

# Book Links

UNPACKING A STANDARD:  
CONNECTING WITH CLASSICS  
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For many of us, the classics are long-standing titles that are wrapped up in childhood memories and bring warm and fuzzy feelings when we reread them. Each year, of course, contemporary authors release notable titles that may become the new classics for our youngest readers. The activities below include suggestions for sharing potential new classics in the classroom, followed by ideas for pairing each title with an established title from the youth-literature canon. All of these suggestions will help implement Common Core State Standards RL.1.2–6.2, which emphasize students' comprehension and summarizing skills.

**RL.1.2. Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.**

**Hooray for Amanda and Her Alligator.** By Mo Willems. 2011. 68p. Harper/Balzer and Bray, \$15.34 (9780062004000). PreS–Gr. 2.

In Mo Willems' first beginning chapter book, six (and a half) short stories detail the adventures of Amanda and Alligator. Invite students to pair up and select one of the stories. After reading the story together, one student can take on the role of retelling the story, while the other student acts out the words. Students can then discuss the retelling to decide if they included all of the important elements of the story. Afterward, have students switch roles and perform the exercise again. Next, have students follow the same steps with *Frog and Toad Are Friends*, by Arnold Lobel. Discuss the similarities and differences between the friendships depicted in the two books. Which characters would the students like to befriend?

**The Cazuela That the Farm Maiden Stirred.** By Samantha Vamos. Illus. by Rafael Lopez. 2011. 32p. Charlesbridge, \$17.95 (9781580892421). PreS–Gr. 1.

The format of this bilingual story will be familiar to students who know folktales such as "The House That Jack Built." The Spanish vocabulary integrated into the story, along with the bright, colorful illustrations, will make for an entertaining read-aloud. After listening to the text, students can use a felt board with pieces cut from a die cut to retell the

story on their own. This can also be done with paper cutouts. Create a cumulative-tale study by pairing this title with *The Napping House*, by Audrey Wood. As a final step, have the students create their own cumulative tale.

**Spork.** By Kyo Maclear. Illus. by Isabelle Arsenault. 2010. 32p. Kids Can, \$14.46 (9781553377368). PreS–Gr. 2.

This lighthearted story explores the joys and difficulties of being a little different. After sharing the book, encourage students to discuss what they think the author's message is and what unique trait they possess that makes them special. Follow this discussion by reading *The Story of Ferdinand*, by Munro Leaf. Afterward, talk about the differences and similarities in Spork's and Ferdinand's stories. How did their differences affect those around them in positive ways? How did they find acceptance?

**RL.4.2. Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.**

**The One and Only Ivan.** By Katherine Applegate. Illus. by Patricia Castelao. 2012. 305p. Harper, \$16.99 (9780061992254). Gr. 3–6.

Ivan is a gorilla living in a cage at a mall, alongside a few other animals, including two elephants, Stella and Ruby. Ivan is content until he gradually begins to remember his life in the wild and later makes a promise that will change everything. Have students break into groups and choose one character in the story on which to focus. Groups can study the words and actions of their characters and then brainstorm ideas about what the character's purpose in the story is. Next, students can present their ideas to the class, and together with other groups, talk about the overall themes of the story based on what they learned about each character and their actions. If students have previously read *Charlotte's Web*, by E. B. White, have them think of a character in White's classic who might be friends with their character choice from *The One and Only Ivan*. What characteristics about the two would make them friends and why?

**Powerless.** By Matthew Cody. 2009. 279p. Knopf, \$15.99 (9780375855955). Gr. 5–8.

*Powerless* is a fantasy story with a realistic feel. Most of the characters are recognizable, contemporary kids—a few of them just happen to have superpowers. After having students read the book, or sharing it aloud in installments, have students take on the role of Daniel, a new kid in town who does not have any superpowers, and write a letter to a friend from his old town, summarizing the events of the story in his voice. A classic story about the advantages and disadvantages of unexpected powers in a realistic world is *Half Magic*, by Edward Eager. After reading *Half Magic*, students could take

on the role of the central characters—Martha, Jane, Mark, or Katharine—and write a letter back to Daniel, pretending to be from his former city and summarizing what has happened to them.

