

April 13, 2004

Dear Parents / Volunteer:

Thank you so much for participating in this novel study project. This is a new and exciting method for exploring a novel – it will be interesting to see how the students respond to a new challenge!

The main goal for this project is to provide **the** students with an opportunity to read share and respond to a novel with a different audience. My hope is that you and your child will have some interesting dialogue (both written and oral) about the book the student has chosen. **The** students will be encouraged to choose a book that will present a bit of a challenge to them.

This year, I have been asking the students to respond to literature that we have read as a class and that they have read on their own. We have been focusing on writing letters to one another about their novels. This novel study will follow the same format. Your child will be given a duotang with two sections: one with pertinent information for you; and the other to hold the letters (on lined, 3 ring binder paper). Please read over the information immediately / as soon as the duotang goes home and feel free to phone or email me with any questions.

Your role will be to respond to what your child has written (e.g., answering any questions your child may have). As well, share any of your own thinking that took place during and / or after reading the required section, and ask some questions that will require your child to think about the story in a different way. (Please see the parent section for some examples of questions to ask.) Your child's Reader's Notebook contains our correspondence from the school year, providing examples of the kinds of writing I am looking for.

How The Novel Study Will Work:

1. Your child will choose a novel that will offer them a challenging read. They can choose books from school or one from home, you might want to have a few discussions on what you would like to read and perhaps offer some suggestions. I do have multiple copies of many books, but you and your child may have to share the same book.
2. The students will be asked to break the novel into 3 chunks (by taking the total number of pages and dividing by 3).
3. The students will be responsible for reading 1/3 of the book each week.
4. The students will write two letters each week. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, they will be given time in class to work on their letters. The letters are **not** to be a summary; they are to include questions, predictions, thoughts and feelings. For both of these entries, the

students will be asked to write in detail and have a fairly lengthy entry.

5. On Tuesday and Thursday night, the journals will come home to you and you will have a few days to respond **in writing** to what your child wrote. The student will need to have their journals at school on Tuesdays and Thursdays. When you are responding to your child, write to your child in a letter format as well. Please write *to* your child, ask them questions, clear up any misunderstandings, and ask them to think about a situation from a different point of view.
6. I will mark the student's journal, looking at the quality of *their* letters. Essentially, your interaction with them will guide them in writing good quality letters. Please see the scoring guide (rubric) that I will be using to mark your child's work.

Thank you so much for participating with this project. I am looking forward to seeing how the students respond to writing to someone other than me. I would like this project to start the first of May, but if your child is ready to begin now, you may. I expect 6 letters from both parent and child on May 31st.

If you have any questions or concerns, please give me a call at James Strath, or email me at mcdonaldatstrath@yahoo.com

Sincerely,

Kerry McDonald

In summary...

It is up to the students to:

- keep up with their reading
- have their journals at school on Tuesdays and Thursdays
- clearly write their thoughts about the novel, focusing on connections, questions, thoughts, ideas, **and** predictions
- give their journals to you on Tuesday and Thursday night so that you have time to respond before the journals need to be returned to school (students **MUST** have their journals at school on Tuesday s and Thursdays)

It is up to the parent / volunteer to:

- keep up with the reading
- respond in writing to their student's letter (journal entry)

Ideas for Responding to Your Child's Letters

Below are a series of prompts that might be of help when you are writing back to your child. These prompts can be used to help with your own personal response to the book, or to assist you in framing a question to pose to your child.

- ◆ how the book reminds you of another book (text to text connection)
- ◆ how the book makes you feel / your personal reaction to a specific scene
- ◆ how the author describes things
- ◆ whether you like the book or not and why
- ◆ why you think the author wrote the book
- ◆ how you feel about the author's writing
- ◆ whether or not you would recommend the book to another reader, what rating you might give, and who would be the targeted audience
- ◆ what you predict will happen
- ◆ what you would change about the book
- ◆ what you found interesting
- ◆ examples of stereotype or bias
- ◆ what you were wondering about
- ◆ genre: what you know about it, what questions you have about it
- ◆ what you think is the author's message
- ◆ what books you look forward to reading after you've read this one
- ◆ what you don't understand or questions you have about the book, a scene, a character, etc
- ◆ how you can relate to a character
- ◆ what you notice about the author's style / language
- ◆ something about the author and what it has to do with the story
- ◆ what was funny to you
- ◆ what you like / dislike about the setting

