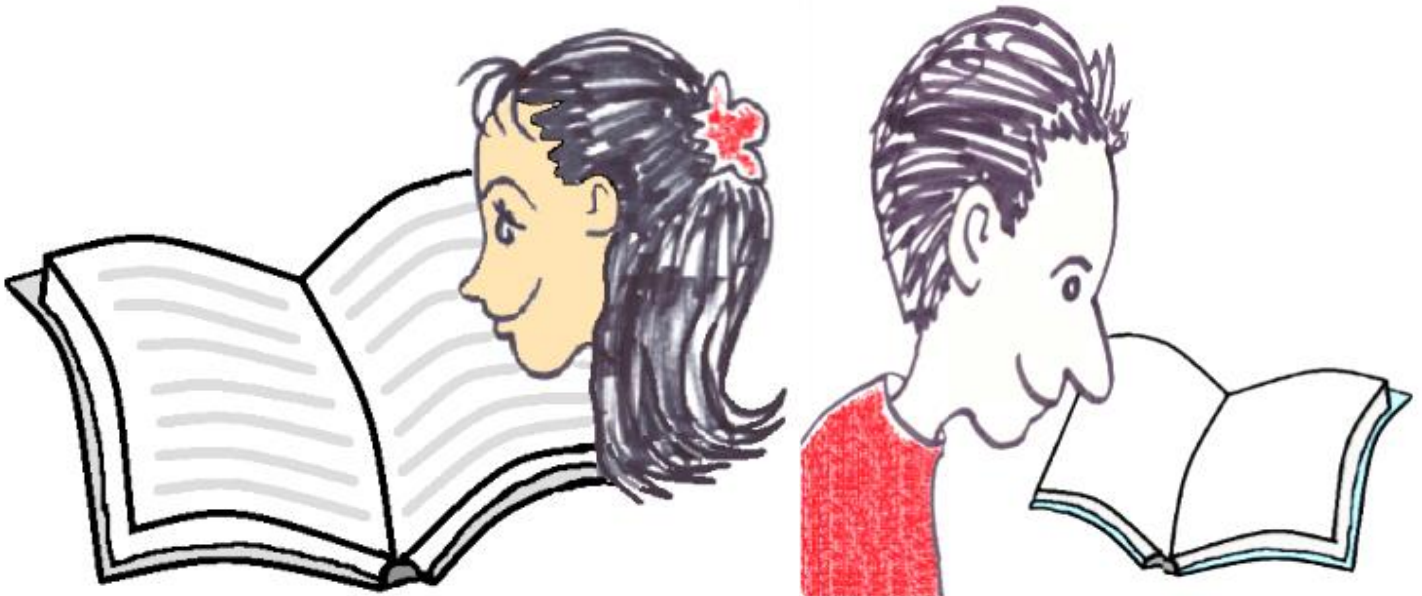


MEANINGFUL READING COMPREHENSION CHECKS

FOR ALL LEVELS & ALL LANGUAGES

By Bryce Hedstrom



13 Different Light Reading Book Reports
Reading Reflections
Traditional Book Report Forms

Dual Entry Journal Forms
Exit Tickets
Reading Logs

And more!

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WHY “LIGHT” READING?

The books that students choose to read on their own for these assignments are considered *light reading*. The requirements for light reading are that the book be **interesting and comprehensible**. This kind of self-selected reading is different than the heavier academic reading that is done in many subject areas in school. For academic reading, students often need the help of an instructor to fully understand the text, but they can do light reading on their own because they can understand the text and their own interest drives them.

For this light reading, students pick novels that they want to read. Each student may receive a **Light Reading Book Report** before reading so that they can have a focus as they enjoy reading their books. Each of these reports gives a specific purpose for reading.

We do light reading not only because it is easier and more enjoyable, but because students learn more language from it. Research in language acquisition over the last 30 years indicates that **students learn more useful language from free reading than from traditional structured vocabulary and grammar lessons**. Here are some quotes by leading SLA reading researchers that support this idea:

“Less frequent words... may best be learned by reading extensively, because there is just not enough time to learn them all through conscious study.”

