



THE INVESTIGATOR



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A NEW YEAR FILLED WITH READING!

Welcome back to our second edition of *The Investigator*! This publication is comprised of insights on good literacy and language practices. We are teachers at LCCS who have had years of experience in understanding how children acquire language and become life long readers. In this issue we will be taking a closer look at quality

literature for readers of all ages. We hope you find our investigations helpful and learn a few clues that will help guide you in discovering quality literature to share with your child. We will also be sharing helpful techniques for middle school parents in reading non-fiction with their child.



Special Points of Interest

- Non-fiction reading techniques for students in middle school
- Finding Quality Literature for young children.

Reading Techniques to assist in Understanding Non-fiction text for Middle School

by Lori Kramer

As a parent of three children, ages 6, 12 and 15, and as an enthusiastic middle school language arts teacher, I am always

looking for ways to help kids discover the true joys of reading. I love being able to make book suggestions and help

kids connect to their favorite genres and authors. The greatest rewards, however, come afterwards, once the reading is complete and I get a, "Thank you Mom/Mrs. K., that was a great book," and the conversation begins. I live for those moments! But what about all the other

Reading Techniques to assist in Understand Non-fiction continued.....

moments? What about all the times I ask kids to read things that are prescribed or part of a required curriculum? What about when kids are not really interested in the texts that are placed before them? Well then, it's a different story.

Much of our middle school aged kids' lives are spent with assigned reading, the type they find in textbooks or teacher handouts; in other words, our kids are not only reading what they choose, but what school chooses for them, and much of it comes in the form of non-fiction texts. The reality is that our kids' futures will be filled with this type of reading at every level. So, as much as I love bonding over fantasy, mystery, science-fi, and all other realms of fiction, it is imperative kids learn how to develop a desire to know, understand and appreciate non-fiction texts as well.

Reading and understanding non-fiction, often complex texts, is not an innate skill. As parents and teachers, it is our duty to support the development of this skill so that our kids read successfully across the content areas, not just during language arts class. To that end, there are various strategies that can be utilized to approach and understand non-fiction. By acknowledging just a few of these strategies, and encouraging their use, we can support our kids' efforts to become better readers, thinkers and consumers of the printed word.

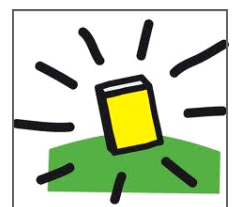
-SQ3R stands for **Survey, Question, Read, Write, Review**. This strategy is best employed when kids are asked to read a chapter of a textbook or a detailed article about a given topic. **Survey** means to spend a moment skimming over the pages of text just as a hawk skims the surface of a lake searching for its next meal. Kids pay attention to the common features such as headings and subtitles, words in bold, graphs, charts, inserts, photographs, etc. and create an appetite for content. Next, kids set a purpose for reading by turning titles, subtitles, bolded words and observations regarding photographs, charts and other features into **questions**. The questions are written out with space given for the answers. For example, a social studies textbook may include a chapter entitled **The Revolutionary War**. Possible questions prompted by this title may be: *What was the Revolutionary War and when did it occur? Where did the Revolutionary War take place? Who was involved in the Revolutionary War? How does the Revolutionary War compare and contrast to other conflicts I already know about?* The questions provide a distinct motivation for reading as kids usually want to find the answers! The third SQ3R step is to actually **read the text**, keeping the questions in mind. After reading, students return to **write** the answers to their questions. Unanswered questions may prompt a return to the text for rereading, which is a highly recommended strategy fostering better comprehension, or the unanswered questions may prompt further research or discussion, which is also favorable. Once the questions have been addressed, everything is **reviewed**. Kids read over their questions and answers to cement comprehension and appreciation of the selected reading. The **SQ3R** strategy enables kids to interact with non-fiction text within a specific structure and routine. The questions make it interesting; the discovery of new information and connected ideas through answering the questions makes the reading process quite satisfying. Try it; you'll like it too!



Highlighting is another strategy kids can use to interact with text. Those funky, neon colored, translucent marks can provide more than visual interest and variety. Highlighting text is only beneficial, however, if it initiates a conversation between the reader and the text. Kids need to know, understand and appreciate why they are calling attention to particular things. Instead of keeping ideas, connections, questions, revelations, etc. in their minds while reading, kids record their thoughts right next to the featured words, phrases and sentences. Highlighting calls the reader's attention back to what was personally meaningful or confusing. Kids need to be able to explain why they highlighted what they did in order to demonstrate true comprehension and appreciation of what was read. It can get messy, but the messier, the better. All highlighting should be accompanied by writing; if kids are not allowed to write on the given pages, Post-It Notes are the way to go! Based on their highlighting, we can engage our kids in meaningful dialogue and assist in the process of learning through conversing with us, and the text, in this way.

