

“I wanted to read ‘Last of the Mohicans’” : Extensive Reading in a Japanese University Context

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Introduction:

Last year, for the first time, I taught a course in extensive reading, as mandated by Siebold University. At the end, I felt that this course was very valuable, and wished to share my thoughts and offer procedures for the management and running of such a course, should it be offered again in the future. After giving a brief definition of extensive reading, the goals, structure, and administration of the course will be outlined. At the end, by way of evaluation, pre-and post-SLEP test scores will be compared, and students' own words about the course will be highlighted.

Background: Extensive Reading — Definition and Goals

Four identified styles of reading are skimming, scanning, intensive, and extensive reading. Coined by Harold Palmer, extensive reading means reading “rapidly” (1964) and “book after book”. (1968) While reading, a learner’s attention should be “on the meaning, not the language of the text.” Michael West called this style of reading “supplementary” (1955, p. 26) and when this style was adopted by the New York City Board of Education for its 1931 *Syllabus of Minima in Modern Foreign Languages*, the goals of this type of reading were “the development to the point of enjoyment of the ability to read the foreign language” (1948, p. 301, quoted in Day and Bamford (1988)) and the methodology involved “taking care of individual differences and encouraging the reading habit.” (p. 302, quoted in Day and Bamford)

According to Day and Bamford, (1998) the goals of an extensive reading program are to give the students practice in

- making meaning directly from a text without translation
- knowing the purpose for which one is reading, because different purposes require different ways of reading
- “going for meaning,” that is, remaining focused on the overall meaning of what is being read without getting sidetracked by unfamiliar language or ideas
- guessing at or ignoring unfamiliar language or difficult ideas
- reading at an appropriate speed for one’s purpose
- being satisfied, when appropriate, with less than total comprehension (p. 120)

For more detailed information about extensive reading, I would like to refer readers of this paper

to Day and Bamford's (1998) Extensive Reading the Second Language Classroom.

Goals of the course

The main goal for my students was to read 10 graded readers (Penguin and/or Oxford) in one 14-week semester. In addition, while using the text "Reading Power," students were made aware of, and practiced reading skills, such as skimming, scanning, reading for main ideas, speed reading, vocabulary building, etc.

Administration of the Course

Students were placed in one of four classes based on pre-course Secondary Level English Proficiency (hereinafter referred to as SLEP) reading test scores. There was one upper-level class, two medium-level classes, and one lower-level class. This study reports on the two medium-level classes. Each class met for two consecutive ninety-minute periods each week. Generally, during the first class each week, the focus was on universal reading skills; during the second, the focus was on a variety of reading activities, such as timed readings, oral reports, SRA card activities, newspaper articles, etc. For a full outline of the class schedule, please see Appendix A. The following section briefly details each activity.

Course Requirements and Initial Selection of Books

Students were given a detailed sheet of instructions for the course and a list of course requirements. The most important requirement for the course was the portfolio, a special folder where all materials for submission were to be kept. These included four oral report preparation sheets, 10 written book reports, 4 SRA answer sheets, 1 prepared newspaper article for discussion, vocabulary sheets, and 2 speed reading charts.

Before students were taken to the library during the first class period and shown the section where the graded readers are kept, following the suggestion of Day and Bamford (1998), students were given a sheet with one-page samples of reading texts from levels 2-5. Students were told to read each sample and count the number of new words. If the number exceeded 5, the students were told to choose a lower-level reader to start with. Students were told to choose a reader and bring it to each class, starting the next day.

Sustained Silent Reading:

At the beginning of each class, everyone, including the teacher, read silently for fifteen minutes. From time to time, at the end of the 15-minute period, the teacher would talk about her book to the class. Students were also told to read at home for at least 15 minutes each day.

Oral Book Reports

During the course, students were required to spend three class periods talking about their books with partners. This served several purposes. First, it required students to prepare book summaries in English. Second, students were required to listen and record information about what their group members said about their books (see Appendices B and C for sample oral report and listener report forms, respectively). Finally, students had a chance to learn about new books and give and receive recommendations for future reading.

Written Book Reports

Throughout the course, students were required to submit 10 book report forms, asking a range of questions about their texts. Questions included difficulty level, readability, and interest, among others. (See Appendix D for a sample book report form.)

