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# Predictable text with primary age children in a Title One reading program

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When predictable text is implemented into a Title One reading program, students can more successfully interact with text. This sense of achievement motivates them to become actively engaged in reading experiences. As a result, students became better readers because they are reading more. Also, they became improved writers because the writing and reading processes have many common tasks.

**Predictable Text with Primary Age Children in a  
Title One Reading Program**

**A Journal Article  
Submitted to the  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
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**by**

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## Abstract

Readers create meaning in print through the process of prediction. Prediction and comprehension are intricately tied together. Reading predictable books helps young readers comprehend text because their expectations are repeatedly confirmed. Predictable text brings children naturally into the reading process and allows them to process print much as mature readers.

When predictable text is implemented into a Title One reading program, students can more successfully interact with text. This sense of achievement motivates them to become actively engaged in reading experiences. As a result, students became better readers because they are reading more. Also, they became improved writers because the writing and reading processes have many common tasks.

Nurturing children's emerging literacy is currently a well-publicized goal. At the same time, increasing numbers of children are entering school who are likely to experience difficulty learning to read. To put a more positive perspective on young children's learning, teachers need to consider that children enter school with prior knowledge and language abilities. Teachers can nurture children's emerging literacy by providing opportunities to engage in meaningful whole language experiences. Children need to be immersed in a rich language environment with a quality literature base (Goodman, 1996).

Predictable literature fosters young children's oral language and reading and writing abilities. The implementation of predictable texts in a Title One reading program makes learning to read easier and more enjoyable for these at-risk students because predictable texts provide natural learning with whole units, not fragmented pieces (Routman, 1991).

The purpose of this paper is to explore predictable literature as a means of supporting young children's language growth in a Title One reading program. The value of predictable text will be considered and then related to specific predictable literature with some suggested implementation.

## Reading as Prediction

Frank Smith (1994) relates that there is only one way in which language can be comprehended and that is by the audience bringing meaning to it through the process of prediction. In the reading process, prediction is a critical factor for a number of reasons: It allows readers “to keep ahead of the text, to project possibilities, to reduce ambiguity, and to eliminate irrelevant alternatives” (p. 17). Prediction and comprehension are closely related. Prediction involves asking questions, and comprehension occurs when the answers to those questions are found.

Ken Goodman (1996) makes reference to the role of predictions in reading.

As active readers, we don't wait until we have all the information before we make up our minds. We are constantly anticipating where a text is going, what will come next, what we will see, what structures we will encounter, and we make inferences from what we think we've seen and predicted. Our predictions are based on the information we've selected and sampled from the text, but they also guide the process of selecting and sampling (p. 113).

Effective readers engage in many prediction strategies while they read. These strategies span the range from metacognitive ideas (e.g., Knowing Kevin Henkes and his stories, this story will be about a mouse

who has the qualities of a child and his/her problems.), to predicting events in a story (e.g., I think the girl will learn not to be afraid of thunderstorms.), to confirming the expected word or phonic elements (e.g., Max was sent to his b\_\_\_\_\_). Students' prior experiences with stories, print, and life in general enable them to efficiently process the text in this manner (Smith, 1994).

Prediction tasks are learned through interaction with stories. Reading predictable books helps young readers to flow fluently through the text because their expectations about what comes next are repeatedly confirmed. These stories' familiar content and structure and the often repetitious, cyclical sequencing make them predictable (Thogmartin, 1995).

Experiences with quality predictable books can provide motivation for young readers to engage in the reading process (Huck, Hepler, Hickman, & Kiefer, 1997). These texts appeal to children and offer a play activity for young readers. This meaningful practice not only fosters comprehension of the text but also children's fluency in oral reading and confidence in their ability to engage in the reading process (Rhodes, 1981). Predictable books can offer young children in Title One programs many successful experiences with reading tasks.



## Reading Instruction for Young Children in Title One Programs

Quality literature should be the base of a print-rich learning environment for young children. Literature serves as a model of language and provides strong motivation for learning to read and write. Children who are introduced to literature at an early age develop sophisticated language structures. These experiences nurture background knowledge, appreciation of books, and interest in learning to read (Huck et al., 1997).

Morrow (1989) stresses the importance of providing children with daily opportunities to experience, discuss, and share literature. Routman (1991) relates that the presentation of quality literature experiences promotes children's thinking-language abilities and provides informational and pastime experiences.

