

The Balanced Literacy Program: My Two Units For a Balanced Classroom

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract

After researching the different definitions of the balanced literacy approach to teaching, I have created a summary of the information I learned. Since I hope to teach fifth grade I focused on what the balanced approach looks like in the intermediate grades to create my thesis. Learning that the focus moves to comprehension and response activities, I created teaching guides for two units. Included are a unit centered around the prejudice during World War II and another unit that is an author study on Avi. I have an introduction to these guides that includes how the groups would work, how I would group the children, rationale for choosing the novels, standards addressed, activities to do to teach each standard, graphic organizers and activity sheets for some of these lessons, and how I would teach vocabulary. All of these parts combine to form the comprehension portion of the balanced reading approach to literature that I will emphasize in my classroom.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Sherry Kragler for all of her help throughout the formation of my thesis. Her advice, direction, and suggestions have been invaluable at every stage of my project. Thank you, Dr. Kragler, for your support and guidance.

A balanced literacy program means different things to different people. Although most would agree it is a literature approach that balances two varying things, people disagree about what two things are balanced. Many consider a combination of a phonics approach and a whole language approach as the center of a balanced literacy program (Stoicheva, 1999); however, other experts list many things that should be balanced. The International Reading Association Balanced Reading Instruction Special Interest Group adopted a list of principles of balanced instruction in 1993 (Blair-Larsen & Williams, 1999). In addition to the balance between phonics and whole language ("isolated skills to meaning emphasis"), they included a "balance between teacher-directed instruction and student-centered discovery learning, a balance between prescribed instruction and instruction based on the students' needs, a balance between planned and unplanned instruction, a balance between teacher-selected materials and those the students select, a balance between authentic instruction and standardized tests, and balancing all of the aspects of reading and writing" (Blair-Larsen & Williams, p3).

Jill Fitzgerald's (1999) views on the balanced literacy program are centered on some different balances. She believes that the types of knowledge about reading need to be balanced. The three types are local knowledge which includes phonics and word identification strategies, global knowledge is being able to understand and interpret the text and then being able to respond to it and affective knowledge, or enjoyment in reading (Fitzgerald, 1999). Fitzgerald says that there are also many knowledge sources, such as teachers, parents, other adults, children, books and television, and that these sources should also be balanced (1999). Another balance in her program is a balance between different ways of student learning, such as teacher directed or discussion groups (Fitzgerald, 1999). She believes that a balance in different ways of grouping is beneficial and that there should also be a balance in different types of books (Fitzgerald, 1999).

Dixie Spiegel (1998) lists what she believes are the characteristics of a balanced reading program in her article "Silver bullets, babies, and bath water: Literature response groups in a balanced literacy program." It includes such things as a program that is well-founded on research. The teacher should be an 'informed decision maker' which is important because the teacher needs to be flexible and constantly adapt her lessons throughout the unit. A final characteristic she lists is that it must be "built on a comprehensive view of literacy" (Spiegel, 1998). It should include all aspects of reading, such as word identification and meaning and all aspects of writing, such as mechanics and writing for meaning (Spiegel, 1998).

The balanced literacy approach is implemented differently at different grade levels (Fitzgerald, 1999). She states that development of word recognition skills is most important in first and second grade. In third grade, the focus moves to fluency in using these strategies and after third grade, comprehension becomes more important (Fitzgerald, 1999). Marinak and Henk (Blair-Larsen & Williams, 1999) also believe that in the intermediate grades the focus should be on comprehension and responding to the text. In their piece, *Balanced Literacy Instruction in the Elementary School*, they state that "instruction in word-study strategies replaces the word recognition and phonemic awareness activities taught in the primary grades" (p.154-155). They feel that students at this level should be working on constructing meaning, summarizing, evaluating text and making, adjusting and confirming predictions (Blair-Larsen & Williams, 1999).

