

Picture Removed

# Running From the Traditional Approach to Teaching Reading

**Claudia knew that she could never pull off the old-fashioned kind of running away. That is, running away in the heat of anger with a knapsack on her back. She didn't like discomfort; even picnics were untidy and inconvenient: all those insects and the sun melting the icing on the cupcakes. Therefore, she decided that her leaving home would not be just running from somewhere but would be running to somewhere. To a large place, a comfortable place, an indoor place, and preferably a beautiful place.<sup>1</sup>**

**T**hus begin the adventures of Claudia and her brother Jamie in *From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* by E. L. Konigsburg. You'll have to read the book if you want to know where they run to and what kind of adventures they have.

For many years in Seventh-day Adventist schools, reading has been taught in a very traditional, teacher-directed way with anthologies and workbooks. Have you ever thought about running away from the traditional approach? Departing from tradition can be uncomfortable and scary. If well planned, however, it

Picture Removed

BY THERESA J. ROBIDOUX

can be an exciting adventure. Simply plan to go “to a large place, a comfortable place, an indoor place, and preferably a beautiful place.”

Literature circles can be just such a place. “A literature circle, simply defined, is an opportunity for a small group of students to come together for the purpose of sharing or talking about a novel, short story, or some other literary experience.”<sup>2</sup>

### **To a Large Place**

You may be asking, “Where would I begin?” The research and resources on teaching reading can be a large and intimidating place. The Literature Circles Resource Center at Seattle University gives a wonderful overview of literature circles and how to get them started in your classroom. They host a

***“A literature circle, simply defined, is an opportunity for a small group of students to come together for the purpose of sharing or talking about a novel, short story, or some other literary experience.”***

Website at <http://www.litcircles.org>. In addition to their own information, they list a number of links to other

Websites and a list of books to help get you started.

The North American Division (NAD) Office of Education has produced a number of Seventh-day Adventist Literature Guides that will be helpful.<sup>3</sup> There are guides for various grade levels and books. These simple guides provide author information, a short summary, discussion questions, and related activities.

### **To a Comfortable Place**

Chances are that if you try something and it feels uncomfortable, you will stop doing it. So, be sure that you are comfortable with your choice as you depart from the traditional approach. Start slowly and use what you know and love. Ask yourself:

- Do I read aloud to my students

Picture Removed

Picture Removed

(of all ages) daily?

- Do I have my students read self-selected books silently for a sustained period of time each day?
- Do I use trade books to teach reading?

If you answered No to any of the questions above, these ideas may be something you could try.

Choose a book that you have read and love—your enthusiasm will readily transfer to your students. Be sure to begin with motivational activities. In my classroom, when we read *Water Sky* by Jean Craighead George,<sup>4</sup> the students couldn't wait to get their hands on the books and read after our pre-reading activities.

### To an Indoor Place

Your classroom is where students come to learn to read. Make it a literature-rich environment by filling it with as many quality books as you can. However, use caution in choosing literature for your classroom. *Gateway to Reading*<sup>5</sup> is a wonderful resource for good quality literature.

Set up your classroom in a way that encourages students to read. You could bring in an old comfy couch,

## **Choose a book that you have read and love—your enthusiasm will readily transfer to your students.**

beanbag chairs, or oversized pillows. Create a special corner or zone especially for reading. Make it inviting to the students, where the only thing they are allowed to do is read.

### To a Beautiful Place

Nothing is more satisfying than a class of happy students. They may look forward to silent reading time if they know that afterwards, they will have a few minutes to talk with a partner or small group about what they read.

As you read aloud to your class, they may beg you to read a new chapter each day so they can see what happens next.

As the room fills with writing, projects, and activities that students have produced, reading will become more exciting and rewarding for them.

Fill your knapsack and get ready to run away from the traditional approach. It will be a great adventure! Have fun! ✍



---

**Theresa J. Robidoux** teaches the 8th grade as well as language arts to grades 5 to 8 at Browning Elementary School in South Lancaster, Massachusetts. At the time this article was written, she was

the Principal and grade 5-8 teacher at the Worcester Seventh-day Adventist School in Worcester, Massachusetts.

---

### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. E. L. Konigsburg, *From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* (New York: Dell, 1987), p. 11.

2. Rebel Williams, *Integrated Learning Workshops: Launching Literature Circles* (Bothell, Wash.: The Wright Group, 1993), p. 5.

3. Ninety Seventh-day Adventist Literature Guides for grades 1-8 are available from Pacific Press Publishing Association.

4. Jean Craighead George, *Water Sky* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989).

5. North American Division Office of Education, *Gateway to Reading*. Noncopyrighted material.