

Stories to Teach By: How to Utilize Children's Literature in Your Curriculum

Amy Popillion, Ph.D., CFLE
Senior Lecturer, Iowa State University

A good children's book is
not only enjoyed by
children.

C.S. Lewis

Taken from: “Children's Literature Offers Lessons In Decision Making” by Pamela Leong, Ohio State University Extension article

- * “Children's literature is available as a springboard to assist parents in teaching children how to develop sound decision making skills. Stories abound for the youngest child to those in their teens. Used in creative ways, childhood stories are an effective supplement to help children learn the skills needed to make informed and responsible decisions.”

Benefits of using picture books...

- * Quick and focused
- * Can activate prior knowledge
- * Put more abstract concepts into a specific context
- * Brings controversial or complex topics down to a personal level
- * Great way to introduce units and spark interest

Some criteria for picture books for older readers:

- * Mature themes
- * More complex illustrations than those that would be easily appreciated or understood by younger readers
- * More text or difficult text than would not be appropriate for the short attention spans of younger readers
- * Subtle meanings beyond the understanding of younger readers
- * Two levels of meaning - one for younger readers and one for older readers
- * Fiction or non-fiction

Taken from: Osborn, S. (2001, Spring/Summer). *Picture Books for Young Adult Readers*. *Alan Review*, vol.28, no. 3.

Bibliotherapy

- * Use of books AND discussions to address a variety of psychological concerns or typical developmental issues
- * Benefits – information, mutuality, empathy, ideas for solutions, inspiration/encouragement

Did you know that all of these topics can be found in a picture book?

- * Death
- * Divorce
- * Racism/prejudice
- * Cultural differences
- * Peer pressure
- * Moving
- * Mental illness
- * Terminal illness
- * Homelessness
- * World issues (i.e. war)
- * Racial identity
- * Aging grandparents
- * Disabilities
- * Stereotypes
- * Gender
- * Adoption
- * Foster care
- * Social class
- * Weight/appearance
- * Environmental issues
- * Sexuality
- * Types of families
- * Learning disabilities
- * Parents in prison

Excellent resources!!

- * Teaching with picture books:
<http://teachwithpicturebooks.blogspot.com>
- * Purpose as stated on the site: “The main purpose of this site is to help teachers, librarians, tutors, and homeschooling parents in grades 3-8 use picture books to enhance their instruction.”
- * “Teaching with Picture Books in the Middle School” by Iris McClellan Tiedt
- * Picture Books to Support Character Education Lessons:
<http://www.sdcoe.net/lret2/media/pdf/character-traits-hfj.pdf>

Beyond picture books...

- * Using young adult novels to explore various themes
 - * Teenage fatherhood – “First Part Last” by Angela Johnson
 - * Being in the wrong place at the wrong time or not?? – “Monster” by Walter Dean Myers
 - * Acquaintance rape – “Speak” by Laurie Halse Anderson
 - * Drug addiction – “Crank” by Ellen Hopkins
 - * Suicide/bullying – “Thirteen Reasons Why” by Jay Asher
 - * Dating violence – “Dreamland” by Sarah Dessen