

Strategies and Activities for Teaching Across the Curriculum

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“The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled.” -Plutarch

The exercises listed below are offered to educators as a means to engage students in multi-faceted ways to comprehend rich literature; to assist them in critical thinking and analysis; and, help them to become better readers and writers.

I encourage you to build upon these exercises and create your own. Please note that the exercises below, while perfect for primary students, also work for older students, and even adults.

Reading and Storytelling Across the Curriculum

Students of all ages enjoy a good story! Stories are powerful teaching tools, and are not just reserved for Language Arts, but across the curriculum.

Storytelling leads to and through oral language, to organizing and articulating thought, and to building listening skills.

To further define “Plot Definition and Development,”

Ask students to identify:

- *The theme or problem of the story**
- *Obstacles that must be overcome in the story**
- *The main characters: the protagonist(s); the antagonist(s)**
 - *The hero or heroine**
- *The climax (turning point) in the story**
 - *The resolution**
- *The moral or lesson of the story**

Identifying the features above can be applied to any event in history or fiction and to stories about real or fictitious people.

Let’s take Aesop’s Fable of “The Tortoise and the Hare” as an example of how to utilize the following activities.

The Theme or Problem of the Story

A **QUICKWRITE** is a vehicle for students to “quickly” write their thoughts on the story or specific feature of any topic assigned by the teacher such as any of the identifiers listed above. It’s a great way for students to obtain an opinion or stance before class discussion (especially relevant for introverts who may be more willing to speak up when in possession of such notes). You might consider having students keep a “Quickwrite Journal.”

QUICKWRITE EXAMPLE: *The theme of “The Tortoise and the Hare” is to show that the tortoise was just as clever as the hare. Bragging is not a good way to represent oneself. The problem was that the hare was rude, falsely sure of himself, and he made fun of the tortoise. The tortoise was aware of his physical restraints but tried his hardest in the race against the hare.*

Obstacles to Overcome in the Story

QUICKWRITE EXAMPLE: *What are the obstacles that the characters need to be overcome in the story? The hare needs to learn a lesson and have a consequence for his poor behavior. The tortoise needs to figure out a way to do the “impossible” and win the race. The other animals need to see that “slow and steady” wins the race and that the good guy deserves to win.*

CHARACTER IMITATION THROUGH MOVEMENT (non-verbal storytelling/body language; understanding of how it would feel to be really fast or really slow)

MOVEMENT EXAMPLE: Ask for volunteers to show what it would be like to move like a speedy hare and other volunteers to move like a slow tortoise. Divide half the class to move like the hare and the other to move like the tortoise. Switch roles.

Ask students to **QUICKWRITE** on how it felt to move quickly or slowly.

DISCUSS: Times that students may have felt bullied or too sure of themselves.

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The main characters; the protagonist(s); the antagonist(s)

QUICKWRITE EXAMPLE: Define the main characters; protagonist; antagonist. *tortoise is the protagonist and the hare is the antagonist. There is the bear who says, "On your mark, get set, GO!" and there is also the crowd of people.*

CHARACTERIZATIONS (A way to give voices to each character in the story and to allow students to add their own interpretation regarding the nature of the character)

Ask four students to come before the class and represent THE TORTOISE, THE HARE, THE BEAR and A MEMBER OF THE CROWD. Each student then adapts the persona of his/her character first by introducing him/herself as the character with a description of his/her interests and beliefs. The characters ask each other questions.

CHARACTERIZATION EXAMPLE:

HARE: *"Hello I am a loud, bouncy hare who always likes to win. I love to talk fast and I also like to make fun of people."*

QUESTION TO HARE FROM TORTOISE: *Why does making fun of people make you happy? Did you even think about how I felt when you made fun of me?*

HOT SEAT: (Another exercise to further build depth of character and encourage students to further develop their opinions and understanding of the story)

One student sits before the class in the persona of a character from the story. The class then shoots questions at the student who then answers them with his/her own interpretation.

HOT SEAT EXAMPLE:

TORTOISE character sits before the class.

STUDENT: *"How did you feel when the hare was teasing you?"*

TORTOISE: *"I wanted to cry and go into my shell and stay there."*

STUDENT: *"What made you decide to participate in the race?"*

TORTOISE: *"My mother always told me to try my best and not to encourage bullies."*

Both CHARACTERIZATIONS and HOT SEAT provide a multi-dimensional perspective into the literature and motivate students to use critical thinking, imagination, and listening skills to better understand and remember the story.

The Hero or the Heroine

QUICKWRITE EXAMPLE: Who do you think is the hero/heroine of this story? Does the story specify which characters are male or female? Who do you think is a male/female and why? *I think that the hare is a boy and the tortoise is a girl because boys are meaner than girls. I think the tortoise is the heroine.*

Note: Similar exercises can be included or combined with the activities from **The main characters; the protagonist(s); the antagonist(s)**

The Climax (Turning Point) in the Story

QUICKWRITE EXAMPLE: At what point in the story do you begin to get an idea as to how things may turn out for the characters? *When the hare fell asleep on the hill, I began to be hopeful that the tortoise would win the race even though it still seemed impossible.*

The resolution, Moral or Ending of the story

QUICKWRITE EXAMPLE: What is the moral of the story? What would have happened if the hare won the race instead of the tortoise? Would there still be a moral? What would it be? *The moral of the story is "Slow and Steady Wins the Race." If the hare won the race instead, a moral could be, "Try your best no matter what!"*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: What does "Slow and Steady Wins the Race" mean? Can you apply this moral to your own life experience? Can you think of other morals that apply to your life?

A FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY:

***Create a ONE PAGE NEWSPAPER**

Group students into teams and with the task of creating a one page newspaper from the town where the tortoise and the hare live. Encourage them to create interesting headlines like, "Tortoise Outsmarts Hare in Country Race." Other newspaper features can include Recipes (what would tortoises, hares, bears be interested in cooking?); cartoons; editorials and features and classified ads for movies or products that would be of interest to this community.

More Strategies for Multi-Dimensional Learning **Across the Curriculum**

GUIDED VISUALIZATIONS

Guided Visualizations provide students with the opportunity to BE STILL, LISTEN, FOCUS, IMAGINE and PROCESS. Use these visualizations to settle in after (or before recess). Describe it as a "slide show in your mind." Point out to students that a visualization has to go slowly enough so that ones mind can capture and engage the picture before the next images comes. The visualization MUST have rich, descriptive language in order to be appealing enough to captivate the listener's imagination so that s/he doesn't drift off into his/her own thoughts.

When students are familiar with the qualities of a visualization, they can be asked to write their own visualizations about a particular theme related to a topic being studied in class. In so doing, they must focus on rich description, adjectives and a story theme that is engaging. When asked to present their visualizations to the class, the speaker must be cognizant of timing and pacing in order to create a "verbal slide show." This lesson includes creative, thematic writing; Speech/Drama/Oration skills; Listening; Critiquing.

NOTE: Visualizations can be found in written form and also in audio such as Jim Weiss' recordings, *Good Night* and *Sweet Dreams*.

ANIMAL CARDS

Make a 30-card deck of 6 suits (five cards each: horse, chicken, sheep, dog, cat, cow). Shuffle well and distribute to class. Students need to group themselves into 6 groups of five Without speaking, and instead, making the sounds of the given animals on their cards.

OBJECTIVE: Role Play...will define extravert/introverts; discuss style and comfort levels)

STRAWS (OBJECTIVE: Will identify extroverts/introverts; define style and comfort levels...non-verbal communication, facial expression, leadership roles. Did students who are usually quiet get the chance to lead?)

Students self group into groups of 4-5 students. Each group gets a box of straws and a roll of scotch tape. Students must try to construct the highest, free-standing structure possible WITHOUT SPEAKING OR WRITING.

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PERSONALITIES FROM DIFFERENT ERAS

Ask students to choose a personality from a given era and re-tell his/her story as a first-person account. Include feelings, emotions, thoughts and ideas. Describe physical image, including body language, facial expressions, and other non-verbal clues

ARRANGE SPEAKERS FROM THE COMMUNITY TO ADDRESS THE STUDENTS

Invite people from other countries or generations such as grandparents to tell their stories and describe how and where they lived. Have children evaluate these presentations with regard to storytelling: elements of the story; descriptive oral language; body language; emotional content.

CHOREOGRAPH A SCENE FROM A STORY AS A DANCE

EXAMPLE: If for example, the class is reading a book from Renaissance times, obtain a piece of music from that era and divide students into teams with the task of creating a dance that interprets a scene from the story.

ACTING OUT A STORY PHYSICALLY

Create a context in which students act out a story physically. They might climb a mountain, swim across a stream, run from a dragon, join villagers in a circle dance, etc. Lead them to different scenarios that tie in with the curriculum. Ask them how to act out some of the story's challenges.

CREATE A SONG

Create a song or use an existing melody using words that apply to a particular story

CREATE A COLLAGE

Ask students to make a collage of characters/personalities from a literary or historical time

CREATE A COLORING BOOK

Ask students to make their own coloring/line art pages and compile a class coloring book of literary or historical figures. Be sure to include captions or quotations from the figures.

CREATE CHARACTER MASKS

Have students make masks of characters in an existing story, or create a new story based on masks the students create.

DRAW OR PAINT A MURAL OF A STORY

WHAT IF's

Ask students to create and then share "What-If's":

What would have happened if Cinderella hadn't lost her slipper? How else might she and the prince have met? What if Jack climbed up the beanstalk and found the giant's castle abandoned? Might there have been some other ending? This can be a group or individual exercise. *It works well with historical characters as well.*

EXPLORING IMAGINATIVE LANGUAGE

Read aloud to the students stories with particularly humorous, imaginative language. Try Carl Sandburg (*Rootabaga Stories*) and Rudyard Kipling (*Just So Stories*). Read Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky* and ask students what happens in the course of the poem and how we know it. Explore Carroll's use of onomatopoeia.

RETELL A STORY

Retell a story in the persona of a television journalist reporting on the event.

