



Descriptions of Out of the Box Book Report and Literary Study Ideas to Motivate your Readers

There are times where you want your learner to just read a book for the enjoyment of reading that particular book. You might want to even just talk about it a bit and why your reader enjoyed it and then move onto another book.

Then there are times where you want your learner to learn or apply and practice a skill after reading a book. Or maybe you need to keep a portfolio of your child's work for your homeschool.

These alternative book report ideas are great ways to engage reluctant readers in the upper elementary through high school ages as well as add interest and variety to their assignments. And, they are geared to different kinds of learners – with some of the activities geared more toward visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners. You use different levels and kinds of thinking skills as well as intrinsic talents and interests of your learners that will keep them engaged in the process of learning from their reading experience.

I usually present to my students and my own children different choices of activities after reading a book where I want them to do some of kind of literary analysis or learn specific skills and concepts. The activity would focus on that skill and concept, but the type of activity would be geared to the learners' learning styles, personal interests and talents so that they will be motivated and interested.

These activities are geared toward specific skills or concepts that are included in the literary and story elements for the book but are of a nature to make sure to capture the interest of the learner.

Ideas Geared Toward the Visual Learner

Construct a mobile with pictures, string, either a hanger or some dowel rods or sticks of some kind and you can hang the pictures from the string on these. These pictures can be symbols for or pictures that have a relationship to show the theme of the story or can be about the characters or events that occurred in the book. So you discuss and focus on what "theme" is for the story and that how that relates to the book your learner has just finished. If you focus on the characters in the story, you can discuss the different characteristics of the characters in the story – they can be physical or about the personalities and discuss what "character analysis" is. The pictures you include with the mobile can show different aspects about the different characters – you can include the idea of "static" and "dynamic" and if different characters changed in their personalities through the course of the story and the pictures can show the changes.



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For events that occurred in the story, you can include pictures of major events that influenced the story and the order of things happening and hang them from the mobile. You can include discussion of a “plot map” and the ideas of rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution and include the most important events. This requires being able to identify the most important events and their significance to the story.

Write an advice column – Also, for character analysis, you can write an advice column and focus on a main character where the character writes for advice about a conflict or problem he encounters in the story. How the character writes and what he writes about should reflect what kind of person he is and motivations he has in the story.

Character email or letter exchange – You can also have characters reflect who they are by writing as if you are two the main characters and have them write emails to one another. The topic of the email exchange can focus on a main event in the story or a conflict that may be between the two characters. Again you want the emails to reflect the personalities and motivations of the characters.

Character Facebook Page – Another way to depict a character analysis about a main character in the story is to write up a pretend Facebook page for the character, filling in all the information you would normally fill in – like the About, Interests, Education, Work etc. And you can include pictures and posts and statuses that that character might include on their Facebook page.

Journal or Diary – If you do have a writer or one that enjoys keeping a journal or diary, this project may be for them. It can be used

So, you can see by these examples so far, there are a variety of ways to include a study about a literary aspect of the book and include what might interest a particular learner. And they are completing a form of a literary analysis of a certain type without writing a typical essay. And, they are using a variety of thinking skills at different levels at the same time.

Character Resume and Cover Letter – Here, you can pretend a character is trying to apply for a particular job – you would want the job to fit the character and would make sense. In the resume, you can include the different talents, skills, and traits that this character would possess that you can derive from the story and put them in the appropriate framework in a resume. In the cover letter, you can have the character reveal his personality and motivation for the job application. This would be another type of character analysis that might include even more creativity if your learner would like to bring in a little more imagination.

Character Dossier – If you have a learner who enjoys solving mysteries or likes the idea of detective or spy work, your learner can pretend to be a detective or spy who has to put together a dossier of one of the characters. Here’s another fun way to do a character analysis. They can include written descriptions of the character including physical and psychological characteristics and motivations, as well as background information about the character that your learner can infer from reading the story. They might also want to



include pictures they draw or put together on the computer, simulating photos that may be taken by a detective who is watching their suspect.

