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A Unique Approach to Introducing Information Literacy in the Primary Grades

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Introducing Information Literacy in the Primary Grades

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Information literacy, as defined by the National Forum on Information Literacy (NFIL), is the ability to “know when there is a need for information, to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively use that information for the issue or problem at hand” (NFIL, accessed 2005). Without these skills, declares NFIL, today’s students cannot be fully participating citizens and the workers of tomorrow. The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and Association of Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) consider it to be the “keystone of lifelong learning” (1998). Research indicates that many high school students fall short in the areas of research and information skills. This is especially noted in high needs schools and with at-risk students. More than ever before, children need to be taught these skills starting as early as possible to avoid later inadequacies. Young children wonder about everything. They continually ask questions. Why not tap that innate wonder, to begin teaching the skills they need to know to answer those questions; later they are not so curious. The primary years are the easiest and most exciting time to teach children information literacy skills. Research also shows that in order for these skills to be truly meaningful, they must be taught in the context of the curriculum. However, just putting it the context of the curriculum doesn’t necessarily make it meaningful *enough* very young learners. It also has to be motivating and fun. Those who teach primary kids know just how easy it is to lose their attention and just how wonderful it feels when you see them working enthusiastically. The most wonderful thing happens to a teacher librarian when you see that little light come on in a young child’s eye-he got it. He understands. Information literacy skills helps make that happen.

A STORYBOOK APPROACH TO INFORMATION LITERACY

There are many excellent information literacy (IL) models in the field (e.g., Stripling, 2003; Eisenberg & Berkowitz 1990; Kuhlthau, 1987; Pappas & Tepe, 1995; Yucht, 1997). They lay the groundwork for what information skills to teach. Yet they also leave room for you to incorporate different approaches, techniques, and strategies for acquiring the skills described in the models. Figure 1 below represents one approach or technique (not a model) you can try with your primary kids. Simplicity is at its core. Its strengths are three-fold:

- It is based on a ‘tried and true’ pedagogical principle: “Build on the familiar,” in this case, the familiar world of storybooks.
- It works toward the goal of information literacy through its triangulation of curriculum content, early literacy, and individual information skills.
- Primary grade children will find it motivating and fun.

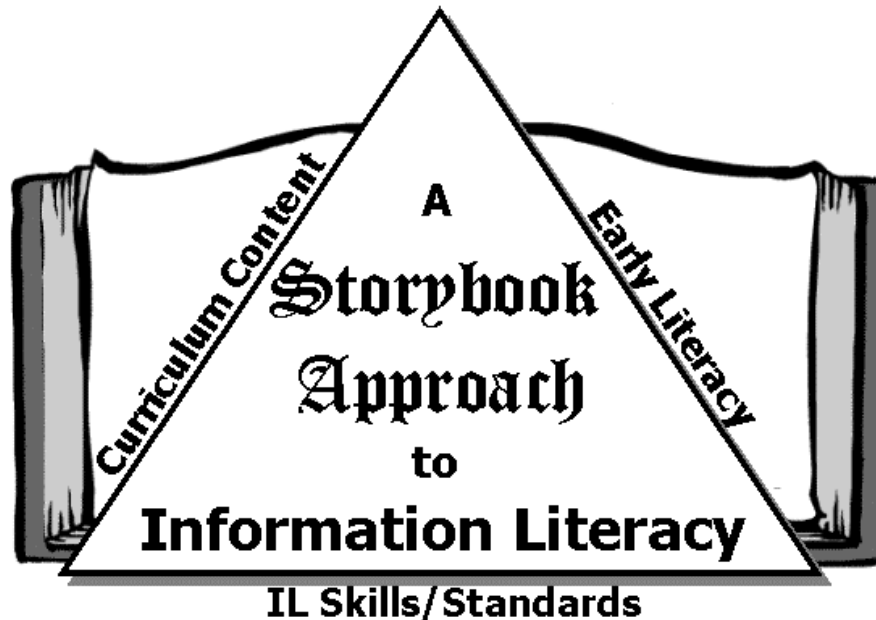


Figure 1: Approach based on Arnone, M., *Educators Guide: The Strangest Dinosaur That Never Was* (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2003): 5, 51-57.

The last strength may sound a bit trivial but without considering the motivation and “fun” potential, success may be elusive. Next we will describe each of these strengths and later provide a simple recipe for success.

