



Reading Comprehension: Picture Walk and Other Strategies

Purpose: The Primary Aim of Reading is Comprehension

In our Reading to Kids program, we can provide opportunities for students to practice comprehension strategies when they are listening and responding to the stories that we read to them.

For the younger grades, a picture walk is a tool that teaches emerging readers to use pictures as clues to understand the meaning of a story and guess at unfamiliar words.

Here's how it works:

First show the children the cover and read the title. Ask them what they think the story will be about, based only on what they see.

Then slowly flip through the book, page by page (or by picking several key pages in advance) without reading a single word. Ask them questions about each picture they see.

"**What** is going on here?" "**Who** is this?" "**Why** does the character look so excited?"

"**When** is this story taking place?" "**How** do you think the story is going to end?"

Ask plenty of questions that will engage the kids' imaginations and encourage their active participation.

Remember when you ask questions your responses should be vague so that don't give away your knowledge of the storyline. Good responses leave open the possibility of many "correct" answers, and include follow up questions to encourage the children to think about the reason they gave an answer, for example:

"That's very possible!" "Are you sure about that?" "How can you tell she is feeling _____?"

Once you're done with the "picture walk" and have started the actual read-aloud session, short discussions while you're reading can be very beneficial to the children because they reinforce the critical thinking that you fueled by stimulating their curiosity during the "picture walk."

Some good topics for discussion include:

- 1) Testing their storyline hypotheses ("Do you still think the story is going to end like that? Why or why not?"),
- 2) Appraising characters' actions ("Was it a good idea for the character to do that? How would you have solved that problem?")
- 3) Examining cause-and-effect relationships ("So now that you know what really happened, why do you think the character looks so excited?").

Kids will be excited to find that outcomes they have predicted are correct or they will be surprised to find that the plot has taken some unexpected turns.

The picture walk can serve as a great tool to stir interest in both the story and in the read-aloud session. Not only can it encourage the children's participation in group discussion, but it can also improve their comprehension of the story. Providing them with a tantalizing glimpse of visual story elements should help stir their imaginations and help them weave an intellectual frame of reference for better organizing and evaluating what they hear as you read the actual story.

Reading Comprehension *without* pictures:

For the older grades (4th & 5th), we often have stories that are chapter books with very few (if any) pictures. While a picture walk is helpful for reading comprehension in the younger grades, we need to use modified strategies to engage the older children and to help them to better organize the story in their head.

Some strategies for increasing reading comprehension in the older grades include:

Setting Reading Goals

- Activate prior knowledge by discussing what is already known about the subject.
- Browse the story by looking at the title, author and illustrations.
- Decide what to expect from the text based on what is known about the subject and what the cover hints at.

Summarizing

- When a narrative text has covered a long period of time or a number of events
- When many facts have been presented
- When an especially critical scene has occurred
- Anytime there is a potential for confusion about what has happened

Asking Questions

The process of effective questioning begins with “*Who? What? When? Where? How? or Why?*” Advancing from literal questions which can be answered with explicit information in the story, students can move to inferential questions which must be answered by interpreting story content.

Predicting

Predicting can be appropriate at the beginning of a selection and can be confirmed or revised throughout the story. Students need to determine what clues in the story or in the illustrations helped them predict in order to learn that predicting is not merely guessing.

Making Connections

Students should be guided to think of memories or people which might remind them of characters or events in a story. Sharing your connections will help students become aware of the dynamic nature of reading.

Visualizing

Students should form mental images about the setting, characters, and action in a story. Visualizing helps students understand descriptions of complex activities or processes.