After returning to the classroom, some teachers will find that the students are so eager to read their books that perhaps ten minutes or so could be incorporated into the class period to give the students a chance to get into their books. After all, the goal of the unit is to assist students in choosing books that they are likely to enjoy and ultimately gain a new appreciation for reading. Teachers should nurture this newfound excitement as best as they can. Alternatively, if you see that the students need more time to browse, then you could have those who are done sit in the library and begin reading while the “stragglers” complete their final choices.

HOW TO CHOOSE A BOOK

Children have a need and desire to be excited. In my experience with children’s books, I have found that the most common reason a child might not like a book can be summed up in one word: “boring.” If something doesn’t excite them, they move on to the next activity. Additionally, inexperienced readers tend to have very short attention spans that do not allow them to waste time reading something they don’t enjoy, even when it is required reading for school.

I have observed many students choosing to read books they have seen other students read. While this is not a bad way to go about choosing a good book to read, many students find it hit and miss. This unit will give students the opportunity to offer editorial comments to their peers, suggesting the reasons that they liked a particular book (Smith 37).

This unit will help students realize exactly why they liked or disliked a particular book. The goal is to get students to go beyond phrases such as, “I liked it” or “It was boring” to understand why they liked or disliked it and what specifically turned them on or off. The end result is that if they can objectively judge a book and truly understand the specific aspects of it they liked or disliked, then they will have stronger reasons for their preference and, therefore, have greater success the next time in choosing a book.

This unit will rely on teacher recommendations, student recommendations, and individual assessments. The teacher recommendations will come from reading the student interest inventory (provided below) as well as one-on-one conferences between teacher and student. The student recommendations will come from written reviews or oral reports from students recommending books to their peers. The individual

assessments will come from analyzing what books the student has enjoyed in the past and looking for connections among these books. Individual assessment will also come from the documentation provided by the student that will be discussed below.

After the teacher has done several book talks with the students, exposing them to each genre, the teacher can do a simple and quick survey to see where student interest lies. Students could even submit an account of genres that interest them or books that they have discovered since the teacher gave the book talks. If desired, the teacher could ask students to expand on their book choices by giving as much detail as possible as to what particularly interested them in a certain genre.

The student recommendations will be a way for students to “sell” a favorite book to the rest of the class. One of the biggest influences on students is their peers. If a classmate is highly interested in a book, the likelihood of several of his or her classmates being interested in the same book is high. Also, students have a way of speaking a language that only other students understand. A student’s reasons and justification for liking a book can be expressed to his/her peers much more easily than a teacher could translate such information to students. Having students in charge of book reviews and recommending books to their peers gives them a sense of ownership over their reading. Imagine the self-confidence boost when one classmate sees another classmate check out a book that was recommended by him. The student recommendations also require students to carefully explain what interested them about a book and put their thoughts into concrete, justified reasons.

Individual assessments are a way for students to document books they have read and the reasons for their interest or disinterest. This documentation will come primarily from the Book Review that will be discussed below in this unit. Also, student assessments will come from the teacher discussing and evaluating the student’s history in books. The teacher will be able to see what books the student has generally been interested in in the past and can make suggestions as to further readings that might also interest the student.

The overall process of guiding students in choosing books comes from several sources. The goal is that by assessing all aspects of student reading and exposing the student to new genres and books, a whole new world of literature will be open for the student.

SILENT READING

Middle school students in my classroom are required to read a minimum of 20 minutes each evening for homework. An additional 20 minutes of classroom time is assigned daily. This unit is intended to stress the importance of sustained silent reading as a measure of proficiency. The silent reading time is such a crucial time to really determine what students are reading and how they utilize their silent reading time. This is a time when students can really branch out and be selective and personalized in their book

choices. Students must be given enough time during the day to be meaningfully engaged in reading (Smith 34). Some teachers may find themselves pressed for time and feel that incorporating silent reading time into the day just isn't feasible. My answer to this dilemma is simple: plan your activities around silent reading time. Our school is on block scheduling, which means I see a particular class for 90 minutes every other day. When I make my lesson plans, the first thing I write down is SSR (sustained silent reading). It is already built into the 90-minute block. Therefore, I know that I have approximately 60-70 minutes of time allotted to instruction or practice, and that's how I plan my lessons. I also make sure that we do SSR at the beginning of class. This helps to ensure that we don't run out of time at the end of class and eliminate silent reading.