Stick Figures and Comics- What kid doesn't love a good comic strip or classic stick figure drawing? When reading non-fiction, students can set the purpose of illustrating the key ideas, facts, figures and other interesting information provided by the text. It need not be fancy, elaborate or colorful; the drawings are meant to be almost primitive representations of the concrete and abstract thinking that occurs when engaging in non-fiction. If a reader can draw the main idea, draw the supporting details, and create visual representations of the important information and interpretations of a text, than he or she has demonstrated personal understanding and ownership of the material. Say it with me now: sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words!

SQ3R, highlighting and stick figure drawings are just three strategies that can be used to engage and interact with non-fiction text. Each method sets a different purpose for reading, but all strategies support comprehension and appreciation of factual information found in the type of reading kids are required to do across the content areas. *Kids need to read non-fiction differently than fiction.* They need to slow the reading pace, reread when things don't make sense and stop to reflect along the way. All three strategies support these favorable reading habits. The future is filled with new information waiting to be interpreted, debated and digested; our kids will be ready, willing and able to meet the demands of reading in this informational age if we are present, as teachers and parents, and prepared to support their efforts.



How to Identify Quality Children's Literature by Debra Silva

It all began one morning when I was delivered a pile of books to sort through for our school library. They were wonderful well intentioned donations to a starving library. I began to sort through the pile of books and I realized that 75% of what I was sifting through had some mass media appeal. They were literature adapted from some television show, movie, or Disney corporation. It's no wonder with ipads, iphones, nook and the television hysteria that kids are so fascinated with the content from these shows. In this article I am going to explore the characteristics of Quality Children's Literature that will set a strong foundation in reading and developing values and help you as parents decide what makes quality literature.

I have experienced this following scenario: You are walking through a local bookstore and tables are set out throughout the store. Usually new authors are highlighted or a holiday display of some sort is in the middle of the child section. Just as I am about to show her the newest book published, she darts to the latest version of "Sponge Bob Square Pants." She looks at me with these puppy dog eyes and says, "Please mommy!!" Now, I am in support of reading in general. I look back at her and say, "o.k!" I mean after all, we are reading right??? I am sure other parents have encountered this same dilemma. But the books we put into our kids hands does make an impact on what we are exposing them to. Do the values in Sponge Bob run deep?? I understand topic may motivate the reader but is motivation enough? By looking at the qualities of good literature, we can get closer to the types of texts we want in our children's hands to develop life long readers.

Timelessness

Quality literature stands the test of times and can be enjoyed for several generations states Jackie Castle, a literacy expert. A good story doesn't grow old; it continues to grow endearing. This is an important aspect in looking for a good book. It is not dated or contain a story line that is stuck in a certain time period.

Connection

Another characteristic of quality literature is it's ability to provide relatable subject matter that parents and children alike can make personal connections. Even if you cannot connect with the setting of the story the morals that the characters display through out the plot are relatable and teach a worth while lesson.

Values

In good literature, there is a message that the author wishes to convey so the reader can walk away growing and learning just as the main character has done. I will stir emotions inside each of us that make us a better person than before. We can learn about people of different races, cultures, and diverse backgrounds.

How to Identify Quality Children's Literature continued....

Often, the stories developed from movies and T.V. shows are dumbed down versions of the original. They take out huge portions of the text to make them "readable" for beginning readers. So.... if you are going to buy these texts, just be weary that there are large chunks of the plot that has been taken out. Also, the original language and vocabulary has been depleted. Be wary of such books where a plush toy may accompany. Often this is a marketing strategy to sell the latest movie

Things to look for to help you choose quality literature:

Look for Literature that is an Award Winner!!

- **The Newbery Medal** which is named for the eighteenth-century bookseller John Newberry is awarded annually by the American Library Association for the most distinguished American children's book published the previous year.
- **The Caldecott Medal** which is named after the nineteenth-century English illustrator Randolph J. Caldecott is awarded annually by the American Library Association to the artist who has created the most distinguished picture book published the previous year.
- **The Coretta Scott King Award** was established in 1969 and commemorates the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, JR. and honors Mrs. King for her courage and determination to continue the work for peace and world brotherhood. It is presented annually by the American Library Association both to an African-American author and an African-American illustrator for an outstandingly inspirational and educational contribution published during the previous year.

Look for quality agencies and websites

For notable quality literature, look for agencies that pride themselves in supporting and honoring quality literature such as books supported by The American Library Association (ALA) which strives to promote the importance and improvement of libraries as well as a variety of informative services to the public. This site has lots of information for parents . Go to <http://www/ala.org/parents/index.html> .

The Children's Book Council is a nonprofit trade organization that promotes children's trade books and the love of reading. As the official sponsor of Young People's Poetry Week and National Children's Book Week, the CBC's online site provides a wealth of information. Go to <http://www.cbcbooks.org/>

