

The Secrets of Droon Teacher's Guide

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Introduction

This *Teacher's Guide* is a tool for maximizing children's pleasure and comprehension as they read *The Secrets of Droon* series by Tony Abbott. *The Secrets of Droon* is an ongoing series of novels published for readers who enjoy high fantasy at its most exciting and engaging.

Its premise is simple and age-old. Discovering a magical staircase by accident, three best friends – Eric Hinkle, Julie Rubin, and Neal Kroger – venture into Droon, a world of magic, suspense, and adventure. Droon is also a world in trouble, an ancient land with a deep and mysterious past, where now good and evil are pitted against each other in a struggle for conquest.

Among the first people the trio meets is Keeah, a young princess and wizard-in-training, a girl whose own past lies shrouded in mystery. Acting as her guide is Galen Longbeard, the old first wizard of Droon. Against them is Lord Sparr, a malevolent sorcerer who wants nothing less than to call Droon his own.

Droon is a populous world. There are: Max, Galen's eight-legged, orange-haired spider troll assistant; Khan, king of the pillow-shaped purple Lumpies, whose nose sniffs danger wherever it may be; fleet six-legged beasts called pilkas; and the red-faced Ninns who ride flying lizards known as groggles, to mention only a few.

The geography of Droon is varied, as well, with each novel featuring one or more strange landscapes, such as invisible cities, volcano palaces, vanishing islands, and castles under the sea.

While each book is a stand-alone adventure, the tales are textured with story lines that arc across one or more books, allowing the breadth and scope of the Droon saga to expand with each new tale.

In fact, *The Secrets of Droon* has been described by its author Tony Abbott as “a vast fantasy told in installments. While each individual book does, I hope, satisfyingly stand alone, taken together they form a continuous story well over a thousand pages in length, a saga parceled out for younger readers in bite-size, readable installments every few months.”

The series began publication in June of 1999, and as of the time of this writing, fourteen volumes have appeared, with at least another six volumes to be published over the next two years (see complete publication details at the end of this *Guide*).

The Secrets of Droon was cited by the American Booksellers Association as one of the top ten works to read while waiting for the next Harry Potter. Fast, whimsical action, engaging characters, and surprising, imaginative situations are the hallmarks of Droon, one of the best-selling series for its primary age group of 7- to 10-year old readers. This *Guide* is intended to help educators maximize the books’ effectiveness in engaging such readers and challenging their skills.

The *Guide* focuses primarily on reading comprehension strategies, literary elements, and moral development. Each section offers suggestions to help students read the Droon books with deeper understanding, but also provides them with strategies and

understandings to bring to future reading. Since the act of reading is the best use of a young reader's time, please keep in mind that the suggested activities are secondary to the reading itself.

Research about reading reinforces the importance of time spent with eyes on print. More than any other classroom practice, large daily doses of reading improve a student's ability to read. The NAEP report notes: "There is a consistent relationship between the amount of reading done in school and for homework and the students' scale of scores" (*National Assessment of Educational Progress*, p. 88). There is clear evidence from other sources, as well, that the volume of reading directly affects reading achievement. If we want our students to become life-long readers, we must give them long blocks of time to read on their own in books that they want to read.

Series books entice young readers to keep reading, and that is exactly what the Droon series does. Children love knowing that there is another exciting adventure with Eric, Julie, Neal, and Keeah as soon as they finish the book they are presently reading.

"So let's add series books to our classrooms. Let's promote series books by reading them aloud once in a while. Let's have kids share their favorite series," writes Richard Allington in his recent book, *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers: Designing Research-Based Programs* (p. 64).

Books in a series are especially helpful to developing readers. The familiar characters and settings allow children to enter the story more easily. The availability of the next book in the series makes book choice simple and the desire to keep going propels readers through book after book. For young readers, daily engagement with books is

critical. As students follow the exciting adventures in the Droon series, reading can even supplant the lure of television or video games.

Please consider the activities suggested in the *Guide* as a menu. Choose and match activities to the needs of your readers. You may wish to focus on only one comprehension strategy and use that with an entire book, as learning strategies need practice and time to become automatic. Or if your students are already familiar with the strategies, you may decide to incorporate several as students read through a book. The better you know your students as readers, the better able you will be to select activities that enhance understanding and pleasure.

