

# Today's Children's Literature



Mr. Breitsprecher's Edition

November 2008

FREE!

## Creating a Reading Community

One of the main goals of most elementary schools is to send students into the third grade as readers. This is critical – studies show that students that read at grade level after the second grade are likely to succeed in school.

Children that are behind at the end of the second grade are less likely to learn to read fluently; have less access to academic curriculum; require expensive long-term support; and, sadly, often continue to fall behind their classmates in reading.

Even worse – this adversely affects these students' self-esteem, motivation, self-confidence. It also makes behavioral problems more likely.

One way to more-fully support the developmental needs of students learning to read is to create "literacy centers" where the youngest students continue to develop important early literacy skills and where young readers are offered multiple options to apply strategies and extend skills with access to a variety of resources that meet their developmental needs, interests, and independent reading levels. This is what a library media program should be.

Creating a reading community requires varied and interlocking components and a balanced literacy program where all school stakeholders share ownership in reading instruction and students' success (WMAS).

Affective development is an important part of a child's intellectual development. Children will learn to read best when they have fun and work with caring people that express interest in their reading development.

While reasonable people can have different ideas about pedagogy, most would agree that fundamental skills like reading are too important to let personal philosophies and preferences usurp student needs and outcomes.

To say that there is just one way that kids learn to read is not true. It is

### Recreational & Leveled Reading

In another school district, I saw something that made me think. A girl was looking for her *Accelerated Reader* book (leveled reading by *Renaissance Learning*) and found a book that excited her. The indicated level, however, was "too high." I had to ask myself, "would she successfully complete and enjoy reading this book?"

Today's accountability movement probably demands that programs like AR, with formal assessments on each book, be part of the curriculum. Leveled reading also helps teachers select books that teach specific strategies during guided reading. Educators need to remember, however, there is not "one way" to "level" books.

Authors and publishers create books with different ideas about reading levels. Even when an organization like *Renaissance Learning* levels books, differences in how a book uses language impact how children read that book – even when 2 books are represented as having the exact same "level."

I hope that students understand that their "level" is a guide – a tool to help them comfortably read. It works. It is part of the curriculum in some school districts. The number that represents a student's current place in a series of "leveled books", however, does not identify the student's ability to enjoy other books.

I helped this girl find an AR book that fit her level. I told her that I was confident that if she was really interested in the book with a higher level number, that she would work her way through it. In fact, she would probably enjoy doing it.

We read in different ways and we select reading materials in different ways too. I enjoy watching students learn to read. I enjoy watching students find fun books that they will enjoy, even though a book may challenge them. Students' self-assessment and directed reading work together to develop reading skills.

probably not accurate to even say that there are only a few ways.

A well-managed library media program provides an environment that supports students' affective and developmental needs; provides access to appropriate resources that support informational, curricular, and recreational needs; and promotes collaboration between students and teachers/library media specialists.

Creating a reading culture demands that people share different backgrounds, specialty training, and experiences that stakeholders bring to the process. Historically, librarians have understood the value of reading to those not ready to read fluently on their own and have done so without expectations for those they serve. Reading to children is important, but so is talking about and promoting authors and books, and information skills.

The relationship between oral language and the written word is the gateway to reading – librarians understand this. Children need to hear the written

word. Books use language distinctly differently than the spoken word. Librarians understand that reading aloud is not just for prereaders – it helps older children, teens and even adults.

To more-fully serve students, schools must create a reading culture. This demands communication between teachers, parents, school library media specialists, public school libraries, and even siblings and other relatives.

Please remember, when we talk about early literacy and reading in Kindergarten through second grade, we are actually talking about each student's readiness to participate and succeed in every other level of schooling.

"Literacy centers" and "reading communities" need to be more than slogans. They require collaboration and a place where diverse resources, perspectives, abilities, and needs are appreciated and nurtured. They are bigger than any one group, class, or grade. They model and teach skills we want our children to master.