

Language Arts in a First-Grade Classroom

Take a peek inside a first-grade classroom with a rich language arts program.

By Miriam Myers, GreatSchools Staff



In reader's theater students read aloud from scripts with expression

What does language arts look like in a first-grade classroom? The following photographs show first-graders from an elementary school in Pennsylvania involved in daily language arts activities using the reading, writing and comprehension strategies taught to them throughout the year.

Many of the teaching strategies used are from the following two books: *Reading with Meaning: Teaching Comprehension in the Primary Grades* by Debbie Miller and *The Art of Teaching Reading* by Lucy McCormick Calkins.

What does a parent see when he walks into a classroom like this? Excitement about learning. A cooperative work environment. Students taking ownership of their learning as readers and writers.

A poster "**Look at What Good Readers Look Like**" is prominently displayed in the classroom. The students are the "stars" of the poster and are able to see themselves as readers and feel confident about their reading abilities.

Buddy or partner reading is a strategy used to allow students to share their reading abilities with another student. Together they choose a book. The readers can take turns reading or read at the same time. Buddy reading can be useful for those who need support reading and a peer's support can be most helpful.

Independent reading is a time when a student can choose a book at his reading level and interest, and read quietly in a comfortable spot in the classroom. In **reader's theater** students read aloud from scripts with expression. Reader's theater is used to increase reading fluency and expression. "**Four corner reading**" is an activity in which a student reads a book aloud to others. This is a way for each reader to be celebrated in the classroom. All children are able to be readers because each chooses a book at a level she can read. It also allows the class members to appreciate each other's strengths and developmental growth. Students **write** in a variety of spaces in the room to help themselves think creatively. This is done during the brainstorming and creation stages of the writing process. A **Venn diagram** is a graphic organizer that may be used to compare similarities and differences in characters and stories. After reading *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* and *If You Give a Moose a Muffin* by Laura Numeroff, students worked in groups to create a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the two stories. **Synthesis activity** is when students work in groups to synthesize the parts of a story. They read a story as a group, stop to discuss what happened in the story, record their thinking and then come up with a final synthesis. Students change their thinking the more they read the story, taking what they know and what they read to help them understand the story. For example, students read the book *A Bargain for Francis* by Russell Hoban. At the beginning of the story the students discuss how Francis gets hurt by her friend and her mom doesn't like her friend. As they read more they discuss how Francis's mom was warning her to be more aware of her friend's ways and wants Francis to stand up for herself. In one reading comprehension technique for nonfiction books, students ask an "**important question**" about a topic, then look for the answer. They write the important question at the top of the page, answer the question at the bottom, illustrate their topic and cite the source they used.