The activities suggested here will give you a solid grasp of how well students are understanding as they read. It is not necessary to bog them down with comprehension questions at the ends of chapters. Questions leave children with less time and desire to read. Unlike comprehension questions, the activities in this guide invite children to find their own meaning in the Droon stories. They reinforce the expectation that readers make personal connections to texts. When students find their own meaning and pleasure in what they read, it's a giant step toward long-term literacy.

In some classroom settings, you may wish to begin by using one of the Droon books as a read aloud. Then children can read books from the series on their own during daily independent reading time. The books also work well for smaller groups that you guide through the text chapter by chapter. The activities suggested may be used with any and all of the books in the series.

Comprehension Strategies

Students must have a strong connection to the books they read if they are truly to be engaged as a reader. Through this personal engagement, they connect what they already know and have experienced to the characters and events in the book. Without this active awareness, words lie dormant on the page. Although clearly a part of the tradition of fantasy literature, the Droon books are carefully grounded in the familiar, since three of the four main characters are children from our world with whom the reader can easily identify. The following activities help children understand the role of accessing prior knowledge and making personal connections as they read.

Making Connections

In small or large group discussion, ask students to connect what they are reading by using the following cues:

- That reminds me of . . .
- I have a connection . . .
- Remember when . . .

1. The same cues may be used for written responses as children connect what they already know to what they've read.
2. A double-entry journal has two columns. Across the top have students label the first column "Page # and Words in the Book." At the top of the second column, they write: "My Connection." In the left column, students copy down the phrases or sentences from the book that triggered a connection, and the page where they read it. On the same line in the column on the right, students write their personal connection to what they quoted, using several sentences to explain.

Example from *Under the Serpent Sea* (Book 12)

Page # and Words in the Book	My Connection
p. 29 "The inventor's workshop was long and low. It was filled from wall to wall with odd devices."	My grandpa has a workshop in his basement. He has all kinds of tools.
p. 77 "Suddenly one of the plants nearest Eric unfurled two spiky tendrils and grabbed for him."	That reminds me of a plant called a Venus-flytrap. I saw one once in a plant store, but my mom wouldn't buy it for me.

Students enjoy sharing their connections and seeing the variety of responses in the group. This highlights for children that readers bring their own background and experience to what they read.

- Some students may prefer to *draw* their connections and then describe their drawing. Provide a response page with a blank section at the top for the illustration and the bottom half for a written explanation.

Questioning

“Asking questions engages us and keeps us reading. A reader with no questions might just as well abandon the book. When our students ask questions and search for answers, we know that they are monitoring comprehension and interacting with the text to construct meaning, which is exactly what we hope for in developing readers” (Harvey and Goudvis *Strategies That Work*, p. 81).

- Ask students to put a sticky note at parts where they have a question and make a brief note of their question. Put a “?” for a question and a “C” where they are confused. At the end of reading time, share their questions and decide if they are questions that will be answered in the book.
- Prompt children to begin their verbal responses with statements that begin with
 - I wonder . . .
 - Why . . .
 - I don’t understand . .
- A double-entry journal also works well for questioning. See the example below from *The Sleeping Giant of Goll* (Book 6):

Page # and Words in the Book	My Questions
p. 34 “Julie tried to join them but stumbled on the rocky ground. She struggled to her feet, but the funnel tore after her, whirling and spitting dust.”	I wonder if Julie will escape from the dust storm in time.

A third column can be added to indicate if they think the question will be answered in the text.

- Another journal entry can be also have three columns: What I Know/What I Wonder/What I Want to Know.
- Students may prefer to draw a picture and then write about their question. They may also use the picture to predict the answer to their question.
- Readers have questions throughout the reading process. Pause with students to share questions before, during, and after reading.

Visualizing

Books come alive in our minds as we read. We each create our own unique moving pictures. The better the movie in our heads, the better we understand and enjoy the book. Readers often remark that the Droon books are very visual and aural, with detailed sight and sound descriptions that encourage readers' involvement in the ongoing action. Specific practice with the strategy of visualization helps children to gain the maximum satisfaction from what they read.

