

How to Select Books for Teaching to Children: Taking a Critical Look at Books Through a Pedagogical Lens

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to guide the process of selecting meaningful books to use in pre-K-6 classrooms. With thousands of children's books being published each year, it is difficult for teachers to select which ones hold the most potential to inspire students towards a life time of reading pleasure and purpose. This paper outlines selection criteria and provides lesson examples grounded within past and current pedagogical research.

Keywords

Children's Literature; Elementary Students; Reading Instruction; Book Choice; Literary Relationships; Book Selection Criteria; Literature Instruction; Evaluating Literature; Elementary Education; Reading for Pleasure; Reading for Purpose; Teaching Fiction; Teaching Nonfiction; Literature-Based Instruction; Reading Fluency; Reading Comprehension

Teaching children about literature should not be just about teaching reading and language skills (Serafini, 2011). Primarily it should be about teaching relationships between books and children (see Weih, 2014a). The natures of these relationships already exist within children from an early age (see Weih, 2014b); however, it is the role of the teacher to bring these relationships to a conscious existence within each child. For this to occur, children need to understand that books can be part of their lives, that every book contains embedded meaning beneath the words—books are not just words on a page (Pantaleo, 2004). The understandings and subsequent relationships that children construct with books grow from their individual interpretations of this meaning which is grounded in their backgrounds, i.e., their environment, culture, family, literary experiences, and all life experiences (Rosenblatt, 1976). Children become passionate about the things that they derive the most pleasure from, and this passion provides the fuel for literary relationships to grow.

When faced with a diverse classroom of children, teachers frequently are unaware of the backgrounds of their individual students, so it is imperative that teachers make available to children all types of books and reading material that children could personally relate to at some internal level. However, this presents the dilemma of how to select the right books. There are thousands of children's books being published each year, but just because a book has been published, does not mean that it is worthy for teaching to children; it does not mean that the book holds the potential for fostering the necessary meanings and relationships that children need that will lead to pleasurable and purposeful reading experiences.

Frequently, publishers look for the latest fad—whatever will sell; or something that is just different or unique in some way that will catch the public's attention, without regard to the book's potential to have a meaningful impact on the reader. It is along these lines that many books for children have been written by celebrities such as Madonna, Jay Leno, Joy Behar, Jenna

Bush, Amy Carter, Katie Couric, Billy Crystal, Jamie Lee Curtis, Queen Latifa, Tim McGraw, Leann Rimes, Steve Martin, Will Smith, and the list goes on. Do any of these individuals have expertise in pedagogy, children's literature, or even writing, for that matter? Sometimes, even publishers base their decisions with little underlying knowledge about the best books for impacting the lives of children.

What Criteria Should Teachers Apply When Selecting the Best Books for Their Students?

The books that teachers use in their classrooms have the potential to greatly influence their students' lives (Weih, 2014b). The selection can have both negative and positive consequences. With this in mind, what criteria should teachers apply when selecting books that hold the *most* potential for providing reading pleasure and purpose for their students?

Teachers should first get to know their students, community in which they teach, and school culture. They can learn useful information about their students by administering surveys (see Weih, 2014c). They can find about the community that they are teaching in by becoming involved in service projects in the community, and they can discover characteristics of the school's culture by attending school related events, e.g., sports, fund raisers, arts, and science events. With the information gleaned from these endeavors, teachers are prepared to examine books based on their students' interests, cultures, and developmental characteristics.

How can Teachers Access Books for Evaluation?

Teachers do not usually have funding to just purchase multiple books just for the sake of evaluating them; therefore, they can use other means for accessing books. The school library and/or public library are good places to start. They usually receive funding for purchasing new books every year. They also have their own set of selection criteria that the teacher can implement into her own evaluations. Another place to access books is to attend book fairs. The newest and many times the most popular books are on display, and it helps to be able to pick up a physical book and examine its appearance. Teachers usually do not have enough time to evaluate the book on the spot without buying it, but they can either write down the reference for the book or take a picture of the front cover with their phone. With this identifying information, teachers can examine reviews about the book on websites such as Amazon.com. Teachers can also find books that have won awards by using the following search term typed into a search engine such as Google: *children's book award winners*. Through this search term, multiple websites for children's book awards will be accessible along with lists of current and past award winners. It is important to know, however, that just because a book has won an award, does not necessarily mean that it is the right book for the teacher's students. Teachers should delve further by studying a book's reviews on websites which can serve as a means of narrowing down the search to finding a book to examine at closer range, meaning, to make the decision to either buy it or if possible, check it out from a library, and carry on a more thorough evaluation with the book in hand.

