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Reading with *Just Imagine!*

Children's earliest literacy experiences often involve fiction stories. As children learn to read on their own, narrative stories continue to make up a large part of their reading material. (This is changing; many nonfiction reading series have been introduced to allow more variety and choice in reading material for early readers.) The switch from learning to read to reading to learn remains a hurdle for many readers. Nonfiction makes up the bulk of what people need to read every day, yet many students, even proficient readers, often lack the skills necessary to understand and retain what they have read. Struggling readers face an even greater challenge.

Just Imagine! can help. This program was designed for the struggling upper-middle and high school reader. It bridges the gap between narrative fictional tales and nonfiction articles and texts. The paperback books are chock-full of articles that interest young adolescents. The stories read like narratives, with the familiar pattern of beginning-middle-end. But the content is often nonfiction or based on actual events. Students gain concrete knowledge, garner reading success, and practice critical-thinking skills.

The format is handy and fun—the books look almost like comic books, not reading primers. Dynamic illustrations add to the comic book feel and appeal to visual learners. The combination of low reading level and high interest topics encourages reading—and reading success. The short line length and slightly

enlarged type makes it easy for the eye to follow the lines of print. The brevity of the stories allows students to feel a sense of accomplishment when they finish reading a complete story in a short time.

The *Just Imagine!* books contain many nonfiction stories. Others are fictionalized historical accounts. Some stories are identified as urban legends or ghost stories. Whatever the genre of a particular story, readers are encouraged to think about what they are reading. The activities that accompany the books build and reinforce vocabulary, practice reading-comprehension skills, and challenge students to think critically. Do students find a particular explanation of a strange event believable? Why or why not? What connections do they see between two stories? How would they react if they were a character facing a fantastic event? Such questions engage readers in the stories and invest them in the reading process. They also teach students that all readers, even those with reading fluency problems, bring something to reading; their ideas count. Giving students the sense that they are entitled to be readers is a great gift, one that *Just Imagine!* can help offer.

Nonfiction Reading Strategies

These reading strategies are useful for any kind of reading material. For able, fluent readers, some of these skills may be second nature. For others, the skills need to be broken down and introduced or retaught. With practice, the skills will become a natural, integral part of the reading process.

• **Activate background knowledge**

Making an initial connection to a text can mean the difference between reading and not reading. If you know nothing about a topic and have no interest in it, why would you want to read about it? The key to this prereading step lies in helping students see that they have some background knowledge about many things. For example, even a difficult science article about DNA can seem accessible if students realize that they have watched television shows about crime scenes and DNA evidence. Tapping into students' investment in a reading motivates them to read.

One way to activate background knowledge is to scan tables of contents of books and magazines. A key phrase may hook a student. A chapter title might remind a student of an earlier class. Any back-cover or jacket blurbs can also draw students in and spark a connection. In books such as *Just Imagine!* an introduction gives a brief overview of the content. Students may find something there that strikes a chord. A class discussion in which other students share background knowledge can empower a less confident reader to recognize what she or he brings to the reading.

• **Visualize**

Picturing scenes of a story is like watching a movie—something teens love to do. Visualizing what you read is not just pleasurable, it is also useful. It gives your brain another way, in addition to decoding and analyzing printed text, to capture an idea.

Teaching students to visualize using fiction is not difficult. You may read aloud a passage that has plenty of sensory imagery, and ask a student to draw or describe the scene he or she sees in the mind's eye.

Visualizing nonfiction texts is more challenging, depending on the type of text. For nonfiction narratives, the process is like that for fiction. If there are illustrations, as in *Just Imagine!* these help keep an image in front of the reader, not just in his or her head.

For nonnarrative texts, visual aids can help. If such graphics exist in the text, students can be reminded to look at them first, before reading the passage, again while reading, and once more after reading. Students may want to make a graph, a pie chart, a Venn diagram, or chart of their choice to organize what they are reading. This is not just a mental process, of course, but also a physical one.

• **Ask questions**

Confident readers ask themselves questions, make predictions, and revise ideas as they read. Struggling readers can learn to do this by practicing. Guided reading questions can help at the start, training students to recognize the kinds of things they need to notice in the reading.

Nonfiction Reading Strategies, continued

Asking students to jot questions that arise at specified points in the reading is another step. Asking students to keep a journal of questions, predictions, and answers while reading can help them see how active reading works. Eventually, students will learn to ask the questions themselves, mentally, while reading.