Group Articles

Each group of 4 students (self-selected groups) was responsible for choosing one newspaper article, finding new vocabulary and giving definitions, developing comprehension and discussion questions and leading a discussion about the article. (See Appendix E for requirements for this activity.)

Science Research Associates (SRA) Card Days

There were two days in which a box of SRA materials was brought to class. Students had three levels to choose from (Rose, Violet, and Purple) and were given a sheet to fill in as they read each card. After reading, they then checked their own answers and submitted the sheet to the teacher. Time permitting, students could complete 2 or 3 sheets. (See Appendix F for sample worksheets.)

Timed Readings

Using the readings from the "Reading Faster" section of Reading Power, students practiced timing themselves as they read short articles and answered questions. They kept a record of their answers on the speed reading charts provided in the text.

Portfolio Check

Every few weeks, beginning with the first class of the third week, I checked the students' portfolios. The purpose was to make sure that they were on track with their reading, that they were reading books at more than one level, and that they were completing all sheets as required. (See Appendix G for sample portfolio check sheet).

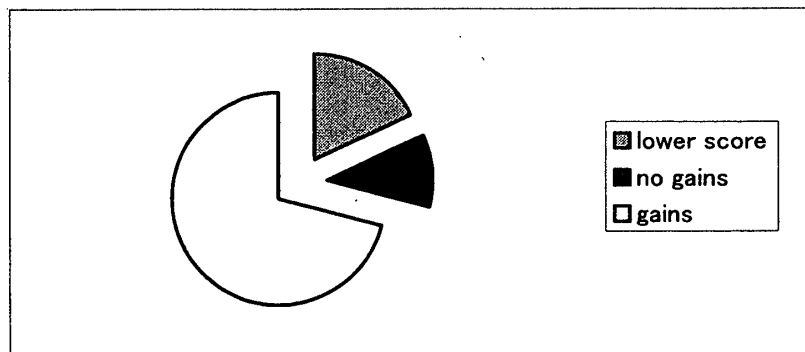
Evaluation

In addition to the portfolio, students were also graded on participation (including attendance) and a final quiz based on activities from the Reading Power textbook.

Outcomes 1: Pre- and Post-SLEP Reading Test Score differences

Forty-seven students took part in the pre-test and forty-four in the post-test. The results of the forty-four who participated in both tests will be looked at here. A trend was found within which students' scores were lower on the second test, scores did not change, or gains were made. In the first group, 8 students (18.1 percent) received lower scores on the second test than on the first (generally within 1-3 points). Five students (11.3 percent) showed no change in scores. However, it is significant to note that the remaining 31 students (70.4 percent) showed gains between 1-12 points averaging 5.54 points overall. Taking all groups into account, the average gain was 3.54 points. See figure 1.

Figure 1. Pre- and post-SLEP test results

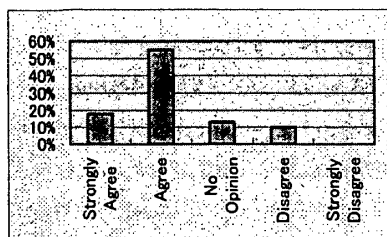


Outcomes 2: Students' comments about the course

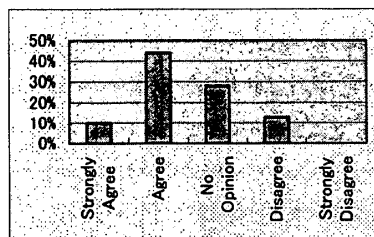
Students were given a questionnaire at the end of the semester. Using a 5-point scale (1- strongly agree, 2- agree, 3- no opinion, 4- disagree, 5- strongly disagree) they were asked to give their opinions about the activities done in class (see Appendix H for the evaluation form). Thirty-eight students completed the form. I will highlight only the general trends in responses.

Figure 2: Comments on Graded Readers

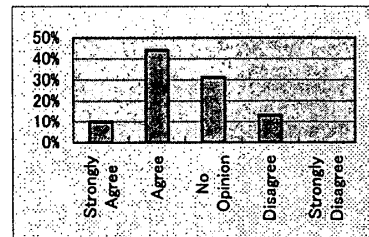
Enjoyment



Improvement



Speed

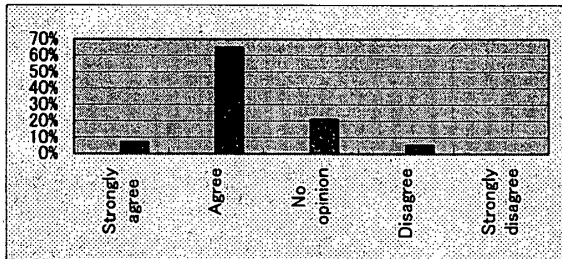


Regarding the graded readers, 21 students agreed that they enjoyed reading them, 17 students agreed that they felt their reading ability had improved, and 17 agreed that their reading speed improved as a result of reading them. See Figure 2 for details. The graphs below show rough percentages.

