



賽馬會「知優致優」計劃

Jockey Club “Giftedness Into Flourishing Talents” Project

# Reading Fables

**English Language Primary 6**

Level 1: School-based Whole-class Teaching



香港賽馬會慈善信託基金

The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust

同心·同步·同進 RIDING HIGH TOGETHER

## **Background and Notes**

The design of the learning and teaching plan reflects the actual circumstances of the particular school at the time of implementation. As it is developed and tailor-made to meet the specific cognitive and affective needs of students, all learning and teaching resources are for reference only.

When adapting the materials, curriculum, instructional and assessment modifications can be made in accordance with the diverse needs and abilities, learning styles and aspirations of students, professional competence of teachers, and gifted education development of the schools.

Teachers are strongly recommended to read the introduction, theoretical background and summary of the resource package to have a better understanding of the principles of Gifted Education and strategies for implementation.

**This unit includes 1 foreword and 1 lesson plan.**




With reference to our resources, educators can design suitable learning activities and implement the elements of Gifted Education, based on students' needs and interests, and teaching experience, so as to unfold students' potentials to the fullest.

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# Reading Fables

**Grade: Primary 6**

**No. of Lessons (Learning Time): 1 Lesson (35 minutes)**

<b>Prior Knowledge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The structure of a story (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution)</li> <li>- Adjectives to describe characters</li> <li>- Forming different types of questions to clarify the development of a story</li> <li>- Reading different fables</li> </ul>
<b>Learning Objectives</b>	<p><b>Knowledge</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students will identify the features of a fable</li> <li>- Students can describe the characters in terms of their personalities</li> <li>- Students can use similes to accentuate one's personality</li> </ul> <p><b>Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students can identify the main ideas and values embedded in different fables</li> <li>- Students can relate those ideas and values to one's personal experience or knowledge</li> <li>- Students can rewrite a fable creatively by changing the personality of a character, the context, and the challenges encountered</li> </ul> <p><b>Values and Attitudes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students will develop enjoyment in reading and writing fables given powerful semantic and syntactic clues</li> <li>- Students become more aware of how one's personality affect one's conduct</li> <li>- Students will draw on the lesson learnt to strengthen one's life</li> </ul>
<b>Learning &amp; Teaching Strategies</b>	Hot-seating, Story Improvisation
<b>Operation Mode of Gifted Education</b>	Level 1: School-based Whole-class Teaching
<b>Core Elements of Gifted Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Higher-order Thinking Skills</li> <li> Creativity</li> <li> Personal-social Competence</li> </ul>

## Foreword / Background

As suggested in the English Language Curriculum Guide (2017), understanding the intention, attitudes and feelings conveyed in a text is one of the reading skills that students in Hong Kong are expected to comprehend in Key Stage 2 (Curriculum Development Council, 2017). It is also suggested that positive values and attitudes of students can be developed through activities based on the reading materials.

To implement the intention, attitudes and feelings, in addition to developing positive values and attitudes through reading, fables are usually the chosen text type in different schools in Hong Kong. Most of the chosen fables are taken from the textbooks and it is common to find that similes are the major language focus taught while reading the fable. Most of the time, the reading lessons are usually teacher-centred since teachers believe that students are only able to decode the meaning or intention of the fables after teachers' verbal explanation of the vocabulary items, the similes, and the development of the story. In other words, the focus of the learning process is on basic reading skills, including the decoding of new words and similes. It usually starts with students' reading aloud the chosen fables, then teachers' explanation on the vocabulary items and similes. After that, to check students' understanding of the fables, including the intention, attitudes, and feelings conveyed, as well as their development of positive values and attitudes, students are usually asked questions of different levels verbally or via written reading comprehension exercises. Students then work on reading the comprehension exercises, for example, matching or writing the definitions of the similes stated in the reading text. For a post-reading task, students are often expected to rewrite the fable into a script, with the taught vocabulary items and similes, individually.

The target group of students involved in the following discussion was 5 Grade 6 classes. Based on students' overall academic performance, they were allocated into 5 classes, with one higher-ability class. The discussion will focus only on the higher-ability class. Basically, they all performed well in their English Language examinations and from teachers' daily observation, all students in this class loved reading. The class could also be divided into two major groups of students. The first group was a batch of students with strong fluency and accuracy in their use of English. They were found to possess strong reading skills, which enabled them to decode unknown words, make use of effective reading strategies, and process the information of the text immediately after reading. They were able to read texts with more complex features, for example, argumentative texts. On the other hand, the second group of students possessed only basic reading skills. Anxiety could be an issue with them as they needed more assistance to decode any unknown words. They focused more on accuracy rather than fluency when they expressed their own ideas. They preferred to read texts with simpler features, for example, stories or comics.

