

Questioning: A Reading Comprehension Strategy

Saskatchewan School Library Association

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SASKATCHEWAN SCHOOL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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Teacher Notes on Questioning:

1. Asking questions is something that we as humans do on a daily basis in many different areas of our personal and academic lives. Some of the reasons that we ask questions when we are reading are to:
 - clarify meaning
 - word definition
 - make a guess about what is to come
 - determine the author's intent, style, content, and format.
 - locate a specific answer in the text
 - consider other questions inspired by the text
2. If a reader is asking questions they are more likely to come up with better predictions as to what the piece of text is about. Many times our predictions are based on the text features that we immediately see and question.
3. Good readers always come up with questions **before, during, and after** reading a specific piece of text and they understand that there are different types of questions that will help them better understand what they are reading.
4. Good readers understand that many questions are not answered in the text but are left up to the reader's interpretation. However, when an answer is needed, good readers determine whether it can be answered from the text, their background knowledge and/or other pieces text.
5. There are 3 different types of questions:
 - a. Right There Questions – You can find the answer right in the text. Examples: Define...Who did... When... Right-There questions do not require much thought to answer; therefore they are referred to as Thin Questions.
 - b. Think and Search Questions – The answer is in the text, although it may come from multiple parts of the text. Examples: What would happen if...What makes you think... Explain how...
 - c. On My Own Questions – The answer is inside your head. You use the text and what you already know to answer the questions. On My Own questions require a deeper level of thought; that is why they are referred to as Thick Questions. Examples: What was your reaction to... In your opinion... How do you feel...

Prison by Deborah Ellis

Introduction and Modelling:

1. Create a T-Chart on your chalk or white board with the headings: Questions and Potential Answers.
2. Put up onto the overhead, data projector, or interactive whiteboard the piece of text called *Prison*. This four-paragraph passage is found in the following book: Ellis, D. (2005). *Our Stories, our songs: African children talk about aids*. Markham, ON: Fitzhenry & Whitesides. p.38 -39.
3. Read *Prison* to the students making special note to stop and model asking any questions that may come up as you are reading it. Be sure to accept any questions that the students have as well. You can either use sticky-notes to write questions on or write them directly on the board in the column “Questions”. Tell the students that if they have questions they can write them on a sticky note and place them in the question column of the chart. Should you happen to come across an answer to a question that has been asked be sure to record its answer in the “Potential Answer” column. You will find that some students will begin to provide answers to questions. We are not on an answer finding mission but instead are formulating questions that will lead us to a deeper understanding of what we are reading. We are just coming up with questions for now.
4. Some possible suggested questions follow. Please feel free to come up with ones on your own to authenticate the questioning process. Don't assume that the students are going to know specific things.
 - a. Where is Lilongwe?
 - b. What kind of a prison is it?
 - c. What is maize?
 - d. Why would the prisoners be wearing white uniforms while working in the fields?
 - e. Are the guards poor because they live in “shacks” with their families?
 - f. What is a parcel?
 - g. If the men who are sentenced wear white, are other men in different coloured uniforms?
 - h. What would the different coloured uniforms mean?
 - i. Why would men, boys, and women be in the same prison?
 - j. How is it that the women are no longer able to feel their babies and resort to killing them?
 - k. What does a welfare officer do?

- l. What does the Youth Watch Society do?
- m. Where is the Youth Watch Society based?
- n. What does industry mean?
- o. How do you make soap?
- p. What ingredients are in soap?
- q. Why is the author waiting for some boys?
- r. If both men and women are in the same prison, why are the men in the fields and the women are not?

5. Explain to students that readers who questions what they are reading will always come to a better level of understanding of the text that they read. Explain that they need to use other portions of the text as proof to help them formulate questions.
6. Model the thinking process that you go through when one of your questions may be answered, or if new questions come up.
7. Go through the list of questions:
 - a. Are some of these questions answered in this piece of text?
 - b. Where could we find answers to the questions that are left?
8. Suggest that when reading a novel or a longer piece of text students keep a journal or a stack of sticky notes close by to use for questioning. Sticky notes on the page make it easier to locate where you had questions and will possibly help when you go finding answers.

Sticky Questions

1. As the students are reading their novel/article/piece of chosen text they are to make note of any questions that they have on sticky notes so that they can begin to isolate their thinking processes.
2. You could ask them to come up with a minimum number of questions for the time that they are reading. 7-10 is a good starting point for a half hour of reading.
3. They are to stick the sticky note in the place where the question occurred to them.
4. Instruct students to keep the sticky notes there because they will be used in the next activity.

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 - c. On My Own Questions – The answer is inside your head. You use the text and what you already know to answer the questions. On My Own questions require a deeper level of thought; that is why they are referred to as Thick Questions. Examples: What was your reaction to... In your opinion... How do you feel...
2. Go through and explain the differences between the questions.
3. Ask the students to go back to the sticky note questions that they had identified last time and they are to identify each as one of the three types of questions and then as a Thin or a Thick Question.
4. Provide students with the 3-Types of Questions Collection Sheet for recording their questions.

3-Types of Questions Collection Sheet

“Where are the Answers?” There are 3 types of questions.

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- c. On My Own Questions – The answer is inside your head. You use the text and what you already know to answer the questions. On My Own questions require a deeper level of thought; that is why they are referred to as Thick Questions. Examples: What was your reaction to... In your opinion... How do you feel...

Right-There	Think and Search	On My Own

Before, During, and After Lesson

1. It is important to use a piece of text that is easy to read through in one class period as well as one that the students have not had the opportunity to read through before. A great picture book selection is *You Are Special* by Max Lucado.
2. Ask the students to take out three pieces of loose leaf paper. Label each with the date, the title of the story being used, and one of each of the following titles in a T-Chart:
 - a. Questions I Have **Before** Reading this Story
 - b. Questions I Have **During** the Reading of this Story
 - c. Questions I Have **After** Reading this Story
3. The other half of each T-Chart will have the title "Potential Answers".

Date

Title of story or article

Questions I have _____ Reading	Potential Answers

- Using sticky notes or just by writing on each chart student will individually come up with questions that they have for each of the three sections.
- Show students the cover of the book You are Special. Don't give out any information regarding the story or author. Go through the book page by page and show the illustrations to the students. Finally show them the back cover. As you are doing this have the students record any questions that they have from the viewing the front and back covers illustrations, as well as all of the illustrations that are in the book on the "Questions I Have **Before** Reading this Story" T-Chart. Invite them to share a question or two with a partner and predict a potential answer.
- Re-focus the students attention to the **During** Reading T-Chart. Read the story to the students, showing the illustrations again, and asking them to record any questions that they have while the story is being read.
- Ask students to record questions that they may have **After** reading the story on the last T-Chart.
- Discuss as a class some of the questions that were posed in each of the three sections and what some of the answers might have been. Be sure to recognize and note the difference between Thin and Thick Questions using the students' examples.
- Invite students to go back to see if any of their own questions had been answered from information in the text. Have them record the answers where they are most appropriate. Not all questions will have answers but, in that case, an idea of how the answer could be obtained should be noted.

Evaluation Suggestions:

1. Student questions on sticky notes or written on charts
2. Completed “Before, During and After Reading” T-Charts
3. Attempted answers to questions or a plan of where to obtain an answer is noted.
4. Positive and purposeful participation in class

Sources

Ellis, D. (2005). *Our Stories, our songs: African children talk about aids*. Markham, ON: Fitzhenry & Whitesides.

Lucado, M. (2007). *You are special*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.