

*The wacky game that develops
your students' comprehension,
paraphrasing & summarizing skills!*

K-12!

CRAZY PROFESSOR

READING GAME

Chris Biffle

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THE CRAZY PROFESSOR READING GAME

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INTRODUCTION

The Crazy Professor Reading Game is a new reading system that addresses one of the most perplexing and important questions in education, “How can we, at home and at every grade level, progressively, and systematically increase students’ reading comprehension?” If poor reading skills are an illness, then we are suffering, kindergarten to college, from an illiteracy plague. As an instructor of advanced philosophy courses at Crafton Hills College in Yucaipa, California I teach some of the best students in San Bernardino County; I am shocked at the problems they have understanding what they read.

Students (and teachers) work hardest when they are happiest. Reading, of all human activities, should be entertaining. Confronting and analyzing complex ideas, exploring stories, creatively grappling with written language is one of the most exciting of all human enterprises. Therefore, we have built plenty of fun into the Crazy Professor game.

The following is a step-by-step guide that will increase

students' reading comprehension at school or at home ... while they, their teachers and parents have lots of laughs.

The Crazy Professor is an elaborate variation on a reading technique known as Buddy Reading. In Buddy Reading, students divide into pairs and take turns reading sentences. Juan reads a sentence; Paula reads the next sentence, and so on. As you'll see, the Crazy Professor takes this useful pattern much further, building deeper and deeper levels of comprehension.

In the first section, I'll describe how the Crazy Professor can be played in school. In the second section, you'll discover that the Crazy Prof makes home visits.

THE CRAZY PROFESSOR IN SCHOOL

Here is the handout you'll distribute in class to help your students understand how to play the Crazy Professor Reading Game.

The Crazy Professor Reading Game

	One's	Two's
1. Dramatic Reading	Reads slowly with a dramatic tone of voice.	Silently uses gestures to show what is being read.
2. Paraphrasing	Paraphrases what has been read with a dramatic tone of voice and gestures.	Silently mirrors the gestures.
3. Q and A	Asks questions about what has been read with a dramatic tone of voice and gestures.	Answers questions about what has been read with a dramatic tone of voice and gestures.
4. Connecting	Using a dramatic tone of voice and gestures, makes connections between reading material and life experiences (and/or course material).	Silently mirrors the gestures.
5. Silent Skimming	Skim reads one page ahead ... when finished, skims same page again and again.	Skim reads one page ahead ... when finished, skims same page again and again.
6. Silent Reading	Silently reads using gestures to show what is being read.	Silently reads using gestures to show what is being read.
7. Silent Summarizing	Using gestures, silently summarizes what has been read.	Using gestures, silently summarizes what has been read.
8. The Crazy Professor	Becomes the high energy Crazy Professor: uses gestures, props, summarizes all that has been read ... during explanation can tell partner "tell me what I said!", "Give me a 10 finger woo!", "Ask me a good question!", "Are you paying attention?!", etc.	Becomes the high energy Eager Student: praises the Professor, mirrors his/her gestures and use of props, asks questions, can say "Oh, fantastic!", "You're a genius!", "Tell me more! more!", "Keep going!" "I get it ... what's your next great point!", etc.

Without making it obvious, divide your class into stronger and weaker readers. Have them count off by twos. Thus, all students will be either a One or a Two. If you have an odd number of students, then one group will have two Ones. In this group, the Ones will take turns. Next, have students open their books to a reading assignment, fiction or non-fiction, that is several pages long.

Say something like the following, “We’re going to play a game they play in college, it’s called The Crazy Professor Reading Game. The Ones will begin reading with a dramatic tone of voice. The Twos will show what the Ones are reading with gestures.” Using your best story teller voice, illustrate the tone you want. (Amazingly enough, you can use this story teller voice to enliven nonfiction as well as fiction.) Next, demonstrate how students can illustrate anything that is being read with gestures. Read with a dramatic tone and use exaggerated gestures to show what you’re reading. If you’re reading about a king, put an imaginary crown on your head; if you’re reading about a storm, swirl your hands in the

air; if you're reading about an ant walking across a desert, walk your fingers through the air and then wipe the invisible sweat off your forehead.

