



LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION

Ways to engage students in the thinking process while they are reading fiction:

Effective reading instruction depends on the explicit teaching of decoding skills as well as the thinking processes required to make real meaning of the text. There are any number of strategies that can be used to teach students to deepen their thinking while reading. We have chosen to highlight six of these on the Strong Nations website. They have proven effective for all grade levels and curriculum areas and a brief description of each is provided below.

The six strategies that we chose to describe are suitable for all grade levels and curriculum areas. They will support a diverse range of students to engage in a more thoughtful reading experience. To be truly effective these strategies require explicit modeling and teaching. This takes time. If you were to consider allowing six to eight weeks for each strategy you should be able to introduce five of them within a school year. The following framework might help you with that planning:

Step 1: Modeling

- Introduce the strategy as a tool that can be used to help students become more thoughtful readers.
- Use appropriate literature to model the strategy with the students.
- Give explicit explanations and directions as you are modeling.
- Reflect on the process.

Step 2: Guided Practice

- Use appropriate literature to model the strategy.
- Create opportunities for the students to participate in the process.
- Provide encouragement and feedback.
- Have the students reflect on the process.

Step 3: Independent Practice

- Continue to provide modeling and practise.
- Create opportunities for the students to practise independently (individually, with partners, in small groups, and as a large group).
- Have students share and reflect on the process.
- Provide encouragement and feedback.



LESSON PLANS FOR READING CONNECTIONS

FICTION



Learning Strategy #1: Formulating Questions

Readers formulate questions when they wonder about the story before, during and after reading it. When talking to students about questioning it is important to emphasize that:

Asking and answering questions helps the reader to understand the text.

Some questions are easy to answer because the information is in the text.

Some questions require a lot of thinking because the answer is not in the book. These questions often do not have one right answer, make the reader think outside of the story and often create more questions for the reader.

Some useful questions words are: who, what, where, when, why, how, would, is, should, if, did, do are, does, doesn't, can't and couldn't.

Download a lesson plan for the titles below at: → www.StrongNations.com
→ Kids Books
→ Reading Connections

- Fox on the Ice

- Granny's Giant Bannock

- The Story of the Rabbit Dance

Learning Strategy #2: Making Connections

Readers connect to a story when something in that story evokes a memory. When talking to students about making connections it is important to emphasize that:

A reader makes a connection to a story when a memory surfaces.

Readers can make connections to many aspects of a book: the pictures, the characters, the events, and even the emotions expressed in the story.

There are several types of connections that a reader can make:

- connections between the book and the reader's own life
- connections between the book and other reading material the reader has encountered
- connections between the book and events in the reader's world



- Download a lesson plan for the titles below at:** → www.StrongNations.com
- I'm in Charge of Celebrations → **Kids Books**
 - The Wish Wind → **Reading Connections**

Learning Strategy #3: Making Inferences

Readers infer when they take what they know about a story and then fill in the information that was not included. When talking to students about inferring it is important to emphasize that:

Inferring helps the reader to better understand the story.

Readers need to look for clues in the pictures and the text as well as relying on their own background knowledge to fill in what is not written on the page.

Some authors deliberately write very little but leave the reader lots of clues to think about.

- Download a lesson plan for the titles below at:** → www.StrongNations.com
- Baseball Bats for Christmas → **Kids Books**
 - A Salmon for Simon → **Reading Connections**
 - Storm Boy

Learning Strategy #4: Predicting

Readers predict when they use their prior knowledge, as well as all of the information that they have gathered from the text and illustrations, to come up with a guess about what the story will be about. When talking to students about predicting it is important to emphasize that:

There is no right or wrong answer.

There are many clues in the text and in the pictures.

Their prediction might stay the same, or it might change, when new information is added to their prior knowledge.



Predicting is something that good readers do before they start reading a story.

Readers continue to predict while they are engaged in reading a story.

Download a lesson plan for the titles below at: → www.StrongNations.com

- A Promise is a Promise

→ **Kids Books**

→ **Reading Connections**

- A Team Like No Other

- A Dragonfly's Tale

- Hide and Sneak

- How Chipmunk Got His Stripes

- The Loon's Necklace

- The Star People—A Lakota Story

Learning Strategy #5: Transforming

Readers are transformed by what they read when they make a shift in their own thinking. When talking to students about transforming (synthesis) it is important to emphasize that:

Transforming means that they change the way they think about themselves and the world around them.

