

Literature Position Paper

Students as Readers of Literature

The students I have taught over the past four years have been from four different schools and three different grade levels so I have seen and experienced a wide variety of readers. I have noticed with my younger readers they are very motivated and excited to read chapter books while my older students want to read picture books. Currently I am teaching a fourth grade class with very high readers. I am still amazed at their comprehension and their ability to have outstanding discussions related to a wide variety of texts. I have used Literature Circles with my fourth graders this year and it has been a very positive experience. These students have been able to effectively use literature circles for fiction and nonfiction books. I spent a lot of time preparing a classroom library with the books categorized into different genres and as I watch my students reading books they are almost always reading graphic novels which I do not have in my classroom library. Almost every one of my students has read Diary of a Wimpy Kid or Captain Underpants at some time during the school year. I currently do not have picture books in my classroom so when my students have an opportunity to pick a book from the library even some of my high readers come back with picture books.

What I Want for My Students as Readers of Literature

As a teacher my main goal in terms of literature has always been that I want my students to be able to read on grade level fluently and with a high comprehension. This is a very common goal for teachers with such a push for student achievement and tracking student data over the course of the year. Through this graduate course I have realized that there is so much more I want for my students as readers of literature. When my students leave my classroom at the end of the year I want more for them than just simply being a proficient reader. I want my students to enjoy literature. I want my students to be exposed to different genres, authors, and mediums of text. I want my students to have authentic conversations about literature without assigning literature roles or discussion questions. I want to see my students using reading strategies and comprehension strategies every time they are reading regardless of the level or genre of text. I also want my students to see my passion, love, and excitement for reading and literature. All of

these goals to work towards will take time and dedication to integrate into my classroom and instruction but they are important components in literature.

Literature in My Classroom

As a teacher I want literature to be a powerful part of my student's education and daily lives. I want students to be excited to read and become excited from what they read or hear in literature. I want my students to have an understanding that literature can be used in many ways including escaping to another world, time period, cultural, or a different person's perspective. I want literature to be a resource for students when they are sad and need a laugh, have a problem and need a solution, or want to learn more about a topic. I want characters to come alive to students. I want my students to be able to talk about picture books and novels with knowledge of the story elements, illustrations, and text. I hope that my students will be involved in the literature they read by connecting to the book, talking about literature, or reflecting on their reading. I do not want literature to just be a two hour block during schools where students have to read and "prove" that they understand what they read. Reading and literature is and should be so much more for the student and the teacher.

I feel that being exposed to literature is just as important for me as the teacher as it is for my students. I want literature to be the core of my classroom in all areas of teaching and instruction. I want literature to drive my instruction in terms of what I do with my students, how I teach lessons, and how I grow as a teacher. I need to constantly surround with myself educational literature for teachers in terms of new methods and practices. There are so many great resources specifically for literature and reading that will push me to be a more effective teacher. I need to expose myself to as much children's literature as possible. The more children's books I am familiar with the more I can integrate them into everyday lessons and concepts. There are so many books that deal with children's issues in school such as bullying or issues at home such as divorce that can be used in the classroom to help talk about these important issues that impact children's lives. Knowing that my students have a great enjoyment for picture books I should work to incorporate quality pictures books into lessons not only in reading but also in science and social studies units. As my group discussed early in the course, a book like *Rose Blanche* would be great introduction or conclusion to a unit on the war or

Holocaust. As I familiarize myself with more quality children's books I will find some that I can use in my classroom units this year.

Role of Literature in the Curriculum

Literature does not have a single role in a classroom or in the curriculum. Literature has many important roles to play in relation to the curriculum. Depending on the age of the students literature can have a very simplified role such as learning how to read and understand letter or phonics sounds. As students become stronger readers the role could be identifying different genre elements. To narrow the spectrum of different roles literature can play in a curriculum I will relate it specifically to fourth grade which I am currently teaching.

