



Issue 4, 2007/08

Teacher's Resource

Scholastic Canada Ltd.
175 Hillmount Road
Markham, Ontario
L6C 1Z7
Tel: 1-888-752-4690
Fax: 1-800-387-4944
Email: magazines@scholastic.ca
Website: www.scholastic.ca/education/magazines

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COMET

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Introduction



Many classroom teachers are now using small-group classroom organization to enhance student learning. There are many benefits to this style of teaching:

- it gives students greater opportunities to talk to one another and check that ideas and understandings are clear;
- it supports theories of learning as social practice;
- it provides purposeful and practical contexts in which students can use and develop a range of skills;
- it provides a supportive environment in which students can tackle challenging activities;
- it provides an opportunity for the teacher to develop differentiated activities within the whole-class group;
- it provides the teacher with a “focus group” for manageable teaching and assessment purposes.

This model of teaching has led to the need for a wider range of activities that can be used for explicit teaching purposes, independent and practice work, and extension.

The purpose of this resource is to introduce a range of strategies that can be used in this small-group context.

The aim of these strategies is to provide a starting point for you. They have been chosen because they are generic in nature and with a little adaptation can be applied to any number of texts.

Using *Comet*

Comet is an invaluable resource in the classroom because:

- an exciting, new issue arrives at the school every term;
- each edition is based on a central theme (in this issue the theme is “Homes”) and easily used to support cross-curricular units;
- it contains a range of genres, making it useful in many ways, and in many contexts;
- it is colourful, motivational, and attractive to students;
- it contains short, “snappy” articles that are appealing and inviting—even to less confident readers;
- it provides fresh ideas for practical classroom activities.

Establishing Learning Groups

There are many different ways to organize a classroom into small groups. Young students are commonly grouped according to literacy ability, but this is not always necessary or even advantageous. Mixed-ability groups ensure that students who can work independently and those who require support can work together to enhance interaction and to make groups more independent. This gives the teacher more time to work intensively with students that need additional support.

The ability to be a cooperative and engaged member of a group is not an inborn skill. The skills of cooperation and effective group membership must be taught and regularly reinforced with all students.

Similarly, if you have not used small-group learning in your classroom before, it is unrealistic to introduce the model of four or five groups working simultaneously and expect everything to go smoothly. It takes time, explicit instruction, and practice to have a number of groups working effectively without close teacher supervision.

Introducing Strategies to Students

The strategies presented here are ideal for use in literacy learning centres. There are several different ways to organize and teach using learning centres. Many teachers are familiar with classroom-practice models that involve the use of rotational group activities. The activities in the *Comet* teacher's resource include a label to be used on the board to indicate which groups are scheduled to do which activities.

You will need to explain each of the strategies to the students before they are implemented and then debrief students once they are completed. It is a good idea to develop multiple groups that work with little direction before introducing strategies that will take too much thought and hard work. Once groups are working, introduce one strategy to the teacher-group and support students as they learn the activity. In later activities, this strategy can be expected of groups which are not the teacher-group.

Alternatively, each strategy can be introduced to the whole class and modelled with them before becoming a teacher-group task and then an independent activity. Students will need more support and more time to master some of the strategies than for others.

Organization of the Teacher's Resource

On pages 6–11, reading notes are provided for the selections in *Comet*, Issue 4. Included with the notes for each selection are:

- broad-based curriculum connections
- general teaching support
- links to resources on the Internet and to Scholastic Canada resources

Reading Notes



Sail Away! by Carrol Baker pages 4–5

Text type: Non-fiction: Narrative—Personal Account

Curriculum connections: Social science

Summary

Cameron has lived on a yacht since he was a baby. In this personal account, he describes what living on a yacht is like. Different parts of a boat are defined.

Notes

Read the article with the students. Note the words in bold. Check their meanings in the glossary at the end of the article. After each paragraph, ask students to find the photo (or photos) to match the words. Look at the plan of the yacht. Ask students to find Cameron's bedroom, the kitchen, shower, and so on. Ask students to draw a plan of their own home.

Rabbit Habitat by Liz Flaherty pages 6–7

Text type: Non-fiction: Description—Personal Account

Curriculum connections: Science, language arts

Summary

Rachel and Darcy help build a rabbit hutch.

Notes

Ask students if they own, or have owned rabbits as pets. Did their rabbits have a hutch? Ask students if they own, or have owned other pets. What types of homes do they have? Create a class list of the types of home pets can have.

Earth Houses
by Catriona Hoy
pages 8–9

Text type: Non-fiction: Description—Interview

Curriculum connections: Science


Summary

Students learn about homes made from different materials.

Notes

Ask, “What is your house made of? What other materials can we make houses from?” List these. Ask, “What are ‘natural materials?’” Which of the materials in our list are natural? Mark these with “N” for Natural. Ask, “Which are not natural but made by people?” Mark these with “M” for Made (or Manufactured). Ask, “How is building a house out of rocks different from building one out of bricks?” Compare some brickwork with the photo of the rock wall. Note the regular pattern and straight vertical and horizontal lines in the brickwork, and the “jigsaw puzzle” effect in the rock wall. Talk about the advantages and disadvantages of different house-building materials. For example, using mud bricks may be much cheaper but will mean a lot more work as the bricks have to be made. Straw will be a good insulator.

