Be a Model Reader is a reading reminder excerpted from Reading Reminders: Tools, Tips, and Techniques by Jim Burke.

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Our job as literature teachers should be to model reading and thinking about a text, not to dictate meaning.

CAROL JAGO, FROM WITH RIGOR FOR ALL: TEACHING THE CLASSICS TO CONTEMPORARY STUDENTS

Be a Model Reader

RATIONALE

Harkening back to the apprentice system, we must function as master readers whose job is to show the novice how it is done. We must also show them, through both words and deeds, why it should be done (and when and where it can be done).

WHAT TO DO

• Get to know your students so that you can provide them with appropriate recommendations about what to read.

• Talk whenever appropriate about your own reading, not only to show them that you practice what you preach, but to illustrate how your reading applies to a range of situations. Specifically, talk about when, why, where, how, and what you read, so that they are able to see that books are a viable source of information.

• Talk to students about how you choose and read your books, with the goal of demystifying these processes.

• Model for them any assignments that you give. This means thinking aloud as you read so that they can hear how you approach reading any particular text.

• Set up a bulletin board in your room to post articles that support the idea of reading and its importance (e.g., article about a barber whose back room is an African American bookstore and reading room).

• Reinforce the importance of reading, but also of ideas, information, and thinking skills, all of which are best developed and improved through reading.

• Improve your ability to read aloud so that you can make a powerful impression during this activity.

• Talk about the role that you, as a parent, play in your child’s literacy, to remind your students that whatever their attitude toward reading, it is something they would want their own children to be able to do well.
• Read and talk about a wide range of texts, including different genres and subjects, so that you can recommend books in all fields to your students and demonstrate how vast the world of reading is.

• Recycle your magazines from home: keep different kids in mind, and when you come across an article that you think one of your students would find interesting, bring it in and present it in a way that piques their interest.

• Remember Thoreau’s words: “How many men’s lives have been changed by a single book?”

• Remember Lincoln’s words: “He is my friend who will give me a book I have not yet read.”

• Provide opportunities for your students, whatever grade, to be mentors to those who are younger than they. Students who participate in Reading Buddies programs at elementary and secondary schools develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments and an understanding of the importance of reading.

• Teach them how to be independent readers who can find and choose their own books and read them on their own for personal satisfaction or a specific use.

• Tell students what you do when you have trouble reading a book or get bored with it. This shows them that everyone gets stuck once in a while; it also shows them how to solve particular problems.

• When you see kids reading a book with which you are not familiar, ask them how they like it and if they would recommend it to their peers. This allows you to develop recommendations for other students.

• Read your own book on SSR days or during other reading occasions.

• Talk about the role of literacy and reading in the larger world so students gain an understanding of, for example, the obstacles faced by an illiterate person in the economic and political spheres.

• Model effective reading at all times so that students see the skills of predicting, questioning, inquiring, challenging, clarifying, and so on, properly executed. If appropriate, explain to students why you do what you do when you read so that they appreciate the importance of, for example, asking questions of themselves, the author, and the text as they read.
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