Retell the story from a different point of view – Another form of character analysis would be to retell the story from another character’s point of view other than from the one the story is originally told. For example, *The Three Little Pigs* was told from the point of view of the three pigs. Here you can discuss the different kinds of point of view from which a story can be told and then identify the point of view of the book that you just read. An alternative from the pigs telling the story, the wolf can tell the story from his point of view and this reflects his thoughts and his character.

Symbolic Time Capsule or Museum Exhibit or Suitcase or Collection – With this project you can either draw and cut out or make out of different kinds of materials such as paper or play dough or find little objects at home to represent a character or main characters in the story. Or, they can be symbols or objects that reflect the theme or events that occur in the story. You can place them in a time capsule or some kind of container for a collection or a suitcase for a character. You can also make some kind of shelves out of box or cereal box and pretend to put together a museum exhibit with little display shelves and elaborate on it as much as you want.

3 D Relief Map or a Diorama – The relief map can depict the story if it is a story with different places and geography and features. You would want to include this kind of project if the setting and location are important to the story and influences the theme, characters, and setting of the story. Have your learner explain its importance to the story.

The Diorama can be in a shoe box or a bigger box or on a flat piece of wood or cardboard and can reflect a major scene or event or a few them. It can be made with paper, paper mache, legos, salt dough, play dough, or things from around the house.

At the same time, the scene may also reflect the character and reveal an important aspect of the character involved in that scene.

Photo Album – Construct a photo album for a character for a character analysis or depict significant scenes from the story. The pictures you include can emphasize different elements of a story depending on what you want to focus – it can be the plot or the theme.

Foldable Display Board – Using the kind of display board you would use for a science fair display, you can focus on one element of a story – character analysis, plot, theme, or literary elements used by the author in his writing. You can focus on one or you can focus on three since they have three separate sections. You can use a combination of words and pictures.



Drawing Projects –

Book Jacket, Comic Strip, Collage – Main events, theme, or characters of the story.

Flip Book or Trading Cards – These can also focus or include on one or more story elements.

Mini Quilt – If you have a learner who knows or wants to learn how to sew, a mini quilt is a fun project to construct pictures with scenes or symbols used for events, characters, and theme or a combination of these to include in the quilt. You can choose what aspect of the story you want to focus on.

Charts – Maybe if you have a learner who likes things organized in linear and formatted fashion, they may like doing some kind of project with charts. After reading a book, depending on what you want to discuss about the book, you can use a chart to pull out that information and organize it.

To discuss the various parts of a plot and the different parts of a plot map and sequence, you can sketch out a flow chart of the most important events. You can also do a cause and effect sequence or a chart with separate events and their corresponding results.

A **timeline** can also be another way to sketch out the sequence of events of a plot instead of drawing a plot map.

When discussing characters and doing a character analysis where you want to describe the different personalities, characteristics, and motivations of the characters, you can do this in a compare and contrast chart between characters or even a Venn diagram. In the Venn diagram, you can have separate circles for the different characters and their characteristics and then an overlapping circle for common characteristics among the characters. This would appeal to your more logical learners and your visual learners. So if you have a learner who enjoys math, this may be a project they enjoy to include in their literature study.

An **analogy chart** is very effective when you have a story such as Pilgrim's Progress or Animal Farm where the characters, places, and events represent other concepts.

Literary Devices Chart – To focus on the writing technique of the author if you want to practice identifying different kinds of literary devices, a chart is a good start. As your learner reads the book, they can write down different kinds of literary devices they see and put an example of it from the reading in quotes and the page number of the book.



Compare and Contrast Books or Authors – A chart is a good device or format to use if your learner has enjoyed a particular theme and has read two books with that same theme or enjoys a particular author and has read two books from that author. Your learner can practice comparing and contrasting the books and how that theme was handled or the two books by the same author and the similarities and differences of those books.

Wordle – For your more creative and techy learner, I've had students really enjoy making a Wordle where for whatever topic or concept we are examining for the story – like the theme or a main character- they can use a software program to input words of significance that depict the theme or are a description of the character.

Ideas Geared toward more Auditory Learners

Drama – Now, you might have a very creative and expressive learner who found a character fascinating or infuriating. Here is a great opportunity to have them act out that character and bring that character's personality to life.

