

January 1991

Whole Language: What It Is and Isn't

Constance Weaver

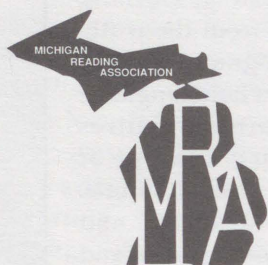
Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj>

Recommended Citation

Weaver, Constance (1991) "Whole Language: What It Is and Isn't," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 24: Iss. 1, Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol24/iss1/3>

This work is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Michigan Reading Journal by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.



Creating Your Own Fables: A Motivational Whole Language Lesson

by Arden Ruth Post, Ed.D.

The current emphasis on the whole language approach has revolutionized and revitalized the teaching of reading and the language arts. But it has also sent teachers scurrying to find literacy activities that fit in with the whole language philosophy of providing communication-centered language experiences. Sources for whole language learning derive from children's literature, the content areas, real life experiences, or the nature of language itself, its sounds and patterns.

Several other criteria are consistent with whole language activities. Speaking, listening, reading, and writing are integrated into a language arts lesson plan with thinking underlying all four components. The oral component of speaking and listening receives much emphasis with students engaging in brainstorming, dramatizing, discussing, and oral composing. Sharing what they have produced follows most activities. Lessons are interrelated and a lesson sequence may stretch for several days as the proposed one will indicate. Lessons frequently follow a sequence of language activities. For example, reading may lead to discussing which leads to writing and then to sharing. Finally, whole language classrooms make frequent use of four patterns of classroom organization: whole class, small groups, partners, and individual/personalized learning oppor-

tunities.

A READING WRITING SEQUENCE

This series of language activities can form one lesson or several lessons stretching over several days. I have found that anticipation builds and students look forward to what their classmates will share the next day. The lesson is easily divided into daily components at several points along the sequence.

READING - whole class

The sequence begins with the teacher reading a fable to the class. I have used "The Sly Fox" and "The Tortoise and the Hare", but almost any fable would be suitable.

IMAGING - individuals

As they listen to the fable, students are invited to sketch any part of it. They listen intently so as to decide just what they want to draw. A few begin immediately but most students listen and one by one their faces light up, as if to say "That's what I want!", and they begin to draw.

SHARING - partner

When I finish reading, I allow five minutes or so to finish the drawing. Then students are invited to share with a neighbor what they drew. This part of the activity produces giggles and animated discussion. Students know

that they are to respond kindly and constructively to what their classmates share. I then ask the class some questions,

"Who drew the robin flying away?

"Who drew the fox climbing the tree?"

"Who drew the bird dropping the cheese?"

The questions get everyone involved and often produce some novel ideas for drawings.

"Who has drawn something different from what I've mentioned so far?"

"Good. Will you share it with us?"

CHARTING - whole class, small group

The next activity is a chart, "Fable Findings," in which we identify key elements of this particular fable, leading to a discussion about fables in general. We may check a dictionary definition of a fable or literary sources. The chart, and the subsequent one, "Designing a Fable," have been adopted from one suggested by Hennings (1982).

The first time this activity is introduced, it is wise to do it with the whole class. Students are invited to suggest words or phrases to fill in the chart. Once students are comfortable with the activity, it can be done in small groups or with partners.

SHARING - whole class

If the "Fable Findings" chart has been completed in groups or by partners, the next step is for the teacher to fill in the "Fable Findings" chart on the board or an overhead projector transparency so that all students can offer suggestions and add to their charts. To save time I may have some of it filled in and invite students to add any additional information. Points of disagreement, which frequently occur in the sequence of events, provide good

discussion opportunities. Differences of opinion about the lesson, or moral, of the fable foster critical thinking. Students become quite excited about adding something no one else thought of, defending their sequence of events, or giving their own inferences about the lesson of the fable..

CREATING - small group

After reviewing the characteristics of a typical fable and checking literary sources for a general understanding of fables, the students are ready to create their own. The "Designing a Fable" chart is handed out and students are invited to brainstorm characters, a lesson, a title, and words or phrases to use in their fables. Discussion becomes very animated and, if a sharing time with the class follows, many students choke back laughter as they report their characters and lesson. They are pleased and amused at what they created and sometimes a little embarrassed about sharing it. The class atmosphere of mutual respect, support, and interest soon eases any reluctance.

WRITING - individual

At this point students are more than ready to write. While the fable can be group-written, a more intriguing approach is to ask students to write their own individual fables based on what they brainstormed in their groups. This is a good place to end for one day and assign the written fable to be completed for the next day.

SHARING - small group

Students return eager to share what they've created. First, they rejoin their groups and read to each other. They are always surprised at how very different their fables turn out even though they started with the same characters and lesson.

REVISING - partners

The next steps are optional, but are valuable for teaching peer editing. Students form partners and make suggestions to each other on how to improve the flow of the story, individual words or phrases, etc. Then they exchange fables and edit each other's for mechanical aspects: punctuation, capitalization, sentence construction.

PUBLISHING AND ILLUSTRATING - individual

The grand finale is a neat copy of the fable with an illustration completed by each student that enters the **Class Fable Book**. This can become a yearly event so that a collection of fable books lines the bookshelves for student browsing. Each class leaves its fable book for subsequent classes to enjoy. Readers come to realize that starting with the same characters and lesson can lead to very different episodes.

SUMMARY

The above sequence is typical of many that can be created using the principles of whole language. A teacher's imagination and creativity are the keys to producing motivational, meaningful, and communication-centered activities that provide lasting reading enjoyment.

REFERENCE

Hennings, D.G. (1982). **Communication in Action: Teaching the Language Arts**. pp. 6 & 7.

DR. ARDEN RUTH POST
is an Associate Professor
of Education at
Calvin College,
Grand Rapids, Michigan.

FABLE FINDINGS

Title of Fable

Name: _____	Date: _____
Characters I: _____	II: _____
Adjectives to describe characters: _____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Sequence of events: _____

Lesson or Moral: _____

- Adapted from Hennings, D. (1982). **Communication in Action: Teaching the Language Arts**. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co.

Write your fable on
the lines below:

Title

•Adapted from Hennings, D. (1982). *Communication in Action: Teaching the Language Arts*. Boston:
Houghton, Mifflin Co.

DESIGNING A FABLE

A Plotting-Out Guide

Name: _____ Date: _____

The character(s): _____

Lesson the main character will learn: _____

Possible title of fable: _____

Designing a character:

Nouns (names,
objects)

Adjectives (Describing)

Verbs (Action)

Adverbs (how, why,
when, to what,
where, extent)

• Adapted from Hennings, D. (1982). *Communication in Action: Teaching the Language Arts*. Boston:
Houghton, Mifflin Co.