



Reading & Writing as Partners

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Donna Marie Wagner, BA, ED,
MSLS

Have you experienced a child in your class who says, “I love to read but I hate to write!” If you have; than here are a few ideas to promote reading and writing as partners in the classroom. Reading fluency is improved when a student practices reading again and again. Comprehension is taking the reader from a page of reading words to a level of understanding ideas. Before the school year is completely over take time to pick up a book and read it to your students. Get excited about them, do the usual picture walk, previewing and prediction but leave them hanging before you get to the end. Just when you have hooked them it is time to let their writing skills kick in.

Writing fluency is improved by great brainstorming activity. This is also known as free writing. Back to the story for example, I am reading The Phantom Tollbooth by Norton Jester. It was one of my favorite books as a young girl. I told the students I would read two chapters a day if there were time. I also told them I might not finish the book before the last day of school. When I started reading the book, I was already familiar with the plot, characters and little hidden intricacies of the story. It is a good idea to familiarize yourself with the book before you read it aloud. By knowing this I am able to change my voice, add emphasis where needed and give just the right “pause” for them to hang on the edge...waiting for what will come next. This makes the difference between a good reading and a great one!

“So let’s see, I have 8 days of school left and we are on chapter 5, there are 20 chapters in the book.... will I be able to finish the book if I read 2 chapters per day?” This question I posed to my math wizards. One student did the math aloud, “8 days x 2 chapters per day = 16 chapters. There are 20 chapters and we are on chapter 5 so $20-5=15$ chapters left. Yes, I think we can finish the book.” He did the math but I didn’t tell him we would have two half days in there and one day we could only read one chapter and there was the Awards ceremony.... Many interruptions a 4th grader doesn’t count on but can be easily sidetracked with when they come. So the conclusion is we may or may not finish this book. I have a plan just in case.

I told them I'd try to read 2 chapters a day. In the meantime I am giving them daily opportunity to write in their journals to respond to what they are listening to. Day one we discovered Milo is a boring child who wastes a lot of time and has absolutely no adventures. He is greeted by a surprise package with instructions to assemble a tollbooth. He has nothing better to do so he assembles the tollbooth, gets in his little car, pays his toll and goes on his way. He arrives in the Kingdom of Wisdom and ends up in the Doldrums after which he travels to Dictionopolis and is thrown into the dungeon with a watchdog named, Tock. But I must stop here because this is a stopping point. This is where my students get off to write a response to their own experiences in the Doldrums and the joys of Dictionopolis. Oh and however with Milo and Tock get out of their six million year sentence to prison? As I tell my students, I guess you will just have to write about it and figure out what you would do if you were Milo in that situation.

Reading and writing have always been partners. It is up to the teachers to bring the two together. Milo and Tock just happened to meet each other and reading and writing have long are partners. Comprehension is improved when the student takes what he hears to respond to what he knows or can imagine. My favorite Einstein quotes is "Imagination is more important than knowledge." If you have an imagination you will never be bored. Reading and writing responses will often need a teacher's help by offering a well-constructed prompt. Read the book, and select at least 5 interesting things from each chapter. Word them in open-ended question format. Create prompts that will stir the imagination and allow the students to predict where the story will go next. Don't give it too them all at once. One small idea can lead to many great ones. As the school year closes encourage your students to read more of your recommended books. Make a list of ten good books for them to read over the summer and offer a few ideas of things they can write about along with those books. This will surely get them thinking and writing. So if you think reading and writing are soloists, think again. They have been and always will be partners!