

# Reading and sharing the books (1)

**R**ead from the class novel or picture book on a daily basis. It is worth taking the time to read the books through beforehand and thinking about where you might wish to stop for discussion or some sort of activity. Anyone can dream up 50 things to do with a book, but the key is to halt at moments where an activity or discussion is needed to deepen engagement and understanding.

On most occasions, picture books should be read straight through without endlessly stopping – the children want to hear the story! Only occasionally might there be a moment to pause where a situation has been set up and it is worth asking the children to think about the possibilities for what might happen next. However, a good picture book will demand re-reading over a number of days so that you can focus on different aspects of the story.

'Talk for Reading' is a form of comprehension that can be carried out with the class or with a small group. It involves an open discussion about a worthwhile text, intending to develop engagement and the ability to read critically, deepening understanding and therefore appreciation. This form of talk is highlighted constantly in the new National Curriculum in England and should take place often. The skill is for the teacher to become a *good listener*, prompting the children to do most of the wondering, thinking, exploring, suggesting and summarising.

## The principles of 'Talk for Reading'

- All ideas are accepted and given serious consideration.
- Everyone should think, try and 'have a go' at contributing.
- You can build on someone else's ideas.
- You can also challenge someone's ideas by putting forward alternative thoughts.

- Be ready to change your mind.
- Everyone must listen to each other.

The teacher's role is to instigate a conversation, acting as an interested listener and occasionally holding up an idea for further inspection by repeating what has been said. The teacher may also draw attention to certain sections of a book that might benefit from further thinking by focusing the children. The children are trained to read sentence-by-sentence (or image-by-image) from the beginning all the way through, tying ideas together as they go along, revising their thinking in the light of new information and making connections across a text. Much of the talk will hinge around what intrigues us as readers, constantly raising questions and putting forward possible interpretations. Make a list of tentative phrases that might help children talk, for example: *I'm not sure but... We wondered whether .... The writer seems to be suggesting that...*

Over time, the children move to a stage where they carry out almost all of the talking – often interpreting at length and talking through their understanding aloud. At first, this may have to be modelled by the teacher, but very soon the children will latch on to the idea. It is important though that the teacher does not dominate the thinking and talking.

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# Reading and sharing the books (2)

## Things to talk about might include:

- initial ideas, thoughts, feelings, memories, experiences, possibilities and questions;
- what did we imagine, think and feel;
- what might have happened before the passage;
- what might happen next – predicting and clarifying;
- statements about what the words mean – commenting, referring to the textual evidence;
- vocabulary – other words that might have been used;
- key words that provoke interest;
- how the writing is hooking the reader;
- inferences/deductions – work out from the clues in the text;
- possible meanings;
- re-reading constantly for fluency – to emphasise meaning;
- saying a sentence aloud using expression – discussing possible different ways of ‘saying’ the sentence, noticing punctuation;
- changing an idea in the light of new information/ events;
- seeing events from the different viewpoints of characters/sides of an argument;
- visualising – what you can see inside your head;
- reading the pictures, thinking about the effect of the image on the reader and considering the contrast between the words and the images;
- raising questions – wondering;
- making connections with our own experiences or making connections between books;
- reading as a writer – discussing organisation, sentence patterns, word choice in relation to effect – the writing style;
- drawing the threads together – summarising;
- discussing the overarching theme or line of argument – evaluation and personal preferences.

It is important that the children do not have to play ‘guess what is in teacher’s head’. The teacher is interested in developing the children’s thinking, though it is worth remembering that the teacher is not the sole provider of wisdom. Through gradual scaffolding

and building on each other’s thoughts, as well as challenging, we can discuss collectively and co-construct new thinking, deepening understanding. When this is done well, the teacher will find their own understanding deepened with new insights gathered from the children. The teacher’s role is to listen, to reflect, to focus attention and to help children deepen engagement and understanding.

As the Reading Spine has been carefully selected, you will find that there are links between the themes and concerns of many of the stories. *In which ways are they alike or different?* It is this sort of talk that should become a byword for working with the Reading Spine. These are intriguing, deep and challenging books. There will be much to discuss. This should become a habit so that children constantly get the most out of quality literature and think deeply, carefully and cautiously to illuminate their thinking. This should constitute every child’s experience of reading.

**Please note:** for each year group the books have been set out in the order in which they might be read, as the final books in each section tend to be more demanding. Always read the books first to decide if they are appropriate. Read Aidan Chamber’s book *Tell Me* (Thimble Press) for more about oral comprehension.

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