A Thematic and Literature-Based Language Arts Plan For The First Grade

An Honors Thesis (Honors 499)

by

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Explanation of the Project

The purpose of this project was to create a thematic and literature-based plan for teaching the language arts at the first grade level. The plan that I have written is thematic in that the literature and related activities focus on various themes, such as dinosaurs, to create increased interest and motivation for students. It is literature-based in that it utilizes children’s literature to integrate the teaching of the four areas of the language arts: reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

There are six sections to this language arts plan. The first is a listing of possible themes a teacher may make use of when planning instruction for the year. The second section is a statement of year long goals appropriate for the first grade, and divided into the four branches of the language arts. The third section is a collection of teacher activities that I believe are essential to the successful teaching of the language arts using this plan. Next are listings of possible reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities which could be employed when preparing lessons. The fifth section is a group of sample language arts activity plans based on specific pieces of literature, and on the previously mentioned themes. Finally, a sixth section, provides a selected bibliography which could easily be utilized for selecting literature for the first grade classroom.
Themes
1. Mystery / Adventure

2. Imagination / Fantasy

3. Animals
   A) Insects
   B) Endangered Animals
   C) Domestic Animals
   D) Circus Animals
   E) Exotic Animals
   F) Under Sea Animals
   G) Dinosaurs

4. Our Environment
   A) Water
   B) Plant Life
   C) The Land
   D) Weather
   E) The Four Seasons

5. Transportation
   A) Boats
   B) Planes
   C) Cars and Trucks
   D) Bicycles
   E) Space Transportation

6. Feelings
   A) Fear / Worry / Anxiety
   B) Anger
   C) Happiness
   D) Sadness
   E) Anticipation
   F) Love
   G) Loneliness
   H) Isolation From The Group

7. World Cultures
   A) Native American
   B) African
   C) Russian
   D) Asian
   F) Hispanic
G) European
H) South American
I) Indian
Goals For The Year
Reading

• To develop a desire to use leisure time for reading a variety of literature

• To develop the ability to understand and bring meaning to words, phrases, and sentences

• To develop the ability to use a variety of skills to aid in word recognition and comprehension (recognition of sound / symbol relationships, visual discrimination, use of phonetic and structural analysis)

• To develop the ability to determine and expand word meanings through context clues, synonyms, and antonyms

• To develop print recognition

• To develop the ability to relate background experiences to what is read

• To develop critical and reflective thinking about materials which are read

• To develop the ability to respond actively, imaginatively, and critically to literature

• To develop an understanding of the differences between prose and poetry
Writing

- To develop the use of a process approach to writing (prewriting, writing, revising, and publishing)
- To develop the ability to write in a variety of forms (stories, poetry, personal narratives, letters, reports, reviews, jokes, and riddles)
- To develop an understanding of why grammar, punctuation, handwriting, and spelling are important to good writing
- To develop the ability to use grammar skills when writing (sentence structure, basic verb tenses, singular and plural nouns, pronouns)
- To develop the ability to use punctuation skills when writing (capitalization, use of periods, use of question marks, and exclamation points)
- To develop printing skills
- To develop the use of correct spellings in writing situations
- To develop an understanding of a dictionary's importance and use
- To develop the ability to use a picture dictionary
Speaking

• To develop the ability to participate in small group discussions, large group discussions, and conversations

• To develop the ability to participate in conversations, choral speaking, puppetry, creative dramatics, joke and riddle telling, storytelling, reporting

• To develop the ability to use speech for a variety of purposes (to discuss a topic, to express an opinion, to inform, to question, to entertain)

• To develop comfort in speaking in and to groups

• To develop the ability to successfully use and interpret non-verbal communication

• To develop voice control and articulation when speaking
Listening

• To develop specific knowledge of various types of listening (informative, critical, appreciative, inferential, and aesthetic)

• To develop the use of listening for a variety of purposes (for information, for identifying mood, for separating fact from opinion, for appreciation and enjoyment, for recognizing propaganda, for evaluation, and for showing courtesy to the speaker)

• To develop the ability to respond actively, critically, and imaginatively to what is said
Essential Teacher Activities
• Create a nonthreatening environment that allows children to take risks, and to feel secure.

• Encourage children to do their best.

• Encourage the involvement of all students.

• Provide varied, interesting, and valuable language experiences for the children.

• Provide experiences that allow all children to be successful.

• Set realistic expectations for the children.

• Set time aside everyday for the student to read independently.

• Set up a comfortable reading area for the students.

• Maintain a classroom library that includes student and class books, literature used in class, and high interest books.

