

THE PRIMARY GRADE RESEARCH REPORT

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Though research reports typically may be thought of as junior to senior high school projects, their basic processes may be distilled so as to make them valuable experiences for very young children as well. Working through the years with our second grade students, we have established a sequence of three projects by which they are introduced to basic research skills. Beginning simply in the fall, and increasing in complexity through February, our activities build children's skills in taking responsibility for selecting their topics, forming questions to be answered, locating source materials, and reporting their findings back to the class. The children discover purposeful reading beyond the "reading group" and writing to communicate factual information. The entire curriculum is enhanced by the integration of language arts skills with other subject matter areas. Once the three preliminary projects are completed, students display enough confidence and ability to participate in and enjoy as many more such activities as time will allow. Throughout the exercises, our goal is not a polished final product, but rather experience with the research process and the growth in independent learning which results.

The following three projects revolve around animal topics pertinent to our particular science and social studies curriculum, but could certainly be substituted with material relevant to any program. Our first project in the fall relates to a study in science of animal life cycles. As a culminating activity, children individually choose an animal of interest to them. Group discussion then centers around possible topics of interest which could be investigated regarding the animals, such as habitat, winter activities, foods, life cycle stages, and so on. Throughout the discussion, children are

encouraged to begin thinking of at least two questions which they would like to answer about their particular animal. Each is then given a 5x7 inch index card on which to record his or her findings as overnight homework. Possible sources are also discussed and may include home encyclopedias, dictionaries, other books, and even parents. The following day, when the children share their findings orally, it is not unusual for them to appear with books and pictures to show and have much more than two facts to relate. The first research experience has given everyone a measure of success and whetted an appetite for investigation that will continue to be stimulated as the year progresses.

Both the second and third projects involve the use of the children's library, either public or in school, and advance preparation by the teacher is involved. For these two projects, we compile lists of animals for which good source material is available in the library and offer this list to the children from which they then choose their individual animals. Prior to our arrival at the library, the needed books are displayed on tables so the children may locate their materials quickly and begin work.

Our second project is a study of Alaskan animals done in January. Since this project is a good deal more complex, students are assigned partners with whom to share their topics, though each must complete the required work. We have found it helpful to combine better readers with poorer readers so that the pair may work without teacher assistance in reading the library materials. Preliminary discussions and requirements are quite similar to the fall project except that three facts are expected on the overnight assignment. The following day, the class works in the library where, if necessary, children may complete the three facts begun the night before, and then add any additional information they find interesting. Copying from texts is not allowed; instructions are to read, close the book, and write what you would tell if you could tell someone about your animal. As with the first, this is a very open ended project allowing children to tell as much as they like—take along extra 5x7 inch cards! Once back in the classroom the next day, children draw or paint a picture of their animals to display with their cards.

The third project is, of course, the most demanding and sets the pattern for any additional ones that may follow. Once again, the teacher has scanned the library and prepared a list of animals

from which the class may choose, in our case Australian animals this time. Children work independently, though the partner system could be continued if desired. More deliberate research is required as children are asked to investigate specific areas regarding their animals: 1. home, 2. size, 3. coloring, 4. enemies, 5. food, and 6. a fact interesting to the student. Work may be begun in the classroom library or at home and continued in the school or public library the following day until the six required facts are found. Though our educational goals continue to center around the research process, the children's ability has increased to the point at which they enjoy producing a more elaborate project through which to communicate their findings. Following this research, children are given paper pre-cut according to the size of their animals, and ranging from 2 inch squares to whole 12x18 inch sheets which we refer to as "tiny, small, medium, large, and giant." They then paint or draw their animals, referring to their information to keep size and colors accurate. With this format, their display indicates the relative size of the animals studied along with the information they have compiled.

With these three experiences behind them, students are sufficiently prepared to engage in many more such activities in a variety of subject areas. The following are ideas which we have found to be successful.

A biography project is one which children find interesting and which is easily supported by most children's library collections. We begin the project as a group by reading a short biography selection usually taken from an auxiliary basal reader. In discussion, we consider what made that person memorable and begin to generalize to include other famous individuals as well. Traits such as honesty, determination, intelligence, physical ability, inventiveness, and curiosity typically are mentioned. Specific requirements for the research are listed in class: 1. dates of birth and death, 2. home area, 3. family, 4. why we remember him or her, 5. what you like about him or her. Since biography collections are usually quite extensive and selections are lengthy, children make their choices at the library and begin a period of one to two weeks during which they read their books, either alone or with parents in the evenings. They are encouraged to keep in mind the facts they will be required to write and are usually well prepared by the time the 5x7 inch cards are distributed at

the end of the reading period. When the research is completed, the children paint portraits of their people, frame them in dark paper strips, and display them with their research cards along a time line.

In conjunction with our study of the farm in May, we have sometimes conducted a research project on crops. This, as with the second and third projects, demands prior preparation by the teacher to assure success in the library. Specific information requirements include: 1. where the crop is grown, 2. how it is used, 3. where it is used, 4. special equipment required, and 5. its ideal seasons or weather conditions. These reports could be displayed with yarn lines linking them to a world map.

Our science curriculum includes a year-long study of trees which is highly conducive to a research report. Children choose a particular variety of tree and seek the following information about it: 1. size, 2. type of leaves, 3. fruits, 4. type of bark, and 5. where it is located. Trees are then painted on appropriately scaled strips of paper, cut out, and displayed as a class forest.

Indian tribes are very popular with children and very easily researched. Possible requirements might be: 1. location, 2. foods, 3. clothing, 4. shelter, 5. transportation, and 6. a unique fact. Children then build or paint a representative home for their tribe and display it on a United States map.

Though the research report may seem a formidable project, by choosing child-appropriate topics, methods, and products, young children can be quite successful with them. The goals and rewards of these experiences lie in seeing students begin early to use the techniques of independent learners.

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