—Norbert Schmitt, *Vocabulary in Language Teaching*

“The only significant predictor of the ability to use the subjunctive was the amount of free voluntary reading done in Spanish; the amount of formal study of Spanish, the amount of formal study specifically aimed at the subjunctive, and how long subjects had lived in a Spanish-speaking country were not significant predictors of subjunctive competence.”

—Stephen Krashen, *Free Voluntary Reading*, p. 27

“The best way to improve in a foreign language is to do a great deal of comprehensible, interesting reading. The case for self-selected reading for pleasure is overwhelming.”

—Beniko Mason, *Extensive Reading in English as a Foreign Language*

Additional quotes supporting self-selected or light reading are found at the bottom of each *Light Reading Book Report* to help remind students why we are doing this.

Is Light Reading Enough?

Well... yes and no.

**The ultimate goal is authentic literature.
Light reading is how we get students there.**

“Despite the benefits of light reading, a diet of only light reading will probably not lead to advanced levels of development.” —Stephen Krashen, *The Power of Reading*, p. 114

Light reading is not the end, it is the beginning. Light reading is not likely to be enough for students to develop the highest levels of literacy and fluency in language, but light reading is not the end goal of language learning; it is a bridge to more. The ultimate goal is authentic literature. Light reading is how we get students there. Light reading should be encouraged because it lays the groundwork for more reading—hopefully a life-long habit of reading for pleasure. It also provides the motivation, positive feelings and linguistic foundation that will allow students to continue to read at higher levels. If we give students access to good books, modeling and time to read, they will often develop into readers that can and do read challenging higher level materials:

“Reassuring and supporting evidence comes from studies that show many children who do extensive free reading eventually choose what experts have decided are “good books” (Schoonover 1938), and studies show that readers gradually expand their reading interests as they read more (LaBrant 1958). Also, books

children select on their own are often harder than their official “reading level” (Southgate, Arnold, and Johnson 1981).” —Stephen Krashen, *The Power of Reading*, p. 116

Language teachers want their students to engage with authentic literature. This is the ultimate goal for students that reach the highest levels of literacy in the target language, but if students do not have positive experiences with books that they understand and enjoy, they will never reach the reading levels required to read authentic literature. Language learner literature is the way to get students there. Most language students never get to advanced levels with simplified reading materials, even lower level students can get the advantage of being exposed to language in a pleasant way. The exposure to materials in the target language that they can understand

It is the number of comprehensible words they read that builds acquisition. Reading engaging materials in a low stress environment is the way it happens.

Most reading that students are asked to do in schools is difficult and academic—at their level and even above. This kind of reading is neither enjoyable nor self-motivating. Because it is neither interesting nor comprehensible, students begin to resent reading and say that they hate it.