A rich literature-based language environment that fosters young children's emerging literacy involves reading aloud to children. Listening to stories introduces children to patterns of language, extends their vocabulary and comprehension abilities, and influences writing abilities (Huck et al, 1997).

When children reach school, they frequently experience an entirely different learning situation. Instead of continuing whole-to-part learning in which they have played an active role in their home life, they are suddenly thrust into a situation in which learning is part-to-whole. According to Ken

Goodman (1986), schools have tended to break language into bits and pieces on the premise that it seemed easier for children to learn simple little units. Unfortunately, such instruction loses the real purpose of language because pieces of language are unrelated to the needs and experiences of children.

Engaging in meaningful whole language experiences allows students to continue their search for literacy in a natural way. Before entering school, children's emerging literacy is fostered by experiences with whole units of language. These children who have confidently owned their reading experiences may find to their disappointment that reading in school means learning the alphabet and isolated skills (Goodman, 1996).

Young students in Title One reading programs benefit from experiences to create meaning. However, in many programs, these underachievers are involved less in the reading process and spend more time on isolated skill exercises and drill (Cambourne, 1988). Frank Smith (1994) believes that the more children are involved in the process of reading the more they will learn to read.

Title One remedial reading students need many successes in their reading instructional program because they do not see themselves as competent readers. Reading is not functional for them. Many of these

students do not believe that reading can help them in school and in daily life (Worth, 1996).

Title One students need access to texts that are meaningful to them. Reading experiences open another way of learning about the world to them. Because background knowledge and experience are so important to reading comprehension, the more children read the more they increase the prior knowledge that they bring to reading experience (Braunger & Lewis, 1997).

Students who struggle in learning to read also need time to engage in the reading process in order to grow to enjoy reading and to choose it for both learning and pleasure. They also need appropriate teacher-directed instruction and modeling of the reading process (Braunger & Lewis, 1997). Clay (1991) gives a special plea to teachers to provide literacy activities that can become self-managed, self-monitored, self-corrected, and self-extending for children, even for those who initially find transitions into written language difficult and confusing.

In order to feel successful, children need opportunities to respond to quality literature. Related expressive activities can extend the understanding and enjoyment of literature without resorting to worksheets (Routman, 1991).

Title One students also need opportunities to interact with peers and adults in many different ways concerning the meaning they have created through involvement in the reading process. Cambourne (1988) says that this interaction, an engagement in the reading process, has four essential elements:

1. Learners must be seen as potential doers both personally and by those around them.
  2. Learners must see learning as personally meaningful.
  3. Learning must be perceived by the learner as being low risk.
  4. Learners must have the opportunity to bond with other doers
- (p. 54).

### Predictable Text in Title One

#### Reading Programs for Young Children

In Title One reading programs, predictable texts can bring young children naturally into the reading process. The repetitious sequencing of language allows children to become actively engaged and find success (Goodman, 1986). Language patterns commonly found in predictable books are: repetition, cumulative structures, sequential episodes, and rhythmic language and rhyme (Slaughter, 1993). Many wonderful pieces of quality literature are available in each category to use with Title One students.

Experiences with the predictable texts can provide opportunities for students to respond to their meaning through many types of activities: oral discussions, retelling, acting, drawing, painting, and writing. Finally, students need opportunities to share their expressive activity with their friends (Stanovich, 1994).

These characteristics of predictable text assist young children in applying what they already know about language, thus furthering their understanding of printed language. Bridge (1979) relates that predictable texts are so advantageous for emergent readers because patterned language text during initial reading instruction enables them to process the printed page in the same way as mature readers. Readers employ predicting, sampling, confirming, and disconfirming strategies. Thus, the children are able to make accurate predictions of meaning and efficient use of visual information.

Teacher-directed activities are an important part of helping children become confident readers with predictable text. Throughout all teacher-directed activities, it is paramount that students feel comfortable in the learning environment and receive as much support as needed (Rhodes, 1981).

The teacher can support children's experiences with predictable text by choosing appealing stories and by providing extending

discussions. In selecting predictable texts, Slaughter (1993) recommends these criteria:

1. The pictures support the text.
2. Large patterns of language are repeated so that one page often cues the reader as to what will be found on the next.
3. The language used is literary but natural, often sounding like oral language.
4. The story line reflects experiences in the child's world.
5. The language is patterned in such a fashion that it has rhythm that supports the reading of the text (p. vi).