Through my research of the balanced reading approach, I have determined that this is the approach I will use in my classroom. I feel that using a variety of teaching procedures, grouping methods, and response activities is the best way to meet the needs of all of my students. As part of my language arts curriculum, I plan on having literature circles in my classroom. Dixie Spiegel (1998) examines literature response groups to see if they fit into the balanced literacy approach in her article "Silver

bullets, babies, and bath water: Literature response groups in a balanced literacy program." She found that literature response groups had many of the characteristics of a balanced approach. For example, they are built on research that supports them, they allow for social interactions which help student comprehend text, and they allow for the teacher to be flexible and make many decisions (Spiegel, 1998). They also involve some of the different aspects of reading and writing; however, they do not address them all (Spiegel, 1998). For this reason, Spiegel believes that although literature response groups work well in a balanced program, they should not be used as the sole activity (Spiegel, 1998). It is important to have supplemental activities, texts and lessons to teach students what literature response groups do not (Spiegel, 1998).

Drawing on Spiegel's (1998) research on the benefits of literature response groups and Fitzgerald's (1999) stance about the importance of comprehension and response activities in the fifth grade, I have created two literature units I would use in my fifth grade class. They are made up of response activities that the students would complete and share with their literature response groups. These units focus on comprehension and response to literature. Although these are important skills, they are not the only ones that will be addressed in my classroom. The purpose of my units is to focus on one aspect of my balanced program.

One unit is historical and includes three books centered around the time of World War II and the prejudice that occurred then. The books I have chosen are *Number the Stars*, *Journey to Topaz*, and *Keep Smiling Through*. The other unit is an author study on Avi, including *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, *Poppy*, *Who Stole the Wizard of Oz?* and *Something Upstairs*.

For my guides, I have included a few things I think would be helpful when teaching these units. I have included how I would group the students for this unit and the rationale for choosing these particular novels. I also chose to address nine of

Indiana's Language Arts Standards for fifth grade. I have listed these standards along with the response activities I would do to address each of the standards. I used the same standards in each unit but used different activities so that the students would have multiple times throughout the year to work on each standard, but in different ways.

For those activities in which the student would need a graphic organizer to fill out, I have created and included them. If there is a (see sheet) at the end of the activity, it means that I have included a paper that will help the students do the activity. I tried to include several graphic organizers because Blair-Larson and Vallance write of the benefits of these organizers in their chapter *Comprehension Instruction in a Balanced Reading Classroom* (Blair-Larsen & Williams, 1999).

A final thing that I have included is the form I will use to do vocabulary. Marinak and Henk (Blair-Larsen & Williams, 1999) state that the emphasis moves from word identification to word-study strategies in the intermediate grades. Learning vocabulary, especially through context clues, is a skill that fits in this category. Students will be creating their own dictionaries using the provided sheet. They will fill in new words as they come to them in the text along with a definition they develop from the context of the word.

These are the guides that I would start using for the units. However, an important aspect of the balanced reading program is the constant reevaluation of the students and what they all personally need. Therefore, it would be imperative for me to assess what my students need to work on and adapt my lessons accordingly. In this sense, no guide will be complete for my class since I will need to reevaluate and change the lessons. Not knowing now the needs of my class, this is the guide I would start using and would adapt these lessons to fit my class.

References

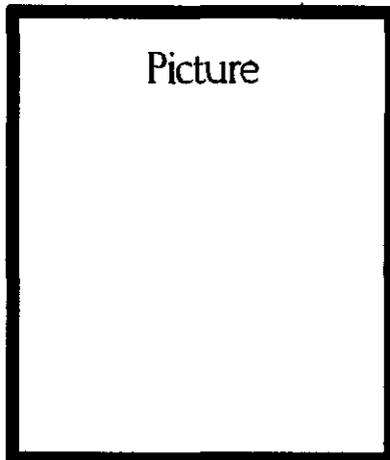
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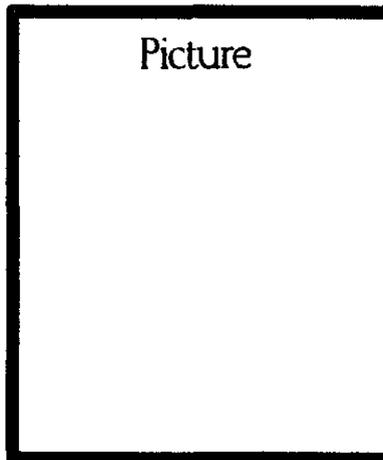