My students are on a routine. They know that the first thing they will do when they come to my class is to fill out their agenda with today's schedule and then open their books and begin reading. There is never a question of what they are to do and what is expected of them when they walk into class. I have even found that on the rare occasion that we have a shortened class because of testing or early dismissal and I have to eliminate SSR the students become concerned because they don't see SSR on the board. I have also found that on those rare occasions (approximately 2-3 time per year) that I don't write SSR on the board as the first activity for the day's agenda, the students read anyway, out of habit. They are so trained to start class by silently reading that they do it naturally.

There have been many studies done to support the effectiveness of SSR in the classroom (Nagy, Smith). The bottom line is simple: SSR in the classroom really works to help generate better readers. It goes back to the old adage, "Practice makes perfect." When the students "practice" silent reading everyday, they become better readers. It's just that simple.

Some teachers may bring up the question of accountability for this silent reading time. This is a perfectly valid point. If a teacher is going to adjust his or her lesson plans to incorporate class time for silent reading, then most likely that teacher will want some sort of accountability from the students that they do actually read. In other words, some teachers may want a grade associated with this free reading time. Again this is a perfectly valid point and concern. The act of documentation will be discussed below in the unit. For now, the point can be addressed by putting it into the teacher's hands. Whatever sort of accountability or documentation the teacher feels is most effective for his or her satisfaction and grading process is perfectly fine. There is nothing to say that a teacher can't hold students accountable for the reading done during class time. It is really up to the teacher to discover what sort of documentation he or she wants.

In my classroom I have students do a reading response once a week. I prepare four questions for the student to answer about the selection of text they have just read. The first question is always the same: title of book, author, and pages read (page started and page finished). The next three questions vary each week. The questions range from

summarization to character analysis to plot recognition to personal ratings of the book. From the questions I can tell several things quickly. First, did the student actually read during SSR? Second, does the student understand what he or she just read? Third, is the student consistently completing each book begun? Since the students complete a reading response each week, I can track the books they are reading, determine if they are completing books, and also get an idea of the type of book they are choosing.

The frequency of accountability is, of course, up to the teacher. A word of caution should be stated here, though. The idea of the silent reading time is to allow students uninterrupted time to be engaged in reading. The teacher should caution against making each silent reading time attached to an assignment. There should be some opportunities where the student can read freely without having to complete an assignment afterwards. I have found that the once-a-week reading response works well for me. It makes for less grading and also doesn't overwhelm the student with constant questions.

DOCUMENTATION

Students in my classroom often find it difficult to remember what they have read. This unit will train students in the essential academic skill of documentation.

Students will be required to document the books that they read. Their entries will describe and summarize the book they read, the genre of the book, the time they spent reading, and their editorial comments. The purpose of this log is assessment for the teacher and reflection for the student.

The Book Review should contain a reaction to what was read. A reproducible Book Review will be included at the end of this unit. In general, though, it will contain pertinent information about what was read, why the book was chosen, the genre, pros and cons of the book, a recommendation to peers, and general response to the book.

Each aspect of the Book Review is basically self-explanatory. The purpose of this documentation is to help students evaluate their reading and voice their opinions. This review is an opportunity for a student to evaluate his/her opinion of the book rather than just recall facts from the story (Dekker 39). The student is asked to justify his or her opinion personally. Going beyond phrases such as "I liked it" or "It was boring," the student is asked to explain why they liked or disliked the book. The student is asked to look deeper into the reflections and find out why.

