



Rediscovering Children's Literature Lesson Plan

Introduction

Children's literature provides a vehicle for multiple learning activities for secondary students. In this series of activities, students practice analytical reading and writing skills, using children's literature about older adults.

Objectives

Students will:

- analyze children's literature depicting older persons;
- read books aloud to young children; and
- write their own children's story related to aging and intergenerational relationships.

Materials

Children's books about aging and intergenerational relationships.

Procedures

1. Introduce the unit by asking students what names they have heard used for grandmothers and grandfathers. Some names are specific to individual families. Others reflect different languages or ethnic backgrounds. Discuss the growing importance of relationships children have with their grandparents and other older adults. Since more people live to an old age, younger people have more opportunities to interact with and relate to older people. In terms of literature (and television and motion pictures), more stories include persons of three, even four generations. Explain the objectives of this unit. If possible, show examples of children's books and the names given to grandparents. Below are some examples of grandparents' names from books.
 - "Nana," in *Waiting for Noah*, by Shulamith Levey Oppenheim;
 - "Om a," in *Gretchen's Grandma*, by Phyllis Root and Carol Marron;
 - "Starenka," in *A Visit with Great-Grandma*, by Sharon Hart Addy;
 - "Bigmama" in *Bigmama's*, by Donald Crews;
 - "Abuela," in *Abuela*, by Arthur Dorros;
 - "Grammy," in *Grammy's House*, by Eve Rice;
 - "Granzly," in *Granzly Remembers*, by Mary Grace Ketner;
 - "Babushka," in *Thundercake*, by Patricia Polacco; and
 - "Tut," in *I Visit My Tutu and Grandma*, by Nancy Alpert Mower.
2. Have students bring in children's books or take students to an elementary school library to conduct a content analysis of children's literature. The teacher can focus on intergenerational issues or on aging. As students review the books, they record the title, author and general theme, and what underlying messages students might receive about what it means to be old. How did the books handle more sensitive topics, such as death? Were there topics related to aging that were not addressed in the books they reviewed? Discuss students' findings. The most common theme in

children's books is the mutually satisfying relationship between grandparent and grandchild. The grandparent's unconditional love allows honest conversations with young children.

3. Students should select between three and five of their favorite books to read to young children. They may read the books to younger siblings or neighborhood children. Arrangements can be made for students to volunteer in elementary school classrooms or in after-school reading programs.
 - Discuss the importance of choosing books that portray a balanced view of aging. Since only about five percent of persons over 65 are in nursing homes, it would not be balanced to read books only about older people who are physically or mentally impaired. Students should select books that present a diversity of cultural, racial and health status.
4. After reading to young children, students write a short reaction paper to the experience of reading to children and to the responses from these children to the readings.
5. Next, have students write their own children's stories related to aging or intergenerational relationships. The stories should be about something real to them. The characters and themes of their stories should provide a fresh, creative approach to the general topic of aging or intergenerational relationships - something they have not read in other children's books. The writing process will involve several drafts and revisions. Organize students into cooperative learning groups to suggest possible ways to improve their classmates' stories.

Extension Activities

Have students serve as reading partners with elementary students or even read to latchkey children over the phone after school when these children are without adult supervision.

Have students help elementary students write and illustrate their own children's stories.

Invite older adults to join in the children's literature project. They can be part of the student learning groups or collaborate with students on a joint project.

Give the accompanying annotated bibliography to town and school librarians. An organization representing older adults might be willing to contribute to the purchase of books that promote understanding and appreciation of older adults.

Encourage students to illustrate their stories. Some students might work collaboratively on the project, with some writing the text and others illustrating the story.

Present the collection of children's stories written by students to a town or school library. Encourage students to present their stories to family members as gifts.

Examine multicultural relationships presented in children's literature, using the list of books under multicultural relationships in the accompanying annotated bibliography.