

How to Make the Studying and Teaching of Reading Less Boring

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When speaking about reading, most people primarily think in terms of comprehension. That is, whatever we read must be understood. Therefore, the teachers who teach reading usually select reading material like books, short stories or articles and have their students read them. Then, they ask their students questions directly related to the material to see if the material has been comprehended. The questions might be of a multiple choice or true-false type, or those which require sentence and paragraph writing, or combination of these. This method of teaching seems to be boring to the students because what they have to do again and again is to keep on reading whatever their teacher gives them to read and answer the typically dull questions. They are not allowed to try any novelty or deal with a particular interesting aspect of the material which will make their reading more interesting and exciting.

If the students get bored with their studies, the teaching of the course can hardly be successful. Therefore, those who teach reading should be aware of this problem and try to find ways to

solve it. One suggested solution is to let the students read what they are personally interested in, after the teacher has approved it. A question here is how a teacher is to find out what kind of material his students are likely to want to read. The simplest answer is to allow the students to suggest a list of materials or types of topics which interest them.

Once the teacher knows his students' interests, the teacher should consider if those materials suggested are worth reading with regard to content, language and the possibility of creative thoughts leading to creative activities in the class-room. Suppose the suggestions seem qualified; then they can be used as reading materials. An important advantage of this method of choosing reading material is that the lesson should be much more effective since the students have already shown their interest in a selection before reading it.

In a case where some students have no idea what kinds of material they would like to read, or they have a limited knowledge....the teacher should then choose good material that, he thinks,

will interest his students. It is important, in this respect, that the teacher should know as much as possible about individual students' interests, experiences, and abilities. Another significant point here is that the teacher should know how to rouse his students' interest in the selection before reading it.

For instance, suppose a teacher has decided to assign his students who are studying arts to read *The Moon and Sixpence*, by W. Somerset Maugham, because it is a good book about a world-famous painter whose artistic feelings and experiences might interest and be understood by arts students. Before assigning his students to read this, he should give a brief talk to make them acquainted with the story, which reflects the real life of the world-famous painter, Gauguin. The details should be left to the students to read so that they can appreciate the book by themselves. In addition, the teacher might suggest that his students read something of Gauguin's biography, and look at some of his paintings for a better comprehension of the story.

The second suggestion, which is likely to lessen the student's feeling of boredom while studying reading, is to allow him to exercise his own thinking or participate in special attitude-oriented activities concerning a reading selection. This method will add liveliness to the atmosphere of any classroom which has

seemed to be dull and tedious. This suggestion is derived from a psychological belief that human beings tend to be self-centered and, therefore, are likely to prefer subjectivity to objectivity.

When the student has an opportunity to think on his own, another purpose is added to the basic one of reading—which is to comprehend the reading material. A person does not read to understand the content of a selection only, but also reads to obtain ideas or information which will evoke individual thought. Reading is thus considered as a dynamic cognitive and affective process. While we are reading, we are thinking and feeling as well.

Smith and Barrett who wrote about using reading to foster creativity in the middle grades said, "...thinking is the process of working with elements or parts, and combining them in such a way as to constitute a pattern or structure not clearly there before."¹ As a result, reading effects creative thinking to the extent that it produces new ideas or provides for different kinds of creative activities.

Torrance has mentioned the great value of good books which encourage their readers to think creatively: "A good story, biography or other reading material is likely to evoke many ideas and questions which can send the reader

¹ Richard J. Smith and Thomas C. Barrett, *Teaching Reading in the Middle Grades*, 2d ed. (Massachusetts : Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1976) p. 84.

far beyond what is read.”² If students are provided with good selections and stimulated to perform some related creative activities, they will always be kept alert and not get tired of their studying. Smith and Barrett also agreed with this: “The experience with creative thinking was fun for most of the students and proved that a good story and a good question can send the reader on a purposeful search for ideas that he didn’t know existed.”³

These two suggestions (providing the students with selections they are interested in, and encouraging them to think constructively) should be the criteria of selecting material for students to read. Consequently, while searching for reading material, a good teacher should ask the following questions:

1. Are there any books, articles or other reading material which might interest his students?

2. Are there any possible activities which can be performed in a constructive way, stimulated by the reading?

Selections students are likely to feel interest in, and possible creative activities

1. Short stories Almost all students like to read fiction. This fondness begins to develop at an early age when children have a craving for fairy tales or myths. To foster creative activities in the classroom, the short stories to be selected

should contain ideas or information which will rouse the students to think. Some authors of short stories, such as Roald Dahl, often create problems for their readers to solve. Roald Dahl wrote several interesting short stories like *Person’s Pleasure* and *Mrs. Bixby and the Colonel’s Coat*. These stories end when they reach a climax and their readers have to imagine what is likely to happen afterwards.