THE UNIT

The overall unit will tie in these previous four topics to form one solid format for teachers to assist students in becoming skilled and proficient readers. The unit will stress the importance of student choice and exploration. With this choice, though, will come the realization that a student is capable of finding more than one book that piques his/her

interest. Once the student taps into this knowledge, the world of books becomes an expansive, worthwhile and successful form of entertainment as well an endless source of knowledge.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan 1: Student Interest Inventory

Objective: Students will complete an interest inventory for teacher evaluation.

The unit will be introduced by surveying the student interests. A form attached to this unit that can be reproduced and given to each student to complete. After all surveys have been returned, the teacher can read through them and get a general idea of what the students have read thus far. This can help the teacher determine which books to choose for the distinguishing genre portion of the unit. This can also help the teacher to see where the interest lies among the students.

Lesson Plan 2: Distinguishing Genre

Objective: The students will be introduced to a variety of genres and learn to distinguish between them.

This section of the unit is explained above. This lesson will simply focus on what to do with all of the information mentioned above. The teacher should start out by explaining the word *genre*. Genre is said to mean a type, class, or category of literature. It is a way to categorize different writings in order to distinguish between them.

A definition of each genre can then be explained. Except where noted, the following definitions were taken from *The Language of Literature*.

- Biography/Nonfiction – A biography is the true story of a person’s life, written by another person. Biographies are usually told from the third person point of view. Nonfiction is writing that tells about real people, places and events. (R7, R15)
- Historical Fiction – Fiction that is set in the past. It may contain references to actual people and significant events in history. (R12)
- Mystery – A story or novel about crime, especially murder (*The New American Webster Handy College Dictionary* 352).
- Poetry – Poetry is a type of literature in which ideas, images, and feelings are expressed in few words. Most poetry is written in lines, which may be grouped in stanzas. Poets carefully select words for their sounds and meanings, combining the words in imaginative ways to present feelings, pictures, experiences, and themes vividly. In poetry, the images appeal to readers’ sense, as do elements of sound, such as alliteration, rhythm, and rhyme. (R15)

- Realistic Fiction – Imaginative writing set in the real, modern world. The characters act like real people who use ordinary human abilities to cope with problems and conflicts typical of modern life. (R16)
- Science Fiction/Fantasy – Science fiction is fiction that is based on real or possible scientific developments. Fantasy, on the other hand, is literature that contains at least one fantastic or unreal element. The setting of a work of fantasy might be a totally imaginary world or it might be a realistic place where very unusual or impossible things happen. (R11, R18)

Once the teacher has introduced each genre, examples of specific genres can be introduced. The teacher has the choice of reading a chapter or two from selected books or perhaps giving summaries of several books. This can be left to the discretion of the teacher. Depending on the amount of time the teacher has with the students, this lesson should take part of three to five class periods. I don't recommend trying to introduce each genre as well as read from each book in a condensed period of time. The students need time to absorb the information and also have time to truly understand the different genres.

As a lesson review, the teacher can ask each student to write down the last five books they have read and attempt to categorize them into the genres just discussed. This will be a quick check for the teacher to see where review is needed.

Lesson Plan 3: One-On-One Conferences

Objective: The teacher will find the genre interest of each student.

The teacher should now schedule one-on-one conferences with each student. During this conference the teacher will look over the student interest inventory as well as find out from the student what genre they took the most interest in from the genre lesson. The teacher should help the student to choose one specific title or one specific author and plan for the student to check out that title or author during the library visit.

Lesson Plan 4: Library Orientation

Objective: Students will be able to locate specific genres in the library.

As stated above, after the teacher has introduced each genre to the students as well as given brief book talks about each genre, the students should be ready to go to the library to check out books. The teacher should have a pre-arranged with the librarian for this visit. The librarian or teacher will show the students how the library is arranged and how to locate specific authors, titles or genres using the library catalogue. Each student should check out the specific book agreed upon during the one-on-one conference. It could also be helpful for students to be provided with a map layout of the library. This

could be given as a handout or simply posted in the classroom and library. This is especially helpful to sixth-graders, as this is their first time in a middle school library.

