

Wild About Books:
My Philosophy of Literature-Rich Teaching

Children's author Judy Sierra and I have one thing in common: We are both "wild about books!" Her picture book, *Wild About Books*, tells the story of an entire zoo-full of animals from arangutangs to zebras "Going wild, simply wild, about wonderful books." I cannot imagine teaching without them, e-books included. Stories and children's nonfiction are important to a child's development and can be a powerful instrument in their learning and in their lives. Stories and poems do so many things for children. They teach, they provide hope, they allow experiences beyond the real and normal, they present mirrors which reflect ourselves, and open windows through which to view others. As I think of it now, I see a strong parallel between the roles of literature and teaching – both have the potential for touching students' lives in miraculous ways. Knowing this defines the kind of teacher I want to be.

Literature in the Lives of Children

Reading is a powerful tool that can provide children with many positive experiences; it is empowering. Through reading, children discover new worlds and develop their own thinking about them. Reading helps students learn academically and experience the world emotionally. In my teaching I can use literature to teach many literacy skills such as sequencing, literary elements, vocabulary development, identification of fact and fiction, critical and interpretative thinking, and many more. A simple picture book such as Seuss' *The Sneetches* is both rich in language play and poignant in its theme of appreciating others different from ourselves. A book such as Frank Serafini's *Look at the Ocean* provides vivid and artistic photography that can enhance visual literacy skills and at the same time, teach the art of photography. Children are capable of learning about the world in which they live. I can use any number of realistic fiction or historical fiction books to enrich those subjects in the curriculum. Using such books as the basis of my lesson planning can extend my teaching strategies to include reading process discussion and reader-response activities. Helping students develop connections between self and text and from text to text or text to world allows me to help them make connections that influences creative and critical thinking. Teaching story elements such as setting, character, plot, conflict and resolution teachers analysis skills. There is no doubt that the language arts can be greatly enriched by focusing on literature. Using literature across the curriculum means I can introduce math concepts, science units, and social studies events with a well chosen picture book. *The M & M Counting*

Book, From Seed to Flower, and *Ruby Bridges* are titles to use for this. I don't think there is a subject in the school curriculum I cannot connect a children's title to. In addition to the intellectual skills that literature can help develop, children need to be nurtured as readers, seekers of enjoyment, and cultivators of introspection. I see it as part of my role as teacher to motivate children to read, to read between the lines, and to consider illustrations as aspects of entertainment. Given all the competition for their time, reading is an endangered activity. Helping students engage fully in the reading experience will assist them in social development and emotional response. A story such as Eve Bunting's *The Flower Garden* or Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* provide emotional response.

A Literature-rich Classroom Environment

Creating a literature-rich classroom environment will provide students with the opportunity to see the importance of reading. If my classroom focuses on reading and its positive outcomes, then my students will gain a better understanding of the power, importance and rewards of reading. I will establish a literature rich environment by creating an inviting library in my classroom that offers a wide variety of genre, themes, and reading levels. In building my collection, I will keep cognizant of the features of quality and use references such as the American Library Association and the International Reading Association to help guide my selections so that they are age and developmentally appropriate. At the same tie, I I will include titles current to my teaching grade level, as well as those above and below to be able to provide for all my readers. I will also provide quiet places for students to read independently. I will create a ritual of reading in my daily routine. I will encourage book talks and book recommendations. I will allow for partner and small group reading, read-alouds, and readers' theater versions of stories to motivate my students to read.

In order to make a difference and truly have that literary-rich classroom, I need to adopt specific dispositions and attributes. I realize I make all of the difference. In order for a classroom to be successful, it depends on me to teach the material and provide the students with this experience. I will be creative in planning my lessons. Children's literature does not only apply to language arts, but can easily be used in creating lessons in other curriculum. I will choose reader-response activities that allow students to think outside of the box, and be creative. I will also be supportive of my students. I will see all of my students as readers, and will support each of my students as they continue with reading. There are many types of readers, all of them at different areas of their reading experience, and I will provide

time for each of them to read. I will have the students set their own goals in reading and encourage them to reach their goals. I will also be reflective. In order to be a successful teacher I need to reflect on the lessons that I have done. I need to continuously learn and improve myself. After every week I will provide myself with time to reflect on the lessons I have given and provide time for myself to make changes and to take notes on what needs to be changed in order to improve myself and my lessons.

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Can you tell I am just wild about books? Living this as a role model for my students means that they have a greater chance of becoming keen readers themselves and of developing an appreciation for all that literature can offer them. This is my pledge to my future students: Together, my students and I will support each other's love for and learning from literature and, just like the zoo animals in Sierra's story, if you cannot find us, we are likely "Snug in our niches, our nests and our nooks, going wild, simply wild, about our wonderful books!"