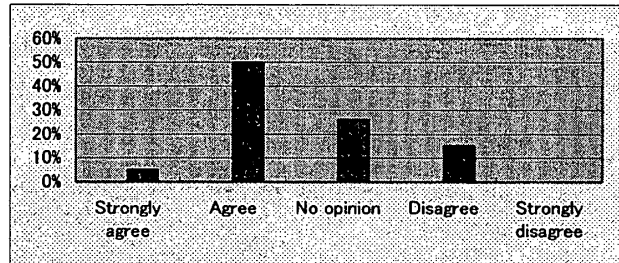
Regarding the **textbook activities** from Reading Power, 25 students agreed that the readings were useful, 19 students enjoyed the readings, 21 students felt that their reading ability improved, and 15 students felt that their speed improved, while 15 students had no opinion about their reading speed. See Figure 3 for details. The graphs show rough percentages.

Figure 3: Comments on Textbook Activities

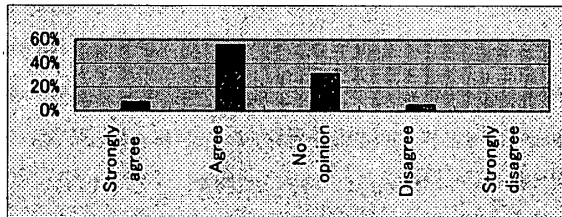
Usefulness



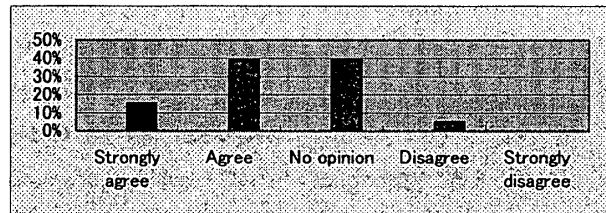
Enjoyment



Improvement



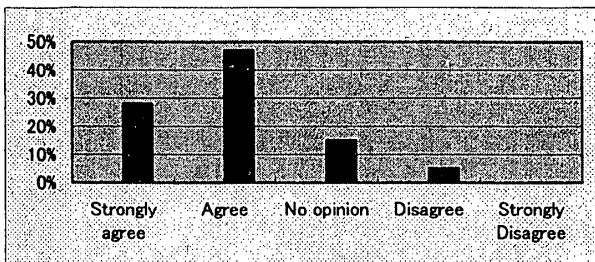
Speed



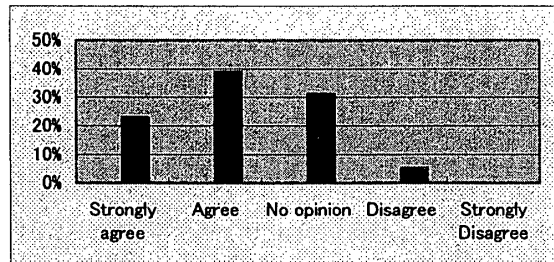
Regarding the **SRA activities**, generally 18 students agreed that they found the activity useful, 15 agreed that it was enjoyable, 16 had no opinion about their improvement, and 14 agreed that their speed improved. See Figure 4 for details. The graphs show rough percentages.

