

Ban the Book Report

Promoting Frequent
and Enthusiastic
Reading

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The More Reading, the Better

Teachers recognize the benefits of frequent independent reading by students—increased knowledge on a range of topics, enhanced vocabulary, and improved reading comprehension. Instead of narrow and analytical book reports, response assignments should be more closely aligned with the reasons that people read voluntarily: exploring personal interests, making important emotional connections, and enjoying themselves. Teachers who value showing as well as telling expectancies appreciate resources that illustrate motivated reading responses and powerful personal connections to one's reading.

Chapter 1: Meaning that Includes Personal Significance

- Conferences and Surveys

- School Library Collections

- Oral Reading and Book Talks

- Reading Targets and Contests

- Timed Reading Records

- Celebrations of Reading

- Using Rubrics and Exemplars

1

Meaning that Includes Personal Significance

Response to independent reading must value meaning-making that includes emotional response and personal connections as well as thematic meaning and stylistic analysis.

Reading research has long emphasized the importance of frequent independent reading by students, not only for reading comprehension but also for enrichment of students' lives. For years we have recognized that without encouragement many young people would not voluntarily read longer texts, such as novels. The digital age intensifies the challenge, since online reading is often characterized by skimming, scanning, and shuffling around multiple texts rather than extended reflective reading of longer texts. Despite the challenges, educators must clearly and enthusiastically advocate frequent independent reading. The independent reading habit is a gift that yields lifetime enjoyment and opportunity.

Teachers and parents should remember frequent independent reading leads to writing. Published writers frequently report that their reading led them to their writing and that without their reading habit they never would have become writers. Even if one's writing is never published or even shared with others, it represents a highly significant form of personal exploration and self-understanding.

To encourage students to read frequently and independently, stress the following program features:

- Students enjoy access to a wide collection of reading materials in classroom and school libraries.
- Students have the opportunity to hear books read aloud.
- Students spend class time reading self-selected texts.
- Students talk about and write about their personal and emotional responses.

Critical analysis or personal response—which is more likely to motivate life-long reading? Since book reports are impersonal and analytical, rather than personal and reflective, offer your students response options other than book reports for independent reading.

The meaning readers create when they read extends beyond thematic meaning, and effective response options recognize this. Of course, readers interpret the themes presented in texts. These themes often confirm or challenge beliefs, and usefully do so. However, meaning also includes emotional understandings and reflection on the readers' personal experiences. When a reader reports being unable to stop reading the book, the reader has emotionally connected to the text. Thinking about why a book is so emotionally appealing represents a truly valuable and motivational exploration of meaning.

Finally, when readers connect the experiences presented in text to their own experiences, when they compare fictional characters, conflicts, motivations, and

settings to their own lives or to characters, conflicts, motivations, and settings encountered in other fiction, they engage in a personally meaningful and academically significant exploration. When they compare information, observations, and interpretations presented in nonfiction to their own current understanding, based on personal experience and reading of other texts, once again, readers are engaging in meaningful learning. Response to independent reading must value meaning-making that includes emotional response and personal connections as well as thematic meaning and stylistic analysis.

Conferences and Surveys

Boys often prefer practical how-to and informational texts.

In conferences with students, especially students who claim not to enjoy reading, teachers and librarians can usefully invite students to identify subjects of interest—football, hockey, cars, horses, magazines, movies, and so on. Librarians provide invaluable help in matching reluctant readers with texts linked to their current personal interests. In recommending texts based on current interest, we can encourage students to extend their reading tastes over time. In helping students select texts with an appropriate level of difficulty, we can nudge students toward more challenging and more literary texts as their reading abilities develop. With guidance, a reader can be led by a favorite author, topic, or genre to similar and possibly more challenging books.

Matching students with personally significant and motivational books becomes a major focus as teachers encourage frequent independent reading. When students claim to dislike reading, respond that they just haven't yet discovered the right book and that the right book awaits discovery by every reader. Work from the conviction that there are interesting books for every student, books that motivate personal involvement and lifelong reading, books that lead readers enthusiastically to recommend titles to other students.

Reading profiles or surveys represent one strategy to guide students in their choices of books for independent reading. Consider using surveys like those on pages 15 and 16 in a class discussion about favorite reading. Have students revisit the survey throughout the school year, so they can note changes in their reading preferences.

See page 15 for a reproducible version of My Current Reading for Pleasure Survey; see page 16 for My Current Reading Profile.

My Current Reading for Pleasure Survey

NAME: *Chris Lopez*

DATE: April 25

I like books that are *fictional, romantic and funny*.

I am likely to reread material that is written *by my favorite author or that is fun to read*.

I dislike books that are *always talking about tragic events*.

My favorite place for reading is *in my room*.

I would like to read more about *fictional, romance books*.