Transforming may not take place right away. The ideas, facts, questions and inferences that surface while reading the story may be stored away in their memories for a long time.

Download a lesson plan for the titles below at: → www.StrongNations.com

- Red Parka Mary

→ **Kids Books**

→ **Reading Connections**

- The First Strawberries



Learning Strategy #6: Visualizing

Readers visualize when they make images in their heads from the text that they are reading or that is being read to them. When talking to students about visualizing it is important to emphasize that:

Visualizing is easy to do.

Visualizing and connecting are very similar. The images that you create in your mind come from connecting the author's words to your memories.

There are many colourful words that help you create pictures (rainbows, etc.)

Download a lesson plan for the titles below at: → www.StrongNations.com

- Berry Magic

- Firedancers

- Frog Girl

- Goose Girl

→ **Kids Books**

→ **Reading Connections**



LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION

NONFICTION



Learning Strategy #1: Formulating Questions

Readers formulate questions when they wonder about the story before, during and after reading it. When talking to students about questioning it is important to emphasize that:

Asking and answering questions helps the reader to understand the text.

Some questions are easy to answer because the information is in the text.

Some questions require a lot of thinking because the answer is not in the book. These questions often do not have one right answer, make the reader think outside of the story and often create more questions for the reader.

Some useful questions words are: who, what, where, when, why, how, would, is, should, if, did, do are, does, doesn't, can't and couldn't.

Download a lesson plan for the titles below at: → www.StrongNations.com

- Fraser Bear—A Cub's Life → **Kids Books**
- National Aboriginal Day → **Reading Connections**

Learning Strategy #2: Making Connections

Readers connect to text when something evokes a memory. When talking to students about making connections it is important to emphasize that:

1. A reader makes a connection to a piece of text when a memory surfaces.
2. Readers can make connections to many aspects of a book: the illustrations, information in the charts, maps and diagrams, etc.
3. There are several types of connections that a reader can make:
 - connections between the book and the reader's own life
 - connections between the book and other reading material the reader has previously encountered
 - connections between the book and events in the reader's world



Learning Strategy #3: Making Inferences

Readers infer when they use their own knowledge and clues they find in the text to fill in the information that the author has left out. When talking to students about inferring it is important to emphasize that:

1. Inferring can help the reader to answer questions that s/he might have.
2. Inferring can help make the text more meaningful to the reader.
3. A reader often says “I think that...” when s/he is inferring.

Learning Strategy #4: What’s Important?

Readers are able to determine what is important when they can identify the main idea in a piece of nonfiction text. When talking to students about determining importance it should be emphasized that:

1. Nonfiction books are filled with information. Some of this information is really important because it is outlining the main idea of the text. Some of it is extra detail that is meant to help the reader get a clearer picture of the topic.
2. Visualizing the key ideas can help the reader to block out the extra details and to determine what is really important in the text.
3. Some nonfiction text is written in a sequence (recipes, model building instructions, experiments, etc.). Sketching or writing the events in the correct order will help to determine the main idea of the text.

Download a lesson plan for the titles below at: → www.StrongNations.com

- Building an Igloo

→ **Kids Books**

- Drum Making

→ **Reading Connections**

- The Inuksuk Book



Learning Strategy #5: Transforming

Readers are transformed by what they read when they make a shift in their own thinking. When talking to students about transforming (synthesis) it is important to emphasize that:

1. Transforming means that they change the way they think about themselves and the world around them.
2. Transforming may not take place right away. The ideas, facts, questions and inferences that surface while reading the text may be stored away in their memories for a long time.

Learning Strategy #6: Text Features

Readers use the features of nonfiction text to help find information about the topic they are interested in. When talking to students about the features of nonfiction text it is important to emphasize that:

1. Nonfiction text features help to make the important information easier to find.
2. Nonfiction text features usually highlight the most important pieces of information.

Some Common Nonfiction Text features:

labels, bold words, titles, headings, charts, table of contents, fact boxes, photographs, index, captions, italics, diagrams, maps, glossary, illustrations, graphs, webs, speech bubbles.

