

# A useful hobby for students of all ages

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In Pui Ching Middle School, great importance is attached to inculcating a reading habit among the students. While encouraging the frequent use of the School Library, there is also enthusiastic promotion of newspaper reading.

Students subscribe to English newspapers in groups for expense sharing and to avoid leftover copies piling up at a classroom corner. They are offered free choices of Macau and Hong Kong newspapers, usually those targeted at students of varying age groups.

Understandably, teacher guidance and support is essential. Hence, tasks are designed to arouse their interest in reading. Considering their already stressful workloads, the tasks are usually interesting and easily manageable.

For Senior High students, the objective is to keep them well informed of social happenings, both locally and overseas, while simultaneously enhancing their ability of critical reading and writing. Independent reading is monitored with a daily or weekly

writing assignment in the form of a short article, a summary or a short commentary based on a news report. Both fact-based and opinion-based questions are used to enhance their understanding. Besides, news reports can familiarize the students with useful expressions that they can use to achieve brevity and clarity in their own writing. They sometimes marvel at how well some newspaper terms help them discuss much-talked-about incidents. They are also encouraged to create a word bank with the useful vocabulary acquired from the reading. Students of an outstanding writing ability, a rare group though, can attempt to post comments on news articles, too. In addition, newspapers usually include a page on Liberal Studies with activities to encourage analytical thinking, thus serving as a useful source of materials for the teaching of speech and debate skills.

Under good teacher guidance, Junior High students can also benefit immensely from their reading despite their comparatively limited word power and attention span. The first and foremost activity is a quick glance of the different sections of the newspaper, guiding them on how and where to start reading. Then carefully chosen tasks can be introduced. Interesting and thought provoking classroom activities are actually available from the newspaper. And the teacher needs only to make the right choice. Modifications are necessary to ensure that the activities appeal to the students and meet their needs. Vocabulary games are an almost unailing preference.

One activity that deserves more attention than it is now given is reading aloud. Personally, I find this a very useful kind of training in oral English. While reading aloud, the student needs to pay good attention to the spelling, pronunciation and even punctuation. He is better aware of the syllables a word is divided into. He also takes care of the rise and fall of the tone when reading a yes-no question or a wh-question. Attention to the plural ending or suffices can also consolidate his understanding of grammar usage especially that associated with the participles,



noun forms  
plural ending  
grammar  
usage  
participles  
Vocabulary games  
reading despite  
power  
usage



adverbs and noun forms. This, I believe, can lead to greater language accuracy. As reading aloud in chorus cannot often take place in class because of the limited lesson hour and the tight syllabus to abide by, students ought to do reading newspapers aloud at home for ten or twenty minutes every day. How can they expect themselves to speak good English if they cannot even read aloud properly?

In addition to its merits in enhancing language competence, newspaper reading also helps broadening the students' social awareness and global perspectives. Students who read newspapers extensively find themselves better prepared for an interview when applying for university admission. They can express their points of view with ease and confidence as they have been exposed to an endless wealth of information and different ways of thinking through reading newspapers.

Regrettably, there has been a recent decline in the popularity of newspapers as youngsters are more attracted to the computer in this technological age. Besides, newspapers are also blamed for paper wastage. In fact, with the increasing acceptance of technological products such as ebook readers, paper copies will inevitably be obsolete over time. However, this does not necessarily spell doom for newspaper reading. We can remain optimistic as this can be done online, too. The newspapers our students have been subscribing to actually provide online access to their publications. The only disadvantage, assumedly, is greater difficulty in monitoring independent reading online. It takes, therefore, more creative task assignments to ensure students do their reading, whether online or not.

All in all, newspaper reading is a hobby recommendable to students of all ages. To promote this hobby calls for increased efforts of the teachers. Students, on the other hand, ought to learn to derive pleasure from their reading rather than seeing it as a distasteful obligation.