



Reading Comprehension

Leisure Time Language Input

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Leisure Time Language Input Homework Assignment

So many parents and students believe the only way to expand vocabulary, reasoning skills, language comprehension, and general knowledge outside of the classroom is by reading novels or resource books. I always explain to my students and their parents that there are so many other sources of content that lead to language improvement, including ones that a child or teenager may actually enjoy reading or viewing! This homework handout requires that students read or view a choice of language content sources, and then fill in a brief summary of that content. An included discussion explains the how and why, along with a description of recommended sources. By the way, it's called "Leisure Time Language Input" rather than "Leisure Time Reading" because taking in language auditorily can improve a person's language comprehension and expression just as well as taking it in through reading, and is in fact a more effective means of input for students with decoding deficits.

Name _____

Due date _____

Leisure Time Language Input Homework

Check one of the following:

_____ I read an article on digg.com / on _____ (circle one)

_____ I watched a video on Vsauce / ted.com / digg.com / Nerdwriter1 (circle one)

_____ I watched a news / nature / science program / _____ (circle one)

_____ I watched a documentary on _____

Title:

Author(s) / Presenter(s) / Director(s):

Summary:

One interesting thing I learned:

One question I would ask the author(s) / presenter(s) / director(s):



Leisure Time Language Input: Discussion

So often parents of my high school students will ask what reading their children can do during leisure time to improve their language skills. I always tell them that the truth is their child doesn't have to read a novel or a textbook to improve his or her language skills. Any time they are exposed to language input that's somewhat intelligent they are improving their vocabulary, their syntax, their comprehension, their inferencing skills, their conceptual understanding, and their reasoning skills. Motivation is key! There are plenty of sources of intelligent discourse, including family discussions at the dinner table, in which a teenager could be interested. Forcing children to read, listen to, or watch material that doesn't interest them will only turn them off from learning.

As a speech language pathologist working at a Regents high school, I infrequently give my students homework, and when I do I give homework that requires little effort. I know that they receive tons of homework from their academic courses. But I talk to them about the benefit of taking in language during their leisure time on topics that interest them. And then I give them the preceding homework assignment after presenting them with a description (or showing them examples on my laptop) of the following sources:

digg.com—Has tons of interesting articles and videos on a variety of topics. Students can use the search bar to zero in on the topics that interest them the most. Articles vary significantly in length, so students who struggle with decoding have the option of choosing a video or a shorter article.

Nerdwriter1—My son turned me on to this one! The Nerdwriter presents video essays on his YouTube channel Nerdwriter1. His videos range in length from about 6-12 minutes, and present interpretations, analyses, and reviews of art, literature, television, and cinema, with titles including “How Emily Dickinson Writes a Poem”, “The Problem with DC Action Scenes”, and “Seinfeld: What Nothing Really Means”. These videos present interesting ideas using sophisticated language, but at a slower pace and accompanied by tons of visuals—making them terrific for students with any language deficits.

Vsauce—Also discovered by my son, a science lover. Michael Stevens is the creator and host of Vsauce, a YouTube channel comprised of short videos, usually 5-25 minutes, on a variety of science topics, including “Why is Yawning Contagious?”, “The Science of Awkwardness”, “The Most Dangerous Place on Earth”, “Which Way is Down?”, and “What if the Earth Stopped Spinning?” I'm not a science lover, yet I find these videos fascinating!

ted.com—I believe most people are familiar with TED Talks. This website has an immense collection of inspirational, educational, and thought-provoking videos of various lengths on a practically endless variety of topics. As with Digg, students can search for their favorite topics.

Note: I give my students the option of watching videos rather than reading content, since whichever way is easiest for them to take in language is fine.

Lastly, I discuss with my students sources of interesting programs, including PBS, science shows, nature shows, HBO and Netflix documentaries, C-Span, news shows, political debates, etc. Any time they are exposed to intelligent discussion they are improving their language skills.