Download a lesson plan for the titles below at: → www.StrongNations.com

- Exploring the World of Coyotes

→ **Kids Books**

- Exploring the World of Eagles

→ **Reading Connections**

- Exploring the World of Wolves

- The Caribou Feed Our Soul

- The Inuit Thought of It



LEARNING TO SPEAK/SPEAKING TO LEARN: A GUIDE TO CLASSROOM TALK



Part 1: Structured Partner Talk

Introduction:

Classrooms right across our continent are filled with sounds of children engaged in structured and thoughtful talk. Educators realize that talking not only helps to develop their students' literacy skills but it is also a critical part of learning in all subject areas. Various types of talk (structured partner talk, social conversation, drama or role playing, rehearsed presentations, choral readings, etc.) can be utilized in the classroom depending on the targeted goals, the content area, the activity, and the age and experience of the children.

A Definition:

Classrooms right across our continent are filled with sounds of children engaged in structured and thoughtful talk. Educators realize that talking not only helps to develop their students' literacy skills but it is also a critical part of learning in all subject areas. Various types of talk (structured partner talk, social conversation, drama or role playing, rehearsed presentations, choral readings, etc.) can be utilized in the classroom depending on the targeted goals, the content area, the activity, and the age and experience of the children.

- Who? Structured partner talk is widely recognized as a powerful learning strategy for all students K-12 and beyond.
- What? Structured partner talk is a learning strategy that should have specific goals, clear expectations and a defined time.
- Where? Pair students together. Have them sit facing each other (toes facing toes, knees facing knees, shoulders facing shoulders). Students could be seated at their desks, around a table or on the floor.
- When? This strategy can be used in any content area.
- Why? Oral language is acknowledged to be an important part of the curriculum and accounts for a large percentage of the primary language arts programme.
- How? Develop criteria for structured partner talk with the students. Set clear expectations. Model each step. Have the students practise each step until they can demonstrate the ability to work independently.



A Framework:

- Step #1: The teacher sets a specific task (predicating the outcome of a science experiment, determining the main idea of a story, choosing a method for solving a problem, etc.).
- Step #2: The students are given time to think about the task on their own.
- Step #3: The students each turn to a predetermined talking partner and share their thoughts. The teacher keeps the talking time short (1 of 2 minutes is enough at first).
- Step #4: The students report out to the larger group.
- Step #5: The teacher encourages and thanks the speakers.

Some Tips for Success: Creating a Safe and Respectful Environment

1. Together the teacher and students develop criteria for what a good speaker and listener looks like (on the outside and the inside). For example:
 - a. On the outside a good listener looks at the speaker, sits still, acknowledges the speaker with a nod, does not interrupt, and asks questions only when it is appropriate.
 - b. On the inside a good listener stays focused, asks mental questions and tries to determine the main idea.
 - c. On the outside a good speaker waits until the listener is ready, sits or stands still, speaks clearly, speaks at an appropriate pace and stays on topic.
 - d. On the inside a good speaker is aware of the audience and stays focused.
2. The teacher posts the criteria on chart paper.
3. The teacher models the respectful behaviour.
4. The teacher introduces the steps for structured talk slowly and gives lots of time for the students to practise.

The teacher is consistent with the framework for structured talk and the expectations for student behaviour.

Some Ways to Choose Partners

Partners should be chosen prior to the lesson. Students should have the opportunity to talk to a variety of partners over the course of the year. Some ways to choose the partnerships are:

1. Arrange the students' desks in pairs. Have each student talk to their desk partner.
2. Randomly choose partners by pulling popsicle sticks or slips of paper with student names on, from a jar.
3. If the students are sitting together on the floor just ask them to turn and talk to someone sitting next to them.



Some Ways to Decide Who Will Talk First

Brainstorm with the students and then chart a variety of ways that partners can decide on who talks first. Some common responses are:

1. Play rock paper scissors.
2. The tallest/shortest/oldest/youngest/longest hair/ etc. goes first.
3. Students say: "You go first today, I'll go first tomorrow."

Choosing the Discussion Topic

Start with topics for which the students have lots of prior knowledge. Create questions that are open enough to elicit a variety of responses.

Some Ways to Report Out to the Larger Group (Reporting out is critical to holding students accountable for listening.)

