

CHAPTER 11 – Reading comprehension

Classroom Activities: Active reading

Active reading can be conducted with a small group or as a whole class. Aukerman, Schuldt, Aiello and Martin (2017) write that collaborative small-group reading processes can reposition bilingual children as ‘the competent, thoughtful textual meaning makers we believe them to be, rather than as struggling readers’ (p. 484). They suggest that these group processes matter particularly for bilingual children who work with linguistically and culturally unfamiliar and otherwise challenging texts.

The strategies of KWL, retelling, text cues and text frames all engage children in making personal connections between the text and their prior knowledge, support the development of higher level thinking skills, and can be used effectively to develop an awareness of narrative and expository text structures (Gambrell & Dromsky 2000).

KWL

KWL is a strategy that activates children’s prior knowledge on a topic and has them pose questions that they wish to answer: K—what do I know?; W—what do I want to learn?; and L—what have I learnt? The strategy can be used with information or narrative texts, in small groups, pairs, individually or with the whole class. The ‘what do I know?’ and the ‘what do I want to learn?’ are done before reading the text, as a whole class, in groups or pairs, or individually, and the ‘what have I learnt?’ is done after reading in pairs or individually.

Some teachers add another column for ‘H’— ‘how can I learn?’ (for example, ask others in the class, read books, check on the internet, test out the idea myself and so on)—so they have KWHL.

Figure 11.9 A KWL chart about spiders

TOPIC: Spiders

| What do I know? | What do I want to learn? | What have I learnt? |
|--|--------------------------|---------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• eat flies• eat bugs• eat moths• have 8 legs• use spinnerets to make webs | | |

Text clues

Before reading a book in teacher read-aloud or shared book, ask the children to predict what words will be in the book. Write these on a chart or whiteboard. When the book has been read, the children can check off the words that occurred in the book. If you think that there are words that need to be added to the list, you can add these.

Author or character hot seat

After reading a book, the children can ask questions of the author or a character in the book. At first the teacher can model this. For example, with the book *Where the Wild Things Are* (Maurice Sendak), the children might ask questions about writing the book such as, 'Why did the wild things let Max leave the wild rumpus?' or 'Why did the book end with Max going home?' The author hot seat helps children understand narrative structure and can also be used with information texts to explore the author's choice of text features and text structure. In character hot seat, children explore the characters' intentions and infer meanings. For example, Max might be asked, 'Why did the forest grow?' and 'Did you really see the wild things?'

Six hats

Edward de Bono (2000) suggests that many problems can be solved by putting on different hats to shift perspectives. Children can wear coloured hats to start, then once the ideas are clear, they can operate without the hats. They give brief answers to the problem according to the 'hat' they are wearing.

White hat: information is given or relevant facts only

Yellow hat: a positive 'yes' answer is given with reasons to support the answer

Red hat: the feelings of people involved are discussed

Purple hat: a 'no' answer, the negative view with supporting reasons

Blue hat: monitors the process, encourages others, monitors time

Green hat: a divergent view, something that has not yet been tried

Reciprocal reading



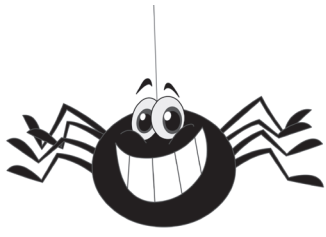

Each of the comprehension strategies of *predicting*, *clarifying*, *summarising* and *questioning* promotes both comprehension of a text and comprehension monitoring. Palincsar and Brown (1986) developed a technique called reciprocal teaching, where children are given demonstrations of how predicting, questioning, summarising and clarifying concepts and inferences can be used to understand texts.

Reciprocal reading has been modified for children beginning school (Myers 2005). A puppet can be used to represent each of the comprehension strategies, with the Wizard predicting what may happen, then, as a book or section is read, Quincy Questioner asks literal questions, and Clara Clarifier asks inferential questions. Finally, the Princess Storyteller provides a summary (see Figure 11.10). Puppets or cards can be used to identify the comprehension strategies and the use of puppets or cards produces more talk about the text, particularly for shy or reluctant children.

Roles

For older children, different roles can be assigned to members of a group. The teacher, as one member of the group, might read a book while the others listen and play out their roles (see Figure 11.11).

