

Course Topic: Teaching Reading

Course Instructor

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Course Synopsis

Literature is a rich source of language for English language students. The universal themes, emotions and messages of great fiction writing speak to students of all ages and backgrounds. In order to make literature accessible to all levels of English language learners, major and specialty publishers have created graded readers. Graded readers are adaptations of literary works and non-fiction works that preserve the plot, characters and settings of the stories but tell them with simplified grammar and vocabulary. In this session we take you through a variety of activities to use with literature, fiction and non-fiction graded readers in order to increase the amount of extensive reading that your students do both in class and outside of class.

Course Agenda

1. Intensive versus Extensive Reading
2. Using Literature to Teach Reading
3. Using Graded Readers to Teach Reading
4. Criteria for Selecting Literature or Graded Readers
5. Sources for Graded Readers
6. Activities for Using Literature and Graded Readers to Teach Reading

1. Intensive versus Extensive Reading

Intensive reading is designed to help students develop specific reading and language skills; all students in the class read the same material and study it in depth for both content and language.

Extensive reading allows students to choose their own texts and read for pleasure so that general language improvement can take place. In an extensive reading program, students can choose what they would like to read based on their personal interests or the teacher can offer a selection of options. As a result of these choices, students within a class read different books at different times.¹

2. Using Literature to Teach Reading

Literature is defined as written material such as poetry, novels, and essays, and other works of the imagination that are characterized by “excellence of style and expression and by themes of general or enduring interest”. Another great definition of literature is that it is “artistic writings worthy of being remembered”.² The themes of literature cut across all cultures and present experiences that every human being can relate to: love, family, loss, hope and so on.

Some examples of literature that have been used effectively in the language classroom are as follows:

- *The Little House on the Prairie* books
- *Pride and Prejudice* or any other Jane Austen book
- Edgar Allan Poe short stories
- *The Three Musketeers*
- *Jane Eyre* or any other book by the Brontes
- *Tom Sawyer* or other Mark Twain books
- *Treasure Island*
- *The Swiss Family Robinson*

Challenges when using literature in the English language classroom include:

- The language level including grammar and vocabulary may be too high.
- Some of the vocabulary may be dated, in that it belongs to the era in which the literature was written.
- The book may be too long.
- The writing style or structure might be too complex.

3. Using Graded Readers to Teach Reading

Graded readers are adapted versions of both fiction and non-fiction that have been written specifically for language learners at defined language proficiency levels. Adaptations that publishers make to create graded readers include:

¹ For more information on the learning benefits of extensive reading see: http://www.oup-bookworms.com/downloads/pdf/successful_reading/er_article.pdf

² www.dictionary.com

- Simplified grammar
- Shorter sentences
- Simplified vocabulary
- Current vocabulary rather than dated vocabulary
- Simpler story structure
- Larger text type
- More white space
- More illustrations
- Decreased overall book length (word count)

Advantages of graded readers include:

- They can be easily understood by students at a particular language proficiency level.
- Readers do not need to frequently consult a dictionary because the vocabulary is at an appropriate level.
- Students are exposed to a lot of language that is appropriate to their language level.
- Graded readers allow students of any language proficiency level to have an enjoyable and successful extensive reading experience.
- With a successful reading experience, students are motivated to read more.
- Readers can learn independently.

4. Criteria for Selecting Literature or Graded Readers

Regardless of whether you use literature in its original form or as an adapted reader, the following are some criteria to think about when selecting which literature to use with your class:

- Age appropriate
- Student interest in content
- Student interest in genre
- Appropriate vocabulary level
- Appropriate vocabulary content
- Appropriate level of grammar complexity
- Appropriate length
- Appropriate ratio of text to illustrations.

5. Sources for Graded Readers

Most major English language publishers have a division that produces graded readers. There are also some smaller publishers that specialize in graded readers.

