

The Seven Reading Strategies

1 Making Predictions

Judge a book by its cover! If you are reading a poem, short story or a novel, talk about the title, the cover, the blurb and the illustrations if there are any. Learners discuss the sort of text they are about to read, using their prior learning. When about to view a film, the same principles apply. This can be done using the cover of the the DVD, or ideally by using a short trailer. This strategy be used effectively before reading and at key points in the texts, where learners discuss what might happen next, or how the story might end. However, like all reading strategies, it should not be overused or allowed to spoil the narrative.

Typical Questions

What do you think this might be about?

Does this remind you of anything you have seen, read, heard before?

What kind of story do you think this might be? (this relates to an increasing awareness of the features of genre)

What do you think (character) will do next?

How do you think this will end?

2 Asking Questions

This may seem like an obvious strategy, since as teachers we do it all the time, but the key idea here is that we develop an understanding in the learner that asking questions is probably more important than answering them. This is a core strategy in the development of critical thinkers, and we need to guide learners towards the hierarchy of questions they should be asking as they read a text.

Typical Questions

Questions generally fall into one of 3 categories: LITERAL, INFERENTIAL or EVALUATIVE

How many references are there to time in this story? (Literal)

Where and when do you think the story is set? (Inferential)

Why does (character) act in this way at this particular time? ((Inferential)

What do you think is going through (character's) mind here? (Inferential)

How do you think the author wants us to feel towards this character? (Inferential)

How well do you think the author has captured the feeling of happiness here? (Evaluative)

3 Making Comparisons

As sophisticated readers, when we read a text we are constantly (and sub-consciously) making associations between what we are reading and our own real-life experiences. Or, to put that another way, we are drawing on our prior learning. In order to develop that in young readers we have to encourage them to make the links and explore those aspects of the text which are most likely to elicit the comparisons. It is also important to explore the notion that while the text will often be a shared experience, our reactions to it may be quite different, depending on the associations we make.

Typical Questions

Does this remind me of anything I have experienced before?

Does this remind me of anything I have read or seen before?

How would I have behaved in that situation? Why?

How does this text compare with (a previous one I/we read)?

4 Looking for Patterns

By comparing and contrasting texts they have read, the sophisticated reader begins to show a deeper understanding of *genre*, or of the work of a particular author (or indeed *auteur*). Patterns might include elements of the plot, structure, layout, use of graphics etc. It also includes language patterns, the repeated use of particular words, images or symbols, and the recognition of common themes in a text or group of texts.

Typical Questions

What kind of story is this? How do we know? (Introduce concept of *genre* when appropriate)

Can you see anything in the text which appears more than once?

What would you expect to happen in this kind of story?

Do you notice any habits this writer has in the way he/she uses language?

5 Making Pictures

Visualisation, or the interpretation of a text into internal images, is a natural process for trained readers, but it needs to be made explicit for a developing reader. Asking learners to draw a character or a scene from a text allows them to present their unique interpretation of the text. Using graphic organisers such as Mind-maps can be a very effective way of making sense of a text, summarising key elements, committing to memory or sharing with others, while storyboards or comic-book software make the creation of narrative easier and more fun.

Typical Questions/Activities

What do you think this character/place would look like?

If you were to make a film of this, where would you make it and who would play the leading roles?

Draw a map of the area where this story takes place.

Draw a mind-map showing the main elements of the story.

6 Summarising

The ability to summarise is an essential skill for the developing fluent-comprehending reader, but it is also a highly sophisticated skill which needs to be modelled repeatedly by the teacher. It can be broken down into the following component parts, each of which can be emphasised in different contexts and can be practised through a range of activities:-

Paraphrasing putting into your own words

Selecting picking out the main points

Combining two or more ideas or sentences into one

Readers can be asked to write chapter headings, list the writer's main ideas, provide a blurb for the book or a trailer for the film, or write a short review, all of which are essentially a kind of summary of the text.

Typical Questions/Activities

Provide a suitable heading for each paragraph of the chapter or story.

Write down the main events in the order in which they happen.

In no more than 50 words, tell the story in your own words.

7 Evaluating

One aspect of reading which rarely has to be encouraged, but is often the least considered or developed, is the process of evaluating or assessing the worth of a text. Readers of any age will happily tell you what they think of a text, but will often struggle to explain why, beyond the stock responses of "it was boring" or "it was exciting". When engaged in this strategy, therefore, it is the quality of the discussion and the use of open questions which will determine the quality of the outcome. It is also important that in any evaluation, the criteria for success are shared and agreed, and these will usually be related to *audience* and *purpose*. An appropriate vocabulary needs to be developed over time.

Typical Questions/Activities

What was the author's purpose here and to what extent did he/she achieve it?

What is the writer's (as opposed to the character's) point of view?

Was the ending of the story the most appropriate ending? Why?

