

Exploring New Directions in Children's/Young Adult Literature

Student Summaries

An Introduction to Postmodern Literature in the Fifth Grade Classroom

Rachel Burgett

What is Postmodern Literature?

*Postmodern characteristics have become a trend in many of the books being written for children and young adults today. Postmodern Literature can be identified by having at least a few of the following characteristics: **Co-Authoring, Non-Traditional Format, Intertextuality, Multiple Perspectives, Self-Referential, and Non-Linearity.** These six characteristics have been used in the writing of books to give children of today an up-to-date way to read books. Children are already using these characteristics in their everyday lives through television, computers, and much more, so these characteristics have been added to books to streamline technology and books.*

How does it look in the classroom?

This ten day unit was used in a fifth grade classroom. The following is a brief overview of how each part was presented and when it was taught.

Day	Topic & Lesson
1	Introduction to Postmodern Literature Unit Co-Authoring & Non-Traditional Format: reader helps create the story & page layout has many layers Read Aloud: <i>Black & White</i> <i>Zoom</i> Group Activity: <i>Tuesday, Sidewalk Circus, Free Fall, Flotsam, 7 Sector 7, The Red Book</i>
2	Intertextuality: other stories, books, or works can be found in the book besides the story Read Aloud: <i>The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales- selected parts</i> <i>Into the Forest</i> Group Activity: <i>Gorilla, Goldilocks Returns, The Jolly Postman or Other People's Letters, Willy's Pictures</i>
3	Multiple Perspectives: more than one voice in the story Read Aloud: <i>John, Paul, George, & Ben</i>

	<p>Group Activity: <i>June 29, 1999, Voices in the Park, I am too absolutely small for school, The Three Pigs, Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?, I am the Dog I am the Cat, George Vs. George</i></p>
4	<p>Self-Referential: the narrator talks to the reader</p> <p>Read Aloud: <i>An Undone Fairy Tale</i></p> <p>Group Activity: <i>Any from previous categories</i></p>
5	<p>Non-Linearity: not following a particular order from first to last</p> <p>Read Aloud: Chosen by the students as to what books they have found so far that follow a non-linear pattern. <i>Willy's Pictures</i></p> <p>Group Activity: <i>Any from previous categories</i></p>
6	<p>Writing of Postmodern Books: Students will then choose two of their favorite characteristics and begin writing their own postmodern picture book. Students will have a short amount of time to begin the project and will be given the rubric so the expectations are clear from the beginning.</p>
7	<p>Students will work in a Writing Workshop style to create their own postmodern picture book. (Approximate place-finish drafting)</p>
8	<p>Students will work in a Writing Workshop style to create their own postmodern picture book. (Approximate place-finish edit & revision)</p>
9	<p>Students will publish their postmodern books and prepare to share them the following day.</p>
10	<p>Sharing of postmodern picture books.</p>

What I learned!

**Postmodern Literature allows all students to have an opportunity to be successful!*

**Postmodern Literature forces students to dive deeper into the meaning of the books!*

**Postmodern Literature can energize even the most reluctant reader!*

Resources

All of the titles listed above are terrific children's books to use with any age group when introducing Postmodern Literature. The following are a few articles that give more information on how to use Postmodern Literature in your own classroom.

Brueggeman, M. A. & Knickerbocker, J. L. (2007, July) *Postmodern literature for children and young adults: Reflections of contemporary life and learning*. Paper presented on: <http://www.littera-apl.org/conference/index.php?opcao=2&ling=2>. Retrieved on March 2, 2008.

Goldstone, B. P. (2002). The postmodern picture book: A new subgenre. *Language Arts*, 81(3), 196-204.

Pantaleo, S. (2004). Young children and radical change characteristics in picture books. *The Reading Teacher*, 58(2), 178-187.

Ray Frisbee

Inquiry Seminar

Book Review Project

About the Project:

This project was done for the ED 727 Literacy Inquiry Seminar. Over the course of the semester I collected twenty current professional journal articles that dealt with Postmodern literature. These articles were examined briefly summarized and were accompanied by a personal reflection of the article. The articles highlighted several key components of what is considered to be part of the postmodern literature subgenre. Metafictive devices were analyzed by the authors and in turn applied each to the second part of the project. Each article appeared in a scholarly journal and was documented professionally. The result of reviewing the articles was a more complex comprehension of this type of literature and its elements. The second part of the project was to read twenty postmodern books that ranged from pre-kindergarten picture books to secondary level novels. Each novel or book was read thoroughly and then an analysis was derived. All of the book reviews included a suggested reading level, summary, literary critique, analysis of metafictional characteristics, teaching suggestions, and finally evidence that professional opinions were considered when reviewing the book. Each book was categorized into one of two groups: Elementary Level or Middle Grades-Secondary Level.

