

Introduction

Regardless of what trends and new research show, exposure to literature remains one of the most important components of early childhood education. There is nothing quite like a really good book to capture children's interest and help fuel their desire to read independently. But, a love for reading is only a small part of why children's literature should be used in the classroom. Children's books are delightfully flexible and imaginative. Just from encountering the small sample of literature explored in this book, children can learn about the moon, worms, ducklings, kindergarten, snow, and fairy tales. They can share in the experience as characters find a friend, achieve a goal, learn through trial and error, entertain a guest, negotiate an agreement, and care for a pet. They can learn simple words such as *dog*, *big*, and *bell* or complicated vocabulary such as *neutral*, *collecting*, and *escalator*.

With such a wealth of resources available, it seems only natural to build curriculum around children's books. Children's books touch on every possible subject, theme, and skill teachers could possibly want to teach, including motor skills, rhythm and music, science, math, art, social studies, problem solving, creative dramatics, manners and social skills, and, of course, reading and language arts. All educators of young children want to teach at least some of these skills, but finding the context in which to naturally teach them can be difficult. Children's literature helps teachers build organic learning situations in the classroom. Teachers can find a context for all manner of art projects, games, fine and gross motor activities, social studies activities, math activities, creative dramatics activities, and social skills activities by connecting them to children's books.

It may seem old-fashioned, but it really is smart to base young children's education on children's literature. As a teacher, it feels good to pull out books you love—or discover new classics—and share them with your students. As a child, it makes sense to create art projects, do experiments, play games, build structures, and learn words that revolve around a familiar tale and beloved characters. So, dust off your books, sit in a circle, read the stories, and prepare to inspire a roomful of learning and fun.

