



Recapturing Our Lost Youth: Using "Little Red Riding Hood" to Engage Reluctant Readers

Curriculum Unit 17.01.01

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Introduction

The research tells us that it is important to read to children – that children who were read to on a regular basis generally outperform children who were not read to regularly, both during school and later in life. But since when has research ever convinced anyone? If it did, we would no longer be having debates about evolution, about man's impact on climate, or about the health benefits of eating chocolate in small doses at least thirty-seven times a day. Clearly, science has no place in any modern debate – it's all about what we feel in our guts. Just look at the current political landscape . . . I rest my case.

My gut tells me (and luckily, the research backs me up as well) that I like to read because I was read to as a small child. Being read to on a regular basis, not only made me a quicker study of the reading process and ultimately a more fluent reader, it also imbued me with a feeling that reading was one of the best ways I could connect with the people I love. Practically the only moments during my childhood where I had my mom's complete and undivided attention were when she was reading to me and when I was about to do something that was likely to get me killed and cost her a whole lot of money. In the first case, the experience was usually associated with the warm comfort of my bed, the soothing tones of my mother's voice describing the friendship between Frog and Toad, and the reassuring feeling that – if only for a few moments before sleep – there was an escape from the anxiety and unhappy endings of the real world. In the second case, there was lots of screaming and occasionally a spanking. So I suppose you can guess which kind of experience has proved a strong motivator to read whenever I get the chance.

I love reading because it reminds me of the bond I had with my mother before I became a teenager and realized that being snotty and insecure is a much better way to cement relationships. I love reading because it gave me a reason to talk with my favorite aunt who always bought me ice cream and asked what I was reading before she handed me something new to explore from her extensive library. I love reading because it connected me to the friends I still have from high school. I love reading because even growing up in Kansas, a state not known for the erudition of its citizens, the houses of all the smartest people I ever knew had whole rooms devoted to books and I wanted to be just like them when I grew up and eventually got a house (or a double-wide trailer) of my own.

So I think the secret to getting kids to read is getting them to associate reading with the things and the people they love. Of course, this happens most readily when we are very young and still very dependent on love and nurturing from our parents, but what happens if our parents didn't read to us, if no one from our early years connected with us through literature? Do we then we find other ways to connect with the people around us, the people we love and who love us? Perhaps we do it by watching TV during dinner, if that was how our parents showed us that people bond. Or maybe we do it through our phones, through social media, if that is how we see other people connecting. It seems that sometimes, if our parents didn't show us better ways to connect and communicate, we do it through shouting for attention or insisting that everyone give us exactly what we want. Then maybe we grow up and we don't read anything longer than a Facebook post or a Twitter announcement because reading never had any deeply-felt rewards attached to it.

So as a teacher, what should I do now with a classroom full of teenagers who were not read to when they were little, who have no interest in reading because it doesn't remind them of quality time with family members and it doesn't seem to offer them better times with their friends? Who don't see reading as offering any significant enjoyment or advantage in their immediate lives? Do I just push forward with a curriculum full of texts that offer only misery and boredom to my students and cause them to feel more disaffected than they already do? Or do I take them back to a time in their lives when perhaps they missed the opportunity to read or have read to them the stories that teach us how to survive into adulthood, the stories that stay with us our entire lives? Can I take them back to a time when reading was supposed to help them connect with others? Can I help them resuscitate the ill-formed bonds that have since withered into disinterest or antipathy?

I think I can. And even if it turns out I can't, it's still worth a shot because much of what we are doing now in class is not working.

Background

Before I describe where I teach, I would like to assure you that, whatever my criticisms, I care deeply about my students and their success. I have been teaching English for twenty-one years at five different schools in a wide range of socioeconomic settings. Regardless of wealth, race, or test scores, in all of these schools there were good students and not-so-good students. The good students are easy to love because it is not hard to be a good teacher with students who are interested and able to learn. But the not-so-good students are no less worthy of our compassion and consideration because they are rarely if ever fully responsible for the deficits of enthusiasm and aptitude that burden them as they enter school. If anything, they need more love than those other students.

My goal as a teacher has always been to be honest with my students, but part of that is an honest belief that if we openly admit our obstacles, we can always find a way to overcome them. So my criticisms are not targeted at the students, but at our insistence on avoiding identifying and dealing with the real problems in education. I do not believe I am alone; I have never met a teacher who did not care about her students. Many of the people I have worked with in my career were brilliant and a small few were fairly incompetent, but they all cared. I don't know where I land on this spectrum, but I do care that my students learn what they need to succeed and to leave this world a better place than they found it. Unfortunately, and often due to circumstances beyond our control, it is sometimes a struggle to get the kids to care as much as I do, and nowhere has this been more painfully true than in my current job.

Cooperative Arts and Humanities Magnet High School as its rather lengthy appellation suggests is a magnet school in New Haven, Connecticut, that attracts and educates students from the city and surrounding towns who ostensibly have an interest in pursuing the fine arts (theatre, dance, music, visual arts, and creative writing). Of course, there is often a gap between intention and reality, and Coop is no exception. Many of the students attend not because of their undying passion for artistic expression, but rather because a parent wanted them in a slightly safer, more accepting environment than their local high school would provide. Only about half of the students attending Coop have any real interest in their chosen art, and only a few more than that seem to have much interest in being educated at all – at least, not in accordance with state and national standards.