Strengths: This project broadened my reading selection and forced me to read books that I normally would not choose for myself. In reading the articles I gained a better understanding of postmodern literature. The picture books were actually tougher to read than the novels because the picture books required a sense of awareness and a reader must be fully engaged to get all of the nuances presented to him or her. Without total concentration I found myself moving through a book but still wondering what happened several pages ago. This project enabled me to add another tool to my teaching arsenal. By using postmodern literature in a classroom, there is more opportunity to reach students.

Weaknesses: The postmodern picture books were very tough to read in the beginning because I had been so consumed with the traditional way of reading that I could not follow or comprehend most of what was related in the stories. However, this ultimately turned into a strength because

it forced me to relearn how to read a different style of book. I would have liked to expand further out into different authors to see what other books and stories were out there, but I did not have a chance to do so.

Recommendations: Even if a student is limited in terms of reading, using a postmodern book may be a chance for that student to gain interest in literature or succeed in the classroom. In one of the articles, a study was conducted in a below average standard classroom and towards the end of the project it seemed as if every student was generating different ideas and responses. This style of literature can be very helpful in a classroom if used properly and grouped with the correct techniques and teaching.

Elementary Level Books:

Books:

The Red Book by Barbara Lehman

Cinderella's Rat by Susan Meddaugh

Richard Tchen

Officer Buckle and Gloria by Peggy Rathmann

Black and White by David Macaulay

The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs by Jon Scieszka

Shortcut by David Macaulay

The Three Pigs by David Wiesner

Zusak

Snowflake Bentley by Jacqueline Briggs Martin

The Emperor's Egg by Martin Jenkins

Tuesday by David Wiesner

Into the Forest by Anthony Browne

Voices in the Park by Anthony Browne

Middle Grades - Secondary Level

Surrender by Sonya Hartnett

Spinners by Donna Jo Napoli &

Where I Live by Eileen Spinelli

London Calling by Edward Bloor

Holdup by Terri Fields

How I Live Now by Meg Rosoff

I am the Messenger by Markus

Octavian Nothing by M.T. Anderson

Postmodern Characteristics Evaluated

-Nonlinearity (Story does not flow in a sequential order and often jumps between scenes)

- Multiple Perspectives (More than one narrator or character is speaking through the text)
- Irony/Contradiction (Sarcasm or playful jokes between text and illustrations)
- Self-Referential Text (Reader is made aware of a situation or the story refers to itself)
- Co-authoring (Story relies on the reader to fill in missing parts of the story to formulate own ideas)
- Intertextuality (Other sources are called upon in reference to the story)
- Nontraditional Format (Does not follow typical format, but style incorporates metafictional characteristics)

Li-Ping Peng
Inquiry Fair Handout
Education 727

Introduction to Postmodern Literature

There are seven important features that appear, singly or in combination, in postmodern texts. The first feature is intertextuality which indicates a reference to other texts or non-print media. The second is co-authoring which requires the reader to actively create his or her own meaning. The third is nonlinear which means that sometimes the story goes in different directions and has flashbacks and flash forwards or jumps around. The fourth is self-referential which means the author talks directly to and may ask questions of the reader. The fifth is multiple perspectives where more than one character tells about events or circumstances. The sixth is irony and contradiction, when an expected outcome is different from the actual outcome sometimes mocking the original story. The seventh is nontraditional format, when the narration and illustration layout consists of unusual formats such as overlapping illustrations, combinations of different typography, and mixed genres.

Throughout this course, I have not only learned about postmodern literature, but also I learned about western culture such as about Biblical stories and vampires. It also prompted me to

recall my knowledge about the Ming dynasty of Chinese history, and some well-known tales. Even though I struggled to read professional articles because of my insufficient English ability, I felt I gained much information. Because of this postmodern literature class, I have increased my knowledge about another culture. In particular, reading postmodern texts motivates me to read more and more, and it captures my eye-connections to read. Hence, I am really enjoying reading postmodern texts, even the illustrated children's books.

Spring Education Inquiry Fair
EDUC 727

Sarah Shepherd
Postmodern Literature

The topic for our Literacy Inquiry Seminar was postmodern literature. Postmodern literature consists of texts written post World War II and contains one or more metafictional elements throughout the book. Metafiction is a type of fiction that self-consciously addresses the devices of fiction. It is the type of writing that makes the reader actively aware that it is a work of fiction. These elements include but are not limited to: nonlinearity, a narrative structure that does not contain a traditional linear structure of a beginning, middle, and end, but the story may jump forward or move back in time; non-traditional format, insertions of text unlike that of traditional story writing such as letters, diary entries, emails, or stories written in poetry form; multiple narratives, alternating voices throughout the text; intertextuality, references to other stories, particularly fairy tales, or to pop culture within the text or illustrations; self-referentialism, where the author speaks directly to the reader, making the reader actively aware of reading the text; irony and contradiction, when the illustrations and text contain irony and may

not coincide, or there is a sarcastic tone to the story; and co-authoring, where the reader creates the meaning of the text through extensive interpretation, making inferences and conclusions often, or makes decisions regarding the order of reading non-linear stories.