• Involve students in selecting books for the classroom library.

• Encourage the students to bring in favorite books to share with the class.

• Read aloud to the children everyday.

• Encourage parental participation in the classroom.

• Provide each child with individual attention.

• Allow for flexibility in scheduling.

• Provide varied and interesting decorations and materials for each theme.

• Invite speakers to talk to the class on topics that relate to each theme.

• Plan integrated activities and experiences around the themes.

• Discuss how each piece of literature read relates to its theme.

• Encourage the students to bring things from home that relate to the
different themes.

• Teach grammar and usage in the context of writing.

• Teach punctation in the context of writing.

• Encourage children to use proper spellings, and their best handwriting only when appropriate (publishing experiences).
Possible Reading Activities
• The children will read the other children's stories and poems.

• The children will read the stories and poems that they have written to small groups.

• The children will listen to literature that is read to them.

• The children will discuss illustration styles in small groups.

• The children will evaluate the illustrations of a specific book, or several books by the same author.

• The children will participate in the critical analysis of literature in small or large groups.

• The children will replace description words in a story or poem with a synonym or antonym, and analyze how the changes affect the meaning of the whole piece.

• The class will generate lists of similarities and differences between prose and poetry as a group.

• The children will, in small groups, choose an unknown word from a piece of literature, generate ideas as to its meaning from the context, and come to a consensus as to its meaning.

• The children will generate lists of synonyms and antonyms for words in small groups.

• The children will discuss and determine, in small groups, the type of literature (folk tale, fable, haiku, limerick, etc.) a story or poem is.

• The children will discuss the similarities and differences they find in stories.

• The children will discuss the similarities and differences in stories by the same author.

• The children will create a fairy tale mural in which each child illustrates a favorite fairy tale scene on a large bed sheet or piece of butcher paper.

• The children will create mobiles or models of a story, or a scene from a
The children will illustrate what they feel to be the most important scene in a story.

The children will illustrate their own wordless picture books.

The children will write their own text for wordless picture books.

The children will create a board game for a story.

The children will participate in a “favorite character day” for which the children dress up like their favorite storybook characters, and act as that character for the day.
Possible Writing Activities
• The children will dictate stories individually, in small groups, or as a class, which the teacher, or a parent volunteer writes down.

• The children will keep journals in which they share their feelings about stories or poems that they have read, and life events.

• The children will write their own tall tales, fairy tales, fables, legends, poems, autobiographies, non-fiction stories, letters, reviews, jokes, and riddles.

• The children will brainstorm to generate ideas for their stories.

• The children will make determinations on whether specific pieces of their writing should be published or not.

• The children will participate in a variety of art activities to stimulate thinking, and to generate writing ideas.

• The children will create story webs to help them write stories.

• The children will write, and keep lists of, story ideas and starters.

• The children will choose particular pieces of their writing that they really like, and explain the reasons for their choices.

• The children will participate in peer editing groups.

• The children will publish their best writing, in the classroom, in a variety of ways.
Goal
To develop the students' ability to relate background experiences to literature.

Activity
1. Take the class for a short walk outside the building, and ask the children to pay close attention to the things that they see during their walk.

2. When back in the classroom, the children make lists of the things that they saw, and write descriptions of those things.

3. Read the story to the children.

4. Discuss the plot of the story with the children.

5. Divide the children into groups of four or five, and ask them to discuss possible connections between what they saw outside, and the descriptions they wrote, and the story that was read to them.

6. Appoint a member from each group to share the group's ideas with the rest of the class.

7. Come to a class consensus about how the walk activity related to the story Crow Boy.
Possible Speaking Activities
• The children make puppets for a story, and then retell that story using the puppets.

• The children will be given five to ten minutes of “conversation” time each morning before starting class.

• The children will act out stories that they have heard.

• The children will participate in readers theater activities using stories and poems that they have heard.

• The children will participate in choral speaking activities using stories and poems that they have heard.

• The children will tell their favorite stories to each other in small groups.

• The children will participate in large group discussions.

• The children will discuss stories, poems, and current events in small groups.

• The children will take turns giving class announcements.

• The children will give reports over different topics and events to the class.

• The children will tell jokes and riddles, that they have written themselves, to small groups.

• The children tell tongue twisters, that they have written or read, to small groups.

• The children will be videotaped while participating in various speaking activities, and then will analyze their own speech.

• The children will read stories, poems, jokes, and riddles, that they have read or written, onto cassette tape.

• The children will choose pictures from a picture file, and tell stories about them to small groups.

