



Effective Grammar School Teaching & Leadership with Lori Jill Keeler

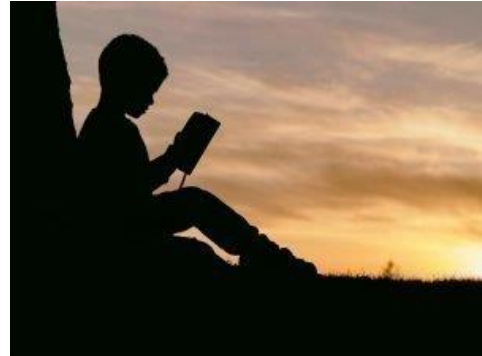
Lesson 9: Teaching Reading in the Grammar School (Part 2)

Outline:

More Effective Reading Instruction (Part 2)

Introduction

- The first session (Lesson 8) was about Reading Strategies and focused mainly on K-3.
- This session focuses on 4-6 grades.



How to Choose Good Books

- It is not always best for teachers to choose the books that they like best.
- In 2010, it was estimated that 129 million books had been published.
- The Library of Congress houses 18 million books.
- American publishers add 200,000 books per year.
- For every one book you choose, there are thousands you are not choosing. So how do we decide which books to select for our students?

Criteria for Choosing Good Books for Middle Students:

- **The timing of the book:**
 - Is it the right time to give students this book for study?
 - Is the book appropriate for the developmental level of the student? You're looking for books that offer just the right amount of challenge and just the right amount of comfort. A book should march a bit ahead of the student's current development, leading them forward.
 - Consider the syntax, vocabulary, and theme, and whether the book is spiritually appropriate for that time in the student's life.
 - Students need time to grow their biblical worldview before they should exercise that worldview against the force of culture displayed in many books.
 - Sometimes it is wise to humbly postpone the reading of a book until a later time.
 - If the book is too easy - meaning the student can understand theme, characterization, plot on his own - it is probably not a good choice for classroom study at that point. You even run the risk of spoiling the book for the students.



- The book should serve well as a window to other cultures and should pose intellectual challenges demanding that students stretch and grow.
- **Integration with curricula and the logic phase:**
 - Know what students are studying in history.
 - How might reading books fit in and integrate with what students are learning in history, science, or Bible? E.g. You might read *The Bronze Bow* (which is set in ancient Rome) when the students are studying the gospels.
 - Seek books that prepare them to think logically—like *Sherlock Holmes (The Hound of Baskervilles)* in 6th grade, which features the scientific method and logical thinking. *The Phantom Tollbooth* works well for the same purposes.
- **Books that encourage a delight in good literature:**
 - Problem: Avoid constant proclamations that “reading is fun.” Students may start comparing the book you give them to other things they think are “fun” like video games or sports activities that are more obviously appealing.
 - Reading will be hard at times but will become something that is rewarding and that they will love. Some things are loved greatly in part because of the hard work entailed.

Building on the Foundation

- Build on the grammar of literature with which students should already be familiar; teach it to them if they are not familiar with it.
- Even the most excellent instruction of reading in the primary grades does not guarantee that students will successfully make the shift to higher-level literacy demand.
- Students need to learn how to organize and apply background knowledge as the context for their reading.
- Teach more complex reading strategies for more complex texts.
- Students need to get their information more efficiently from the text and monitor and adjust their reading as needed.
- Primary students learn to read.
- Upper elementary students read to learn.
- Changes that come with more complex texts:
 - Increase in overall length of the text
 - Longer and more difficult sentences; e.g., more figurative language, paraphrase difficult dialectics

Lesson Planning

- Set overall goals (K-12; 4-8, etc.)
- Set yearly goals for your grade level
- Engage in long-range planning
- Develop daily lesson plans



Helpful Strategies for Teaching Reading in the Middle Years

- Use guided reading questions.
- Learn effective ways to assess comprehension: e.g., frequent reading comprehension quizzes; three-sentence paragraph summaries of the chapter; “What would you have titled this chapter?”
- Tap students’ prior knowledge: e.g., “Write about a time when you stood up to authority” as a way of preparing them for Antigone.
- Address vocabulary struggles: don’t avoid these; remind students they will encounter vocabulary they don’t know as the normal course of reading. Have dictionaries available to students; create a list of difficult vocabulary words ahead of time.
- Teach students how to negotiate complex syntax. Reading long sentences with difficult syntax will be challenging for students; have them slow down and develop the habit of re-reading when a sentence doesn’t make sense right away. Help students by parsing the sentence with them, or by having them paraphrasing it. Hold students accountable for actually reading (accountability quizzes, looking at the notes in their marginalia).

Developing Literary Discernment

- Discernment means to test everything.
- Discernment means to hold fast to what is good.
- Discernment means to abstain from every form of evil (1 Thess. 5:21).
- Discernment is “the skill of comparing what we hear or read to God’s work to discover its authenticity according to revealed truth.”
- We can read by the light of spiritual truth of the gospel and with the mind of Christ. We are now capable of reading with discernment.
- Treasure what is true, good, and beautiful and reject what is evil.
- There is no real tension between words and images, but students will need to learn patience to find the meaning in words. “It takes words to give the real truth and meaning behind what is seen.”
- As a word-centered people, we must learn to prize language and reading in a visually-dominated world.
- Therefore, we must teach students to love words.

Biblical Paradigm for Shaping Worldview

- “Human beings require stories to give meaning to the facts of their existence.”
–Neil Postman
- Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration: These make up the biblical narrative that shapes a Christian worldview and enable students to become discerning readers.
- Before students can become discerning, they must be informed, and informed by a direct study of Scripture.