1. Talk with students about how words in a book make pictures in the mind.
2. Prompt them to talk about visualization using these sentence starters:
 - I can see . . .
 - The picture in my mind is . . .
 - I visualize . . .
 - I imagine . . .
3. Have students put sticky notes on parts of the text they could really see, taste, smell, hear, and/or feel. Mark these notes with a "V" if they could visualize or see what's happening in the text, a "T" if they could taste it, a "SM" if they could smell it, an "H" if they could hear it, and an "F" if they could feel it. In a small or large group, compare the parts marked.

For example, in *The Hidden Stairs and the Magic Carpet* (Book 1) a student may put the following sticky notes:

Page 2 – "Knock, knock"

H

Page 3 – "On the right side of the stairs was the playroom. It had paneling on the walls, bookcases, a toy chest, a big sofa, and even a television."

V

Page 64 – "*Kla-blam!* A bolt of red fire shot from his hand. He staggered backward as the fire blew past Keeah, punching a hole straight through the wall to the hall outside."

V

4. Have students use a double-entry journal. This time they will write the part they could visualize on the left and their response to it on the right.

Example from *The Mysterious Island* (Book 3):

Page # and Words in the Book	Pictures in My Mind
p. 19 “The serpent witch lifted the ship high above the waves. She held it there for a moment and then threw it back into the water.”	I can see a huge bony arm with long fingers picking up the boat and throwing it back down.

5. Students draw the picture in their minds from a specific part they could really see.

Predicting

1. As students read, ask them to mark passages where they found themselves making a prediction. Put a “P” on the sticky note. Compare places where predictions occurred.
2. Use a double entry journal like the example below from *City in the Clouds* (Book 4):

Page # and Words in the Book	My Predictions and Why
p. 23 “Khan sniffed. ‘But we must hurry. At midnight, Ro vanishes again. Once it does, it will be impossible to leave for a whole year.’”	I predict that they will get to Ro in time and be able to leave, because if they don’t, the kids won’t be able to get back home.

3. Ask students to make predictions based on the chapter titles. For example, “Door to the Past,” chapter 4 of *The Golden Wasp* (Book 8) or “Óne Head is Better than Two,” chapter 1 of *The Hawk Bandits of Tarkoom* (Book 11).
4. Ask students to make predictions before, during, and after reading.

Retelling

Children must read with wide-awake minds. Retelling is a way to hold them accountable to the text and help them understand the importance of remembering significant details in a book. Students need to understand how retelling allows them to replay the text sequentially and when it is useful, such as at the end of a chapter. Retelling is more than a “low” form of comprehension. It encourages readers to synthesize, question, interpret, and make meaning of the text.

Practice retelling first with a read-aloud book. Stop every few pages and say, “Let’s recall what’s happened so far.” The first few times model retelling for students. Then ask if anyone can fill in anything you may have forgotten. After retelling several times on your own, start the children off with your own brief remembering. Then ask a student to

continue the retelling. Encourage them to piggy-back on each other's ideas. Later, ask one child to retell the whole chapter or story. Sometimes you may want to have students retell to a partner. Before reading, coach students by saying, "Let's listen today in ways that will help us remember and retell what has happened."

Reader's Theater

Reader's Theater allows children to get inside books and stories through a dramatic reading. With reader's theater, every word and line of the text is part of the performance. It's like a group reading of a story. Sometimes several students read a line or two in unison to vary the sound. Parts aren't memorized, but read with a dramatic flair. Performers sit or stand in one place as they read their parts aloud.

The first time students do reader's theater, you will need to model the steps. After that, they will be able to do it on their own with minimal supervision. A reader's theater group with three to six children works best.

The stories in *The Secrets of Droon* series are especially suited to dramatic representation because their characters are well defined, are of both genders, and are both young and old. In addition, the more fantastic Droonian creatures lend themselves to imaginative performance, including the use of odd or funny voices.

Begin by copying several pages from a book that are especially exciting. For example, Chapter 5 of *The Hidden Stairs and the Magic Carpet*, which includes Eric, Julie, Neal, Max (a creature who is half spider, half troll), and Galen, a 542-year-old wizard. If there are five students in the group, use highlighters to mark the parts, dividing the text in a way that it will sound most interesting. Have some lines said by one reader, some in unison, some two voices, and some three voices.

