IN THE CLASSROOM

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Stimulating children to read and write through Jack Tales
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Jack Tales are adaptations of the familiar folktale, “Jack and the Beanstalk.” Such tales, popular among American mountain people, were collected and recorded by Richard Chase (1943). Elementary students can write their own Jack Tales and in so doing enhance both literacy skills and multicultural awareness. “Chiang and the Magic Rice Kernel,” “Luigi and the Grape Vine,” and “Pedro and the Cocoa Tree” are examples of Jack Tales written by intermediate-grade students experimenting with the writing process. Writing such tales integrates reading and writing across the curriculum by stimulating higher-order reading skills, research, and written and oral expression. The activity also effectively heightens multicultural awareness as students try to apply the basic plot structure of “Jack and the Beanstalk” to diverse cultural settings.

The procedure follows the typical sequence of writing stages.

Prewriting
Read a favorite version of “Jack and the Beanstalk.” Classic versions include adaptations by Reed (1953) and the Platt and Munk Company (1922). Discuss the traditional motifs of a folktale, namely:
- “Once upon a time...”
- importance of the number three
- magical elements
- “...happily ever after.”

Assign or have the children select various countries as settings for their tales. Provide resource materials such as encyclopedias and other reference books. Encourage children to gather information about social mores, geography, economy, vegetation, names of cities and people, and traditions of the countries they will use in their Jack Tales. Demonstrate how to integrate the motifs of folktales with specific information from resource materials. This can be accomplished with the whole class by brainstorming characteristics of a familiar country. The teacher then models how to weave these characteristics with the general motifs of a folktale.

Drafting
Provide time for children to write first drafts.

Revising and editing
Encourage peer sharing for ideas and revising.

Publishing
Explore various publishing options such as binding books, oral presentations, creative drama, presentations to other classes, and videotaped readings.

A typical sixth-grade level Jack Tale might begin in this manner:

Jack and his family had a very large coffee plantation in Chile until the weather got too cold and froze all of their coffee plants. They were forced to become tenant farmers for a large banana plantation. They lived in an adobe hut in the middle of the jungle. Jack’s mother kept a few coffee beans, which she hoped to be able to sell when in desperate need of money.

Using a different country, another student might develop the plot as follows:

On his way to Calcutta, Mohammed met a little British man in a white suit who asked, “Where did you get such a fine looking rug?”

“My mother weaves rugs for a living, and I must now go to the market and sell one so we can eat.”

“Well, Mohammed, tell me what I’m going to do. Because I like you, I’m going to let you in on the deal of a lifetime. For just one rug, I’ll give you these magical rice seeds. They are guaranteed to bring you health and fame and elevate you in the caste system.” Mohammed quickly made the trade and ran home.

His mother was not happy to hear Mohammed’s news. She looked into his eyes and said, “You foolish boy, we cannot make a meal with seven grains of rice!” Disgustedly she dropped them out the window.

Another student might conclude a Jack Tale in this way:

As soon as the giant fell asleep, Pedro grabbed the gold, diamonds, and magic toucan and ran for the cocoa tree. The squawking of the toucan awakened the giant, and he ran after Pedro.

As Pedro neared the bottom of the tree, he began shouting, “Madre, bring an axe quickly!”

As soon as he dropped to the ground, he began chopping down the tree. The giant decided not to risk it, so he climbed back up through the clouds to his castle.

Pedro cut down the tree and used the wood to build a new home for his madre. Thanks to the money they received from the toucan’s golden eggs, they lived happily ever after.

The Jack Tales strategy has proven to be very popular with classroom teachers participating in the Northwest Writing Network, a collaborative effort by teachers, administrators, parents, and university personnel to improve reading and writing skills in area classrooms. Network participants report high success with this strategy. Give it a try!
new family patterns, of homelessness and helplessness. Then I think of activities, particularly writing activities, that might extend my students' understandings of the ideas they are exploring. Here are some of the books and projects that my students and I have found interesting.

Issues of war and peace

An important book to share with children is The Big Book for Peace. It contains stories, poems, and illustrations by 31 of the best-known children's authors and illustrators, all of whom donated their work to organizations working for world peace. This fine collection of stories and poems presents thoughtful models for young writers.

A haunting look at the aftermath of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima is presented in Hiroshima No Pika, by T. Maruki. The story of a seven-year-old who survives the attack but whose growth is arrested. It could be used, perhaps, with Dr. Seuss's The Butter Battle Book and Patricia Quilkan's Planting Seeds to spark informed discussion on the fear of nuclear warfare and about ways to work for peace. Children may be inspired to write letters to public officials as well as stories about conflict resolution in their own lives.

