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Middle school is a time of major physical, social, and emotional growth. Children are faced with many challenges as they enter puberty and try to become more independent. So, it's no surprise that in middle school, it's quite a challenge to get them interested in reading. To most students, novels can feel overwhelming and they might not be willing to make that commitment on top of all the other school activities. Therefore, short stories for middle school are the perfect solution to teach active reading skills, introduce new literary concepts, and build critical analytical skills in an entertaining way. Short stories are easy to read, while still following a captivating plotline. Some schools have very limited resources, while homeschool tutors have to rely on their own when searching for educational short stories through which they can teach a variety of literary elements. This is why we made a list of our top 15 short stories for middle school you can use. The Best Short Stories for Middle School "All Summer in a Day" by Ray Bradbury "All Summer in a Day" is a short science-fiction story published in 1954. The story is about a class of students who live on Venus – a place where the Sun is visible for only one hour, every seven years. Only one student remembers the Sun and writes a poem about it, describing it vividly. However, her classmates haven't seen it, they don't believe her, and they bully her. The story is great for teaching setting elements as there are beautiful and detailed descriptions of the Sun. It's also a story that's very relatable and emotional for middle schoolers as it deals with issues like bullying. You can use the story to encourage empathy between the kids and work on their moral reasoning. If you're into philosophy, you can even draw links to Plato's Cave. "The Scholarship Jacket" by Marta Salinas "The Scholarship Jacket" is a well-known story about a Mexican girl named Martha, who after earning excellent grades in school is faced with a difficult situation. Her school has a tradition of awarding a scholarship jacket to the class valedictorian every year, and she is first in her class. However, the principal tells her that she has to pay fifteen dollars or the jacket would go to the runner-up. Martha's decision conveys the author's message – if you've earned something, you shouldn't purchase it. The story is simple to read, yet very thought-provoking, which means it's great for discussions. Through this story, you can teach descriptive language (imagery) and diction (word choice) for revealing one's point of view. Roald Dahl is a popular children's writer, and his story "The Wish" is a suspenseful tale that explores the darker side of human nature. In fact, the main theme of the story tries to convey how fear is the ultimate obstacle in life. The plotline revolves around an imaginative boy's play which goes out of hand. Though this story kids can learn a lot about their emotions and how to talk about them. You can teach imagery and extended metaphor. "Ruthless" by William De Mille "Ruthless" is an amazing book that stimulates analytical and critical thinking. The book is about a businessman that wants to get revenge on a man who he thinks stole from him. The plotline is very interesting and easy to follow. You can use the book to teach students about the justice system, consequences, responsibility, and control. When it comes to literary elements, you can use it to teach characterization, narrative structure, as well as inference. "Test" by Theodore Thomas The "Test" is a fantasy/faction story about Robert Proctor, a man who's taking a driver's test. During the test, he's under hypnosis and has an accident. As a consequence, he doesn't get his license and is even taken in by the authorities. However, the readers are left to discuss if he was hypnotized and who's actually responsible. Through this story, you can teach about plot, conflict, and setting. You can also introduce students to a variety of genres and make a comparison between the different genres' elements. "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry "The Gift of the Magi" is another well-known short story that tells us about a young couple who struggle to buy Christmas gifts for each other as they have very little money. The story is sentimental and conveys a strong moral lesson. Through this book, you can teach students about irony. Students will also have the opportunity to learn about communication in relationships and love. "There Will Come Soft Rains" by Ray Bradbury Ray Bradbury tells a meaningful and very insightful story by describing an intelligent house that operates autonomously – without humans. The message that Bradbury sends to the readers is a warning of the dangers of a technology-driven future with no human interaction. This book is a wonderful choice for teaching symbolism, foreshadowing, and setting. The author goes in great detail and describes the scenery beautifully, which allows young readers to immerse themselves and draw a lot of information about what the author is trying to convey. "The Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin Since middle schoolers are experiencing puberty and with that, their first heartbreaks, "The Story of an Hour" would be a good choice. Chopin tells the story of a woman whose husband dies in an accident. This raises the question of whether one can die from heartbreak, and the story has a powerful and shocking ending. The book is very emotional and thought-provoking, with an unexpected ironic twist at the end. It's a great book to teach character insight, motives, and thoughts. "The Most Dangerous Game" by Richard Connell "The Most Dangerous Game" is another famous short story in American culture, commonly given as a reading assignment for 7th-grade students. The story is about a big-game hunter from New York City who has an accident. He falls off his yacht and saves himself by swimming to an isolated island in the Caribbean. There, he is hunted by a Russian aristocrat. The story is inspired by real events that happened in the 1920s in South America and Africa. Through it, you can teach about the importance of creating suspense, and students can work on plot diagrams, as well as describe the setting. "The Monkey's Paw" by W.W. Jacobs "The Monkey's Paw" is an old supernatural short story in which the owner of the monkey's paw is granted three wishes. However, we later find out that the fulfillment of each wish comes with unexpected consequences. The story is suspenseful and captivating. It will leave students with many questions and motivate them to discuss. You can teach foreshadowing, irony, and different points of view. "Thank You M'am" by Langston Hughes As the name suggests, "Thank You M'am" is an interesting short story about gratitude and kindness. It bears great social value as it teaches readers some valuable life lessons. The plotline