- ◆ how the setting affects the characters
- ◆ about specific vocabulary / dialect used in the book
- ◆ how / when the author captured your interest
- ◆ how you connect with the book (text to self connection)
- ◆ how the book relates to something that is happening or has happened in the world (text to world connection)
- ◆ special quotes or passages from the story that meant something to you or captured your interest

November 4, 2003

Dear Mrs. McDonald:

I have made two really good connections to the book I have just finished. They are as follows:

Making connections to real life (text to world)

When Molly is kidnapped by a wizard named Michael Scot for a map she found in Gran and Da's attic. I can relate to this because the girl Cecilia was kidnapped in Toronto recently right from her bedroom inside her house. In the story she is kidnapped right from the kitchen with her whole family right there. It helps me understand the story because I know how Cecilia's family feels with her missing. So I think it would probably be the same. When everybody's trying to figure out where she is in both the book and in real life.

making connections to own life (text to self)

When I go to my grandparent's house, just like in the book I like to go and explore what there is from the past just like in this book. When the three American children go up into their grandparent's attic, they find a whole bunch of old games like patience. I have from my relatives quite a few of older games. Until I read this book I didn't know that older things could mean so much. When Molly finds the olden map inside the doll's pocket it reminds me of finding olden maps inside older books. It helps me understand the story because if you have grandparents you can find out how interesting some older things and I've had that opportunity.

making connections to another book (text to text)

I have just finished the book The Wizard's Map. Now I am reading the 2nd book in the series called The Pictish Child. The Wizard's Map reminded me of the book What Jamie Saw because in both books they are on their way to one of their relatives house / trailer to go visit relatives.

Keep reading,

September 16, 2004

Dear Mrs. McDonald:

empathizing
with a
character

Right now I'm reading the book Holes by Louis Sachar. While I'm reading Holes I am thinking of how sorry I feel for Stanley / Caveman. Since he's innocent but still sent to an awful bad boys camp called Camp Green Lake. I'm also thinking about what the Warden is looking for and why she's looking for it. I like all the characters in this book a lot.

questioning
the text

noticing the
author's
style

Louis Sachar (the author) I find has a very interesting style of writing which makes me want to read more and more.

Some connections I make with this book are I know what it's like to be out in the super hot sun all day long (brother's birthday party) and I've slept in tents before and I don't find it easy to fall asleep like Stanley.

making
personal
connections
(text to self)

I know you've read this book and I hope you've enjoyed it as much as I have so far.

Sincerely yours,

November 5, 2003

Dear _____ :

Support their connections. Showing how reading helps make sense of the world.

You have made two excellent connections. I really liked how you related Molly's kidnapping to the Cecilia Zhang' case. I agree that it helps you understand things that happen in the world when you read a story with similar events. I really felt you explained yourself really well in your letter.

Reinforcing their new knowledge and learning.

I appreciated the insight you gained about appreciating things from long ago. I think it is important for us to learn about the past. It helps us understand what people have been through when we can talk to them and learn from them. It is nice to be able to share some of that with your grandparents.

Sharing opinions, thoughts and background knowledge.

Are you enjoying The Pictish Child as much as The Wizard's Map? I didn't like the second book as well. Do you have any predictions for what will happen to Molly and her siblings? What do you think of the setting of this book? I can really relate to it because I have been to Scotland, so I get a really mental picture in my head when I read the descriptions. Scotland is such a beautiful country and I like how Jane Yolen describes it.

Offering specific help.

Are you confused about any of the Scottish words or stories in this book? Let me know if I can help.

Keep reading,

Love,
Mrs. McDonald

September 16, 2003

Dear :

Sharing my enthusiasm and love of reading.

You are reading one of my favourite books! I love how you have empathized with Stanley. He has certainly had some tough luck. Do you believe in curses? Do you think that luck is what you make it, or that you are destined to have either good or bad luck?

Asking questions to make the reader think about the situation in a different way.

What do you think about the friendship between Stanley and Zero? Aren't they interesting characters? They both come from such different backgrounds, yet they have developed a friendship. Have you ever thought about why you are friends with the people you are friends with? Most of the time we are friends who have similar interests, yet often in books, friends are different from one another. Can you think of other examples of characters that are friends like Stanley and Caveman?

Asking student to make a prediction.

What do you think is going to happen next in the book? Are you confused when the story shifts to Kissing Kate Barlow?

Teaching about a literary technique particular to this book.

That type of story is called a flashback. It can be a bit confusing, but most of the time the stories connect in a way that wraps the whole story up. Let me know if I can help you keep track of the plot.

Keep reading,

Love,
Mrs. McDonald