

Project Read

Janet Carsetti

Teaching writing to young people can be a difficult task. Teaching writing to young people who are deficient in reading and listening skills is indeed a frustrating task--and one that challenges hundreds of teachers who work with youthful offenders. Providing motivational activities for functionally illiterate "troubled youth" has been a major task of **Project READ** during the past five years.

Funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, **Project READ** is a national literacy and arts program for troubled youth. The purpose of the project is to provide young people in the juvenile justice system with the skills they will need to become self-sufficient in a literate society. Since its inception early in 1976, **Project READ** has worked with close to 40,000 troubled youth from 400 institutions, alternative schools, and community-based programs in 50 states and the District of Columbia. Nearly 600 teachers have participated in teacher training workshops while more than 200,000 paperback books have been distributed to young people across the nation.

The results of testing well over 10,000 youthful offenders indicate that their reading ability is not only far below their grade level but also far below their language potential. While the national reading competence for this population has risen from a third-grade level to almost a sixth-grade level, most of these young people lack the communication skills necessary for survival in a literate society. It is important, however, to recognize that these data also indicate that **Project READ** students **can read, but don't**. Therefore a major task of **Project READ** has been to provide a highly motivating approach to teaching functional literacy to reluctant, yet able learners.

The following are some activities that motivate reluctant readers.

- a. Use methods and techniques different from the approach(es) used the first time around. For example, a student who hated a reading text in the primary grades should not be taught via the basal reader approach.
- b. Permit students to make decisions about the selection, quantity, and difficulty of each learning task.
- c. Focus on the strengths of students, not on their weaknesses.

Moreover, teachers working with reluctant learners must adopt a philosophy of **acceptance** as well as a positive self-fulfilling prophecy that all students **can** improve. The activities designed to improve functional literacy skills should also be relevant to everyday tasks and should employ techniques that build all communication skills--speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Following are a number of motivational activities used successfully by **Project READ** to improve functional literacy skills.

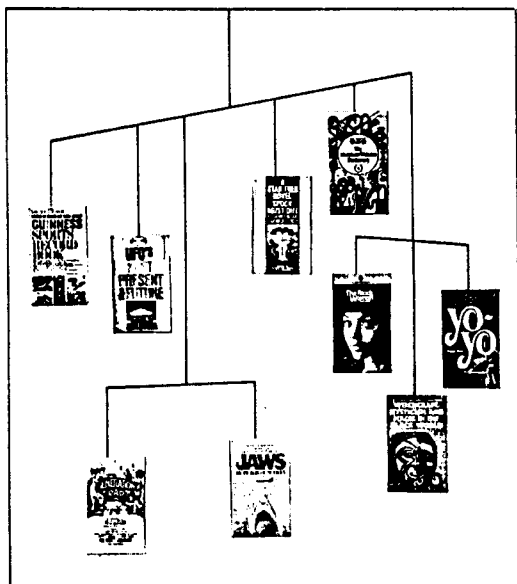
Non-Stop Reading

Each school participating in **Project READ** receives hundreds of paperback books to use during a daily thirty minute non-stop reading period. These books are grouped by interest categories, not readability; and they represent situations that teenage readers are concerned about--such as sex, drugs, career, sports, biographies, puzzles, and movie-T.V. tie-ins. Best sellers are included as well as reference books. During 1979 the

top books from a list of 800 included these:

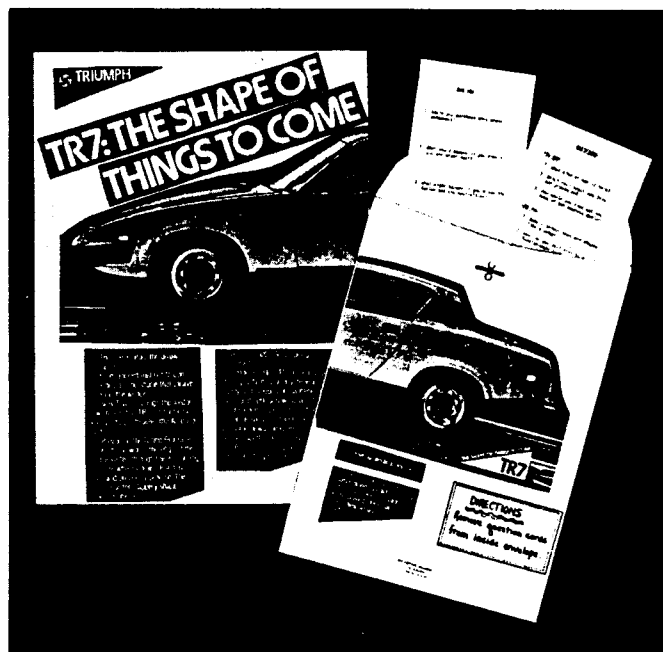
- Grease
- The Hobbit
- Sarah T: Portrait of a Teenage Alcoholic
- Rock On
- Our Bodies, Ourselves
- Coma
- Webster's New School and Office Dictionary
- How to Prepare for the G.E.D.
- Go Ask Alice
- Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman
- Guinness Book of World Records
- Drugs: What They Are, How They Look, What They Do