Slaughter (1993) suggests that teachers use these instructional strategies as they present predictable texts to young children. As teachers introduce a carefully chosen book to young children who have limited reading ability, they can direct oral discussion of prereading predictions. Language patterns and vocabulary in the context of oral discussion can also be presented. Teachers need to make sure that the children are familiar with the vocabulary of each story. The amount of time necessary for vocabulary discussion will depend on the children's prior knowledge.

Big books are ideal for young children's reading of predictable text, but with a small group, a regular-size book is acceptable. While reading

aloud the text, the teachers can demonstrate strategies for figuring out unknown words. They can model good expression, focus on the whole text, and point to the lines of predictable text as they are read (Slaughter, 1993).

Teachers can read a book again and encourage children to chime in. As teachers hesitate at the lines of predictable text, children can participate in the reading. Over the course of continued readings, teachers can gradually withdraw support, and the children can assume more and more responsibility for reading the story. Then, teachers can begin to provide time for sustained silent reading in which the teacher models silent reading along with the students (Slaughter, 1993).

#### Implementation of Predictable Texts into a Title One Reading Program for Young Children

In my Title One reading program for primary children, I have presented many predictable texts and related expressive activities. Such reading experiences have provided meaningful activities, extended comprehension abilities, and offered children success. Examples of experiences with each category of predictable text from my program are offered.

## Repetition

The category of repetition involves sentences, phrases, or episodes repeated throughout the story. In Eric Carle's book, The Very Busy Spider, the sentences, "The spider didn't answer. She was very busy spinning her web," are repeated after each of a series of familiar animals attempt to distract the spider from spinning her web. Students can make fence posts out of brown construction paper and use puffy paint to create their own "feely" web. Students can change the setting and write The Very Busy Spider at the Zoo. Also, they can choose another setting, such as the farm or the beach, and choose different animals, including the sounds they make and the questions the animals would ask.

Bill Martin's books, Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?, and Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What Do You Hear?, follow a repetitive question and answer pattern. Identification of the new character through picture clues enables children to read the next question. A small group or an individual student can create a repetitious question and answer pattern. For example, "Striped tiger, striped tiger, what do you smell? I smell a gray wolf over the hill. Gray wolf, gray wolf, what do you smell?"

Other predictable books may repeat certain words many times, as in Teeny Tiny, retold by Jill Bennett with pictures by Tomie dePaola. "Teeny tiny" is repeated and the pictures give the clues for the next "teeny



tiny” animal or object. In Snow on Snow on Snow, by Cheryl Chapman, the little boy wakes up “under blankets, under blankets.” The little dog gets lost so they look “behind trees, behind trees, behind trees.”

A longer and more conceptually demanding text is A House is a House for Me, by Mary Hoberman. Using a simple idea, the author produces many interesting living quarters for all kinds of creatures and things. Students can explore their own environment, generate additional examples of their own, and write their own book with the final page their favorite house.

In Eric Carle’s picture book, The Grouchy Ladybug, sentences are repeated as a grouchy ladybug challenges everyone it meets. The students and the teacher can orally discuss their feelings when someone threatens them. Language and mathematics concepts can be combined with the presentation of this book. Students can make their own time booklet with a clock face stamped on each page. Students can create fingerprints with red paint to depict ladybugs and use black markers to make the dots and antennae on the bugs.

Roosters Off to See the World, by Eric Carle, uses repetition to produce a fable with a timely lesson. For dramatizing the story and reciting the repetitious lines, students can develop simple costumes: a red hat and

scarf for the rooster, whiskers and tails for the cats, green shirts for the frogs, and colanders for turtles' backs, and the fish can blow bubbles.

### Cumulative Structures

These stories with cumulative structures contain phrases, sentences, or story lines that are repeated and/or expanded. An example is Don and Audrey Wood's The Napping House in which an old lady and then several animals one by one are added to the sleeping group until a flea "bites the mouse who scares the cat."

The cumulative plot in the picture books of Laura Numeroff, If You Give a Mouse a Cookie, If You Give a Moose a Muffin, and If You Give a Pig a Pancake, provide an interesting pattern from which students can invent their own stories and illustrations. Children can also retell the Laura Numeroff stories and their own stories with flannel or magnetic pictures as prompts.