I teach low-level juniors, most of whom do not like to read – unless you consider the avid and ongoing consumption of text messages, Twitter feeds, Instagram updates, and the ephemeral offerings of Snapchat to qualify as reading. Some of these kids can read relatively well, but find it dull in comparison to the aforementioned attractions; many others dislike reading because it is painfully difficult for them. Almost none of them read regularly enough to know for sure if it is a cognitive deficit or simple disinterest that prevents them from reading proficiently and enjoying the experience. Many of my students, however, have been tested and found to read below grade level, sometimes well below level. Regardless, they have been passed along each year because that is easier and less expensive than addressing their individual deficits. (Besides, if you can become president without ever having read a book, why should your inability or unwillingness to do so prevent you from graduating high school.) Some of these students have diagnosed disabilities; others have flown under the radar because no one (parents, teachers, counselors, etc.) has actively and persistently advocated for them. And even if we wanted to identify and address the needs of every student, the expense of doing so would be enough to bankrupt the district. So we are left with few resources and many students who are badly in need of extra help if we wish to graduate young men and women who are not only able to read, but are also occasionally excited to do so.

The reasons for reading deficits among our student body are manifold. Environmental and biological factors both play significant roles. Some students grew up in homes where parents did not read to their children nor encourage reading because the parents were absent, overworked, disinterested, illiterate, abusive, unable to speak, read, and/or write English. Then there are the more mundane causes of their deficits: pervasive technology, an anti-intellectual society, myriad distractions, an ever-increasing demand for immediate gratification, and evolutionary biology. When literary texts have to compete with social media and rapidly shrinking attention spans, it is a wonder that anyone under that age of thirty reads at all.

So it becomes incumbent upon any teacher in New Haven (and many other places as well) wishing to maintain his sanity, his authority, and his hopes of helping the next generation to become more enlightened than his own (or just survive and succeed) to offer a more engaging curriculum than might have been necessary to capture the attentions of a previous population more oriented on academics. Texts are chosen, not because one would (or could) argue they contribute to some indispensable canon of classic literature, but because they are of high interest to an otherwise disinterested audience. Assignments are given in conjunction with these readings to foster or remediate basic skills and often require extensive direction and examples to ensure the success of some of our more limited students, some of whom fail even to begin the assignments, let alone finish them in any timely fashion. Mostly, classes are a battle to engage and maintain the attentions of wandering minds in fierce competition with whatever next appears on an individual's cell phone. So whatever you are planning to teach . . . it had better be interesting to a student who reads and writes and often thinks at a minimum of three grades below level.

At the same time, there are students who can and do read reasonably well – students who will quickly become bored by the pace at which one must move to maintain the participation of every student in the class. So a teacher needs to find texts that can be read by everyone, regardless of level, while still offering an intellectual challenge to even the most advanced reader in the class. If you can find texts that simultaneously appeal to the socio-emotional interests of each student as well, then you are a genius with no need for my clumsy curriculum to improve your practice. (As an aside, I would recommend books like Sherman Alexie’s *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* , Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* , or Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street* as having the potential to be such texts – they have the additional advantage of being collections of short stories that can be abridged as necessary.)

I would wish that New Haven was an educational anomaly, and that no other school system in the United States resembles it in any of its deficits, but having taught at schools across the cultural and socio-economic spectrum, I can tell you that New Haven suffers from no illness that is not widespread. Recent studies of adolescent brains have suggested the neural networks of young people (to say nothing of their social skills) are being altered by their continual access to technology; we simply are not dealing with the same brains that previous generations of students possessed and these new brains are often too impatient and too inattentive to read well. Regardless of intellect or interest, teachers face a challenge that is poorly understood and largely unaddressed by current pedagogy. Books cannot compete with each new technology when it comes with neural stimulation and immediate gratification. I am sure this comment echoes those made during the advent of radio and television, but the threat has increased exponentially in recent decades.

I have no panacea that will return us to the foggy nostalgia of the “golden age” of education, but I do know that simply telling my students that reading is good for them will not suffice. I have to get them to make an emotional connection to reading; I have to give them the skills to make simple comprehension and complex literary analysis more gratifying than the mindless consumption of whatever easy entertainment their televisions and computers offer – which seems impossible; I have to get them to need stories, and poems, and essays in the same way they seem to need the applications on their cell phones. The key, as far as I can tell, is a return to the time when they, much like Little Red Riding Hood, were tempted to stray from the safe and healthy path to happiness and success by the charming wolf of modern media. The key is to go back to that time in their childhoods when they did not develop a connection to books and a love of reading like the fairy tales tell us they were supposed to. The key is to show them that the connections they can make through reading are stronger than any virtual friendship they might form on the internet.

The Rationale

As many of my students did not have the “traditional” upbringing that might have fostered a nostalgia for and lifelong interest in reading, they have a limited familiarity with the classic fairy and folk tales many of us remember from our youth. Many were not told bedtime stories by their grandparents or read to by their parents and so they excluded from what some education and child development experts would consider a crucial period in the growth of young readers – those moments when stories not only ignited our imaginations but also strengthened the connection between reading and being close to the people we love. Reading may be important for enlightenment and entertainment, but it is just as important for how it reminds of us of the bonds we have (or wish we had) with others. So one goal of this curriculum is to return them to a time when they missed something vitally important to many a happy childhood, to perhaps restore what was lost to the

distractions, shortcomings, and traumas of their less than perfect childhood homes. Perhaps by doing this we can make reading something fun again (or for the first time), something that does not torture them or expose their stupidity. Perhaps we can nurture the bonds that reading creates between people and communities, giving us a sense of belonging and security.