Meet with the group and explain that this is different from a play that has only characters speaking. In reader's theater, the book is read as a play, but none of the words are omitted. Read through the play a time or two and then ask students to practice their parts on their own. After another run-through, they will probably be ready to perform for the rest of the class. A three- to five-minute performance is a good length for the first time.

Here's a short example from *The Great Ice Battle* (Book 5). I have used different fonts to designate the parts.

Narrator One, **Narrator Two**, **Narrator Three**, **Narrator Four**, *All voices*

Page 47 – Chapter 6 (Imagine the readers standing or sitting at the front of the classroom reading from their parts that have been highlighted or coded in some other simple way.)

The Red Wolves of Droon

“It’s like a tomb in here,” Eric said as they entered the cave. “And darker than I remember it.”

“Thanks for scaring me again,” said Neal.

Keeah pulled a flaming torch from the wall outside and handed it to Max.

She took another for herself. “It gets even darker down below.”

Carefully, the five friends tiptoed into darkness.

Soon, the rocky cave floor gave way to rough, carved steps.

Sssss! The torches sizzled as the thick ice on the ceiling melted down onto the flames.

Eric felt bad about letting Sparr in. There was nothing he could do now, except help make it right. He hoped they could reverse the curse.

“How did the wolves get here?” he asked.

As I arbitrarily assigned the parts, my primary consideration was to balance them so that all children had fairly equal parts. Two or three voices speaking in unison adds to the texture and tone of the performance.

Once children have tried reader’s theater with your guidance, they will be anxious to select pages to perform with a small group, deciding how to divide up the lines all by themselves. Children generally enjoy this activity and it is excellent practice for developing fluency. Even unsure readers can be successful with extra practice and coaching.

Talking Partners

Learning is social. Be sure to give students time to talk about what they are reading with their classmates. At the end of independent reading time every day, my students had an assigned “talking partner.” I set the timer for just three minutes, and that was a time partners told one another about their reading. We created a chart of possible things to talk about, and over a few days, several pairs modeled their talk for the class. As children learned how to use this time for literary talk, it became an important few minutes where they shared a part of their literacy lives. They changed partners every two weeks and became facile at discussing their reading with one another. I randomly eavesdropped on conversations and complimented careful listening and fluent retelling.

Author Study Format

Studying an author is an excellent way to bring energy and interest to reading. The books by Tony Abbott lend themselves to an in-depth study. The format below provides a way for the class to read different books by Mr. Abbott and learn more about the writer's craft. The first step in organizing the study is to visit your local library and gather as many books by Mr. Abbott as possible. There should be enough books so that all children can have a choice. Partner reading also works if books are not in abundant supply. Display the books in a prominent place in your book corner or classroom library.

Immersion:

Teacher reads books aloud for discussion and pleasure.

Students read extensively from the author's books.

Students rate and record each book as they read.

Students complete other related activities
(e.g., reading response, journal entries, marking passages)

There are many whole and small group **conversations** about the books. Some students may wish to communicate directly with the author, either by regular mail or email (see the end of this *Guide* for details), and use the results of their communication as the basis of a report or other project.

Reference chart: What do we know about Mr. Abbott as an author . . .

Prove-it: Type up the information from the reference chart with blank spaces where book titles will be added. Students prove the statements about Mr. Abbott's writing are true with examples from a book, and write the title and page number in the space provided.

Venn Diagram: Comparing books, authors, characters, settings, etc.

Persuasive letter: Dear (Your Name), I think all (your grade level) graders should/should not do an author study of Tony Abbott because . . .

Evaluation: Rating books and selecting favorites.

Holding on to Their Thinking About a Book

When children finish reading a book, they often benefit from pausing and reflecting on what they have read, what they especially liked, and so on. Taking time for a representation of their learning offers a healthy change of pace and invites students to revisit what they have read with a broader lens.

Students can represent and hold on to their thinking by:

- **Writing:** stories, letters, journal entries, poems, etc.
- **Drawing:** pictures, book illustrations, graphic designs, masks, maps, etc.
- **Oral presentations:** drama, recitation, puppet show, etc.
- **Visually:** dioramas, models, posters, mobiles, etc.
- **Artistically:** compose a song, paint a picture, sculpt a clay representation
- **Kinesthetically:** choreograph a dance, create movements to accompany a story or poem

Additional Ways to Use Sticky Notes While Reading

“Sticky notes and highlighters are authentic aids that experienced readers rely on to help them understand and remember what they read. They add a sense of purpose and seriousness to reading and maneuver students closer to the text. This closer connection improves comprehension and eases children toward life-long meaning-making from print.” (Skolnick, *More Than Meets the Eye: How Relationships Enhance Literacy Learning*, p. 138).