How to do a Thorough Evaluation of Children's Books

It is very important for teachers to have clear purposes for teaching a particular book, and a well thought out plan. For this to happen, teachers need to think about the book's meaning in relationship to themselves, and the possibilities of relationships that the children will discover, based on their backgrounds.

A teacher's enthusiasm over a book can be an extremely motivating factor that inspires her students to want to read the book, too (Malloy, Marinak, & Gambrell, 2014). This enthusiasm can be like a contagious disease that spreads rampantly among the students having far reaching implications that even extend into the students' personal lives. For example, students might feel motivated to seek out other books, websites, and videos based on the book's topics (see Weih, 2008). Sometimes, students feel inspired to construct art projects, act out scenes, and organize social gatherings all on their own, outside of the school day, in connection with the book that their teacher is reading aloud in the classroom (see Weih, 2014b).

Another important concept to realize is that all too often, when a student appears to be failing at reading, teachers look at the *student's* reading abilities to see where the problems lie, instead of examining the *books* that they are assigning as reading material (see Weih, 2014c). Putting the possible potential for the book to have meaningful connections for the student aside, *the book may be poorly written, and therefore, impeding the student's reading abilities.*

Once the teacher has the book in hand, then she is prepared to follow through with a more detailed and systematic method for evaluating the merits of the book using the criteria described below:

The following criteria were created to guide the process of thoroughly evaluating the written content of a book.

Evaluating Narrative Books (i.e., written in a story format, including fiction and nonfiction)

Evaluating Narrative Books: The Setting

- The location of the story should be clearly described in either words, illustrations, or a combination of both.
- The time of the story should be clearly identified in either words, illustrations, or a combination of both.
- Both time and location should be addressed early in the book-the first few pages.

Evaluating Narrative Books: The Problem or Conflict

- The problem or conflict should be described within the first few pages.
- Some authors use foreshadowing or revealing some details about what is to come to arouse the reader.
- The problem should be something that is important to children, something that stands out, something that is significant and relevant to *their* lives, and something that peak their interests.

- The problem should also interest you, the teacher, because if it does not, then it probably will not interest children, either.

Evaluating Narrative Books: The Plot or Events of the Story

- If the book is a novel, something exciting, surprising, and maybe shocking should happen in each *chapter*.
- If the book is a picture book, something exciting, or surprising, or maybe even shocking should happen on each *page*.
- The plot of the story should be the rising action building to a clear, distinguishable, and important peak or climax when all the story's suspenseful events come together. The falling action should lead the story characters past the climax to a satisfying resolution regarding their problems or conflict.
- If the book is dull to you, it will be dull for children, be aware of dumbed down plots or over simplification of words, action, and problems. Children are drawn to excitement and uniqueness, just as adults are, just because it is a book for children, does not mean it should be devoid of interesting vocabulary; it should just be a topic that they can relate to, understand, and care about. Many times, children will struggle through on their own in reading a book that is above their reading ability just because they have strong personal motivation to read it (see Weih, 2014b).

Evaluating Narrative Books: The Characters

- The characters should be ones that children would be interested in.
- The characters can either be similar to them or drastically different from them.
- If the characters are animals, the author should develop them as fully as she would if they were humans (in the following criteria, the word "characters" is also intended to include "animals" as characters in a story). This will make them relatable to children.
- The characters should be clearly and thoroughly described in the first few pages in either words or illustrations. If not in illustrations, then with words so descriptive, that the children will be able to create an imaginary image of the characters in their minds.
- The characters should have multiple layers of personality, or a collection of qualities, revealed through how they act, talk, and think.
- The behavior and thinking of the characters should change and develop through the story, they should not remain the same or stagnant.
- Characters should go through a range of emotions: sadness, joy, courage, fear, surprise, humor-children enjoy humor and can especially appreciate it when it accompanies a character's full-range of emotions.