1. Have the student use a prop that can be held in the hand like a microphone (a stick or a feather works well).
2. Have the student stand to report out.
3. Let the students know that they must all be prepared to report out. If anyone needs extra time have him/her go back to their partner for coaching. Be sure to return to them later for their response.
4. Have each student include their partner in the report out, if appropriate ("My partner and I thought that.....").
5. Don't have everyone report out on the same day and vary your selection methods for choosing the students to report out: choose by pulling the popsicle sticks from the jar, select students wearing running shoes, students wearing something red, students with an even number of letters in their names, etc.
6. Shy students could report out with the support of their partner.
7. Provide sentence frames or prompts when first starting out.
8. Have the chart of criteria for good speaking and listening clearly visible and refer to it frequently.

Introductory Lesson #1

Introducing Structured Partner Talk:

The following 3 lessons can be used as an initial introduction to structured partner talk. They can be adapted to suit a number of grade levels. Good listening and speaking skills need to be rehearsed and practised on a daily basis for a number of weeks-until partner talk becomes smoothly integrated into the culture of the classroom. After the students have practised talking about the concrete and familiar objects used in the lessons you could move to using literature as a basis for discussion.



Goal: To review the attributes of a good speaker and a good listener.

Materials: Criteria charts for good listeners and speakers (developed as a part of creating a safe and respectful environment)

1 paper plate for each student

Plasticine of various colours cut into small chunks

Before

1. Post the criteria charts where they can be seen by all students.
2. Call the students' attention to the charts. Review the criteria together. Add any new criteria that might come up during the discussion.
3. Explain that today you will be modeling good speaking skills (refer to the chart). Explain that the students' job will be to model good listening skills.

During

1. Explain that each student will receive a piece of plasticine and a paper plate. The plasticine rules are: It stays in your hand or on the plate. This is to prevent greasy marks on desk tops, plasticine being tracked around on the bottom of shoes, etc.
2. Distribute the materials. Have students put their names on the plates.
3. Have each student warm up the plasticine in their hands,
4. Teach the students the meaning of the following words and demonstrate the appearance of the shapes with your plasticine: sphere, pancake, snake, cylinder, and raindrop.
5. Have the students practise each of the shapes with their plasticine.
6. Have the students roll their plasticine back into a sphere shape.
7. Demonstrate how to make a snail with your plasticine (make a snake, roll it up on itself, use an extra little piece to make antennae).
8. Have each student make a snail and stand it up on the plate.
9. Invite a student to join you at the front of the classroom to help you model structured partner talk to the rest of the class.
10. Sit facing the student (toe facing toe, knee facing knee, shoulder facing shoulder).
11. Show the student your model snail, tell the student the snail's name and a number of interesting (and imaginary) facts about it.

After

1. Compliment the volunteer for being a good listener.
2. Have the students refer to the chart and invite 3 students to make a positive comment about the volunteer's listening skills.
3. Ask 3 students to make a positive comment on the way you modeled the speaking skills.



Introductory Lesson #2

Goal: To practise the attributes of a good speaker and a good listener.

Materials: Criteria charts for good listeners and speakers

1 paper plate for each student

Plasticine of various colours cut into small chunks

Before

1. Post the criteria charts where they can be seen by all students.
2. Call the students' attention to the charts. Review the criteria together.
3. Explain that today everyone will be practising their listening and speaking skills.

During

Step 1

1. Distribute the paper plates (their names were put on them in lesson #1)
2. Remind the students of the plasticine rules: It stays in your hand or on the plate.
3. Have the students squish up the snail and warm up the plasticine.
4. Have the students make each of the shapes they learned in Lesson #1: sphere, pancake, snake, cylinder and raindrop.
5. Have the students roll the plasticine back into a sphere shape.
6. Demonstrate joining two pieces of plasticine together to make the body of a ladybug (rough up the two joining surfaces, join them, smooth plasticine around the join). Join the legs and antennae in the same way.
7. Have the students practise the joining process by making a ladybug.
8. Have the students roll up the ladybug into a sphere.
9. Set the students this new task: Create an imaginary insect. It must have at least 3 body parts, 2 eyes, and 6 legs. Think of a name for the insect. Think of some interesting facts about it (food, habitat, enemies, defence mechanisms, etc.)
10. Give the class some time to complete the task.

Step 2

1. When the insects are finished they should be set firmly on the plates.
2. Invite a student volunteer to join you at the front of the classroom to help you model structured partner talk to the rest of the class.
3. Sit facing the student (toes facing toes, knees facing knees, shoulders facing shoulders).
4. Begin modeling good speaking skills by describing the details of the insect you have manufactured, to the volunteer. Point out certain features of the creature on the model. The volunteer demonstrates good listening skills as this is happening.