Then say, "All right. I want the Ones to begin. Please read slowly so that the Twos can illustrate what you're saying with their gestures. When I shout 'Switch!', I want you all to shout 'Switch!' and then switch roles, the Ones become the Twos and the Twos become the Ones."

Practice shouting Switch! a few times and have the students shout Switch! back to you. Then, ask them to begin.

As you think appropriate, explain each of the steps in the Crazy Professor. Here is a summary of key points.

For K-3 teachers, or whenever reading aloud is used, I've included notes in parenthesis.

1. **Dramatic reading:** the reader reads slowly, so the listener has time to form gestures. The reader gains comprehension by emphasizing key words. The listener adds a kinesthetic dimension to meaning by finding appropriate gestures. (Reading aloud: The teacher reads dramatically and students make gestures dramatizing the text.)

2. **Paraphrasing:** The reader does most of the work, using a dramatic tone and gestures. The listener silently mirrors the gestures. Paraphrasing is a key intellectual skill. Students need hundreds of hours of practice in putting what they read into their own words. (Reading aloud: the Ones use gestures and explain what the story was about to the Twos. The Twos mirror the gestures. Demonstrate what you want with one of your brightest students.)

3. **Q and A:** The Questioner and the Answerer both use gestures and a dramatic tone of voice. Virtually all theories of reading emphasize the importance of asking and answering

questions about reading material. (Reading aloud: The Ones ask questions with gestures and the Twos give answers with gestures. Demonstrate what you want with one of your brightest students.)

4. Connecting: Tell your students that any connection they can make between the reading material and anything else they know, or imagine!, is a good connection. According to brain science, we only learn when we link new information to old information. Tell students to vigorously clap their hands together, one hand “connecting” to the other, each time they make a connection. When students get the habit of making connections, you can, where appropriate, ask them to focus on making connections to other course material ... this is more difficult. (Reading aloud: During a group discussion. ask your students questions like, “What does this remind you of?” “Has anyone seen anything like this?”, “Have we studied anything like this?” and so forth ... have all students say “connection” and clap their hands together whenever anyone makes a connection. Strongly praise

any student who can link the reading to class material.)

5. Silent Skimming: Ask students to move one finger down the page as they skim ahead for key information. Once they have skimmed one page, they start over until you change the task (see below). Skimming may be easier for lower grade students, if they merely point at and silently read the first sentence in each paragraph. (Reading aloud: skip this step.)

6. Silent Reading: A major problem with silent reading as an in-class activity is that students drift off into their own worlds. If you've instructed your students to quietly illustrate what they read with gestures, you can easily tell who is on, or off, task. In addition, using gestures as they read will increase students' comprehension. Instead of glossing over phrases, they must find a physical equivalent of the meaning of what they're reading. (Reading aloud: skip this step.)

7. Silent Summarizing: We occasionally want students to stop, and think back about what they have read. Silent summarizing is a break for intellectual reflection. (Reading aloud: ask students to quietly tell the story to themselves and make gestures.)

8. Crazy Professor: This is the payoff. Let students be as loud, and energetic as you, and teachers in adjacent classrooms, can stand. The Crazy Professor uses wild gestures, a dramatic voice and especially props to summarize everything that has been read. A prop could be a pen, a book, a water bottle, and could stand for a character, a problem, a location, anything. Students love using props. The Eager Student is, essentially, the hyper audience for the Professor. The two form the perfect learning team. The Crazy Professor really wants to teach; the Eager Student really wants to learn. (Reading aloud: encourage the Ones to retell the story to the Twos using gestures and props. The Twos should applaud and encourage the Ones. Demonstrate what you want with one of your most energetic students.)

After you have taught students several of the steps in the Crazy Professor, say something like the following, “When I say Switch!, you all shout Switch! and change roles. When I shout a number, 1, 2, 3, 4, you all shout the same number and go to that step, with the Ones starting.”

Using this Switch/Number pattern makes for very efficient classroom management. Every minute or so, have students switch roles or go to a new step on the Crazy Professor handout.(step one is dramatic reading, step two is paraphrasing, etc.) Have them switch roles on the same step as many times as you wish.

Rehearse this movement around the Crazy Professor handout, until all your students know what role they should be playing and what step on the handout they should be using. When students have this pattern down, you will have enormously eliminated breaks in the game when students ask questions like “What should I be doing now? Where are we?”