• The children will tell stories about pictures, that they have created themselves, to small groups.
Possible Listening Activities
- The children will listen to stories that are read to them.
- The children will listen for a predetermined new word and for its meaning from the context.
- The children will develop class criteria for being good listeners.
- The children will listen to a story, and develop a time line for the plot.
- The children will listen to a story for a specific story characteristic (a character, the setting, the mood, the main idea, the plot, etc.).
- The children will listen to a story, and generate questions about it to ask the teacher, or a cooperative group.
- The children will listen to groups of words, and decide which word in the group does not rhyme.
- The children will listen to groups of words that rhyme and complete the group with words of their own.
- The children will identify sounds from a teacher prepared tape of different sounds.
- The children will listen to groups of words from a story, and identify which word does not belong in the group.
- The children will develop directions for a specific task, read the directions to a classmate, and then ask their classmate to follow those directions.
- The children will listen to a story, and retell that story (using the flannel board, to a friend, to a stuffed animal or puppet etc.).
- The children will listen to a story and then orally sequence the events of that story.
- The children will listen to a story, and then choose important or favorite parts of that story.
- The children will play repeat and add games in which a child says a word, the next child repeats the first word and adds a word that fits with that word, the third child repeats the previous words and adds a word, and so on.
• The children will listen to stories, and describe or demonstrate the rhythms that they contain.

• The children will listen to a story or to music, and respond with movement or pantomime.

• The children will listen to stories the teacher tells to them.

• The children will listen to stories which have been read onto cassette tape, and follow the story in the book.
Activities Related To Specific Pieces Of Literature
There’s An Alligator Under My Bed

and

There’s A Nightmare In My Closet

by

Mercer Mayer

Goals

To compare and contrast two similar books by the same author.
To introduce the students to the works of Mercer Mayer.

Activity

1. Read the books to the students.

2. Divide the children into six groups.

3. Assign two groups to each of the topics (similarities and differences in the illustrations, similarities and differences in the plots, and similarities and differences in the characters).

4. Ask each group to come up with a list of examples and thoughts on their topic from the two groups.

5. Ask a representative from each group to share their group’s list with the rest of the class.

6. Point out other books by Mercer Mayer to the class that they might want to read.
Goal

To develop pre-writing skills.

Activity

1. The afternoon before you read the story to the class ask the children to pay close attention to what happens as they go home from school.

2. The next day ask the students to make a list of the things that happened, and that they saw as they went home from school the previous day.

3. Read the story to the children.

4. Discuss with the children how their lists differ from what happened to the little boy in the story on his way from school.

5. Ask the children to use their imaginations to change their lists so that they are more interesting and exciting.

6. The children dictate or write And To Think That I Saw It On ____________ Street stories.

7. The children illustrate their stories.
Goal
To develop the students' interest in reading.

Activity
1. Read the story to the students.
2. Divide the students into groups of four or five.
3. The students create their own jungle games in small groups.
4. The groups exchange the games.
5. Each group plays another group’s game.
Goal

To develop the students' concept of a story line.

Activity

1. Children individually, and at different times, write the story line for this wordless picture book.

2. Divide the children into groups of four.

3. The children compare the different story lines of the group members.
Goal

To develop the students' letter writing skills.

Activity

1. About a week before this story is read ask the students to bring in a stamp from home.

2. Read the story to the students.

3. Discuss the characters, and those characters' feelings with the students.

4. Discuss letter writing with the students.

5. The students write letters to one of their family members, describing their feelings toward them.

6. Help the students address envelops for their letters.

7. Send the students' letters.
Goal

To help the students make connections between their lives and literature.

Activity

1. Read the story to the students.

2. Discuss with the children the feelings of happiness and sadness, and how they relate to this story.


4. Divide the students into groups of 4.

5. The children share their lists with their groups.
**Caps For Sale : A Tale OF A Peddler. Some Monkeys And Their Monkey Business**

by

**Esphyr Slobodkina**

**Goal**

To develop the students’ concept of main idea.

**Activity**

1. Discuss main idea with the students.

2. Read the story to the students.

3. Discuss the main idea of the story with the students.

4. The children draw a picture of what they feel to be the most important part of the story.

5. Divide the children into groups of four.

6. The children describe to their group how the scenes that they drew relate to the main idea of the story.
Goal

To use literature to help children explore their own feelings.

Activity

1. Discuss “bad days” with the children, and how those days make people feel.

2. Read the story to the children.

3. Discuss the events of Alexander’s day, and his feelings during his “horrible” day with the children.

4. The children write in their journals about a bad day that they had, the feelings that they had during that day, and how their feelings related to those of Alexander’s.