Figure 11.10 Reciprocal reading with group roles

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>CONNECTOR Predicts what the book is about from the cover</p>  <p>Wizard</p> | <p>CLARIFIER Asks a question to clarify concepts after book/section is read</p>  <p>Clara Clarifier</p> |
| <p>QUESTIONER Asks a literal question after book/section is read</p>  <p>Quincy Questioner</p> | <p>SUMMARISER Provides a summary book/section</p>  <p>Princess Storyteller</p> |

(based on Myers 2005)

Figure 11.11 Reading roles

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Social critic Social critic asks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this book fair? • Are there stereotypes? • Are there people missing or not included in this book? • How could the book be more just and fair? | <p>Me Me asks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does this mean to me? • Have I experienced something similar? • How did I feel when this happened to me? • Does this remind me of another event or another book? |
| <p>Word/image finder</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asks what words were used to create a feeling or image • Lists interesting words on paper • Tells the group about these words • Looks up the meanings of some unfamiliar words | <p>Summariser</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lists events in sequence • Puts the story into two or three sentences • Asks others to listen and check whether they agree with the ideas in the summary |
| <p>Illustrator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illustrates an idea or an event • May draw a sketch, diagram, cartoon • Shows the group the illustration • Asks the group to talk about the illustration before revealing what has been drawn | <p>Manager</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manages the group • Asks each person to predict what will happen before the story is read • May stop the group during the reading and ask for predictions • Asks questions at the end of the discussion |

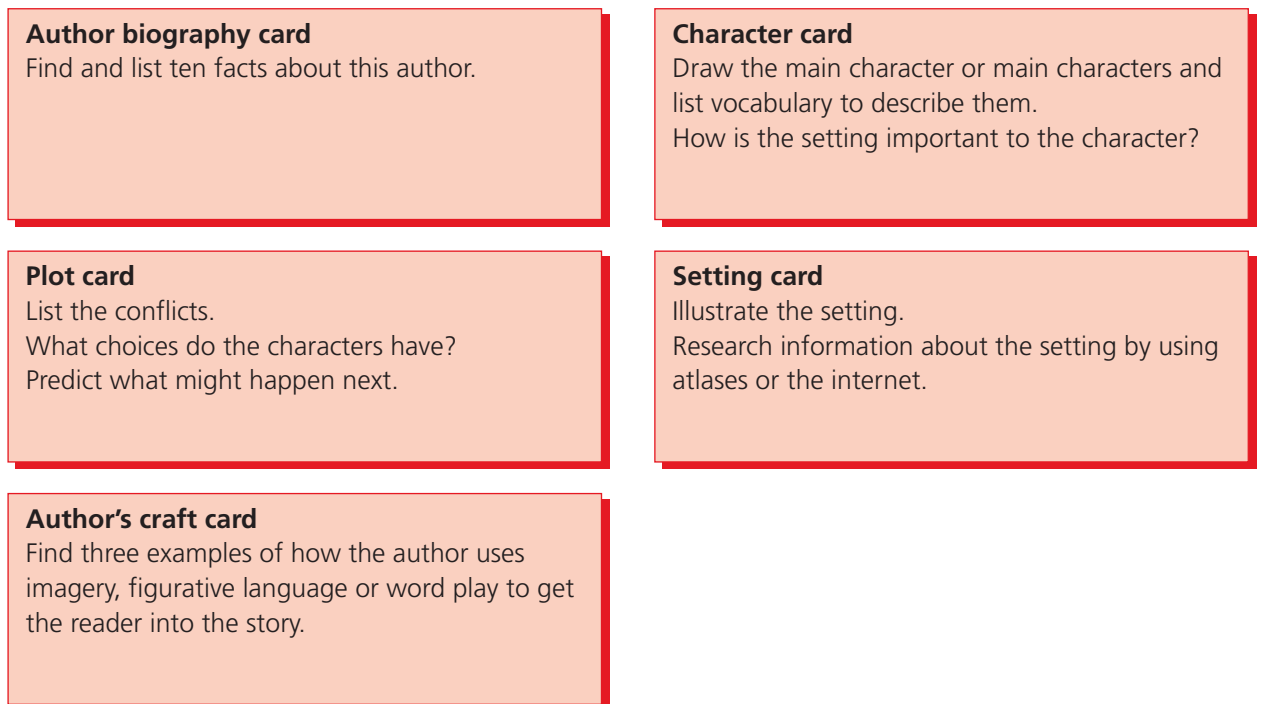
Once the expert groups have sufficient information or the time limit has been reached they re-form into five cooperative groups with a research expert on each author. The groups share information, with each member describing information they alone in the group can provide. They could construct a poster, a play or a group poem to share with the class.

When planning the groups, it helps to work numbers carefully. If there are 20 children, they could be placed in five expert groups of four, and re-form into four cooperative groups of five to share ideas (ideas based on Aronson, Blaney, Stephan, Sikes & Snapp 1977).

Mini jigsaw

Mini jigsaw is another good way to carry out an author study. Have the class select an author who has written a number of books. Divide the class into groups, each of which is responsible for studying one text. Each person in the group takes an aspect of the story to research and provides information to the group. You could make cards for each group member to select.

Figure 11.12 Mini jigsaw author cards



When all the information is completed, have the groups compile a poster on A3 paper displaying the information and inviting other readers to read the book.