Possible activities :

1.1. *Writing.*

1.1.1. With stories like these of Mr. Dahl or with any adventure or mystery story from which the teacher has withheld the ending, the students can be asked to write their own imaginative climax and conclusion for that story. This will certainly help the students to integrate their language skills with their personal creativity in order to come up with some of their own fun fiction.

1.1.2 The students might be asked to write a letter sent from one character in a story to another character. This is a good reading-related activity which stimulates creative thinking because the students have to imagine what the character might have written.

1.1.3 Another possible activity is for the teacher to

² E. Paul Torrance, “Guidelines for Creative Teaching,” *The High School Journal XLVII*, 1965 : 459-464.

³ Op. cit.

choose the most interesting or impressive chapter in a story and ask his students to write a play about it with interesting dialogue. If there is enough time, the teacher might ask the students to give a performance of the play they have written.

1.2 *Speaking*. A discussion or debate on the problems left unsolved by an author (or on those created by the teacher) to evoke students' creative thoughts might be held. This activity encourages logical imagination based on the actual events or behaviour of characters in a story. Discussions and debates not only promote speaking skills but listening skills as well.

2. **Articles** Students might be interested in articles written about familiar subjects such as those about the dangers of smoking cigarettes, the problem of juvenile delinquency and other social problems which average people can understand.

Possible activities :

2.1 *Writing*. Students might be asked to write their opinions about a selected article. For example, they might be asked to propose the best solutions to the problem of cigarette smoking or to take part in a campaign. Besides, they can probably write slogans or poems warning cigarette smokers of the dangers involved in smoking. This activity also helps improve verse writing.

2.2 *Speaking* Students might arrange a discussion or debate on the problems concerned; for instance, does cigarette

smoking have more advantages or disadvantages?

3. **Comic strips** Students are usually fond of reading cartoons or comic strips in newspapers and other printed material. Some people might argue that the language used in these comic strips is full of slang. Nevertheless, if their teacher advises them to read, those cartoons which use fairly good language, then these drawings might be of some use.

Possible activities :

3.1 *Rearranging* pictures. Cut a comic strip into smaller frames and mix them up. Then students are told to rearrange them into the correct sequence. This activity helps them learn to be logical and meanwhile is fun especially if used as a timed competition between students.

3.2 *Drawing*. If the students are capable of drawing pictures, they might be asked to draw a picture of their favorite characters in a story.

3.3 Familiar cartoon strips could be produced without the captions included. Then the students would be asked to work out and write in their own captions. Comparing the students imaginative ideas in class could be quite humorous, enjoyable, and linguistically helpful to all involved.

4. **Amusing stories** Students might prefer to read amusing stories for a change after having read those selections dealing with serious and/or academic subjects.

Possible activities :

4.1 *Speaking* Students might exchange information about the funny stories they have read. This activity helps speaking and listening skills.

4.2 *Writing* The teacher might ask his students to write a humorous anecdote each has experienced or witnessed himself.

5. Crossword A lot of students have an interest in and enjoy doing cross word puzzles. Besides providing fun and good mental exercise, a cross word puzzle also helps increase the students' word power.

Possible activities

5.1 Students might be asked to make new puzzles and exchange them with their classmates.

5.2 Students might learn the meanings of those words from cross word puzzles by choosing the best meaning from a list of given synonyms or definitions.

6. Instruction manuals Naturally, young people like to try inventing or making things. Thus, students might enjoy *reading* about how to make and produce something which is not too hard and does not take too much time, such as folding paper into different forms of animals.

Possible activities :

6.1 After reading a particular selection of literature, students might be asked to follow the instructions given in a manual to make something which relates to their reading.

6.2 *Writing* Each student might also be asked to write instructions giving information on how to make or do something he knows, and exchange this with his friends. This activity allows him to find out more about producing new things and to practise his writing skill as well.

Concerning the evaluation of students' achievement, some people wonder what method would be the most effective. As a teacher who has taught reading for quite a few years, the writer would like to suggest a method which combines the old method of evaluation with a new one. In the old method, there are written examinations to evaluate students' reading ability. Questions could be both subjective and objective. As for the new method, students' participation in the classroom should be highly considered. The ratio of the points to be given to written examinations and to classroom activities might differ depending on the teacher's opinion of their importance. However, the value to be given to classroom activities should not be less than that given to written examinations since those activities have been done throughout a whole semester. Consequently, this method of evaluation is more accurate than that based on one or two written examinations.

These suggestions are hoped to be of some use in teaching and learning to read better. Motivation, as we said, is crucial here and will depend on how well the reading materials and activities relate to the students' interests, experi-

ences, and abilities. If we hope to involve our students creatively in the reading process, then we must be sure that we are being creative in the selection of materials and activities that we present to those same students.

References

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