The role of literature in fourth grade classroom should include comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, variety of text genres, metacognitive strategies, book discussions, and fostering a positive reading attitude in children. Students should share their understanding of literature in different ways including class or group discussions, literature circles, book talks, or self reflections on reading. Teachers should model fluency in read alouds so students understand what to work towards to improve their reading abilities. The most authentic way for students to learn new words and expand their vocabulary is through spending time reading books. As students read harder books they will be exposed to new words that they will learn through context, questioning, or looking up unfamiliar words in the dictionaries. Students should be exposed to the different genres through read alouds, independent reading, and guided reading groups. Children should be given the opportunity to develop an understanding each genre without the teacher always explaining exactly what needs to be known. Students at even very young ages could read a variety of books in the same genre and determine similar characteristics to describe that genre. This type of exploratory learning is similar to the approach of this course. In this course we read books, talked about books, and through our experiences and book discussions we drew conclusions to form our own authentic learning. Reading aloud literature can be used to teach and model comprehension strategies which help students become better readers. Using a wide variety of books in a classroom including picture books, novels, informational books, different genres and authors all help to promote a positive reading attitude and wide knowledge base of literature.

Changes through Coursework

As I have discussed with my group and spent time reading I have experienced many changes in my thinking and understanding about the uses of literature in my classroom. I realized that there is so much more to literature than simply reading books. Literature is more than what is on the page, it is what you learn from books, how books make you feel, how you interpret books, the discussion you have with someone after reading, the authors that write the books and their experiences. I realized that there are so many things I am not doing with my students that I need to start doing to be a more effective teacher and so that my students become stronger readers. I use comprehension strategies with my current students all the time however I have never explained that predicting, monitoring comprehension, making inferences, summarizing, and questioning are strategies that they need to use on their own. When I do start teaching comprehension strategies I will also have to follow up and assess my students to see if they are using these strategies while they are reading on their own. I have always used reading groups and writing conferences in my teaching but I have never used one-on-one reading conferences with my students. Denise Johnson author of the *Joy of Children's Literature* (p.425) explains the importance of these one-on-one reading conferences. During this time I should have authentic conversations with the student, assist the child in understanding aspects of reading and routines related to reading, teach and assess reading skills and strategies, and observe oral reading. This is only one of the many newly found aspects of literacy that I feel like I need to add to my instruction.

My view on how students should respond to literature has changed from my experiences discussing literature with a group. Prior to this course I had my students respond to literature through writing or graphic organizers. I learned that as I discussed books and literature with my group my understanding of the material grew and I was able to see other's perspectives. Through discussions so much more can be discovered from one piece of literature. There were so many times I misunderstood something in one of the books or missed an important or interesting detail that someone else brought to my attention. Since this change in view on responding to literature I have used more discussion and less writing to respond to books. I have really enjoyed listening to my students discuss their books. I have seen my students' ability to discuss books really take

off and they have made major improvements. Even my lower groups are pushing each other's thinking and going back into the book to find what they need to help other's understandings.

The more time I spent in discussions with the my group members the more I realized that there is not one right answer for responding to books, there are many possible responses to text. The responses a reader has after reading a particular book will vary based on their experiences, situations, and context of the reading.

Although I have been able to move away from written response and towards discussion there is an aspect of reader responses that I am still struggling with. While reading The Joy of Children's Literature I came across a part that suggested teachers stay away from book reports and have students respond in other ways that are more authentic. This year I started doing monthly book reports with my students after hearing about them from a fellow teacher in my school. I have tied the book report into the genre focus for the month. The students have taken an interest in these and have been very successful on them so I am struggling with moving away from this type of reader response.

Literature circles are discussed in The Joy of Children's Literature which I found very helpful when I started using literature circles. The book suggests that children should get to pick their books and the groups they are in so that they take a greater interest in the book. Even though this sounds like a good idea I feel this is complicated because I group my literature circles on reading ability. I do not know how to approach this aspect of literature circles unless I have multi-level groups where the book is very easy for some and very hard for others. This is something that is very confusing to me because I have always heard and read that reading groups should be based on reading ability. Every school I have worked at has required ability grouping in reading.

Poetry has always been a struggle for me, I struggle understanding poems and I struggle writing poems. Last year when I was required to focus on poetry for a unit study I choose to focus on funny poems, especially because the students were younger. Through this course work and the use of great poetry examples I feel excited and prepared to teach poetry to my students for the first time. I have never heard of a verse novel prior to this class and it was something that I really enjoyed. I will cover a poetry unit in the upcoming months with my students and I will

make sure to get My Man Blue and Locomotion to share with my students. There are so many great discussions to have with students from these two books about poetry and about the content in the poems. Poetry is harder for students to understand and it is important as teachers that we do not limit poetry to just a “unit” or one month of year. I feel that it would really help my students to start reading poetry now and familiarize them with the concepts.