With the teacher-centred approach mentioned above, and according to teachers' observation, it was found that most students were not actively engaged and had not exhibited their strengths in the learning process. The product of the post-reading exercise, in which students wrote the script based on the fable, were all very similar. The highly-able students completed the tasks with the

least effort; they merely made use of the vocabulary or language features provided in the story. They produced the script individually with the required number of words without any of their own opinions or understanding of the story. For the group of students with basic reading skills, they were found to be anxious in the post reading exercise. They wrote the script using short and simple sentences which they felt more secure to use and did not show much confidence in using the vocabulary items or the similes.

## Objectives of Collaboration

To respond to the need to design a learning experience for gifted students and to enhance all students' learning experiences, teachers reviewed the learning needs of the students of both groups and discussed how they could be more engaged, and how they could demonstrate their potential in the reading lesson. With the Professional Development and School Support (PDSS) Team of Project GIFT, teachers were guided to analyse the behavior and characteristics of the students from their daily observation. It was found that the group of highly-able students loved giving opinions and making suggestions about others' work or behaviors in their daily life. They were used to expressing their opinions through speaking or writing. In contrast, the group of students with basic reading skills showed lack of willingness to participate in individual learning tasks. They preferred tasks which involved peer interaction, for example, role-play. They preferred showing their opinions through illustration instead of writing or speaking.

To accommodate the needs of the highly-able students, enhance the learning experience of all students in the reading lesson, and to minimize the anxiety of students with basic ability in English reading, teachers of the school designed one lesson of whole-class learning through collaborative lesson planning and discussion. Lesson observations of one lesson and post-lesson discussions were also conducted to evaluate the learning process and outcomes. Then the learning objectives and process for the selected class would be modified and tailored based on the learning needs and characteristics of the students. It was expected students with higher ability would share their opinions and give further suggestions based on their previous experiences throughout the reading process and be more engaged while the other group of students (Group B students) would be more engaged in the reading activities in the learning process.

## Theoretical Framework

### 1. A More Engaging Learning Environment for the Highly Able Students

According to Halster and Reis (2004), gifted readers tend to use advanced processing in reading. Moore (2005) suggested that gifted readers mastered reading strategies more quickly. They possess advanced vocabulary and read with effective strategies. They process the words from visual input into meaning directly. In other words, they have already mastered the basic reading skills, and extension for them in reading tasks is necessary. Levande (1993) stated that reading programs for the gifted should cater for the characteristics of the students by offering opportunities for them to expand and extend their giftednesses. Rena and Nancy (1996) pointed out that

the learning environment or the learning process should foster the enthusiasm and interests of gifted readers. Gifted readers always look for ideas from the texts with a greater depth. They are more responsive and engaged when the learning environment is more student-centred and less structured. They prefer to be engaged in a learning process with more critical thinking and independent learning. It is stated by Cathcart (2004) that students may be frustrated by the materials provided by the teachers. Gifted readers read a wide variety of materials covering a wide range of topics. They may not feel challenged by the reading materials in a whole-class teaching environment.

With reference to Collins and Alex (1995), the learning process for gifted readers should be more focused on the development of a critical reading experience. Materials for them should be more demanding than those for students with basic skills in English reading. It is common to use advanced reading materials which are more complicated in form and meaning (Baskin & Harris, 1980; Hauser & Nelson, 1988). Enrichment could be one of the approaches used for gifted readers to learn and be involved in the reading process.

## **2. Promoting Critical Thinking Skills of the Gifted in Reading Lessons**

Critical thinking is not developed through reading fables without facilitation of the teachers. Whenever students analyze the reading materials, they apply their critical thinking skills (Paul, Binker, Jensen, & Krelau, 1990). According to Moore, Alverman, and O'Keefe (1990), discussion and dialogue have been implemented in the classrooms for the development of critical thinking skills and reading instructions. Furthermore, Dennick and Exley (1998) emphasized that cooperative learning with peers allows students to share points of view from different perspectives.