Evaluating Informational Books (i.e., not written in a narrative story structure, includes only nonfiction)

Explanation for Background Perspective

- Some books of this type are written to provide information for how to make or do something.
- Some books are intended to give explanations about topics.
- Evaluating this type can be a difficult task, but try to think about what children would be drawn to. What would attract them? What would interest them? What would keep their attention? Why would they pick up this book in the first place?

Evaluating Informational Books: The Creativity

- Children are drawn to uniquely created books.
- The innovativeness of the book should hit you in the face! It should really stand out! And be the first thing you notice.
- The front and back covers should have large illustrations with bright colors and large print.
- The inside covers, albeit not frequently done, should also be highly interesting.
- There should be imaginative and clever words, terms, labels throughout the entire book.
- The topics of informational books should also be stimulating and unique.

Evaluating Informational Books: The Graphics

- The graphics should be colorful and as large as possible and take up most of each page.
- Each page should have graphics that catch the children's attention and arouse their curiosity.

Evaluating Informational Books: The Organization

- Unlike stories that are intended to be read from the beginning to the end, informational books have sections that are written to stand alone for meaning. These sections should be clearly and distinctly identified in the book.
- There should be a table of contents that is eye-catching, has large distinguishable print, color, and illustrations (i.e., interesting format and style)
- There should be a section covering facts in an interesting format and style.
- There should be a section covering terminology or a glossary of terms that also has an interesting format and style.

Evaluating Informational Books: The Print

- The print on the pages should vary in size and font to signify different purposes, for example: headings, explanations, labeling of illustrations, insets into margins, and captions to illustrations; but it should be very readable for children and not scribbly, and overall, larger than found in narrative books. Sometimes, for the sake of uniqueness, authors use scribbly writing which actually impedes children's reading abilities. Large, standard, dark print is what children can read the best.

Explanation of Appendixes

Included within this paper are appendixes that show examples of books that follow the selection criteria addressed in the previous sections. In addition, each appendix includes a brief lesson plan about how to teach the book for the sake of creating literacy instruction focused on fostering literary relationships rather than reading skills. The premise in this approach is that children desire relationships over skills, and once the former is realized, the latter will be enhanced.

The appendixes, which are each brief lesson plans, begin with lessons connected to books for pre-school through third grade children (see Appendixes A, B, & C), followed by lessons connected to books for fourth grade through sixth grade children (see Appendixes D, E, & F). The titles of the Appendixes are listed below and they can be found following the Reference section of the paper.

Appendix A

Teaching the Book: K is for Kissing a Cool Kangaroo.
Andreae, G. (2002).

Appendix B

Teaching the Book: Way Out in the Desert.
Marsh, T. J., & Ward, J. (1998).

Appendix C

Teaching the Book: Runaway Pumpkin.
Lewis, K. (2003).

Appendix D

Teaching the Book: I Survived: The Nazi Invasion, 1944.
Tarshis, L. (2014).

Appendix E

Teaching the Book: The Nine Lives of Travis Keating
Maclean, J. (2008).

Appendix F

Teaching the Book: Tintin: The Secret of the Unicorn
By Herge (/erg/) pen name of Gorges Remi, Brussels, Belgium (1943c).

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About the Author

Timothy G. Weih is a retired elementary teacher who currently is an associate professor teaching literacy and literature methods courses to students majoring in elementary education at the University of Northern Iowa, USA.

Appendix A
Teaching the Book: K is for Kissing a Cool Kangaroo.
Andreae, G. (2002).

Getting Started

Materials: writing utensils, paper, and either enough books for each student, or at least one or two for each small group; and illustrated alphabet flash cards (look for cards that have pictures and words of things that all start with the featured alphabet letter)-a set for each small group.

Divide students into small, mixed ability groups.

Show them your self-created example of what they will be creating using your own name.

Have students put their names on their papers and tell them to write without worrying about spelling, punctuation, or handwriting. Very young students can draw or illustrate however they want to.

