

Introduction

Why Alternative Responses to Literature?

For a long time, we teachers have depended on the traditional, paper book report to judge whether or not our students really understand the literary elements of fiction. But today's upper elementary classroom is a far more complex place than ever before. Students must work toward specific objectives and satisfy state-mandated performance standards, not only in language arts but also for social studies and science as well.

While the traditional book report focused mainly on responding to fiction, it's not terribly well-suited for informational genres. How can we include responses to nonfiction literature and content-area topics and subjects that now appear on state assessments (and which students also enjoy reading!)?

Creative Book Reports gives you 39 hands-on projects that help your students expand their book report horizons. These alternative responses to literature will engage your students as they demonstrate their knowledge of literary elements such as plot, character, setting, and theme in fiction – or their comprehension of informational selections or content-area concepts.

The alternative response ideas in this resource go well beyond the very narrow scope of the traditional—and much overused—book report, and also satisfy our need to ensure that students are working to performance standards. Alternative responses to literature allow students freedom of expression. They provide a concrete and visual way for each student to explore literature response. And they give us teachers an alternative assessment option.

All of the projects in this resource help students to synthesize information of large concepts into smaller pieces in visual and concrete ways. They provide opportunities for students to work in various media, thus better meeting the needs of the visual, the kinesthetic, and the auditory learner. And instead of tending to point to one "correct" answer, alternative responses to literature encourage critical and creative thinking.

Best of all, the learning "sticks." Because these projects actively engage students, learning becomes fun. As writer Alfred Mercier once said, "What we learn with pleasure, we never forget."

Why Use Rubrics?

When students know what's expected of them, the quality of their responses increases. Each project in this book comes with a rubric of clearly stated objectives, which research has shown to positively affect student achievement. (Wise, Kevin & Okey, James. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*. pp 419 – 435, 1983).

Rubrics appeal to teachers and students alike. Rubrics give students a working

guide that clearly spells out the criteria on which their work will be evaluated before they begin their projects. Students use the rubrics to focus their efforts. They can easily see what areas of their work need improvement. The objective, justifiable standards on the rubrics also make it easier for teachers to assess that work, too.

The grading rubric attached to each student project allows you to assess student performance on individual parts of the project. For example, while one student may immediately grasp the idea of the importance of plot, he or she might not be able to fully comprehend setting. Using a rubric allows students with varying abilities and learning styles to become successful because you, the teacher, are able to provide assistance with objectives with which a student may have difficulty. Later, these rubrics also can be used in parent conferences or to assess improvement throughout the school year.

The rubrics in this resource attach point values to each of the assessment criteria in an assigned project. Each criterion is listed individually on the student reproducible page. Some rubrics are based on a 50-point scale, but the point breakdowns can easily be doubled to increase a project's value to 100.

For your convenience, the rubrics also can be found on the CD, formatted in Microsoft Word®. This makes it easy to adapt them to fit specific subject-area needs, or alter to focus on specific performance goals, such as response length or number of paragraphs you will require. The rubrics are as adaptable and flexible as you need them to be.

When you use rubrics to grade, assessment is made easy. When I use rubrics, for example, I circle any objectives that are missing and determine the points awarded. When assessing the grammar and punctuation, I simply put a slash mark on the rubric for each miscue. This way, I can quickly compute the total points awarded and have time left to attach a "Good Work" sticker to the rubric, or to write an instructional note for the student. All the grading criteria are stated clearly so that projects can be rapidly and objectively graded.

How to Use this Book

Variety is truly the spice of life—especially when talking about literature response! The many different kinds of book report projects in this resource will keep your students excited about learning over the entire year.

Most projects described are designed as a response to a single book that would be read and shared by the entire class, but every project can be adapted for separate books which are assigned to small groups or for independent reading. Most can be done either in class or assigned as homework. They are versatile enough to fit into social studies or science lesson plans, too. And because you can teach many different concepts with the same project, you will find you'll save lesson-preparation time as well.

The Project Page Format on page xi shows you where the information for each lesson is located. Read that first to become familiar with the format.

Note that projects are organized by presentation media. Those projects listed with subtitles include rubrics that are specific to those projects. Rubrics for projects without subtitles should be changed to fit the book or topic you want to assess.

Of course, every one of the projects can be adapted for your needs. "Other Ideas" are listed for every project, with suggestions for applying it for language arts, science, or social studies. There's also a cross-index at the back of the book to help you organize the projects by content or topic.

Try all of the projects at least once and see what works for you and your students. When focusing on one performance standard, it is possible to have each class work on a different project. Where one class is making character cards, another could be preparing character cutouts. This gives you a chance to see what works best for your teaching situation, to make instructional adjustments according to your classroom needs, and to have fun facilitating while your students are actively engaged in responding to literature.

Classroom Management Tips

As most teachers realize, time spent on a task varies from group to group. Many of the projects in this book could be completed in one or two class periods, but since most teachers don't focus solely on literature for that length of time, I suggest planning 20 to 30-minute blocks of time for several class periods until the project is complete.

