MICHIGAN READING JOURNAL

Michigan Reading Journal

Volume 29 | Issue 1 Article 4

October 1995

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Recommended Citation
Rife, Karen (1995) "Increasing Involvement of Intermediate Grade Parents in Reading Instruction," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 29: Iss. 1, Article 4.
Available at: https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol29/iss1/4

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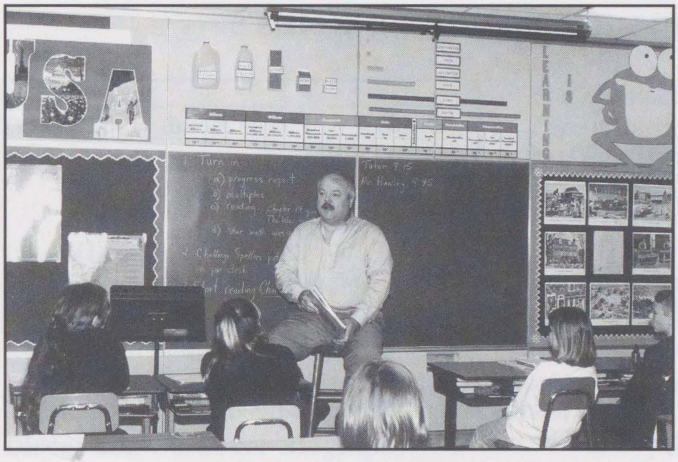
Increasing Involvement of Intermediate Grade Parents in Reading Instruction

ARTICLE BY **KAREN RIFE**

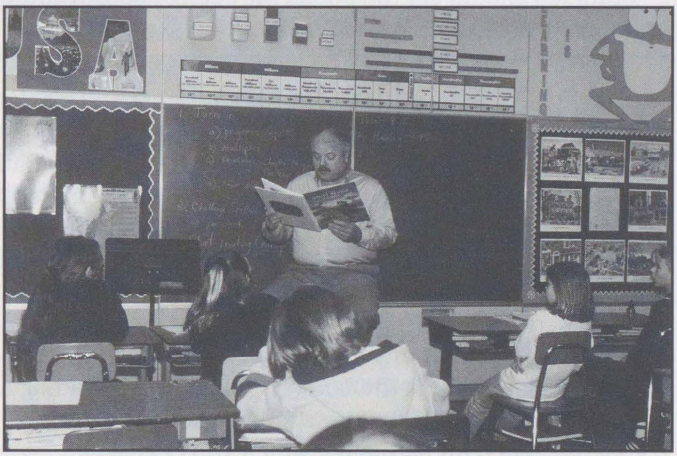
It has been my experience that many parents of fourth and fifth graders are not actively involved in their child's reading practice or instruction. Most of these same parents report active participation in reading to and with their children in preschool and early elementary grade years. Why then has their involvement faded? Some, perhaps, have decided that their child is already a satisfactory reader and have breathed a contented sigh of relief. Others may have decided that every approach has been tried by the child's teachers, and they have resigned themselves to accept that their child will never be a first-rate reader. They may buy books for their child and tell the child it is important to read, but they become increasingly less involved. In over 20 years of teaching I have not encountered even one parent who negated the vast importance of reading and reading instruction, and yet, by the end of the elementary school years, too many are giving up on active participation in the process. They may feel that their help is either no longer needed or no longer helpful. Some seem to feel that reading to or with an upper grade child is no longer appropriate; that the child has to learn to "do it on his own" now that he is in the intermediate grades. Furthermore, students, especially those who are not confident readers, become increasingly reluctant to read. Therefore, reading with the child may become less pleasant and more time consuming for the parent, and choosing appropriate books may be more difficult. Perhaps, also, the specific goals or outcomes of reading instruction at upper elementary grade levels are less obvious and not as clearly communicated to the parents.

Whatever the reasons, however, we as teachers can not afford to let the parents' help slip away. Too much is at stake, and with all of the things competing for a child's time and attention, we need parent reinforcement and assistance in imparting reading skills and habits more than ever.