Requirements of the Spring Inquiry included twenty Postmodern article summaries and reflections and twenty Postmodern book reviews. We were asked to select a variety of K-12 postmodern books that would include a wide range of metafictional characteristics. Part of the assignment also required us to list teaching strategies that we might use with the book. Reading the articles and writing summaries gave us the background knowledge that we would need to be able to identify, select, and critique postmodern literature. Reading and reviewing the books deepened our understanding and appreciation of this style of literature.

I found all of the books that I chose to read very entertaining and thought-provoking. They were all interesting in their own right, many of them having very different writing formats and styles. As an example, I have selected one of the books that I reviewed and some of the teaching suggestions that I recommended.

An Undone Fairy Tale (2005) by Ivon Landler is a picture book for children ages 5-8. One of the many metafictional characteristics that is used is self-referentialism. The narrator, also a character in the story, speaks directly to the reader warning not to turn the page because the illustrations have not been completed. The book also has a non-traditional format because the tale is told in an Old English style of font and the narrator's warnings are in italics. The frames of the story are also interrupted when the illustrator is shown painting the unfinished scenes. Intertextuality is also used, as we recognize familiar fairy tale aspects such as her Rapunzel-like confinement to a tower. Finally, irony is evident in the props that are used as substitutions since they have not yet been painted by the illustrator.

I suggested using a Read-Aloud to assist students in identifying the metafictional characteristics since there are so many of them. I would read the story aloud to the students and guide them in the process as I shared with them things that I was thinking and noticing as I read the story. Reader's Theatre or drama would bring the characters to life. This is a fun story filled with silly props and a narrator which would make this type of activity ideal. A fairy tale comparison chart could also be used by choosing similarities in the story to other fairy tales. When analyzing the props used in the story, the class could brainstorm alternative props. The students could then create an alternate ending to the the story using ideas from the list created.

This course gave me a new appreciation for children's and young adult's literature. No longer are books a passive and predictable reading experience. Readers are actively engaged in the process and are using higher levels of cognitive thinking. It is the teacher's responsibility to understand how postmodern books differ from traditional books, and to provide students with the necessary tools for interpretation. It is also important for educators to build confidence in their students so they can explore this unique and sometimes challenging genre in literature with a better understanding.

Andrew Hosfeld
Inquiry Fair Handout
May 3, 2008

Over the semester, I read twenty professional journal articles to broaden my understanding of postmodern literature. In these articles, I found various characteristics of postmodern literature. Some of these characteristics include non-traditional format, multiple perspectives, and nonlinearity. After widening my understanding of what makes literature postmodern, I had the opportunity to choose books that contain these characteristics. Many of my reading selections were based on application in the classroom. I have already had the opportunity to use some of the

books in the classroom to teach story elements. My students are beginning to understand the differences between postmodern literature and traditional literature.

Throughout this experience, I had the opportunity to read a variety of books. These books have influenced me to change much of the literacy education in my third grade classroom. My goal during this inquiry seminar was to see what effects postmodern literature would have on my students when used in the classroom. I have allowed the students to explore books such as *The Red Book* by Barbara Lehman and a variety of the *Three Little Pigs* books. I also had the opportunity to read aloud *The Tale of Desperaux*. My students have been working with story elements in these books. They have also been able to make inferences about these books and compare the style of writing to traditionally written texts. I have witnessed a change in attitude by many of my students toward this new genre of reading materials. My students have truly enjoyed reading and interacting with postmodern picture books.

Recommended Postmodern Reads:

High School Level:

The Book Thief.....Marcus Zusak
Postcards from No Man's Land.....Aiden Chambers
The Sledding Hill.....Chris Crutcher

Middle School Level:

The Tale of Desperaux.....Kate DiCamillo
The Witch's Boy.....Michael Gruber
Day of Tears.....John Lester

Elementary School Level:

The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs!.....David Weisner
The Turn-Around, Upside-Down Alphabet Book.....Lisa Ernst
Tuesday.....David Weisner

What makes a book postmodern?

Commonly Found Postmodern Characteristics:

Intertextuality - when a text is tied closely to and references another text or form of media

Co-authoring - the reader must create much of the meaning of the narrative

Self-referential - the creation of the text is exposed by the characters in the text

Multiple Perspectives - many characters who perceive a situation or experience from different angles

Non-traditional Format - the narrative is unconventionally told using a variety of formats

Nonlinearity - when a book changes time frames and doesn't flow in a chronological order

Irony and Contradiction - when the expected outcome is reversed in order to cause a wowing effect; sarcasm is often used to accomplish this