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ABSTRACT

This lesson plan based on "Freak the Mighty" by Rodman Philbrick includes the modeling and practicing of specific reading comprehension strategies, vocabulary and word study, a figurative language activity, and a selection of final projects which can be used for assessment with the accompanying rubric. During three 60-minute sessions for four weeks, students will: make predictions based on the content that is read as a means of improving comprehension; make personal connections to the text as a means of improving comprehension; demonstrate comprehension of the novel; choose and use appropriate voice in their writing; recognize and create examples of metaphor and hyperbole; and increase their written and spoken vocabulary. The instructional plan, lists of resources, student assessment/reflection activities, and a list of National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA) Standards addressed in the lesson are included. A comprehension assessment rubric is attached. (PM)

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Reading and Writing Workshop: *Freak the Mighty*

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Grade Band

6-8

Estimated Lesson Time

Three 60-minute sessions for four weeks

Overview

This unit revolves around Rodman Philbrick's *Freak the Mighty*. Lessons include teaching and practicing the comprehension strategies of predicting with support and making personal connections, focusing on the use of voice in one's writing, figurative language, vocabulary development, and word study. It also includes a multiple choice of culminating activities with an accompanying rubric. The lesson format consists of a list of activities related to the novel, so the specific daily lessons can be best planned to fit the needs of individual teachers and classes.



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From Theory to Practice

Experienced readers use specific strategies before, during, and after reading in order to make sense of the texts that they read. In order for students to develop these strategies, they need to see the techniques modeled and they need to be urged to practice the strategies themselves.

In particular, attention to vocabulary in the texts that they read can lead to increased written and spoken vocabulary as new words are individualized to the needs of the student, through personal dictionaries and personal meaning-making activities. Additionally, understanding of vocabulary and the ability to read unfamiliar words increases through the study of prefixes, suffixes, root words, and related words.

Further Reading

Atwell, Nancie. (1998). *In the Middle: New Understandings about Reading, Writing, and Learning*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook.

Hansen, J. (1987). *When Writers Read*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann.

Robb, Laura. (2000). *Teaching Reading in the Middle School: A Strategic Approach to Teaching Reading That Improves Comprehension and Thinking*. New York, N.Y.: Scholastic, Inc.

Student Objectives

Students will

- make predictions based on the content that's read as a means of improving comprehension.
- make personal connections to the text as a means of improving comprehension.
- demonstrate comprehension of the novel.

- choose and use appropriate voice in their writing.
- recognize and create examples of metaphor and hyperbole.
- increase their written and spoken vocabulary.

Resources

- [Comprehension Assessment Rubric](#)
- [Metaphor Examples Web Site](#)
- [Glossary of Poetry Terms](#)
- [Bookbinding Instructions Web Site](#)
- [Rodman Philbrick's Web Site](#)
- Class Set of *Freak the Mighty*
- Dictionaries
- General classroom supplies
- Journals for reader response
- Magnetic letters or letter cards
- Small notebooks or material for bookmaking

Instructional Plan

Resources

- Class set of *Freak the Mighty* (1 for each student)
- Dictionaries
- General classroom materials (drawing paper, colored markers, crayons, and so forth)
- Journals or spiral notebooks for reader responses
- Magnetic letters or letter cards
- Small notebooks or materials for bookmaking

Preparation

1. Pre-read the novel.
2. Generate a sample list of metaphors and hyperbole appropriate for the level of your class.

Instruction and Activities

Comprehension Strategies

Before Reading Strategy

Activating Prior Knowledge/Making Connections

1. Pass out the book, and ask students what they use the backs of books for.
2. After students share, tell them that we're going to use the back of this book to "get our brains on the right track for this book."
3. Give an example of a time when you've tried to solve a problem while you were thinking of something else and how, as readers, it's important to focus your thoughts. This is known as "Activating, or turning-on, your prior knowledge—what you already know about something."
4. Model with the first sentence on the back: "I never had a brain until Freak came along...." Give an example of what this makes you think of. Then ask students if they thought of something different.
5. Tell students that you're going to read the rest of the back aloud. You will be stopping once

in the middle of the paragraph and then at the end. When you stop, students will jot down a couple words or phrases to represent what they're thinking of as they hear what's read. When you've finished reading, ask students to share their thoughts with their neighbors.

6. After you've completed the reading, ask for a volunteer to share what he or she thought of and what made them think of this.
7. Pair students and have them share their thoughts. The sharer should include what made him or her think of that. The listener should be listening for this support, and ask for it if it isn't given.
8. Share as a class.

