



Florida Literacy and Reading Excellence Professional Paper

Using Crossover Picture Books with Adolescent Learners

THE EVOLUTION OF PICTURE BOOKS

Since the early 1900s when John Newberry began publishing books specifically for children, the depth and breadth of children's literature has grown tremendously. In 1976, Charlotte Huck wrote the classic reference, *Children's Literature in the Elementary School*, which chronicles the development, evaluation, and use of children's literature in elementary classrooms. Huck discusses the difference between picture books and picture storybooks by delineating that in a picture book the text and pictures are synchronized and related as in an informational text, but there is no character development as in a picture storybook. In a picture storybook, "both the artist and author must sustain children's interest, carry the story line, and portray subtle changes in expression and mood" (p. 107). In her section on picture books Huck highlights the growing trend of picture books and picture storybooks for older readers—books with higher level content, symbolic art work, and sophisticated themes.

Today the choices of reading materials for use in teaching are endless. In wading through possible selections, teachers will usually choose books that match the developmental needs of their students. For older readers, most teachers will opt to use chapter books and grade appropriate textbooks. However, crossover picture books are also an excellent resource to use with middle and high school students. Within the genre of picture books there are an increasing number of crossover picture books that are created for a more mature audience. These books have multiple layers of meaning and sophisticated content.

Teachers can identify notable crossover picture books by consulting with other teachers, resource books, and lists of award winning picture books. The annual Caldecott Medal was first awarded in 1937 by the American Library Association as a way to recognize the artist who created the best illustrated children's book of the year. A link to many outstanding picture book lists, including the Newberry Medal winners and honor books, may be found at the FLaRE website:

http://flare.ucf.edu/FLaRE_Book_Lists.htm.

BENEFITS OF USING CROSSOVER PICTURE BOOKS

The benefits and purposes of using crossover picture books as an instructional tool with secondary students can be categorized into the following areas:

- Engagement of Readers
- Building Background Knowledge
- Vocabulary and Concept Development
- Anchor Lessons for Strategic Reading/Thinking Activities
- Genres Studies
- Teaching Literary Devices for Writing
- Visual Literacy
- Rich Support for English Language Learners

ENGAGEMENT OF READERS

Engagement of readers is often tied to the factors which relate to the conditions of learning identified by Brian Cambourne (1988) and brain research reported by Pat Wolfe (2001). Crossover picture books especially are connected to the ideas of immersion, demonstration, novelty, emotional impact, and social interaction. Teacher led interactive read alouds immerse students in the demonstration of reading and allow students to have a glimpse of how another reader makes sense of the text. The reading and discussion of crossover picture books hinge upon social interaction as students experience the emotional impact of *Rose Blanche* by Roberto Innocenti. Many of today's picture books feature topics of special interest to secondary students such as personal values, interpersonal relationships, physical abuse, drug abuse, peer pressure, individuality, and psychological issues such as suicide, cutting and eating disorders.

Vacca and Vacca (2002) state that picture books are often overlooked as instructional tools even though they are some of the most interesting texts available. Harvey and Goudis (2000) agree proclaiming, "Picture books have been a prominent feature of elementary classrooms for decades...but elementary kids can't have all the fun!" (p. 46).

BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

According to Pearson (1982), background knowledge (schemata) is the single most important factor related to a student's ability to comprehend a particular piece of text. As an instructional tool, crossover picture books are a great way to develop general background knowledge and specific vocabulary information needed prior to the study of a topic. The availability of crossover picture books on almost any theme and genre allows teachers to find a variety of books that correlate with the content to be taught.

An appropriate crossover picture book can serve as a spring board for concept development and vocabulary building which is all part of the background knowledge needed to understand more difficult texts. Within the picture book, illustrations support the text and support the reading task, which is often a challenge for striving adolescent readers. Using crossover picture books with adolescent readers can increase motivation, afford a deeper understanding of concepts, and provide striving readers with easier reading material (Carr, Buchanan, Wentz, Weiss, & Brant, 2001). In this way the crossover picture book serves as a scaffold to a more difficult text on the same topic.

VOCABULARY AND CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

According to the Hayes and Ahrens (1988) children's books contain more rare words per thousand words than adult prime-time television or the conversation of college graduates. Children's books have 32 rare words per thousand compared to prime time television scripts (22.7), children's television scripts (20.2), expert witness testimony (28.4), and college graduates' talk to one another (17.3). When chosen appropriately, a crossover picture book can be a rich source for oral language and vocabulary development. High-quality crossover picture books contain rich vocabulary, well-crafted stories, and exquisite illustrations. They are useful not only to further students' understandings of difficult concepts, but they also appeal to students aesthetically (Carr et al., 2001).