• Monitor comprehension

Some struggling readers may not recognize reading as a process. They may believe that proficient readers just sit down, open a book, read it through once in a smooth progression, and understand what they have read. Giving readers the freedom to stop and think, and to reread when necessary, develops the idea of reading as a process and increases the likelihood that they will understand and retain what they have read.

Teaching students to monitor comprehension means allowing them to think. At first, asking them to stop and regroup at a certain point in the reading can be helpful. If there is anything that does not make sense to them, they should feel free to reread a section.

• Review

Readers retain more information when they write about it. Writing notes, writing a summary, making an outline, or using another graphic organizer can help students analyze, synthesize, and think critically about the meaning of what they have read. Blank graphic organizers are included for use with any writing assignment.

• Think critically

Students sometimes believe that anything in print is true or good or worthwhile. Of course, this is not the case. Students can be encouraged to think about any text by asking questions about what lies behind the text, such as

Why did the author write about this topic?

Why did the author choose this word over another?

What opinion does the author have of this topic?

What is fact in the reading, and what is opinion?

What devices does the author use to make her or his point, and why?

Students can make their own connections to the text by asking themselves questions such as

What would I do in that situation?

What do I think of the choice/decision a character made? Why?

How am I similar to or different from a person in the text?

How did the setting—the time and place—of the text affect the people in it?

Has anything like what happened in the text ever happened to me?

Have I read or heard anything about the topic that does not agree with what this text says?

Bizarre Creatures

There are many things for people to fear in this world. Car accidents, for example, kill thousands of people every year. The flu once wiped out millions worldwide. Lightning often strikes people during thunderstorms.

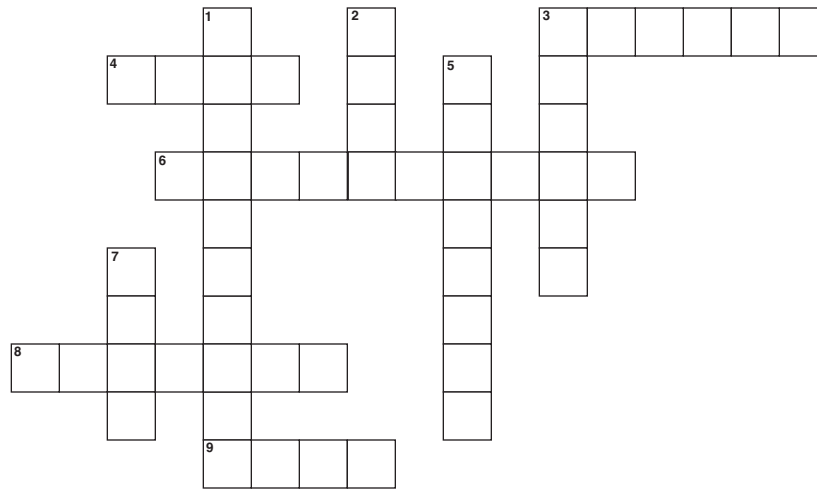
Yet, somehow, no one gets goose bumps over cars or bad weather or the flu season. We save our deepest shivers for things we can't even see. We fear the dark and "things that go bump in the night."

And all over the world, people turn fear of this type into stories. They make up monsters to explain the fears that make no sense. You may have shivered over such stories yourself. Perhaps you have heard tales of witches, ghosts, or werewolves. People in other places have their own monsters. Africans and Asians, for example, tell stories most Americans have never heard. Even in this country, different groups have different monster tales.

Get ready to meet six monsters from different lands. Compare them to monsters you have heard about. See if you think they are more scary or less so. Which ones would make good movies or television shows? Why or why not?

Match each clue with a vocabulary word from the box. Write the correct vocabulary word in the puzzle.

deserted	race	unpleasant	catnip	common
bare	dusk	ruin	flitted	translated



Across

3. occurring often; ordinary
4. without covering; empty
6. not pleasing
8. to pass quickly from one place to another
9. time of evening just before dark

Down

1. put into another language
2. a large group that shares characteristics that are passed from one generation to another
3. a plant with a strong smell that attracts cats
5. not lived in
7. the remains of something that has collapsed or been destroyed

What do you remember about “Shapeshifters of the Muslim World”? Answer the questions to find out.

1. The story suggests that jinns do not come out during the day. List details from the story that say jinns are nocturnal, or active at night.
2. How are jinns different from genies?
3. Why did Shahbuddin stop at the mill?
4. Why did he go on toward the mill after something flitted past him?
5. Why did he run away after he peeked around the corner of the mill?

Just Imagine!

Imagine that you are home alone one night. You see strange lights flickering outside a window as you go to bed. Are you curious? Or alarmed? What do you do? Why? Write your answers in the space below.

