

English as an Additional Language

Comprehension strategies for fiction

Before reading

- *Text Shuffle*

The teacher cuts up chunks of the text and asks the children to discuss the content, characters, events and vocabulary. They then try to predict what the story might be about. This can be done individually, in pairs, or in groups. The children then attempt to correctly sequence the chunks of text. They can refer back to their predictions and their sequencing while reading the story. After reading, they can rearrange the text, if necessary, to reflect the actual events.

- *Semantic Impressions*

The teacher displays the title of the story and selects seven significant words in the order they appear in the text. These words can be explored in some detail, for example, the meanings, origins, synonyms and antonyms. The children, in groups, then predict a storyline based on these words.

- *Directed reading*

The teacher asks the question before, not after, reading! This gives children a focus and a pre-determined purpose when reading and they know what they are looking for. There should be a balance between the types of questions posed, for example, literal, inferential, interpretative and evaluative.

During reading

- *Conscience Alley*

This involves decision-making. The teacher stops reading at a critical point in the story where a decision has to be made. The teacher then becomes that character and the children have to try to persuade or dissuade the character regarding a particular course of action. The class is divided in two and the character reflects on the reasons given. The teacher then continues to read the story in order to compare the class decision with that of the character in the story.

- *Creating Images*

The children create images while reading a story. They can mark these points with a post-it, as they read, and then choose one or two images to discuss and elaborate on. This can sometimes be followed on by drawing one of these images.

- *Generating Questions*

This involves the children using post-its, or a pencil, to highlight places in the text where they have a question. This question can be about a character, a decision, a relationship or an event in the story. It can be to clarify a point or to gain further information about the story. This activity can be done at whole-class, group, pair or individual level.

- *Read and re-tell*

The children are encouraged to summarise the story while they are reading. This can be at pre-determined points in the text, for example, at the end of each paragraph, or alternatively, whenever the child feels there is sufficient information to summarise.

- *Re-read*

This requires the children to re-read sections of the story to clarify the meaning.

After reading

- *Story Maps/Boards*

This involves creating a map or a board which illustrate the main points of the story. It will usually include a setting, characters, a problem, and a resolution.

- *Sensory Impressions*

This requires the children to describe a point in the story from a sensory perspective, for example, *what could you smell at this point in the story?*. The other senses can also be used, for example, what could you see, hear, touch, taste.

- *Making connections*

The children relate the events in the story to their own lives, or to another text they have read, for example, 'This story reminds me of a time when ...'

- *Improvisational Drama/Mime*

The children improvise the story from a different perspective, for example, one character is given a hidden brief that will change the outcome of the story. The teacher can also influence the outcome of the story by taking on the role of a particular character in the story, that is, teacher-in-role. The EAL learners can have the option of taking on roles in the drama that are not heavily language-dependent.

- *Mime*

The story can be re-enacted through mime. This allows the child with little or no English language proficiency to participate. This mime can be further developed through hidden briefs and teacher-in-role.

- *Hot-seating*

One child takes on the role of a character from the story and the rest of the class ask questions of this character, for example, 'Why did you do that?', 'What is your favourite game?' and 'Describe your day',

- *Role-on-the-wall*

Each child writes a word or a phrase that describes a particular character on a post-it. These are compiled on a class role-on-the-wall. A child with little or no English language proficiency can contribute to this profile by drawing, or writing the word or phrase in their first language.