

The background of the cover is a light yellow-green color with several faint, stylized leaf motifs scattered across it. Each motif consists of a stem with two leaves pointing upwards and to the right.

# **NOVEL IDEAS FOR YOUNG READERS!**

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**Projects and Activities**

**Katherine Wiesolek Kuta, Susan Zernial**

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**Novel Ideas  
for  
Young Readers!**

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## *Projects and Activities*

Katherine Wiesolek Kuta

Susan Zernial, Ed.D.

2000

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*This book is dedicated to several special readers  
in my family who I am fortunate  
to see read, learn, and grow constantly.*

*My enchanting daughter, Melanie, who reads and writes at age seven  
and creates wonderful stories for me to listen to and enjoy daily.  
She also inspires me to write more for children.*

*My godchild, Laura, who has once again become  
connected with me  
and makes me treasure our time together.*

*My godchild, Joey, whose imagination, humor, and creativity over  
the last eleven years constantly surprise everyone.  
He enriches me with his performances.*

*My niece, Karly, who has been sweet and insightful  
for the last nine years  
and helps me feel young at heart.*

—Katherine Wiesolek Kuta

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# Preface

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This book provides activities and projects for teachers to use with their students as before-, during-, and after-reading activities with any kind of fiction. It is also possible to use some activities with nonfiction reading material. This resource book can be used as authentic assessment as well as performance assessment because all the activities involve students displaying their knowledge and understanding of a book or short story in a creative, original manner. Students can work on these projects in groups, in pairs, or as individuals as directed by the teacher.

This book offers 60 varied activities and projects to accommodate many different learning styles. Some students may prefer activities that require more reading and writing, if they are skilled in these areas. Other students may prefer creating objects that represent their knowledge, if they tend to be more “hands-on” learners. Students who are exceptionally verbal may feel most comfortable speaking to an audience for their project. Teachers should offer choice and variety to accommodate students’ interests whenever possible, but all students should be exposed to all modes of expression and skills during the course of the school year.

Most of these activities can be adapted for any grade level, ability group, type of class, or type of literature. Because teachers’ purposes for assigning an activity will vary, as will the skills that need reinforcing, the activities are divided into three sections with 20 activities per section. Each section emphasizes two of the six language arts standards: reading, writing, representing, viewing, speaking, listening.

Selection of the material was based on successful classroom-tested projects. I have used most of the activities with students from kindergarten through high school. As expected in good teaching, I constantly revise and adapt activities as I find out what works, especially after feedback from my students. Even though most of my experience is with high school students, I have found all students have several common needs. They need the opportunity to express themselves individually, to be successful, to increase self-esteem, and to learn about themselves and the world they live in. A way to do all of the above is through children’s literature and activity projects.

Through my experiences, I have met with many professional teachers who have shared ideas with me. I have saved, changed, and molded these ideas to fit my needs and the needs of the students that I was working with at any one time. I am thankful to all my colleagues who shared ideas and materials with me when I was the “new kid on the block” during the years of starting over with a new class, grade level, or school. This book has now allowed me to organize the old as well as create the new so that I can share successful materials with others.

I have also been very fortunate to work with Susan Zernial as a consultant for this book. She has wonderful expertise as an editor and irreplaceable experience as an elementary school teacher. She has been able to simplify and look at material from an experienced, practical point of view.

I have taught remedial students during my entire teaching career, and there are three factors that I have found add to success with students. The first is to plan a variety of activities for use within a class. The second is to give students the power of choice; and the third is to use children's and young adult literature in the classroom. I wrote this book with these three factors constantly in mind.

Because teachers like ready-made materials that meet their needs, the activities and projects are reproducible. Each activity/project has a list of purposes, how to use the activity, evaluation, and variations. Teachers can change or enlarge the forms as they feel necessary.

I hope that you become more enriched with ideas by using this book with your students and that your students learn and grow to be lifelong readers.

Katherine Wiesolek Kuta

# Introduction

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With the publication of the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English's Standards for English/Reading Language Arts in 1996, I felt a need to show teachers the kinds of activities and projects already being done successfully in the classroom that match these standards. These six necessary skill standards—reading, writing, representing, viewing, speaking, and listening—are stated specifically in the 12 student-centered standards.

More recently in many states, there is an increasing emphasis on goals, standards, benchmarks, and performance assessment at all levels. The activities and projects in this book are geared toward performance assessment that coincides with the six basic skill areas. My editor and I feel a strong need to reach the early elementary-level students to establish the necessary connections to literature, so the goal of this book is twofold: (1) students should begin to develop the six skills and (2) students should make connections with print and form strong memory impressions thereby increasing comprehension.

I created this book as a desk reference of practical, classroom-tested ideas for teachers to use when planning units and lessons with fiction. However, some of the activities/projects can be used with nonfiction readings. Students can accomplish most of these activities in groups, in pairs, or as individuals. Students often learn from each other when put in cooperative group settings. Students need to learn to play, work, and communicate with one another at an early age to help prepare for later in life.

