

Fire Up with Mrs. Skorupski

• Keep 'em Reading •

Grades
K-2, 3-5

by | Toni Buzzeo

Keep 'em Reading



Dear Mrs. Skorupski:

An Occasional Advice Column with Mrs. Skorupski, LMS @ Your Service

Dear Mrs. Skorupski,
It seems that LITERACY is the key focus in my elementary school right now. Of course, as a librarian, I am all about literacy, but sometimes I need

to remind my colleagues of that fact! I've been hearing about school-wide reading incentive programs and I would love to sponsor one but don't know where to begin. I'm short on time and wonder whether you have any suggestions for me?

Signed,
Literate in Lancaster

Dear Literate,
You are right! You can't sit in a staff meeting or read a professional journal without hearing the word "literacy" five times. And that is the good news. What are libraries about, after all, if not literacy?

Fire Up with Reading

A school-wide reading incentive program is a great idea! It will get you in the literacy game and get your kids reading at the same time. Let me suggest that you consider adopting the program I developed at Liberty Elementary School. I called it "Fire Up with Reading." I think you're going to love it.

You'll want to begin as soon as possible, of course, and if you adopt my idea, you can be up and running in no time. I conducted the program from the start of school through Read Across America Day (March 2, Dr. Seuss's birthday). Since the culminating event is a huge dragon parade, it's the perfect Dr. Seuss birthday celebration.



The Basics of the Program

Begin by announcing the program at a school-wide assembly. Of course, you know me! I made sure to dress in keeping with the theme (think fire engine tights and a dragon ring). And I asked my principal, Mr. Moriarty, to join me on stage and encourage student participation.

The rules are simple.

- Each student will record the number of minutes he or she reads during the program. I used a simple student reading log (see p. 52). You can choose to have these returned weekly or monthly.
- For every thirty minutes a student reads, he or she pastes a scale on the dragon.
- The teacher of the Top Reading Class is declared the Dragon-headed Teacher and wears the dragon head in the Read Across America Day parade on March 2.
- The top reader in each grade also marches in the dragon costume.

The Process for Using the Program

The process is also simple.

- A paper dragon decorates the wall outside each classroom and is accompanied by a fishbowl full of paper dragon scales with a sticker stating the rules (see p. 52). I asked my art teacher to design the dragons.
- The first class to paste up 5,000 dragon scales receives Fire-breathing Dragon Status. I attach yards of red, yellow, and orange cellophane dragon flames to the dragon when this happens.
- Once a month during the program, I announce the Top Reading Class on the intercom as well as the Top Reader at each grade level. This keeps students engaged and motivated. (Of course this requires that I keep track, monthly, of student minutes read. A volunteer parent helps me with this task.)
- All forms of reading—including audiobook listening, listening to read-alouds, and reading to others—are included in the tally.
- On March 1, I announce the final winners.
- The teacher of the Top Reading Class and the Top Reader from each grade level march in the dragon costume in the Read Across America Day parade.

Materials Needed

Are you ready to give it a try? Here are the materials you'll need:

- paper dragons for the wall outside each classroom
- fishbowls to hold the dragon scales
- dragon scales for each fishbowl
- red, yellow, and orange cellophane for flames
- student reading log sheets
- a method for maintaining a tally of the minutes each student—and each class—has read (Consider a dedicated parent volunteer for conducting this task.)
- a dragon costume (Check with your local costume rental shop or find a community member who can design something simple using a length of fabric and a somewhat more elaborate head and tail.)

Since the dragon costume for the parade is likely to be the most challenging, start looking for—or designing—one early so that you are ready for the big day.

And by all means, notify the press. You'll get media attention for literacy in schools—and for the essential role of the library and the library media specialist in that literacy focus.

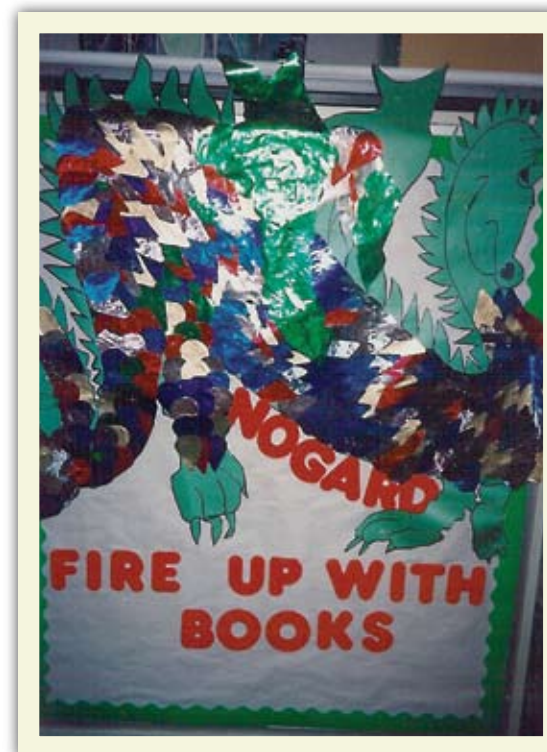
Okily dokily. You now know everything you need to know to launch your own Fire Up with Reading school-wide reading incentive program. Good luck and let me know how it goes!

Signed,
Mrs. Skorupski, LMS @ Your Service

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Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist and member of the Maine Association of School Libraries Executive Board. She is the author of six picture books, most recently *Fire Up with Reading! A Mrs. Skorupski Story* (UpstartBooks, 2007) and many professional books and articles. Visit www.tonibuzzeo.com or e-mail Toni at tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com.

The reading incentive program Mrs. Skorupski sponsors in Fire Up with Reading was inspired by a school-wide reading incentive program Toni ran when she was the library media specialist at Margaret Chase Smith School in Sanford, Maine (see photos).



Reading Log + Fishbowl Sticker