A similar theme appears in Eve Bunting's The Wall. A young father takes his son to see the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington. While searching for his grandfather's name, the boy notices the flags, photographs, letters, and an old teddy bear that have been laid against the wall. When they leave, his father places a photo of the boy beneath his grandfather's name and says, "I'm proud that your grandfather's name is on this wall." The boy is too. "But I'd rather have my grandpa here, taking me to the river, telling me to button my jacket because it's cold. I'd rather have him here."

Deborah Nourse Lattimore's stunning The Flame of Peace tells the story of how a young Aztec boy prevents the outbreak of war. The illustrations are based on authentic Aztec drawings and will increase readers' aesthetic awareness of another culture as well as inspire young writers to write a story about the achievement of peace.

The environment

Many children care deeply about nature and the environment. Cynthia Rylant's When I Was Young in the Mountains presents a picture of Appalachian life that emphasizes the beauty of a life close to nature where "we listened to frogs at dusk and awoke to cowbells outside our windows." The book is an excellent model for autobiographical writing.

Vera Williams has written the story of a journey, Three Days on a River in a Red Canoe, which also celebrates the joys of the natural world. Steve Lowe has made selections from Walden available to young children in a new edition with hauntingly beautiful linoleum-cut illustrations. Students might compare these with John Schoenherr's illustrations in Jane Yolen's Owl Moon, for which they won the Caldecott Medal. Schoenherr's watercolors describe a night's walk in the woods in search of an owl.

Chris Van Allsburg's Just A Dream is the story of a child who dreams of a future wasted by mismanagement of the environment. Its message is loud and clear and effectively addresses children's concerns. Fireflies, by Julie Brinckloe, is another story with a message—a reminder that life is precious.

A young child, realizing that the wondrous light from the jar of fireflies he has captured is gradually dimming because the insects are dying, tearfully releases them to the moonlit night. Both books should inspire passionate discussion and serious writing.

Relationships between generations

There are a number of new books that highlight the special relationships of children with elderly friends and relatives. Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen by DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan will help children understand the important work done by soup kitchen volunteers and perhaps inspire them to write about the needs of the hungry in other neighborhoods. Abuela by Arthur Dorros is so vividly and vibrantly illustrated by Elisa
Klever one can almost climb into the pictures of New York City. Rosalba's abuela, the Spanish word for grandmother, takes her on extraordinary trips in Rosalba's imagination. The book is sprinkled with Spanish vocabulary and provides a model for the way a second language can be integrated into a text.

Children may be inspired to write about grandparents after reading Amazing Grace by Mary Hoffman. Grace is told by her classmates that she can't play Peter Pan in the school play because she is black and a girl, but with the support of her loving grandmother, she proves them wrong. Some picture books are appropriate for all ages. After hearing Mem Fox's Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge, a student who worked in a senior citizens' center borrowed it to read to her clients. This is a delightful story about a young boy who helps Miss Nancy re-capture her memories, with sensitive and humorous illustrations by Julie Vivas. The seniors loved it so much that they too began to write about memories.

The development of self

In Anthony Browne's Piggybook, Mrs. Piggott, tired of doing all the work that is demanded of her by her family, leaves a note, "You are pigs!" and walks off. Sure enough, they become pigs. All ends happily with housework evenly shared and mom fixing the car. The hilarious illustrations lend much to the book. Browne's work appeals to older children because it is imaginative and surrealistic. He explores a brother-sister relationship in The Tunnel, a book that invites young writers to describe other worldly adventures. Researchers tell us that pre-adolescent girls begin to lose self-esteem in the fourth grade. A number of books present examples of autonomous, self-possessed young women who know with assurance that they can do anything they want.

The Paper Bag Princess by Robert Munsch is about a clever and brave princess who rescues her prince from a ferocious dragon, only to reject him because he cares more about her personal appearance than her character. Faith Raingold's Tar Beach is a visually stunning autobiographical tale of a young girl growing up in Harlem who dreams of helping her father become a member of the steelworkers' union. With Tomie dePaola's The Legend of the Bluebonnet, these books provide models of independent thinkers, characters who are able to make decisions based on moral conviction.

