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# Children's Magazines As Resource Materials For Language Teaching

WONG YIN MEE

The recent emphasis on Active Communicative Teaching (ACT) in the primary schools and the move towards a thematic approach in language teaching have resulted in a demand for more authentic and interesting materials to supplement school textbooks. Many teachers have turned to the use of newspaper articles, but while the newspaper has a variety of articles on contemporary issues, they are not always written for primary school children, and may pose difficulty for the average reader. The other problem is that with newspaper articles, children get exposed to the same genre all the time, and too much of the same invariably loses its effectiveness.

One unexplored source of authentic materials is children's magazines. There are a number of locally published titles available in Singapore (see end of article for a listing) at modest prices in addition to imported magazines which are easily available through subscriptions. Many school children are already subscribers to local magazines, and some school libraries subscribe to foreign magazines such as *Cricket* and *National Geographic World*.

Magazines are a valuable source of resource materials for the teacher because they have great flexibility. They are also well-rounded and typically broader in content than most books. Magazines provide variety and a regular supply of good learning materials on a variety of topics. A typical magazine invariably features fictional and factual prose passages, poems, jokes, letters, riddles, puzzles, contests, comic strips, and almost always, a page for children's contributions. Apart from providing children with exposure to a variety of writing genres, teachers can also use the stories and feature articles for a variety of purposes.

Recreational reading can be easily promoted through magazines. Magazines can encourage an interest in reading because they are a part of reading in the real world, and magazine reading is a good way to immerse children in print. Reluctant readers who are easily put off by "thick" books can be encouraged to browse through magazines, and be given the opportunity and responsibility to choose what they want to read.

Magazine subscriptions help children form consistent reading habits because the magazines come regularly. The teacher can subscribe to a magazine for the class, and every time the magazine arrives, she can go through the copy with the class, highlighting the interesting stories and articles, before placing it in the reading corner. This is a good way to get pupils looking forward to the magazine. Generally old magazines are just as appealing as new issues, and these can be obtained cheaply from second hand bookshops. It is also a good idea to subscribe to several magazines, or to get a group of teachers to subscribe to different magazines. These can be swapped around during the month.

Magazines are a good way to help supplement the class library. Many teachers have complained about the lack of interesting books or funds to purchase new books; magazines are one way to remedy the situation. Stories published in these magazines can also be used. They can be removed (photostated if the originals are not too clean) and mounted on cardboards. These can be laminated, and the stories can be organised either according to themes or difficulty level and bound into an anthology or "skinny" books. The latter are useful for encouraging beginning and reluctant readers who are always put off by thick books. A colourful cover will add to their attraction.

Apart from recreational reading, magazine stories and articles can be used as reading comprehension and cloze passages, for vocabulary development and writing assignments. Magazine stories are ideal reading comprehension passages because they are interesting, authentic, and of a suitable length. Most passages used in class are incomplete extracts and are, therefore, not representative of the real reading children are expected to do. Magazine stories and feature articles also cover a variety of child-centred topics that can be easily integrated into the language arts themes. Some magazines

grade the stories, and this means that the teacher can select material of varying difficulty levels to cater to the different ability groups in the class.

Apart from comprehension, children can be encouraged to write new endings to the stories, write to the Editor, contribute to the Readers' Page, take part in contests, study the advertisements, and work on the new words encountered in each issue. Puzzles, jokes, quizzes featured in each copy can be removed and mounted on cardboards and laminated. These can be placed at the back of the class for children's amusement in between lessons. The lamination allows the puzzles to be used over and over again by children if they are given non-permanent markers or grease sticks to write on. In addition, magazine pictures can be used for a variety of purposes e.g. input for picture compositions, stimulus for discussion, for art and craft work etc. Magazines are also suitable for teaching a vast array of other subjects e.g. Social Studies, Science, Maths, Moral Education. In fact, special interest magazines are available on a variety of topics.

Magazines are a good first step to literacy and a good way to supplement book reading. They are a real bargain being cheap, abundant, easily available and appealing and are a good source of recreational and educational reading both at home and in school.

A list of magazines published locally:

**D'Light**, published monthly, by STP Distributors. Stories, articles, puzzles, riddles, jokes. Contributions from children welcome. Articles systematically coded and graded. Good quality pictures and printing.

Subscription \$24 per year.

Subscription address: STP Distributors Pte Ltd.  
Direct Marketing Department  
Times Centre, 1 New Industrial Road,  
Singapore 1953.

**Sharity**, 4 issues a year, published by the Community Chest of Singapore. Stories, contests, puzzles, letters to Editor, contributions from readers welcome, penpals. Few articles on factual material.

Focus on sharing and giving. May be suitable for younger readers. Subscription: \$6 for 4 issues, a portion of the cost goes to the Community Chest.

Subscription address: Subscription Club Management Services  
55 Lorong L, Telok Kurau  
#03-65 Bright Centre  
Singapore 1542.

**The Bookworm Family (for lower primary children), Bookworm Digest** (for older children) published by Bookworm Consultants. Stories, some short factual material, contests, puzzles and cartoon strips in the both magazines. Children's contributions accepted. Plenty of pictures but not coloured.

Subscriptions not available but each bimonthly issue costs \$1 (Bookworm Family) and \$1.20 (Bookworm Digest). Available in a number of bookshops.

**Young Generation**, published by Educational Publications Bureau Pte Ltd. This is a bilingual magazine with the regular features, plus an assessment paper for PSLE. Has coloured and black and white illustrations. Suitable for Upper Primary children.

Subscription \$8.50 for 10 copies a year.

Subscription address: Educational Publications Bureau Pte Ltd.  
Blk 162, Bukit Merah Central  
#04-3545, Singapore 0315.

**Funland**, published by Wixard Publishers Pte Ltd. Black and white illustrations with the same regular features as the other children's magazines.

Subscriptions not available but each fortnightly copy costs \$1.20. Funland is available in a number of bookshops.

**Zoo-Ed and Zoo Garden**, published by the Singapore Zoological Gardens. Good quality glossy magazines featuring animals in the zoo. Has interesting factual articles on plants and animals and contests for readers. Friends of the Zoo get free copies. Subscription rates for Zoo-Ed, \$4 for 4 issues per year.

Subscription address: Zoo-Ed,  
Singapore Zoological Gardens  
80 Mandai Lake Road  
Singapore 2575.

### *Foreign Magazines*

(Please send US\$4 for postage with every subscription)

**Cricket**, published by Open Court Publishing Company. Black and white printing but of good quality. Excellent stories, poems from well-known children's authors. Contributions welcome from readers. Cricket is the winner of a number of national awards for excellence. Subscription: US \$22.50 per year.

Subscription address: Cricket Magazine  
PO Box 51144  
Boulder, CO 80321-1144  
USA.

**Stone Soup**: The magazine by children published by the Children's Art Foundation. This bimonthly magazine publishes fiction, poetry, book reviews and art by children. An interesting section is "Activities" where the children's contributions are discussed and projects suggested for readers based on these contributions. Printed on high quality paper, the magazine has colour art inside and on the covers.

Subscription: US\$20 per year  
Subscription address: Stone Soup  
PO Box 83  
Santa Cruz, CA 95063  
USA.

**National Geographic World**, published by the national Geographic Society features factual stories about outdoor adventure, history, sports, natural history and science. It has special features like posters, games and crafts.

Subscription: US\$10.95 per year  
Subscription address: National Geographic World  
PO Box 2330  
Washington, DC 20077-9955  
USA.