Figure 4: Comments on SRA Activities

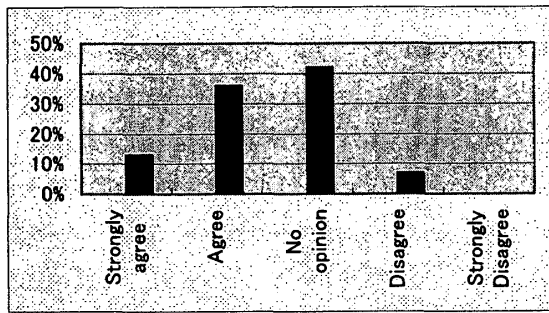
Usefulness



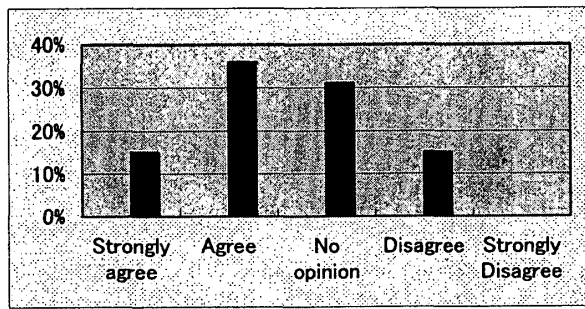
Enjoyment



Improvement



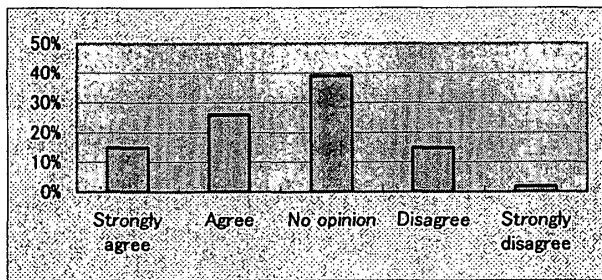
Speed



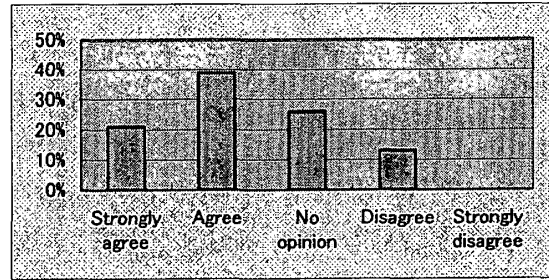
Regarding the **oral book reports**, 15 students reported that they had no opinion about their enjoyment of this activity. However, 15 students reported that they agreed that the activity was useful for them. It appears that in contrast with the first three activities listed above, this one was the least popular. I suspect that the reticence of Japanese students to speak up in class may be the reason for this. Although they didn't necessarily like the activity, they acknowledged that it was useful. See Figure 5 for details. The graphs give rough percentages.

Figure 5: Comments on Oral Book Reports

Enjoyment



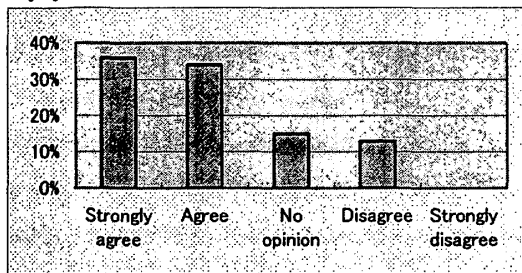
Usefulness



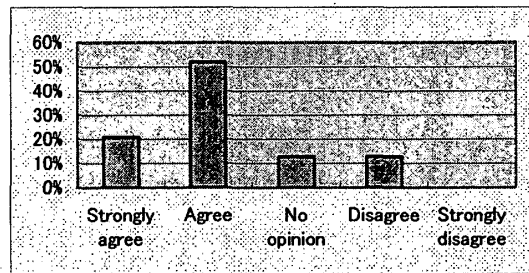
Regarding the **newspaper article preparation**, the majority of students, 14 and 13 respectively, said that they strongly agreed or agreed that they enjoyed this activity, making it the most popular. Twenty students agreed that the activity was useful for them. See Figure 6 for details. The graphs give rough percentages.