5. The children create “how I feel today” collages.
Goal

To develop the students' knowledge of a fable.

Activity

1. Explain to the children what makes a story a fable.

2. Tell the children that they are going to listen to a fable, and ask the children to listen for the elements of a fable while they listen to the story.

3. Read the story to the children.

4. Discuss the plot of the story with the children.

5. Ask several students to describe what they learned from the story.

6. Review with the children the elements that make a story a fable.

7. Divide the class into groups of three or four, and give each group the task of deciding what happens in the story that makes it a fable.

8. Appoint one child in each group as group leader, and ask each group leader to explain their group's answer to the rest of the class.

9. Come to a class consensus as to why Alexander And The Wind - Up Mouse is a fable.
Goal

To develop the students' ability to relate background experiences to literature.

Activity

1. Take the class for a short walk outside the building, and ask the children to pay close attention to the things that they see during their walk.

2. When back in the classroom the children make lists of the things that they saw, and write descriptions of those things.

3. Read the story to the children.

4. Discuss the plot of the story with the children.

5. Divide the children into groups of four or five, and ask them to discuss possible connections between what they saw outside, and the descriptions they wrote, and the story that was read to them.

6. Appoint a member from each group to share the group's ideas with the rest of the class.

7. Come to a class consensus about how the walk activity related to the story Crow Boy.
**Goal**

To develop the students’ knowledge of riddles, and their writing skills.

**Activity**

1. Discuss with the children what a riddle is.

2. Read the riddle book to the children, allowing the children to try to answer the riddles.

3. Ask the children to describe what they like about riddles.

4. Share two or three animal riddles that you have written with the students, and let them guess the answers.

5. The children individually write three animal riddles.

6. Divide the children into groups of four, and have the children read their riddles in small groups.
7. Each student decides which of their riddles he or she likes the best, and those riddles are checked for spelling and grammar errors by the other members of the group.

8. The children draw pictures of the animals that their riddles are about.

9. The students recopy their riddles onto their pictures.

10. The riddles are posted around the room.
**Goal**

To develop the students' sequencing skills and small group discussion skills.

**Activity**

1. Tell the story to the children using the flannel board.

2. Discuss the events of the plot in order of occurrence with the children.

3. Divide the students into five or six groups.

4. Each group makes a set up puppets for the story, and decides on which child will be each character when the story is retold.

5. The children retell the story using their puppets in their small groups.
Goal

To develop the students' appreciation of literature.

Activity

1. Select two of the stories from the book, and read them to the students.

2. Divide the students into groups of four or five.

3. Each group member shares with the group which of the stories he or she liked best, and why.

4. Individually, the students choose their favorite scene from one of the stories, draw a picture of that scene, and write a short description of what is going on in that scene for their pictures.

5. Display the pictures around the room.
Goal

To develop the students' knowledge of non-fiction books, and their handwriting skills.

Activity

1. Discuss what non-fiction is with the students.
2. Tell the students that the book they are about to hear is a non-fiction book.
3. Read the book to the children.
4. Discuss why the book is non-fiction with the class.
5. Discuss the importance of feet with the class.
6. Have each child make a list of important things that their feet do.
7. Have the children recopy their lists onto their construction paper feet using their best handwriting.
8. Display the children's feet around the room.

What Neat Feet!

by

Hana Machotka
Tyrannosaurus Was A Beast: Dinosaur Poems

by

Jack Prelutsky

Goal
To develop the students' knowledge of poetry.

Activity
1. Discuss what a poem is with the students.
2. Discuss the differences between poetry and prose with the students.
3. Read the book to the children.
4. Discuss selected poems with the students.
5. Write a dinosaur poem as a class.
6. Write the poem on a large construction paper dinosaur.
7. Read the poem out loud to the class.
8. Read the poem out loud as a whole class.
Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears: A West African Tale

by

Verna Aardema

and

Illustrated by Leo Dillon and Diane Dillon

Goal

To develop the students' understanding of the importance of illustrations to a story.

Activity

1. Read the story to the children, and ask the students to pay careful attention to the illustrations.

2. Discuss the plot of the story with the children.

3. Discuss with the children why the illustrations are important, and improve the story.

4. Ask the students to point out particular illustrations that they like, why they like them, and how the illustrations depict what is going on in the story.

5. Have the children write in their journals about what they liked about the artwork in Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears.
The Legend Of The Bluebonnet: An Old Tale Of Texas

and

The Legend Of The Indian Paintbrush

by

Tomie de Paola

Goal

To introduce the students to the work of Tomie de Paola.

Activity

1. Read both stories to the students.

2. Discuss the plots of both stories with the students.

3. Discuss the artwork of the two books with the students.

4. Divide the students into groups of four or five, give each group a copy of the two books, and ask the students to analyze the similarities and differences in the two books by the same author. Advise the groups to look at both the plot and the illustrations. Ask one member of each group to keep a record of the ideas presented in the group.

5. Ask one member of each group to share the group's findings with the rest of the class.
Goal

To improve the students' creative writing, and reading skills.

Activity

1. Schedule parent volunteers for the class if possible

2. Read the story to the students.

3. Discuss the plot of the story with the students.

4. Ask the children to think about why they think the sun comes up at the beginning of the day, and goes down at the end of the day.

5. Have the children dictate stories about the sun to the teacher or a parent volunteer.

6. Ask the children to illustrate their stories.


8. Have the children read their stories to each other in small groups.
Goal

To develop the students' understanding of the similarities and differences in two versions of the same story.

Activity

1. Read *The Three Little Pigs* to the students.
2. Discuss the plot with the students.
3. Read *The True Story Of The Three Little Pigs* to the students.
4. Discuss the plot with the students.
5. Discuss the fact that there are sometimes two or more versions of the same story written, and that there are similarities and differences between those versions.

6. Divide the students into groups of four or five.

7. Have each group answer the questions: What is the same about the two stories?, What is different about the two stories?, Which of the two stories do you like best?, and Why?

8. Ask one member of each group to share their group's answers with the rest of the class.
The Three Billy Goats Gruff

by

Peter Christen

and

Illustrated by Paul Galdone

Goal

To improve students' speaking skills.

Activity

1. Read the story to the children.

2. Discuss the plot and the characters with the children.

3. Divide the students into groups of four.

4. Tell the students that they are going to act out the story in their groups.

5. Have each group determine who will be each character in the story.

6. Allow time for the groups to practice acting out the story.

7. Have each group act out the story for the rest of the class.
Goal
To develop the students' knowledge of what a character is.

Activity
1. Discuss with the children what a character is.
2. Read the story to the children, and ask them to pay careful attention to the characters in the story.
3. Discuss the characters in the story with the children.
4. Have the children choose a character from the story, and write a description of that character.
5. Have the children draw a picture of that character.
6. Have the children recopy their character description onto another piece of paper.
7. Attach the students' character descriptions to their pictures, and display them around the room.
Goal

To develop the students' concept of a story line.

Activity

1. Explain to the students that sometimes a story is told without any words, only pictures, and that to understand the story you must pay close attention to the pictures.

2. Have the students individually read The Snowman, and write the story that they feel goes with the pictures.

3. Divide the class into groups of four or five, and ask the students to share their stories with the other members of their group.

4. Discuss the differences among the story's interpretations, and that that is all right because there is no right or wrong interpretation.
Goal

To develop the students' ability to see the relationships between a fictional story and a real life situation.

Activity

1. Review information about the environment with the students.

2. Read the story to the children, and ask them to think about the environment while the story is being read.

3. Discuss the plot of the story with the children.

4. Discuss what happens to the environment in the story with the children.

5. Discuss the parallel between the environment in the story, and the environment of our planet.

6. Have each child plant a seed in the classroom, and when it is big enough send the plant home with the students to plant at home.
The Listening Walk
by
Paul Showers

Goal
To improve the students’ listening skills.

Activity
1. Tell the students that they are going on a listening walk, and explain to the students that during this walk they are to listen carefully to the things that are going on around them. Tell the students that when they come back from their walk they will be writing about what they heard.

2. Take the class on a listening walk outside.

3. When you get back ask the students to make a list of all the things that they heard, and what made those sounds.

4. Read the story with the students.

5. Discuss the similarities and differences in what the students heard on their walk, and what was heard during the walk in the story.
Goal
To improve the students' concept of a story line.

Activity
1. Review the idea of the wordless picture book.
2. Show the students the story as a class.
3. Discuss the plot of the story
4. Have the students illustrate their own wordless picture books that have a definite story line.
5. Divide the students into groups of four or five, and have the students share their books with their group.
A Selected Bibliography
Imagination / Fantasy


Seuss, Dr.  *And To Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street.*  New York: The Vanguard Press, 1937.


Seuss, Dr.  *If I Ran The Zoo.*  New York: Random House, 1950.


Feelings


1947.


Animals


Mystery and Adventure


World Cultures


Our Environment


Transportation


Works Consulted


