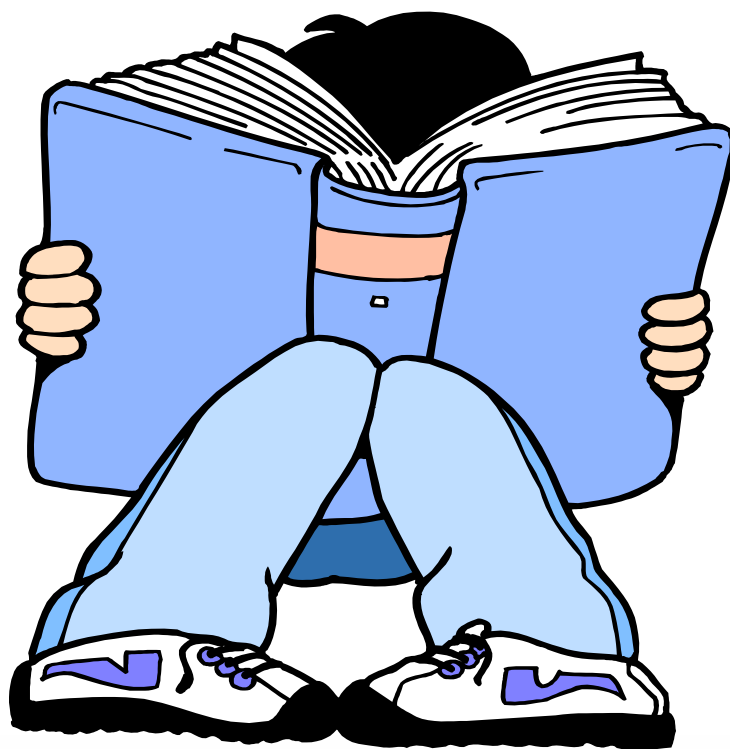


Lancashire Primary Strategy: Literacy



Strategies to Develop
Comprehension
During Guided
Reading



Strategies to Develop Children's Understanding of Text

There is a large body of literature on strategies to support readers in understanding, responding to and reflecting on texts. What follows is a 'reference list' and a very brief outline of some of the main strategies. Each of these comes from a background of theory, research and classroom practice and references are given where possible. You may well find that some of the things we mention are already well known to you (e.g. character grids), but others may be completely new. It is not an exhaustive list and it is one that we hope will continue to grow as we share our successful practice with each other. As you look at these consider whether they are pre-reading, during reading or post-reading strategies. Also consider how children could use these strategies in independent reading as well as when reading with a supportive adult.

The strategies apply equally to 'reading' pictures in picture books and other texts where exploring the visual information is important to full understanding.

Cognitive Strategies

Prior knowledge activation

Activation of prior knowledge can develop children's understanding by helping them see links between what they already know and new information they are encountering. There are many ways of encouraging children to bring to the forefront of their minds, knowledge that relates to the text they are about to read or are reading.

- Brainstorming around the title, chapter heading, picture on the front cover (these can be written, oral or drawn)
- Word association chain around key word in title or an image in the text.
- Ask for memories around key word in title or an artefact (*This reminds me of...It makes me think of...*)
- Filling in a mind-mapping, concept mapping or other grids / proforma (e.g. the first column of a KWL grid)

The use of such strategies is based on insights from schema theory, which explores how we build and access knowledge.

Prediction / group prediction

This involves discussing a text with a teacher or reading partner. The aim of the strategy is to establish the purpose for reading, to encourage reasoning whilst reading and to test predictions. The children read the text a section at a time and as they do so the teacher encourages them to explain what will happen next, predict how it will end, revise their earlier predictions in the light of new evidence found in the text. The children should offer evidence for their hypothesis. This can be oral, or children could make written predictions / revisions in a reading journal.

Prediction is one of a group of strategies, including cloze procedure, summarising, sequencing, comparing texts and alternative representations. These are known collectively as Directed Activities Related to Text (DARTS), which were developed, by Lunzer and Gardner in the 1980s.

Constructing images (visualising, drawing, drama)

Creating visual images is claimed to improve comprehension by linking prior experiences to the new idea thus building richer schemas (also see 'Activating prior knowledge' above).

- The teacher models the process by reading aloud and talking about any associations that come to mind and asking the children to picture it. Children are then encouraged to do the same for other passages and verbalise this process to a partner. Can be used with both fiction and non-fiction texts.
- During and after reading children can sketch what they see, undertake freeze frames of key moments in a story and make models based on the text e.g. creating the Borrowers living room in design and technology sessions.

Summarising

Effective summarising involves children evaluating a text and deciding which elements of it are most significant.

- Model skim reading of a text. Then encourage skim reading or rereading and ask for oral summaries.
- Go through a text paragraph by paragraph highlighting the key sentence/sentences in each.
- Children can be asked to write brief summaries at the end of each chapter outlining key events and further insights into character and plot.
- Summarise by restructuring key information contained in a text into a non-prose form. It may involve children drawing a matrix, a tree diagram, a semantic map/word web, a labelled picture or a retrieval chart.