Lesson Plan 5: Book Talk

Objective: Students will persuade their peers to read a favorite book they have chosen.

Another way for students to learn about new books is from their peers. The teacher should set up an opportunity for students to do oral presentations where students persuade their peers to read a favorite book selected by the presenter. These presentations can be done once a grading period. In other words each student would have one presentation every six weeks or nine weeks, depending on the grading cycle of the school. It's really up to the discretion and preference of the teacher how to set it up to fit the needs of the class. The presentations don't have to be any longer than 5 minutes. It's just an opportunity for students to share a favorite book in hopes that a few other students will take an interest in reading that same book. The teacher has the opportunity here to incorporate a written activity, whereby the student simply reads aloud a report that has been written by the presenter. These written reports can then be posted in the classroom for students to refer to as they prepare to choose their next book.

Lesson Plan 6: Daily Activities

Objective: Students will begin a daily routine of reading and documentation.

A daily routine of silent reading and documentation should begin. The students should be assigned a set amount of silent reading time for each class. This should be a time where no other activity is allowed. The students should also be given homework assignments of daily reading. As stated earlier, a minimum of 20 minutes a day of at-home reading is preferable. Silent reading during class and at home should be a daily routine.

I use a reading log in my class as a way to track students' daily at-home reading. It is used as a grade once a week. They have to read a set amount of minutes per week as well as fill out the reading log completely in order to get full credit. The reading log I use comes from a software program called *Accelerated Reader* (Renaissance Learning). The reading log contains the following information: date, book title, reading level, AR point value, minutes read, and parent signature line.

As students complete books, they should also complete the Book Review. For each book completed, students should have a Book Review turned in. The teacher can keep these in a student file for the yearly record. The teacher can also post them in the room for other students to read. As stated earlier, peer recommendation is a very strong persuasion tool when it comes to book choice.

STUDENT INTEREST INVENTORY

Personal Life

What would you like to be when you grow up?

What do you like to do in your spare time?

What do you usually do after school?

Entertainment

How much time do you spend watching television?

On a school day? _____ hours. On a weekend? _____ hours.

What are some of your favorite television programs?

What are some of your favorite movies?

School

What is your favorite subject in school and why?

What is your least favorite subject in school and why?

Reading

What is the name of the last book you read?
Why did you choose that book?

What is the name of your favorite book?
Why do you like it?

What is the name of your least favorite book?
Why do you dislike it?

What is the name of your favorite author?

How many books do you own?
Where did you get the books you own?
Do your parents read to you at home?
How often do you see your parents read? Every day _____ A few times a week _____ A few times a month _____ Almost never _____
Would you rather read a book by yourself or have someone read it to you?
Do you ever read magazines? _____ Newspapers? _____ Comics? _____ If so, name some of them.
How often do you visit the local library?
How do you feel about reading?
On average, how many books do you read per month?
If you had to guess, how many books would you say you've read in your entire life?
How many pages was the longest book you've ever read completely?
How often have you started a book and not finished it? Very often _____ Sometimes _____ Never _____

BOOK REVIEW

Date Began	Title	Author
Completed	Genre	
Vocabulary Difficulty 1 2 3 4 5 Easy Hard	Ability to Understand the Book 1 2 3 4 5 Easy Hard	Overall Rating 1 2 3 4 5 Easy Hard
Would you tell a friend to read this book? Yes No	Why?	
Would you read another book by this author? Yes No	Why?	
Why did you choose this book?		
What comments do you have about this book?		

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Teacher Resources

Abrahamson, Dr. Richard F. *Survey of Children's Literature*. University of Houston: Department of Curriculum and Instruction.
A college manual for the use in the class "Survey of Children's Literature." The manual has various lists of distinguished books organized by genre.