Non-stop reading gives students (and teachers) a time to practice reading during the school day and it stimulates intellectual and emotional interests. The importance of reading becomes apparent to the most reluctant reader when teachers, staff, administrators, janitors, and cooks stop what they are doing and read with the students each day. As a result of this "practicing," students have tripled their growth in reading as measured by standardized tests. Students who previously gained one year in reading for every two years in school are now gaining one or two years for each year in school. More importantly, they are learning vicariously through the books. As one student who read Run, Shelley, Run stated: "If I had read that book [before] I never would have run."



Functional Reading Packets

Teachers design their own learning materials from labels, applications, telephone books, menus, order forms, advertisements, T.V. guides, newspapers, catalogs, and the like. To provide for students at various stages of skill development each packet has activities at a factual, interpretive, and problem solving level. Similarly, students may respond to questions by telling a friend, matching cards with pictures, words, or phrases, or by writing. A system of self-correction built into each packet allows for immediate feedback.




Music Activities

Assuming that most young people enjoy music, activities are designed using music, which the students select, to reinforce listening, reading, and/or writing skills. For example, while listening to a song, students may be asked to fill in the missing words on an accompanying activity sheet. Likewise, they may listen for synonyms or antonyms of key words in the song; answer questions at the literal or interpretive level of thinking; listen for rhyming words; play a form of Bingo while crossing out consonants, blends, or digraphs; learn to categorize elements in a song (places, people, vegetables, etc.); or even discuss (or write) their feelings about the message a song conveys.

Native North American Child

Bully Sainte-Marie



Listen for the names of Native North American Tribes. Fill in the blanks.

S _ _ m _ _ _ _ _	Ch _ _ _ _ _
A _ _ _ ch _ _	M _ _ sk _ _ _
P _ _ _ _ _	F _ _ _ _
Sh _ sh _ _ _	P _ _ _ _ q _ _ _ y
N _ _ _ _ _	W _ _ _ _ o _ _
C _ _ _ _ ch _ _	H _ _ _ _ _
H _ _ _ _ _	M _ _ _ _ _
E _ _ _ _ _	S _ _ _ _ x
C _ _ _ _ _	S _ _ _ x
T _ _ _ _ r _ _ _	Ch _ _ _ _ _
Y _ q _ _ _	Oj _ _ _ _ _
P _ _ _ P _ _ _	Ch _ _ _ _ _
O _ _ _ _ a _ _	M _ _ M _ _ _
	M _ _ _ _ _

From the Journal of North American Indian Studies, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1974

TOMORROW

from the Broadway Musical "Annie"

Directions: Listen for the rhyming words.

