

LANGUAGE ARTS

CHITA'S CHRISTMAS TREE ACTIVITIES

GRADES: K-3

MATERIALS:

- the book Chita's Christmas Tree by Elizabeth Howard

METHOD:

1. Before Reading the Book, cut some yellow stars out of construction paper. Write one of the following words on each star... Saturday, bowl, ham, snow, flour, supper, buggy, sugar, sweet potatoes, cookies, woods, hominy.
2. Introduce each vocabulary word by placing one star at a time on the large cutout of the tree.
3. Now that you have your word tree put up, try this activity later during the week. Teacher picks a word from the word tree and the kids have to guess what it is. Tell them you will give them 5 clues. Clue# 1; It's one of the words on the tree. Clue#2; It has four letters. Clue #3; it begins with a b, Clue#4; The vowel is an u, Clue#5 It finishes the sentence...
4. Read the story, as you read you will come to the page with the horse and buggy going to the deep, deep woods. Encourage your students to think about how this might feel, smell, and sound.
5. Chita went with her father to select a special tree for the holiday. Some of your students may be able to make a text to self connection here. Discuss with the class if anyone else selects a Christmas tree like Chita does. Have them share how their way of selecting a tree is

similar to Chita's way. You may start by modeling how you relate, "this part of the book reminds me of when I select a tree..."

6. After reading the story, Ask your students to describe and illustrate favorite holiday traditions. Have each child write a sentence, paragraph, or story describing his family tradition. Post each students work on a bulletin board decorated with a holiday background. Title the board, "Our Family Traditions."

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TALKING TURKEY

GRADES: 5-9

"Talking Turkey" is a creative writing assignment that provides students with the opportunity to write from different points of view.

MATERIALS:

- pen
- paper
- optional – word processor and/or Microsoft PowerPoint

METHOD:

1. Prior to assigning this creative writing activity, you should first discuss with the class what point of view is, and make sure all students have a clear understanding of how to change view points on a given topic. Explain to the class that they will be writing a Thanksgiving story from a point of view other than their own.
2. The Topic of the writing will be “what is Thanksgiving like from the _____ ‘s point view”
3. Suggestions for possible points of view:
 - The turkey being cooked and served
 - The table being eaten on for dinner
 - The fork being used to serve the turkey
 - The light fixture above the dinner table
4. Activity extensions incorporating technology would be to have the students make their stories into cartoons using PowerPoint or type stories in a word processor with graphics.

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“WHAT’S IN THE BOX?”

GRADES: 1-6

This is a game for building confidence in oral expression and teaching vocabulary in beginning English learners.

MATERIALS:

- a colorful box (i.e. 7 inch diameter cookie tin)
- treats/prizes for the box

METHOD:

1. The object of this game is for students to try to guess what object you have placed in a colorful box (I use a 7" diameter cookie tin).
2. The first thing to do is teach the students 3 or 4 simple questions. I use "Is it something to eat?", "Is it a toy?", "Is it something to use in the classroom?", and "Is it something else?".
3. Then each time we play the students add one or two new words to their list of "things to eat", toys, classroom supplies, or "something else".
4. Things to eat can be cookies, candy, gum, potato chips, crackers, juice (orange, apple, grape) – anything that you can find that comes in a small package. Toys might be a little harder, but packages of party favors, or things at "dollar" stores would work. Classroom supplies are the easiest: pencil, pens, erasers, etc. And something else can be anything that doesn't fit your categories, but is small enough to fit in the box!
5. Supply the students with the questions and allow them to use the lists of choices.
6. Put one object into the box without allowing them to see it. Shake the box one time, so they can "hear" a possible clue.
7. Then choose one student to begin the questioning.
8. If your answer to the first question is "No", then the next student gets a turn. If your answer is "yes", then the same student can ask another question. For example, if the first student asks, "Is it a toy?", and you say "yes", then that student can ask, "Is it a ball?". If the object is a ball, then you open the box and give them the toy! If it is not a ball, the next student can

ask, "Is it a slinky?", etc. and the game continues until a specific number of "prizes" have been earned for the day. The students desire to get a reward easily overcomes their fear of speaking out, and the fact that they must mentally keep track of the incorrect questions, builds listening skills, and painlessly increases their vocabulary. I also have found that some really great objects don't quite fit into the box. So I just shake the box without putting the object in it. The questioning procedure remains the same, but the students soon learn what sort of objects "don't fit" if they are paying attention.

9. When the students English level has improved, so that this game is easy for them, additional questions can be required before specific objects can be asked for. For example, when a student asks, "Is it a toy?", and the answer is "yes", they must then ask something like, "Is it round?", or "Is it long?", and receive a positive answer to that question before they can ask, "Is it a ball?"

Getting the objects might cost a bit, but the students will learn to speak with boldness!

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POEMS BY YOU ABOUT YOU

GRADES 5-12

This is an excellent activity the first week of school. It helps to get students involved immediately in the curricula, get to know each other, and it gives the teacher some examples of student work to post for Back to School Night.

- Hand out the two poems entitled **I AM**, (see below—feel free to print them out and reproduce them for your class).
- Hand out the **I AM MODEL**, (see below); put a copy on an overhead projector, if available, for the entire class.
- Using the model, create an original poem as a class, incorporating ideas from the students.
- Assign **I AM** to the class.
- Optional: Each student does an art project (collage, diorama, anything that shows WHO they are) to accompany the poem.
- Students orally present their personal **I AM** poem to the class. **I AM**

I am a carefree girl who loves horses.

I wonder if there ever was a horse that could fly.