Now some may warn of the dangers of ethnocentrism and a prejudiced perspective on the “perfect” childhood. They might argue that my attitude and efforts will only serve to alienate and embarrass those students who were not read to as children. This is a valid concern, but it leads to a criticism that could be made just as powerfully against reading as a whole. Evolutionarily, we are not designed to be readers. We are designed to gather information that will ensure our survival and enable reproduction. In as much as familial and community bonds promote these goals and reading promotes these bonds, a shared canon of literature (or at least stories – because the oral tradition has a longer history and is more pervasive than the written word) is necessary. In as much as reading provides the information necessary to best achieve these goals, reading itself will be attractive to the individual. But when our brains evolved, there was no writing and the gathering of such information required the use of all our senses – most especially sight, hearing, and smell. So when modern technology can appeal to two of those senses in the process of disseminating essential (or non-essential) information, how can reading, which stimulates only one, really compete? Communication and perception was largely lacking in complex symbolism when our brains evolved – there was no alphabet, no written words – so how can writing with its lack of literal ease and obvious appeal to our visual senses survive against video images that mimic the real world in a so much more vivid and readily digestible way.

Our evolutionary predilections aside, reading has almost universally been the province of the wealthier classes of society, an occupation of privilege rather than survival, so there will always be a bias toward elitism in our expectations that every child read at a high level. If we truly wanted to accommodate a universal education unfettered by socio-cultural prejudices, then we would promote an oral tradition of storytelling because all cultures have embraced that regardless of wealth or technological advancement. And embracing the oral tradition is very much a part of this curriculum. However, if our goal is to prepare our students for the world in which they live, then that is the world of reading and being indoctrinated into a love of literature from an early age is an American ideal if not a consistent practice.

With that in mind, I would like to reintroduce (or introduce) my students to the classic folk tale “Little Red Riding Hood.” We could ultimately explore other tales, but the goal will always be to explore how these stories are more than simple, silly narratives meant to be remembered fondly and then ignored as our tastes mature and our reading abilities improve. Because these stories are generally easy to read, teaching them will not meet with the resistance one gets when offering *Hamlet* or *The Scarlet Letter*. Because they are a reminder of childhood they will ideally engender an enthusiasm in my students to embrace the familiar and return to a time before life became terribly complicated and difficult. This will maintain their attention while we use these stories to strengthen their appreciation of how to interpret a text’s deeper meanings as well as their understanding of how these ageless tales have been adapted from time to time and culture to culture to serve some common purposes and some very different purposes. Fairy and folk tales are always popular; that is why they are even today being refashioned into movies and TV shows. This popularity can be attributed to cultural nostalgia, to timeless themes, to simplicity of language and message, to appealing plots and characters, and to their effectiveness at conveying the cultural expectations and societal norms of a given people in a given place and time. My students will love them at first because they are short, accessible, and entertaining, but they will appreciate them even more when they realize they are not exactly the juvenile stories my students thought they were.

Reading “Little Red Riding Hood” and other stories will help my students overcome their difficulties in decoding and dissecting texts, but there are other reasons for choosing these tales. There have been countless adaptations of these stories in a variety of forms. Studying various versions of “Little Red Riding Hood” and other tales would allow the students a cross-cultural perspective on the use of folk tales to educate/warn people young and old about the perils of the wider world. They could learn which elements of life and storytelling are universal and which elements are unique to particular cultures and/or time periods. We will read, watch, and listen to various versions of these tales and analyze what each says about the time and society from whence it came. Ultimately, this will allow them some insight into the cultural and temporal spectrum of humanity, even as it offers them a stronger sense of their own place and purpose in their specific corner of the world.

“Little Red Riding Hood” offers us an excellent gateway into a study of how fairy tales reflect cultural and temporal proscriptions and prerogatives, and how many of those proscriptions and prerogatives are consistent across time. An obvious interpretation of Perrault’s version would introduce my students to the socio-sexual mores of 17th century France, but more importantly and more interestingly, it would get them thinking deeply about an issue that greatly affects many young members of their community, perhaps even themselves: teenage sexuality. Nationally, teen pregnancy and STD rates are the lowest they have been in a long time, but if you were to survey my students you would find that almost all of them know at least one girl who has gotten pregnant while in high school (and often the father is an older man who preys on their youth and innocence.) The statistics on teen pregnancy are terrifying when it comes to future prospects for both the mother and the child. The likelihood of the mothers dropping out of high school and ending up on welfare is high. The chances their children will repeat this pattern is also high. The statistics for Hispanic and African-American girls are even worse. There are very few positive outcomes for young inner-city women who are careless about their sexual activity. By studying, Perrault’s version (and a few other versions) of “Little Red Riding Hood,” my predominantly female and minority students can draw parallels between the dangers of their own time and place and those imperiling young women in other times and places. They can begin to understand what has changed and what has not across time and distance, and they can use that understanding to strengthen both their connections and protections when walking through their own little modern corner of the woods.

By using a story with which they already may have a vague familiarity, one that is more or less easy to interpret and understand, academic commentary and criticism becomes much more accessible to struggling readers. If a text such as *Hamlet* is used, just understanding the play becomes enough of a challenge and reading academic papers dissecting it becomes an incomprehensible bore. The interest they have in “Little Red Riding Hood” stemming from its intrinsic connection to their lives will propel them through more difficult readings in literary analysis and criticism and offer them deeper interpretations of the story as well as insights into the various cultures that have adapted it. This more complete comprehension will ultimately lead them to a stronger ability to research and analyze a favorite folk or fairy tale of their own choosing.

The culminating activity for this unit will be to produce a contemporary version of “Little Red Riding Hood.” This adaptation must capture through symbolism the particular mores of a subculture within American society to which they belong and offer a necessary warning to the children of that subculture. Having accomplished that, they will then turn their new version of the story into a children’s book (or play script, video, or graphic novel) to share with a larger audience either within or outside of Coop.

