



Reading Champs

Rita M. Wirtz

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Reading Champs offers hands-on activities educators and parents can use to teach youth to read.

Though graduation rates are increasing across the nation, there are still too many graduates who lack the reading skills necessary to be successful employees or college students. Rita M. Wirtz's *Reading Champs* introduces a lesson series called Common Sense Mini Lessons (CSML) that, if applied early and consistently, might be able to address this challenge.

The forty-nine lessons in the series provide guidance for teaching reading, from decoding to comprehending, that can be used with a varied audience, including English-language learners and students with learning differences or delays. Attention to phonics, spelling, grammar, comprehension, and vocabulary, including several lessons on structural analysis, round out the program.

Lessons are short and designed to present a skill and then offer the learner opportunities to practice it using multisensory games and activities—involving movement, sound, and manipulation of materials. The lessons suggested vary in value. Most lessons are filled with content designed to engage and instruct a learner. For instance, the text preview chapter, CSML 041, has activities, such as book walking and the PWR (predict, write, read) strategy, for the learner to engage in to help build interest and prior knowledge before reading, essentials for reading comprehension. However, CSML 032 explains to a teacher, parent, or tutor how technical writing works but gives little advice on how to convey these ideas to a student.

The author, who has a master's degree in reading and has served as a reading specialist for four decades, suggests anyone, even persons without an educational background, can use these lessons to teach students of all ages. However, lessons do include terms, techniques, and theories that are assumed to be general knowledge, such as stages of reading, reading response theory, KWLW charts, and developmental stages of spelling. While the book may be helpful for students of any age, some of the activities (e.g., chanting and responding with movements) will have to be adapted for adolescents.

It is surprising that the sources referenced are dated, with 2002 as the most recent, and that little attention is given to digital tools that can both enhance reading skill development and influence how instructors attempt to teach reading in 2015. For example, many activities recommend using resources such as index cards when the same activity might be more accessible and engaging if apps were recommended.

Reading Champs will be most useful to those with educational backgrounds or parents who aim to home school and can use the tools offered here to cultivate winning readers who go on to excel in college, in the workplace, and in life.

KAAPONIA HINTON (June 8, 2015)

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