

***Asking Questions and Determining Important Ideas in a
Non-Fiction Text
Linking Literature to the Curriculum
Intermediate, Secondary***

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Purpose/Objective

As educators, we are always searching for ways to help students to make meaning of non-fiction text. One of the challenges we have is helping students ask essential questions which will expand their thinking. We need to provide opportunities for students to ask thoughtful questions and to clarify and share their understanding both orally and in written format.

This strategy gives ample opportunity for all students (advanced learners, ESL, struggling readers/writers, etc.) to listen to opinions of others, ask questions, determine important ideas and share their understanding.

This strategy will also give students the background knowledge they need on a topic before beginning a more formal and in-depth study either through using a textbook or working on a research project.

Teaching the Lesson

Strategy: *Linking literature to the curriculum by asking questions and determining important ideas*

Lesson Text:

Picture books which hold the students' attention, prompt thoughtful questions and encourage meaningful discussion.

Classroom Supplies:

Three-column note form headed Facts/Questions/Response (FQR). The first two columns (facts/questions) elicit important information and provide opportunities for questions. The third column (response) is

added to encourage the students to think about their own reactions, opinions and feelings.

Connect and Engage:

In order for students to be intrigued by the topic and want to learn more, they need to have some background knowledge. Picture books are a great way to introduce a topic and to engage students in their learning.

Before introducing the picture books, ask students to turn to each other and talk for a minute about what they already know about the topic. Ask them if they can make any personal connections. This will provide time for the teacher to walk around and gain more insight into the level of understanding the students have around the topic.

Model:

The teacher models the kind of thinking she expects from the students, discussing what is being read by jotting down facts, questions and responses to the picture book being used. As the teacher goes through the book, students add their own facts and questions which the teacher records on an overhead or chart paper for everyone to see. At the same time, students record facts and questions on their own FQR form.

Please note:

During the modeling session the teacher should explain the difference between 'assessment' questions and more thought provoking questions.

Assessment questions include:

- Questions we know the answer to*
- Questions we ask in order to check or monitor students*

More thought provoking questions include:

- Questions we don't know the answers to*
- Questions we ponder and wonder about*
- Questions that require further research by both the teacher and student*

When asking more thought provoking questions we:

- Make connections to what we already know*
- Generate ideas*
- Ask more questions*
- Infer to make sense and find answers*

Once the teacher is confident the students understand how to gather facts, ask thoughtful questions and respond to their own questions, she moves on to the guided practice stage.

Guided Practice:

The teacher organizes the class into groups of approximately 4 students. Together, the students select, read and respond to the picture books provided, eventually rotating through them all (provide multiple copies if you have them).

Hint:

Students are usually eager to read and are engaged in the activity so in order to slow them down, suggest that they stop after each page or two to discuss their ideas and note important information and questions. As a result, students think more carefully about their reading and are able to focus and identify the most important ideas.

During the guided practice, the teacher walks around the room, making suggestions and providing guidance to ensure that students understand that they are recording the main facts as well as thoughtful questions based on those facts.

This interaction with the students also gives the teacher valuable information regarding their level of understanding and can adjust the activity and instruction accordingly. This is also an opportunity for teachers to assess students' oral language skills as they are working in a small group setting.

As the teacher observes the groups she should see students using reading strategies that would have been previously taught. Such strategies would include questioning, inferring, and determining the importance of the information they are reading. We also hope to see students not simply using these strategies to gain information, but to try and achieve insight into the topic.

Application:

As students work through the picture books, certain questions may come up again and again. During a class discussion, ask students to put an asterisk next to questions they found themselves still thinking about or were unable to answer even after having read several books.

Note:

When it comes time for students to pursue their own research question or the class begins a more in-depth study using a textbook, you will find that

most students will be curious about some topic or issue encountered in the books they read.

Share the Learning

After students have the opportunity to read several picture books and complete their FQR sheets, ask them to share their burning questions either with a larger group or with the whole group. This sharing of information also helps deepen their level of understanding of the topic.

Reflection and Assessment:

Did your students:

- ❑ Learn how ask thought provoking questions?
- ❑ Understand that is important to include their own thinking when they are reading?
- ❑ Use reading strategies to determine the main ideas in the text?
- ❑ Build on and extend their knowledge of the topic to arrive at a new insight?
- ❑ Share their thinking and show their understanding orally?
- ❑ Make connections to what they already know?
- ❑ Infer to make sense of information and to find answers?