Figure 6: Comments on Newspaper Article Preparation

Enjoyment



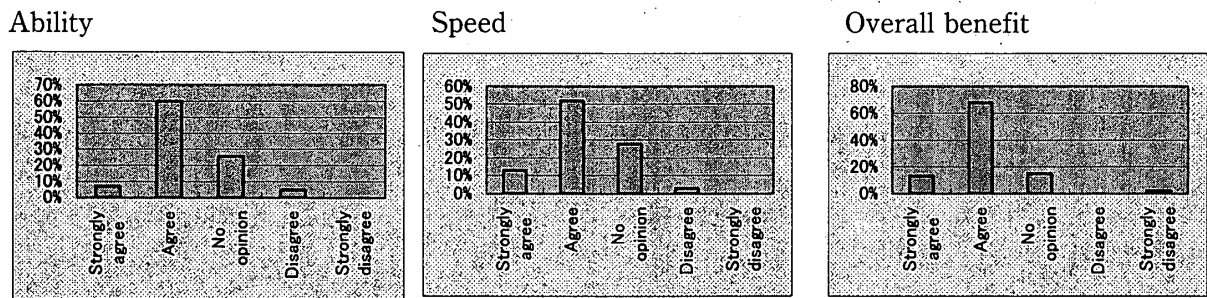
Usefulness



Overall impressions

Students were asked to comment generally on improvement in their reading ability, speed, and feeling that they benefited from taking this course. Twenty-three students agreed that their reading ability improved overall, 20 agreed that their speed increased overall, and 26 agreed that they benefited from taking the course. See Figure 7 for details. The graphs give rough percentages.

Figure 7: Students' Overall impressions



In their own words: Students' comments about the course

At the bottom of the questionnaire, space was left for students to record their comments about the course. I have divided their comments into sections: course activities, overall positive impressions, and negative impressions. Comments are transcribed in the students' own words.

Course activities:

"I liked Oral Book Reports. I could listen about many books. It's really interesting. Time reading was also interesting. But there were some not interesting activities in the textbook."

"I enjoyed this course. I especially like article preparation. It's useful to practice my reading skill and conversation. I think my reading speed is faster than before and I'm so happy."

"Great (graded) Readers is very fun to read. I will read after the semester finish."

"I wanted the opportunity to talk (Oral Reports) and group articles."

"At first I was not interested in textbook activities. But as I get used to, it became interesting to do textbook activities. And I think that I could probably improve my reading ability and increase my reading speed. And I enjoyed reading books written in English. If this course finish, I'm going to keep reading books written in English."

"In this course, I like reading books before activities start. And I enjoyed preparing article."

“I enjoyed this course. I like Article Preparation and Oral Book Reports better than the other lesson. Though I’m not good at speaking in English. It’s enjoyable for me to talk everyone in English.”

“I enjoyed reading English book very much. But I didn’t enjoy textbook activities.”

“I’m happy I can read English book and I think SRA activities is very useful. From now, I will read more English books, because I want to improve my English ability.”

“I like SRA activities especially.”

Overall positive impressions:

“Perhaps my reading speed increased, so I feel that’s good.”

“I enjoy this course. These activity is useful for me to improve English ability.”

“This course was useful for me, because I hadn’t never read book written by English.”

“I haven’t read English book since I started this course. So I enjoyed reading books. That is very fresh for me. And I enjoyed group discussion too.”

“This course is more hard than Oral communication for me. But it’s good for me that I read English books. It’s a good chance.”

“I like to read the book, so I was very enjoyed reading books. And I think I can read faster than before. Textbook activities were sometimes difficult for me. But I know that activities need for me to improve my English ability, so it was good for me, actually, I think. After all, this course was useful for me.”

“This course was more difficult than oral class for me. But I thought this class was so useful because I came to read English books and my reading speed increased as a result of using textbook and so on.”

“I think my English ability improves. I realized reading English books regularly is very important thing. This course is fun and valuable.”

“I enjoyed this class. I want to read books written in English after this course.”

“I enjoyed this course. I had not read English books much. But I could try to read it in this course.”

“It is fast (first) time for me to read like this long story and one book. So Oral Book Reports was

my good study."

"This course was difficult for me, but I think I benefited from taking this course."

"Usually, I don't read English book. So it was a nice chance to read Graded Readers in this course."

"I love English, but I learned that I have to study more vocabulary. I enjoyed this course, but if I knew the meaning of words more, I could enjoy this course more."

"Thanks of this course, I can read speedy and I can meet many story. I want to read many books after this course."

"I enjoyed this course. I don't reading the English books if the class have not chance reading the books."

"Group activities were fun. English books were little difficult for me."

"It was little difficult for me to read Greaded Readers. Because I have few word knowledge. So I have no ability to read and understand. But I like SRA Activities and Article Preparation. Because there are chance for saying my opinion or answer."

"This course was available to improve my reading ability and reading speed. I couldn't read so much books, but I enjoyed reading. I'd like to read books after this class is over and improve my reading ability more. I really enjoyed this course."

Overall negative impressions:

"I liked this course but I didn't like the atmosphere of the class."

