

Let's Work Together Teaching Guide

Dear Teacher,

A favorite genre of students, realistic fiction opens a window into their world and their hopes and dreams, and often validates their life experiences. Bonding to realistic stories can happen quickly as students connect with characters that experience a similar range of emotions, relationships, problems, and wonderings.

When students relate to realistic plots, they can connect deeply to characters, the antagonistic forces they struggle against, and the decisions they make. Realistic fiction is a genre that also appeals to developing readers because the stories can have relevance to their challenges, hopes, and dreams. All learners can connect to the range of emotions characters experience in a world that's familiar. Let's capitalize on the impact realistic fiction can have on students' reading lives as they bond with characters that show them alternate ways to cope with similar problems and situations.

Laura Robb

START WITH YOURSELF

Invite students to do a quick write about everything they know and feel about realistic fiction. Model by completing a quick write on large chart paper or under a document camera so everyone can observe your process. Tell students the quick write will last three minutes and the purpose is to write furiously, not worrying about punctuation or complete sentences. If ideas stop flowing, write the last word again and again until an idea comes. In the box below is a quick write I wrote for fifth graders (you'll notice that the punctuation isn't perfect!). It's helpful for students to watch you cold write as it gives them a mental model of the process. Quick writes are also great for reacting to poems and accessing students' prior knowledge.

Encourage students to pair-share and discuss your quick write. Have them jot down questions to ask you before they complete a quick write of their own in their readers' notebooks. Emphasize that you're looking for thoughts and feelings in their quick writes.

Realistic Fiction

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ROBB'S SAMPLE QUICK WRITE

I read tons of realistic fiction and reread favorites more than once or favorite parts that I connect to. The plots are real, real, real and could happen to me or friends and that's why they work for me, me, me. Sometimes I learn different ways to solve a problem or to deal with a friend who betrayed me by talking about me behind my back back back. This can make me sad, and realistic fiction brings out lots of emotions so I laugh, cry, hold my breath cause I'm scared for what could happen to a character I really care about. When the plot is real and I relate to it, I don't want to stop reading.

TEACH STUDENTS HOW TO CHOOSE A "GOOD FIT" BOOK

Post the suggestions that follow on chart paper. Pick two suggestions and model how they help you select a book, and then invite students to choose a book from the shelf of recommended books or from your class library.

- Look for books on topics and genres that interest you.
- Study the front cover illustration and read the information on the back cover or the inside cover flap.
- Think of books you've read and enjoyed. Is the topic, genre, or author similar?
- Read and enjoy the illustrations or photographs.
- Ask a friend to recommend a book.
- Ask your teacher to recommend a book.
- Read the chapter titles in the table of contents and ask yourself, *Does this interest me?*
- Take a test drive and read two to three pages or the first chapter. Can you retell key points?

TEACHING TIP

Create a wall of top-notch realistic fiction books students recommend. Tack a large piece of construction paper onto a bulletin board and title it: "Great Reads: Realistic Fiction." Ask students to remember the title and author of two realistic books they read and enjoyed so much that they wanted to reread each one. Older students can print their first and last names and jot their choices underneath, using brightly colored markers. You can write the book choices offered by younger students.

TEACHING TIP

Give the list of books to your school's media specialist and ask her to pull those that are in the school's library. Check the books out and add to the stack by pulling books from your class library. Create a separate shelf of recommended realistic fiction books for students to choose from. Of course, they can check out other books, but peer-to-peer recommendations can be enticing!

MOVE TO STUDENTS:

Once students have selected a book, give them sticky notes and have them divide their book into three to five chunks. When chunking, students can place a sticky note at the end of a chunk and write “stop to think” on each note.

After students complete a chunk, pair them up and have them select a question/prompt from the list below to discuss.

NOTEBOOK WRITING

Before writing an entry, students should head the page with their name, the date, the title and author of their book, and the entry's topic. Pairs can choose a question they discussed, jot it and some notes on the headed page, and then write the response. Students can also draw their favorite character and write a few sentences introducing him or her, or they can choose an event, draw it, and explain why it was important or how it affected the protagonist

ADDITIONAL IDEAS

for Engaging Students with Realistic Fiction

- Describe a problem the protagonist had, explain how he/she resolved it, and then discuss how you would resolve it. Offer reasons that explain your decision.
- Illustrate two of your favorite parts in the book.
- Present a dramatic monologue for the protagonist. Start by giving some background information about the character and then describe two key events or moments. Present the monologue as if you have become the character; use the pronoun “I.”
- Pretend you are the author of an advice column. Write a question that a character from your book might send to you about a problem he/she faces. Then write your response, giving the character advice about dealing with his/her problem.
- On notebook paper, write three to four text message exchanges the protagonist might have with another character. Stick to the book's plot, interactions, and decisions.
- Choose a powerful event and turn it into a short graphic text.
- Using information from the book and your imagination, design and draw the protagonist's room or favorite place to hang out.
- Imagine the protagonist keeps a diary. Using the events in the book, write four to six entries he/she might write in the diary.

TEACHING TIP

Pair up students who are no more than one year apart in instructional reading levels so they have something to contribute to each other.

Students can discuss different books or the same book.

- Describe two important problems the protagonist faced. Why do you feel each one is realistic?
- Think of the protagonist at the beginning and the end of your book. Discuss one event, decision, and character that changed the protagonist. Point out the changes and explain whether each one is realistic.
- What problems or relationships do you and the main character have in common? Choose one problem and compare the way you would deal with it to the way the protagonist dealt with it.
- Does the protagonist have conflicts with another character? Describe one of these conflicts and explain why it was or wasn't resolved.
- Choose two to three settings and explain how each one affects the protagonist. Have similar settings influenced you in the same way? If so, explain.

TEACHER'S NOTES:

Lined area for teacher's notes.