## **3. Responding to Students' Readiness, Learning Styles and Interests**

Students have different characteristics, which include their levels of readiness, learning styles, and interests. To cater for the learning diversity in whole-class teaching, ranging from those with higher ability in English reading to students with basic skills in reading, differentiated strategies could be adopted (EDB). With reference to Tomlinson and Hockett (2008), differentiation means finding multiple ways to run through the learning process using differentiated learning strategies and content. Every student learns at the level of their readiness and interests.

To motivate and engage students with different abilities, learning strategies could also be designed with a strength-based approach. According to the Theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1983), there are eight intelligences embedded in the human mind, namely linguistic, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, musical, bodily kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and naturalist intelligences. If students are allowed to learn according to their own strengths and learning styles, not only will the engagement of the students will be raised, but their reading abilities could also be enhanced.

## Learning and Teaching Strategies

After reviewing the effectiveness of the reading lesson with the teacher-centred approach and with reference to the learning objectives and students' behavior, a more student-centred approach was adopted. Instead of focusing on the explanation of the vocabulary items and the similes in the fable, the teacher tried to provide a more positive environment for students to express their own opinions or understandings of the story. All students rewrote the fable creatively by changing the personality of a character or the setting of it. They were then able to find out the main ideas and values embedded and relate them to their own personal experience. They could comment and give suggestions on the behaviors of the characters verbally and in written form.

The learning focus of the reading lesson was put on the promotion of critical thinking skills of the higher ability students. They were expected to analyze and interpret the intention of the characters in their response to the fable. They were expected to use similes, which were not stated in the textbook, to accentuate the characters' personality. Students with basic reading skills were expected to be more engaged and more willing to express their opinions. They were expected to describe the characters with appropriate adjectives or similes.

Thus critical thinking skills of the highly able students in reading could be further promoted and the anxiety of students with basic reading skills towards the new vocabulary items could be minimized.

The strategies adopted are summarised as follows:

### 1. A More Interactive and Encouraging Learning and Teaching Environment

To provide more engagement of students' critical thinking skills, the focus of the reading process was swapped from a teacher-centred explanation of the meaning of the vocabulary items and similes to the development of students' critical thinking skills through interaction among peers. A fable which is familiar to the students was chosen – The Crow and the Fox. With this familiar title, teachers' concerns about teaching the vocabulary items of a new fable could be minimized. At the beginning of the lesson, students were asked to imagine they were one of the characters. Then, to provide more opportunities for students to interact among themselves, 3 students who had a stronger ability in verbal English and interpreting the intention of a story were selected to role-play the fox, the crow, and the goat. The activity of hot-seating was then introduced to the students. Students had to prepare questions of different levels to interview the 3 characters and give some suggestions to them to make improvements. Students who role-played the characters had to respond to the questions using their own imagination and critical thinking skills. After that, students could choose the characters they liked most for a story improvisation. They rewrote the story with a new storyline by changing the personality of the selected character or the setting. They then had to give suggestions or comments to their peers in groups after listening to the stories of other groups.

## 2. Discussion and Dialogue – Hot Seating and Story Improvisation

To provide more opportunities for the highly able students to develop their critical thinking skills, some activities which involved peer interaction were introduced in the lesson, for example, hot seating and story improvisation. Through hot-seating, dialogue among the students as different characters could be developed. With dialogue, further discussion on some issues which were relevant to the characters could be raised. For example, a student asked the one who acted as the crow, “Why were you so proud of yourself?”, “How would you react in the future if you were asked the same question?” The student who acted as the crow then responded from the point of view of the crow, “I will learn to be more humble in the future.” In that way, a natural dialogue was developed in the classroom.

For story improvisation, students formed groups of 3 to 4. They then made a new story by changing the personality of the character or the setting and the problems the characters faced if they wanted to challenge themselves. They did not have to present their stories in written form at the beginning. They were encouraged to discuss the storyline in groups and present their stories verbally to another group. Critical thinking of the highly able students could be further displayed through these types of cooperative learning experiences.

## 3. Differentiation and Strength-based Approach

To cater for the diverse learning needs, a differentiated and strength-based approach were implemented throughout the process. Different materials were offered to students with different abilities to choose to read. For example, different versions of the same fable with more complicated features or other fables with different topics were introduced to the highly able students. Students with higher ability in spoken English were chosen to role-play the characters. During story improvisation, homogenous groupings according to students’ choices of the fable characters, followed by discussion and sharing of real-life experiences created rapid interaction among students. Students with higher ability in verbal expression were assigned to tell the story of their group to other groups. While creating the post, students could choose to illustrate their ideas through drawing or writing.