During Reading Strategy

Passage Master (Linguistic Roulette)

1. Tell students that you'll be reading aloud the first chapter. When you finish the chapter, you'll be asking students to skim back through the chapter and find one sentence that stands out for them. It could be interesting, puzzling, important, or something they can relate to.
2. Have students write their sentences on a slip of paper. Have them share with their neighbor along with their reasons for selecting the sentence. Then have two pairs join to share. Then share as a class.

During Reading Strategy

Predict/Support—Confirm/Adjust

1. After completing the Passage Master activity, model how to make predictions with support based on the Cover and Chapter 1.
2. Have students come up with their own predictions and support.
3. Assign Chapter 2 reading for homework, telling them we're looking for either more support for our current predictions or something that causes us to change our predictions.

During Reading

Additional Chapters of the Text

Alternate the Passage Master and Predict/Support activities for practice throughout the novel

Post Reading Strategy

Final Confirmation/Adjustment of Predictions with Support

Discussion or prompted response regarding the meaning of the title, where it comes from, and why it's important to the story. Ask students to brainstorm with partners other possible titles and explain why each would fit as a title.

Writing Connection

Voice

During Writer's Workshop, use the book within a mini-lesson about the writing trait of "voice." Compare the following basic summary of Chapter 1 to the actual chapter and discuss the differences.

I started living with my grandma and grandpa when I was in day care. Back then I went around kicking everyone so they called me "Kicker." That's when I met Freak for the first time. I remember him because of his leg braces and his crutches.

I didn't see Freak again until third grade when I saw him ride by in his bus.

My name is Maxwell, but kids at school and in my class call me many other names. I'm not too smart, and am in the LD class at school.

One night, I overheard my grandparents talking in hushed voices about how I not only look like my dad, but that I act like him too and that they better keep an eye on me because who knows what I might do.

Then for practice, provide students with a couple writing prompts to choose from like "It was the worst day ever" or "I'll never forget when..." and have students focus on including their own voice in their writing.

Hyperbole/Metaphor

Choose the humorous definitions like "boats," "critters," and "zoo" as examples. Talk about how you could picture Max's feet with actual boats instead of shoes. Discuss the exaggeration of hyperbole and comparison through metaphors and provide further examples. Students then choose a word to write a humorous definition for. They then make a poster with the word, definition, and an illustration. I provide them with an example of "bags: what Mrs. Hebert gets under her eyes when she stays up late grading papers."

Word Study

"Freak's Dictionary" provides many opportunities for word study. A number of words provide prefix, suffix, and / or root instruction.

Letter Mover

With the following letters, students manipulate the letters to form words that fit the clues. As an extension, particularly for struggling readers, have students find other words and group by families of phonics sounds. Then have them list other words that fit with these families. This extension can be used for phonics instruction, especially for the various "y" sounds and "a" sounds.

Challenge—figure out the mystery word that's spelled using all the letters (answer: dictionary).

letters—a, c, d, i, i, n, o, r, t, y

Word Clues 1:

1. 3-letter word describing the time when the sun is up (day)
2. Add two letters to make it specific to the time we're in now (today)
3. Change the first letter of the first word to make a three-letter word meaning a part of a line that extends forever in one direction (ray)
4. Add a letter to make the object your lunch comes on (tray)
5. Exchange the last letter for two letters to make a 5-letter word for a type of vehicle (train)
6. Remove a letter to get all wet (rain)
7. Add a letter to change the noun to its adjective form (rainy)

Word Clues 2:

1. 3-letter word for a type of transportation (car)
2. Add a letter for a type of game (card)
3. Replace the first letter with a different one to make a unit of measurement (yard)
4. Replace the last letter to be able to knit (yarn)
5. Remove the first letter and change the last letter to make a curve (arc)
6. Change the last letter to make something beautiful (art)
7. Change a letter to pretend to be something you aren't (act)
8. Add a two-letter suffix to change the word from a verb to the noun, meaning a person who does this (actor)
9. Change the suffix to a three-letter suffix to make another noun that means "the process of doing." (action)
10. Keep the suffix and change the root to make a 5-letter synonym for "country." (nation)
11. Change one letter to make noun meaning "a fixed amount." (ration)

Personal Dictionaries

Vocabulary Teaching with *Freak the Mighty* is a great way to start the school year for the purpose of establishing a vocabulary development practice to use throughout the year. After finding out about Freak's personal dictionary, have students begin their own personal dictionaries. Spiral notebooks or journals can be set up for this by labeling pages alphabetically. Dictionaries become more personalized if students make and bind their own dictionaries. Throughout the reading of *Freak* and continuing throughout other novels, students find new, unfamiliar words and add the words with a definition in their own words and an illustration of the word. Provide students with your expectations for the number of words.