5. Thank the volunteer and ask for 3 positive comments from the class to highlight the good listening and speaking skills they had just observed.
6. Reverse the roles. While the student volunteer is speaking you can encourage by nodding, smiling, prompting with a question if the student hesitates, etc. Thank the student when s/he is finished and again invite 3 positive comments from the class.

Step 3

1. Ask class to sit (toe to toe, knee to knee, shoulder to shoulder) with their predetermined partner.
2. Ask the partner on the left to talk to their partner about their insect. Reverse the roles when the first speaker is finished.

After

1. Ask the students to reflect on their listening and speaking roles.
2. Have some students share with the larger group something that their partner had done really well during the practise.

Introductory Lesson #3

Goal: To practise the attributes of a good speaker and a good listener.

Materials: Criteria charts for good listeners and speakers
The students' paper plate and plasticine insects
Drawing paper and coloured crayons or pencils

Before

1. Post the criteria charts where they can be seen by all students.
2. Review the criteria with the class.
3. Encourage and compliment the students on their first practise.
4. Offer any suggestions for improving their practise.
5. Explain that today everyone is going to practise their listening and speaking skills.



During

Step 1

1. Show your plasticine insect model to the class.
2. Draw your own insect on the chalkboard. Label the insect with the most important information. Provide a caption underneath the drawing.
3. Distribute the students' models and the drawing paper.
4. Have the students draw and label their insects.
5. Have them provide a caption underneath the picture.
6. Have them colour the drawing.

Step 2

1. When the drawings are finished, invite a student volunteer to join you at the front of the classroom to help you model structured partner talk to the rest of the class.
2. Follow the same procedure as in Lesson #2.

Step 3

1. Have the class practise their listening and speaking skills with a partner following the same procedure as in Lesson #2 using their drawings as the basis of their conversation.

After

2. Ask the students to reflect on their listening and speaking roles.
3. Have some students share with the larger group something that their partner had done really well during the practise.



LEARNING TO SPEAK/SPEAKING TO LEARN: A GUIDE TO CLASSROOM TALK



Part 2: Rehearsed Talk

A Definition:

- Who? Rehearsed talk can be used as a learning strategy for students of all ages K-12 and beyond.
- What? Rehearsed talk should have specific goals, clear expectations and a defined time for students to rehearse and prepare what they are going to say.
- Where? Students can present to a partner, small group or the whole class.
- When? This strategy can be used in any content area.
- Why? Oral language is acknowledged to be an important part of the curriculum and accounts for a large percentage of the primary language arts programme.
- How? Develop criteria for rehearsed talk with the students. Set clear expectations. Model each step. Have the students practise each step until they can demonstrate the ability to work independently.

A Framework:

- Step #1: The teacher sets a specific task (reciting a poem, presenting a piece of information, giving directions, etc.).
- Step #2: Each student is given time to rehearse.
- Step #3: Each student makes the presentation (alone or in a small or large group).
- Step #4: The teacher encourages and thanks the speaker(s).

Some Tips for Success:

Create a Safe and Respectful Environment

Together the teacher and students develop criteria for what a good speaker and listener looks like (on the outside and the inside). For example:

On the outside a good listener looks at the speaker, sits still, acknowledges the speaker with a nod, does not interrupt, and asks questions only when appropriate.

On the inside a good listener stays focused, asks mental questions and tries to determine the main idea.

On the outside a good speaker waits until the listener is ready, sits or stands still, speaks clearly, speaks at an appropriate pace and stays on topic.

On the inside a good speaker is aware of the audience and stays focused.

The teacher posts the criteria on chart paper.

The teacher models the respectful behaviour.



The teacher introduces the steps for rehearsed talk and gives lots of time for the students to practise.

The teacher is consistent with the framework for rehearsed talk and the expectations for student behaviour.

Some Choices of Topics for Rehearsed Talk:

Students should start with topics for which they have lots prior knowledge, such as:

A song, poem, or chant for a special occasion or theme of study

The presentation of information for a theme of study

The giving of instructions for a game, event, science experiment, etc.

A book talk

The presentation of a model, piece of artwork, mask, etc.