Questioning/clarifying

- Discussion
Class, group or individual focused discussion with the aim of clarifying understanding. Such discussion goes beyond simple recall questions into inference and deduction.
- Talk to the author
A text is provided (with wide margins). Questions to the author are written in the margin, for example 'Who was this? Why did this happen?' The teacher models this process initially and then the children try. It is claimed that it encourages children to engage with the text and helps them differentiate between fact and opinion, as well as helping them search for bias.
- Focus journals
These journals are claimed to encourage students to review their background knowledge, reflect on previous learning and predict future learning. The children will have read some of the book in private reading and when they join the guided group it is a way of focusing their attention before reading the next section. The teacher writes the focus on the board before the children join the group e.g. what seemed important to you in what you learnt about X? The children read the focus, reflect on their response and write in their journals. This then serves as a basis for discussion.

Story Grammar/Text Structure analysis

Throughout the 1970's and early 80's cognitive psychologists examined individual's mental representations (schema) of story components and how these components fitted together. They argued that as we listen to and read stories so our knowledge about stories grows and we can draw on this knowledge to help us predict and understand what is happening, and is likely to happen, in new stories. This accumulating knowledge of stories texts develops in us a set of expectations for the structure of a story, helps facilitate our understanding of stories and improves our memory/recall of a story. This work gave rise to several classroom strategies such as story mapping and story structure charts. In the 80s and 90s attention turned to the structure of non-fiction texts.

Story maps/story shapes/story charts

Children draw a 'map' of the events in a story. This helps them recall and retell the story. The particular structure of a story, such as a circular story or an 'A to B' journey can also be made explicit via story mapping.

Structural organisers

Recognising the structure of non-fiction texts and then mapping the content onto various structural organiser grids e.g. point/evidence grid, cause/effect grid, argument/counterargument list.

Interpretive strategies

As many books on reading cover strategies from several of the subheadings listed under 'Interpretive strategies' a general reference list will be found at the end of the section.

Character development

Imagining how a character might feel; identifying with a character, charting the development of a character over time in a longer text.

There are many strategies that require children to make explicit their response to and knowledge of a character. These include;

- Feeling graphs or map showing how emotions develop throughout the story
- Journal entries
- Hot seating
- TV interviews. Compile a list of questions to ask if you were to interview the character. This can be combined with hot seating and the interview conducted with the character.
- Drawing characters and surrounding the drawing with phrases from the text
- Writing thought bubbles for characters at key moments in the text when they don't actually speak
- Relationship grid with each character listed along the top and down the side. Each cell represents a relationship to be explored.
- Speculating on actions and motives e.g. asking why did, what if?
- Character emotions register. This involves creating a 5-point emotions scale with the pupils for the possible range of reactions at certain specific points in the story (for example from 'mildly irritated' to 'incandescent with rage'). Pupils then rate characters on the scale.

Identifying themes/information

- The author's chair
Child takes on the role of the author, answering questions about the book and justifying what 'they' have written
- Draw a diagram, grid, flow chart etc. to show information
- Draw a strip cartoon/story board identifying 4/5 main points from the story or information
- Highlight words, phrases which link together to build a picture of character or mood, or setting and so on
- Write a blurb for the book
- Identify facts and opinion and consider how they are woven together
- What's important grid (Susan Close materials)

Reading for multiple meanings

- Rank characters according to criteria e.g. most powerful to least powerful, kindest to meanest. Do different criteria give different insights?
- 'The roles we play'. In an outline character shape pupils record all the different roles they play in a story – e.g. daughter, friend.
- Give the text only or pictures only from a multi-layered picture book and ask the children to tell the story/read the prose story before reading the complete book. Discuss any changes in their perceptions and responses. Any changes?
- Retell a scene from the point of view of a minor character within it.
- Justify the actions of a 'villain'.
- Problem solving. Stop at the point where a character faces a problem or dilemma. List alternative suggestions from the group. Consider the consequences of each suggestion. Arrive at a group decision.

Looking for/challenging a consistent point of view

- Genre Exchange – ask children to transpose something from one written genre they have just read into another written genre.
- Criteria rating certain scenes at a crucial point – mostly likely to happen/ least likely to happen, most likely to be true, least likely to be true.
- Story comparison charts. Several versions of a story are read (e.g. Cinderella tables) and a comparative chart is completed.

Relating texts to personal experiences

- Say what they would have done at certain points in the story.
- Choose the funniest, scariest, most interesting moment from a story or information book. Justify their choice.
- Response journals (ongoing throughout the reading of long books).
- Relate to other books by the same author or on same topic, read by the group or individual. Discuss similarities or differences.

Semantic strategies

Previewing vocabulary

The teacher provides a list of words relating to the book/topic. The meanings of the words are then discussed before reading.

Building banks of new words

As children read they mark or note on post-it notes or in vocabulary journals any new words/words they are unsure of. After reading, the group discusses ways of working out the meaning (e.g. root, morphology, etc). Once a word is understood children note its meaning. They may add a visual cue to remind them of the meaning.

Word tracker/oral thesaurus

Children track particular groups of words/phrases (e.g. appearance words). They list these and suggest alternatives.

Making dictionaries and glossaries

Children can track words whose meanings are unclear e.g. technical words, dialect words, slang and so on. They then investigate the meanings and create text specific dictionaries or glossaries.