Esphyr Slobodkina's Caps for Sale is an amusing cumulative tale with a frustrated peddler and copycat monkeys. Students love to dramatize this story pretending to be the peddler and the monkeys.

The cumulative plot in the Mixed-Up Chameleon, by Eric Carle, produces a hilarious animal. A bored chameleon wishes it could be more like the other animals but soon decides it would rather be itself. Students can work together to make the characteristic parts of each animal the

chameleon wishes to be. The parts can be put together as students retell the story. Each time the story is told, the chameleon has a little different shape.

In the cumulative folk tale Too Much Noise, by Ann McGovern, Peter's house is gradually filled with animals. The repetition of the lines, "The bed creaked. The floor squeaked....," makes this story predictable. Students can easily adapt the story to a reader's theatre with many sound effects.

A longer and more complicated cumulative plot is present in the humorous tale Simple Pictures are Best, by Nancy Willard, with illustrations by Tomie dePaola. The shoemaker and his wife add one object after another until the picture becomes too silly and impossible to take. This story makes a fun dramatization experience. Students can also write about items for a cumulative story of their own.

The cumulative predictable plots of familiar folk tales, such as Henny Penny, Henny Penny, by Paul Galdone; Goldilocks and the Three Bears, by Jan Brett; The Little Red Hen, by Jean Berg; The Gingerbread Boy, by Paul Galdone; The Three Little Pigs, by James Marshall; and The Bremen-Town Musicians; by Stadtmusikanten Bremer, offer successful, pleasurable reading experiences for struggling readers. These tales are fun to read and then compare and contrast their elements.

Books of Maj Lindman with the characters, Snip, Snap, and Snurr, and Flicka, Ricka, and Dicka, first published in the 1930s, have been favorites with children for many years. In Snip, Snap, and Snurr and the Buttered Bread, the cumulative plot finally makes it possible for the children to have some butter on their bread. Students can think of three new names that rhyme or begin with the same sound and create their own story. For example, in one of my student's stories, Flat, Flop, and Flew had some interesting adventures as they fled from a flamingo. Storm, Stomp, and Steam had exciting adventures under the stairs and with a stork and a steering wheel.

### Familiar Cultural Sequences

The structures of these stories are developed through familiar cultural sequences, for example, the hours of a day, the days of the week, the months of a year or the seasons of the year. Eric Carle uses the structure of the days of the week in The Very Hungry Caterpillar. The story depicts a caterpillar eating its way through the days of the week (and the pages of the book). In The Grouchy Ladybug, by Eric Carle, time to the hour and the quarter hour is sequenced.

The months of the year form the predictable cultural sequence in the book A House for Hermit Crab, by Eric Carle. As the year progresses, the hermit crab decorates his house with various sea creatures. Students

can make hermit crabs from paper plates folded in half and then decorate them with the images of the items the hermit crab added to his house to make it beautiful. These items can be created with colorful scraps of construction paper or wallpaper and glued on. The finished product can be put on a bulletin board with a background of blue wash as done by Eric Carle for the book. Other ocean images can be added. They can be made from construction paper, wallpaper scraps, or students' drawing or painting. Students can retell A House for Hermit Crab from the illustrated month words they have created. Students can write about and draw each room in their dream home. The book can be shaped like a house.

In Maurice Sendak's rhyming Chicken Soup with Rice, each verse begins with a month, progresses through the year, and ends with adding something to the soup. As a group, students and teacher can make up their own verses using Sendak's pattern and repeated phrases.

The rhyming text in Denise Fleming's In the Small, Small Pond takes a frog's point of view of life in a small pond during each season of the year. Students can discuss the sights and sounds of another environment, such as a forest or a farm field, during each season. Simple information books can be offered for reference to assist in the discussion and perhaps a group of individual writing experience.

Hierarchies based on size, such as those in the tales of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, by Jan Brett, and The Three Billy Goats Gruff, by Peter Asbjørnsen, help children read. Repetition in these stories assist children in predicting the action of the plot. Folk tales with their patterns of three, such as three pigs, three bears, and three billy goats, support children's reading. As children recognize the story structure, they know that if the great big bear says, "Someone has been tasting my porridge," then the middle-size bear and the baby bear will both say the same thing.

