

MAKING EVERY BOOK COUNT

by Maria P. Walther and Carol J. Fuhler

Motivating Readers

In our last column we highlighted a number of ways to infuse meaningful teaching into your read-aloud time. Reading aloud to students is one powerful way to motivate readers, but for some students this essential practice is simply not enough. Let's take a look at two important factors to consider when creating an environment that will spark even the most reluctant reader: student interest and student choice.

Sparking Student Interest

Think for a moment. What motivates you to read? Is it a recommendation from a friend, or perhaps your membership in a book club? Do you reach for the advice of expert educators by reading professional publications? Just as your interest drives your reading selections, student interest is equally important in motivating your young readers. Discovering each student's individual reading personality is essential to motivating that child to read.

Fortunately, this is an enjoyable task. Make time to get to know your learners' reading needs and interests by simply listening to them read and talking with them about books. The more you know about your students, the easier it will be to find the right books to motivate them to read. A few questions to guide your discussions might include:

- What kinds of books do you read?
- What is your favorite book?
- What other kinds of books would you like to have in our library?

To assist you in finding titles to match your students' interests, we've included a sampling of books in three broad

categories that may appeal to the readers in your classroom. For a complete list of the books mentioned below, turn to "Comprehensive Bibliography" on p.61.

Balancing Fiction and Informational Books

Balancing fiction and informational titles enables you to motivate readers who prefer one genre over the other. Some popular topics among elementary-age readers are dogs, dinosaurs, and sports. Luckily, there are many appealing titles, both fiction and nonfiction, from which to choose. For young dog lovers, read aloud John Grogan's *Bad Dog, Marley!* (HarperCollins, 2007) and David Shannon's *Good Boy, Fergus!* (Scholastic/Blue Sky, 2006). Pair these titles with Linda Bozzo's informational book *My First Dog* (Enslow, 2007) from the series My First Pet Library. After sharing, display all three books in your library, where they are sure to be read again and again. On the more serious side, upper-grade readers continue to enjoy the longtime favorite *Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls (Random, 1961). Book talk this classic, and it will quickly disappear from the shelf.

Sally M. Walker's *The Search for Antarctic Dinosaurs* (Millbrook, 2007) and *SuperCroc Found* (Millbrook, 2005), both in the On My Own Science series, take beginning readers on exciting adventures. If these books pique a student's interest, Walker includes a list of Web sites and titles for further reading. Intermediate readers will be intrigued by Barbara Kerley's *The Dinosaurs of Waterhouse Hawkins* (Scholastic/Arthur A. Levine, 2001), and you might partner it with the informative *Digging for Bird Dinosaurs: An Expedition to Madagascar* by Nic Bishop (Houghton, 2000).

For readers who enjoy titles about sports figures, include *Tiger Woods: A Biography* by Lawrence J. Londino (Greenwood, 2005), along with Dan Gutman's popular Baseball Card Adventure series. Book talk Kadir Nelson's *We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball* (Hyperion/Jump at the Sun, 2008), and older readers will line up for a turn to learn about these heroes. For young soccer enthusiasts, consider *Young Pelé: Soccer's First Star* by Lesa Cline-Ransome (Random/Schwartz & Wade, 2007) or Mia Hamm's book *Winners Never Quit!* (HarperCollins, 2004).

Including Graphic Novels in Your Library

Graphic novels are continually growing in appeal. Like long-popular comic books, graphic novels offer relatively simple text, art that fills in the story line, and a less intimidating look than a book with denser text. Young readers might enjoy the nearly wordless Owly series by Andy Runton, including volume 4, *Owly: A Time to Be Brave* (Top Shelf, 2007). These titles will appeal to middle-grade



Inspire the most reluctant reader with these just-right tips and strategies.

readers as well. Fans of the Baby-Sitter's Club series will welcome *Kristy's Great Idea* by Ann M. Martin and Raina Telgemeier (Scholastic/Graphix, 2006). Those seeking informational offerings in this format will be drawn to Siena Cherson Siegel's recounting of how she became a ballerina in *To Dance: A Ballerina's Graphic Novel* (Simon & Schuster/Richard Jackson, 2006). The motivational offerings in this format are enticing to explore.

Finding Books That Make Them Laugh

Young children can't resist funny stories, especially if they are about characters a little bit like themselves. If you haven't discovered Megan McDonald's hilarious Judy Moody books yet, they are a must-have addition to your library, aimed at children in grades one (for advanced readers) through four. In *Judy Moody: Around the World in 8½ Days* (Candlewick, 2006), Judy and Class 3T take a whirlwind world tour. Also, don't miss meeting Clementine in *The Talented Clementine* by Sara Pennypacker (Hyperion, 2007). It's difficult to imagine what would happen if Judy and Clementine were best friends. Finally, Sarah Weeks introduces middle-grade readers to a young man with a most unusual talent in *Oggie Cooder* (Scholastic, 2008). Both funny and thought-provoking, add *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis (Delacorte, 1995) to this category.


Helping Students Make Good Choices

If you work with primary-grade students, you know that they are attracted to chapter books long before they are able to successfully read the words. It is our job to help learners understand the importance of choosing appropriate books for independent reading. We do this by exposing them to a wide range of books during our read-alouds, by guiding their book selection, and by teaching them about "just-right" books. To introduce the concept of just-right books to her first-graders, Maria reads the book *You'll Soon Grow into Them, Titch* by Pat Hutchins (Greenwillow, 1983) and then discusses how books are similar to clothes. For example, some clothes are too small (even though we still love to wear them), some clothes are a bit too big, but we will eventually grow into them, and some clothes are comfortable and fit "just right." Consider posting the following guidelines in your library:


You know it is a "just-right" book when:

- You are interested in the topic.
- You can figure out and read almost all the words.
- You can read and think at the same time.
- You understand what you read.

Certainly, we want students to have additional experiences with books that are above their independent level, so we teach them how to read the pictures or retell an old favorite story. Students in the middle grades need just-right books, too. Modeling the above questions as you read the opening pages of several novels or informational books will demonstrate how they can effectively make appropriate choices each time they reach for a new book.

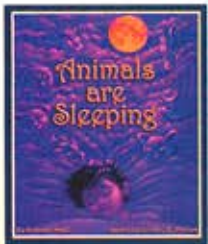

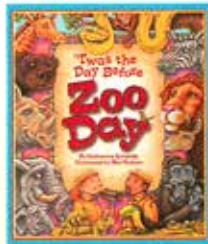
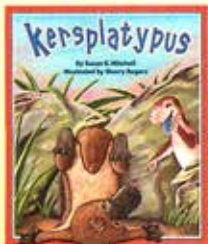
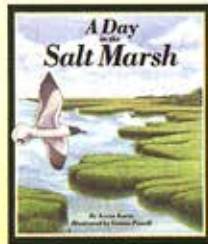

We hope this article helps make motivating each reader in your classroom or library a rewarding experience for both you and your students! 

Maria P. Walther is a first-grade teacher in Aurora, Illinois. **Carol J. Fuhler** is an associate professor who teaches literacy courses at Iowa State University. They are the coauthors of *Literature Is Back! Using the Best Books for Teaching Readers and Writers across Genres* (Scholastic, 2007).



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