

## ***USING LITERATURE FOR LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT***

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### **Introduction:**

Over the centuries the use of literature has been inextricably tied to language teaching. For years the majority of teachers of English came to the classroom with a background in literature, which was a driving motivation for learning English in the first place.

Literature deals with our innermost concerns and allows us to escape the limits of our immediate surrounding as we create our own imaginary world. Teachers have always stated that literature represents the best that the language can offer. Literature is an example of authentic material rich in cultural and historical content, which leads to a variety of activities.

Literature is usually used to meet two major objectives: studying literature for the sake of literature or for enriching the students' language. Students in their academic studies are normally required to get acquainted with a wide variety of literary genres. Literature, for the students, constitutes the most beautiful aspects of reading. Teachers, therefore, need to increase student choice in what they read. The acceptable students' options include: literature study / Reading circles such as book clubs at their best and works can be fiction or non-fiction. Students choose books from teacher-chosen selections. By their choice, of a common book, students form groups of five or six. The students read book, keep literature log or other forms of notes. Students meet in groups (usually when a teacher in attendance for discussion). The teacher gives minilessons and eventually culminating activity: art, drama.

In a sense, literature circles implies pupils' work in pairs form circles and each one talks about a certain piece of literature. Another students' option includes readers' workshop. In this workshop students choose books to read

individually. In Buddy Reading, pairs choose common books. While and after reading students keep literature logs and share with peers. Teachers meet with students for reading conferences and afterward give minilessons. The minilessons for literature study include various activities. Topics can include the following:

During mini lessons, teacher invites students to share relevant information on insights from the work they are reading. Students can also share about their piece of writing.

Organization of reading classroom plays an eminent role in creating a quiet and friendly atmosphere. The elements of literature that would be related to could be: setting, plot, character development, initiating event, suspense, mood, strong structure, problem, resolution, description, point of view, metaphore, etc. The students would also relate to reading strategies and response activities: logs, projects, posters. Students can use Post-its (“stickers”) to mark places in the text with their notes and ideas. The group meets again to share their ideas. Frequently, each successive discussion brings up new points that students want to examine. I would suggest that if the initial discussion fails to suggest to you (or to the students) any new assignment, it’s helpful for you to have jotted down ideas when you read the book: an interesting character, an unusual setting, a powerful theme, a surprise twist in the plot.

You may have to exhibit extra-ordinary patience as you wait for students to contribute. Many students may be unaccustomed to having their opinions sought and valued. Take the time to help students learn to work collaboratively. What skills will they need in order to have a successful literature study session?. Give students a repertoire of questions both cognitive and affective, to guide their discussion and also as prompt for their literature logs or Reader’s notebook. These questions can be kept in their

notebooks and/or posted on the wall for easy reference. Just by establishing literature study groups in your classroom, you are showing your faith in your students: they are powerful readers with powerful literary opinions.

### ***PRIOR KNOWLEDGE: AWAKENING, BUILDING***

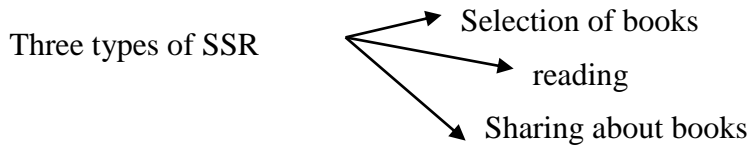
It is essential that students' prior knowledge be awakened before beginning to read any kind of text. This "opens the files" in the brain, and thereby creates a more receptive mind, enabling students to comprehend text better, to infer meaning of unfamiliar words from context more readily, and to predict as they read. If a student has little prior knowledge, academic or experiential, of the theme or topic, then you must aid him/her in acquiring the basics before moving on. You are a good source of this knowledge, and the peers can be excellent sources as well.

#### **Types of prior knowledge:**

- 1) Prior knowledge about a topic. The more your students know about a topic, the easier it is to learn more about it and the easier it is for them to comprehend text about it.
- 2) Prior knowledge about the structure of content or of a text. Teaching students about the formal or organization of the content helps them understand it.
- 3) Prior knowledge about word meaning: pre-teaching key vocabulary helps students especially if you connect the new words to concepts they already know. Students also need practice in drawing word meaning from context, in other words, making good guesses.

### **Free reading**

The authors are our co-teachers. Once students have begun to read in English, our job is to turn them over to the authors as soon and as often as possible. The research in free reading is quite conclusive: there is hardly anything else we can do that will boost students' reading proficiency as efficiently. Many classrooms implement some type of free reading on a daily or regular basis. Most teachers refer to this as Sustained Silent Reading or SSR.



Teachers report that if these steps are kept separate, in other words, if students choose a book or books first, find a place to read silently, and share later (rather than during the reading time), that time allotted to SSR is more sustained, more silent, and offers them a more intense reading experience. And, of course, the teacher reads, too.

### **Free reading can also take place in the home:**

Many teachers of elementary, secondary, and adult English learners report that their students' reading proficiency increased as a result of a regular assignment of a certain number of minutes of reading on a nightly basis.

Students can choose what they wish to read, can abandon books at any time, but they must read each night and complete a reading log (summary or reaction).

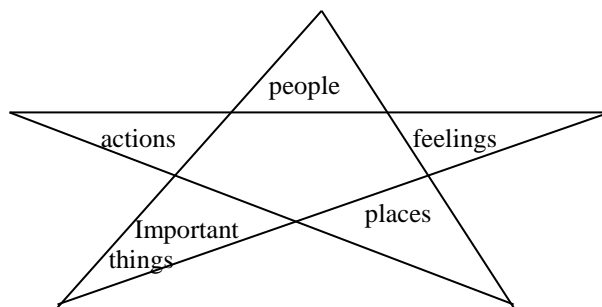
**OPIN:** An opin is a modified cloze activity. Students fill in the blank with a word that makes sense, and you've eliminated words that have lots of possible replacements, so more success is guaranteed. There is no word-

bank here – student drew on their own understandings, making good guesses based on context. The OPIN offers students a number of good things: it helps them draw on context and perceive nuances of meaning; it arouses their curiosity about the reading selection; it opens their mental files and thereby gets their brains more ready to comprehend the reading selection to follow; it helps them become accustomed to the author’s style; and it helps them feel more powerful as they embark on the reading of the selection in its entirety.

**Steps:**

1. Students fill in the blanks as individuals.
2. Students discuss choices with a partner.
3. Teacher conducts a whole-class share, and can list appropriate word choices on the board.

**Vocabulary Star / Literary Star**



This word – sorting star can be used in a variety of ways. Many teachers use it as a small-group activity to build vocabulary from a text or fiction passage. Others use it as simple pre-activity structures for a fire topic piece. The topics can vary according to the passage or writing prompt. Social studies topics might include people, conflicts, places, events, goals.

The five senses are good for poetry word sorting.

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