#### Rhythmic Language and Rhyme Patterns

Rhythmic language and rhyme patterns can create predictable patterns in book texts and song lines. Familiar verses of Mother Goose encourage reading because they are known from listening experiences and as they are recited. Children can read the book, The Eensy Weensy Spider, by Alan Daniel, because they are familiar with the song. There was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly, Tabach Simms, is a ridiculous cumulative rhyme, which is also a folk song. Five Little Monkeys, by Juliet Kepes, contains rhythmic language that children enjoy.

The fun rhyming in Each Peach Pear Plum, by Janet Ahlberg, is combined with an "I Spy" activity. Peanut Butter and Jelly, retold by Nadine Westcott, contains simple rhyme and rhythmic language that is repeated. The teacher or a student can read the verses and then the

group can join in on the refrain. The children can use their body and hands to enact the rhythm of the story.

Eve Merriam in Blackberry Ink explores poetry as though it is a game with the sounds of language (Harms & Lettow, 1992). In the poems “Swish, Swash,” “Latch Catch,” and “Gooseberry,” strong sounds of language are created through rhythm and rhyme. They invite the audience to join in.

Laura Numeroff's Dogs Don't Wear Sneakers and Bill Morrison's Squeeze a Sneeze contain fun poetry with much rhyming and many illustrations. Students can use their imagination to create more creatures doing unlikely things and make the words rhyme.

Casey at the Bat, retold by Ernest Thayer, is a fun rhyming poem enlivened by Patricia Polacco's illustrations. Students can discuss and journal about their baseball and softball experiences.

Deborah Guarino's Is Your Mama a Llama? is a longer predictable story told in rhyme. In the story, a baby llama asks the repetitive question, “Is your mama a llama?” to each animal he meets. They in turn provide factual and rhyming clues that make it easy to guess the identities of their mothers. To extend this literature experience, children can think of other animals and use a classmate's name to write their version of the poem

following the same format. An example would be, "Is your mama a llama?"

I asked my friend, Burt. "No, she is not. She wears a pink shirt."

"I Can't" said the Ant, by Polly Cameron, is bursting with rhyme. Children can follow the ant's efforts to save the teapot. The illustrations closely accompany the text. Students can find the eighty different rhymes. They will get caught up in the lines and can compose many of their own and illustrate them--for example, "What a pickle," said the nickel, and "Here we go," said the dough.

Noisy Nora, by Rosemary Wells, contains rhyming words and the repetitive phrase, "So Nora had to wait." Students can make paper bag puppets and retell the story. They can also write a sequel of the story entitled, Nora's Return.

The humorous fantasy of Mercer Mayer in What Do You Do With a Kangaroo? contains a lively repetitive structure that children are quickly drawn into. Children can mime the various actions of each animal, for example, the opossum brushing his teeth. The child who guesses the correct animal has the next turn. Students can think of other animals not mentioned in the story and with the teacher's help can make up additional episodes using the structure of question, criticism, demand, and solution. Then, students can write their own stories and illustrate them.



## Summary

Quality literature with predictable text was successful with my Title One readers. The predictable material gave them opportunities to be successful risk-takers. It allowed children the opportunities to predict what will be the next idea or the next pattern of words. The students could use all the clues provided by language—phonetic, syntactic, and semantic—to aid them in comprehension. The students could skip a new word and continue reading, using context clues to figure out the unfamiliar word. In unlocking the unknown words in the predictable texts, sometimes the children responded with a silent pause and other times they verbalized aloud the clues and then reread the whole sentence.

The most rewarding result of experiences with predictable text was the enthusiastic attitude that the children developed toward reading. They began to be increasingly excited about reading the next book and sharing it with others. They were delighted to find books that they had listened to or read and to discover other books written by an author or illustrator with whose work they were acquainted. They regularly borrowed books from the library to read.

The children's writing was another measure of their reading progress. Their encounters with many types of stories influenced their emerging writing abilities. The predictable materials stimulated

composition and illustration activity while providing a connection between reading and writing. Their peer interactions related to reading and writing activity encouraged each other and gave each other ideas.

Predictable literature as part of the instructional program fosters young children's reading and writing abilities. The implementation of predictable texts into a Title One reading program makes learning to read easier and more enjoyable for these at-risk students.

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