I hear the stomping of a hundred mustangs on the desert in Arabia.

I see a horse with golden wings soaring into the sunset.

I want to ride swiftly over a green meadow.

I am a carefree girl who loves horses.

I pretend to be an Olympic jumper.

I feel the sky pressing down on me as I ride along a sandy shore.

I touch the clouds on a winged horse.

I worry that I'll fall off and become paralyzed.

I cry when a colt dies.

I am a carefree girl who loves horses.

I understand that I will not be able to ride every day of my life.

I say, let all horses roam free.

*I dream about the day when I have a horse of my own.
I try to be the best rider in the world.
I hope to ride all my life.
I am a carefree girl who loves horses.*

-ELLY TATUM

I AM

*I am a nutty guy who likes dolphins.
I wonder what I, and the world, will be like in the year
2000.
I hear silence pulsing in the middle of the night.
I see a dolphin flying up to the sky.
I want the adventure of life before it passes me by.
I am a nutty guy who likes dolphins.
I pretend that I'm the ruler of the world.
I feel the weight of the world on my shoulders.
I touch the sky, the stars, the moon, and all the planets as
representatives of mankind.
I worry about the devastation of a nuclear holocaust.
I cry for all the death and poverty in the world
I am a nutty guy who likes dolphins.
I understand the frustration of not being able to do
something easily.
I say that we are all equal.
I dream of traveling to other points on the earth.
I try to reach out to poor and starving children.
I hope that mankind will be at peace and not die out.
I am a nutty guy who likes dolphins.*

-SANDY MAAS

I AM-MODEL

FIRST STANZA

I am (two special characteristics you have)
I wonder (something you are actually curious about)
I hear (an imaginary sound)
I see (an imaginary sight)
I want (an actual desire)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

SECOND STANZA

I pretend (something you actually pretend to do)
I feel (a feeling about something imaginary)
I touch (an imaginary touch)
I worry (something that really bothers you)
I cry (something that makes you very sad)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

THIRD STANZA

I understand (something you know is true)
I say (something you believe in)
I dream (something you actually dream about)
I try (something you really make an effort about)
I hope (something you actually hope for)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

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BEGINNING OF THE YEAR AUTOBIOGRAPHY

GRADES: 2-8

Many teachers use the first few weeks of school for community-building and getting-to-know-you activities. To integrate

language arts into this community-building theme, I begin my writing program by having the children write and publish their own autobiographies. The first year that I did this, however, a problem arose when I tried to find a suitable model of an autobiography to read to the class before they began their own writing. My solution—I wrote my own autobiography!

MATERIALS:

- the implements with which your class generally writes and illustrates
- your imagination and facts about yourself—your family, interests, hobbies, childhood, early schooling, etc.

METHOD:

1. Follow the same writing procedures you ask of your children—writing, editing, having a peer conference with a colleague, revising, illustrating, and designing the cover.
2. On the first day of school, talk to your class about autobiographies—the stories that people write about their own lives and that others read to find out about the author's life.
3. Read your autobiography to the class as a way of introducing yourself.
4. Kick-off your writing program by having the children begin to write their own autobiographies.

This book becomes a popular one to sign out and take home to read. By the time Open House arrives a few weeks into the school year, many children have read it at home and their parents already “know” me—and the interests that we share! There are personal benefits as well. Creating a book this way makes you aware of the feelings involved in the actual publishing experience and the risks involved in putting your work out for public scrutiny. In all my years of teaching writing to small children, I think this is the most valuable

lesson I have learned about the writing process.

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THE EVILS OF BOOK REPORTS

GRADES 4-12

This is one of the most controversial lessons I'll ever write...but also one of the most important.

I never give book reports to my students. Never.

There are some basic premises to my position:

- A MAJOR GOAL OF MOST TEACHERS IS TO GET STUDENTS TO ENJOY READING.
- ALMOST EVERY TIME A BOOK IS ASSIGNED, THE STUDENTS ARE REQUIRED TO WRITE A REPORT
- STUDENTS HATE BOOK REPORTS
- STUDENTS ASSOCIATE BOOK REPORTS WITH READING
- STUDENTS DO NOT VOLUNTARILY READ

This may sound simplistic...and it is. But it's also basic psychology—the students associate a negative experience (reports) with an action (reading books), and therefore, hate the action!

Think about it...how often, when you assign a book, do the students immediately inquire whether or not they have to do a report! And when they find out that a report IS required, how

excited are they to now read?

So how do we get the students to read? Or, as many teachers may ask, how do we check up on whether or not they are reading? Here are a number of random ideas:

- Require the students to keep a reading book with them at all times, as part of their supplies. They read the book during their free time. When a book is easily accessible, they will naturally read.
- Assign genres of books as usual. However, instead of a report to check up on them, sit down and talk to the student, one-on-one. It's easy—you'll get all of the information you need, and you'll also develop a closer relationship with the student. This one-on-one only has to take a few minutes and can occur over a couple of weeks, during students' work time.
- Participate in book clubs (i.e. Scholastic, Troll). The students are picking their own books, and paying for them, and therefore, are more apt to read them.
- Start a classroom "card catalogue". After each student reads a book, he/she makes a card with a short summary for other students in the class to read. This is an easy way to check on the students reading!
- If you MUST give a project, use a type of book "project"—anything but a "written report". This can be a diorama, book poster, book cover, etc.

I have found that my students continuously read. They are always purchasing book club books, and their parents often relate back to me that the students get upset because they don't have enough time to read (when I give them too much homework). Reading has become a pleasurable experience—not one associated with a dreaded "book report"!

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