BUILDING ON THE FAMILIAR

Whenever you can link new knowledge to past knowledge or experience, it becomes more meaningful (e.g., Small & Arnone, 2000). The world of stories and storybooks is familiar to the child. Starting from this place of comfort, you can take them many places. Their teachers and parents routinely use storybooks to teach. There are books about reading maps, about using good manners, about the right foods to eat. Teachers and teacher librarians are continually looking for the right story to teach curricular and other concepts. Stories are powerful learning devices for students of all ages. As one example, teaching children to search the Web could begin with exploring the ways they search in a book and then making comparisons. This helps them transfer some of their existing knowledge to the less familiar medium (although in today’s world, one cannot be sure of how many children may experience the Web before books!).

Using this approach, the storybook is not only the catalyst but it becomes the anchor. It can serve as your weaving thread for your related activities or even throughout a unit. It will be that familiar place to which young children return, and build confidence to step out once more and explore. The secret is that it has to be the right storybook for the job, a storybook that will allow you to make the necessary connections between your information skills objectives, literacy objectives, and other curriculum content, *and* you have to use a special recipe.

TRIANGULATION

The Storybook Approach considers integrating specific information skills, emerging literacy skills, and curriculum content to be critical to the goal of becoming information literate at a basic level. Through the power of a storybook, it is possible to bring all these areas together in a meaningful way for primary grade children.

Information Skills

The information literacy (IL) models mentioned earlier describe information skills that students must acquire to become information literate. If you already have a model that you use in your school and it works for you, stick with it. Remember, what is described in this paper is one of numerous approaches you can incorporate into your favorite model. Some models share commonalities. In *Turning Kids on to Research: The Power of Motivation*, Small & Arnone (2000) synthesized the major IL models into eight broad categories of information skills which were then sequenced over three broad research stages: beginning, during, and ending. The synthesis does not imply a lockstep or strictly linear process; the process is often repetitive or recursive with students revisiting prior skills which many of the IL models emphasize. For example, a student may wish to refine an initial topic after having explored a number of resources. Figure 2 summarizes the stages and broad level skills; each broad skill would include a number of subskills.

RESEARCH STAGES	Beginning	During	Ending
INFORMATION SKILLS	Definition Selection Planning	Exploration Collection Organization	Presentation Evaluation

Figure 2: Synthesis of major IL models (not including subskills), Small & Arnone, 2000

Your IL curriculum may also revolve around state or national information literacy standards. The nine national information literacy standards put forth in *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (1998) were written by the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT), and published by the American Library Association (ALA). They have provided excellent guidelines for new and established teacher-librarian

Early Literacy

An approach to introducing information literacy that also builds early literacy skills is an important component of the *Storybook Approach to Information Literacy in the Primary Grades*. It integrates early literacy skills in an almost seamless manner. Children will be listening attentively to spoken language and for a specified length of time, listening to gain information, recalling and speaking in response to the reading of imaginative and informational texts, participating in group discussions, and using grade-level vocabulary to communicate orally ideas, emotions, or experiences for different purposes. Reading and early literacy skills are the first step in becoming information literate. “Stories are the answer,” to helping children learn to read and how to answer their questions (Coatney, 2002).

Curriculum Content

Addressing information skills and early literacy objectives should be accomplished in tandem with the content and objectives of the primary grades’ overall curriculum. Research has shown that when information skills lessons are taught in the context of the curriculum and students’ actual information needs, they are more effective, in part because learning them becomes more *relevant*. Young children want to learn everything-now. They are curious. They do not separate by subject matter. They want to know about the toad they saw, where to find out about it and how to access the information-all at once. They are not as interested in just knowing how to locate a book (any book) on the library shelves. *Relevance* is discussed as a motivational concept in the next section. There are numerous ways to incorporate aspects of a storybook into curricular assignments and later we’ll provide some examples. The key is collaboration. .

MOTIVATION

Storybooks naturally engage young children in a world of wonder. At one moment, they seem serene, almost entranced as you read aloud in your cozy story corner. Then suddenly you encounter an explosion of questions that underscore their exuberance for learning. There is no doubt that reading aloud is fun and has a high motivation and learning potential. The storybook is a catalyst for the varied activities that can spring from it and support the interrelated areas discussed under triangulation. While the storybook itself is motivational, so must all the activities that stem from it.

TIP

When you think about motivation, remember the acronym **ARCS**. The **ARCS Model of Motivational Design** created by John Keller (1987) is used widely in educational contexts around the world. Recently, ways to utilize the ARCS Model in designing educational media materials for children was explored by one of the authors (Arnone, 2005). ARCS stands for Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction and incorporating teaching strategies that address these motivational elements dramatically increases your chances for success as measured by both student engagement and learning. When lesson planning and preparing activities, ask yourself: Will this activity gain and sustain my students’ **ATTENTION**? How can I increase **RELEVANCE**, that is, make this activity more meaningful to students? What strategies can I employ to build and reinforce their **CONFIDENCE** in their abilities to use information skills in doing research? How do ensure **SATISFACTION** with experience?

