

*Ubiquity: The Journal of Literature, Literacy, and the Arts, Praxis Strand*, Vol.3 No.1, Spring 2016, pp. 95-110

*Ubiquity*: <http://ed-ubiquity.gsu.edu/wordpress/>

ISSN: 2379-3007

### **Using Children's Picture Books for Language and Literacy Development**

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2016

**Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to create playful activities to help young children to develop language and literacy skills. Each strategy has a step-by-step teaching procedure, including assessment. Creating an environment of support and using effective strategies are certainly important in helping children to enjoy learning for fun.

*Keywords:* Language learning, lesson, literacy

## Using Children's Picture Books for Language and Literacy Development

### Introduction

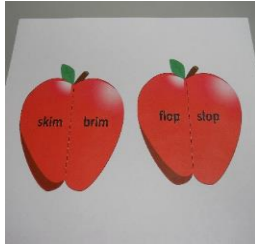
Children's literature or picture books have an essential value in helping children learn to read and write and can be beneficial for continuing development of children's language and literacy (Kiefer, 2010). Reading to children and giving them a chance to work with real books helps with their learning to read and with their literacy development (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013).

As new classroom teachers, we were researching for children's books that could be integrated into school curricula and foster young children to develop language and literacy skills. Some of Brian Cleary's books caught our attention. For instance, *Stop, Drop, Flop in the Slop* (Cleary, 2009) has multiple literacy purposes for students who have some challenge in decoding skills, word recognition, reading fluency, and retaining information.

We used the book *Stop, Drop, Flop in the Slop* to create some playful strategies to work with our second-grade students for three weeks. Each strategy has step-by-step teaching procedures with some examples so that teachers can easily use them.

### Activity # 1: Apple Rhyming Magnets

This activity is to help students develop the concept of rhyming words and to be able to identify rhyming words by reading and listening. Use construction paper and trace an apple shape and cut each apple into a half. Write each word on each apple (see Figure 1 below).



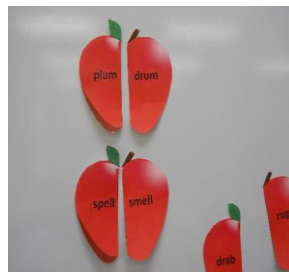
*Figure 1.* An example of Rhyming Magnets.

**Step 1.** Read aloud each page and explain what rhyming words are. Some word definitions may be needed if they are beyond their grade level.

**Step 2.** Place all apple rhyming magnets on the white board in a disorderly manner and ask students to match rhyming pairs. Then place each pair of apple rhyming magnets on the white board (see Figures 2 & 3 below).



*Figure 2.* Rhyming Magnets.



*Figure 3.* Rhyming Magnets.

**Step 3.** Have students work in small groups. Give a set of rhyming apple magnets to each student. Have students take a turn to show their words, and ask their peers to match the right rhyming words. After teaching, select some rhyming apple magnets and ask students whether rhyming pairs assist in their understanding about rhyming words.

**Activity # 2: Hot Seat**

The activity is a whole-class activity to help students develop phonological awareness. The term “phonological awareness” means the ability to hear sounds that make up words in spoken language. This includes recognizing words that rhyme, deciding whether words begin or end with the sounds, understanding that sounds can be manipulated to create new words, and separating words into individual sounds (Tompkins, 2014). The teacher selects several sets of the rhyming apple magnet words, places these words into a teaching pocket chart, and then pre-teaches these words after reading aloud from the book. Set up four chairs in the front of the class.

**Step 1.** Students prepare for the hot seat activity by listening to the book.

**Step 2.** Ask students to think about how to identify rhyming words and what they would like to share at the beginning of the activity.

**Step 3.** Say words such as *clam, rink, sled, stop, grass, smog, grump, grab, grid, smell, plug,* and *swim* and call on students who would like to share their rhyming words in the class. Then they have to sit on “hot seats” to speak in the class. The process should continue until all students have a turn.

**Step 4.** Continually say more words, and the students who are in the hot seat need to call on their peers to share rhyming words to match the words that the teacher says.

**After Teaching.** Review these words after the hot seat activity, and then ask students if there is any word they do not know well or that they need to have more assistance with. This follow-up teaching will reinforce phonological awareness and will make rhyming words more meaningful. In the meantime, assess student-learning outcome in rhyming, syllabication,

blending sounds (the ability to build words from individual sounds by blending the sounds together in sequence [Tompkins, 2014]), and phonics skills.

### Activity # 3: Popsicle Stick Match

Popsicle Stick Match is an activity to build vocabulary for young children. This activity helps students to develop spelling and word building. Write blends at the end of each Popsicle stick in one pile and then write short vowels on the end of the Popsicle sticks in the other pile (see Figures 4 & 5 below)



Figure 4. Popsicle stick.



Figure 5. Popsicle Stick Match.