tomorr ow gr in

sorr ow ch in


s un s ay

n one m ay

 d ay

 aw ay


 gr ay



Queen of the Silver Dollar

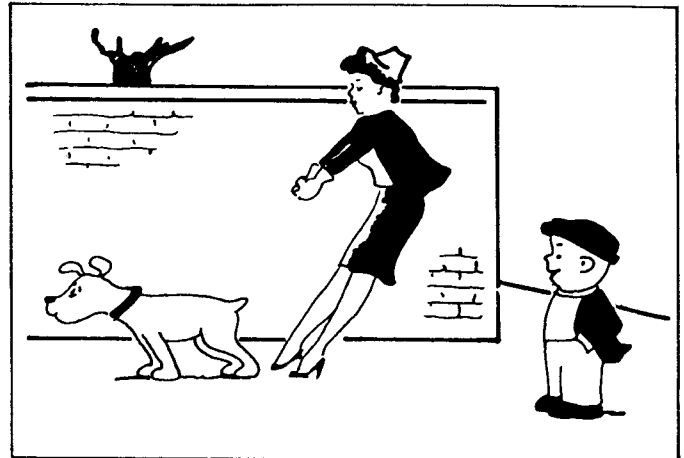
by Emilou Harris

1. The Queen arrives in splendor at _____ o'clock.
2. Her chariot is a _____.
3. The chariot stops right down the _____ (rhymes with clock).
4. She rules a _____ and it's _____.
5. Her royal dress is made of _____.
6. Her royal jewels are _____.
7. Her shoes are _____.
8. Her scepter is a _____ and _____.
9. A _____ is her throne.
10. A _____ flock around her.



Comic Strips

Using comics from the Sunday newspaper, students can develop vocabulary by matching a comic frame with a word, or develop comprehension through a more complex system. Teachers design packets containing one comic strip cut into frames. Students may be asked to sequence the frames; answer questions (orally or in writing) that teachers have written on the back of certain frames; develop captions or dialogue for frames which have none; and/or rewrite the dialogue.



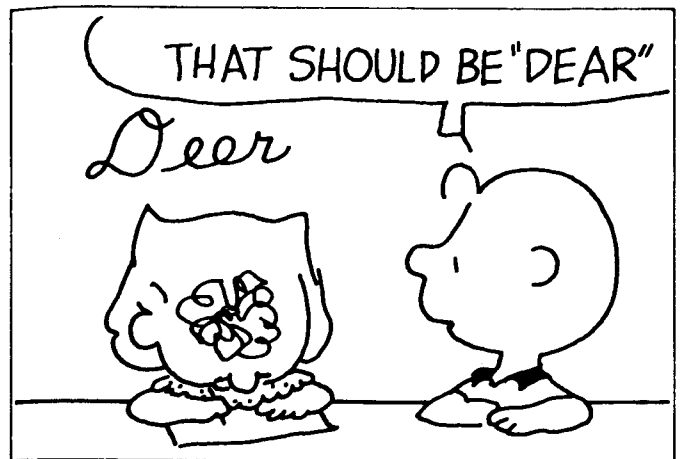
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2. What is missing from this picture?



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Write what you think was in the real note.



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1. Write a paragraph beginning with "Deer." Then write another beginning with "Dear."

Warm-up Writing Exercises

In addition to writing for ten minutes a day (see Daniel Fader's article, p. 53) in a log to practice writing, students are encouraged to write by providing them with short, fast, fun activities such as this: You have 20 seconds to make a list [of any one idea].

Make a list of
sounds in a department store
sounds heard on a farm
evening sounds
sounds at an airport
kitchen sounds
things you do at a park
things that sparkle
adjectives that
describe people you
like

Make a list of
things that breathe
things that reflect
things that chill
things that harmonize
things that hurt
things you do at a
restaurant
things you could do with
a list
things you love
things found in two's

Make a list of
delicious things
morning things
squishy things
vegetables
car parts
bike parts

"When the list is complete, write a sentence using as many words as possible."

Writing Name Poetry in Small Groups

Select one person's name and have students each contribute one line to the poem by starting their lines with the letters of the person's first name.

L oving you
I s
S o much of
A reward.

Round Robin Paragraphs

One person writes a sentence (about anything), then passes it on. Each subsequent writer adds something to expand the idea.

Shape Poetry

Draw a figure such as a star, circle, square, or abstract design on an 8-1/2 X 11 piece of paper. Have students write a poem about the shape while writing around the shape.

While all these ideas help motivate reluctant learners, they also provide them with skills necessary for survival in a literate society--skills necessary to complete job applications; read leases, street and road signs; use telephone books, read newspapers, labels and directions on food packages. Realizing that to be literate is more than knowing how to read and write, **Project READ** encourages the development of other qualities in the teaching and learning processes, such as sensitivity, respect, confidence, self-discipline, and self-appreciation. We have learned that students read and write best when they feel good. When a student's creativity is encouraged, recognized, and directed, learning becomes **fun**, not frustration.

Janet Carsetti is Director of Project READ, Inc., a national literacy and arts program for troubled youth funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Project READ, Inc. is based in Washington, D.C.