Your learner can either come up with their own summary and written monologue or use one expressed by a character in the story and then perform it. They may even want to put together a costume they envision the character wearing from descriptions in the book. These kinds of skills where the learner is interpreting what they are reading and inferencing what the character looks like and would wear and their physical mannerisms and behavior are terrific skills to acquire and practice when reading. So you see we aren't just doing something fluffy or just focusing on concepts of literary analysis, we are using various kinds and levels of thinking skills.

A variation of this kind of oral or dramatic presentation is to have your learner become the author and have the author of the book present or discuss an aspect of the story and his point of view or purpose in writing the story, the events, the characters, and the writing techniques that were used.

Instead of pretending to be the character, your learner may have really enjoyed or was affected by a particular scene the way it was described in the story. You can have your learner take that section of the book and practice doing a dramatic reading of it and perform it for you and then have a question and answer chat or relate to you why they chose that section and what significance it had to them and to the story.

If you have learners who enjoy arguing or who tend to be on track to be lawyers, your learner can come up with a mock trial (depending on the story and the characters involved) where a character is on trial for something they did in the story.



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If you have an arts and crafts kind of learner or one who may entertain the idea of becoming a teacher or a librarian, they may enjoy the idea of creating puppets for the characters (again doing a character analysis of physical and personality characteristics) and focusing on a key or key scenes from the story that depict who the main characters are or the plot of the story. They can be elaborate as they want with their puppet show, the set, the puppets, the program, the tickets etc.

Write poetry, songs, or raps – Maybe you have a learner that loves music or plays an instrument or sings. What a great opportunity to have them write a poem, a song, or even a rap about one or more characters, the theme of the story, or the plot. They could have fun practicing some of the same literary devices that the author may have used in the story.

Book Club - I mentioned in last month's podcast that reluctant readers may enjoy being part of some kind of book club where it can be a social as well as learning event. This can include just group discussions or be as involved as having a tea, social or party around a book. Everyone can dress up as characters from the book, have food from the story, and play games centered around the story or theme or just have a book discussion around the table.

Audio or Video Recording – A fun idea is to set up a simulation of a talk show of some kind and have a host interview a character or author of a book. You can just have a recording like on the radio or a podcast or a video with costumes and a setting. The conversation or interview can focus on any literary aspect of the story you want to focus on.

Radio Play – You might want to share with your learners a recording or video of what old time radio plays were like with sound effects and the story being told with the different characters and their voices. Maybe your learner will want to put together a shortened version of the story or just a scene and produce a radio play with different sound effects and characters with their voices.

Videos – Some learners enjoy the camera and taking pictures and videos of themselves. Take advantage of that interest with your learner acting as a news reporter and reporting about the book's events or characters, producing a movie trailer using some the fun software out there, a power point or Prezi presentation converted to a movie, or a commercial or sales pitch for the book.

Ideas Geared toward more Hands-on Learners

Games – Maybe you have a game lover who could develop a board game for their book. I've had students take this idea and run with it. They had playing pieces or tokens for the characters or symbols from the book and a board game as simple as Chutes and Ladders or something complex that was a map of the Middle Kingdom from Lord of the Rings. There have been different kinds of task cards that the players draw or



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consequence cards where they landed on a spot and had to draw a card and were rewarded or penalized by the card. Some games included collecting significant tokens or items they had to accumulate on the way to the finish line or the players just had to make it to the finish line to win. They also developed a list of rules and how to play the game and demonstrated and explained the significance of all the game components before everyone sat down to play the game. It was extraordinary what they were able to come up with!

Another type of game doesn't have to be with a game board. It could be along the same lines as a scavenger hunt type game or another interactive type parlor game among the players.

Cooking and Baking – I've had some students where reading and writing were a major challenge but they really shined in the kitchen. So project for them after a book was to bake a cake and decorate it to reflect the theme of the book and then be able to explain the significance of everything she had included in her cake and the decorations and how they related to the book.

So, you see if you take a moment and think outside the box, take a look at your learner and their personal interests, talents, and abilities, you can include those to come up with a way to study literature that would emphasize their personal strengths and interests AND still practice various thinking skills and literary concepts and analysis.

I hope you have found these ideas helpful and are excited to try some of them with your own learner after you finish reading your next book!