**Step 1.** Sort Popsicle sticks into two groups. On one set of Popsicle sticks, write onsets (the initial consonant or consonant cluster of the word) and on the other write rimes (the vowel and consonants that follow it). For example, in the word *bat*, “*b*” is the onset, and “*-at*” is the rime. This activity can be done where the same colors would form a word or where the sticks can be random in color and students would be able to choose from different colored Popsicle sticks to create words.

**Step 2.** Have students work in pairs. All students need to take turns to say the word to their partner when each word is created and write in it their mini notebook (please refer to Figures 6 & 7). Their partner needs to do the same procedures until all of the Popsicle sticks have been used up.

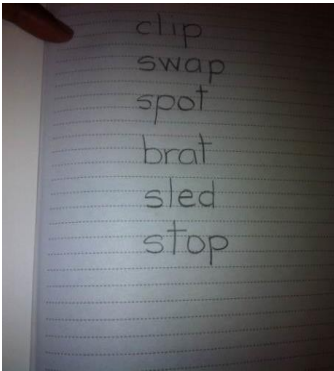


Figure 6. Mini notebook.



Figure 7. Writing sample.

**Step 3.** Randomly select some students to take turns participating in this activity and assisting and monitoring students who need extra help to create or say a word correctly.

**After Teaching.** Have students pick five of their words and write sentences and share with the class. Students not only can learn how to blend sounds together, but they can also practice spelling and writing afterwards. To assess students' spelling and writing development, randomly select some words from the text. The teacher reads aloud the selected words and asks students to write down the words and write sentences in their notebooks.

#### **Activity # 4: Easter Egg Twist**

Easter Egg Twist (Southard, 2014) is a playful activity to support students' identification of short vowel sounds and manipulation of these sounds for writing and spelling. This strategy requires students to use their knowledge of blends and rimes as well as short vowels to create one-syllable words. Place each plastic Easter egg into two halves and put both halves of the Easter eggs back together and place them in a basket (see Figures 8 & 9 below).



Figure 8. Easter Egg Twist.



Figure 9. Easter Egg Twist.

**Step 1.** Read the text aloud again.

**Step 2.** Have students work in groups and ask each student to take an egg from the basket. Each child needs to say the word in the group when they twist the egg.

**Step 3.** Write all of the words given by each group on a whiteboard once all eggs have been taken (see Figure 10 below).



Figure 10. Grouping words.

**Step 4.** Select and explain the meanings of some challenging words and write sentences to go along with these words. For example, “You need to blend the sugar with the butter when you are making a cake.” This will help students to understand how to use the words accurately.

**Step 5.** Ask students to select several words from the text. Ask them to use these words to make sentences in their notebooks. After they finish writing, have students share in the class.



**After Teaching.** Have students read all the words on the board again to see whether or not they know how to blend or pronounce them. Revisit words that students are confused about or are not sure how to say correctly. To assess students' learning outcomes, the teacher can hand out an informal assessment survey with all words on the text. Ask students to circle words they do not know well enough. The teacher revisits the text again and reviews words that students have circled. The teacher could get more information about each student's learning process and needs by using the survey.

### Activity # 5: Bingo Blend

Bingo Blend is a fun activity to help young children learn vocabulary. The purpose of Bingo Blend is not only to support children in practicing blending sounds, but also to increase vocabulary knowledge. Use blank bingo sheets to write single syllable short vowel words in different orders on pairs of bingo sheets and then laminate these sheets (see Figure 11).

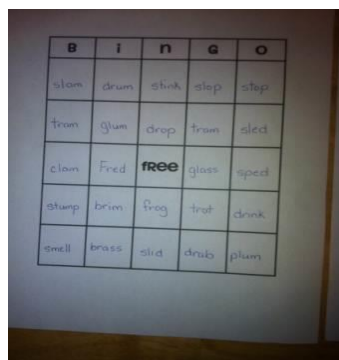
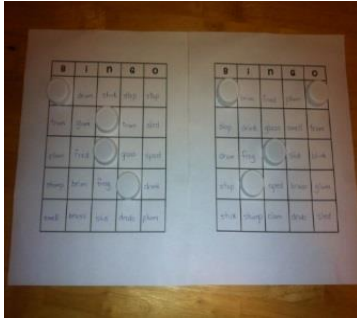


Figure 11. Bingo sheet.

**Step 1.** Place students in pairs with bingo cards and counters. All words will be the same but will be in a different order.

**Step 2.** Explain and demonstrate how to work on the game. Students need to place a counter on each word they hear. See Figure 12 below.



*Figure 12.* Bingo game.

**Step 3.** Students need to shout “Bingo” when they have counters lined up vertically, horizontally, or diagonally.

**After Teaching.** Call each student to pick two words from the bingo sheet and say the words, then spell and write them on the board—for example, “We drink milk every day,” or “We need to stop talking when teachers are teaching.” To make teaching and assessment connect to the text and the Bingo game, the teacher asks students which words they do not know how to use in sentences after teaching. The teacher demonstrates writing sentences on the white board based on words that students select.