Show students how to write their names in vertical format on their papers. Pass out the alphabet flash cards and show students how to use the cards to find corresponding words to match each letter of their names, and to write these words in horizontal lines beginning next to each letter of their names (this is similar to an acrostic poem).

Facilitate students working together in small groups to accomplish this task.

After it looks like most have at least one word for each letter in their names, then read a few engaging passages from the book aloud to peak their interests. Pass out the books to the small groups of students.

Next, help students in each group to read the book together (i.e., partner reading, choral reading, alternate reading, echo reading, or shared reading; for very young children, read the book aloud to them while they follow along with the books they have in their small groups) and search the book for more words that correspond with the letters in their names and to write these words horizontally next to their beginning name letters and words. When they are done, they will have an acrostic poem demonstrating alliteration similar to what the author has done in his book.

Context for Teaching

This picture alphabet book could be a classroom book (teacher read aloud and all have a copy), small group book, or just one that you want children to be aware of that you have in your classroom for free-choice, unassigned reading.

Grade Levels for teaching are pre-school through third grade.

The book holds many ways for children to form relationships, and it is a terrific example of quality writing of the picture alphabet book format in the fantasy genre that children could use as an example for their own writing of a similar alphabet book. The author's use of alliteration also promotes children's reading fluency.

The picture alphabet book could be taught as part of a larger writing project during which children are making their own alphabet books.

The large, full page, colored illustrations, with animals that have large eyes and friendly faces grabs the attention of young readers.

The book demonstrates word concept development through the direct relationships between the letters of the alphabet and the illustrations.

Major Relationship Awareness

Children form relationships with books that sound amusing and entertaining when read aloud (see Weih, 2014b).

Children first learn pre-reading abilities by listening to and looking at the words and pictures in the book.

The repetitive pattern of words on each page is easy for them to memorize in association with the pictures along with the rhyming and sounds of the letters.

This memorization is followed by pretending to read on their own as they turn each page, which in turn, leads to real reading. Most children will experience success in reading this book, which will lead to instilling a self-awareness of reading confidence. This is an important concept for children to realize and holds implications for their future success in school and work.

Appendix B
Teaching the Book: Way Out in the Desert.
Marsh, T. J., & Ward, J. (1998).

Getting Started

Materials: writing utensils, paper, and either enough books for each student, or at least one or two for each small group; and illustrated number flash cards (look for cards that have pictures of things representing the Arabic numerals 1-10 on the flash cards)-a set for each small group.

Divide students into small, mixed ability groups.

Have students put their names on their papers and tell them to write without worrying about spelling, punctuation, or handwriting. Very young students can draw or illustrate however they want to.

Have students do an illustrative response to the following prompt:

1. Draw a picture of any animal you want to along with its babies, and inside your drawing, write a number that shows how many babies there are in your picture.

Show them your self-created example.

Facilitate students working together with the flash cards in small groups to accomplish this task.

After it looks like most are finished, then read a few engaging passages from the book aloud to peak their interests. Tell students that the illustrator of the book has hidden in each picture a number that shows how many babies there are. Pass out the books to the small groups of students.

Next, help students in each group to read the book together (i.e., partner reading, choral reading, alternate reading, echo reading, or shared reading; for very young children, read the book aloud to them while they follow along with the books they have in their small groups) and search the book for the hidden numbers. Allow them to revise their own illustrations however they want to.

Context for Teaching

This picture book could be a classroom book (teacher read aloud and all have a copy), small group book, or just one that you want children to be aware of that you have in your classroom for free-choice, unassigned reading.

Grade Levels for teaching are pre-school through third grade.

The book holds many ways for children to form relationships, and it is a terrific example of quality writing of the picture book format in the fantasy genre that children could use as an example for their own writing of a similar story.

The picture book could be taught as part of a curriculum unit in math or the North American Desert. It contains embedded factual information, vocabulary, and terminology that children will learn and enjoy (see Weih, 2014b).

The large, full page, colored illustrations, with animals that have large eyes and friendly faces grabs the attention of young readers, and there is an embedded game of finding the number hidden in each page.