"Sometime interesting, but sometime not, because I want this class to more practice."

"I know that I don't have much vocabulary. So I want to build up my vocabulary."

"Oral reports was hard for me. I know I should study more vocabularies."

"This course seemed like classes in high school or junior high school."

"I don't like reading books. So I think I don't improve very much. I think the textbook is not enjoyable but useful. Frankly speaking, I don't enjoy this course."

"Sometimes I can't concentrate in reading the book. Because these books were often boaring."

But overall, I'm enjoying reading books.”

“It wasn't interesting for me to read English book. However, sometimes I was impressed with it. I enjoyed this class.”

Recommendations for the future

Should I teach this course again, I would make several changes. Although I would basically follow the same course outline, I would change the written reading report form so that the students would be asked to provide more detailed information. In addition, I would hold two small-group oral report sessions in my office, so that I can more directly monitor students' progress. In terms of administration of the portfolio, I would provide special folders for students to use, because it was my experience that some students handed in their regular notebooks for portfolio checks, and those notebooks tended to include extraneous class handouts. I would also give students a portfolio check sheet to hand in each time, so that they include only the material asked for on the sheet. Also, I would caution students from the beginning not to plagiarize summaries from book jackets for their oral reports! In addition, I would do more timed readings in class, as many students failed to do this assignment at home and submitted incomplete sheets.

Regarding the comments brought up by the students, I would try to emphasize the need for fluency over the need for vocabulary. Also, I would rely on the textbook less often, or perhaps choose the lowest level of the Reading Power series instead of the intermediate level. I would also tell students that they need not finish a book they find “boring,” but choose another right away. Generally, I would give students more breaks between activities and time to talk about what they are reading, perhaps for 10-15 minutes in each class.

Conclusion

Overall, I think teaching extensive reading along with focusing on reading skills is a good way to help students improve their enjoyment, speed, fluency, and skill in reading. I hope that this course is reinstated into future curricula at Siebold.

References

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- Palmer, H.E. (1964). The Principles of Language Study. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Palmer, H.E. (1968). The Scientific Study and Teaching of Languages. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- West, M. (1955). Learning to Read Foreign Language. In M. West, Learning to Read a Foreign Language and other Essays on Language-teaching. (2nd ed.) (pp. 1-46). London: Longmans, Green.

Appendix A

Course SCHEDULE

Week	Thursday Class	Friday Class	Homework
1	Placement	Introductions Course Information and requirements Library Tour	Choose a graded reader to bring to next week's class
2	Scanning 1	Sample Group Articles and Sign-up	Thinking skills pp. 161-164 (Ex. 1-5)
3	Scanning 2	Portfolio check Timed readings 1	Preparation of oral book reports Timed readings, TBA
4	Previewing and predicting 1	Oral book reports 1	Thinking skills, pp. 164-167 (Ex. 6-10)
5	Previewing and predicting 2	SRA Day Portfolio check	Preparation of group articles Timed readings, TBA
6	Vocabulary building 1	Group articles 1	Thinking skills, pp. 167-171 (Ex. 11-15) Preparation of oral book reports
7	Vocabulary building 2	Oral book reports 2	Timed readings, TBA
8	Vocabulary building 3	SRA Day Portfolio Check	Thinking skills, pp. 171-175 (Ex. 16-20) Preparation of group articles
9	Finding the topic	Group articles 2	Preparation of oral book reports Timed readings, TBA
10	Understanding paragraphs 1	Oral book reports 3 IN CLASS Timed readings 2	Thinking skills, pp. 175-179 (Ex. 21-25)
11	Understanding paragraphs 2	SRA Day Portfolio Check	Preparation of group articles Timed readings, TBA
12	Understanding paragraphs 3	Group articles 3	Preparation of oral book reports
13	Skimming	Oral book reports 4	Preparation of group articles
14	Timed readings, TBA	Group articles 4	Timed readings, TBA
15	SLEP Post-test	Reading Quiz Submit Final portfolios	

Appendix B

Name: _____ Student Number: _____

ORAL REPORT

My impression of the book

I would/wouldn't recommend this book to you, because...

The book was easy/difficult to read, because...

My favourite character was..., because...

My least favourite character was..., because...

I liked/didn't like this story because..

Now give a short summary of the story to your group.