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Like anything you need the proper ingredients to make it work. They are simple, too.

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS
Making the Storybook Approach Work!

Ingredients:

- 1. Collaboration**
- 2. Connections**
- 3. Creativity**

Directions: See below

Collaboration

There is much evidence today that students benefit from collaborative efforts between the library media specialist and the classroom teacher (e.g., Ross and Kuhlthau, 2004). Simply put, students learn better and achieve more. Using the storybook approach teachers and library media specialists can harness the power of story and, it can also be fun not only for the students but also for the library media specialist and the classroom teacher. Sometimes, a storybook can be the catalyst for an entire school-wide event! That's exactly what happened at an elementary school in Syracuse, New York. The delightful book entitled *The Journey of Oliver K. Woodman* by Darcy Pattison and illustrated by Joe Cepeda was initially read to a class of special education students by their teacher, Dan Lounsbery. They loved it!

Before long, library media specialist Bonnie French and other teachers recognized this enthusiasm as a wonderful opportunity to integrate curriculum content with research and information skills using *The Journey of Oliver K. Woodman* as the weaving thread. Plus, it all tied in very nicely for the younger students in terms of building early literacy skills.

If you are not familiar with the book, it tells the story of a wooden man who travels from South Carolina all the way to California. It is the kindness of strangers that gets him to his final destination. In the book, the people who help Oliver K. Woodman along his route send postcards to his owner who anxiously awaits news of Oliver's travels. It was just the right book to spark the collaborative effort required to make a successful school-wide project. *Collaboration* was a key ingredient but the book was also suitable for making the right *connections*, the next ingredient in the recipe for success.

Connections

Not all storybooks will qualify. It takes the RIGHT storybook to do the job! The right storybook will be one with which you can *connect* curriculum content objectives, information skills objectives, and literacy objectives in a complementary way. When you identify such books, you will almost hear the harmony they will inspire.

The Journey of Oliver K. Woodman was one such book for the Syracuse, NY school. Once Dan Lounsbery decided he could build an Oliver look-a-like from lumber he had hanging around his house, the possible connections seemed limitless. The school would send their own Oliver who they named "Mick Bright" after their school, McKinley Brighton, to a classroom in California. To increase

excitement, the entire student body voted on his name. Before leaving, the school gave him a big parade. A truck driver agreed to pick Mick up and he was on his way! Here are just a few of the *connections*:

Curriculum

Math: A paper cutout of Oliver K. Woodman was downloaded from the book's Web site; students helped do the math to enlarge him for the wood version.

Language Arts: Children wrote summaries of the story. They also wrote prediction papers about what might happen to their "Mick Bright" along the way.

Art: Children created wooden man props in the art class that they used when reading their summaries mounted on large posters.

IL Skills/Standards

"**Collaboration, leadership, and technology** are integral to every aspect of the library media program and every component of the library media specialist's role" (AASL/AECT, 1998). That's exactly what Bonnie French brought to this school-wide project. She helped get teachers onboard, generated enthusiasm and supported the language arts and art activities with library components. What about technology? Technology played an important role, too. Bonnie had one of the older students from the school's GoVideo Club videotape each student as they read a section from the book. To make it more fun, they used their wooden man props created in art as a pointer to the words which were on large decorated posters. One child would read as another had the prestigious *pointing* task. Children watched the videos and critiqued themselves. Each child decided on a presentation skill he could improve. They practiced and then videotaped again. The students were amazed at their improvement! If you would like to see a video clip of these students in action, visit *S.O.S. for Information Literacy* at www.informationliteracy.org and go to the *Spotlight on Educators* page. This school-wide project was featured in the Spring/Summer 2005 issue. (Both authors are involved in the *S.O.S. for Information Literacy* project and can vouch for the quality materials you will find when you visit.)

A variety of IL skills and standards were addressed including the following AASL/AECT national IL standards:

- 3.0 Uses information accurately and creatively.
- 3.1 Organizes information for practical application.
- 3.4 Produces and communicates information and ideas in appropriate formats.
- 3.2 Appreciates literature and other creative forms of expression.
- 5.3 Develops creative products in a variety of formats.

Early Literacy

Reading, viewing, and listening all played integral parts in Bonnie's activities in the library media center. Students practiced decoding skills, increased phonemic awareness, and read aloud in the context of meaningful activities. By videotaping students, they had a chance to practice their viewing and listening skills. With guidance, they also reflected on how they could improve their skills. Bonnie was able to assess each student's progress in these areas. Best of all, students were motivated. The activities had a high *fun* potential from the start!