Major Relationship Awareness

Children form relationships with books that sound amusing and entertaining when read aloud, and they also form relationships with books that hold information that they can make use of in their own lives (see Weih, 2014b).

Children first learn pre-reading abilities by listening to and looking at the words and pictures in the book.

The repetitive pattern of words on each page is easy for them to memorize in association with the picture along with the rhyming and sounds of the letters.

This memorization is followed by pretending to read on their own as they turn each page, which in turn, leads to real reading. Most children will experience success in reading this book, which will lead to instilling a self-awareness of reading confidence. This is an important concept for children to realize and holds implications for their future success in school and work.

Appendix C
Teaching the Book: Runaway Pumpkin.
Lewis, K. (2003).

Getting Started

Materials: writing utensils, paper, and either enough books for each student, or at least one or two for each small group. Enough photographs or pictures of jack-o'-lanterns for each small group of students to have several examples (this will be very helpful for students who may not be familiar with Halloween traditions).

Divide students into small, mixed ability groups.

Have students put their names on their papers and tell them to write without worrying about spelling, punctuation, or handwriting. Very young students can draw or illustrate however they want to.

Have students create an illustrative response to the following prompt:

1. Draw a picture of a jack-o'-lantern.

Show them your self-created example.

Facilitate students working together with the pictures of jack-o'-lanterns in small groups to accomplish this task.

After it looks like most are finished, show students the front cover of the book and ask them to think about what might be happening, and then to turn to their neighbor and share their thoughts (this is known as the reading comprehension strategy of Think-Pair-Share, which will be very helpful for students who may not be familiar with Halloween traditions) then read a few engaging passages from the book aloud to peak their interests. Pass out the books to the small groups of students.

Next, help students in each group to read the book together (i.e., partner reading, choral reading, alternate reading, echo reading, or shared reading; for very young children, read the book aloud to them while they follow along with the books they have in their small groups). Allow them to revise their own illustrations however they want to.

Context for Teaching

This picture book could be a classroom book (teacher read aloud and all have a copy), small group book, or just one that you want children to be aware of that you have in your classroom for free-choice, unassigned reading.

Grade Levels for teaching are pre-school through third grade.

The book holds many ways for children to form relationships, and it is a terrific example of quality writing of the picture book format in the fantasy genre that children could use as an example for their own writing of a similar story.

The picture book could be taught as part of a curriculum unit on pumpkins, Halloween traditions, or historic farming practices of the past.

The book contains large, full page, colored illustrations, with animals and people in comical situations, which will serve to excite the students. The illustrator has embedded many details within the illustrations that will attract the attention of young readers, who many times see the tiniest of objects.

Major Relationship Awareness

Children form relationships with books that sound amusing and entertaining when read aloud and that also have comical illustrations (see Weih, 2014b).

Children first learn pre-reading abilities by listening to and looking at the words and pictures in the book.

The repetitive pattern of words on each page is easy for them to memorize in association with the picture along with the rhyming and sounds of the letters.

This memorization is followed by pretending to read on their own as they turn each page, which in turn, leads to real reading. Most children will experience success in reading this book, which will lead to instilling a self-awareness of reading confidence. This is an important concept for children to realize and holds implications for their future success in school and work.

Appendix D
Teaching the Book: I Survived: The Nazi Invasion, 1944.
Tarshis, L. (2014).

Getting Started

Materials: writing utensils, paper, and either enough books for each student, or at least one or two for each small group.

Divide students into small, mixed ability groups.

Have students put their names on their papers and tell them to write without worrying about spelling, punctuation, or handwriting.

Have students do a Quick-Write (i.e., tell students they have 5 minutes for writing, but allow enough actual time for your students to write several items for each question) to multiple prompts and only sharing at the end. Display these prompts for all students to view. If students do not know what to write, tell them to copy the prompts on their paper and to spend the time thinking about them and to write down their thoughts after the sharing time is over.

1. What do you know about World War II?

2. What do you know about the Holocaust?

3. What do you know about Jewish partisans?

After it looks like most students have at least a few items for each prompt, have them share their Quick-Write responses with each other. This discourse among students will serve to enhance their understandings of the book. Allow them to change, revise, and add to their answers however they want to.