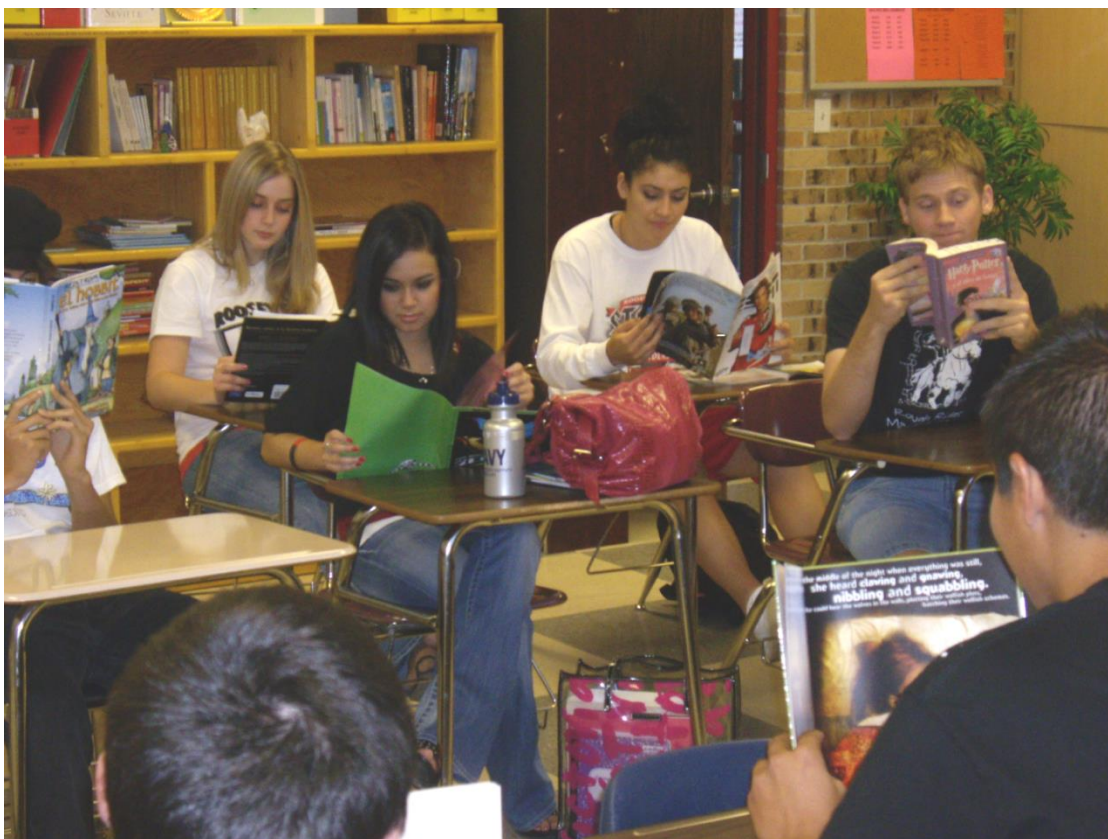
STUDENTS CHOOSE

Student choice is paramount. They are choosing the genre and the reading level. The teacher supplies the reading material, but students choose.



Novice Level Self-Selected Reading Choices

(Left to right) **Los amigos detectives**, an easy language learner literature mystery for levels 1-2, **If You Give a Pig a Pancake**, a children’s book in English and Spanish that had been read aloud to the class previously, **Hay diez perros en la tienda**, an authentic easy reader picture book that had been read aloud to the class, **Día de calor**, an easy reader picture book that had been read aloud to the class, **¡Horton escucha a un quien!**, a translation into Spanish of the classic easy reader Dr. Seuss book, **Picture Dictionary of Spanish**, an exhaustive resource with color pictures and Spanish descriptions, **Piratas**, easy language learner literature, **¿Eres tú mi mamá?**, a Spanish translation of the classic easy reader.



Intermediate Level Spanish Self-Selected Reading Choices

(Left to Right) **El hobbit**, a graphic novel version of the classic children’s book in Spanish (this is a familiar story, but it is challenging reading—many rare words), **AP Spanish Literature textbook** (far above presumed reading level of this AP Spanish Language class—the student chose it and read it regularly during free reading time), **Zoo Books**, a Spanish translation of a short, colorful, magazine-style reading about butterflies (this is the easiest reading level of any material in the photo being read by one of the top students in the class), **ESPN Deportes**, a Spanish sports magazine, being read by an outstanding basketball player, **Harry Potter novel** in Spanish (challenging reading due to many rare words), **bilingual children’s book** (English translation helps with rare words).

