**My Kid is a Gifted Reader. Help!**

A Parents’ Night Presentation

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In working with parents and teachers of gifted learners, the most common question I am asked is: *How do I find appropriate but challenging reading material for my child (my students*)? Tonight, we will look briefly at the nature of gifted readers; characteristics of literature most appropriate for gifted readers; and review suggestions from current literature.

It is easy to summarize my approach to reading for gifted learners:

***1. Know your reader!***

***2. Know your literature!***

***3. Make the Match!***

**Before We Begin: A Note on Literacy**

While literacy has long held our attention, it appears to me that recently this concern has been re-energized. We seem to be especially concerned about what literacy for the gifted learner is and what it would look like. I offer here a summary of what I have shared with teachers and administrators.

1. First and foremost, how we define literacy affects classroom instruction;
2. Definitions of literacy change with time and it changes and develops within an individual’s life-time;
3. Very quickly, there are general four types of literacy definitions:
   1. Functional perspective: the basics – the skills needed for daily living;
   2. Cultural literacy: includes awareness of cultural heritage;
   3. Literacy for personal growth: through language we grow into an understanding of ourselves, our cultural, and our world.
   4. Critical literacy: an examination of language to understanding and to rationalizing our social conditions.
4. This leads us to four ways that we understand literacy:
   1. Literacy as a set of skills: Reading, Writing, Oral Skills and Numeracy Skills to enable us to access knowledge and information
   2. Literacy with a focus on application and practice of skills. There is no one set of literacy skills – they are viewed within a social and/or cultural context.
   3. Literacy as a learning process: Literacy is viewed as a process rather than a product and critical reflection is important.
   4. Literacy as text. We view literacy as subject matter and our focus in on communicating socio-political practices.
5. For the purpose of “school,” a combination of these approaches have identified some conventional literacies:
   1. Reading
      1. Phonemic awareness
      2. Phonics
      3. Reading fluency
      4. Vocabulary development
      5. Comprehension strategies [NICHHD: *National Reading Panel,* 2000]
   2. Writing
   3. Math skills
6. To these, we have added some 21st Century Skills:
   1. Collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving
   2. Information literacy
      1. Information Literacy is knowing when and why you need information, where to find it , and
      2. How to evaluate, use, and communicate it in an ethical manner.
   3. Media literacy
      1. Media literacy consists of a series of communication competencies, including the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate information in a variety of forms, including print and non-print messages. [National Association for Media Literacy Education]
      2. Media refers to all electronic or digital means and print or artistic visuals used to transmit messages. Also called digital literacy.
7. What are the implications for the gifted learner/reader:
   1. Primarily, we foster the concept that literacies, skills, and disciplines are pursued as tools to enhance our [understanding](http://www.noodletools.com/debbie/literacies/rhetoric/understand.html) of important questions, topics, and themes.
   2. Today's readers develop literacy by reading the words and symbols in today’s world as well as those of the past.
   3. Today’s readers compare, evaluate, and interpret **multiple** representations from a variety of disciplines and subjects, including texts, photographs, artwork, media, and data.
   4. Today’s readers choose and modify their communication based on an analysis of each [situation](http://www.noodletools.com/debbie/literacies/rhetoric/rhetsit.html).
   5. Today’s readers create [points-of-view](http://www.noodletools.com/debbie/literacies/rhetoric/pointofview.html) by interacting with individuals, texts (of whatever type) and the platform of communication and collaboration.
8. This is basically an advanced and more in-depth concept of what we should expect from all learners.

**Now Let’s Turn to Nurturing and Guiding Gifted Readers**

**What are the Characteristics of the Gifted Reader? Who are they?**

* They have a passion for reading;
* They learn to read earlier often spontaneously in preschool;
* They learn to read independently soon after classroom instruction begins;
* They read better (advanced reading abilities) and at a faster rate;
* They read materials beyond the norm for their age;
* They have an advanced and large vocabulary;
* They require less drill – **if any** – to master techniques of the reading process;
* They read longer;
* They read a greater variety of literature;
* Their reading interests differ considerably from their age group;
* They are more likely to branch out from realistic fiction to fantasy, historical, fiction, and biography.
* They continue to be voracious readers into senior high and adulthood;

From my “Quick” Review of the Literature: Halsted: 2009; Gross: 1994; Hawkins: 1983; Whitehead: 1984

**What are the Characteristics of Books Most Suited for the Gifted?**

* Books that use a high level of language and vocabulary;
* Books that have pronunciation guides, maps, and glossaries (“notes” at the end);
* Books that utilize the full array of literary devices;
* Books that use descriptive words that stimulate strong visual images;
* Books that are written by authors who delight in the use of language and the expression of nuances;
* Books that provide language patterns and vocabularies from other times and places;
* Books whose structure puts the mind to work;
* Books whose settings evoke an experience of other lifestyles;
* Books that present unresolved problems and the reader must make some conclusions.

From Judith Halsted: *Some of My Best Friends are Books* (2009)

**An Observation: Halsted’s Characteristics suggest literature of a high standard:**

* + Our first response might be to turn to the classics;
  + But the classics do not deal with contemporary issues and interests of our learners;
  + Our readers have not had the life experiences to appreciate and interpret these literary treasures fully;
  + Remember when and for whom many of the classics were written: highly educated adults at the turn of the 19th Century for the most part);
  + Remember that children’s classics were often written for moral teaching purposes and that much of so-called children’s classics were originally intended for older audiences;
  + Research has shown that too early an introduction to the classics can easily turn off readers and kill their joy of reading.

**So What are our Goals for Gifted Readers?** *I think that we can agree that our goal is to help every single reader, especially gifted readers, become skilled, passionate, habitual, critical and creative readers.*

* **Nancie Atwell** (2007) calls this stance *The Personal Art of Reading*.
  + - This involves helping readers to choose books, develop and refine their literary criteria, and carve out identities for themselves as readers.
    - The goal is that every reader is able to say: “These are my favorite authors, genres, books, and characters this year, and this is why.”
    - Personal preference and choice make up the foundation for reading to become a *personal art*.
* **Donalyn Miller** (2009) holds to this same/similar conclusion. In waking-up “dormant readers” and nurturing developing readers, she suggests that we create environments that provide:
* Hours and hours of time spent reading;
* The freedom for readers to make their own choices in what they want to read;
* A classroom environment that values independent reading.

***My Suggestions to Parents to Nurture and Support Their Gifted Readers***

1. My first and perhaps foremost suggestion: Read yourself!
   1. Let your kids see you read;
   2. Tell them about your reading and reading habits;
   3. Talk about the book you are now reading.
2. Create an environment in which a love of books and reading is natural.
   1. Value reading;
   2. Turn off television and gaming or at least restrict time;
   3. Have a family reading time.
3. Read aloud to your kids or let them read to you and this is **not** just for the young ones.
4. Allow your readers to select their own reading material. Provide guidance when needed.
5. Make books available. The research shows that owing books is a great reading motivator.
6. Visit book stores together.
7. Check out reliable book lists such as the American Library Association (ALA) Award Lists and the National Book Awards.
8. Try to read before you recommend, if at all possible, to check language, situations, and possible situations with over-sensitivities.
9. Talk with your reader about what they are reading – best if you have read or are reading the same book together.
10. Explore genres. Don’t get stuck, but it’s okay to find your favorite genre, author, etc.
11. Take parental responsibility for the amount of television time, texting time, and gaming time in which your child is involved.

**References**

Atwell, Nancie. (2007). *The Reading Zone: How to Help Kids Become Skilled, Passionate, Habitual, Critical Readers*. New York: Scholastic.

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