#### **Activity # 6: Word Slider**

The Word Slider activity can help students improve word recognition by blending short vowel words. Students are able to manipulate the slider to create new words as they separate the blend from the rimes in each word. The teacher reviews or teaches some words by using cardstock paper to create a word pocket prior to doing this activity. It may be laminated for durability. Please refer to the following steps.

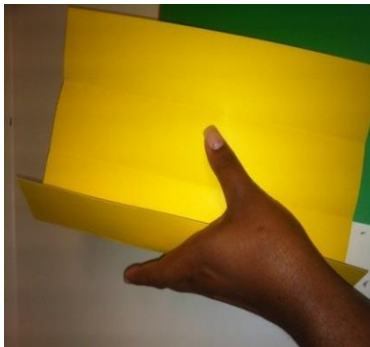
**Step 1.** Read the book aloud.

**Step 2.** Pick three colors from the pack of cardstock paper. Please see Figure 13 below.



*Figure 13.* Cardstock paper.

**Step 3.** Fold the first paper (yellow) into four (hotdog style). See Figure 14 below.



*Figure 14.* Folding.

**Step 4.** Use two of the four sections and write blends on one side. Leave one side blank.

Laminate if you choose to afterward. See Figure 15 & 16.



Figure 15. Blank.



Figure 16. Blend words.

**Step 5.** Cut the two strips and bend each end. Staple both ends together and fold flat.

Please refer to Figure 17.



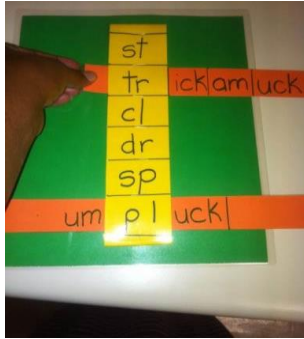
Figure 17. Staple together.

**Step 6.** Use another piece of cardstock paper (orange) and write rimes across the strip (laminare if you choose). Then staple the yellow onto the last piece of cardstock paper (green). Staple across while creating pockets as you go along. Please refer to Figure 18.



Figure 18. Staple together.

**Step 6.** Cut the orange strips and insert them into the pockets you created. Please refer to Figure 19.



*Figure 19.* Create a pocket.

Here are some additional teaching procedures that should be involved.

**Step 1.** Have students work in pairs and take turns creating words by using the slider.

**Step 2.** Each student says the word to his/her partner then records it on a dry erase board or notebook when a word is formed. Students are expected to give a simple definition of each word and use the word in a sentence.

**Step 3.** Give students other examples of the word family. The teacher will use a large chart paper to list words in each family under one column.

**Step 4.** Have students select three words they like most and ask them to make sentences in their notebook.

**Step 5.** Ask students to share their sentences.

**After Teaching.** Assess students' learning outcomes, which are vital for each lesson. Ask each student to select three words most challenging for them. The teacher uses this opportunity to review the words again.

**Concluding Remarks**

After three weeks of using Brian Cleary's (2009) *Stop, Drop, and Flop in the Slop*, students have made significant improvement in phonological awareness (such as recognizing when words rhyme, identifying sounds in words, blending sounds, etc.), spelling, and writing skills. The majority of students are able to distinguish parts of speech (subjects, verbs, nouns) to make connections. We have noticed that providing effective reading and writing strategies offers more opportunities for students to engage in literacy-learning activities and enhance their literacy skills. When teachers integrate reading and writing into their daily teaching routines, not only do students comprehend the meanings of different genres and experiment with different words, but they are also inspired to appreciate literacy learning activities.

We found books like Brian Cleary's or similar books by other authors not only provide primary sources of information; they also can foster young readers' language and literacy skills as well as enlarge their views and open their minds. Even within the constraints of a curriculum, creating a classroom as a reading community is necessary in today's classrooms, which are also critically important in making reading meaningful and in creating an environment of support for more reading choices and effective strategies (Guthrie, 2008; Huang & Kowalick, 2014).

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**Author Bio:** Dr. Suhua Huang received a Ph.D. in Reading Education from the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma. Currently, she is an Associate Professor at Midwestern State University, where she teaches children and adolescent literature, reading diagnosis, and ESL methods for both undergraduate and graduate courses. Her research interests are reading motivation, reading instruction, and reading assessment. Dr. Huang has published two books and several articles have been published in respected journals such as *Reading Psychology*, *Language Teaching Research*, and *TESOL Journal*; others are still in press. One of her current research articles has been revised and resubmitted to *Reading Research Quarterly*. Dr. Huang is also engaged in a research study about college students' reading interests and habits. The article was not only published in *Reading Psychology*, but it was also highlighted in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* on May 1, 2013 in the article, "Students May be reading plenty, but not for class." The topic has received much attention in higher education circles. Dr. Huang also received several internal and external grants to support her research agenda and teaching practices.

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