I would describe the amount of reading that I do as *a hobby; an enjoyment*.

I am likely to finish a book that *that has a great plot*.

I am unlikely to finish a book that *always talks about bad, depressing stuff*.

For the next month, my personal reading goal is to *re-read the Twilight Series of Stephanie Meyer and try out other books*.

My Current Reading Profile

NAME: *Ann Shaefer*

DATE: September 12

The first part I look at in a novel is *the front picture*.

I like to read novels that look at *something scary or surprising*.

One thing that “puts me off” reading a novel is *when the author says the same thing over and over again*.

I usually read a novel in about *one day* (days, weeks).

My favorite authors are *Peg Kehret*.

When I describe myself as a reader, I usually use phrases such as *fast, good*.

My good reading habits are *I read fast and can summarize a book*.

Reading habits I would like to change are *to stop reading a book in one day or less*.

My personal reading goals for this term (week/month) are *to read something different than chick-flicks and scary books*.

School Library Collections

School library collections strongly influence the viability of independent reading effort. Teachers and librarians must constantly monitor and update classroom and school library holdings, paying particular attention to authors, titles, and subjects that appeal to students. Collections should include graphic novels, texts at a range of reading levels, a range of informational texts, fiction and poetry, and audio books.

Recorded reading or audio books allow students to enjoy texts beyond their reading level. It is critical that students follow the print as the text is read so that they learn print forms of oral language. In some independent reading programs, volunteers record readings of texts or serve as reading buddies; i.e., partners who read the book with the students.

See page 106 for titles that can assist you in maintaining current library sources.

Oral Reading and Book Talks

Many adults identify a teacher’s reading aloud as their favorite memory of school—a memory that inspires their own lifelong reading.

Encourage frequent independent reading by regularly sharing your own competent and enthusiastic reading of appealing texts in a variety of literary forms. When students present a competent oral reading of a favorite part of a text, it can motivate other students to read the book.

Follow these guidelines to improve your oral reading of texts. Encourage students to apply these techniques when they engage in oral reading.

- **Respect Punctuation Cues:** Many readers pause unnaturally in oral reading. Unnatural pauses impair a listener’s comprehension of an oral reading. Remember that a comma signals a pause; a period signals a stop. An exclamation mark signals emotion; a question mark signals an inquisitive tone, and, in some cases, a tone of disbelief or anger.
- **Use Timing and Pacing:** Decide how quickly the text will be read and where changes in pace are appropriate.
- **Vary Volume:** Different texts require different volume and changes in volume.

- Use Emphasis: Remember that an effective oral reading always moves to a focal point. Choose the point of emphasis. Signal it with a slight pause and a deliberate emphasis of key words.

Good Bits conferences represent another possibility to encourage students to read extensively. A *good bit* is a part of a text that the reader finds interesting, enjoyable, memorable, or personally important. Following your modeling of a Good Bit conference, students take turns sharing good bits with the entire class or a group of classmates. Provide them with these guidelines:

- Provide a little background about the text and why you chose it.
- Read the good bit as effectively as you can.
- Tell why you like the good bit, why it is enjoyable for you.
- Invite questions and reactions from others.

Reading Targets and Contests

A school's independent reading program sometimes includes the setting of targets—often a minimum of five to ten books per year. The targets specify dates that reading responses are due. Ideally, students will voluntarily read beyond the minimum targets.

Each personal-response assignment in this book includes the requirement that students report on reading completed; e.g., the entire book, at least half of the book, less than half of the book, little or none of the book. Consider whether students will complete responses for books that they have not read entirely. If they have not completely read the book by the date on which a response is due, you might challenge them to do so by the next due date. You might suggest that students complete a response based on a partial reading of the text and then move on to another book that might be more motivational. As a feature of differentiated instruction, set different reading targets for different students.

It is a good idea to provide a reading folder for each student. The folder will contain reading surveys completed by the students throughout the year, as well as the students responses to independent reading. A few times during the year, challenge students to review the collection to select what they think is their best response, with a page attached to explain their choice. Encourage students to identify a personal reading goal as part of the assessment. With their own and parents' permission, students share responses in classroom displays and presentations. Such sharing motivates other students to read the book and illustrates possibilities for thoughtful reading responses.

Be wary of contests as part of independent reading programs. Schools that employ prizes, such as pizza, hockey cards, and merchandise, suggest that reading is a chore that is good for you but requires an extrinsic reward. While contests and prizes might motivate students to develop a love of reading, often the reading ends at the end of the contest. Instead, emphasize that reading is enjoyable and personally important; therefore, reading is its own reward and often is a better entertainment option than a prize item.

Each personal-response assignment in this book includes the requirement that students report on reading completed; e.g., the entire book.

Selection criteria for best responses should be negotiated in class.