Youngsters delight in the story of Tomie dePaola's The Art Lesson, another insightful look at the importance of maintaining one's individuality. What a wonderful critique of the demands we make on children in classrooms and what an interesting way to stimulate intermediate-grade children to write about their own experiences in school. This is but a sampling of some of the new and not-so-new picture books available for use in upper-grade classrooms. Children themselves will come up with many clever and creative ideas for their use in all areas of the curriculum. And perhaps that's the best lesson of all: to ask students to extend their own learning, lead their own discussions, and write their own stories.

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References

thereby enhancing their writing with more vivid descriptors. In the middle school classroom, Alice Adjective would provide motivation and enthusiasm for the study of grammar in a natural language context.

The following four lessons use a design borrowed from Hunter (1982) providing for set, modeling, guided practice, extended thinking, and closure. Unusual elements such as costuming activity and staged exits within the unit are designed to contribute to a complete and balanced lesson.

In Act I (lesson 1), the teacher briefly leaves the room, grabs a raincoat, bonnet, and galoshes, and enters as a special visitor who will introduce the class to the concept of adjectives. In some unusual persona, Alice carries on boisterously and enthusiastically as follows:

Hi, I'm Alice Adjective. I put adjectives on all my clothing. Like, my raincoat, it's blue and hooded, waterproof and wrinkled. Like, it's yellow inside and....

This monologue continues, using adjectival expressions to describe the coat, bonnet, and galoshes. As Alice dramatically utters the descriptive adjectives, she also points to the words written boldly on index cards pinned to corresponding garments.

Alice pauses at this point and, still in character, discusses the purpose and use of adjectives. She elaborates on this concept using bug as an example. Alice says, as she points to one youngster:

Like, there's a bug crawling up your leg. Uh, is that descriptive enough? Um, like, can the class tell what the bug looks like from what I just said? No! But if I said there's a black, hairy, multi-legged insect crawling on your leg, you would have a better idea of what the bug really does look like.

Students should be asked to state additional descriptive adjectives to further the discussion. Moreover, classification of adjectives by qualities, attitudes, details, and comparisons can be accomplished at this time.

Alice Adjective takes the place of a staid teacher lecture, chalkboard listing, and handout exercise used to instruct youngsters about adjectives. Alice's rain garb, as well as the bug activity, will demonstrate and support the importance of adjectives as descriptors and the need for precision when modifying nouns or pronouns. But the Alice character brings this concept to life for the students, makes it apply to daily occurrences, and removes it from a strict textbook-learning approach.

In the closure to Act I, Alice leaves, bidding the class a fond, adjective-filled farewell. Seconds later, the teacher re-enters in her usual attire.

In Act II (lesson 2), Alice Adjective returns dressed normally but highly accessorized. She is wearing make-up, earrings, bows, lots of jewelry, and a multi-colored dress to create a visual wealth of nouns for which students can supply adjectives. (Males could dress in a flashy tie, colorful suspenders, and analogues trappings.) Alice explains, in character:

I can't believe this. I left the house without adjectives, but your teacher [give name] asked me to do this so I could make sure you truly understand the importance of adjectives as descriptors.

Alice asks for a show of hands from those who can provide an adjective for her attire. She distributes index cards, markers, and a piece of tape to each volunteer. Students record adjectives with the noun to describe each object, for example, gold earrings. After the allotted time, students are called forward to tape the cards on Alice. One teacher portraying Alice was covered from white teeth to red-bowed shoes.

Students will probably fail to recognize some nouns in need of adjectives such as a ring, watch, or pocket. Alice challenges the class to add any adjective-noun combinations omitted. Then she exits, applauding the class for such able-minded adjective awareness and ending this portion of the unit.

Alice arrives for the third act with easel and colored chalk in hand. On the chalkboard she draws a sketch of a flower (or whatever design artistic talent allows) and calls for help in making the flower come alive in color and substance. The colored chalk is then applied to the picture as class members suggest green stems, yellow petals, etc.; the drawing blossoms with adjectives. Having set the mood, Alice provides students with paper and markers. She instructs each student to choose a subject and to draw a picture with vivid detail. After 5 to 10 minutes, she pairs students and instructs them to switch pictures. The partners then analyze each other's picture by listing on a separate sheet the appropriate adjectives. Class members are called forward to show the pictures and tell adjective-noun choices. Alice leads a discussion after each presentation and elicits other adjectives and classifies selected adjectives as describing qualities, attitudes, details, or comparisons.