As you move students around in the Crazy Professor, there are only a few provisos.

1. In general, silent summarizing should follow silent reading.
2. When silent skimming, students should not be allowed to skim once down a page and then quit. Skimming becomes re-skimming the same page, or section, until you announce a new step.
3. When you return students to step 1, Dramatic Reading, they always begin where they left off previously at step 1. This will ensure that students reread passages.
4. You don't have to follow the steps in order. In fact, you'll maintain more student interest if you occasionally bounce them to an unexpected spot in the game.
5. Keep switching at the same step if that seems useful.
6. The Crazy Professor is always the last stage, and brings everything to an excited climax.
7. Your students will have a much easier time playing the game, if you make copies of the grid on page 3.

We are interested in hearing from teachers who try our method. We would especially like to know which lessons work best at specific grade levels.

To see Chris Rekstad, a 4th grade teacher, demonstrate with his class a simplified version of the Crazy Professor Reading Game, go to the following address on YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/ChrisBiffle>

THE CRAZY PROFESSOR AT HOME

You can use the same Crazy Professor handout at home, as at school. On the next page is another copy.

The Crazy Professor Reading Game

	One's	Two's
1. Dramatic Reading	Reads slowly with a dramatic tone of voice.	Silently uses gestures to show what is being read.
2. Paraphrasing	Paraphrases what has been read with a dramatic tone of voice and gestures.	Silently mirrors the gestures.
3. Q and A	Asks questions about what has been read with a dramatic tone of voice and gestures.	Answers questions about what has been read with a dramatic tone of voice and gestures.
4. Connecting	Using a dramatic tone of voice and gestures, makes connections between reading material and life experiences (and/or course material).	Silently mirrors the gestures.
5. Silent Skimming	Skim reads one page ahead ... when finished, skims same page again and again.	Skim reads one page ahead ... when finished, skims same page again and again.
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8. The Crazy Professor	Becomes the high energy Crazy Professor: uses gestures, props, summarizes all that has been read ... during explanation can tell partner "tell me what I said!", "Give me a 10 finger woo!", "Ask me a good question!", "Are you paying attention?!", etc.	Becomes the high energy Eager Student: praises the Professor, mirrors his/her gestures and use of props, asks questions, can say "Oh, fantastic!", "You're a genius!", "Tell me more! more!", "Keep going!" "I get it ... what's your next great point!", etc.

When playing the Crazy Professor at home you can set the game up with any number of children, but I'll give directions in the following for a parent/child team. (If you are playing with more than one child, take the role of the teacher and follow the directions in the previous section.)

Say something like the following to your child, "We're going to play a reading game that is used in college; it's called the Crazy Professor Reading Game! I'll be the One and you are the Two. We'll take turns. I will begin reading with a dramatic tone of voice. You show what I'm reading with gestures." Using your best story teller voice, illustrate the tone you want. (Amazingly enough, you can use this story teller voice to enliven nonfiction as well as fiction.) Next, demonstrate how your child can illustrate anything that is being read with gestures. Read with a dramatic tone and use exaggerated gestures to show what you're reading. If you're reading about a king, put an imaginary crown on your head; if you're reading about a storm, swirl your hands in the air; if you're reading about an ant walking across a desert, walk your

fingers through the air and then wipe the invisible sweat off your forehead.

Next say to your child, “All right. It’s your turn. Please read slowly so that I can show what you’re saying with my gestures. When I shout ‘Switch!’, I want you to shout ‘Switch!’ and then we’ll switch roles, I’ll read and you gesture.”

Practice shouting “Switch!” a few times and have your child shout (or say quietly, if you prefer) “Switch!” back to you. Then, begin.

As you think appropriate, explain each of the steps in the Crazy Professor. Here is a summary of key points.

For pre-readers, or whenever you’re going to read aloud, I’ve included notes in parenthesis.

1. **Dramatic reading**: the reader reads slowly, so the listener has time to form gestures. The reader gains comprehension by emphasizing key words. The listener adds a kinesthetic dimension to meaning by finding appropriate gestures. (Reading aloud: The

parent reads dramatically and the child makes gestures dramatizing the text.)