Read a few engaging passages from the book aloud to peak their interests. Pass out the books to the small groups of students.

Next, facilitate students reading the book by supporting partner reading, choral reading, alternate reading, echo reading, shared reading, or silent reading-however the students would like to read it.

Encourage students to revise their Quick-Writes as they read.

Context for Teaching

This historical fiction book could be a classroom book (teacher read aloud and all have a copy), small group book, or just one that you want children to be aware of that you have in your classroom for free-choice, unassigned reading.

Grade Levels for teaching this book are grades four through six. Children in grades four through six, who are reading below grade level as far as 2nd grade, should be able to read the book mostly on their own.

The book holds many ways for children to form relationships, and it is a terrific example of quality writing of the historic fiction genre that children could use as an example for their own writing of a similar story.

The book could be taught as part of a curriculum unit in social studies covering WW II. The story contains factual details, concepts, and terminology from the historical period, but written using simplified story grammar, sentence construction, and word usage, thereby making the concepts easier to understand for children.

Children can become involved in online learning through the author's website and multiple websites about WW II, the Holocaust, and Jewish partisans.

Additionally, the author has 11 books to date in the I Survived Series, all historical fiction covering both natural and man-made disasters. The books have potential to help children understand these major events in history through storylines especially appealing to young learners.

For more information about this book and author, visit the following website:
<http://www.laurentarshis.com/>

Major Relationship Awareness

Children appreciate finding out about how children in the past have dealt with the disasters faced in the world around them. They are curious to know and understand, and to be able to somehow conquer their own fears by living through the disaster vicariously through the book's characters (see Weih, 2014c).

Appendix E
Teaching the Book: The Nine Lives of Travis Keating
Maclean, J. (2008).

Getting Started

Materials: writing utensils, paper, and either enough books for each student, or at least one or two for each small group.

Divide students into small, mixed ability groups.

Have students put their names on their papers and tell them to write without worrying about spelling, punctuation, or handwriting.

Have students do a Quick-Write (aka, tell students they have 5 minutes for writing, but allow enough actual time for your students to write several items for each question) to multiple prompts and only sharing at the end. Display these prompts for all students to view. If students do not know what to write, tell them to copy the prompts on their paper and to spend the time thinking about them and to write down their thoughts after the sharing time is over.

1. What are your thoughts about bullying?

2. If you had a friend whose mom or dad died, how would you help this friend?

3. If you had to move from your home to someplace far away and leave all your friends, how would you feel?

After it looks like most students have at least a few items for each prompt, have them share their Quick-Write responses with each other. This discourse among students will serve to enhance their understandings of the book. Allow them to change, revise, and add to their answers however they want to.

Read a few engaging passages from the book aloud to peak their interests. Pass out the books to the small groups of students.

Next, facilitate students reading the book by supporting partner reading, choral reading, alternate reading, echo reading, shared reading, or silent reading-however the students would like to read it.

Encourage students to revise their Quick-Writes as they read.

Context for Teaching

This book could be a classroom book (teacher read aloud and all have a copy to follow along), small group book, or just one that you want children to be aware of that you have in your classroom for free-choice, unassigned reading.

Grade Levels for teaching this book are grades four through six.

The book holds many ways for children to form relationships, and it is a terrific example of quality writing of the realistic fiction genre that children could emulate in their own writing.

The book could be taught as part of a curriculum unit in social studies covering Newfoundland or Canada. It could be included in a unit on friendship, bullying, or coping with personal loss.

Major Relationship Awareness

Children relish books that have characters in them that are either like them or represent someone that they would like to be (see Weih, 2014c).

Children appreciate books that deal with real-life issues that they can understand and identify with, and learn something that they can use to help them handle their own problems.

Appendix F
Teaching the Book: Tintin: The Secret of the Unicorn
By Herge (/erg/) pen name of Gorges Remi, Brussels, Belgium (1943c)

Getting Started

Materials: writing utensils, paper, and either enough books for each student, or at least one or two for each small group.

Divide students into small, mixed ability groups.