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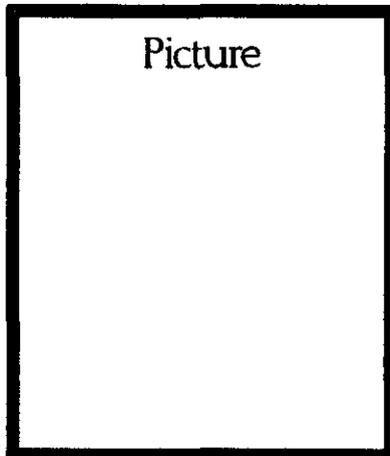


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World War II Unit

Books I chose:

Number the Stars by Lois Lowry

Journey to Topaz by Yoshiko Uchida

Keep Smiling Through by Ann Rinaldi

Why I chose these books:

All of these books are set during World War II. They also center around the prejudice that occurred during this time. *Journey to Topaz* is about the discrimination towards Japanese Americans that happened after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. *Number the Stars* is about the prejudice towards Jewish people. *Keep Smiling Through* deals with the attitudes towards German Americans during WWII. The books are appropriate for fifth grade social studies and reading levels.

How I would group the class:

For this unit, I would have the students choose which novel they wish to read. I would do a short book talk on each novel, and the students would then pick the novel they want to read. If a student had a slightly lower reading level, I would suggest he read *Keep Smiling Through*, because it is at a slightly lower reading level. In addition to the groups they are in with students who are reading the same novel, they would have another group that I create made up of students who are reading the other. They would share some of their activities in these groups so that all students can learn from each book.

How the group would work:

Students would meet two times a week in their literature response groups that are reading the same book to discuss the reading and to present some of their response

activities to the group. On two days student would meet in their literature response groups that are made up of students reading all of the novels to present some of their response activities and share what is happening in their book. On the fifth day, students would work on response activities. Reading would occur some in class on days when they meet in their same book groups and also outside of class as homework. The unit will take between four and six weeks to complete.

How I would monitor the students' progress:

Throughout the unit, I would monitor different components of each student's learning. I would monitor their understanding of the book. I would do this with my observations of the literature groups and through evaluating students' comprehension activities. Their ability to respond to literature is the second thing I would be monitoring. This would be done by evaluating their response activities. Rubrics would be made to make the subjectivity of grading these activities more objective. Some of the students' writing would be collected and kept in their portfolios. Finally, students would be monitored on their progress with the specific skills the activities address, such as understanding theme or writing persuasively. Students would be continually monitored and the unit would be altered to fit the needs of the children.

When I would do this unit:

I would make this unit part of my social studies unit on WWII. It could also be tied into other lessons. For example, the discrimination towards Japanese Americans can be related to the feelings some people feel towards Muslim Americans since the Sept. 11 attacks. This correlation can be made during lessons when students talk about prejudice.

Standard	<u>Number the Stars</u>	<u>Journey to Topaz</u>	<u>Keep Smiling Through</u>
Identify the main problem or conflict of the plot and explain how it is resolved	Have students create a story map at the end of the book. Make sure they include the main conflict and how it is resolved.		
	Give students suggestions on the different kinds of story maps they could create: All pictures, all words, a combination of words and pictures, index cards attached with string, an accordion book, etc.		
Contrast the actions, motives and appearances of characters in a work of fiction and discuss the importance of the contrasts to the plot or theme.	Create a table with three columns and numerous rows. Label the first column 'Event.' Label the next column with the name of one of the main characters. Label the column with the name of one of the other main characters. (see sheet)		
	As different things happen in the book, have student write down the even and then write how each character responded to the thought. Have them include actions and thoughts of the character.		
	After several events, have students write about how the characters differed in their responses and how this affects the story.		
	possible characters: Annemarie, Ellen, Mama, Papa, Kirsti	possible characters: Yuki, Ken, Mother, Emi, Jim	possible characters: Kay, Amazing Grace, any of Kay siblings, father.

