

Teacher to Teacher

039-0300-0042

10 Ways to Use Real Books with Adult Beginning Readers

Nancy Padak

**B-B-B-Buh... bird.
Can Nan fan Dan?
A Langston Hughes poem.**

Which would you find more engaging? Which would likely motivate you to persist at the challenge of learning to read?

We all know that persistence is critical for adult beginning readers. We also know that motivation and positive experiences are related to persistence. And we know that real texts-- poems and stories that amuse us, move us, or provoke thought-- are motivating. So, then, how can we use these texts to promote positive experiences, to help adult beginners move toward reading proficiency? Ten sure-fire ways to use real books and other authentic texts are described in this article.



Read Aloud

Everyone, no matter age or reading ability, enjoys a good story well read. This is part of the popularity of books on tape and cd. You can take advantage of this natural interest and introduce your students to wonderful texts by reading aloud for a portion of each class session. Select books, short stories, poetry, newspaper articles—anything likely to be of interest. Look to Eureka! for an easy-to-use resource for finding good books. Practice the reading beforehand, so that you can serve as an excellent fluency model for your students.

You can encourage discussion either during the read-alouds or afterwards. Ask thoughtful questions about content rather than factual or literal-level queries. Use the Directed Listening-Thinking Activity http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/dr_ta.pdf. You can teach beginning readers lots about comprehension while they listen.

Read Together

Some texts are meant to be read orally—poems, pieces of speeches (check http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/School_Bell/Social_Studies/History/Speeches/ for famous US history speeches), drama. On occasion prepare such texts for choral reading. Make an enlarged version of the text (chart paper or overhead transparency) as well as individual copies for students.

Use this routine when introducing these texts to your students: I'll read it to you; you read it with me. This provides support for beginners so they will not be frustrated by unknown words or concentrating on decoding to the exclusion of fluency and comprehension. Read the text to students several times; point to words in the

enlarged version as you do. Then invite students to read aloud with you.

Depending on the nature of the text, you may also want to ask students about varying their voices as they read. Excited words can be read in a loud, sharp voice. Sad words can be read in a whisper. This sort of discussion invites comprehension, as students must understand the author's intent in order to make decisions about how to use their voices.

Read While Listening

Most public libraries have book/ tape sets available for checkout. (More able readers can also make these tapes for others to use.) Make books and tapes available for students. Create a listening center with a couple of tape recorders and headsets. Invite students to listen to texts while they read them silently. This listening-while-reading routine has consistently been shown to improve students' reading ability.

Practice Reading

Purchase some blank cassette tapes for your listening center. Help your students become comfortable with using the recorder and hearing their voices on tape. Ask a student to read a text (or a part of a text) into the tape recorder. Then ask the student to listen to his/her reading, critique it, and prepare for another reading of the same text. Ask the student to continue this routine—reading, critiquing, rereading—until he or she is satisfied with the oral rendition. Research has shown that this practice, called repeated readings, improves students' word recognition, fluency, and comprehension.

Ohio Literacy Resource Center

Enhancing Adult Literacy

Teacher to Teacher is a publication of the Ohio Literacy Resource Center
Research 1—1100 Summit St., Kent State University
PO Box 5190, Kent, OH 44242-0001
Phone: (800) 765-2897 or (330) 672-2007
FAX: (330) 672-4841 Email address: olrc@literacy.kent.edu
Web site: <http://literacy.kent.edu>

Use Story Maps and Other Graphics

A simple story map might have sections for setting, characters, and plot. Create a large map (chart paper or overhead). Stop a few times during read-aloud of a story. Ask students to decide about important words or phrases to put on the map. Then read more of the story, and when you stop again, ask students to revise (delete, add) the information on the map. After the story has been read and the map is complete, information can be used to develop a summary. If students are able, they can write the summaries independently or with partners. If they are unable to do this, you can take dictation.

Nonfiction graphics can be used in the same way. If the text has a problem-solution structure, your graphic will list places for problems and solutions. An enlarged timeline can be used to keep track of important information in a piece written as a chronology <http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/WhatisaTimeline.pdf> and http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/prob_solution.pdf.

Take Dictation

You can use your students' out-of-school interests to develop reading material. Invite students to bring in magazines or other texts of interest to them. Read these aloud to students. At the end (or mid-way if the text is long), invite discussion of content. Take notes of important ideas for students if necessary. Then invite students to retell the text while you take dictation. Remember that you should use correct spelling, capitalization, and punctuation while taking dictation, but also that you should use students' own words.

When the dictation is complete, read it back to students and invite revisions. Make these, if requested. Then prepare final copy of the dictation (or have students do this) using a word processor. Make individual copies of the text for everyone who participated in the dictation. Have students practice reading this text silently. At each reading, ask students to underline words they recognize. Both you and they will be pleasantly surprised at the rapid growth in students' sight vocabularies.

Encourage Sketching

Students can sketch while you read aloud to make nonverbal notes of important ideas. These can be kept in a journal or used to write or dictate a summary of or a response to the text.

“Sketch to Stretch” http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/sketch_stretch.pdf is a during-listening activity. Stop a few times while you are reading to students. Give them a minute to sketch something of interest or importance related to the text. Then ask students to share these sketches with each other, explaining what they drew and, more important, why.

Practice Fluency

Any simple text, such as a short poem, can be used for fluency practice. First ensure that students will be able to read the text successfully by using the “I’ll read it to you; then we’ll read it together” routine described above. When students are individually capable of reading the text successfully, ask them to find partners. Each student should read the text to his or her partner three times. The partner should offer positive encouragement after each reading. Then partners switch roles. This routine, called the Fluency Development Lesson, was cited by the National Reading Panel as a research-proven way to enhance fluency and comprehension.

Harvest words

Many of the activities described above will result in students learning the words in the short texts they read and reread. When this happens, you can use these words to teach decoding. Provide small scraps of paper. Ask students to select words they know from the texts that are interesting or important or that contain a phonic element or word part (prefix, suffix, root) of interest. For example, if you need to teach long /a/, ask students to select words containing long /a/. Since students' words will be different, you can combine them into a lesson about long /a/ that will include both familiar and unfamiliar words for students. Each selected word should be put on a separate scrap of paper.

With these word cards, you can teach about a certain element using the whole-part-whole instructional routine. You can collect words that have a phonic element and use them to teach the sound, eventually asking students to try their new knowledge with unfamiliar words. You can ask students to sort their words by syllable, presence of prefixes, parts of speech—the possibilities are abundant. These quick word activities are fun. Moreover, they are an effective way to teach about parts of language and enhance development of students' sight vocabularies.

Do Readers Theater

Readers Theater http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/readers_theater.pdf involves performing a script without action, costumes, props, scenery, or memorization of lines. Performers simply stand in front of an audience and read their lines, much like radio dramas of the past. The practice that precedes this performance has repeatedly been shown through research to improve students' comprehension, fluency, and decoding ability.

You can use scripts that are already written in Readers Theater format (go to <http://www.aaronshep.com/rt/other.html> to start looking online for scripts), or you and students can write your own scripts. To write a script, students should first find a story (or section of a story) of interest. They should then decide on characters and need for a narrator. At this point, they are ready to develop the script. The author's words can be used verbatim or can be changed to adapt to the script format. You can take dictation of students' ideas, if necessary. After the script is written, it needs to be practiced several (or many) times. Finally, the script is ready for performance.

Either as described or with adaptations, such as taking dictation, each of these 10 activities will be successful with your beginning readers. Using real books and other real texts in this way will motivate students to persist at their goals of becoming readers.

