

Literacy Lead

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Daybook Assessment

After a long absence, I offer another literacy lead ©... the 8th in a series on daybooks.

A key component to daybooks is self-assessment. By having the thinking in one central place, students can refer back to their ideas all year. Writers look back over the pages and see progress. The students write reflections in the daybook to be shared with others, reread for inspiration, and referenced for tests. *The evaluations become as important for growth as the work itself.*

For example, often I ask my students to write answers to two questions: “What have you learned? How will you apply the learning to your life?” My kids refer to this evaluation as their “I-learned, I-will statements.” It isn’t enough to be able to regurgitate what they learned back to me. (i.e. “I learned that we should read challenging, easy and just-right books.”) I want them to think about how they will use the new information. (i.e. “When I go to the library, I will carefully select what to read. I’ll make sure I’m not reading the same level book all the time.”)

I also ask students to keep a Reading Goal page. When I listen to a child read, I talk to her a little about the book, just to reinforce that books are fun to read and interesting! Then I praise something the child did well...usually self-correcting a word. Often, I praise her understanding of the plot or her ability to discuss the changes she sees in a character over time. Then, I use a minute of my time to set a goal for the reader. If I have taken a few minutes to listen to a student read, then it makes sense to offer her my educated counsel. I record the goal AND the child records the goal in the daybook. We can both refer to the goal to see if progress is made or to set new ones. (For more on possible goals, see list below.)

While I spot check to see if my students are writing, I don’t grade the daybooks any more. So I can monitor progress, the children must date entries as they add to their notebooks. I do ask my students to defend that they are improving as readers, writers, and thinkers (more on that in future Literacy Leads). In those essays, students point me to specific pages to read as evidence of growth. They may ask me to read an I-Learned, I-Will statement that was a new idea. Or, they may sticky note a page they made up, something they didn’t see from a video, another classmate or me. For example, a child found that gluing ads into his notebook served as story starters for him. Some students discover that they want to spend their year time creating long projects like novels. Two boys discovered non-fiction books one year and filled their writing notebooks with facts they learned from their reading. Their writing improved dramatically as they read more and recorded new learning in their notebooks.

Monitoring the class while students share also gives me insight as to what is in the daybook. Asking children to leave their books on their desks open to a specific page for me to read helps me stay informed as to their progress. I get a good look at daybooks as I conference with children. As long as students can explain what they’re learning, I am satisfied that the daybook is working and I don’t feel the need (any more) to give a point value to every page.

Daybooks have been around a long time although they are new to my classroom. As a result, workbooks are gone. Through the consistent use of daybooks, ideas are discovered, created and nurtured through collecting regularly both at home and in school. The students work on a variety of tasks at one time and, like the real world, meet deadlines for each project. The container storing the preparation work is the daybook. It is the place where theories and evidence are held. It is in the daybook that students write to learn and remember but, mostly, to figure things out.

Sample Reading Goals

1. Sound out the word starting in the middle or with a chunk you know. Look for recognizable chunks. Example: formidable = form +id + able
2. Look through the whole word. Match the beginning, ending and middle to the letter sounds.
3. Skip words and then come back to make sense of the text. Read on beyond where meaning breaks down to see if the text helps understanding.
4. Skip names or make up a pseudonym.
5. Read slower.
6. Reread. Reread again.
7. Read faster. Read in chunks or phrases, not word for word.
8. Don't try to read every word correctly right now. Look ahead and try to build speed.
9. Try substituting words that make sense.
10. Try to think about where you have seen or heard the unfamiliar word before.
11. When the reading doesn't make sense, stop and think a minute. See if you can figure out what is happening. If not, mark the spot to bring to group and ask about.
12. Use the sound spelling in the dictionary to figure out how to say words. Once you know how to say them, you may recognize them.
13. Look up words in the dictionary or ask someone what a word means.
14. Know when to guess and when to take the time to look up a word.
15. Keep vocabulary pages in your daybook. Record the new word, the page and sentence, and a guess about what it means. Ask someone, look it up or bring it to group to ask about.
16. Find a book you like to read. Use other students, teachers and media specialists for help.
17. Read 20-40 minutes per day. Or, increase your independent reading time.