Start preparing by collecting the materials needed for the presentation you will use. The materials needed for each project will be listed on every Teacher Page. Keep your project materials organized, labeled, and stored in the classroom for easy access. Make a project yourself before you introduce it to students to make it easier to explain.

Prepare your rubrics according to your book, topic, or theme. Choose a presentation method that you like and adapt the rubric to fit, or use a project that already lists an application. You can change the rubrics as you like with the CD, or use them as is from the reproducible pages.

When you introduce a project for the first time, construct a model or have one available for the students to see and handle as you explain it. From that point on, keep one or two of your students' projects to show as examples for the next class.

On the first day of the project, give students their reproducible pages with the directions and rubrics and allow them time to brainstorm, conference with one another (if necessary), and write a rough draft that reflects the project's performance standards. When the students have completed their projects, they will turn in their reproducible pages (with their names clearly written on them!) in order to receive their grades.

On the first day of a multi-day project, give them time to organize their ideas on paper as a rough draft. The second day is a good time for peer review. Allow students time to share their drafts with each other and provide constructive

criticism. (I ask students to paste sticky notes on their friends' papers with comments for revision.) The remaining time during this class period is used for revision. If the project requires research, I usually set aside two or three 30-minute periods in the school media center. The following day or two, I allow students to transfer their revised work to complete their final projects.

Students should be allowed to interact when they work on projects, and some projects in this resource are specifically designed for group work. Group work is a useful activity for teaching real-world situations. Knowing that they will be graded on how well they function within a group dynamic will help your students to sharpen their interpersonal skills.

Quite often, task talk is good talk. Walk around the classroom while students are working; listen to what they are saying and interject your ideas. Conversation builds good group dynamics, and it's your job to facilitate.

Typed work on a final project is always preferred. It not only looks nicer, it's easier to read. Require it if you can, but for students who don't have access to a computer, ask them to print neatly. For those students who have a computer at home, drafts can be revised in class, prepared at home, and attached to the projects when they return to school.

How to Display Projects

With limited bulletin board and wall space in a classroom, a creative solution for display of student projects is essential. One solution that works in my classroom is a clothesline running between the walls at the back of the class. This line stretches from one side of the room to the other. I purchased a roll of wire and two eye hooks that the school custodian placed in the walls. Using clothespins, I am able to display flipbooks, envelopes, mini-books, character cutouts, and many other projects.

If a permanent clothesline is not possible in your classroom, look for a place to run a string or wire from cabinet to cabinet. Hang mobiles from the ceiling with paper clips that fit between the ceiling tiles. Bulletin boards or display cases in the hallway or cafeteria are also great places for students to view each other's work, and don't forget that the media center will gladly welcome student projects, especially those that focus on literature.

No matter how or where the work is exhibited, you'll find that students love seeing their "published" works on display. They will enjoy reading—and getting ideas from—other students' presentations for their next project.

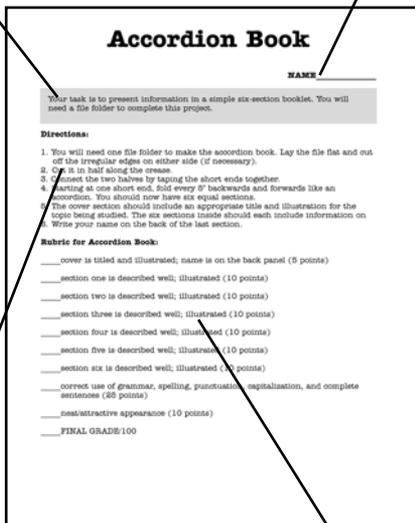
Project Page Format

Student Page

Teacher Page

A space for the student's name. Students turn in this rubric page with their projects.

Every student page will begin with a quick introduction.



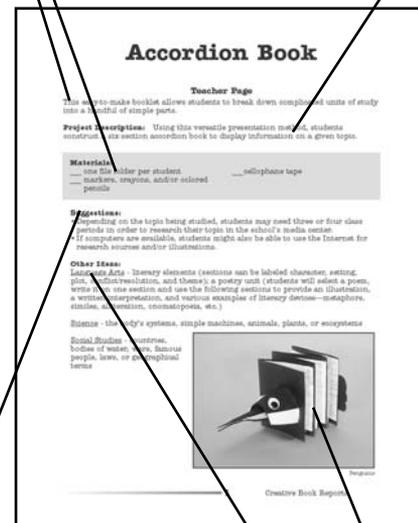
Directions: Step-by-step directions

Rubric: The rubric assigns points for each part of the project, with a total at the bottom. Use the reproducible in the book, or create your own from the rubrics on the CD, which are formatted in Word. Rubrics can be tailored to fit specific books or project needs across the curriculum. Note that the rubrics for projects listed without a subtitle are non-specific. Rubrics for projects with a subtitle contain specific directions for that project.

A quick introduction to the project.

Project description: Includes a project description and explanation. Projects without subtitles supply the presentation idea, and the rubric also is non-specific. The rubrics with projects with subtitles describe one specific use for the project.

Materials: Lists materials needed for each student.



Suggestions: Includes how-to tips to prepare and present the project.

Other Ideas: Suggestions for adapting projects for language arts, history, social studies, and science.

Photograph: Included for many of the projects.