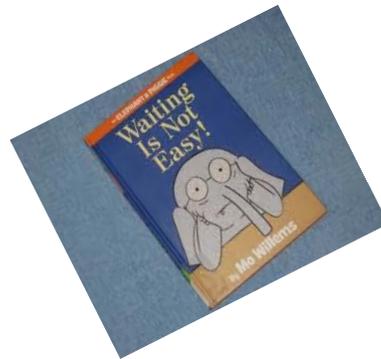


When I began my teaching career I had one fear. That fear was teaching young children how to read and write. Early literacy skills are huge foundational pieces that are building blocks for future academic accomplishments. I understood this but had no idea how to teach it. I was in an alternative certification program and had no direct instruction related to early literacy. The entire concept absolutely terrified me! Little did I know the very thing I feared the most, early literacy, would turn out to be one of the most rewarding skills I would teach.

Early literacy is a nice little word that actually encompasses so many broad aspects that at times it can feel overwhelming trying to keep them all straight. Phonics, phonemic awareness, blending, segmenting, comprehension, connections, fluency, sight words, metacognition, and the big one BALANCED LITERACY...the list goes on and on. Just about the time you think you have a handle on it; you learn a new term, a new strategy or new way of doing it. But don't get overwhelmed. Helping young children learn to read and write is one of the most rewarding things an early childhood teacher can do. You see it doesn't have to be perfect. It just has to come from the heart. What I mean is, if you invest in it and love it so will they.

I want to share with you some of my absolute favorite stories used to teach early literacy strategies. These stories are written by Mo Willems. In particular I love the Elephant and Piggie series along with the Pigeon books. These stories can be incorporated into every aspect of balanced literacy within the early childhood classroom.



Using these stories during a *Read Aloud* allows me to read with emotion and fluency. These stories lend themselves to these skills because they are meant to be read with lots of emotion and they have a natural rhythm to them. I also like to model metacognitive skills during these stories. By stopping during my reading and thinking aloud, I am helping my students understand what actually happens in their heads while they are reading.

Shared Reading using Mo Willems stories is always fun. Students tend to have high levels of connections with the topics of his stories. Allowing students to place sticky notes about their connections on pages of the stories is a highlight during our shared reading time. Being cognizant of higher levels of questions can be difficult during shared reading. Mo's stories are easily used to make predictions, rationalize decisions, create new endings etc. The students love to predict the unpredictable and these stories are wonderful for that purpose. Using student discourse while asking questions about the stories increases student engagement immensely. I will often ask a higher-level question, have the students discuss it, and then give their partners response or write their partners response. They are so eager to discuss the story that keeping them on task is rarely a problem.

Mo Willems stories are simple, but lend themselves so well to the concepts taught within early literacy. They allow students to focus on the characters, their emotions, experiences and interactions. Students are able to connect, relate, and add to the stories. It is one thing to read a book. It is another thing to read a book and discuss it. But it is an entire new level to read a book, discuss it, learn from it and then write about it. That's what these books help young students learn how to do.



Worked as an Early Intervention Specialist for 10 years for Klein ISD.
Taught Kindergarten for 9 years in Killeen ISD
Currently junior high school counselor for Salado ISD
Bachelors in Human Development and Family Studies from University of Houston
Masters in School Counseling from Lamar University
Mother of 3