

DRAGON VIEWS



Berit, G. (2018). No more fake reading: Merging the classics with independent reading. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

My goal, as I prepared for this column throughout the year, was to find an outstanding pair or trio of professional books that shared a common theme. Instead, I found a single book that embedded the information from a plethora of quality professional titles that all offer a lens on reengaging reluctant readers and writers. This book is *No More Fake Reading: Merging the Classics with Independent Reading to Create Joyful Lifelong Readers*, written by Berit Gordon and published by Corwin. Some of the professional books referenced include Donalyn Miller's *Reading in the Wild* (2014), Penny Kittle's *Book Love* (2013), Jeffrey Wilhelm and Michael Smith's *Diving Deep Into Nonfiction* (2017), and Jennifer Serravallo's *The Reading Strategies Book* (2015). Gordon notes the important role these and many other colleagues played in the creation of this text by stating, "This book is the result of countless hours at the computer, but it's equally a product of others' voices and generous contributions. Never again will I look at one person's name on a book jacket without imagining all the unwritten names that belong there, too" (p. xiii).

Many teachers have experienced students' attention wandering, their behavior deteriorating, and their cell phones beginning to appear while they strive to teach important classical literature in a way that will keep students engaged while building a love of these valuable works. Gordon's solution to this dilemma is to blend classic and contemporary literature in a reading program by building upon important classical works through teacher-led reads, offered as whole class instruction, and then applying the lessons learned to independent reading of choice contemporary texts. While she recognizes the love that teachers have for timeless classical texts and their importance in the curriculum, she points out that the only way for students to become better readers is to read texts that they not only *can* read but also *want* to read. She argues that choice texts can actually be quite complex when teachers design questions to prompt rigorous interactions between the text and the reader. Another bonus of choice texts is the differentiation that occurs naturally through individual interests and varied reading levels.

Gordon opens *No More Fake Reading* with a vignette of the
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blended reading program she is proposing. In this vignette, readers are quietly engaged in their choice texts when the classroom teacher enters the room. The teacher asks them to come to a stopping point in their books as he pulls out his copy of Steinbeck's 1939 classic, *Of Mice and Men*. He then summarizes the 15 pages between yesterday's excerpt and the one the class will be studying today. After this recap, the teacher reads aloud the section of the text that will be this lesson's focus. When he reads, he completes a think aloud, so that students can see how he thinks, wonders, and questions the text as a part of his close reading process. Then, he poses some questions about one of the characters featured in that section of the text. To model his expectations, the teacher records his answers to those questions on a two column note-taking form. He finishes up his time with the classic text by asking students to respond to the same questions he answered for a character in *Of Mice and Men* for one of the characters in their choice text. In this way, students are being asked to transfer their learning and engage in intense sustained reading. Gordon shares that, to complete an effective blended lesson, teachers must never talk more than 10 minutes before releasing the students to apply what they taught to their own selections.

As the students silently read their choice selections for at least 30 minutes, they are expected to write out the answers to the questions he posed. Gordon suggests one minute of writing for every 10 minutes of reading to keep the focus on intense, sustained reading. During this time, the teacher walks around the room and engages students in individual conferences. These conversations build students' oral communication skills, develop student-teacher relationships, and help students see themselves as readers. At the end of class, students are asked to write for 10 minutes.

In the following chapters, Gordon shows the reader how to build a classroom library and offers suggestions for ways to organize the check out procedure along with innovative ideas for students to recommend titles to one another. Many lists and websites are offered to help students find a book that is a perfect match for them. Chapters continue with detailed instructions about how to write four-five week units,

beginning with fictional texts and then moving to nonfiction. These instructions are offered in a step-by-step manner for ease in replication. In addition, examples of these units are available in the appendix in abbreviated form. If readers desire the full units, they can be accessed in through the provided url in Corwin's online resources.

To assure that the building blocks are in place, Gordon offers preassessment ideas and model lessons. She shows how to choose the excerpts of the classic that will be taught, demonstrates how to pare down the lessons to only those deemed most crucial, suggests tips to overcome challenges, and recommends resources to help in getting started with a

blended approach to reading. Additionally, she offers ways to encourage strong discussions about shared classics and individual choice texts. Gordon wraps up the text with the benefits of this approach to the grading process.

For anyone who is looking for a way to move students away from fake reading, while still holding onto the prized classics, this text is a treasure! It brings several experts together to offer a comprehensive look at a new approach to engaging reluctant readers and building lifelong learners. As Gordon suggests, "Now is the time to merge our favorite literature with our students' many, yet unfound, favorite books" (p. 220).