

Children's books for Language Arts

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## References

Parish, P. (1963.) *Amelia Bedelia*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

### Cycle 1

Amelia has been hired by the Rogers family as their new maid. On her first day, Amelia proceeds to do the list of chores left for her in the most literal fashion possible; drawing the blinds as picture, dressing the chicken by putting them in clothes, etcetera. At the end of the day, Mrs. Rogers is upset that she has not completed the chores but keeps Amelia employed by virtue of her ability to make delicious lemon meringue pie. I chose this book because, to date, this is still one of the funniest books I've encountered. This is purely a result of the clever wording chosen by the author and the literal interpretations that few could imagine. The illustrations are simple and clean; somehow you can see Amelia's eccentric nature in her eyes and, perhaps, her smile. To top it all off, the flow of the words just sound good; a prime example of how poetry needs not rhyme. Yet, some of the words may be difficult for young children to read on their own. Therefore, it is best suited for 5 year olds.

Amelia Bedelia was my first exposure to poetry, though I didn't know it at the time. Since then, I have had a fondness for the elegant flow of rhyming. Even though I may not read poetry often, this novel has conditioned me to appreciate listening to rhyming poetry.

In a literature based unit, I would use this book to introduce the concepts of rhyming and what it is meant for something to be taken literally. *Amelia Bedelia* is a great way of having fun with language in a method that can expand the vocabulary of students; students could partake in

an activity where they make up their own *Amelia Bedelia* problems. For instance, students can say that vacuuming the house may mean to create a vacuum (void space) within the house or that painting the house may mean to paint a picture of the house. Students can be assisted in this activity by looking up words in a thesaurus. Certainly, this will expand their vocabulary.

Van Camp, R. (1998.) *What's the most beautiful thing you know about horses?*. Littlechild, G. (Illus.). San Francisco, CA: Children's Book Press.

#### Cycles 1 & 2

On a particularly cold day in the Northwest Territories, a young Van Camp passes the time by asking: what's the most beautiful thing you know about horses? He asks friends and family to discover enchanting characteristics of these creatures that are unfamiliar to the arctic. He learns much and gains new appreciation for what lies outside of his small community. Van Camp's work is a touching story about the curiosity of a child and life in his Aboriginal community. Something special about the book is that it seems to have no ultimate goal; the protagonist is not striving to accomplish something specific other than to know all that he can about horses. In this way, the story could go on forever, as long as he can ask someone "What's the most beautiful thing you know about horses?" Moreover, the author has accomplished the synthesis of an expository hidden within a story. The book introduces specific animals and geographical facts without the traditional presentation of an information text; this is a good way of getting students who are not as open to non-fiction in to the book.

As a reader, experiencing Van Camp's story has given me a new perspective on how a story can be driven. I never realized that a story can be a simple exploration rather than a drive to a particular goal. In fact, one could argue that the story does not follow a conventional plot structure at all; something which we take for granted in most western literature. I would relish the opportunity to read more work like that of Van Camp; in this way it is unfortunate that his work is unique.

It is rare to find a children's book set specifically in the Northwest Territories, it is more common to find books addressing the Inuit in Quebec and Nunavut. Thus, this is a good story to expose children to other aboriginal cultures and take a glimpse into their way of life. In particular, how the Dogrib nation uses dogs instead of horses. More fundamentally, seeing the characters talk on phones and drive cars may counter some existing pre-conceptions which children have about first nations and their relationship with technology.

Bemelmans, L. (1939.) *Madeline*. New York, NY: Puffin Books.

### Cycle 1

In an old house in Paris, that was covered with vines, lived twelve little girls in two straight lines. One night, one of these girls, Madeline, falls ill and is rushed to the hospital. All the girls are quite sad that Madeline is sick. The illustrations in *Madeline* are gorgeous to look at; it really is one of those books which you can enjoy just by looking at the pictures. *Madeline* is a book which allowed me to rediscover the value of pictures as a reader. As well, if you are not

someone who appreciates visual literacy, you likely will after reading *Madeline*. The sight of eleven little girls crying in bed nearly brings me to tears.

Primarily, I chose this book for the rhyming present in the diction; it makes it ideal for a lesson on rhyming for 4 and 5 year olds. It is rare to find historical fiction that can readily capture the attention of a young audience. Yet, *Madeline* accomplishes this through the use of a simple story arc. It is amazing to think that such a vintage piece of children's literature is still relevant today; it has inspired an animated series and, more recently, a feature film.

Another use in a literature based unit could take advantage of *Madeline*'s central theme of familial love. Thus, it would be apt to utilize this classic to discuss the power of love. Indeed, Ms. Clavel loves her children so much that she can sense a disturbance from another floor of the house. Moreover, the other children love *Madeline* so much that they wish to be as sick as her if only to stay in the hospital with her. The class can explore how far we are willing to go for love; from waking up in the night to wishing ourselves ill, to protecting our loved ones with our lives.