Here are some additional ways teachers have found to have students use sticky notes as they read the books in the Droon series. They ask students to please mark:

- A humorous part
- Where the dialogue tells you more about the character
- Where the author uses special language – beautifully crafted language
- Vocabulary you can’t understand
- Where they could really feel the story
- A favorite line
- A part you would like to talk about
- A part that makes you wonder
- A part you don’t like
- A very important or exciting part
- A part with tension
- A good part to read aloud
- A part that helps you know the character better
- A part that gives you a clear picture of the setting

Ways to Respond to Our Reading

Journal entries invite children to think further about what they've read in *The Secrets of Droon* books. Students can write about a chapter or a book. Here are some journal prompts. Encourage children to think of their own topics that they would like to write about.

- This book is . . .
- This book reminds me of . . .
- Another way to end the book is . . .
- The book is like . . .
- What I think is special about this book is . . .
- My favorite character in this book is . . . and why
- Some words I really liked in the book are . . .
- This book is like another one I know because . . .
- This book makes me think of . . .
- What I notice in the book is . . .
- Keys and locks (What invites you in, and what is hard to get into.)

Word Study

The Secrets of Droon books have numerous words that Mr. Abbott invented for his fantasy characters and locations. These are an excellent resource for looking closely at how letters combine to create sounds and words. Here are some of the unusual words from *The Tower of the Elf King* (Book 9): *Ninns, Relna, Gryndal, Blampf! Friddle*.

As children talk about how to pronounce the unfamiliar words, they can review the rules of open and closed syllables. Word solving in the context of reading is much more interesting than nonsense words in isolation. Students will enjoy collecting Mr. Abbott's invented words and discussing their pronunciations and why he may have chosen the sounds that he did for a name or location.

Literary Elements

Character

“When I read I try to climb inside the text. I become the characters and I share the unfolding events. We need to help our students deepen their reading experience, especially in terms of the people they encounter in fiction, biography, and autobiography, and in nonfiction writing in the disciplines. When children begin to understand how to ‘read’ people, they interpret the world more effectively. At the same time, they see themselves and their classmates from different perspectives” (Graves, *Bring Life into Learning: Create a Lasting Literacy*, p. 16).

Illuminating the craft of the writer is an important aspect of teaching reading. As students pause and look at how characters are developed, they gain an awareness of how stories

work. This pays dividends in their future reading and writing as they begin to realize what makes a good book.

The Droon series has characters who are consistent from book to book, such as Eric, Julie, Neal, and Keeah, as well as characters who are in just one of the books. Taking a deeper look at how Tony Abbott brings his characters to life moves students closer to the text. The suggested activities will give students a better sense of how the writer breathes life into chapters.

1. **Inside and Outside Characteristics:** Have students make a t-chart listing outer or physical characteristics on one side and inner or personal characteristics on the other. Next ask students to support their statements in the text. Talk about how the author lets the reader know about the character.
2. Readers learn about a character through what the character says or thinks. As they read, ask students to put sticky notes on dialogue or thoughts that helped them get to know a character better. How and why did it help?
3. Using a double-entry journal, have students copy the words of one of the characters on the left and what they think that says about the character on the right. Do all students interpret the words of a character in the same way?
4. Authors also let readers know about the character by what the character does and what other characters say and do to that character. As students read, ask them to put sticky notes where they learn something new about a character. How did the author do this?
5. Have students make a Venn diagram comparing two characters in a book. Mr Abbott gives distinct personalities to the four main characters, Eric, Neal, Julie, and Keeah. How are they alike? How are they different?
6. Each book in the series has a main evil character. Students who read more than one book in the series may want to try a Venn diagram comparing the evil forces in two of the books. How are they alike? How are they different? For example, how does Lord Sparr in *Journey to the Volcano Palace* (Book 2) compare to Ving in *The Hawk Bandits of Tarkoom* (Book 11)?
7. Have students draw the character as they see in it in their mind's eye. Ask them to find quotations in the book to support their drawing.
8. Characters change and evolve in books. When students finish reading a book or several books in the series, have them consider how one of the characters has grown or become wiser. Share these journal entries to compare opinions. Opinions must be supported by the text.

