

JR S EAS IDEAS



THE
NEWSLETTER
OF
THE
ONTARIO
ASSOCIATION
OF
JUNIOR
EDUCATORS

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Just a Thought...

Researchers and developmental psychologists often remark that nine-year-olds have a huge appetite for learning about how things work. They are interested in trying everything they see in order to experience it for themselves. This hands-on attitude and disposition is a **BIG** part of how they find out more about themselves and their developing personality.

Which leads us to reflect upon our classrooms. How much of a student's day is spent exploring, experimenting, discussing - doing activities - and how much time is spent sitting in more passive settings. There is no one right way to teach, but we do know that most children learn better in an active classroom environment.

Bitstrips for Schools

The Ministry of Education has licensed a computer program called Bitstrips for Schools for use in all publicly funded schools in the Province of Ontario.



Comics in the Classroom

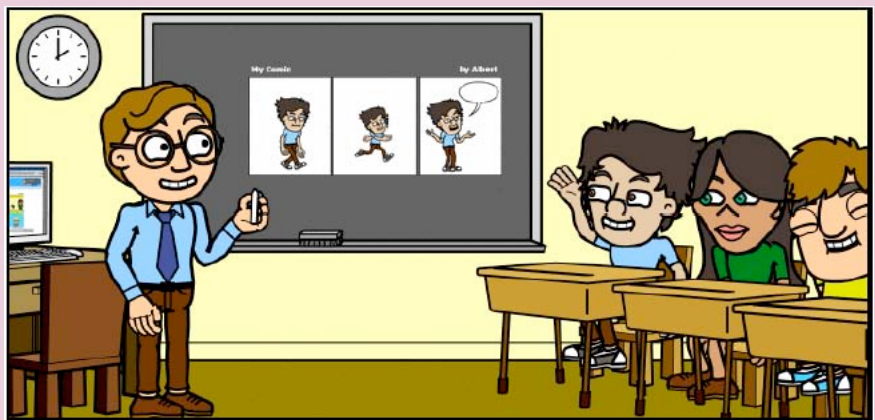
Bitstrips for Schools is an educational tool available on the internet that allows students to make and share comics by simply using the comic-building tools available on the Bitstrips web site.

Students create characters and use them to form comic strips or illustrations for graphic stories. The program actually allows students to create cartoon characters of themselves, which can then be used in stories or other applications. Groups of students can collaborate to create re-mixable comic strip stories and the online assignment library provides teachers with lesson plans and ideas submitted by colleagues using the software.

Bitstrips is available in both English and French.

To set up your free account, just follow these easy steps:

1. go to www.bitstripsforschools.com in any web-browser (you need a broadband connection)
2. click on the link that says "ONTARIO TEACHERS - ACTIVATE YOUR ACCOUNT!"
3. select your school board and school from the list that appears
4. enter your work email address (It needs to end with a school board suffix (like @gecdsb.on.ca or @tcdsb.on.ca
5. fill out the form requesting your name and email, choose a password, and click the 'sign up now' button.



Classroom-ready Ideas for Teachers of Grades Four Through Six

JOIN OAJE FOR FREE!



The Ontario Association of Junior Educators (OAJE) provides a network for education professionals to share ideas and resources, to assist and support teachers and to advocate on behalf of students and teachers in the Junior grades.

Members of OAJE receive a newsletter outlining news, events, conferences and teaching tips. They are also invited to provide input, information and opinions for the Ministry of Education about issues of importance to Junior Division teachers. And, by joining, you will be sure to receive all future editions of this newsletter, along with lots of other valuable teaching ideas.

To become a member of OAJE, simply register online at <http://oajemembership.eventbrite.com>

Read Aloud

The time we spend reading aloud to our students - modeling, inspiring, engaging - is some of our most valuable literacy building.

I remember once attending an address by David Booth where he challenged the audience to think about the reaction they would have if, after just having watched the most wonderful movie they had ever seen, were handed a page with ten questions to answer about details of the movie or their interpretations of the intent of the film maker. It was a powerful point to be made. Sometimes we read for the sheer pleasure of the words and images assembled by a master writer. To analyze, to interpret, to pick apart the poetry or prose would do damage to it and to ourselves, the readers.

So, I offer the following poem, written shortly after World War I by a wonderful British poet. It is most fitting to read aloud on Remembrance Day - without comment or discussion.

A poem to be read aloud by a teacher who can provide a voice to the words. Something to listen to and think about.