Of course, lesson plans are rarely on paper what they become in the classroom, and there is always the need to adapt intentions and ideals to fit the time, resources, and students we have, but below you should find

plenty of information to get you started. The particular focus of this unit will be various incarnations and adaptations of the story of “Little Red Cap” or “Little Red Riding Hood,” but you may modify the contents of this curriculum to guide your students through a study of any classic tale you and/or your students prefer.

The Objectives

I will humbly admit that the best part of this unit is the list of resources (the Annotated Bibliography for Teachers and the Reading List for Students). There you will find a plethora of texts that will allow you to tailor your lessons to many different classes and many different levels and types of students. If you are an art teacher, you can examine how the illustrations accompanying the various adaptations of this story have changed across cultures and over time. You could even examine how the iconography associated with the tale has been used in various media at various times to reach a wide range of audiences for a variety of purposes. The objectives and lessons below are not geared toward that end, but reviewing the resources listed in the bibliography would certainly give you a good start on a unit of your own that is suitable for an art class.

If you are a history teacher, the history of adaptations to this classic story could be used as a vehicle to travel through time exploring the evolution of society as expressed through “Little Red Riding Hood.” To give context to each version you choose to study, you could explore a variety of themes related to the role of women in society and the enculturation of children through storytelling. You could easily examine how the small details in each incarnation change to suit the period, place, and people of its creation.

The unit as created more appropriately serves an English class, but even then there is a great deal of latitude for adapting the materials to suit anything from a creative writing class to a low-level class of freshman to a gifted class of AP Language and Composition students. The source materials can be used address plot structure, the use of imagery and symbolism, allegory, synecdoche, character development, creating tension and suspense, a writer’s audience and purpose, and social and historical context, among other elements of the English classroom.

In Appendix A you will find a list of formal objectives to be focused on in this unit, all taken directly from the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy. Please feel free to ignore them; I often do. One practical objective of this unit is to raise cultural and self-awareness in your students while simultaneously improving their abilities to read, analyze, discuss, and adapt literary texts. The real motive, though, is to foster the connections with each other and their communities that will help your students become lifelong lovers of reading and the kind of people who will leave the world a better place than they found it.

Teaching Strategies

We will begin by exploring the value of reading and what memories my students have of reading and/or being read to, then discussing those in the context of how such experiences shape our attitudes toward reading later in life. To inspire and inform discussion, I usually begin with a journal assignment, responding to a

prompt such as: “What are your earliest memories of reading or being read to as a child?” The desired effect of the following discussion is not to make some students feel badly for having missed certain beneficial and/or meaningful experiences, but to convince them that it is never too late to have such experiences and that such experiences are worth having. When they share their entries we will work in a discussion of why reading may be valuable and why some people enjoy reading while others do not. The goal is to have them see that reading is more than simply a way to entertain ourselves or accumulate information; that it is a vehicle which brings us closer to the people and communities around us.

From there we will brainstorm a list of actual stories we remember from childhood. In this discussion, I may reinforce elements of theme, audience and purpose, and narrative structure. My hope is that, even if they were read to infrequently or not at all, most of my students will have some familiarity with classic fairy tales which will provide for an easy transition into the main focus of this unit: “Little Red Riding Hood.”

Before I read the Perrault version of the story, I want my students to create a graphic organizer that will allow them to track the similarities and differences between the various adaptations of the story we explore. These charts will include things like the identities of the characters, Red’s relationship with her mother and the advice she gets, the items Red brings to her grandma, her first interaction with the wolf (or whatever other animal is chosen as the antagonist), symbols in the story, the outcome of the story, etc. (The Krisztina Szucs website listed in the bibliography below provides an interesting example of how the students could arrange the information graphically if they wish to develop something more exciting than a simple chart.)

Once I have guided them through the creation their charts, I’ll have my students fill in the set of spaces according to their current understanding of the story, leaving blanks where necessary. This will allow them to later identify which version (or versions) they were likely exposed to when they were younger. Then we will gather in a circle on the floor, and I will read the story aloud to them, stressing the appropriate roles for an attentive and invested audience (e.g. making the appropriate noises in response to the drama of the story). I often have my students sit in circles (even on the floor) to read or converse, so this shouldn’t present a problem for them (especially since I will remind them to dress appropriately for such activity prior to this class). If some students are unconvinced, I will offer that recent research suggests that reading aloud to students has benefits even for adolescents . . . and that sitting on the floor saves the custodians from having to sweep and mop it later – besides, their grades and my good mood depends on it.

The first reading is for fun and immersion in the story, but also to show them how to use their voices and pacing to make the story more engaging. After a first reading, we will read through the story a second time, passing the book around to give each student a chance to practice their dramatic reading skills. During their reading, I will offer a “think aloud” for the students to show them how my brain processes what it reads (and likewise how their brains should be processing the reading). This will entail interpretation and discussion of the various symbols and other narrative elements. Then we will reflect/discuss how it felt to be read to and how their individual brains react to a text when they read. We will also eventually fill in the charts, either during our second reading or shortly thereafter, identifying key elements and confirming our interpretations of symbols.

From here there are a few different options for how to proceed. In later years I may have my students find their own versions, pick their own groups for the completion of this unit, and come up with their own ideas about (or variations on) a summative assessment, but for my first attempt at implementing this unit, I will select the groups and the stories they will read to ensure maximum diversity. I will also give them limited options for a summative assessment so that I might end up with a better understanding of the strengths and

weaknesses of the overall assignment (and thereby improve it for future classes).