Over the past five or six years I have tried two new approaches to maintaining parent participation. The first approach replaces the traditional book report with a parent/child discussion. Each student is given a reading goal each quarter. The goal is a number of pages to be read and may include one or more requirements for a type of book to be read (biography, nonfiction, etc.). Completing all of the pages earns the student a 100% (A+) which counts as 25% of his/her total reading grade for that quarter. Verification of the pages read is where the parents must be involved. They are asked to discuss each book read as part of the reading goal with the child and complete a discussion checklist. They sign the checklist form, and the child turns this in, along with the book. If a Newberry Award book is read as part of the requirement, the number of pages credited is automatically doubled. At the present time I have developed four checklists specifically appropriate for fiction, nonfiction, biography, and poetry selections. The checklist serves as a structure for the parent, i.e., as a framework for the discussion. It is to help the parent know the kinds of questions I would ask the child if I had



Parent Mark Hawley reads a classic to the fifth graders.



the class time to discuss with each child each book he/she read. It is a tool to help the child analyze what has been read and to more fully appreciate it. It also keeps the parent current on the child's comprehension skills. Each checklist includes a place for the parent and the child to rate the book and a place for comments either about the book or the discussion process.

The other feature of this approach which seems to astound many parents of fourth and fifth graders is that three reading options are acceptable to earn credit for pages read: 1) the student reads the book independently, 2) the student reads the book with a parent taking turns by page or by chapter, or 3) the parent reads the book entirely to the student. Parents seem to need permission or encouragement at first to choose option 3, but there are many benefits. Parents of even very accomplished readers have found renewed joy in reading to their youngsters because of the quality time spent together, the shared experiences of the story or of learning something new together, and the excellence of the literature available for children. The benefits to the students are obvious to those of us who work at teaching the art of reading and appreciating the written word.

As they are turned in, all of the discussion checklists are saved so that at the end of the year the student has a record of all that has been read. Many children seem to enjoy watching this folder expand as the year goes on, and frequently students will read double, triple, or more the goal I required of them.

A second strategy I have begun using is to ask more parents to come into my classroom to share in reading to the class a chapter or chapters from whatever read-aloud we're involved in at the time. The parents can generate discussion after reading if they feel comfortable doing so. This, I believe, strengthens their understanding of what kind of reading material is appropriate for the grade level, helps define what reasonable expectations for comprehension

Independent Reading Goals

Name:

Reading Goal for Fourth Quarter: 500 pages

Final Day to Turn in Reports: June 5

This counts as 25% of the reading grade for the quarter.

Total # of Pages Read	=	Grade
500+		A+
400 - 499		B+
300 - 399		C+
200 - 299		D+
Below 200		E

Other Requirements:

Credit is not given if only a part of a book is read. Students need to read complete books. Two books this quarter should be nonfiction.

Students should get the books they select approved by me. I am happy to help them make selections here at school.

Nonfiction Book "Report"

Name: _____ Student Rating: _____

Date: _____ Parent Rating (if applicable): _____

Title: _____ Number of Pages: _____

(Rating Scale: 1 Low to 10 High)

Please check one:

☐ I read this book to my child.

☐ My child and I read the book by taking turns reading aloud.

☐ My child read the book independently.

(Students get credit no matter which you check.)

Discussion Guide for Nonfiction

Please check off each item after it has been discussed.

☐ What was the author's purpose in writing the book? (to entertain, to inform, or to persuade)

☐ When was the book written, and is that important for this book?

☐ Discuss the main ideas of the book (chapter by chapter, if appropriate) and the details that supported each.

☐ Discuss what was known about the topic before reading the book and what was learned by reading it.

My child has read the above book and has discussed it with me.

_____

Parent Signature

Comments/Questions:

Biography Book "Report"

Name: _____ Student Rating: _____
Date: _____ Parent Rating (if applicable): _____
Title: _____ Number of Pages: _____
(Rating Scale: 1 Low to 10 High)

Please check one:
☐ I read this book to my child.
☐ My child and I read the book by taking turns reading aloud.
☐ My child read the book independently.
(Students get credit no matter which option you choose.)

Discussion Guide for Biography
Please check off each item after discussing it.
☐ Where and when did this person live?
☐ How was his/her life similar to or different from yours (clothes, school, parents, hobbies, family life, brothers/sisters, pets, etc.)?
☐ What was the most interesting thing you learned about this person? Read a page or two from the book about that part to a parent.
☐ What important contribution did this person make to our world? Why is he/she remembered?
☐ Think of four or five characteristics which best describe this person and explain why they do. (Choose from the list provided or think of your own.)

People Characteristics

humble	selfish	timid	disagreeable	proper
brave	unselfish	shy	independent	ambitious
courageous	self-confident	bold	thoughtful	able
serious	respectful	daring	expert	quiet
funny	considerate	dainty	demanding	curious
humorous	imaginative	busy	gentle	reserved
sad	creative	patriotic	proud	pleasing
poor	energetic	fun-loving	wild	bossy
rich	compassionate	popular	messy	inventive
tall	honest	successful	neat	tireless
dark	mischievous	responsible	joyful	intelligent
light	friendly	lazy	pitiful	conceited
handsome	short	dreamer	cooperative	
pretty	adventurous	helpful	lovable	
ugly	hard-working	witty	prim	

My child has read the above book and has discussed it with me.

