
LITERACY THROUGH LITERATURE

A transition program from Primary School language activities to Secondary School literature studies

Content of the Program

This program consists of four Study Guides and Activities, based on four novels studied by a special group of students at Sacred Heart College, Ballarat East, Victoria. It is a girls' school from Years 7 to 10. The learning activities include speaking, reading, writing, dramatising, illustrating, discussing issues and researching information. The study material is sequentially graded for development.

Book 1 is a study of simple comprehension skills and is based on **The Not-Just-Anybody Family** by Betsy Byars.

Book 2 aims at developing thinking, critical and creative readers through a study of **Callie's Castle** by Ruth Park.

Books 3 and 4 lay the foundation for a more complex study of English Literature by introducing concepts and exercises on plot structure, mood, characterisation and language features in the texts. The novels used are: **Sun on the Stubble** by Colin Thiele and **Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH** by Robert O'Brien.

Each Study Guide and Activity Booklet is a complete entity with its own aims, goals and methodology. Each can be studied without reference to the other texts, but for maximum skill development, the whole program is recommended. **Literacy through Literature** was designed for Year 7 students with language disabilities.

The History of the Program

This work has been evolving since 1987. It has been carefully monitored, changed, modified, enriched and extended. Many students have contributed ideas and constructive criticism. English teachers from all levels at Sacred Heart College have contributed and parents have helped students with the exercises at home.

The Program's Potential for Development

Students who have entered the program with low levels of reading achievement have quickly displayed:

- interest and enjoyment
- enthusiastic participation
- improved reading, comprehension, oral, listening and writing skills
- self-confidence

Non-readers have been able to participate fully by expressing themselves verbally, or through art and drama activities. When presenting the first three novels, teachers have read them *to* and *with* the students before attempting the exercises in this Study Guide. This first reading enables the weaker readers to learn from the modelling of one who is skilled. The students improve word recognition skills, phrasing techniques and expressiveness. The teacher asks the students to predict outcomes and determine cause and effect where it is appropriate to do so. These learning strategies help comprehension.

The Theory Behind the Program

Brian Cambourne was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship at Harvard University in the mid 1970's. He has been a staff-member of Arizona University and the Reading Centre of Illinois, and is Head of the Centre for Studies in Literacy at Wollongong University. Cambourne spent many years teaching and researching literacy learning in Australian schools. His theories have influenced the development and implementation of *Literacy through Literature*. The following page contains a schematic representation of Brian Cambourne's model of learning. It has been taken from his recent book, *The Whole Story*, published by Ashton Scholastic Press, Sydney, 1988.

The theory relating to the sequential development of literal and interpretative comprehension skills, also critical and creative reading, is that of Nila Banton Smith. Her article is titled, "The Many Faces of Reading Comprehension." It was published in *The Reading Teacher*, Vol. 23, No. 3, Dec. 1969.

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The Not-Just-Anybody Family

by Betsy Byars

- AIMS**
- To enable students to make personal responses to the text.
 - To encourage students to devise questions about the story or its characters.
 - To probe students' thinking and to help them clarify their ideas.
 - To encourage students to substantiate their points of view.
 - To help students think more deeply about the characters and the themes.

Nila Banton Smith (1969) listed comprehension skills according to their levels of difficulty. Her work has influenced me in the development of the exercises contained in this book.

COMPREHENSION SKILLS

- | | | |
|----------------|---|--|
| Level 1 | Literal | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ discovering main ideas ➤ listing supporting details ➤ detecting cause and effect ➤ sequencing words in a sentence or parts of a story ➤ comparing/contrasting activities ➤ recalling facts from the story | |
| Level 2 | Interpretive | Reference |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ drawing conclusions ➤ analysing and synthesising activities ➤ generalising ➤ speculating ➤ predicting ➤ detecting purposes ➤ deriving meaning from figurative language ➤ interpreting character traits | <p>"The Many Faces of Reading" by Nila Banton Smith, <i>The Reading Teacher</i>, Vol. 23, No.3, Dec. 1969.</p> |
| Level 3 | Critical | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ judging ➤ detecting propaganda ➤ analysing ➤ checking validity ➤ checking author's biases and purposes | |
| Level 4 | Creative | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ applying information to new situations ➤ responding emotionally | |

Level 5

Study Skills

- > locating
- > scanning and skimming
- > classifying
- > summarising
- > note taking

Methodology

An expressive reader reads the entire novel *to* and *with* the students prior to the study of these exercises.

Predicting and Questioning

1. Consider the title: **Meet the Blossoms**

The Not-Just-Anybody Family

What does the title suggest about the story?

Examine the picture on the front cover of the book and write down some questions that come to your mind.

Researching Information

2. Make a list of the first five chapter headings and their page numbers.

Interpreting Mood

3. Study Vern's remarks in Chapter 1, and select from the following list the words that best summarise his feelings: bored, excited, impatient, annoyed, amused, scornful, happy, contented, discontented.
Explain why he is feeling this way.

Illustrating a Sketch Map

4. Read pages 12, 13.
This is a summary of the escape route that Vern and Maggie took. "... around the barn, past the house, down the gully ... through the trees... over the creek... three miles into the woods." Draw a sketch map of that area. Place all the locations on it and use arrows to indicate the track taken by the children.

Finding Information

5. Provide three or more reasons why Junior was so frightened of being discovered by the police. Read pages 12 to 15. Find ways in which Pap Blossom breaks the law.