Amazon.com. 17 May 2003. <<http://www.amazon.com>>
I used this website to look up titles, authors and publication dates of novels. It was also used to look up most popular titles in specific genres of children's literature.

Banks, Lynne Reid. *Indian in the Cupboard*. Georgia: Camelot, 1981.
Omri, a young boy in London, receives a cupboard as a birthday gift. When his Mom gives him the key to lock it, Omri finds it has magical powers. Whatever toy is put in the cupboard will come to life.

Blishen, Edward. *Oxford Book of Poetry for Children*. Saxon Way West: Oxford University Press Children's Books, 1985.
A collection of English poems by familiar authors.

Blume, Judy. *Are You There God? It's Me Margaret*. New York: Laurel Leaf, 1970.
Young Margaret fears adolescence and begins regular chats with God to discuss her worries. Cleary, Beverly. *Dear Mr. Henshaw*. New York: Avon, 1983.
Leigh Botts is going through a tough family time, divorce. He uses a class assignment to write to his favorite author as a way of therapy and counseling.

Cooney, Caroline B. *The Face on the Milk Carton*. New York: Laurel Leaf, 1991.
Janie sees a picture of herself twelve years earlier on the side of a milk carton and discovers she has been kidnapped at an early age. Her pursuit to find her real parents follows.

Cooney, Caroline B. *The Voice on the Radio*. New York: Laurel Leaf, 1998.
The third in the series of *The Face on the Milk Carton*. Janie's past is revealed publicly.

Cooney, Caroline B. *Whatever Happened to Janie?* New York: Laurel Leaf, 1994.
The second in the series of *The Face on the Milk Carton*. Janie experiences the trauma of a kidnapped adopted child returned to her birth parents.

Curtis, Christopher Paul. *Bud, Not Buddy*. New York: Yearling Books, 1999.

- Ten-year-old Bud leaves his third foster home in search of his father who is possibly a jazz musician.
- Curtis, Christopher Paul. *The Watsons Go to Birmingham, 1963*. New York: Bantam Books, 1995.
The humorous and realistic tale of a family and their two lives, one while living in Flint, Michigan, and the other after moving to Birmingham, Alabama.
- Dahl, Roald. *The BFG*. New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1982.
The story of the Big Friendly Giant who takes Sophie, an eight-year-old orphan, on an adventure to Giantland.
- Dekker, Mary M. "Books, Reading, and Response: A Teacher Researcher Tells A Story." *New Advocate* 4 (1991): 37-46.
Describes classroom-based research on the use of reading logs with second and third graders. Discusses the range and character of student responses, student behavior about books, and the stories they tell the teachers and each other.
- Frank, Anne. *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1947.
The diary of a thirteen-year-old Jewish girl written while she was hiding in an attic during the Nazi occupation of Holland.
- Hearne, Betsy. *Choosing Books for Children: A Commonsense Guide*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1999.
The author is a renowned children's librarian and children's book review editor. She takes her knowledge and provides a sensible guide to children's books arranged by genre.
- Jacques, Brian. *Redwall*. 12 vols. New York: Ace, 1986-2002.
A story of good versus evil containing truehearted animals such as mice, rats and beavers.
- Krull, Kathleen. *Lives of...* 7 vols. San Diego: Harcourt, 1993-2000.
A collection of biographies that are insightful and informative.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Chronicles of Narnia*. 7 vols. New York: HarperCollins, 1950.
A Christian fantasy adventure about a magical place called Narnia.
- Lewis, Valerie V., and Walter M. Mayes. *Valerie and Walter's Best Books for Children: A Lively Opinionated Guide*. New York: Avon Books, 1998.
This children's books guide provides over two thousand books for children ranging in age from birth to fourteen. The book also contains cross-references by

theme and interest as well as candid advice for parents in helping to motivate their children to read.

Lipson, Eden Ross. *The New York Times Parents Guide to the Best Books for Children*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000.

