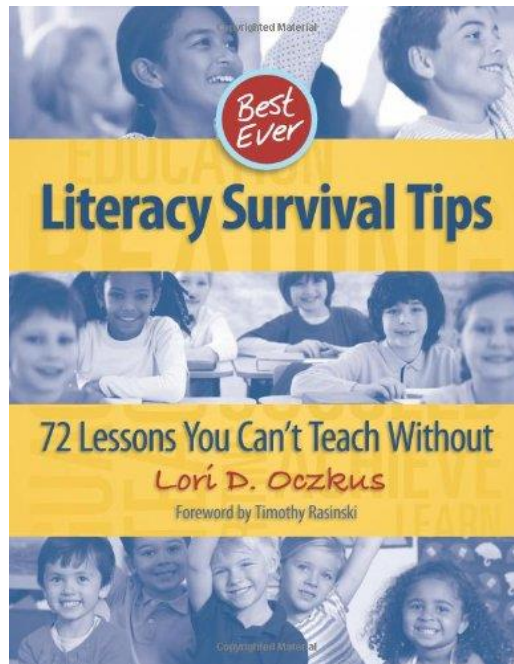


Review of *Best Ever Literacy Survival Tips: 72 Lessons You Can't Teach Without*

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Have you ever found yourself looking for that one book full of literacy resources for your classroom? And not just any old resources, but resources that are motivating, engaging, and ones that will help to achieve optimal literacy growth for younger readers? In *Best Ever Literacy Survival Tips: 72 Lessons You Can't Teach Without* by Lori D. Oczkus, provides just this, a practical guide for teachers looking for the perfect literacy resources. Oczkus is a literacy coach, author, and popular motivation speaker for teachers across the United States. She acknowledges that "the amount of information that educators must know to teach literacy today is overwhelming." In this book, her intent is to provide teachers with the "greatest hits" that are research based and tied to the Common Core Standards. Timothy V. Rasinski, a professor of literacy at Kent State University also emphasizes this point in the books foreword:

...the link between what researchers find and what teachers do is sometimes missing. In short supply are those scholars who are able to take research and scholarly findings and translate them into practical and engaging strategies that can be implemented in classrooms and clinical settings. My friend and colleague Lori Oczkus is one of those rare and gifted scholars (p. xiii).

Oczkus begins with an introduction to the reader, explaining how the book is organized, along with tips on how to read the book. In each of the chapters she includes the following features: "Best Ever Advice" from literacy leaders and classroom teachers, Lori's Top 5 Surefire Strategies, a "Q & A" section, recommended online resources and professional books to study, a before- during- and after-reading Professional Development Guide, scaffolded lesson plans for small groups or whole-class instruction with Common Core connections, formative assessment tips, and classroom-ready bookmarks and other reproducibles.

In chapter 1, Oczkus offers pointers for how to motivate readers. Highlighted in this section is disturbing news from the National Endowment for the Arts study, *To Read or Not to Read*, that established the notion that,

"Americans are reading a lot less. An increasing number of adults do not read even one book a year. Nearly half of Americans ages 15 to 24 do not read for pleasure. The trend is similar for 9-year-olds, with only 54% claiming to read "for fun" (p. 8).

At the heart of this book is how we, as educators, can get kids to view reading as a pleasurable experience. All it takes is one book to ignite that spark for a child to love reading, and it is through the tips that Oczkus delivers that have the potential for students to find that spark.

Reading aloud may be the first to go on a teacher's lesson plans if there is a time crunch, but in chapter 2, Oczkus reinforces that in fact, reading aloud is a "research-based, proven way to motivate your students to read on their own, model good reading, promote critical thinking, and create a sense of community in your classroom" (p. 21). This chapter provides teachers with a variety of ways to extend read alouds to be more enriching for students. Some of the examples provided include: having student be on the lookout for sentences, words, and phrases that peak their senses and having students partner talk before or after the read aloud using the provided discussion starters.

Chapter 3 addresses independent reading, which tends to be a practice that has mixed reviews by teachers due to issues such as students spending too much time selecting books or students staring blankly at the pages. This chapter provides strategies to ensure students are spending the maximum amount of time with their eyes on a text. Starting from day one, Oczkus points out ideas for organizing a classroom library, how to obtain books for classroom use, and how to hold students accountable.

Improving student's comprehension skills is addressed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Oczkus introduces readers to the "Super Six" which is a kid-friendly term that she ensures will stick with students to help them self-monitor during their independent reading. Reciprocal teaching, which is a technique used to increase comprehension skills, is described as "a scaffolded discussion technique that invites

students to work cooperatively using four strategies: predict, question, clarify, and summarize” (p. 61). Oczkus labels this technique as the “magic bullet teachers have been wanting” (p. 61). Narrative examples written by reading specialist, principals, and other literacy experts are scattered throughout the chapter to help illustrate how to exactly execute techniques, such as reciprocal teaching.

Oczkus asserts that the new U.S. Common Core Standards include more content area reading and writing throughout the grades and require that more informational texts be incorporated. Chapter 6 contains ways to help students better understand informational texts, which is very helpful for teachers looking for ways to ramp up their informational text use in the classroom.

Many teachers feel overloaded with assessment and wonder how assessment can be completed without making each one such a formal affair. Chapter 7 contains advice on this information. The Top 5 ways to formatively assess during lessons are included to help ease the stress of traditional assessments. Thumbs up/Thumbs down, individual conferencing, and running records are a few the examples she provides.

In Chapter 8 we are reminded by Allington (2006) that “All students benefit from a variety of grouping formats. Researchers inform us that our struggling readers need frequent, quality instruction in small groups” (p. 103). Oczkus encourages social learning through these small group interactions and offers an assortment of ways students can be grouped to “maximize instruction.”

Strategies for the foundational skills for reading (vocabulary, phonics and phonemic awareness, and fluency) are highlighted in Chapters 9 through 11. Kinesthetic strategies are highlights of these chapters along with strategies that make learning seem more like a fun game rather than a daunting task. The instructions for these tasks are clearly laid out for teachers to immediately replicate in their classrooms.

For some teachers, writing can be a challenging subject to teach, especially if they don’t feel they are writer’s themselves. Chapter 12 opens with quotes from teachers about their concerns for teaching writing. These quotes include concerns about students not being able to organize their writing, having trouble using voice, and even thinking of ideas to begin writing. One way to help teachers feel more at ease with teaching something out of their comfort zone is by being able to view step by step directions. This is just what Chapter 12 provides; to assist in improving students’ writing. Oczkus also emphasizes the importance of writing for authentic purposes and how to encourage students to self-assess in this chapter.

At the end of Oczkus’s book, she provides a bibliography of children’s literature to tie in with each teaching topic explained throughout the book, including suggested books to read aloud. I believe that type of work that Oczkus delivers would be very useful to teachers just entering the field and even for teachers who feel that they need to revive their teaching strategies. Many of the strategies are ones that veteran teachers may already be familiar with, but there are also additional engaging strategies that are more innovative, such as “Book Idol and Flash Mob.” The one criticism I have of this book, is that the layout isn’t your traditional left-to-right format, there are columns, bullet points, quotations, and resources splattered on each page, which some readers may find hard to follow.

Throughout this text, Oczkus emphasizes that the strategies provided are not only for engaging students, but are also designed to meet each students literacy needs. Based on my former experience as an elementary school teacher, I would recommend this book especially for new teachers who may feel overwhelmed at the beginning of their careers. This book provides new teachers with a place to begin in literacy instruction and is truly helpful because this text is essentially a “make and take” it into the classroom resource.