_____
Parent signature

Poetry Book "Report"

Name: _____ Student Rating: _____
Date: _____ Parent Rating (if applicable): _____
Title: _____ Number of Pages: _____
(Rating Scale: 1 Low to 10 High)

Please check one:
☐ I read this book to my child.
☐ My child and I read the book by taking turns reading aloud.
☐ My child read the book independently.
(Students get credit no matter which you check.)

Discussion Guide for Poetry
Please check each item after it has been discussed.
☐ Discuss and read aloud your favorite poem. What was its mood? What was its message? Did it rhyme or was it in free verse?
☐ Find a poem that rhymes and look at which lines the rhymes come in. Try to find a pattern to this rhyming.
☐ Do the same as above with another rhyming poem.
☐ Try to find examples of each of these kinds of poems in the book (or identify the kinds that are in the book):
  ☐ Narrative (tells a story)
  ☐ Lyric (descriptive)
  ☐ Humorous
  ☐ Parody (imitation of something else)
☐ Try to find examples of each of these elements of style in one or more poems in the book:
  ☐ Alliteration
  ☐ Metaphor
  ☐ Onomatopoeia
  ☐ Simile
  ☐ Personification
(if you don't remember what these terms mean, consult the posters in the room, a dictionary, or Mrs. Rife.)

My child has read the above book and has discussed it with me.

_____
Parent Signature

Fiction Book "Report"

Name: _____ Student Rating: _____
Date: _____ Parent Rating (if applicable): _____
Title: _____ Number of Pages: _____
(Rating Scale: 1 Low to 10 High)

Please check one:
☐ I read this book to my child.
☐ My child and I read the book by taking turns reading aloud.
☐ My child read the book independently.
(Students get credit no matter which you check.)

Discussion Guide for Fiction
We have discussed these features of the book:
A. Setting
☐ When and where did the story take place?
☐ How important was this to the story?
☐ Could the story have happened in another time or another place?
B. Characters
☐ Who were the main characters?
☐ Who were the minor characters?
☐ What were the main characters like? What characteristics did they have? How would you describe them?
☐ How were the characters similar to or different from real people you know or other story characters? Who do they remind you of and why?
C. Theme
☐ Was there an over-all message to the reader? If so, what was it?
D. Author's Purpose
☐ Was the author's purpose to inform, to entertain, and/or to persuade?
E. Author's Style
☐ Does the book have lots of descriptive paragraphs or more dialogue?
☐ Is the story "told" by a narrator (third person) or by a character in the story (first person)?
☐ Did the author use humor, exaggeration, simile, stereotype, metaphor, alliteration, etc.?
F. Conflicts
☐ What were the major conflicts in the story?
☐ What type of conflict was each (person versus person, person versus nature, person versus self)?
G. Plot
☐ Describe the major events of the story in order.
☐ What was the climax (high point, turning point) of the story?
☐ How did the story end?
☐ How was each conflict resolved?
☐ Reflect on a different possible ending.

Some questions may not apply to some books. Please feel free to use your own ques-

tions also. Try to ask questions that make students think and reflect rather than those that ask only for recall of facts.

My child has read the above book and has discussed it with me.

_____

Parent Signature

Comments/Questions:

should be, and may also serve to give them valuable insight into the functioning of their own child within the classroom. Students benefit by getting a change from my voice and get to see a variety of adults reading with expression and enjoying books.

There are some parents who do not feel comfortable reading in front of the class, and there may be some who feel a bit "put upon" by the time the book discussions take. Perhaps some only sign the form without having the discussion. (I know you were already thinking this, and it may be true.) However, I have actively solicited feedback from parents about this kind of involvement and have never received any less than positive comments. As they realize that their children are beginning to slip away into adolescence and further away from their own sphere of influence, most parents seem to welcome and truly appreciate specific opportunities to contribute to and share in their child's instruction.

Upper elementary grade teachers are doing all involved a great service by actively endorsing and encouraging parent participation in their child's reading education. All teachers need to be partners in reading with their students' parents. Direct classroom participation and the book discussion approach are two methods for accomplishing this.

Karen S. Rife has been teaching elementary grades for over 20 years and is currently a fifth-grade teacher at Hornung Elementary School in Brighton, Michigan. She is a member of the Livingston County Reading Council and the Michigan Reading Association.