The Box

Once upon a time, in the land of Hush-A-Bye,
Around about the wondrous days of yore,
They came across a kind of box
Bound up with chains and locked with locks
And labeled "Kindly do not touch; it's war."
A decree was issued round about, and all with a flourish and a shout
And a gaily colored mascot tripping lightly on before.
Don't fiddle with this deadly box, Or break the chains, or pick the locks.
And please don't ever play about with war.
The children understood. Children happen to be good
And they were just as good around the time of yore.
They didn't try to pick the locks Or break into that deadly box.
They never tried to play about with war.
Mommies didn't either; sisters, aunts, grannies neither
'Cause they were quiet, and sweet, and pretty
In those wondrous days of yore.
Well, very much the same as now,
And not the ones to blame somehow
For opening up that deadly box of war.
But someone did. Someone battered in the lid
And spilled the insides out across the floor.
A kind of bouncy, bumpy ball made up of guns and flags
And all the tears, and horror, and death that comes with war.
It bounced right out and went bashing all about,
Bumping into everything in store. And what was sad and most unfair
Was that it didn't really seem to care
Much who it bumped, or why, or what, or for.
It bumped the children mainly. And I'll tell you this quite plainly,
It bumps them every day and more, and more,
And leaves them dead, and burned, and dying
Thousands of them sick and crying.
'Cause when it bumps, it's really very sore.
Now there's a way to stop the ball. It isn't difficult at all.
All it takes is wisdom, and I'm absolutely sure
That we can get it back into the box, And bind the chains, and lock the locks.
But no one seems to want to save the children anymore.
Well, that's the way it all appears, 'cause it's been bouncing round for years and years
In spite of all the wisdom wizzed since those wondrous days of yore
And the time they came across the box,
Bound up with chains and locked with locks,
And labeled "Kindly do not touch; it's war."

The author of this poem, Lascelles Abercrombie, lived in England through the time of the First World War. He was born in 1881 and died in 1938, before the start of the Second World War. He was a British professor of English and taught at the University of Leeds, the University of London, and finally, Oxford University.

My favourite quote by Lascelles Abercrombie, and one that certainly fits with using this poem as a read-aloud for your students on Remembrance Day -

"It is more difficult to keep the attention of listeners than of readers."

Fill Your Classroom
with Literacy Tools

Magazines



Many kids love to read and look at magazines. At the beginning of each year my class carried out a 'small-scale' fund-raising activity whereby we raised money to purchase subscriptions to our favourite magazines. Or, you might have a Principal or School Council willing to provide funds for three or four magazine subscriptions. I usually put out old copies of magazines for the students to look at, then we carry out a survey (yes, with charting and graphing . . . a great little practical math activity) to determine which magazines we would like to subscribe to.

The students eagerly await each month's edition. We talk about what is interesting in this month's magazine - looking for articles we want more information about.

A few years ago we sent one of the magazine publishers a class letter outlining the ways that we felt the magazine could be improved. Two months later we received a thank you letter AND a big box of back issues.

Magazines are one of the ways that you can 'litter your classroom with literacy tools'. Here are some of our favourite magazines.

YES MAG - The Science Magazine for Adventurous Minds
www.yesmag.ca

Odyssey: Adventures in Science
www.odysseymagazine.com

National Geographic KIDS
<http://kids.nationalgeographic.com>

dig: The Archaeology Magazine for Kids
www.digonsite.com

Owl Magazine
www.owlkids.com

Kids Discover
www.kidsdiscover.com

Zoobooks
www.zoobooks.com

MUSE Magazine and
FACES Magazine
www.cricketmag.com

Essentially Science & Technology

Make a Pet Eyedropper



Remove the label from a clear, plastic 2 litre pop bottle and fill it completely with water. In a separate container squeeze an eyedropper so that it fills with enough water so that it just floats at the top surface of the water. Drop the eyedropper into the water-filled pop bottle and screw the lid on tightly.

Now, tell your students that you have a pet eyedropper that will do what you tell it to do. Hold the water-filled pop bottle with one or two hands. Tell the eyedropper to go to the bottom of the bottle and at the same time gently squeeze the sides of the bottle. You should do this so that your squeezing is not noticeable to the students. The eyedropper will sink to the bottom of the bottle. Now, tell the eyedropper to rise up to the top, and gradually release your squeeze on the bottle. The eyedropper will rise to the top of the bottle. If you master the discrete squeezing of the bottle, you can actually get the eyedropper to hang half way between the bottom and the top of the pop bottle.

Challenge your students to think about why you are able to get the eyedropper to do what you command. Set the pet eyedropper aside in the classroom and tell the students that they may look at it periodically throughout the week as class work is completed. They can investigate how the bottle works - however, they cannot remove the cap. Tell the students that they have to keep track of their ideas about how the pet eyedropper works, and then keep track of what they did to test their idea. You may wish to keep a large sheet of chart paper next to the pet eyedropper so that students can record what they discovered about how it works.

