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All Grades

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USING NOVEL STUDIES IN THE CLASSROOM

by Margaret Brewer

*Practical ideas for using novels in the classroom,
with the whole class, groups and
independent activities.*



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INTRODUCTION

Teachers have used novels in the classroom for many years. In the early grades teachers read stories to their students, setting a pattern to interest the children in reading. In later grades students learn to read novels for themselves.

The publishing world has facilitated this by publishing novels suitable for all grades and reading abilities. Picture books with a text that tells a story are a child's first introduction to novels and they can then move on to early reader chapter books. Novels vary in length, the number of pictures included and the size of the print so it is relatively easy to choose novels for young readers. There are also novels with a low vocabulary and high interest level for older students who have difficulty or lack interest in reading. Nor should we forget the various adaptation of the classics, such as *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Little Women* and *A Christmas Carol*.

Each year a large number of novels for children of all reading abilities and interests are published and this gives teachers a wide range of novels to choose from for use in their classroom. However, as the constraints of staying within a given budget have to be taken into consideration choices often have to be confined to novels that will not "date" or lose their popularity too quickly. Some novels have been popular for many years, others are newcomers to classroom use. *Bridge to Terabithia* and *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* are old favorites but *Al Capone Does My Shirts* and *Double Fudge* are more recent additions.

Novels can be used to teach many concepts associated with other subject areas, such as citizenship, social studies and history. They can also be used to provide additional material for other academic areas. Reading historical novels can provide valuable background material for study of a specific era.

A novel study is a collection of activities written to accompany a novel. Some are written for a specific novel, others have activities that can be used with any novel. Such a unit can incorporate vocabulary work, grammar and punctuation exercises, creative writing and research connected with the novel. These exercises are usually done, together with comprehension work, as the novel is read.

However, we should try to make sure that the work that accompanies a novel does not become so arduous that it detracts from the pleasure of reading the novel. We should always aim to make read as enjoyable as possible for the student. Only then will students continue to read for pleasure, rather than because it has been assigned.

There are many different ways of using novels in the classroom and this unit will suggest ways to do this. Also included are activity sheets, evaluation sheets and rubrics for evaluation.