

Hot Readers- an Overview

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The Higher Order Thinking (HOT) approach to literacy is used at John Lyman School in all the first/second grade classrooms for all readers. There are some students who need extra practice with pre-reading skills, in addition to daily classroom instruction. These children need more time spent on readiness skills such as auditory discrimination (hearing the differences between sounds; musical sounds, letter sounds), visual discrimination (seeing the differences between symbols; shapes, letters, words, musical notes), tracking (scanning a page from left to right and top to bottom), inner hearing (being able to hear music in your mind, or silent reading), one-to-one correspondence (knowing where a symbol begins and ends; musical notes, words), rhyming and letter sounds. These are the students we call our HOT Readers. They meet with the "Hot Team," three half hours each week. This team consists of a classroom teacher/music teacher, reading specialist and art teacher. The following describes some of the practices that you might see in a Hot Readers class.

Through music, movement and visual art, our HOT Readers get the skills they need presented to them in a way they can understand; by learning with their entire bodies. Our HOT Readers benefit from lots and lots of repetition of the same skill. Piaget, a psychologist who studied the learning behaviors of young children, discovered that people need anywhere from 2-2000 repetitions of a skill in order to fully learn it. Our HOT Readers need to repeat songs, words, letter sounds, and activities over and over until they really feel comfortable with them. HOT Readers provides the children with many opportunities to practice basic reading skills in a multi-sensory way.

Here are some of the skills that are focused on during HOT Reader classes. They all are building blocks to successful, independent reading, which is our goal for each child.

Tracking- This is the understanding that when you read (whether it be music notes or words,) you begin in the top left hand corner of the page, read horizontally across the page from left to right and then jump down to the beginning of the next line. Children need to learn this pattern and use it automatically when reading.

One-to-one Correspondence- Before children can read, they need to understand what a word is. When they can point to each word as they say it, and identify individual words, then they have the concept of one-to-one correspondence.

Letter sounds/ Letter formation (auditory discrimination/visual discrimination) Our HOT readers are often the children who have not yet learned all the letter names and sounds consistently by the beginning of first grade. Often they can come up with a key word (a=apple) or they need assistance to find letter sounds. We need to teach the children to know the letters and sounds thoroughly and independently so they can USE the sounds both in reading and writing. We spend a great deal of time teaching letters and sounds by singing them, moving them, writing them, and finding words that begin with a particular sound. Repetition is the key here. We provide the children with lots and lots of practice in a variety of ways.

Reading is both aural and visual. At HOT Readers, we train the child's eyes and ears to detect similarities and differences in sounds and symbols. Being able to hear the differences between sounds is very important in order for children to learn phonics, to hear inflections and gain meaning from aural cues. We explore a variety of sounds, including musical pitches and letter sounds. We also use the language of art (lines, shapes, forms) to train the child's eye to see the differences between letters and words. Many of our letters look and sound similar. That is why it is so crucial to fully develop a child's sight and sound awareness to prepare them for reading.

Inner Hearing- this is a skill that allows a child to be able to read silently. Students need to be able to hear the words in their minds as they read along. We use songs that add on to each new verse or eliminate words, requiring children to sing along in their heads and anticipate what is coming next. Songs with predictable patterns are the basis for understanding predictable texts and various patterns in reading.

Aside from the specific skills that we focus on with our HOT Readers, we also address the behaviors that are typical of young children who are preparing to read. We want our HOT Readers to feel confident and successful. Our fun, interactive approach is designed with the young child in mind; kinesthetic (very physically active), auditory (sound-rich), and visual (attractive pictures and text).

The HOT Readers class works on increasing attention to tasks. We vary the activities between very active ones where everyone is moving at the same time, with activities that require students to wait their turn. The activities require the children to be active listeners so that they are ready to come in when it is their turn. These skills are critical in the arts. Whether you are performing with a band, chorus, dance troupe or acting in a

play, the concentration level is very high so that you are ready on your cue. The children don't realize how much they are learning about reading and writing when they participate in this class. They have fun, they are successful and they are learning to become competent, confident readers.

Reading is a skill, not the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal is understanding, and the ability to communicate in all human languages. This class is ready to make meaning in the languages of music, movement and words- expressive meaning that touches the head, heart and soul.