



Turn Struggling Readers into Striving Readers: The Power of Hi-Lo Books

By Dr. Virginia Loh-Hagan

Everyone is a struggling reader. We all struggle when we're reading out of discourse. For example, I'm considered a proficient reader but if you give me a physics textbook, I'd be a struggling reader.

But, imagine struggling across all discourses. Would you enjoy reading? The answer is no. Nobody likes to do things that they're not good at. Nobody likes to feel like they're failing.

Older struggling readers are especially vulnerable. These readers have low reading skills yet they're intellectually capable. They deserve books that honor their interests while addressing their reading abilities. If we want struggling readers to improve, we have to help them see reading as a bridge to learning more about the things that matter to them. What matters to them? Content. Engage them by introducing them to the weird, wonderful, controversial, mysterious... increase their interest in the art of reading by giving them texts with content they want to read.

I'm proud to have helped Cherry Lake Publishing develop the 45th Parallel Press imprint. This imprint offers older struggling readers an opportunity to build their reading skills while engaging them in fun and

edgy content. These books are known as Hi-Lo books, meaning they offer high interest content at low reading levels. 45th Parallel Press books are designed to give older struggling readers access to content that may be denied to them in more complex texts. These Hi-Lo books meet the interest levels of students in grades 4-8 while meeting their reading needs at grades 2-3.

Using my experiences and expertise as a classroom teacher, teacher educator, children's book writer, and literacy scholar, I carefully crafted the 45th Parallel Press books to meet the needs of students who need books that are more considerate and explicit. These books focus on fun facts and interesting details about a specific topic. Challenging vocabulary are defined in context and in a glossary at the end of each book. Sentences are short in order to maintain the attention of struggling readers. Also, the books have short chapters and are between 1000-1500 words. This lets struggling readers feel a sense of accomplishment after reading, setting them up for success. These books are accessible to struggling readers at their independent level; as such, literary devices and descriptive language are sacrificed to make the texts easy to read. Furthermore, each book includes various fun features such as catchy visuals (photographs with captions), informational sidebars, and critical thinking prompts. This is meant to capture the readers' attentions by giving them chunk-able bits of entertaining content.

Not many people, especially reviewers, understand Hi-Lo books. Hi-Lo books serve a specific need for a specific population - older struggling readers. As such, the text may come across as "choppy" to proficient readers (and reviewers) but they are meant to give older struggling readers access to interesting books that they can read independently. Access is the main goal. Let's not build walls around our students - Hi-Lo books give older struggling readers access to worlds that are beyond the boundaries set by their reading skills. There's power in Hi-Lo books - Use them!



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