Appendix C

Listener Response Sheet

Name: _____ Date: _____

	Name	Name	Name
Book Title Author Publisher Level			
Notes (make BRIEF notes about the story, characters, etc. for your own reference later)			
My Question			
Does the presenter recommend this book? YES/NO Why?			
Why I would/wouldn't like to read this book.			

Appendix D

Reading report (To be handed in)

My Name _____	My Student number _____
Title _____	Author _____
Book Level _____	Number of pages _____
My book report number _____	Date _____

Circle the statement you agree with

the book was enjoyable _____	the book was not enjoyable _____
the book was fun to read _____	the book was not so fun to read _____
the book was exciting _____	the book was not exciting _____
the book was easy to read _____	the book was difficult to read _____
the story was easy to understand _____	the story was difficult to understand _____
the characters were interesting _____	the characters were not so interesting _____
the vocabulary was easy _____	the vocabulary was difficult _____
I enjoyed it very much _____	I didn't like the book. _____

What grade do you give the book (out of 10)? _____

Would you like to read it again sometime? YES/NO

Appendix E

Reading/Discussion Guide

1. With your group members, choose an article from a newspaper, magazine, or the Internet about a current issue.
2. Number the paragraphs.
3. Provide a list of new vocabulary or idioms that you believe the majority of students may not already know. With those words, identify the part of speech as used in the text, write the definition of the word as used in the dictionary, and construct an original sentence using the word.

See the example below:

Word	Part of Speech	Definition	Sentence
sesamoid	adjective	Shaped like a sesame seed.	My head is not round. It's sesamoid!

4. Provide a list of 5-7 discussion questions. Some of these should ask specifically about the article to make sure that all students understand the article clearly. Most of the questions should be opinion questions about the article itself. These kinds of questions stimulate discussion.
5. Please give Melodie your article in advance for photocopying. Lead the discussion for the group. Make sure everyone in each group has a chance to discuss all the questions.

Appendix F

SRA Reading Exercise Guidelines

Here is what we will do:

Choose a card which is right for you.

When you finish the card, check your answers and then take a second card.

If you finish two cards and you still have more time, you can:

- a) take a third card and do as much as you can
- b) work on a book report
- c) read the book that you are reading now for this class
- d) write the new words that you learned in your vocabulary list

When you get **75% of the answers right three times, you are ready to move up one level.**

Do not do Part E of the exercises. It is not necessary.

For the last 10 minutes, you will tell your partner about what you read.

Fill out a form for each card and put it in your portfolio.

Appendix G

Final Portfolio Checklist

PLEASE INSERT ITEMS INTO YOUR PORTFOLIO IN THE FOLLOWING ORDER.
PLEASE DO NOT PUT ANY OTHER HANDOUTS OR NOTES INTO YOUR PORTFOLIO.

Item	Number of Points
1. Cover Sheet	5
2. Reading Reports in Order by Date	10 points
3. Vocabulary List	15 points
4. 4 Oral Report Sheets	20 points (5 points each)
5. 4 Listener Response Sheets	20 points (5 points each)
6. 4 SRA Answer Sheets	10 points (2.5 points each)
7. 2 Speed Reading Charts	10 points (5 points each)
8. Copy of article presented to small group (if I have a copy, I'll put it in).	10 points
Total	100 points

Appendix H

Rapid Reading: End of Semester Questionnaire

1-strongly agree, 2-agree, 3-no opinion, 4-disagree, 5-strongly disagree

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Graded Readers | | | | | |
| I enjoyed reading these books | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I felt that my reading ability improved as a result of reading them | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I felt that my reading speed increased as a result of reading them | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Textbook Activities | | | | | |
| The activities in the textbook were useful for me | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I enjoyed doing these activities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I felt that my reading ability improved as a result of using it | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I felt that my reading speed increased as a result of using it | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. SRA Activities (reading cards with questions) | | | | | |
| This activity was useful for me | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I enjoyed doing this activity | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I felt that my reading ability improved as a result of doing this | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I felt that my reading speed increased as a result of doing this | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Oral Book Reports | | | | | |
| I enjoyed this activity | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I felt that this activity was useful for me | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Article Preparation | | | | | |
| I enjoyed this activity | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I felt that this activity was useful for me | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Overall, I felt that my reading ability improved | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Overall, I felt that my reading speed increased | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Overall, I felt that I benefited from taking this course | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

My comments about this course (English or かんたん日本語!) (Use the other side if you need more space)
