

BUILDING CONFIDENT, EMPATHETIC STORYTELLERS

by:

Trixia Carla C. Bonus

Teacher III, Pantalan Luma Elementary School

By the time children enter Grade 2, the mechanics of reading—like basic phonics and sight words—should begin paving the way for reading comprehension and expressive writing. The core challenge for the educator is moving students from merely decoding words to genuinely loving the narrative. We want them to stop reading mechanically and start visualizing the worlds hidden inside the text.

To bridge this gap, sensory language must be pulled off the page and into the physical room. To teach adjectives, I often play a game called "Mystery Bag." I hide a secret object, like a bumpy seashell, a velvety pouch, or a coarse kitchen sponge, inside a dark cloth bag. A student comes to the front, reaches their hand inside, and must describe the object to their classmates using only descriptive words—without naming the item itself.

One afternoon, a notoriously shy student reached into the bag, wrinkled his nose, and whispered:

“Magaspang ito, magaan po, at parang maliit na bato.”

("It's scratchy, it's really light, and it feels like a little stone.")

The class erupted in guesses until someone yelled, "A sponge!" The proud smile on the speaker's face was unforgettable. This simple game expanded their vocabulary instantly, demonstrating how adjectives paint vivid pictures in a listener's mind.

In tandem with vocabulary building, English lessons should incorporate "Shared Reading" strategies that foster deep empathy. When reading a story aloud, do not just read from start to finish. Pause at critical moments to interrogate the text. Ask questions like, ""Sa palagay mo, ano ang gagawin niya sa susunod?" ("What do you think she will do next?") or ""Tingnan mo ang guhit ng ilustrador sa kanyang mukha. Ano sa tingin mo ang nararamdaman niya ngayon?" ("Look at the illustrator's drawing of his face. How do you think he is feeling right now?"

By treating characters as real people with complex emotions, students learn that reading is an act of empathy. This emotional connection naturally overflows into their writing. When it comes time for them to write their own short paragraphs, they are no longer just listing sentences; they are trying to make their reader feel something.

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