



Choosing Books for Students

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**“No book is worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally
(and often far more) worth reading at the age of fifty.”**

–C.S. Lewis

- I. Understanding the power of narrative
 - A. God has not only chosen to reveal Himself through narrative but also commands us to “imagine” (cf. Hebrews 13:3).
 - B. The most obvious (and compelling) feature of narrative (whether in stories, dramas, anecdotes, or poems) is that it presents—not abstract information—but human experience.
 1. Facing death: *Everett Anderson’s Goodbye* (realism) and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (fantasy)
 2. Understanding injustice: *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (historical fiction) and *The Diary of Anne Frank* (non-fiction)
 3. Transcending culture: *Grandfather’s Journey* (multicultural picture book) and *The Chosen* (multicultural novel)
 - C. Narrative relies on the artistry of composition/language. This artistry is what makes the content compelling. Truth draped in poor style seems shabby, and falsehood clothed in careful artistry becomes alluring.
- II. Dealing with potentially offensive elements
 - A. Generally avoid potentially offensive elements on the elementary level.
 - B. As students mature encourage them to reflect on questions that will alert them to moral tone.
 1. Is the representation of the potentially offensive element purposeful or present for its own sake?
 2. If purposeful, is it present to an acceptable degree, or is it more conspicuous or vivid than the purpose warrants?
 3. Is the potentially offensive element condemned or is it made to appear alluring?
 - C. As students mature, provide opportunity for them to analyze both positive and negative examples. (See Appendices A & B)
 - D. As students mature, encourage them in their reading to reflect on what a book can tell them about themselves, their world, and their ministry opportunities. (See Appendix C.)
- III. Dealing with literary trends
 - A. Ponder your approach (reaction vs. relationship)
 1. Reaction
 - a. Begins with the current issue
 - b. Responds intuitively (and/or impulsively)
 - c. Defends preconceived ideas and misses genuine spiritual need
 - d. Focusing on reacting to trends produces . . .

- & Christians who rely on bad arguments to support legitimate positions.
- & Christians who draw attention to a conflict rather than to the God they serve.

2. Relationship

- a. Begins with prayer
- b. Reflects on the issue at hand
- c. Discerns key problems and addresses genuine needs
- d. Focusing on our relationship to Christ produces . . .
 - & Christians who provide light in their world.
 - & Christians who remain unspotted from their world.

B. Reflect on your impact

1. Remember your responsibility as an educator: Never comment on a book you have not read.
2. Stay balanced in your approach: Truth without compassion degenerates into “sounding brass”; conversely, compassion without truth degenerates into naïve sentimentality.
3. Remember your responsibility as a Christian leader: Always keep before you Whom you represent and allow Him to guide your response to every issue in every circumstance.

IV. Some of my favorite “reads”

A. High School

Drama:

Pygmalion, Bernard Shaw
The Diary of Anne Frank, Goodrich/Hackett

Fiction:

The Hound of the Baskervilles, Arthur Conan Doyle
The Outsiders, James Hinton
To Kill a Mockingbird, Harper Lee
Frankenstein, Mary Shelley
The Odyssey, Homer (the Robert Fitzgerald translation recommended)
Great Expectations, Charles Dickens
Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen
The Good Earth, Pearl Buck
The Chosen, Chaim Potok
A Wrinkle in Time, Madeline L’Engle
The Time Machine, H.G. Wells
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, Mildred Taylor
Out of Darkness, Alicia Peterson (BJUP)

Non-Fiction:

Diary of a Young Girl, Anne Frank

Collections/Series:

Lord of the Rings trilogy, J. R. R. Tolkien
Out of the Silent Planet trilogy, C. S. Lewis
 Father Brown stories, G. K. Chesterton
 Agatha Christie mysteries

B. Upper Elementary/Middle School

Poetry:

Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices, Paul Fleischman

Fiction:

Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIHM, Robert O’Brien

Shades of Gray, Carolyn Reeder
The Phantom Tollbooth, Norton Juster
Number the Stars, Lois Lowry
The Hobbit, J.R.R. Tolkien
The Cay, Theodore Taylor
The Incredible Journey, Sheila Burnford
Island of the Blue Dolphins, Scott O'Dell
The Bronze Bow, Elisabeth George
The Whipping Boy by Sid Fleischman

Collections/Series:

The Redwall Series, Brian Jacques
The Narnia Chronicles, C. S. Lewis
Tales from Shakespeare, Charles & Mary Lamb

Non-Fiction:

Lincoln, A Photobiography, Russell Freedman
Eleanor Roosevelt: A Life of Discovery, Russell Freedman

C. Picture Books

All the Places to Love, Patricia MacLachlan
Owl Moon, Jan Yolen
The Man Who Walked Between Two Towers, Mordicai Gerstein
Snowflake Bentley, Mary Azarian and Jacqueline Briggs Martin
Mirette on the High Wire, Emily Arnold McCully
Leonardo da Vinci, A.&M. Provensen
Tuesday, David Wiesner
So You Want to Be President? David Small and Judith St. George
Rapunzel, Paul O. Zelinsky

V. Some activities integrating writing skills and visual literacy

A. Connections between receptive and expressive language skills.

1. Use activities that encourage students to describe objects, sensations, and surroundings. (See Priscilla Vail's *Clear and Lively Writing* for more ideas.)
2. Play word games that help them develop vocabulary and appreciate literary devices. (See Appendix D, Sample Word Games for ideas.)
3. Guide them in developing an ear for the poetic—whether in prose or poetry. Read aloud and have a section of books on tape in your classroom library.

B. Connections between the visual and the literary storyteller.

1. Use pictures to create imaginative comparisons. (See Appendix E, Creating Imaginative Comparisons for sample.)
2. Use paintings to inspire character sketches, dialogues, monologues, and storyboards. (See Appendix F for samples.)
3. Use books like *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* by Chris van Allsburg as story starters. (See <http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/features/thepolarexpress/tg/mysteriesofharris.shtml> for more teaching ideas on this work.)

V. Additional web resources

www.bjurg.org (teaching guides for picture books and art-related picture book titles)
<http://www.portlandstudios.com/> (new picture book titles)
<http://www.carolhurst.com/titles/allreviewed.html> (book reviews, teaching resources)
<http://kids.nypl.org/reading/recommended.cfm> (general site for browsing/information)

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