**Trouble Twisters.** By Garth Nix. 2011. 293p. Scholastic, \$16.99 (9780545258975). Gr. 4–7.

*Trouble Twisters* is a gripping fantasy about twins who learn that they have secret powers, which they'll need to protect the world from the Evil. As students read through the book, have them keep a journal. Direct students to record any key words from Nix's text that they feel are necessary to describe the story. Collect the words, either on note cards or on an interactive white board, where the students will be able to see and sort them into phrases, sentences, and a final summary. Follow these same steps with *A Wrinkle in Time*, by Madeleine L'Engle, and then compare the lists. Are there overlapping words? Which words are different, making the individual stories distinct?

**RL.6.2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.**

**Moon over Manifest.** By Clare Vanderpool. 2010. 351p. Delacorte, \$16.99 (9780385738835). Gr. 5–8.

*Moon over Manifest*, the 2011 Newbery Medal winner, is actually two stories in one. One story takes place during WWI, and the other takes place during the Great Depression. To help keep track of the plot created by the two intertwined tales, have students pair up and summarize the book: have one partner focus on the WWI story line, while the other partner focuses on the Great Depression plot. Next, have the students create a time line of events for each story line and then compare the two to visually note the similar characters, events, and places. After creating and comparing the time lines, ask students to discuss what they think the author's overall themes are and why she used this particular dual-narrative approach to get those ideas across. Mildred D. Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, the 1977 Newbery Medal winner, is also set during the Great Depression. After students have read Taylor's classic title, have them perform the same time-line activity in pairs and compare the story line of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* to the two in *Moon over Manifest*.

**Amelia Lost: The Life and Disappearance of Amelia Earhart.** By Candace Fleming. 2011. 118p. illus. Random/Schwartz & Wade, \$18.99 (9780375841989). 629.13. Gr. 4–7.

This biography of the famous flier is rich in details, photographs, and history. Fleming tells her story in dual narratives: a traditional biography and then an almost play-by-play account of the days following Amelia Earhart's lost plane. Have students select a chapter or section of the book and

summarize their portion. If your class has access to video equipment, students who are summarizing the passages in which the plane is lost could create "live" news reports and record themselves. Students who are summarizing Earhart's earlier life could create video "feature" stories about her life that could be interspersed with the other student group's "live" reports. Finally, teachers can combine the video newscast summaries, creating a full, multimedia synopsis of the book. Richard Peck's 2000 Newbery Honor Book, *A Long Way from Chicago*, a frequently taught classroom title, is set during the same time period as *Amelia Lost*. After reading Peck's book, students could take on the voices of his characters to tell Amelia Earhart's story, perhaps as "eyewitnesses."

**Out of My Mind.** By Sharon M. Draper. 2010. 295p. Atheneum, \$16.99 (9781416971702). Gr. 5–8.

Melody is an extraordinarily smart girl who has cerebral palsy, which makes it almost impossible for her to communicate with others. The ups and downs she experiences throughout this novel will move readers to tears. Draper's novel is also a good book with which to practice summarizing without including personal opinions, because reading it will likely bring out strong emotions in the reader. Have students create a two-column journal, labeling one side "Just-the-Facts." When an important event in Melody's story happens, students will need to record it using a short and sweet sentence. Next, have students label the other journal column "How I Feel about It," and allow students to record their feelings as they read about the events in the first column. Finally, students can take their "facts" and combine them to write their opinions-free summary. After studying *Out of My Mind*, have students read *The Secret Garden*, by Frances Hodgson Burnett. Allow students to compare and contrast how Melody deals with cerebral palsy and then how Mary and Colin deal with illness and mobility difficulties.

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