revolves around two characters, Roger and Mrs. Luella. They meet when Roger tries to steal Mrs. Luella's purse in order to buy new shoes. However, Mrs. Luella catches him and, instead of turning him in, gives him money to buy shoes and more. Although this story is commonly read in primary school, middle schoolers can also learn a lot from it. It's a good choice for teaching conflict and characterization. "American History" by Judith Ortiz Cofer Teaching children dark periods of history can be challenging, but stories like "American History" can help students better understand the consequences of our actions in the past. The story is set in the early 1960s when racism and segregation were still dominant. The main character in the story is a fourteen-year-old Puerto Rican immigrant, Elena, living in New Jersey. It's a good read so children can better understand social issues like racism, prejudice, and cultural isolation. Aside from working on their moral reasoning, you can teach about setting, imagery, contrasting perspectives, as well as pair it with historical lectures. "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson "The Lottery" is a controversial piece, yet one of the most famous short stories in the history of American literature. It's considered an inspiration for many dystopian novels and movies. In the story, we read about a fictional town in America where an annual rite, known as "the lottery", is being held. Each year, one random person who "wins" the lottery is stoned to death. This book can be used to spark rich debates about following traditions, rules, and laws. "The Black Cat" by Edgar Allan Poe First published in 1843, "The Black Cat" tells the story of a man who kills his wife and hides her body. Edgar Allan Poe skillfully guides us through the person's psychology of guilt, which leads him to reveal himself as the killer. This book is a great choice for teaching about narrative and analyzing the first-person point of view, especially their reliability, and with that, the challenge of re-telling the story from a third-person point of view. "The Lady, or the Tiger?" by Frank Stockton "The Lady, or the Tiger?" is an allegorical fairytale that tells us about a kingdom where the king plays with people's fates by making them choose between two doors – marriage or death. One day, the princess's lover is put in the area and forced to choose. She knows what's behind each door and discreetly indicates to him to open the door on his right – but did she lose him to another woman or to death? The author leaves us to wonder. With this book, you can help students learn about allegory, symbolism, and no-win situations. Since the ending does not reveal the lover's fate, you can use this to organize stimulating group debates. How to Teach Short Stories in Middle School Getting your students interested in reading short stories in middle school is challenging, which is why we're sharing this simple guide on how to teach short stories. It all boils down to two essential steps – making a detailed lesson plan and engaging the students through fun activities. Make a Detailed Lesson Plan As a teacher or a tutor, you'll find that it's essential to have a well-structured lesson plan to rely on. You should never improvise, although the plan should be flexible so that the kids have time to share their thoughts and discuss the story. Pick a Story To make sure your students are invested, you need to pick a story that you enjoy reading. If a book can't spark your interest, it surely won't be able to hold the attention of eleven or twelve-year-olds. This is why we made sure our list had interesting and thought-provoking reads. Also, make sure the story fits the specific grade-level standard where you're teaching. Decide on Specific Teaching Elements Once you've found a good story for your middle-schoolers, you should read it and decide which literary elements you can teach through it. This will help you create the assignments for the students. There are five elements of short stories: PlotSettingCharacters ConflictTheme Besides, based on the curriculum, you'll find that many short stories are also great for familiarizing students with new literary concepts and vocabulary. Decide on a Timeline Finally, you should decide on a timeline. Ask yourself how much time you have and how much time you need to accomplish the goals you've just set in the previous step. Will you give the story as a unit, or work on it throughout the year? This will also help you determine what's the best way to engage the students. Engage Students After making a detailed lesson plan, you should think about the activities with which you're going to engage the students. After all, guiding them through the reading is crucial as it can help them pay attention to details and identify literary elements. Here's one way to organize the activities. Before Reading the Story Take a moment to make an in-depth introduction of the book and encourage a discussion about the theme before the students read the story. Ask them what they know about the theme in the book. Let students share their opinions and make predictions. For example, if the book is fiction and describes a magical place, ask students to imagine what it would be like if they found themselves in a completely unfamiliar place. Let them explore their creativity and debate. While Reading the Story Make sure to introduce the students to the literary elements you're going to work on and guide them to pay attention to specific details while reading the story. For example, to focus on the setting, character traits, motives, theme, and so on. After Reading the Story Once the students have read the story, it's time to reflect on what they've read and explore the thoughts and feelings they had while reading the story. Ask your students what they've learned, whether their expectations were met, and whether they were able to predict the story or it took them by surprise. Leave time for discussion and encourage them to share their opinions and debate with each other. We have a bunch of literature teaching worksheets you can use for this purpose. Before You Leave We hope that our article will become a valuable resource for finding the most captivating short stories for middle school. Some of the stories are more advanced, while others are much easier to read, depending on the specific grade-level you're teaching. Each recommendation comes with a small description and tips, so you can check out the ones that best fit your needs. On top of that, we also included a guide on how to teach short stories for middle school, including a small lesson plan. To organize everything perfectly without wasting too much time or energy, make sure you check out our worksheet library. Plus, if you're looking to learn more, don't miss our blog, where we share valuable information for parents, teachers, and homeschool tutors.

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