Multicultural literature is a term I have heard frequently in teaching but have never really understood the meaning of the genre. Reading the article “Multiple Definitions of Multicultural Literature” by Mingshui Cai was my first experience learning about the genre, its purpose, and elements. I was shocked after reading the article. I thought that multicultural literature was a standard term that had a common definition accepted by the majority. I found the opposite to be true, “the term multicultural means different things to different people,” (Cai, p.311). My understanding of multicultural literature has been anything portraying a culture different than my own. For example reading a book about a Spanish family, German family, or African American family would all be types of multicultural literature to me. The article’s focus was mostly on the meaning that multicultural literature refers to “those who are most excluded and marginalized, people of color.” Although I do not find myself completely agreeing with this statement I do find myself with a greater understanding of multicultural literature. Cai’s article explains that oppression, racial discrimination, social status, economic status, cultural differences, interracial tension, empowering, and commonalities between cultures important themes to pay attention do when using multicultural literature which I agree are very important topics of discussion. Through the coursework I learned that a lot can be learned about ones culture and beliefs from fiction and historical books. Informational books are not the only books you can learn from.

Where I Was:

Prior to this class I had a very simple view on literature and reading in the classroom. I understood literacy through the balanced literacy approach. I had this understanding of literacy because of my coursework in undergraduate classes and district or school requirements. The past two years in my teaching literature has been based around genre studies which I also found very organized. For a month focus on a different genre and its elements through read alouds, shared reading, and guided reading. I never paid attention to authors or illustrations before this course. In the past I have taught reading strategies to my students. I taught reading strategies to

my fifth graders because they were very low readers and I taught my second graders because they were still learning how to read. This is the first year I have not taught reading strategies to my students. My fourth graders this year have done such a great job on comprehension that I have not taught the strategies. Prior to starting this course I used literature circle response roles for characters, setting, scene setter, word wizard, discussion leader, illustrator, and genre genius. Three of these response roles fall under the textual response used in the discussions for this course. The remaining literature roles do not fall under the literature response roles used for this course.

In my current classroom I originally steered my students away from reading picture books because they are high readers. Even though I enjoy reading picture books to students more I picked chapter books to read aloud to the class. When I did use picture books last year with my second graders we looked at the pictures, but we did not discuss the pictures in depth like we discussed the text in depth.

Where I Am Now:

Literature is so much more than a balanced literacy approach and a few different genres studies. I have learned so many different aspects of literature to include in my current and future teaching. Now I feel that it is very important to discuss the author, illustrator, and illustrations in books. I think it is import to present literature through author studies, theme studies, student interests, content connections, thematic studies, books that depict unique or multiple character traits, student suggested books, and books with global perspectives. Those are only a few to start the list, there are many more ways to present and incorporate literature in a classroom. I am so overwhelmed with new ideas to use in my classroom I do not know where to start. I am excited to get a chance over the holiday break to dig deeper in the Joy of Children's Literature and figure out how I will implement my new literature knowledge in my classroom with the content I need to cover. I hope that my students will see a change in how literature is presented and represented in the class. I also hope to see a change in how my students view literature as I make changes.

I have always had the idea that there is one way to interpret and understand a book. Through this coursework I have experienced and learned that this thinking is not accurate. There are many different ways to understand and interpret a book and that does not make one better

than the others or one correct and the others wrong. The changes in text, reader, or context affect the meaning making in the reading experience. I would like to convey this newly found understanding to my students but feel that I need more experiences or information on how to teach this to children because it is still so new to me.

I have changed the literature response roles I use with my students to match the literature responses suggested through this course. I now have my students complete a personal response where they make a text to self, text to text, and text to world connection. I have also had my students dig deeper into the textual responses by finding paragraphs that are worth discussing.

Where I Want to Be:

There are a lot of changes I would like to make to get where I want to be in terms of using literature in my teaching and classroom. The first thing I would like to integrate into my fourth grade classroom is picture books. I want to use these across the curriculum and teach my students how to discuss books, illustrations, page layout, and point of view. Providing students with more ways to discuss books will open up to more thought provoking discussions. I think that using picture books would be a great way to start really pushing my students to talk about books without using literature circles. Johnson's textbook includes a chart "Helping Children Talk About Books" (p.442) that could be used through modeling when discussing picture books, hopefully it would carry over into their literature circles. Using picture books would also be a great resource to discuss comprehension strategies and the importance in using them in our own reading. Picture books related to changes and experiences that children face could be used to start discussions in the classroom on important issues related to children. Students may feel more comfortable talking about these issues after hearing a book about someone else facing the same problem.