I will divide the class into groups of five students and give each group the same collection of six or so variations of the Little Red Riding Hood tale. The collection will offer a broad sampling of cultures, purposes, intended audiences, symbols, etc. Pending continued research I will probably use “Lon Po Po” (China), “Pretty Salma” (West Africa), “Kawoni’s Journey Across the Mountain” (Cherokee), “Petite Rouge” (Cajun), and “The Grandmother” (France), as well as the Grimm Brothers version of the tale. These and other adaptations are listed in the Reading List for Students – and if you or any of your students happen to be fluent in French or German or another language you will find there are plenty of non-English versions of the tale for your classes to study.

In their groups they will research (starting with materials I provide from the list below – such as “Dances with Wolves: Little Red Riding Hood’s Long Walk in the Woods” by Catherine Orenstein and “The Path of Needles and Pins” by Terri Windling – and continuing with materials they find on their own) the cultural and temporal context of each story as well as interpretations of the symbolism. Then they will read the stories aloud, discuss them as was modeled during the reading of the first version, and fill in their charts for these adaptations.

When each group is done we will re-divide the groups so that each new group has at least one member from each of the former groups. The new groups will briefly share and compare what they discovered in the course of their research and readings/discussion/analysis. After that, I will lead the whole class as we highlight the major understandings we have developed in the course of our group work – focusing especially on commonalities and differences, why and for whom each version was written, and how that version represents the unique culture from which it came. In the end, my hope is that my students are able to identify the most obvious and common variations and explain the motives for these adaptations. How much of the socio-cultural history surrounding each version we delve into will depend on time and level of interest, but I want them to at least understand how fairy tales like “Little Red Riding Hood” reflect the social mores, behavioral expectations, or other motivations behind their creation.

Once they have this understanding of how different cultures and sub-cultures adapt the story to express their identity and serve specific social needs, the students will begin working on their own versions of the Red Riding Hood tale. I will have them begin by pairing up or working in small groups to pick a culture or sub-culture to which they belong – it can be in school, at home, or elsewhere. Then they have to imagine a version of the story that reflects the values, beliefs, and behaviors within that community, one that stresses an important lesson about growth and survival for the children of the community they have chosen. Before they start to write, I will have them fill out a section of their chart for this community and its likely adaptation. Then they will write (and help each other revise) a new incarnation of the fairy tale that they can then turn into a children’s book, a play, or a short video to later share with the class, kids in their family/neighborhood, and/or a younger students at a nearby school. The ultimate intent being to create bonds with each other and their communities through the creation and sharing of their own versions of the Little Red Riding Hood story.

Later, I will have them reflect on their experiences, on the impact of their presentations on others and themselves. My hope is that the overarching effect of this process is a burgeoning sense of nostalgic attachment to reading (and writing and storytelling) that perhaps has eluded them up until this moment in their lives.

As an extension activity, I could have students pick other childhood stories from the list generated at the beginning of the unit to research and adapt – this time with only minimal guidance from the teacher. If

logistics allow, I may even have them partner with younger kids from a nearby grade school to work on the adaptations of these stories, further cementing the bond between them, their communities, and the power of literature.

Annotated Bibliography Resources for Teachers

Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* . New York: Vintage Books, 1976. Offers a psychoanalytic approach to the interpretation of fairy tales as well as their usefulness in educating children. Some academics respect his research, others seem to find it sloppy and perhaps partially stolen. Still, probably worth skimming through for ideas about specific stories you want to present in class.

Calvino, Italo. "The False Grandmother." *Italian Folktales* . New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1992. If you loved *Invisible Cities* . . . this book contains an Italian version of the story that maintains the basic plot but offers some interestingly divergent elements. A video with illustrations and John Turturro narrating the story is also available on-line.

Carruthers, Amelia. *Little Red Riding Hood and Other Girls Who Got Lost in the Woods: Origins of Fairy Tales from Around the World* . Warwickshire: Read Publishing Ltd., 2015. Could be the textbook for this unit as it offers a very good overview of the history and evolution of seven variations on the Red Riding Hood tale.

Carter, Angela. "The Company of Wolves." *The Bloody Chamber* . London: Gollancz, 1979. Gothic fantasy-horror story with content that is perhaps inappropriate to be offering students in high school (though nothing compared to what they are looking up on-line on their own - so it's your call) from a book that won the famous Cheltenham Festival Literary Prize in 1979 and was much praised by critics like Jack Zipes and Marina Warner. Also made into a film.

Clarke, Stephanie. "Close reading drama: 'Little Red Riding Hood.'" *LearnZillion* , 2017. <https://learnzillion.com/resources/72981-close-reading-drama-little-red-riding-hood> (accessed May 27, 2017). If you have really low level kids, this site has some short, video-based lessons that will help them gain the skills they need to deconstruct a text.

Duffy, Carol Ann. "The Little Red Cap." *The World's Wife* . New York: Picador, 1999.

A feminist poem that depicts the protagonist as an empowered young woman who pursues the wolf - resulting in a relationship between the two. Perhaps not suitable for all classes.

Dundes, Alan, ed. *Little Red Riding Hood: A Casebook* . Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989. A very good collection of scholarly articles analyzing the Perrault and Grimm versions of the story. Most of these might be too difficult for struggling readers, but if you want to offer your students a taste of college . . . and a better understanding of why so many college students become heavy drinkers . . . then the essays in this book will do the trick.

