

Language, Literacy and Literature: Using Picture Books for Differentiation

Saskatchewan School Library Association

THE MEDIUM – FALL 2013

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Picture books are a treasure trove for teaching language, which lower elementary teachers have always used for teaching language patterns. Examples of rhyme, word play, descriptive language can be found in the many wonderful children's books in our school libraries. These books can be used to model language and as well as providing opportunities to practice using different types of language. Literature can also be used to meet the variety of needs and abilities of the students in our classrooms. Children of all abilities should be given the opportunities to play with language.

I had the wonderful opportunity to work for two years at in international school in Luxembourg. Because of the varying English language abilities, it was quite often difficult to provide opportunities for all students to be challenged. Students in these classrooms varied from students with little English, to multi-lingualism, to native speakers and everything in between. Using quality children's literature can provide inspiration for differentiating learning activities according to language ability. When working with a Grade 2 class, I choose a classic children's book, *Chicken Soup with Rice*, by Maurice Sendak to work on rhyme. I created different activities so that all students were able to work with the text according to their English speaking abilities.

Activity One:

Whole Class

Using the SMARTBoard, read the story together. Students soon catch on to the pattern and join in. When finished, discuss the vocabulary and rhymes. Have student volunteers come up and circle rhyming words.

Activity Two:

Small groups

Beginning group: Using handout #1, students circle rhyming words, referring to the SMARTBoard when needed.

Middle group: This group gets copies of the book and choral reads, using pointers to point to each word as they say it.

Fluent group: Using handout #1, students circle place words.

Activity Three:

Small groups

Beginning group: Listen to a recorded version of the book (tape, CD, YouTube, etc.) Students use pointers to point to words as they hear them.

Middle group: Using handout #1, circle any words they do not know. Discuss with teacher or an EA.

Fluent group: Handout #3, cloze activity. Students create their own version. Students will likely need teacher support to get started.

Activity Four:

Small groups

Beginning group: Sequencing activity. Cut up handout #2 into sentence strips.

Middle group: Handout #3, cloze activity, students will need support to get started.

Fluent group: Choral reading using books and pointers

Activity Five:

Fluent group read their poems to the class. The Beginning and Middle groups pick out the rhymes. This could also be done in small groups, after modeled to the class.

Activity Six:

Whole Class

There are many YouTube versions which be used in a variety of ways.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNBzJlpwChU>

This mini-unit takes about a week to complete, depending on the pace and abilities of the class. Even though I designed these activities to support a diverse EAL classroom, the ideas could easily be used in any classroom with varying language and literacy abilities. Using quality children's literature will help generate ideas for teaching language. A good place to start are the 'classics', but lists can be found in many of the *Write Traits* publications or the *Guided Reading* publications.