

How to Use Children's Picture Books to Reinforce Vocabulary & Pronunciation

Vocabulary and Grammar Lessons:

Attached is an overview of vocabulary and grammar lessons introduced by the Intercambio Interactive English books, levels 1A through 4B to show tutors when these skills are introduced. Throughout the levels, many of these lessons are reinforced with further practice. Hence, at the higher levels, there are few new grammar and vocabulary skills introduced because those lessons focus more on communication and life skills.

When to use children's picture books?

My students have ranged from young parents, to people preparing to enroll in college, to middle-aged adults who are just trying to improve their English skills, often to obtain better jobs. Most of the books that I choose to read orally are humorous and/or creative. These characteristics override the notion that these are children's books -- humor and fun are universal.

Use these books AFTER the lesson, mostly for fun, but also to reinforce vocabulary or grammar lessons. The critical factor is to find books that you and your student(s) will ENJOY and feel comfortable with. Having your student(s) read these books orally should be a FUN activity, not necessarily academic.

And, to clarify any activity, make sure to tell your student(s) the purpose behind reading the books you choose. Is it because it will reinforce a grammar concept? Or, perhaps the goal will be for your student to be able to practice reading the book to his or her child, or to listen while the child reads to him or her.

The books listed under the skill ladder are only suggestions. You can use higher level books with beginner classes, if you read to your students. Conversely, it is often fun and affirming for higher level students to read easier books.

Also, there are many newer and multi-cultural books that have been recently published that I haven't even begun to list. You and your student(s) may enjoy exploring these books. At the back of this packet, there is a section on how to find new, worthy children's picture books.

Why use children's picture books with Intercambio lessons?

First of all, for reinforcing and expanding your student's English vocabulary, children's picture books have appealing, self-explanatory illustrations. I have used them both in individual as well as class situations.

Many of these books are classics that your student(s)' children may be reading at school. After reading these stories in class, many of my Intercambio students, who are parents, have enjoyed bringing them home to read to their children or to practice themselves.

Secondly, reading these books orally provides practice and reinforcement of vocabulary and correct pronunciation. The more often one practices vocabulary in different contexts, the better one learns new words.

Choosing your own books to use:

While the included list is a great start, children's book titles abound and the library is your oyster!

ELL professionals cite the utility of using children's books with adults. However, not all books are created equal. When choosing books, look for these things:

- Illustrations that are not "child-like"
- Books that incorporate universal themes that will become a discussion topic later
- Books that reinforce grammar or vocabulary you are using in your classroom
- Books that the students' children are using in *their* classrooms to reinforce parent-teacher reading at home
- Books that have been awarded the Caldecott Medal or Newberry Award, or are listed as Notable Books by the Association for Library Service to Children
- Books from the "Teachers First 100 Best Books" list:
<http://www.teachersfirst.com/100books.cfm>

How to reinforce and introduce the vocabulary in these books:

When working with beginner students at levels 1 and 2, it may be helpful to put a word bank (list of words that you want to introduce or emphasize) on the board before your student reads the books. Go over the pronunciation and meaning of these words so that your student is comfortable when reading new words in the book.

In the Levels 1A - 2B skills continuum, I've suggested a few easy books that match the lessons. Most libraries have a children's section that contains very easy books with reading levels indicated. The children's librarian can be an invaluable resource for finding these books.

By the time your students are at Levels 3 & 4, their vocabulary is ample enough to be able to handle more vocabulary with less pre-teaching. At these levels, depending on your student(s), you might just plunge in to reading the book, and stop to define difficult words as you encounter them. Using Pantomime or a picture dictionary can be helpful in explaining the meanings of new words.

How to help your students improve their pronunciation as they read:

Teaching correct pronunciation can be a delicate matter. I have been surprised at how most of my students insist on learning correct pronunciation, and they don't mind being corrected. From a learning standpoint, the earlier pronunciation is corrected, the easier it is to change.

Over time I have learned to never let the students correct each other's pronunciation. If it comes from you, the teacher, it isn't threatening. If a particular word or sound is difficult for most of the class, have each of them repeat the sound correctly.

With beginner students, rhyming books and children's poetry are easier for pronunciation because of the repetitious sounds. As with vocabulary, put a word bank on the board and have students practice sound before they read.

You can model the sounds by reading a passage first. When your students read, you can assess sounds that they may be having trouble with, and create a pronunciation lesson around those particular sounds for another time.

When working with a class, I have students each read a page. You can break the units down to paragraphs if treading a full page is too challenging.