Connections like those described above are important to the storybook approach to information literacy in the primary grades.

CAVEAT

Not all storybooks have to be earmarked for teaching specific information skills. Some stories just need to be enjoyed for the simple pleasure of reading and listening. Modeling enthusiasm for using books and encouraging reading for enjoyment are essential goals for the library media specialist (AASL/AECT, 1998).

Creativity

If you can look at problems from a variety of perspectives, find their essence, and generate possible solutions (many of which represent a unique or unusual view), you are creative. Creativity doesn't mean gifted or highly intelligent; an average person can be creative, as well (Amabile 1989, 1996). According to noted creativity researcher E. Paul Torrance (e.g., 1979, 1989), creative people can generate not only *original* ideas but also *many* ideas, and ideas that *elaborate* on other ideas. They also are flexible in their thought. For example, they can generate *alternative solutions* to a problem.

You have to be creative in the job of library media specialist. While generating alternative solutions to all kinds of technical, logistical, and staffing challenges is one means you will demonstrate that creativity, there are others.

Another way is to tap into your unique talents and interests and apply them in new and different ways that will capture the attention and enthusiasm of your primary students as you teach them new skills. Are you artistic? Musical? Inventive? Dramatic? A singer? A writer? Think about how you can use your talents creatively to help achieve your information literacy goals for your primary students! Perhaps, the following scenario will help.

USING THE STORYBOOK APPROACH: A BRIEF SCENARIO

Mrs. Reeves, the library media specialist at an elementary school, started by getting together with the classroom teacher, Mr. Alberti, to talk about a unit for the second graders. Together they planned a unit on rainforests that would integrate science and language arts content, information skills, and early literacy (*ingredient: Collaboration*).

Using the storybook approach, Mrs. Reeves identified just the right book that could serve as an anchor or weaving thread. She thought "A Walk in the Rainforest" by Kristin Joy Pratt-Serafini would be ideal. She chose it because it provided many opportunities for connecting science and language arts, early literacy, and information skills. On each colorful page, the book depicted different animals and plants of the rainforest with interesting facts. What made it especially useful was that it was written by the author when she was only 14 years old. She saw many ways of incorporating information literacy skills and standards. For example, after reading the book aloud, she asked students how a 14 year old could know so much information on rainforests that she could write a book. How did she start? Where did she find the information? In effect, Kristin became a character herself that children could emulate, wonder about, and even investigate. With Mrs. Reeves help, they were able to identify possible sources of information that Kristen may have used, discovered ways of locating information in a variety of sources, and even checked some of Kristen's facts for accuracy. They then applied their research skills to the classroom project, writing their own book (as a class) on why rainforests need to be protected. They put the skills they practiced earlier to a new and expanded task. Yet, the book was a place to which they could periodically return, think about how Kristen might have done this or that while creating her book, and move on to explore on their own. (*Ingredient: Connections*)

Mrs. Reeves knew that to sustain these young researchers' interest, she would have to use her own creativity while encouraging the same of them. While only one of several creative ideas she would embed into this unit, she decided to use her love of singing, rhythm, and poetry with the children's discovery of new information. She chose a list of 6 simple yet well-known public domain (PD) songs (public domain songs can be used without copyright permission). They included *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* and *Skip to my Lou*, among others. The selection criteria were that each PD song was short and children would have an easy time remembering the melody. Using newly discovered information from their research, she worked with the children to develop several songs with new lyrics written by the children. Each song had to have one fact in it. They could still be silly and fun. Mrs. Reeves even brought in her simple rhythm instruments (i.e., small tambourine, clackers, triangle, and maracas) to add extra excitement. Singing, practicing simple rhyming techniques, and having these songs as one of their research products was fun for both Mrs. Reeves and her students. (*Ingredient: Creativity*).

A NEW TWIST ON THE STORYBOOK APPROACH

Based on the logic of using the approach to information literacy described above, the authors have embarked on a series of books for primary grade children that have the information literacy component built into each story. Three books have been written to date and each contains an educators' guide with lots of ideas for integrating science and language arts. The stories themselves have curious kids embarking on information adventures with the help of Mac, a charming albeit sometimes bungling information detective. All the books use an interactive, hands-on approach interspersing reflection points and questions for students at several points during the stories in the form of *interactive pages*. The *interactive pages* provide teaching and learning opportunities for educators and students.

CONCLUSION

At the AECT presentation of this paper, the authors will focus on the Recipe for Success in using the *Storybook Approach to Information Literacy*. Participants will receive helpful handouts with suggestions of storybooks that can be used for a variety of information skills as well as lots of creative ideas to take home plus a fun exercise for participants.

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