Grambo, Rebecca L. *Wolf: Legend, Enemy, Icon* . Buffalo, New York: Firefly Books, 2009. A good history of our evolving perceptions about and attitudes toward wolves. Excellent if you want your students to understand that fairy tales present a very narrow view of the cultural ideologies representing wolves, and are in some part responsible (along with Christian dogma and the financial interests of livestock owners) for the negative iconography associated with these animals.

Heiner, Heidi Anne. *SurLaLune Fairy Tales* , last updated December 2, 2016. <http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/index.html> (accessed May 27, 2017). This was one of my favorite sites for finding fairy tale information when I first began teaching and I taught a class on

myth and folklore. It is still an easy-to-navigate site that offers versions of many stories and enough information (including links to other sites) to get your students started with their analyses.

Hillard, Molly Clark. "Dickens' Little Red Riding Hood and Other Waterside Characters." *Studies in English Literature* , Volume 49 (Autumn 2009): 945-973. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009. If you are interested in connecting a study of Dickens to the fairy tale, then you may want to track down this article.

Salda, Michael, ed. *The Little Red Riding Hood Project* . Version 1.1, October 2005. De Grummond Children's Literature Research Collection, University of Southern Mississippi. <http://www.usm.edu/media/english/fairytales/lrrh/lrrhhome.htm> (accessed May 28, 2017). A great resource for text and images related to adaptations of the Little Red Riding Hood story.

Mallet, Carl-Heinz. "'Little Red Riding Hood': Rated R." *Sciences* (May 1, 1984): 50-55. <http://lci-mt.iii.com:61080/ebSCO-e-b/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=691881ea-9c47-4317-9aa9-5f983951dc49%40sessionmgr103&vid=1&hid=113> (accessed May 26, 2017). A psychoanalytic (mostly Freudian) review of (primarily) the Grimm version of the tale. Worth a read but perhaps not suitable for all high school audiences.

Morgan, Jeanne. *Perrault's Morals for Moderns* . New York: Peter Land Publishing, Inc., 1985. I'd recommend a strong command of French if you want to read this book (which I do not have), but from what I understood . . . it's about Perrault and fairy tales.

Orenstein, Catherine. *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale* . New York: Basic Books, 2003. A thorough study of the evolution and influences on the various incarnations of "Little Red Riding Hood" and fairy tales in general. Not all parts may be suitable for all high school audiences, but it is a fascinating study of the way fairy tales inspire, educate, and enculturate us according to the intentions of the people adapting them.

Ragan, Kathleen. *Fearless Girls, Wise Women, and Beloved Sisters: Heroines in Folktales from Around the World*. New York: Norton, W. W. & Company, Inc., 1998. Good for versions of fairy tales that offer strong and smart female protagonists.

The Rescue of Little Red Riding Hood: A Juvenile Operetta in Five Acts (Nashville: C. R. and H. H. Hatch, 1883). <https://books.google.com/books?id=ONrj7H3oa5QC&pg=PA3#v=onepage&q&f=false> (accessed May 27, 2017). There's just some strange stuff out there . . . but great if you are into musical theater.

Swyt, Wendy. "'Wolfings': Angela Carter's Becoming-Narrative." *Studies in Short Fiction* (1996): 315-323. (Newberry, S.C.: Newberry College Press, June 1, 1996). <http://lci-mt.iii.com:61080/ebSCO-e-a/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=df5979fe-52af-4be3-8ba8-9d9ac67b1c3d%40sessionmgr4006&vid=1&hid=4211> (accessed May 25, 2017). An academic essay responding to another academic essay, both critical interpretations of Angela Carter's adaptation of the Red Riding Hood tale entitled "The Company of Wolves." You may want to read this and the other essay, Robert Clark's "Angela Carter's Desire Machine," if you are planning on having your students read (or watch the film made from) Angela Carter's story, but I wouldn't make your kids read either unless you want them to understand the abstruse and meretricious arguments academics make to earn their keep.

Szucs, Krisztina. "Violence and Abuse in Little Red Riding Hood." krisztinaszucs.com. <http://krisztinaszucs.com/my-product/little-red-riding-hood/> (accessed May 24, 2017). An excellent, downloadable graphic comparing and contrasting five different versions of the Little Red Riding Hood tale translated and/or edited by D. L. Ashliman.

Tehrani, Jamshid J. "The Phylogeny of Little Red Riding Hood." *PLOS* , November 13, 2013. <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0078871> (accessed May 26, 2017). This is the original paper on which the National Geographic article about the scientific methods used to uncover the origins of fairy tales was based. Read this if you're having trouble sleeping at night.

Thackeray, Miss [Anne Thackeray Ritchie]. *Little Red Riding Hood* (Boston: Loring, 1867).

<https://books.google.com/books?id=qQFFAAAYAAJ&pg=PA1#v=onepage&q&f=false> (accessed May 26, 2017). A Victorian era retelling of the tale, for those obsessed and possessed with reading every possible adaptation they can find.

Warner, Marina. *Once Upon a Time: A Short History of Fairy Tale*. Oxford University Press, 2016. Like Zipes, a well-respected expert on fairy tales, their origins, and their meanings. A good read for insight into a variety of popular fairy tales.

Zipes, Jack. *The Enchanted Screen: The Unknown History of Fairy-Tale Films*. New York: Routledge, 2011. If it's getting toward the end of the year and all you want to do is show movies, then a few references to this book will make it look like there is actually a strong pedagogical basis for your activities.

Zipes, Jack. *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood: Versions of the Tale in Sociocultural Context*. South Hadley, Massachusetts: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, 1983. A must read for this unit . . . unless you don't want to, and then it's not. But it is an excellent resource for social and historical context to many different versions of "Little Red Riding Hood," so reading it will make you look a heck of a lot smarter to the kids.