Before the end of the year I would like to do at least one author study and one theme study with my students. I really enjoyed the progression of reading that dealt with the Abenaki Indians during the Contemporary Realistic Fiction, Historical Fiction, Informational, and Biography lesson. I would like my students to experience the same progression of three books and ending with the informational book. After reading books by Joseph Bruchac I noticed one of my students reading a football book by Bruchac. I was so excited to tell my student I had read

different novels by the author including his autobiography. I explained to my student that he is an Abenaki Indian and writes about his culture. Both my young student and I really enjoyed this conversation. I hope that in time I become familiar with more authors in order to have more of these conversations with my students. I would also like to spend time on different mediums of texts just as we did with the Coraline novel, graphic novel, and film. During a fantasy unit my students read Charlotte's Web and then watched the movie. Now looking back I recognize that it would have been beneficial to spend more time discussing the book and the movie. It would have also been interesting to watch the two different versions of the movie, one with real actors and the second a cartoon.

Although multicultural literature should not be limited to a unit it should be integrated throughout the year and be related to many situations I would like to like to complete one multicultural literature unit for the purpose of the insider and outsider representations of a cultural. I have a large class of African American students and I think that during Black History month would be a great time to discuss the different perspectives an author can share as well as cultural inaccuracies. Spending time comparing books written by African Americans compared to books written by white authors about the African American culture would be interesting and informational even for me.

In the past I have only used the books I have in my classroom because of easy access. Now that I have been experiencing so many new books and authors I never want to fall in this rut again. Once I know what I will be teaching I want to research books online that will relate to the content and find them at the library. There are so many books I learned about just from this course that I want to buy for my own classroom library. When I do go to add books to my library I should make sure I am familiar with the book so I know it is a quality book and I will be able to integrate into my class. I found out this year that what my students enjoy and what I enjoy in books are totally different so I need to add more books that my students enjoy. I should never just stick to what I have. I should take the time to search and find great resources and great examples of literature for my students, but I should also find books my students enjoy.

I would like to create a classroom where students understand and are aware of the different things that literature can do. I think it is important for students to understand that

literature is more than just something to read and spend time on in class. Literature can take you to different worlds, different time periods, and put you in someone else's shoes.

My students are doing such a great job with literature circles and I would like to push them even further in the text and their discussions. I would like to add a critical response similar to the one used during this course.

Through this course I have had to do a lot of reflection on literature, the progression of reading in my life, what I value in a book, why I love a book, and what literature can do. It was the deeper thinking and closer look at literature that brought me to the realization that literature is so much more than simply reading words on a page. Through all of the reflections on my own experiences with literature and reading alongside the discussions about literature I developed a new understanding and appreciation in literature and how it can and should be used in a classroom. I feel that it would benefit my students to reflect and discuss literature in the same way. I would like my students to reflect on many of the same things I have done while in this course. Younger students will have different answers and draw different conclusions than what I have over this course, but their reflections will be just as important to their learning and growth as a reader. I could learn a lot about my students by having them reflect on their progression of reading through a timeline. I would understand where they come from as a reader, what experiences they bring with them, and maybe why they are struggling in the areas they have been. I would even like my students to reflect on literature similar to what this assignment has asked me to do. I would like to hear from my students and know where they would like to be as a reader and help them work towards that.

My students have been discussing books through literature circles but I would like to take them to the next level of thinking. I would like to engage my students in literature as a whole, different genres, authors, illustrations, and text to reader connections. Just as I learned there is so much more to literature than books, I would like my students to experience this through discussions with their classmates and build their knowledge of literature.

Beliefs and Values about Children's and Adolescent Literature

I have always held strong values for literature and how it is used in the classroom. I feel that now after completing this course I hold new beliefs and values about children's literature as

well as a deeper understanding of literature. I believe and value that literature can do so many things and can be used in so many ways. I know that I have not learned every context that literature can be used in but I have been introduced to so many new ones which I am looking forward to introducing to my students and into my teaching. I believe that discussing books is a very important part of literature. The discussions can make the books more meaningful and enjoyable. I also believe for the first time that literature has many different interpretations, there is no right or single answer when responding to a book. This is something exciting about literature that should be valued