To motivate students to participate in the last learning task, the final task of the lesson would be students making their own Facebook page with a character of the fable chosen. Students would express their own understanding towards the story on the Facebook page, they were allowed to choose their own way to present their ideas. Students who were good at writing could express their story in a written form. Students who were good at drawing were allowed to illustrate their stories in the format of a comic or a picture. After that, students were allowed to give their comments on the Facebook page by their peers in their own ways. They wrote from the perspectives of the characters with their own opinions and views. Through all these tasks, students would have to analyse the behavior of the characters and the development of the story, they then shared their view through discussion and dialogue, and cooperative learning. All students would create a post



on the Facebook and they needed to give constructive feedback to, and comments on, their peers' opinions, based on the attitudes and intention of the characters.

## Discussion

### 1. Evidence of Learning

Throughout the learning process of the reading lesson, evidence of learning was observed. All students were engaged in the learning process with positive attitudes and task commitment. All students were willing to share their ideas and give suggestions to their peers. Their body language and facial expressions showed their enjoyment throughout the whole process. For students who possessed stronger reading skills, they were able to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the behavior of the characters. They demonstrated their thinking skills through logical commenting and questioning during the hot-seating activity. It helped facilitate students' analysis skills and interpretation skills. Development of reasoning and thinking skills, together with the values learnt, was also clearly observed and expressed by students. For example, how the attitude of the crow and the personality of the fox developed the storyline. During story improvisation, vivid and relevant interchange among students was found through homogeneous grouping according to the characters that students liked most. Students of all abilities brought in new ideas and the highly able students were able to give constructive feedback towards the ideas given. It was also found that students could relate their understanding of the story to their daily life experiences. Positive values and attitudes were also developed. It was demonstrated through students' comments or reflection on the post-reading activity, the Facebook page. Students did not only enrich the background of the characters through creating the profiles of the characters on the Facebook page with their imagination and interpretation, they were also able to give their opinions from the perspectives of the characters, as their posts were created with the personality or traits of the characters. Those who were stronger in English wrote with vocabulary items or sentence structures which were not stated in the textbook. Together with their imagination, students displayed and exhibited their talents and potential in learning the language and critical thinking. They displayed their critical thinking skills through hot-seating, story improvisation, and creating the Facebook page. They learned about the personality of the characters through analyzing the behavior and responses of the characters towards different events in the story.

### 2. Roles of Teachers

The teacher created a positive and supportive learning environment with several open-ended activities, namely the hot-seating, story improvisation, and the production of the Facebook page. The teacher was a facilitator throughout the learning process. She facilitated the learning of the students according to the responses of the group of students. She also created an interactive learning environment among the peers through giving timely feedback to the performances of the students. Teachers can guide students to ask questions at different levels. She stretched the potential of students with higher ability in English in terms of expressing their ideas verbally through asking open-ended questions. She also involved other students in an English rich

environment by helping them to interpret the values and attitudes of the fables. The teacher provided an inclusive learning process by encouraging students to discuss from different points of view. Gifted students were constantly showing motivation and enjoyment given appropriate facilitation from teachers, whereas other students could be more engaged and discover more. Their critical thinking skills were elevated by their peers and the teacher through their challenging questions and responses.

### 3. Challenges and Suggestions

It was a great challenge for the teacher to adopt the new strategies involved during the process of collaboration as she might not have had experience in teaching the lesson using a new approach. It was also a concern that the teacher had to develop appropriate learning resources for the students based on her understanding of the students. After designing a reading lesson using a fable with a student-centred approach, as well as with the infusion of the 3 core elements of gifted education, higher-order thinking skills, creativity and personal-social competence, as well as differentiated strategies, teachers were impressed by the evidence of learning displayed by the students, especially the engagement of the students during the activities and their demonstration of critical thinking. Although teachers spent a relatively longer time planning the learning process in a way that is new to them, teachers found it worthwhile as the abilities and attitude of all students were strengthened. In order to sustain the practices, teachers were suggested and encouraged to extend the lesson into a unit with the infusion of the 3 core elements and differentiated strategies in the future so that the strategies could also be implemented during pre-reading, and during reading activities. This will be more effective as it will be easier for both students and teachers to get used to the new approach and students will then enjoy their learning process of the whole unit from the beginning.