ANCHOR LESSONS FOR STRATEGIC THINKING

Strategic thinking activities are processes that occur in the readers' mind and aid comprehension of a text. Harvey and Goudvis (2002) identified the strategic thinking activities of making connections, questioning, visualizing, inferring, determining importance, and synthesizing for developing comprehension through anchor lessons. Harvey and Goudvis encourage teachers to use anchor lessons based on short, yet memorable texts, such as picture books, to explicitly model with a read and think-aloud how they make sense of a text. In an anchor lesson a teacher uses a short yet memorable

text, such as a crossover picture book, to explicitly teach each of the strategic thinking activities to make meaning of the text. "The goal is for readers to use these strategies automatically and seamlessly" (p.12).

Because these read and think-aloud anchor lessons are based on memorable and dramatic texts, teachers can refer students back to these lessons to recall and apply these thinking activities to other reading situations. One of our favorite anchor lessons is an interactive read and think-aloud, using inferring, based on Chris Van Allsberg's *The Stranger*. Although most texts can be used to illustrate any strategic thinking activity teachers are encouraged to find their personal favorites to use as focus lessons that will be memorable and vivid for students.

HIGHLIGHTING ALL GENRES

Teachers can expand student interests and strategic thinking skills by introducing all genres through interactive read alouds of crossover picture books. Virtually every genre is available in the crossover picture book format. Genres studies help students expand their interests and understand the text structures and format necessary for reading and writing biographies, fantasy, fables, personal narrative and historical fiction, poetry, etc. Classroom libraries can be arranged by genre and crossover picture books can be placed right along side traditional examples of the genre.

TEACHING LITERARY DEVICES

Literary devices are vividly taught by demonstrating them in short texts such as crossover picture books. Students can then be guided as they read for more appreciation of the nuances that are developed through literary devices and employ these devices in their own writing. Two teacher resource books that give "how to" lesson ideas and extensive lists of picture books that feature each literary device are, *Using Picture Story Books to Teach Literary Devices* (Hall, 2002) and *Using Picture Books to Teach Writing With the Traits* (Culham, 2004). Keeping in mind that reading and writing are reciprocal processes, it can be inferred that language arts and reading teachers may find that crossover picture books are great tools for teaching literary devices.

VISUAL LITERACY

The beauty of crossover picture books is that they have a story line, theme, or concept developed through the relationship between the text and art. The art of crossover picture books encompasses every conceivable media and format such as three dimensional pop-up formats, compositions of collage, highly textured oil paintings, brilliant water color illustrations, cartoons,

and unique photographs. The visual interest in sophisticated crossover picture books makes each book a memorable experience enriched by the emotional impact of poetic text and vivid art. Shared viewing and discussion of crossover pictures books is a great way to develop visual literacy skills which is an increasingly important literacy skill in our ever increasing technological world.

ENGAGING STUDENTS IN DEEP THINKING

Keeping adolescent readers engaged and motivated is extremely important. Many students have lost interest in reading by the time they reach middle school. In addition, much of the material used with adolescents consists of difficult textbooks, which are supplemented by videos, and a list of questions the students must respond to from the text.

Crossover picture books are more interesting and relevant than textbooks since they focus more deeply on a single concept (Carr et al., 2001). According to Putnam and Borko (2000) successful reasoning, remembering, and achieving requires a situated perspective. Crossover picture books can provide a context and a setting that helps students understand difficult concepts and apply them to the real world. Since the amount of reading and the density of the text in picture books are lighter, less able readers are more likely to experience success.

Crossover picture books can be shared with adolescent readers through interactive read alouds. Reading aloud to older readers can provide an opportunity for rich discussion and promote higher order thinking. The discussions can also lead to a richer, collaborative understanding of the concepts presented.

Albright (2002) suggests a routine for implementing the interactive read aloud in middle school classrooms using picture books. First, she develops “starter questions” that

will activate prior knowledge, set a purpose for reading, and reinforce content knowledge (p. 18). Then she designates a time and place for the sessions, and begins the discussion. Students are encouraged to relate the books to their prior knowledge and share their personal reactions before, during, and after reading.

RICH SUPPORT FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

In addition to supporting low progress readers, picture books can be very useful for students who are learning English as a second language (Hashim, 1999). For English Language Learners (ELL), crossover picture books may provide simple, repetitive sentence patterns, a straight-forward plot, realistic dialogue, and wonderful illustrations that extend the meaning of the story. Most crossover picture books are relatively short, consisting of 24 to 48 pages, and can be completed in less than 20 minutes.

IN SUMMARY

By using high-quality crossover picture books with adolescent readers, teachers can introduce a new topic to their class at the beginning of a unit or extend the understanding of a concept which is essential to the content of a textbook. The interactive read aloud provides an opportunity for a rich collaborative discussion and addresses the needs of a variety of learners. Crossover picture books can be used with language arts to illustrate literary elements, with mathematics to develop concepts, and in the areas of social studies, science, and health. In reading classes, anchor lessons can be based on crossover picture book think-alouds to allow students to experience strategic thinking for visualizing, questioning, inferring, determining importance, summarizing, and making connections.

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