2. Paraphrasing: The reader does most of the work, using a dramatic tone and gestures. The listener silently mirrors the gestures. Paraphrasing is a key intellectual skill. Children need hundreds of hours of practice in putting what they read into their own words. (Reading aloud: the Ones use gestures and explain what the story was about to the Twos. The Twos mirror the gestures. Demonstrate what you want, with you and your child switching roles.)

3. Q and A: The Questioner and the Answerer both use gestures and a dramatic tone of voice. Virtually all theories of reading emphasize the importance of asking and answering questions about reading material. (Reading aloud: The Ones ask questions with gestures and the Twos give answers with gestures. Demonstrate what you want, with you and your child switching roles.)

4. Connecting: Tell your child that any connection she can make between the reading material and anything else she knows, or imagines!, is a good connection. According to brain science, we only learn when we link new information to old information. Tell your child to vigorously clap her hands together, one hand “connecting” to the other, each time she makes a connection. When your child gets the habit of making connections, you can, where appropriate, ask her to focus on making connections to school material ... this is more difficult. (Reading aloud: During a discussion with your child, ask her questions like, “What does this remind you of?” “Have you seen anything like this?”, “Did you study anything like this in school?” and so forth ... have her say “connection” and clap her hands together she, or you, makes a connection. Strongly praise her when she links the reading to school material.)

5. Silent Skimming: Ask your child to move one finger down the page as she skims ahead for key information. Once she has

skimmed one page, she should start over until you change the task (see below). Skimming may be easier for lower grade students, if they merely point at and silently read the first sentence in each paragraph. (Reading aloud: skip this step.)

6. Silent Reading: A major problem with silent reading is that your child may drift off into her own world. When your child reads quietly in the Crazy Professor game, ask her to illustrate what she is reading with gestures; you can easily tell if she is on task. In addition, using gestures as she reads will increase her comprehension. Instead of glossing over phrases, she must find a physical equivalent of the meaning of what she is reading. (Reading aloud: skip this step.)

7. Silent Summarizing: We occasionally want children to stop, and think back about what they have read. Silent summarizing is a break for intellectual reflection. (Reading aloud: ask your child to quietly tell the story to herself and make gestures.)

8. Crazy Professor: This is the payoff. Let your child be as loud, and energetic as you can stand. (See the video on YouTube for examples of appropriately wacky behavior.) The Crazy Professor uses wild gestures, a dramatic voice and especially props to summarize everything that has been read. A prop could be a pen, a book, a water bottle, and could stand for a character, a problem, a location, anything. Children love using props. The Eager Student is, essentially, the hyper audience for the Professor. The two form the perfect learning team. The Crazy Professor really wants to teach; the Eager Student really wants to learn. (Reading aloud: you retell the story to your child using gestures and props. Your child should applaud and encourage you. Then switch roles.)

After you have taught your child several of the steps in the Crazy Professor, say something like the following, “When I say Switch!, you shout Switch! and we’ll change roles. When I shout a number, 1, 2, 3, 4, you shout the same number and we’ll go to that step, with me starting.”

Using this Switch/Number pattern makes for very efficient use of time at home. Every minute or so, have your child switch roles or go to a new step on the Crazy Professor handout. (Step one is dramatic reading, step two is paraphrasing, etc.) Have your switch roles on the same step as many times as you wish.

Rehearse this movement around the Crazy Professor handout, until your child knows what role she should be playing and what step on the handout she should be using.

As you move your child around in the Crazy Professor, there are only a few provisos.

1. In general, silent summarizing should follow silent reading.
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3. When you return your child to step 1, Dramatic Reading, she always begins where she left off previously at step 1. This will ensure that your child reread passages.
4. You don't have to follow the steps in order. In fact, you'll

maintain more interest if you occasionally bounce her to an unexpected spot in the game.

5. Keep switching at the same step if that seems useful.

6. The Crazy Professor is always the last stage, and brings everything to an excited climax.

7. Your child will have a much easier time playing the game, if you make copies of the grid on page 3.

As an extra bonus when your child is doing very well, let her be the one who shouts “Switch” or a number to move to a new part of the game.

In general, it’s better to spend shorter periods of time on each step, rather than longer. This maintains both players’ interest and increases the liveliness of the game. Thirty seconds to a minute per step is about right.

For more information, or to schedule a Crazy Professor seminar at your school, contact:

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