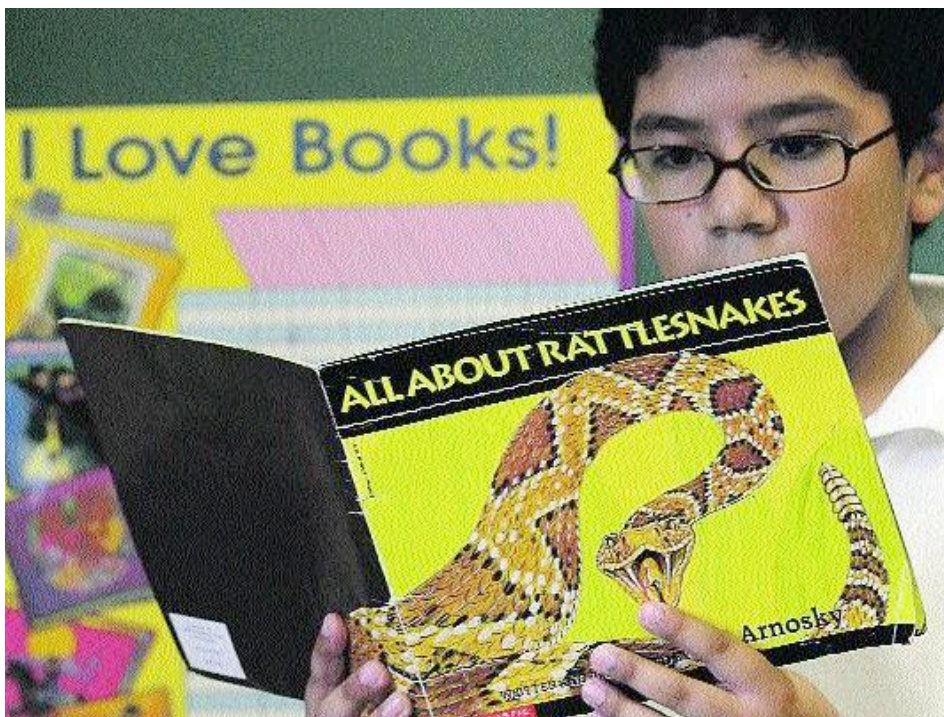
At the end of the week have students who explored the pet eyedropper explain what they tried and what they discovered.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

The pet eyedropper is really a scientific device called a Cartesian Diver. It is named after the famous mathematician Renee Descartes who lived in France in the late 1500's. When you squeeze the plastic bottle you put the water under pressure and it moves into any available space in the bottle. This includes any space you have left at the top of the pop bottle AND the small air space at the top of the eyedropper. As more of the eyedropper fills with water it becomes heavier, and less buoyant - so it sinks. When you stop squeezing the sides of the pop bottle the water you forced inside the eyedropper is squeezed out by the air in it and the eyedropper becomes lighter, or more buoyant and it floats.

The key to getting this to work is to take the necessary time at the start to squeeze enough water inside the eyedropper that it is barely floating at the top of the water it is in.





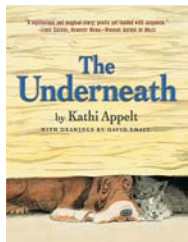
This month we are pleased to feature reviews of some of the newest in literature for junior level students from one of Canada's most distinguished educators.

Dr. Larry Swartz - teacher - consultant - author - workshop presenter extraordinaire and professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education provides his review of eleven new and exciting books for Junior Division students and teachers.

You might want to forward this month's OAJE newsletter to your school librarian and suggest adding these titles to your school's fiction collection if they aren't there already.

Have your students check these titles out and develop and publish their own reviews in a class list of recommended book titles. As Larry has so perfectly demonstrated here, a book review doesn't have to resemble a book report - just provide your reader with a 'taste' of the story, indicate what you thought about the book and give your audience the information they will need to decide if it is or is not a worthy read.

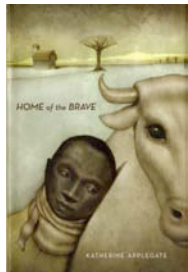
Read Any Good Books Lately?



The Underneath by Kathi Appelt

ISBN 978-1-416-95058-5

According to many blogs, this was a favourite to win the Newbery (it did receive an Honor prize). In her debut novel, Appelt's writing is sublime. The story is intriguing (a calico cat and hound who live underneath a house in a Louisiana bayou, become friends - an evil character named Garface threatens). This, I feel is for sophisticated Junior-aged readers. Good illustrations by David Small but they do not match the tone of the novel. Do not judge this book by the cover (totally wrong). This could become (should become) a classic.