Links to Further Inquiry

 *Houses and Homes* by John Williams (Steck-Vaughn, ISBN 978-0-8172-4886-4) describes various parts of a home and their functions and several different kinds of dwellings, with instructions for making models of various types of homes.

Where Do I Live?
by Petra Poupa
pages 10–11

Text type: Non-fiction: Description

Curriculum connections: Science

Summary

Students match pictures of four animals text that describes them.

Notes

For each animal, list: a fact they have just learned about the animal, something students already know about the animal, and a question about the animal. On a world map, locate the areas where penguins and orangutans live. Locate the Arctic and deserts where foxes may live. Students choose an animal to research. Use the article and the lists made earlier as a starting point. They can make a poster about the animal, including a drawing of the animal in its habitat.

Links to Further Inquiry

 *The Atlas of Animals* by Linda Sonntag (Millbrook Press, ISBN 978-0-7613-0925-3)

Changing Rooms
by Carrol Baker
pages 12–13

Text type: Non-fiction: Description—Personal account

Curriculum connections: Visual arts

Summary

Students are shown creative ways to decorate their bedrooms.

Notes

Have students come up with new designs for their own room.

Links to Further Inquiry

 *Trading Spaces: Boys vs. Girls* by Sharon Lennon and Mona Mansour (Scholastic, ISBN 978-0-439-60730-8)

Bula! Bula!
by Liz Flaherty
pages 14–15

Text type: Non-fiction: Personal Account

Curriculum connections: Social studies

Summary


A young girl describe a family trip to a village in Fiji.

Notes

With the class, use an atlas to find where Fiji is. Ask students where they have travelled with their family. Have they travelled to places as far away as Fiji? Ask students if they know how to say "Hello" or "Welcome" in other languages. Make a class display of the words.

Links to Further Inquiry

 *Fiji* by Kathryn Stevens (Child's World, ISBN 978-1567669077)

 *Turtle Songs: A Tale for Mothers and Daughters* by Margaret Wolfson (Whitecap Books, ISBN 978-1-885223-9-51), is based on a Fijian myth, in which a princess and her daughter are saved from kidnappers by a storm that destroys their canoe and transforms the mother and daughter into sea turtles.

Our Home
by Petra Poupá
pages 16–17

Text type: Poem

Curriculum connections: Language arts

Summary

A playful poem about a chaotic family home.

Links to Further Inquiry

 *A House is a House for Me* by Mary Hoberman (Puffin, ISBN 978-0142407738)

Hermit House
by Margaret Etherton
pages 18–19

Text type: Non-fiction: Description—Report

Curriculum connection: Science

Summary

A description of how hermit crabs and how they find their homes.

Notes

Ask students if they have ever seen a crab. Ask them to describe them and to draw pictures. Have students look at the hermit crabs colourful shell and then to design their own shell and put it on display.

The Adventures of Dracco and the Golden Pot
by Ryan Meek
pages 20–21

Text type: Fiction

Curriculum connections: Language arts

Summary

A grade one students fantastic story about a boy and his dragon.

Notes

Have students write and illustrate their own fantasy story.

Rain
by Olivia Gallagher
page 21

Text type: Poem

Curriculum connections: Language arts

Summary

A six-year-old's short poem about rain.

Notes

Ask students what they like, or dislike about rain. What is their favourite weather? Why?

Mr. Lucky Straw
Retold by Edel Wignell
pages 22–23


Text type: Fiction—Folktale

Curriculum connections: Language arts

Summary

A story based on a Japanese folktale

Links to Further Inquiry

 *Japanese Children's Favorite Stories* by Florence Sakade (Tuttle Publishing, ISBN 978-0804833813).

Make and Do: Build a Fort
by Tracy Hill
pages 24–25

Text type: Non-fiction—procedure

Curriculum connections: Visual arts

Summary

A hands-on activity in which students build a tree fort.

Notes

Send a letter home with the students informing parents of the materials needed, and the expected outcome.

Fun Pages/Your Pages **pages 26–29**

Text type: Non-fiction: Games, puzzles

Curriculum connections: Visual arts, language arts, science

Summary

A collection of games and puzzles.

Notes

The answers to the puzzles are on page 29 of the magazine. These puzzles are great for visual learners. Students can create their own puzzles, based on the content of the magazine, and challenge classmates to solve them.

“Your Pages” include a collection of student-submitted artwork, letters, and jokes, as well as the answers to the puzzles on the “Fun Pages.”

Links to Further Inquiry

 **Scholastic Canada: Kids - Stuff to Do**

Scholastic Canada’s Web site includes games and activities for children of all ages.

<http://www.scholastic.ca/kids/stufftodo/>

Book Reviews **pages 30–31**

Text type: Non-fiction: Book reviews

Curriculum connections: Language arts

Summary

Students review their favourite books.

Notes

Students can write their own reviews of books they have read and submit them to the magazine. Ask students what they think makes a good review.

Boss Moves House **by Carol Jones and Kelvin Hucker** **page 32**

Text type: Fiction: Comic

Curriculum connections: Language arts, social studies

Summary

Boss is forced to move and finds a most unusual home.