The first part of this book concentrates on real-life reading and writing activity projects. The projects include writing paragraphs, news stories, letters, summaries, fiction, and creative responses. These projects are grouped together because the students are involved in reading a book and also in having a writing experience concerned with the book. These activities are not in any particular order, so a teacher can choose a specific activity to meet a specific purpose or offer several activities from which students may choose.

The second part of this book deals with activities and projects that offer students the opportunity to exhibit their knowledge of a book visually, such as with a chart or artwork. In this part, the students must read a piece of literature either individually or collectively, and there may be some kind of writing involved. The focus, however, is on the information in the reading and the students' ability to make connections with and representations of that information in an unusual, creative format as requested by the activity/project. Formats include a collage, poster, mobile, mural, bumper sticker, bookmark, or greeting card.

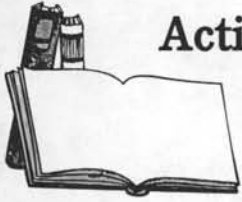
The second phase of each project includes sharing the creation with class members. Students take responsibility for their learning by sharing with and learning from one another. This cooperation enables the teacher to act as a facilitator in the classroom. The use of visual representations becomes a teaching device for students during formal or informal presentations.

The third part of the book offers activities and projects for students to practice speaking and listening standards. The activities were designed for students to present orally to the class and also, in some instances, to be creative. Some activities are a mini booktalk, a panel discussion, an interview, an oral book review, and poems. The class members get to practice their listening skills as the audience for the presentations.

For all 60 activities, there are explanation sheets that give the teacher pertinent information on the purposes of the activities, how to use the activities, evaluation points, and variations of the activities. All activity sheets are reproducible and ready to use in the classroom. The variety in the activities makes this resource book a useful tool to increase students' participation and motivation, as well as to assess students' performance in language arts. If you decide to use an activity for performance assessment, you will need to develop an appropriate rubric to evaluate specific skills. You can mix and match any of the activities and alter them in any way necessary for individual purposes.

**Part 1**

# **Reading and Writing Standards Activities**



## Activity 1—My Favorite Character

---

### Purpose of the Activity

The purpose of this activity is to involve students as active readers. They will be writing and taking notes about a character as they read the book. Students will also reflect on whether they think the character is likable or not based on the information they have on the graphic organizer, which is a visual structure that displays information. Then they must write and support their choice.

### How to Use the Activity

Use the form as a model for students during reading, starting at the beginning of the book. Many times the information about main characters appears during the exposition, generally in the first few pages. Depending on their age group, students can learn about exposition and character development by recording information on this form. After a degree of comfort is reached over time, this activity can be assigned to groups, pairs, or individuals.

### Evaluation

The assessment of the activity could be based on participation, discussion, completion, and understanding. Hopefully, as students become more careful readers, they will automatically become aware of character description as they read. The goal is for the students to move toward independence.

### Variations

For concrete learners, students could be asked to draw the character based on the description or cut out a picture from a magazine. For the personality traits, students could be asked to draw or create symbols. For the other information, students could be asked to place words or phrases around their drawing.

# Activity 1—My Favorite Character

---

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Publisher and year: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Choose a character from your book whom you would like to get to know as a friend. We learn about people by what they say, how they act, and what others tell us. We learn about characters in books this way, too. As you read, write down information about the character you chose. Be sure to include page numbers and specific details.

**What does the character look like?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**How does the character act with friends and family?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Character**

---

**What problems does the character face?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**How does the character solve his/her problems?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you like this character? Write your answer on the back.



## Activity 2—A Character's Personality

---

### Purpose of the Activity

The purpose of this activity is for students to look for specific information, to draw inferences, and to understand the main character's personality, support a choice, and apply the concept of personality traits. The students will practice moving beyond the text as they read. After completion of the reading, they will gain greater understanding of people and themselves.

### How to Use the Activity

Before this activity is used with a book, the students could practice it on themselves and substitute their own name for "character." It would be helpful to either list some personality traits on the board or to have the class brainstorm some personality traits and list them for all to view so students can possibly learn new vocabulary words as well. After this exercise, the students will feel more comfortable with the activity when discussing the many personality traits that make up a character in a book. To apply this concept to literature, this activity should be modeled with the class either during or after completion of the reading. When students are asked to make a decision on whether a particular trait is liked or not liked, they must support their answer. This critical thinking helps students make good judgments in decision making. By applying the trait to someone they know, students are making connections to the real world. The depth of understanding will depend on the age level of the students.

### Evaluation

Assess this activity in terms of how well the students understand the main character and his/her personality by using specific examples from the book, how well they can support their choices, and how well they can relate a trait to a real person.

### Variations

This activity can be expanded to a matching game after several books have been read. Students could be asked to match a picture of a character or the character's name to a group of possible personality traits. Students could be asked to draw concrete examples of traits for vocabulary reinforcement. For example, "kindness" could be represented with a drawing of someone picking up an item that someone else dropped.