For the final act in this study of adjectives, Alice arrives adorned in a poncho made of newspaper with the adjectives highlighted. She explains that the daily news is filled with adjectives that give stories style and focus. Alice distributes the classified section of the local newspaper to each student. In groups of three or four, students are assigned a specific section to search, such as a certain job category in the help wanted section or a type of car in the listings for auto sales. Groups must highlight as many adjectives as they can find and be prepared to tell which noun or pronoun each describes. Groups report their findings orally, classifying their adjectives by function while Alice makes a chalkboard list.

In the four acts described here, the teacher performs center stage to motivate students to achieve specific learning outcomes. The curtain closes on an effective lesson and effective teaching.

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References

IN THE CLASSROOM
Mrs. B's Lakeside Restaurant
Pat Borysiewicz

Teaching a self-contained kindergarten with children from middle to low income families inspired me to develop an activity to develop language growth in students and to provide opportunities to apply newly acquired skills in reading, writing, and math. Since most children know the language of food and enjoy talking and writing about fixing good things to eat, I decided to provide regular cooking experiences for my students by establishing a classroom restaurant designed, staffed, and patronized by the children.

The children were involved in every aspect of the project. First, they painted a scenic view for the wall. They chose Lake Eola Park because it had been the site of our first field trip early in the year. Next, they set up the kitchen area, arranged the dining tables, and selected soft background music for the tape player. We soon celebrated the “grand opening” of Mrs. B’s Lakeside Restaurant, and it has become the most popular activity center in the classroom. The restaurant has three tables and seats 12.

Each morning before the restaurant opens, we discuss the “special of the day” and the letters we will need to write on the order pad. We also practice reading the recipe card we will be using to prepare the food. The children visit the restaurant in groups of six. Before going to the restaurant center, they wash their hands. Once in the center they decide which role they will play initially: maître d’, chef, waiter, or customer. After completing the cooking activity, the children in the group switch roles, and the activity is repeated.

The maître d’ greets the customers and shows them to their table. He or she may also take reservations by “phone” and record them on a tablet. The waiter announces the “special of the day” and takes the customer’s order, writing it down on the order pad (see Figure). The order is read to the chef, who prepares it using large recipe cards. The waiter returns to the kitchen until the customers request their checks. The customers pay their bills to the maître d’, who asks if everything was okay. The waiter clears the table while the customers help themselves to dinner mints (see photos).

The first specials were very simple for the children to prepare: peanut butter on crackers, fruit kabobs, etc. The recipes have gotten more involved as the children have become more skilled. Some of our recent specials have included Mickey Mouse pancakes, ironed sandwiches, purple cows, chocolate fondue, energy mix, egg boats, pizza, carrot-raisin salad, pudding, apple salad, and tuna salad. The children work independently unless heat is involved, in which case I assist.

Each week we invite one adult from our school to dine in the restaurant. We even celebrated a teacher’s birthday with a cupcake and a serenade by our singing waiters.

Restaurant activities invite spinoffs to other curricular areas. I often incorporate literature into the restaurant theme by reading books such as Green Eggs and Ham, Pancakes for Breakfast, More Spaghetti I Say, Stone Soup, and Curious George Goes to a Restaurant.

Arithmetic skills grow as the activities of the restaurant require them. Joshua was making pancakes for three customers, and I could hear him saying to himself, “That’s two spoons plus two spoons plus two spoons…six!” Music to a teacher’s ears!

The children have learned much
more than I anticipated from this classroom restaurant experience. Reading, writing, and listening skills have been reinforced by writing out orders, re-reading them to the chef, and taking phone orders. It is very rewarding when children come to school with notes they have written at home that say, “I like to go to the restaurant.” Children have also reported making some of the recipes for their families. In addition to the obvious academic skills, students have learned about nutrition, sanitation, manners, decision-making, turn-taking, trying new foods, and restaurant careers.

Our cooking needs and successes are made known to parents through a newsletter, which includes related samples of children’s writing as well as lists of the specific items that are required for the following week’s recipes. Parents have been extremely supportive in supplying most ingredients. One of our parents works in a flower shop and frequently sends in flowers for the tables. The meat department at Publix, a local grocery chain, donated chefs’ hats. Parents also send cooking materials (peelers, foil, etc.) when requested. Although our school supplies mixing bowls, a toaster oven, and a hot plate, the PTO in your school could organize a “kitchen shower” for the classroom to supply needed equipment.

The high point for all of us this year occurred in May when our restaurant was featured in an hour-long documentary on creative teaching practices, aired on TV Channel 9 in Orlando.

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