

Hooked On Books

*Roger Wolcott Early Childhood Center
Windsor, Connecticut*

Looking for a fresh way to hook children into reading and help them catch the literacy bug? Hooked On Books caught on as a reading incentive program for beginning readers at Roger Wolcott Early Childhood Center. It involved real fish, paper fish, a contest, some science lessons and books, books, books.

During May, children at the preschool and kindergarten center were encouraged – even more than usual – to read books at school and at home. Each time students read a book or were read to, they wrote their names on a paper fish. At the end of each week, the fish were caught and the class that netted the most was declared the week’s winner. The prize: an opportunity to take care of the center’s pet fish, “Hook 1 and Hook 2.” These two Beta fish share a tank in the Family Resource Center (FRC) when not visiting a winning classroom.

The FRC leader, who organized and promoted the incentive program, asked the owners of a local pet store to supply the fish – four in all, two in each hallway during the contest. The owner agreed and even offered to replenish the supply, if needed. Teachers kept talking up the reading program. The FRC leader visited each class to build interest and encouraged parents to read with their children. The baskets of “caught fish” were displayed in the school foyer to kindle more interest.

Parents helped by reading to their children at home and by volunteering to supply the paper fish to meet the children’s demand for them. The pet store staff got caught up in the spirit of this program, too, and shared tips for taking care of the donated fish. The pet store now proudly displays a certificate of appreciation from the Wolcott Center for its contributions to Hooked On Books.

One family at the school donated a children’s book for each teacher about the care

and feeding of fish. The FRC leader read it to each winning class, as she delivered the fish. Of course, every classroom had a chance to win.

Hooked On Books became a school favorite as it was publicized with fliers, in the monthly newsletter and at a book fair display, where the FRC leader played word games with students and their families. She gave away books that the PTO bought for prizes. The Action Team for Partnerships played a critical role in recruiting volunteers and helping to implement this project.

By constantly reinforcing the idea of reading, the children remained involved and excited about reading. Making it a game added to the fun. Teachers not only saw children’s interest in reading growing, but also had an opportunity to teach those science lessons – about fish and their habitat.

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