Standard	<u>Number the Stars</u>	<u>Journey to Topaz</u>	<u>Keep Smiling Through</u>
Understand that theme refers to the central idea or meaning of a selection and recognize themes whether they are implied or stated directly.	Throughout the book have the students keep a running log of what they think the theme(s) of the book is. Have them change responses if they change their mind throughout the book. Have them add examples from the text that show the theme.		
	At the end of the novel have the children write a paragraph about the theme of the story.		
	Discuss the idea of prejudice. Tell students that it plays a part in a theme of each book. Have the students determine towards which group the prejudice is directed. Have them keep track of every time they see prejudice in the story (see sheet).		
	Prejudice is directed towards Danish Jews	Prejudice is directed towards Japanese Americans.	Prejudice is directed towards German Americans.
Describe the function and effect of common literacy devices, such as imagery, metaphor, and symbolism.	Before the book, talk about symbols that we use. Have students draw a picture of a symbol that is used today. After the student have read some of the book, have them look for symbols in their book during the next week of reading.		
	Have them draw a picture of the symbol they found and display these on a bulletin board.		
Write responses to literature that demonstrate an understanding . . . support judgments . . . develop interpretations . . .	Have students create a newspaper article about something that appears in the book. In groups of four, have students put their articles together to make a small paper.		
	Copenhagen Chronicle	The Topaz Times	New Jersey News Dispatch

Standard	<u>Number the Stars</u>	<u>Journey to Topaz</u>	<u>Keep Smiling Through</u>
Write persuasive letters or compositions.	Have students write a persuasive letter from Annemarie to the Nazis trying to persuade them to stop arresting the Jews.	Have students write a persuasive letter from Yuki to the concentration camp trying to persuade them to let her family leave.	Have students write a persuasive letter from Kay to Amazing Grace trying to persuade her that it is right to tell the whole truth.
Deliver informative presentations about an important idea, issue, or event . . .	Have students in groups of three or four pick something 'historical' that is mentioned in their book. They should research the event/person and present on it to the class.		
	possible topics: Nazi occupation, Resistance, Copenhagen, Denmark during WWII, Star of David, King Christian X, Danes sank own Navy, G.F. Duckwitz, Sweden during WWII, handkerchief to destroy dogs' smell	possible topics: Pearl Harbor, Japanese evacuation from West Coast, Issei, Topaz (the central Utah War Relocation Center), all Neisi combat team	possible topics: war bonds, Hitler, 'loose lips sink ships,' wolf pack/U-boats, air raid drills in school, scrap drive, ration stamps
Deliver oral responses to literature	Divide the class into two or three groups. Have them pick one of the characters and retell the story up to that point as if they were that character. The should use 'I' 'my' 'us' in their story telling.		
	possible characters: Annemarie, Ellen, Mama, Papa, Kirsti	possible characters: Yuki, Ken, Mother, Emi, Jim	possible characters: Kay, Amazing Grace, any of Kay siblings, father.

<p>Draw inferences, conclusions, or generalizations about text and support them with textual evidence and prior knowledge.</p>	<p>Have students pay attention to what life was like during the time of this novel. Using a Venn Diagram, have them compare life during WWII to life now. Have them use references from the novel. (see sheet)</p>
	<p>You could have them write a paragraph or essay about the differences using the diagram.</p>

Name _____

Novel _____

Prejudice against _____

Prejudice by _____

Evidence from the novel:

P ____

P ____

P ____

P ____

P ____

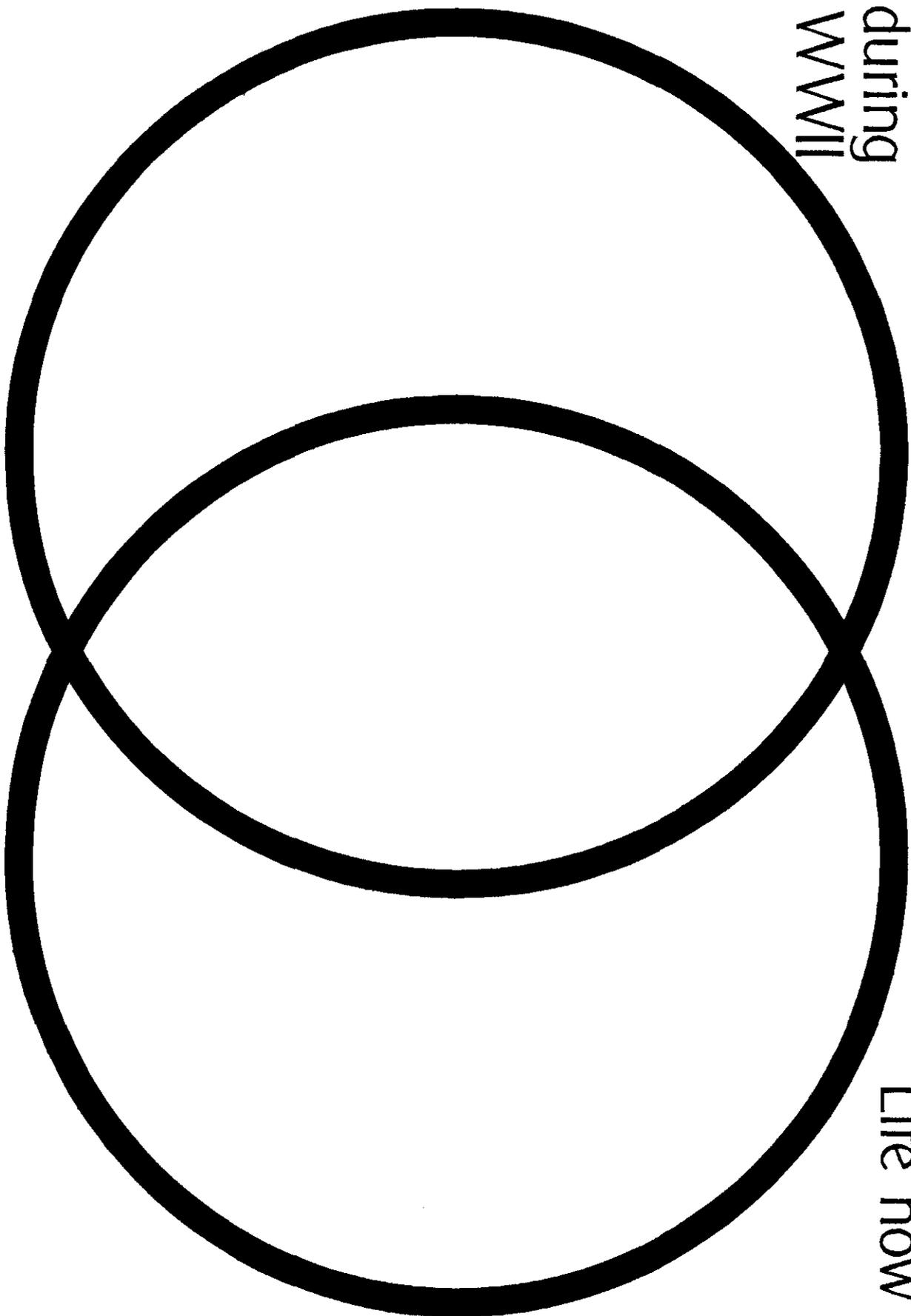
P ____

How it effects the characters:

character

effect

Life
during
WWII



Life now

Avi Unit

Books I chose:

Poppy

The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle

Something Upstairs

Who Stole the Wizard of Oz?

Why I chose these books:

I chose a study on Avi because he is a popular writer and writes a variety of books. He writes novels at different reading levels and he also writes different types of fiction. I chose *Poppy* and *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* because they are on Indiana's list of recommended reading. I chose *Something Upstairs* because it is an Avi novel that is at an appropriate reading level and because it will provide some interesting comparisons and contrasts with the other Avi novels the children will read.

How I would group the class:

For this unit, I would group the students based on their reading level. The lowest reading level group would read *Poppy*. The middle group would read *Something Upstairs* and the highest group would read *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*. In addition to the groups they are in with students who are reading the same novel, they would have another group that I create made up of students who are reading the other. They would share some of their activities in these groups so that all students can learn from each book.

How I would use *Who Stole the Wizard of Oz?*:

I would read *Who Stole the Wizard of Oz?* to the class. I would choose to read an Avi novel to the class because I feel that it would be useful for the class to

become familiar with another Avi novel. This is a shorter novel than the rest so it would be easier to find the time to read it aloud in class. I also chose this novel because the story plot is simpler than the other stories. It would be too easy for the class to read, but would be perfect to show example of new activities. We could do the activity with this straightforward story first when they are learning the procedure before they practice it with their novel.

How the group would work:

Students would meet two times a week in their literature response groups that are reading the same book to discuss the reading and to present some of their response activities to the group. On the other two days student would meet in their literature response groups that are made up of students reading all of the novels to present some of their response activities and share what is happening in their book. Reading would occur some in class on days when they meet in their same book groups and also outside of class as homework. The unit will take between four and six weeks to complete.

