Dialogic thinking for stories

Teaching strategies for reading comprehension

Best for:

- Year level: 5–9
- Phase of learning: deep

Overview

Description	Through discussion and collaboration, students learn to reflect on and think critically about an issue central to a story.
	The strategy can be readily adapted to support critical interpretations of texts in any learning area, e.g.
	- articles about sustainability in the design of products in Years 5–6 Design and Technologies
	- primary sources about iconography in Mayan societies in Year 7 History
	- texts about the impact of changes and transitions in relationships in Years 9–10 Health and Physical Education.
Learning focus (based on National Literacy Learning Progression)	**Comprehension** - recognise that texts can present different points of view (UnT7) - identify supporting evidence in a text (UnT7) - draw inferences and verifies using textual evidence (UnT8) - identify different interpretations of the text citing evidence from a text (UnT9) - evaluate reasoning and evidence (UnT10) - analyse the author's perspectives in texts (UnT10) - select and cite the most appropriate evidence from a text to support an argument or opinion (UnT11) - evaluate the social, moral and ethical positions taken in texts (UnT11) **Processes** - identify language features used to present opinions or points of view (UnT8)
Teacher preparation	- Select a narrative text that can be approached from more than one point of view. - Model the strategy and provide students with a completed example of a dialogic thinking table — see Appendix: Dialogic thinking model. Download the *Dialogic thinking template* and *Dialogic thinking model*. Make these available to students.

Suggested implementation

Read the story

1. Ask students to read the entire story independently or use guided reading for students who are developing readers.

2. As a whole class, summarise the story, e.g. using a story map. Ensure that all students understand the story well enough to take part in the discussion phase.

Consider the central question

3. Download, print and display an enlarged, blank version of the *Dialogic thinking template* (shown in Table 1), ensuring it is legible from a distance. Write the central question, and two possible interpretations that will be the focus for discussion.

Table 1: Dialogic thinking template

Central question:

	Supporting evidence from text and reasoning	Accurate	Relevant
Interpretation A			
Interpretation B			

Insert additional rows for further interpretations, supporting evidence and reasoning, as necessary.
See Appendix: Model — dialogic thinking table for a completed sample.

4. Ask students whether they prefer either interpretation based on their understanding of the story. Students can draw on the text and activate their prior knowledge to consider their initial response to the central question. This also allows you to assess students' initial positions for comparison with later positions informed by close reading.

Identify reasons

5. Ask students to identify the reasons and evidence for supporting the interpretation. You may help by questioning and/or rephrasing. Accept all reasons and evidence initially. List them on the chart.

Evaluate reasons

6. As a class, evaluate the evidence and reasons using criteria such as accuracy and relevance. When introducing the strategy, indicate Yes (Y) or No (N) for accuracy and

relevance, or alternatively use a tick or cross. Additional responses could be added as appropriate, e.g. probably, possibly, unsure, more facts needed.

Only reasoning based on verifiable text information and background knowledge should be used as the basis for a decision. Students should return to the text to check or clarify reasoning and evidence, including the accuracy of quotations.

7. After reasons and evidence have been verified, ask students to consider the strength of support for each interpretation. Students must think critically about what is important and relevant in making informed interpretations of texts. Students may also wish to suggest alternative conclusions at this time.

Synthesising interpretations

8. At the end of the lesson, students can talk or write, in small groups or individually, about their response to the central question, drawing together the threads of the preceding thinking and discussion. Students who have not yet decided can explain their reasons and (if necessary) consider advice on reaching a conclusion.

Variations

A Use language and symbols that are age appropriate, e.g. emoticons could be used instead of words and phrases.

B Assign numerical weightings to evidence and/or reasons, e.g.

- 1 = significant
- 2 = neutral
- 3 = weak or trivial

C Consider adapting the strategy for the interpretations of texts in Science, Humanities and Social Sciences, Health and Physical Education, and Technologies.

Further reading

- This strategy supports the processes of analysis and evaluation. Information about these and other cognitive verbs in the Australian Curriculum (including toolkits for primary and Years 7–10) are available from www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/p-10/aciq/frequently-used-resources/cognitive-verbs.

- For more information about promoting dialogic classroom talk across year levels and learning areas:

  Gillies, R 2019, *Promoting Academic Talk in Schools: Global practices and perspectives*, Abingdon and New York, Routledge.

  Jones, P, Simpson, A & Thwaite, A (eds) 2018, *Talking the Talk: Snapshots from Australian classrooms*, Newtown, NSW, PETAA.

Acknowledgment

This strategy draws on ideas from Commeyras, M. 1993, 'Promoting critical thinking through dialogical-thinking reading lessons', *The Reading Teacher*, vol. 46, no. 6, pp.486–494.

Appendix: Dialogic thinking model

This model is based on recent versions of the 19th century fairytale *Goldilocks and the three bears*.

Model 1 Dialogic thinking about Goldilocks

Central question: Was the behaviour of Goldilocks ethical?

	Supporting evidence from text and reasoning	Accurate	Relevant
Interpretation A Goldilocks behaved in a criminal manner.	Enters house of the three bears without permission — this is criminal behaviour (break and entry).	Yes (according to the law)	Yes
	Creates mayhem — tastes each bowl of porridge and eats all of baby bear's; breaks baby bear's chair; tries every bed and falls asleep in baby bear's bed. She has no respect for the property of strangers.	Yes	Possibly
	Why is Goldilocks in the forest at such an early hour? Why is she so tired and hungry? This behaviour seems suspicious.	More facts needed to decide	Possibly
	An honest person would wait outside until the owners returned.	Possibly	Possibly
Interpretation B Goldilocks did what was required in her situation.	Goldilocks is lost and needing help.	Possibly	Possibly
	Although she enters the house while the bears are absent, she is clearly desperately hungry and tired. Why else would she indulge in this behaviour?	Possibly but no real evidence	Possibly
	Even though baby bear's chair breaks, it is hardly her fault — obviously faulty workmanship is to blame.	Possibly but no evidence to support	Possibly
	Trying the different bowls of porridge and each of the mattresses on the beds is certainly impolite and fussy. However, Goldilocks is young and not thinking straight and this is certainly not criminal behaviour.	Partially	Possibly