

New Start Suspense Series

Part 1

RESOURCE GUIDE

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Background Information

“This is baby stuff. I want to read a novel.” Comments like this are being expressed daily by young people across the country. The dilemma is that the reader’s independent or instructional reading level is at grade two or three while chronological age may be significantly higher. Reading materials at this level look like books for the six, seven or eight-year old. Parents, teachers and librarians are frustrated by the lack of high interest, low vocabulary materials. The focus in these novelettes is on the reluctant reader, learning disabled, brain injured, those with attention deficit disorder and anyone learning English as their second language. The vocabulary is level two and a word list is available to assist the instructor/parent in assessing the material quickly and determining its use as instructional or independent. However, it does not look like “baby stuff”.

The contention of the author is that reluctant readers will begin to make progress when they experience a level of comfort with interesting, readable material.

These novelettes have not been illustrated. Illustrations, in the author’s opinion, make the books appear juvenile. Also, the ages of the characters have been obscured to enable the reader to enter the stories as they wish.

The questions provided for each chapter of each book are intended to promote discussion. Some questions elicit information but most promote the growth of comprehension, evaluation and predictability skills. Developing these thinking skills should further reading abilities. The instructor/parent could easily adapt the material to further factual questions, build character studies, predict the outcomes or write book reports.

Each novelette stands alone and is not dependent on the others for content or continuity of action. The vocabulary, however, becomes progressively more difficult. Therefore, it is recommended that readers begin with book one and continue through the series. Each chapter in each book ends with a “cliff hanger” to encourage the reader to continue reading or make predictions as to the outcomes for that chapter. This element of suspense, along with the ease of the read, will encourage interest in the series and over time, reading in general.

Chapters are short and have not been allowed to run from one page to another. These limitations allow for increased comprehension. Being able to easily complete a paragraph, a page, or a chapter, at this stage, is a rewarding experience.

These non-threatening suspense stories have been piloted with a group of young people ages ten to eighteen and have been met with great enthusiasm. A librarian at a local library described this series as filling a “black hole in literature”.

Recent newspapers across the continent have reported an alarming gap in the literacy skills of secondary school students. The majority of the failing students are the learning disabled, the reluctant reader, the English as a Second Language student and students studying the “essentials” or what was once called the “basic level” student. The author’s years of experience as a Special Education Teacher and Consultant has made her aware of the serious lack of reading materials with which these students are comfortable, beginning from the age of ten.

The Principal and the Resource Teacher from the piloted school were both enthusiastic and relieved that a series of books would be published to meet this existent need in schools. Their claim was that there are a number of ways that these very unique books could be used within their classrooms. The students who took part in the pilot project were described as “hating school, hating reading and experiencing behavioral problems”. Once they began the first novelette they were “begging” the resource teacher to “take us for reading today.”