Extension activities might include students using a given number of their own vocabulary words within a piece of writing, vocabulary quizzes, creating a memory game out of the words and definitions, or other activities you've done in the past for vocabulary development.

Web Resources

Rodman Philbrick Web Site

<http://www.rodmanphilbrick.com/>

The homepage of *Freak the Mighty* author Philbrick, the site contains frequently asked questions of the author, contact information, and teaching guides to his books.

Bookbinding Instructions Web Site

<http://www.pgcps.pg.k12.md.us/~univpark/bookbinding.html>

This elementary school Web site provides step-by-step instructions for students to bind their own books. Helpful illustrations at each step along the way increase the site's value.

Metaphor Examples Web Site

http://knowgramming.com/metaphors/metaphor_chapters/examples.htm

This site provides a listing of a variety of types of metaphors, including examples, and promises to be an "ongoing project" to be continuously updated.

Glossary of Poetry Terms

<http://www.factmonster.com/spot/pmglossary1.html>

A glossary of poetry terms for definitions and examples of metaphor and hyperbole—and much more! Links to examples of the use of many of the terms are provided within the definitions.

Student Assessment/Reflections

1. Review all predictions and connections made during reading to determine if appropriate support is being given for predictions and that the connections are relevant to the text.
2. Comprehension Assessment
 - o After completing the book, provide options for final activities:
 - o Create a Life Map for Max (this is like a road map, but the landmarks along the road are important events in the life of the character)
 - o Retell this story or an important scene from another character's point-of-view
 - o Walk About (Choose 1)
 - Walk in a character's shoes—Imagine that, by magic, you switch places with either Freak or Maxwell. Pick an important event from the beginning, middle, and end from the story (three total) and retell each scene with yourself in the character's place (be sure to show how you would act differently and/or make different decisions.

- A character walks in your shoes—Pick a major event in your life and imagine that either Freak or Maxwell was there instead of you. First, describe the event you experienced. Next, explain how you think it would have been different for the character and the reasons for the differences (use support from the book, for example: Max would be paralyzed and speechless because this is what happened when his father showed up.)
3. Use the Comprehension Assessment Rubric to assess students' development.
 4. Compare a piece of writing after the voice lesson with pieces of writing done prior to the lesson to determine whether increased attempts are made at adding voice to the writing.
 5. Create a figure of speech modeled after Freak's dictionary, showing that the concept of metaphor/hyperbole is understood. Also, provide examples and nonexamples of these figures of speech and have students identify any hyperbole and/or metaphors.
 6. New personal vocabulary words are used when writing and speaking.
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NCTE/IRA Standards

1 - Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2 - Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

3 - Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

4 - Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

6 - Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.

9 - Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

12 - Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).



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Comprehension Assessment Rubric

	Beginning	Emergent	Proficient	Exemplary
Character	Details/examples are missing causing an unclear picture of the character(s) or the actions/details are very different from those of the character presented in the novel.	Most but not all actions, dialogue, and/or examples are representative of the character(s) from the novel.	Actions, dialogue, examples seem true to the character, but some detail is lacking causing the need to have read the book to be able to know the character(s).	Project shows clear understanding of the character(s). The characterization is clear to the viewer due to the details in the project and is true to the characterization as presented in the book.
Plot	Fewer than two important events from the novel are referred to in the project.	Only a few important events from the novel are referred to in the project.	Five to seven important events from the novel are appropriately referred to in the project.	Understanding of the storyline is demonstrated through use of eight or more important events from the novel.
Product	Lack of neatness makes the project difficult to understand. Writing contains many convention errors and artwork requires explanation from the artist to be able to understand the pictures.	Project could be neater, but is still readable. Writing projects contain enough convention errors to cause the reader to have some difficulty understanding the writer's intent. Artwork looks rushed and/or has more than 50% whitespace.	Project is neat. Writing projects contain some convention errors, but intent is clear. Artwork has color and the intent of the drawing is clear and has little unnecessary whitespace.	Project is neat. Writing projects have few, if any convention errors. Artwork is carefully drawn and colorful with little unnecessary whitespace.



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