A Reading List for Students

Artell, Mike. *Petite Rouge: A Cajun Red Riding Hood*. Paradise, CA: Paw Prints Press, 2008. A version of the story told (in part) in a Cajun dialect, where the wolf is an alligator that is defeated in the end by Petite Rouge and some hot sauce.

Ashliman, D. L. "Little Red Riding Hood and other tales of Aarne-Thompson-Uther type 333," *Folklore and Mythology Electronic Texts* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1996-2017), last revised January 15, 2015. <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0333.html>. Offers versions of the Little Red Riding Hood tale representing France, Germany, Lower Lusatia, Austria, Italy, and England translated, adapted, and/or collected by Charles Perrault ("Little Red Riding Hood"), Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm ("Little Red Cap"), Charles Marelles ("The True History of Little Golden-hood"), Beatrix Potter ("The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck"), A. H. Wratishaw ("Little Red Hood"), Christian Schneller ("Little Red Hat"), Achille Millien ("The Grandmother"). These are the versions on which the Krisztina Szucs graphic is based. This site also includes notes and links to original sources as well as links to resources related to the story.

Carryl, Guy Wetmore. *Grimm Tales Made Gay*. (New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1901).

<https://books.google.com/books?id=gbwOAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA3#v=onepage&q&f=false> (accessed May 25, 2017). Light-hearted, satirical versions of some classic fairy tales from the turn of the twentieth century (with illustrations). Amusing in its own right, but even more interesting as a study of American culture at the time.

Dahl, Roald. "Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf." *Revolt Rhymes*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1982. Who doesn't love Roald Dahl? A version of this poem, in which Little Red Riding Hood apparently gets the best of the wolf, can be found on poemhunter.com at <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/little-red-riding-hood-and-the-wolf/>.

Daly, Nikki. *Pretty Salma*. London: Frances Lincoln, 2006. A West African version of the tale that will introduce students to some Ghanian words and Anansi the famous storyteller.

Delaney, Bill. "Perrault's Little Red Riding Hood." *Explicator*, 70 - 72. (San Diego: Heldref Publications, 2006).

<http://lci-mt.iii.com:61080/ebSCO-e-a/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=addcd049-f052-45e1-9507-19068b33a602%40sessionmgr4010&v id=1&hid=4211>(accessed May 26, 2017). A practical interpretation of the tale (with a special focus on the eponymous piece of clothing) based on the time period in which it was probably first told in roughly the form that Perrault canonized.

Ernst, Lisa Campbell. *Little Red Riding Hood—A New Fangled Prairie Tale*. New York: Simon & Shuster Books for Young Readers, 1995. An amusing version of the tale with a stronger grandmother character, a happier ending for the wolf, and baked goods.

Forward, Toby. *The Wolf's Story: What Really Happened to Little Red Riding Hood*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press, 2005. The story told amusingly from the perspective of the wolf.

Hall, Alan. "Nazi fairy tales paint Hitler as Little Red Riding Hood's savior." *The Telegraph*: April, 2010. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-two/7594061/Nazi-fairy-theses-paint-Hitler-as-Little-Red-Riding-Hoods-saviour.html> (accessed May 28, 2017). An article explaining the Nazi's use of fairy tales to recruit children to the Third Reich.

Hamilton, Amelia. "Little Red Riding Hood (Has a Gun)." *NRA Family*, January 14, 2016. <https://www.nrafamily.org/articles/2016/1/13/little-red-riding-hood-has-a-gun/> (accessed May 23, 2017). If you don't want to be perceived as another liberal educator, here's a fun little bit of propaganda from our favorite sponsor of domestic terrorism. Good to show how fairy tales can be manipulated to serve any agenda, as well as to demonstrate how an organization might target an audience that has the reasoning capacity of a small child.

"The Little Red Riding Hood: Summary and Symbols Explained." Owlcation, November 12, 2016. https://owlcation.com/misc/red_riding_hood (accessed May 26, 2017). A student-friendly explanation of the story with interpretations of some of its symbolism.

Marshall, James. *Red Riding Hood*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1987. A classic retelling with cartoon illustrations that stresses the lesson of not talking to strangers. Good for discussing how the tale changes in subtle ways according to the intended audience.

Orenstein, Catherine. "Dances with Wolves: Little Red Riding Hood's Long Walk in the Woods." *MS. Magazine* (summer 2004). <http://www.msmagazine.com/summer2004/danceswithwolves.asp> (accessed May 26, 2017). A history of the story with a feminist slant and some attention to media versions as well as allusions to the tale in advertising. Definitely worth a read in your efforts to understand the ideologies and agendas behind various incarnations of the Red Riding Hood narrative. And if you would like a more in-depth exploration of ideas espoused by Orenstein, her book *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked* is very popular.

Riley, James Whitcomb. "Maymie's Story of Red Riding-Hood," *The Complete Works of James Whitcomb Riley*, edited by Edmund Henry Eitel, 412-418. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1913. <https://books.google.com/books?id=TNARAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA412#v=onepage&q&f=false>. (accessed May 26, 2017). A verse adaptation of the tale by the Hoosier poet as told to him in colloquial English by his grandmother. Provides a good exercise in figure out what someone is saying when she is speaking in a regional dialect.

Rovenger, Judith. "The Better to Hear You With: Making Sense of Folktales." *School Library Journal* (March 1993): 134 -135. <http://ci-mt.iii.com:61080/ebSCO-e-b/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=65c20def-6568-4e2e-8f0d-feb627181f0f%40sessionmgr104&vid=1&hid=113> (accessed May 26, 2017). A brief analysis of various versions of the Little Red Riding Hood story.