Strong Verbs

Lively writing depends on strong verbs. Review with students the important role of verbs in a sentence. Ask students to act out various verbs such as jump, hop, slouch, drag, and so on. Notice how strong verbs create a sense of movement and are therefore easier to visualize.

1. As students read, ask them to put sticky notes on strong verbs. At the end of reading, collect the sticky notes onto a large chart and notice how these particular words create visual images. For example, in *Into the Land of the Lost* (Book 7) Tony Abbott uses these verbs on the first page of Chapter 2 “Under Sparr’s Spell,” page 11:

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Strong verbs</u> Skidded Tumbled Gasped Stood (straight up) Blinked Crackled Swooped</p>

Notice how all the words involve movement. Talk about how strong verbs make the writing more interesting and exciting. Invite students to use stronger verbs in their own writing.

2. Students may enjoy choosing a page with strong verbs such as the one above and substituting weaker verbs to see how the writing sounds. For example (from page 11) “Leep **came** (skidded) to a halt and Keeah **fell** (tumbled) to the ground, out of breath. ‘Sparr will stop at nothing,’ she **said** (gasped).” Students can quickly see how strong verbs add to the movement and flow of a story and make it easier to visualize.

Leads

“Therefore the lead must capture the reader immediately and force him to keep reading. It must cajole him with freshness or novelty or paradox, or with humor, or with surprise, or with an unusual idea, or an interesting fact, or a question. Anything will do as long as it nudges his curiosity and tugs at his sleeve” (Zinsser, *On Writing Well*, p. 60).

The first words, sentence, or paragraph, commonly called the *lead*, pulls the reader into the book. It leads him toward a promised adventure. Mr. Abbott has crafted the beginning of his books and chapters to encourage the reader to keep going.

1. There are a variety of ways to begin a book or chapter. Ask students to notice the way Mr. Abbott begins each chapter. Is there a pattern? How does he write the leads so that the reader keeps reading?

For example, in *The Golden Wasp* (Book 8), some chapters begin with **dialogue**, some with **action**, and some with **description**.

Chapter 8. “Surprise Guests at Plud,” begins with **description**.

“The dark turrets and twisted towers of Lord Sparr’s giant castle jutted to the sky.” (p.71)

Chapter 9, “Fire and Ice,” begins with **dialogue**.

“‘Help! Help! Helllllp!’ Neal’s cries for help echoed in the dark halls. (p. 79)

Chapter 10, “The Harp and the Wasp,” begins with **action**.

“The kids tore across the ice, slipping and sliding toward the glittering staircase.” (p. 87)

2. Ask students to talk about their own preferences. What kind of lead pulls them in and propels them into the next chapter?
3. Ask students to compare the way Mr. Abbott begins several books in the *Droon* series. What patterns do they notice?

Setting

“The setting, or place, creates the world in which the characters live and struggle. In this world, the plot will unfold. Something will happen” (Fletcher, *What a Writer Needs*).

The world of Droon is a fantasy land rich with unusual characters, places, and objects. Looking closer at the setting offers students a chance to explore the imaginary world Mr. Abbott has created.

1. Ask students to choose a favorite scene to draw in detail and to support their drawing with words from the book.
2. Have students put sticky notes in parts that describe the setting. Notice the different ways the author establishes a sense of place using dialogue, description, or action. For example, in *Under the Serpent Sea* (Book 12):

On page 13, the author uses **dialogue** to help create the setting:

“‘It’s Jaffa City,’ said Neal. ‘Right on Keeah’s doorstep.’” And later on the same page: “‘I don’t know, but I see Galen’s tower.’”

On page 12, the author uses **description** to tell about the setting:

“*Whoosh!* The floor vanished and they stood at the top of a rainbow-colored staircase.”

On page 1, Mr. Abbott has the **actions** of his characters give information about where the story takes place:

“Eric Hinkle was jumping on his bed and making noises.”

Paying attention to how the author creates a sense of place heightens the young reader's awareness of how setting contributes to the story line and the actions of the characters.

