

Picture Books in the Secondary Classroom

Meadowcreek High School (Norcross, Georgia)

Meadowcreek High School's underserved AP students grew from 40% to 60% of its total AP population from 2007 to 2010.



A New Look at Books

AP English teachers at Meadowcreek High School were concerned because many of their underserved students were taking AP courses in math and science, but shying away from AP English courses because they didn't believe they could handle the rigorous reading and writing curriculum. These students possess the same intellectual ability as her other students, noted Jenna Gardner, but they may be missing the connection between surface reading and deeper reading. As Meadowcreek worked toward open enrollment in AP courses, faculty members realized that students entering AP classes for the first time need more support than the traditional instructional methods may give.

As our society becomes increasingly visual, it is also becoming increasingly difficult for students to sit down with a book that is just text. Picture books provide the means to draw students in and give them access to a literary world by utilizing visual appeal. A good way to start is by having students illustrate a poem, or by building a storyboard depicting the action visually from a selection of text. Developing this additional method to delve into the deeper meaning of text is a skill that will help prepare students for the challenging literature taught in AP classrooms.

Pictures Worth Reading

Picture books are an instantly accessible resource that can be used to illustrate literary devices, difficult concepts and troubling events. Students would be able to bring in books from home they might already own. Classic fairy-tale picture books teach allegory and allusion. Using picture books makes a difficult text more accessible and makes Shakespeare less intimidating. Similarly, picture books can address students' fear of not getting the deeper meaning of poetry because the compact structure of meaning in a picture book mirrors the compact structure of a poem.

What you need:

Here are some examples of picture books that can be used in both AP history and AP English courses:

- Innocenti, R. and Gallaz, Christophe. (1985). *Rose Blanche* views the grim impact of the Nazi regime and the Holocaust through the eyes of a young German girl who is a witness of the tumultuous events happening in her town.
- Feelings, T. (1995). *The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo*. Master artist Tom Feelings tells the complete story of the cruel and terrifying journey of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean in 64 extraordinary narrative paintings.
- Raven, N. (2007). *Beowulf: A Tale of Blood, Heat, and Ashes*. This descriptive modern rendition of the *Beowulf* story and its engaging pictures stimulate student interest and "buy-in" to navigate difficult text of the ancient epic, *Beowulf*.

What you need to know:

While picture books can be an instantaneous resource, it is also a challenge to acquire enough to share them with an entire classroom. It can be difficult and expensive to buy one for each student. One proposed solution can be to get a projector to display the images. You may also want to split the students into groups working with different picture books at separate tables.

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"The principal's saying for AP in our school is 'rigor with nurture.' Every student should take an AP English course before college. Even if students don't score a 3 or higher, the experience will still better themselves and their skills. We push, but very nicely, and it's very rare that a student drops AP. When they finish, both the teacher and the student feel like they are better writers."

— Jenna Gardner, AP English Literature Teacher

Demographics

Meadowcreek High School
Norcross, Georgia