Have students put their names on their papers and tell them to write without worrying about spelling, punctuation, or handwriting.

Have students do a Quick-Write (i.e., tell students they have 5 minutes for writing, but allow enough actual time for your students to write several items for each question) to multiple prompts and only sharing at the end. Display these prompts for all students to view. If students do not know what to write, tell them to copy the prompts on their paper and to spend the time thinking about them and to write down their thoughts after the sharing time is over.

- 1. What do you know about pirates?*

- 2. What do you know about newspaper reporters?*

- 3. What do you know about comic books?*

After it looks like most students have at least a few items for each prompt, have them share their Quick-Write responses with each other. This discourse among students will serve to enhance their understandings of the book. Allow them to change, revise, and add to their answers however they want to.

Read a few engaging passages from the book aloud to peak their interests. Pass out the novels to the small groups of students.

Next, facilitate students reading the book by supporting partner reading, choral reading, alternate reading, echo reading, shared reading, or silent reading-however the students would like to read it.

Encourage students to revise their Quick-Writes as they read.

Context for Teaching

This graphic comic novel could be a classroom book (teacher read aloud and all have a copy), small group book, or just one that you want children to be aware of for free-choice, unassigned reading.

It holds many ways for children to form relationships, and is a terrific example of quality writing of the graphic comic novel format with the mixed genre elements of realism, fantasy, and science fiction that children could emulate in their own writing of a graphic novel.

Grade Levels for teaching this book are grades four through six.

The novel could be taught as part of a curriculum unit. It could be included in a unit on pirates, the 1600s in Europe, historical sailing ships and seamanship terms, and the studies of other countries and languages. It could be part of a unit on graphic novels and comic books.

There are 24 novels in the Tintin series and they are published in 45 languages, so they could even be part of a unit studying just languages.

The novels have settings in 18 different countries as Tintin travels around the world in his reporter's role. Since world studies are frequently taught in schools, the novels could be connected to the study of a particular country.

Students could do an author study and content study through searching online for connecting information about the author and the contents of the novels through the many websites and Wikis devoted to the series. For more information about these teaching endeavors, see the website below:

<http://us.tintin.com/about/herge/>

The Tintin series are graphic novels with comic content, not comic books which are periodical magazines that have cumulating stories. Each Tintin novel is complete in story; however, there are several that extend the story from one novel into a sequel, but there only a few of these pairings.

The Unicorn and Red Rackham's Treasure are connected stories. The Unicorn was first published in book form in 1943 and was Remi's eleventh book. The two stories are the only ones set in his home country of Belgium.

Gorges Remi wrote 24 books in the Tintin series but the last one was published unfinished after Remi's death.

Most of the books have historical political themes, except the Unicorn and Red Rackham's Treasure. Thus, many could be used within a unit studying historical political science, especially as depicted in cartoons of the day.

Even though meant for children, the author does not dumb-down his use of vocabulary, which is highly interesting, connects to the content of the story, and could be used for vocabulary study.

Special Note: There is satirical humor and irony woven into the narratives that young children may not understand; however, it is not paramount to understanding and appreciating the stories. There is a strong element of drinking and drunkenness on the part of one of the minor characters, Captain Haddock, who appears in almost half of the books; but the author embeds the captain's drinking within bumbling, foolish behavior, which many times causes trouble for him and those associated with him, which serves to highlight the negative effects of alcoholism.

Major Relationship Awareness

Children form relationships with books that have main characters that are children either like them or someone they wish they were like (see Weih, 2014b). Tintin, the main character in the novels, is depicted as a daring, highly competent, and extremely resourceful hero, much like a very young, boyish Indiana Jones. Children can easily identify with him. He also has an adorable little dog Snowy that accompanies him on all his adventures. Their close relationship is emphasized in the stories, and many times, Snowy plays the role as the hero of the day.

In addition, young readers also enjoy characters that are amusing, comical, laughable, bumbling, and clumsy, and the Tintin series has minor characters that fit all these descriptions. Moreover, children will savor these novels for the excitement, adventure, and surprise embedded into the stories, along with the unique vocabulary and terminology.