Scieszka, Jon & Lane Smith. "Little Red Running Shorts." *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1992. A silly, but thoroughly enjoyable retelling of the classic tale in which the protagonist and antagonist join forces against the narrator. And Lane Smith's illustrations are always worth a look.

Sexton, Anne. "Red Riding Hood." *Transformations*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971.

A feminist poem that questions the roles women are expected to play in society. A good challenge for higher level (and more mature) students or ones who wish to explore feminist responses to traditional (especially in the 50s and 60s, but even now) demands for propriety in women.

Shea, Rachel Hartigan. "What Wide Origins You Have, Little Red Riding Hood!" *National Geographic* , November 30, 2013. <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/11/131129-little-red-riding-hood-folktale-tehrani-anthropology-science/> (accessed May 26, 2017). Interview of Jamshid J. Tehrani, the man responsible for the much longer (and more soporific) research paper on the same subject - using science to track the origins of a fairy tale.

Smith, Cordellya. *Kawoni's Journey Across the Mountain: A Cherokee Little Red Riding Hood* . Mustang, OK: Tate Publishing, 2014. A version of the story adapted to incorporate Cherokee language and traditions.

Thurber, James. "The Little Girl and the Wolf," *Fables for Our Time and Famous Poems Illustrated* , 3, (New York: Harper Collins, 1983). <https://books.google.com/books?id=HedNG3C2BpUC&lpg=PP1&pg=PA3#v=onepage&q&f=false> (accessed May 27, 2017). Because I'm a Thurber fan - this is a very short and amusing variation on the story that also speaks to a specific time and audience.

Winding, Terri. "The Path of Needles and Pins." *Journal of Mythic Arts* (August 2004). <http://www.endicott-studio.com/articleslist/the-path-of-needles-and-pins-by-terri-winding.html>. (accessed May 27, 2017). A brief but excellent synopsis, history, and analysis of variants of "The Grandmother's Tale," an earlier version of the Little Red Riding Hood story that may have origins in Asian tales, but later evolved in France during the Middle Ages. Some scholars dispute any Asian origins to the Red Riding Hood story, but this is nonetheless a compelling and relatively easy read worth offering your students.

Young, Ed. *Lon Po Po: A Red Riding Hood Story from China* . London: Philomel, 1989.

A translation of the Chinese version of the tale that won 1990 Caldecott Medal for its illustrations. There are many narrated readings of this book to be found on YouTube.

Various Media Adaptations of "Little Red Riding Hood"

Film and Video Adaptations

Red Riding Hood (2011) - Catherine Hardwicke

Into the Woods (2015) - Rob Marshall

Faerie Tale Theatre: Little Red Riding Hood (2008) - Shelley Duvall

The Company of Wolves (1984) - Neil Jordan

Red Riding Hood (1987) - Adam Brooks

Freeway (1997) - Matthew Bright

Red Riding Hood (2007) - Randal Kleiser

Red Riding Hood (2003) - James Marshall

Petya and Little Red Riding Hood (1958) - Boris Stepantsev and Evgeny Raykovsky

La Caperucita roja (*Little Red Riding Hood* , 1960), *Caperucita y sus tres amigos* (*Little Red Riding Hood and Her Three Friends* , 1961) and *Caperucita y Pulgarcito contra los monstruos* (*Little Red Riding Hood and the*

Monsters , 1962) – Roberto Rodriguez

The Dangerous Christmas of Red Riding Hood (1965)

Red Riding Hood (2003) – Giacomo Cimini

Red Riding Hood (2006) – Randal Kleiser

Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf (1937) – Nazi propaganda film

Adaptations of the Red Riding Hood tale or allusions to it also appeared in:

The Carol Burnett Show (1974)

An ad for Chanel No. 5 (2007) directed by Luc Besson

The season 5 episode of *Charmed* entitled “Happily Ever After” (2002)

The “Red-Handed” episode of the series *Once Upon A Time* (2011)

The pilot episode of the series *Grimm* (2011).

Animated Adaptations

“The Big Bad Wolf” (1934) – Burt Gillett

“Red Hot Riding Hood” (1943) and “Little Rural Riding Hood” (1949) – Tex Avery

“Little Red Riding Rabbit”; “Little Red Rodent Hood”; “Little Red Walking Hood”; “Red Riding Hoodwinked”; and “The Trial of Mr. Wolf” from Looney Tunes (1944 – 1955) – Chuck Jones

“Redux Riding Hood” (1997) – Steve Moore

Hoodwinked (2006) – Corey Edwards, Todd Edwards, and Tony Leech

Comic/Graphic Adaptations

A version appears in Marvel Comics’ series *Journey Into Mystery* #114 (1965).

Neil Gaiman uses a version in his *The Sandman* comics.

The webcomic *No Rest for the Wicked* (2004 – present) has a character named Red who lives in the woods and kills wolves.

Streetfables has a modern, urban adaptation called Red.

Little Red Riding Hood and the Kind Wolf is a manga version that features Red as an abused child.

Musical Adaptations

“Lil’ Red Riding Hood” – Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs (1966)

Appendix A - Common Core Objectives

Below is a list of objectives taken directly from the Common Core that can be directly applied to this unit. If you feel compelled to appease the powers that be, throw a few of these at the top of your lesson plan and your administrators will happily go back to playing Minesweeper in their offices, knowing they have hired teachers who are competent and capable of jumping through any and every hoop.

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Breughel's Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.

Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

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