This is a comprehensive list of recommended children's books for children of every age, selected by the children's book editor for *The New York Times Book Review*.

Lowry, Lois. *The Giver*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993.

Jonas is chosen for an important role for his ceremony of twelve. He has no idea what lies ahead or the knowledge that will be given to him about the community in which he lives.

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The story of Annemarie Johansen whose family protects her Jewish best friend Ellen Rosen from the Nazis during the Nazi occupation of Denmark in 1943.

Maryles, Daisy, Laurele Riippa, and Gary Ink. *Bowker Annual Library and Book Trade Almanac*. New Providence: RR Bowker, 2003.

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McDougal Littell. *The Language of Literature: Grade 6*. Evanston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.

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The New American Webster Handy College Dictionary. New York: Signet, 1981.

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- An autobiographical celebration of Paulsen's longtime love of dog sledding and sled dogs.
- Peck, Ira. *The Life and Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Scholastic, 1968.
A biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Prelutsky, Jack. *The Random House Book of Poetry for Children.* New York: Random House, 1983.
A collection of poetry chosen by Jack Prelutsky.
- Philip Pullman. *The Golden Compass.* New York: Del Ray, 1996.
A fantasy about Lyra who enters the arctic in order to save the world. She finds that humans are paired with loving animals and separation will cause death.
- Renaissance Learning, Inc. *AR Universal.* Wisconsin Rapids: Renaissance Learning, 2003.
Accelerated Reader is a computer software program that tests students on novels they have read. It is a quick quiz to determine if a student has completely read and understood a novel.
- Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter.* 5 vols. New York: Scholastic, 1998-2003.
The story of a young wizard named Harry Potter and his adventures at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.
- Silverstein, Shel. *A Light in the Attic.* New York: HarperCollins, 1981.
A collection of witty and humorous poetry by the author.
- Silverstein, Shel. *Falling Up.* New York: HarperCollins, 1996.
A collection of witty and humorous poetry by the author.
- Silverstein, Shel. *Where the Sidewalk Ends.* New York: HarperCollins, 1974.
A collection of witty and humorous poetry by the author.
- Smith, Christine; Tracy, Esther; Weber, Lynne. "Motivating Independent Reading: The Route to a Lifetime of Education." 1998. *AskEric*. 17 May 2003.
<<http://www.askeric.org/plweb-cgi/fastweb?getdoc+ericdbadv+ericdb+141142+1+wAAA+%28+motivating%26independent%26reading%29>>
This report describes a program for increasing levels of leisure time reading and heightened awareness of age and ability appropriate literature with an effort to encourage targeted students in grades 2, 3, and 6 to become lifelong readers.
- Snicket, Lemony. *A Series of Unfortunate Events.* 10 vols. New York: HarperCollins, 1999-2003.
The sinister and unlucky adventures of the Baudelaire children.

- Spinelli, Jerry. *Maniac Magee*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1990.
Jeffrey Magee runs away from his home with his aunt and uncle to lead a new life. The stories that surround him make for a larger-than-life tale of adventure.
- Stevenson, Robert Louis. *A Child's Garden of Versus*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999.
A collection of children's poems by the author.
- Taylor, Mildred. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. London: Puffin, 1976.
The story of a poor, black family with strong family ties, set in Mississippi during the Great Depression.
- White, E. B. *Charlotte's Web*. New York: HarperCollins, 1952.
Wilbur, a sweet pig, is saved from slaughter by a dear friend named Charlotte, who is a very wise and clever spider.

Empowering students is not the same as abdicating control of your classroom. The ASCD's journal Educational Leadership defines student empowerment as "student ownership of learning." That is a good way to look at it " helping students take control of their own education. But how do you do that? [Let Students Choose](#). [Homework Assignments](#). [Related Articles](#). [Classroom Activities and Games for the New Year](#). As students return after winter break, getting them engaged again in learning