Home of the Brave by Katherine Applegate

ISBN 978-0-312-53563-6

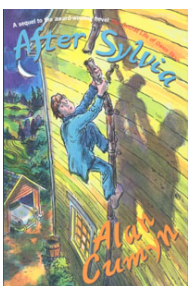
This one is at the top of my list. Written in free-verse style, Applegate writes about an African refugee who is challenged to blend in with his new Minnesota community. Beautiful!



Skeleton Creek by Patrick Carman

ISBN 978-0-545-07566-4

This new mystery series is for the boys. Told in journal format, Ryan writes down the sinister events of being trapped in a house. Seeking to help her friend, Sarah sends videos of things she finds along the way, then sends Ryan the links for him (and the reader) to watch.



After Sylvia by Alan Cumyn

ISBN 978-0-888-99868-2

A great review from Diedre Baker (May 25, 2008) enticed me to read this series book by this funny Canadian author. This title follows the adventures of Owen Skye who is left heartbroken when Sylvia, his one time, true love, moves away. (These books are all available in paperback)

Professional Books by Larry Swartz

Good Books Matter
(with Shelley Stagg Peterson)

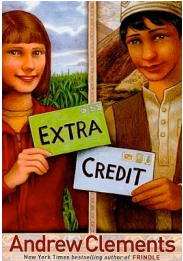
The Novel Experience

The Poetry Experience
(with Sherre Fitch)

The Picture Book Experience

Available from Pembroke Publishers
www.pembrokepublishers.com





Extra Credit by Andrew Clements

ISBN 978-1-494-9299

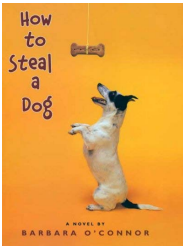
To make up for her failing marks, a grade six girl is assigned a special project to correspond with a foreign pen pal. She is linked to Sadeed Bayat, a young Afghan boy, and in his village it is considered inappropriate for boys to communicate with girls. The appearance of boy-girl protagonists, the exploration of world issues and the well-told story, make this a superb read for junior-aged learners.



The Magician's Elephant by Kate DiCamillo

ISBN 978-07636-4410-9

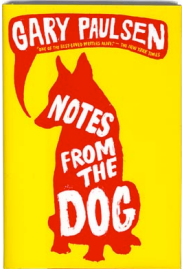
The author of Tale of Desperaux and The Miraculous Journey of Edward T. Tulane has written another gem. Peter, a ten-year-old orphan meets up with a fortune teller in the marketplace and she tells him that his sister is alive and well, and awaiting him. Peter embarks on an adventurous journey after learning from the storyteller that an elephant will lead him to his presumed dead sibling. My vote (so far) for this year's Newbery Award.



How to Steal a Dog by Barbara O'Connor

ISBN 978-0-374-33497-0

A brother and sister live with their mother in a family car. Desperate, the girl devises a plan to steal a dog in order to get reward money. To help students understand poverty in North American society, this is the book I'd love to share with students.



Notes from the Dog by Gary Paulsen

ISBN 978-0-385-73845-3

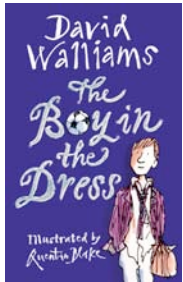
In this short novel, a fourteen-year-old loner named Finn meets up with his next door neighbour, a cool and funny graduate student, Johanna, who is dealing with breast cancer. Johanna has a profound effect on Finn, who comes to learn about his hidden talent for connecting with readers.



When You Reach Me by Rebecca Stead

ISBN 978-0-385-73742-5

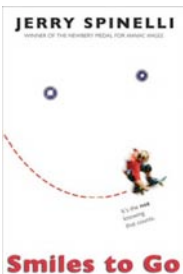
Set in New York in the 1970's, this story is about a 12 year-old girl who is stumped by the arrival of a series of mysterious notes she's been receiving from an anonymous source. A blend of science fiction, mystery and adventure, this novel has been getting very good reviews.



The Boy in the Dress by David Williams

ISBN 978-0-00-72790306

Anyone seen the outrageous British comedy "Little Britain"? Not for everyone's tastes, but I often fall off the couch laughing. David Williams, co-star of the series has written a funny (of course) *The Boy in the Dress*. (the title says it all) The illustrations by Quentin Blake are a bonus.



Smiles to Go by Jerry Spinelli

ISBN 978-006-028133-5

Spinelli does it again! He really gets inside the heads of kids, capturing their voice and day to day dilemmas. Will Tuppence's life is ruled by science and now that he has entered grade nine he has a new perspective on his relationship with his buddies - male and female - and his sister. NOTE: This title and Eggs by Jerry Spinelli have just been released in paperback.