

# READING DETECTIVES – activities for all students

by Brenda Boreham



Brenda has 35 years of classroom experience. She has presented workshops on literature based themes and literacy strategies, and has written a number of resources for teachers. She remains passionate about matching up kids with books.

Given the diverse range of reading levels in your classroom, are you searching for ways to make the information imbedded in critical pieces of text accessible to all your students? Do you have a short poem, song or passage that you want all your students to learn for an assembly or other presentation? Would you like all your students to be fully engaged in the learning process regardless of their reading level? Here are some fun activities that take little or no preparation time and have proven to work well with primary and mid grade students to introduce a unit or reinforce key concepts..

## THE INVISIBLE CHALK GAME

**Note:** This activity is meant to be fun, quick (15 to 20 min.) and repeated over a number of days. As it is an oral lesson, students with a wide range of reading levels can be included. It works well for students in Grades 2 to 6, and de-emphasizes different reading levels in the group.

### GOALS

Each student will:

- commit a piece of text to memory
- connect the text to recent learning
- identify the main idea of the text

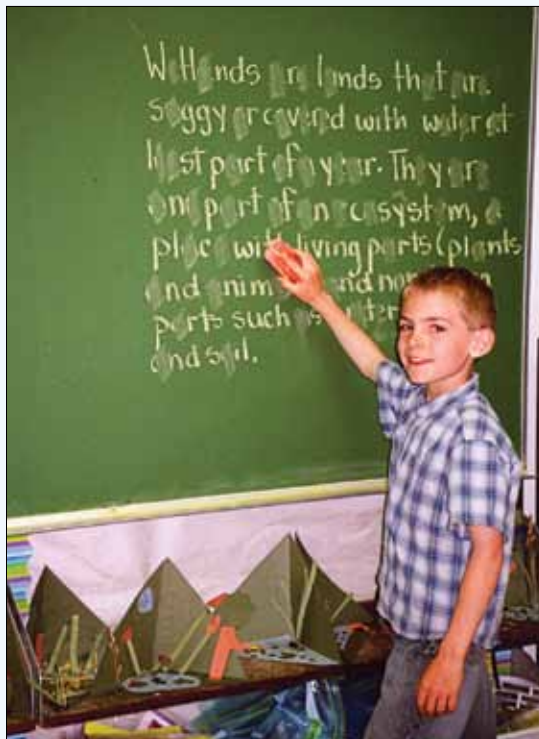
### MATERIALS

- a copy of the text you want the students to learn printed on the chalkboard
- a list all of the vowels printed on the chalkboard beside the text

### PROCESS

1. Have the students sit on the floor close to the chalkboard.
2. Explain that you are going to teach them to be word detectives. They are going to do the impossible—they are going to learn how to read invisible letters!
3. Read the whole text to the class. Quickly discuss the meaning and check that all the vocabulary is understood.
4. Have the students read the text aloud with you (students at lower reading levels will be echo reading).
5. Ask one of the students to choose a vowel from the list.
6. Take the chalk brush, and as you read the

text to the class, erase the letter every time you come across it.



7. Now, challenge the class to read the text with you, with this letter missing.
8. Compliment the class. Act astonished. *How did you do that?* etc.
9. Ask one student to choose another vowel from the list.
10. Repeat the above process with another vowel.
11. When you feel that they are ready, challenge the class to read the text without your support. Continue to act surprised at their mysterious ability and give them lots of encouragement.
12. Keep the time frame short. When you are finished, leave the text and the list of vowels on the chalkboard so that you can pick up the game the following day. Eventually the vowels will all be eliminated. By this time the text will have been read many times and it will almost be committed to memory—even by those students who may not be able to read all of it. At this point you can choose to eliminate consonants or even entire words. By the end of the week you will be able to erase the

entire text and the students will be able to “read” the invisible chalk!

### VARIATIONS

- Keep score (teacher vs. students). Each time the passage is read with minimal error and with full participation, the students score a point. If there are any major blunders the teacher scores the point (needless to say, I always lose, at this game).
- Students can take turns erasing the letters (but they have to be able to read the text aloud as they do this).

### REFLECTIONS

At the end of the week have each student talk to a partner about the game. Ask them: How are you able to read the words when they are invisible? What is the main idea of the text? What connections can you make to the text? Do you have any questions about it? Have students report out their responses to the whole class.

### WHO? WHAT? WHERE? WHEN? WHY?

#### Questioning as a Reading Strategy

**Note:** This activity is especially good for reading non-fiction text that is written at the instructional level for most of your students. Depending on the length of the text, this activity could take place over a number of lessons.

### GOALS

Each student will:

- identify the main idea of the text
- ask and answer “on the page” questions

### MATERIALS

- a copy of the text book for each student

### PROCESS

#### Before Reading

1. Prepare by reading the text and chunking it into short sections.
2. Explain to the class that a good reader will often read non-fiction text up to three times before the content is really assimilated and understood.
3. Explain that asking and answering ques-

tions helps the reader to understand the text.

4. Explain that some questions are easy to answer because the information is in the text. These are sometimes called "on the page questions."
5. Recall that some useful question words are: did, are, who, what, where, when, why, how, does, can.

### First Reading

1. Read all of the chunks orally to the class. Stop to examine any pictures (read the captions), sidebars, charts, etc.
2. Use partner talk to discuss the key ideas in the text.
3. Determine the meaning of all the vocabulary (use the glossary if there is one).

### Second Reading

1. Return to the first chunk of text. Re-read the chunk orally to the class. When you are finished, invite the students to ask you a question. The answer to the question must be found in the portion of text you have just read (this is an "on the page question"). Accept and answer three questions before moving on to the second chunk.
2. The second chunk is read orally by the class to you. At the end of the reading you challenge the class with three "on the page questions." Have them partner talk to find the answers.
3. Continue switching roles back and forth until all the chunks have been read.

### VARIATIONS

Keep score (teacher vs. students). Each time you, or a student, offers a correct answer to the "on the page question" a point is scored.

### Third Reading: Choose One Of The Following

1. Fill in the blanks: Re-read all the chunks to the students. At regular intervals stop and leave out a word. The students must follow closely and "fill in the blanks" by reading aloud the missing words.
2. Partner reading: Each student reads with a partner of similar reading ability. Students who might be challenged by the level of the text could gather as a group to read with you.
3. Independent reading: This is a good option if the reading ability of all the students matches the text.

### REFLECTIONS

Have each student talk to a partner. Ask them to discuss: What do you think is the main idea of the text that you have been reading? Have students report out their responses to the whole class. ✨

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