3. Ask students to choose a favorite setting from one of the books and imagine themselves there. Write a journal entry about what they would do, feel, hear, and so on.

Cliffhanger Chapter Endings

Authors of chapter books try to end each chapter in a way that makes the reader turn the page to find out what's going to happen next. These suspenseful chapter endings are called *cliffhangers*. Mr. Abbott often ends his chapters at a point of high tension.

1. Ask students to read through the chapter endings. Decide which endings are cliffhangers and why. They may want to do this as a double-entry journal.

Example from *City in the Clouds* (Book 4)

Words on the Page and Page #	Why It's a Cliffhanger
p. 10 "One by one, the three friends went down into the strange flying ship."	This is a cliffhanger because I don't know what will happen to them down in the strange ship. I want to read on and find out.
p. 72 " <i>Clang!</i> The giant door on Sparr's airship slammed shut behind them."	This is a cliffhanger because the kids have gone somewhere with the evil Lord Sparr. I want to know if he will do something bad to them.

Plot

Story maps help students to see the structure of a book. After they have finished a book, guide students as they map the main events. Chapter titles will be a good reminder. Retelling the book orally first is key.

For students who have read more than one book in the series, it may interest them to compare the story maps of two of the books. Can they see a pattern to the way Mr. Abbott organizes the books?

Talking about story structure and plot helps students get an insider's view of story making. They begin to realize that events often follow a cause and effect or problem/solution pattern and that story elements depend on what's gone before.

Understanding the inner workings of books supports students in their future reading. It's another way to show children that writing a book is a creative process that involves rethinking and revision to make it a solid and pleasurable read.

Moral Development

Mr. Abbott purposely makes his primary characters children with strong moral fiber. They love to tease each other and to have exciting adventures, but at heart, they are caring human beings who try to make the world of Droon a better place.

1. After reading one of the books, ask students to make a list of the positive characteristics of Julie, Eric, Neal, and Keeah. They should be able to support their claims with references from the book. Which of these characteristics do they value most in a friend or a classmate? Ask them to write a journal entry about why that quality is important to them.
2. Refer back to the previous list. This time ask students to consider which traits on the list they possess. Which qualities that they value do they feel are true of them? Ask students to write a journal entry about their thoughts.
3. Ask students to put sticky notes in the text where Julie, Eric, Neal, or Keeah demonstrate thoughtful or kind behavior. Talk about what other options the characters may have had.
4. In a journal entry, have students create a scene with one of the main characters. Put the character in an interesting situation where they have to make a choice that may not be easy. Show how the positive attitude of the character influences their actions.
5. The main characters in each story often have to make fast and difficult decisions about whether or not to come to the aid of someone in trouble. Stop at these parts and predict what the characters will decide and why.

In Closing

As I wrote this guide, I wanted to include a broad assortment of suggestions. Although the activities focus on different aspects of literacy, my goal is to have each one be worthwhile for young readers. If a recommendation I've made seems too difficult or inappropriate for your students, don't do it. You are the best judge of which activities will enhance the reading experience of your students and which activities will hinder it.

For some, learning to read is seamless and almost automatic. For others, it is a long arduous process that requires patience and support. Wherever your students are on the reading continuum, I wish them many relaxing and rewarding moments as they read the books in *The Secrets of Droon* series. This will help to ensure that reading becomes a life-long habit.

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The Secrets of Droon series is published by Scholastic, Inc., 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012. The following is a list of the series books as of the time of this writing.

1. *The Hidden Stairs and the Magic Carpet*
2. *Journey to the Volcano Palace*
3. *The Mysterious Island*
4. *City in the Clouds*
5. *The Great Ice Battle*
6. *The Sleeping Giant of Goll*
7. *Into the Land of the Lost*
8. *The Golden Wasp*
9. *The Tower of the Elf King*
10. *Quest for the Queen*
11. *The Hawk Bandits of Tarkoom*
12. *Under the Serpent Sea*
13. *The Mask of Maliban*
14. *Voyage of the Jaffa Wind*
15. *The Moon Scroll*
16. *The Knights of Silversnow*
- Special Edition #1: *The Magic Escapes* (September 2002)
17. *Dream Thief* (February 2003)

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