For graded readers for both adults and children see the following websites:

- Benchmark Education — www.benchmarkeducation.com
- Black Cat Readers — www.blackcat-cideb.com
- Cambridge University Press — www.er-central.com
- Compass Publishing — www.compasspub.com

- E-future — www.efuture-elt.com
- Garnet Education — www.garneteducation.com
- Grassroots Press — www.grassrootsbooks.net
- Heinemann — www.heinemann.com
- Iversen Publishing — www.iversenpublishing.com
- MM Publications — www.mmpublications.com
- National Geographic Cengage Learning — www.NGL.cengage.com
- Nelson — www.nelsonschoolcentral.com
- Oxford University Press — elt.oup.com
- Pearson Longman (under the Penguin Reader label) — www.penguinreaders.com
- Portage and Main Press— www.pandmpress.com
- Richmond — www.richmondelt.com
- Townsend Press — www.townsendpress.com

6. Activities for Using Literature and Graded Readers to Teach Reading

When using literature and graded readers with your students for reading, you want to ensure that you can answer the following questions:

- Are students in fact completing the reading?
- Are students understanding what they are reading?
- Are students benefiting in some way from their reading experience?

The activities you have students complete with literature graded readers should always address one or more of these three questions.

Most graded readers now come with an accompanying website with teaching and learning activities including workbooks, reading guides, student activities, suggested lesson plans and online activities. The online support should be your starting point with activities. Here are additional activity ideas.

Pre-Reading Activities

1. Students look at the book cover, title, chapter names, and/or pictures. They predict what the book will be about, including the setting, the characters, the plot and the theme.
2. Students research the author of the book and write a brief biography of the author.
3. Students work in small groups to put the chapter titles, written on individual slips of paper, in the right order.
4. Students read the first chapter in the book. They then discuss or write their predictions about what will happen to the main character throughout the remainder of the book.
5. Students read one chapter in the book. They then discuss or write their predictions about what will happen in the next chapter of the book.

Reading Activities

Reading for Main Idea

1. Students read the first chapter of the book in order to determine the main themes, the key characters and the setting.

Reading for Detailed Comprehension

1. Students fill in a character chart with detailed information about each of the key characters as that information is revealed throughout the book.
2. Students complete a detailed timeline of the events in the plot.
3. Students write a detailed description of the setting (or settings) in the book.
4. Students write a detailed analysis of the themes in the book and the events that illustrate those themes.
5. Students complete a book report in which they answer questions about the characters, setting, plot and themes.

Reading for Language: Vocabulary, Grammar and Discourse

In these activities, you direct student attention to vocabulary, grammar and discourse features that are illustrated in the text.

1. Students keep a vocabulary list with new words and corresponding definitions as they read.
2. Students complete vocabulary comprehension questions based on new words they encounter.
3. Students identify specific grammatical structures in the text and determine how the structures are made and why they are used.
4. Students identify the underlying structure of the chapters in the text and the book as a whole. They identify the language the author uses to create that structure.

Post-Reading Activities

1. Students answer a series of questions that ask them to relate what they are reading to their own personal experiences.
2. Students keep a reading journal in which they note what pages they have read, the date they read them and their personal reactions to what they have read.

3. Students complete a book review in which they rate the book (out of five stars for example) and provide support for their rating.
4. Students script and film a short video that captures the events in one part of the book.
5. Students make a poster to advertise a film based upon the book.
6. If the book has a corresponding film, students watch the film and compare and contrast it with the book.
7. Students form an after class reading club. They get together once a week (or less frequently as their schedules allow) to discuss the book they are reading. Most graded readers also include study questions; these can form the basis of the reading club discussion.

Additional Resources

Macmillan and Penguin have ebooks with more information about how to use graded readers available at these websites:

- www.macmillanreaders.com/using-graded-readers-in-class
- http://engres.ied.edu.hk/lang_arts/exemplars/story/PenguinGradedReaders.pdf

Thanks for participating!

www.aceducation.ca