How I would monitor the students' progress:

Throughout the unit, I would monitor different components of each student's learning. I would monitor their understanding of the book. I would do this with my observations of the literature groups and through evaluating students' comprehension activities. Their ability to respond to literature is the second thing I would be monitoring. This would be done by evaluating their response activities. Rubrics would be made to make the subjectivity of grading these activities more objective. Some of the students' writing would be collected and kept in their portfolios. Finally, students would be monitored on their progress with the specific skills the activities

address, such as understanding theme or writing persuasively. Students would be continually monitored and the unit would be altered to fit the needs of the children.

Standard	<u>Poppy</u>	<u>Something Upstairs</u>	<u>The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle</u>
Identify the main problem or conflict of the plot and explain how it is resolved	Have students create a story chain for their novel. Have them use different colors for the different parts of the story. For example, the conflict will be written on a red chain and the resolution will be written on a green chain.		
Contrast the actions, motives and appearances of characters in a work of fiction and discuss the importance of the contrasts to the plot or theme.	Studente create a Venn Diagram to compare and contrast two characters. After this, they can write a paragraph about the similarities and/or differences and how this effects the novel.		
	possible characters: Poppy, Mr. Ocax, Lungwort, Ereth	possible characters: Kenny, Caleb, Mother, Willinghast	possible characters: Charlotte, Captain Jaggery, Mr. Keetch, Zachariah, Mr. Hollybrass
	Throughout the novel have students pay attention to how the main character changes. Have them record their observation on the provided sheet. At the end have them write about the main differences and how this effects the novel. (see sheet)		
Understand that theme refers to the central idea or meaning of a selection and recognize themes whether they are implied or stated directly.	Throughout the book have the students keep a running log of what they think the theme(s) of the book is. Have them change responses if they change their mind throughout the book. Have them add examples from the text that show the theme.		
	At the end of the novel have the children write a paragraph about the theme of the story.		

Standard	Poppy	Something Upstairs	<u>The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle</u>
Describe the function and effect of common literacy devices, such as imagery, metaphor, and symbolism.	Before the book, talk about metaphors that we use. Have students give an example of a metaphor that is used today. After the student have read some of the book, have them look for metaphors in their book during the next week of reading.		
	Have them draw a picture of the metaphor they found and display these on a bulletin board.		
Write responses to literature that demonstrate an understanding . . . support judgements . . . develop interpretations. . .	Have students write four diary entries throughout the book from one of the character's perspectives. Have the students use 'I', 'my' and 'we.'		
	Encourage students to write about what the character is thinking and feeling instead of what the character is doing. (see sheet)		
Write persuasive letters or compositions.	Have student write a persuasive composition trying to convince someone to read the novel they are reading.		
Deliver informative presentations about an important idea, issue, or event . . .	Have students in groups of three or four pick some aspect of Avi, his life or his work and research this about him and then present on it to the class.		
Deliver oral responses to literature.	In groups of two or three, have students interview a character or two from the novel. Students should answer the interview questions the way the character would. Have the class write the script, practice and videotape it.		
	possible characters: Poppy, Mr. Ocax, Lungwort, Ereth	possible characters: Kenny, Caleb, Mother, Willinghast	possible characters: Charlotte, Captain Jaggery, Mr. Keetch, Zachariah, Mr. Hollybrass

Draw inferences, conclusions, or generalizations about text and support them with textual evidence and prior knowledge.

