Literature Guide

I. Developmental Rational

Title: The Fire Cat
Author and Illustrator: Esther Averill
An I Can Read Book

The Fire Cat, is a great book for 2nd graders to read as they make the transition from being early readers to becoming fluent readers. Ester Averill’s story of Pickles the cat has engaging text. The 7–8 year old’s transitioning conservers mind will enjoy reading the unencumbering text, (Labinowicsz, 1980). The three main characters; Mrs. Goodkind, Pickles, and Joe the fireman, are just the right amount of characters. The supporting characters will not overwhelm the young reader with the part they play in the story, as Pickles learns what it means to part of a community. Equally, the graphics in the book are intriguing and draw the reader into the story, using a few colors well. The beautifully rendered drawings, and their use of fine lines, will appeal
to seven- and eight-year-olds and their tendency to focus on small details close to their eyes (Wood, 2007, p. 84). The drawings’ simplicity tells a great deal while leaving just the right amount un-described, making this a perfect book to use while learning about inferring. The print lies nicely on the page, and is easy to follow with your eyes or finger, reinforcing print concepts, for the early reader. With words comprised of 5–9 letters, plenty of CVC words, distinct word endings in the past and present to hear, the ear needed for developing reading comprehension, and phonological awareness will be strengthen. When readers make their way through the first independent reading of Pickles’ story, they will naturally draw on prior knowledge from the growing bank of phonics skills they’ve been accumulating. Averill’s text has a good balance between familiar words and longer new words, minimizing frustration for the transitional reader, while providing a challenge (Taberski pgs.53–54). While the pages are spacious in their layout, with graphics that are intriguing, as well as charming, Pickles’ adventure of being a growing cat will support the young reader beautifully through the challenges of a new book. Pickle’s himself has a great deal in common with the 2nd grader. Finally, the book’s pace is gentle and builds on one event at a time, lending itself well to synthesizing activities, (Miller, 2002). I would present The Fire Cat, around the beginning of April, after students have learned to write a friendly letter, and an opinion piece, just before they begin to have a more in depth look at informational books. The related extension activities will provide a summative
assessment of reading and writing skills up until this point. The framework of the assessments will provide information to support students continued development of their reading and writing skills in the last 2 months of school, preparing them for entrance into the 3rd grade.
II. Summary

Pickles is a cat with big paws who wishes to do big things. He’s also a mixed up young cat. Mrs. Goodkind tries to help. After some troubles, and being adopted by the Hook & Ladder Co. 7, Pickles the little cat decides to take matters into his own big paws and realize his dreams.
III. Initiating Activities

Objective: To look at the structure of the book
To use our inferring skills
To understand the setting of the story

I will introduce The Fire Cat during Read Aloud, in whole group, on the meeting rug.

Step 1: I will show them the cover and ask students, by looking at the cover and being our detective selves, what do you think this story is going to be about? We’ll listen to each other’s predictions.

Step 2: To create context for the story
I will read the summary on the back cover aloud. I will ask them if their predictions have changed, and their final predictions will be written on the anchor chart, for a later reflection.

Step 3: To create meaning for students and address central themes
I will ask a few focusing questions. What does the writer mean when she writes about the Hook & Ladder Co. 7 might be? We will discuss the possibilities in relationship to the information we’ve gathered so far from our predictions. I’ll ask if anyone has been to a fire station and what they saw there? I will ask what the writer means when she writes about Pickles having big plans? What do we think this story is going to be about?
Step 4: We will examine the title page, and table of contents, and the three chapters listed there. We would also notice the drawing on the contents page. My plan is to stop at unfamiliar words during read aloud.
IV. Mini Lesson

Objective: To develop inferring, retelling, and synthesizing skills.

To relate text to self

To create mental images

To draw on their memory and recreate a sequence of events

Part 1

I will read the book aloud, stopping along the way to talk about unfamiliar words. We will uncover their meaning together. I will ask students to raise their hands, when there is a word they do not understand. I will also stop at words I know are unfamiliar. We’ll keep a list of these words on the anchor chart, to add to our word books later.

I will stop and ask focusing questions

• On pg.7, I’ll stop and ask where is our story taking place? How is it that Pickles lives in a barrel?

• On pg. 15, do you think Pickles will like living with Mrs. Goodkind?

• On pg. 34, I will ask what’s going on here? We’ll look at the picture on pg.34. What does the expression on Pickles’ face tell us about his feelings? The Chief said, “Oh, I know this young cat. He’s the one who chases little cats.” Tell me more…

• On pg.48, I will ask the children what they think the Fire Chief is going to say to Pickles?
Part 2

Our whole group read aloud will end with pg.51. Students are given their own copy of The Fire Cat, they continue reading the last chapter independently in their reading places. They will be instructed in how to make an 8 page blank book from a sheet of 8 ½ x 11 paper, (Routman, 1934). After they finish reading the book, they will draw the Pickle’s story, The Fire Cat, in pictures. They will work in their work places, in small groups. This will give them the chance to review the story, and I will be able to assess reading comprehension. Their retelling of the story in pictures is a preparation for their work in writing workshop the next day.

The following day in writing workshop, we will refer back to Pickles’ story, while we write from one of these writing prompts:

1. Pickles writes a letter to Mrs. Goodkind, It’s the day after Pickle’s big rescue, he writes a letter describing his big rescue. He tells her about his life at the Firehouse

2. Pickles writes in his diary about his feelings the day after his great rescue. He describes hopes and dreams.

3. Can you identify with Pickles, have you ever felt like Pickles? Write about the part of the story you that reminds you of yourself, and why.

4. Write about one big thing you wish to do?
Assessment: students writing reflects their comprehension. I will be able to see how well they understand inferring and are able to synthesize the story into a form of retelling reflecting their learning, while they refer back to the text.
V. Related activity to increase avenues of multiple access for differentiation.

Objective: Synthesis and retelling the story

Finally, the students will construct a Diorama of their favorite part of the story, labeled with a sentence strip explaining why.

Assessment: Student's work will provide insight into their level of comprehension. What interests them, and what impressions they are taking away with them from their overall learning experience built on Ester Averill's, The Fire Cat.
VI. Alignment with Common Core State Standards

NH Reading Standards for English Literature Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, and Technical Subjects K–5

Reading Standards for Literature/Grade 2

1. Ask and answer questions; who what where when why and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in the text.

2. Recount stories and determine their central message, lesson and moral.

3. Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.

7. Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting and plot.
VII. References


Markham, Ontario L3R 3K9.

Routman, R. (1994). Invitations: Changing as Teachers and Learners. In class handout, 3/17/14,

Reading and Literature, Prof. J. Miller, Antioch University New England.


New England.