READ FAST, READ OFTEN

An interesting experiment is described in the book **Fail Fast, Fail Often** by Ryan Babineaux and John Krumboltz (2013). Students on one side of a pottery class were told their grade would be based on volume—the more pounds of pottery they produced, the higher their grade would be. The grades of the students on the other side of the room would be based on quality of their work—if they produced just one outstanding piece of pottery they would get an “A” grade. The quantity group made piece after piece. They produced many times more pieces of pottery than the quality group, who were focused on making the perfect piece. But in the end, the quantity group made more AND better pottery. It was the practice, the experience with pottery that made the difference. They had more exposure to the process of creating pottery. made more mistakes, more mediocre pieces and in the end, more high quality pieces than the group that was purposefully trying to make only high quality pieces of pottery. With pottery the amount of experience beats high focus and purposeful artwork.

A similar phenomenon happens when students read a lot: the more comprehensible words our students read, the more acquisition occurs and the more fluent they become. To get to a high level of reading ability students need to read a lot. The more words that pass before their eyeballs, the better readers they become. And the best way to get them reading and keep them reading is to allow them to choose and then encourage them to read.

For more see the blog: <http://www.brycedstom.com/2017/self-selected-reading-reactions>

WHY READ NOVELS?

“I don’t know how one develops imagination without reading fiction.” —Diane Ravitch

For light reading we encourage students in world language classes to read novels. These are not classic literature in the target language... yet. Rather, they are a special genre of language learner literature: vocabulary controlled and interesting stories of between 2,000 and 10,000 words. This is one of the best ways, if not *the* best way for students to grow in the language and as human beings. Reading novels is advantageous to students both as language learners and for a well-rounded life. Here are some reasons why:

1. **MORE VOCABULARY and MORE GRAMMAR**

Readers acquire more vocabulary and grammar from novels. In a novel the vocabulary tends to repeat itself more than that in non-fiction texts because the setting and the situations are revisited and referred to over and over. This repetition of contextualized vocabulary helps a reader to pick up both high frequency vocabulary as well as the specific words used in the novel. The repeated vocabulary and grammar become automatic. Contextualized, interesting and repeated comprehensible input is what gets students to acquire language. Studying vocabulary lists and practicing grammar with drills is neither as effective nor as enjoyable simply reading.

“Less frequent words... may best be learned by reading extensively, because there is just not enough time to learn them all through conscious study.”

—Norbert Schmitt, *Vocabulary in Language Teaching*

“The study of complex grammatical constructions does not help reading (or writing); rather, mastery of complex grammar is a result of reading.”

—Stephen Krashen, *The Power of Reading*

“Picking up word meanings by reading is 10 times faster than intensive vocabulary instruction.”

—Stephen Krashen

Creating Lifelong Readers

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/105027/chapters/Creating-Lifelong-Readers.aspx>

2. **MORE FUN**

Reading novels is easier and more fun. For most students reading novels is more enjoyable than reading other kinds of materials. Reading novels can be easier because stories lend themselves to prediction. Once you understand the genre, the setting and the characters, you can often guess where a story is going. This natural interaction with the text makes reading fiction easier and more pleasant than non-fiction, especially for young readers and for language learners. It is this element of pleasure that leads students to develop a life-long pleasure reading habit. This ease of access creates what psychologists refer to as “flow.” Reading is the most popular flow activity in the world.

“There is overwhelming research showing that recreational reading in a second language is a powerful means of improving grammar, vocabulary, spelling and writing ability — and it is far more efficient and far more pleasant than traditional instruction.”

—Stephen Krashen, *Taipei Times* editorial, Sept. 14, 2004

Build Your Vocabulary the Novel Way:

<http://www.csmonitor.com/The-Culture/Verbal-Energy/2013/0703/Build-your-vocabulary-the-novel-way>

3. **BETTER RELATIONSHIPS**

Fiction readers have better relationships. Reading fiction serves as a relationship simulator. It helps readers to develop real-life social skills by giving them low stake rehearsals for the complicated relationships they will encounter in real life. In novels we can preview the social situations that we will encounter to prepare us to meet them better.

Your Brain on Fiction by Annie Murphy Paul

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/18/opinion/sunday/the-neuroscience-of-your-brain-on-fiction.html?pagewanted=all&_r=2