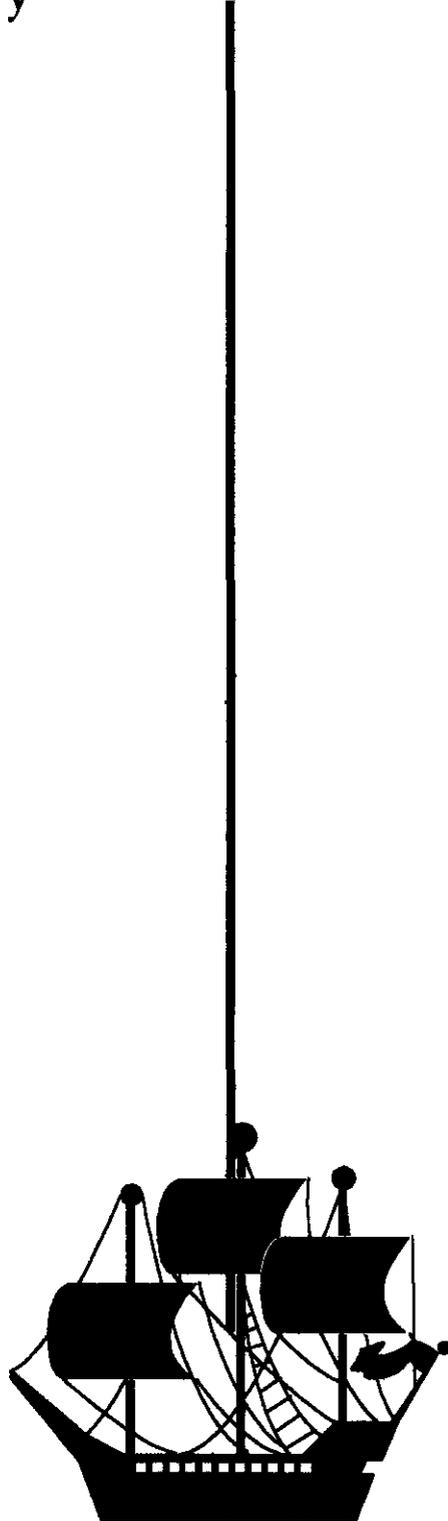
Have students compare the novel they are reading to the one we are reading as a class. Have them brainstorm by creating a Venn Diagram. Students will then write an essay about the comparison they made.(see sheet)

Name _____

Charlotte

Beginning of story

End of story

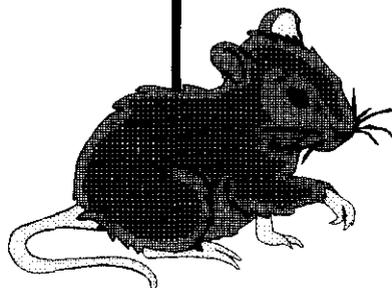


Name _____

Poppy

Beginning of story

End of story

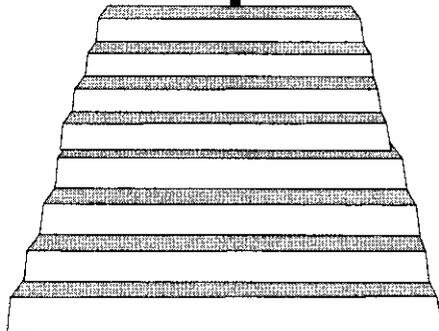


Name _____

Kenny

Beginning of story

End of story



The True
Confessions
of Charlotte
Doyle

Who
Stole the
Wizzard
of Oz?

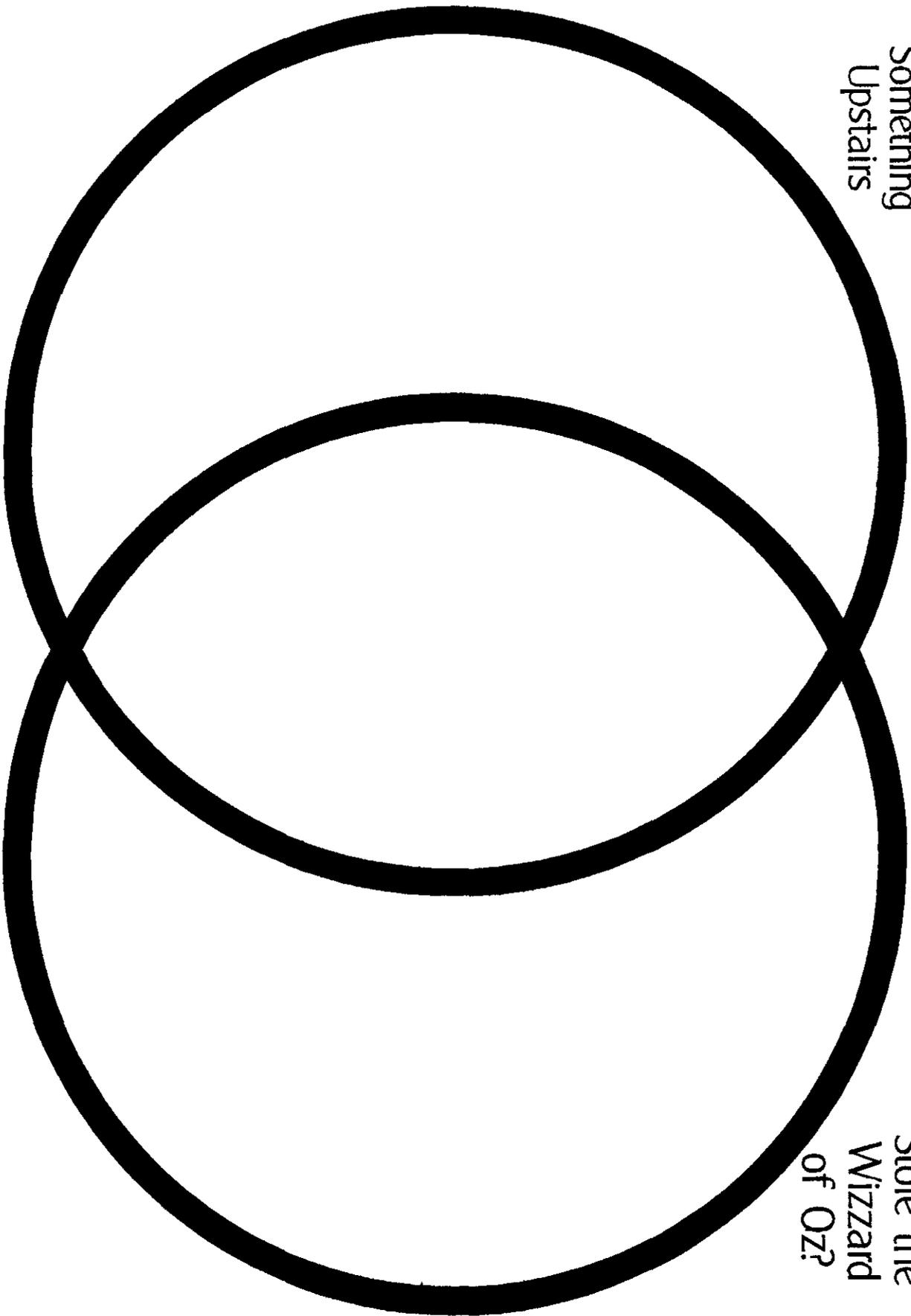
Name _____

Poppy

Who
Stole the
Wizzard
of Oz?

Name _____

Something
Upstairs



Who
Stole the
Wizzard
of Oz?

Name _____

Presentation Of My Thesis

It is recommended that each student presents his/her thesis so a group. This is often done for a group of other honors students. I felt that it would be more beneficial for me to present my thesis project to a group of elementary school teachers. The teachers would get more out of the presentation than a group of students with varying majors, and they would be able to give me better feedback on the strong and weak points of the project.

I presented my project to a group of teachers at Forest Dale Elementary School in Carmel, IN. I gave them the following evaluation forms to record any of their comments. Overall, they considered my use of standards and a variety of activities to be my strongest points. Areas that I could improve upon are adding more technology, giving more detailed directions and including some sort of assessment tool.

Unit Evaluation

Strong Points:

I liked how you incorporated the standards

The Activities sound like fun

Weak Points:

There is not much technology

Suggestions for Improvement:

Add some activities where the students use the internet, computers, cameras. . .

Other Comments:

Unit Evaluation

Strong Points:

USED STANDARDS
LOTS OF OPTIONS

Weak Points:

Suggestions for Improvement:

HOW WOULD YOU EVALUATE?

Other Comments:

Unit Evaluation

Strong Points:

- Great ideas for 20-30 min lessons - Common Clay of a Kind
- Activities look interesting - topic will keep students involved and interested

Weak Points:

Suggestions for Improvement:

- Some ideas are just getting started with the book - could use many of the resources as of now
- more tech ideas

Other Comments:

Wonderful presentation
with a lot of ideas
to go on from
and a lot of
resources to
use

Unit Evaluation

Strong Points:

- how you used the same standards but with different activities for the two units
- included sheets to be photocopied

Weak Points:

Suggestions for Improvement:

- include rubrics or other devices for assessment
- make directions for activities more detailed

Other Comments: