Guidance for teachers

Teaching strategies for reading comprehension in Years 3–9

Purpose

The teaching strategies in this series enhance the classroom practices that support implementation of the Reading and viewing element of the Literacy general capability.

The Reading and viewing element consists of four complementary sub-elements:

- Phonological awareness

- Phonic knowledge and word recognition

- Fluency

- Understanding texts.

The focus of this series is the sub-element 'Understanding texts', which 'describes how students learn, apply, integrate and adapt strategies and skills as they engage with increasingly complex texts, for a range of purposes' (ACARA 2010 to present). Strategies that develop an understanding of texts will support students to apply appropriate processes, develop and use vocabulary, and comprehend (make meaning).

Each teaching strategy includes an overview, a step-by-step guide to using the strategy, and additional resources such as ready-to-use templates and models (see Appendix: Strategy factsheet — annotated sample). These strategies can be used in professional development across year levels, departments and/or faculty groups.

Learning goal

This series provides teachers with practical teaching strategies and resources that support students to understand increasingly complex texts.

The process of reading

The Active view of reading, developed by Nell Duke and Kelly Cartwright (2021), is a model of reading that draws on recent research to update aspects of earlier models — such as the Big 6, the Simple view of reading (SVR) and Scarborough's rope model (see Parkin 2020 for further information). The Active view of reading model provides a broad context for the sub-elements of reading in the Literacy general capability v9.0.

As Figure 1 shows, reading involves several components: active self-regulation, word recognition, language comprehension and bridging processes. In the early years, reading instruction focuses heavily on the systematic, explicit development of word recognition, i.e. foundational decoding skills, including phonic knowledge, and several of the bridging processes. Fluent decoding reduces cognitive load, allowing readers to focus on comprehending written texts.

Models of reading can assist teachers to identify student reading strengths and aspects of reading that might benefit from targeted teacher support. For example, evidence shows students with effective word recognition and language comprehension can still struggle to read. Using the Active view of reading model, a teacher might identify opportunities to support students' self-regulation or their use of one or more bridging processes.

Figure 1: Active view of reading model (Duke & Cartwright 2021)
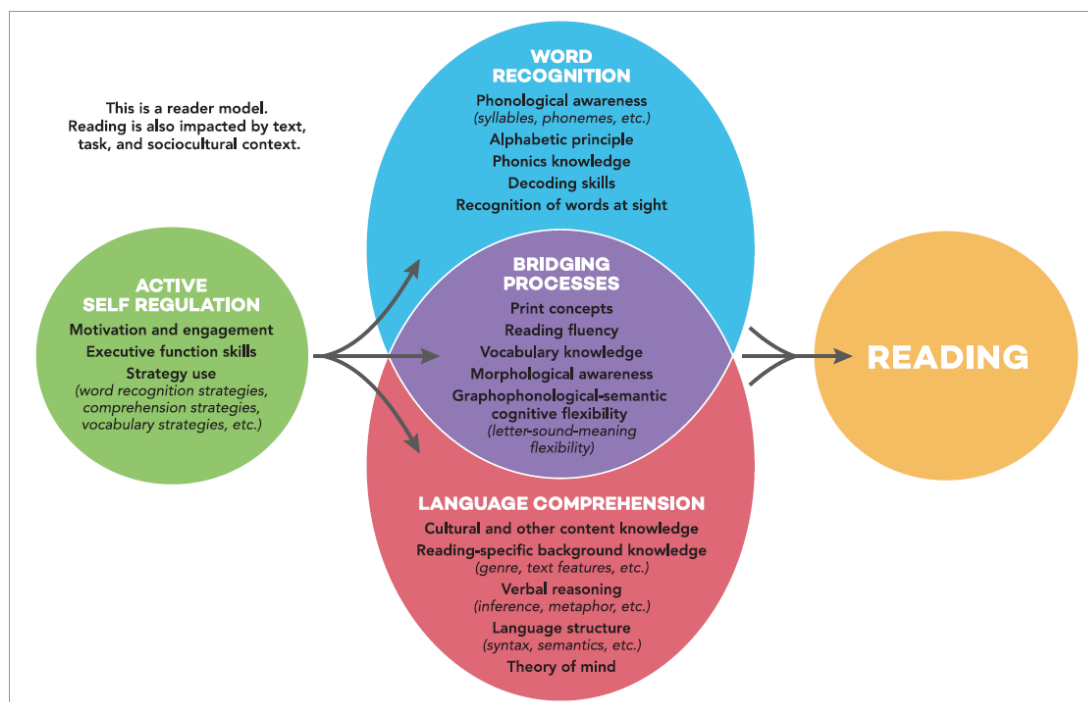
Teaching strategies within phases of learning

This series presents each teaching strategy for developing understanding of texts (including comprehension, processes and vocabulary) in the phase of learning the strategy is likely to be most suitable for. The phases of learning identified by Fisher, Frey & Hattie (2016) are:

- **surface learning** — the initial phase when students first encounter knowledge and skills, often in the form of explicit teaching

- **deep learning** — the phase when students make connections across concepts and knowledge, participating in active discussions to unpack and make sense of their reading (and viewing)

- **transfer of learning** — during which students take responsibility for their own learning, comparing concepts and knowledge across texts, and responding to new situations by applying their skills and understandings.

Each phase builds on the other, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Strategies for developing understanding of texts

Surface learning	Deep learning	Transfer learning
- KWL - Oral (or zip) cloze - Possible sentences for vocabulary - Reading aloud - Skimming and scanning - Talking places/graffiti walls	- Dialogic thinking for stories - Expert panel - Reciprocal teaching - Story map - Understanding concepts through texts - Vocabulary map	Inquiry chart (I-chart)

Selecting the strategies

Teachers select strategies to meet the needs of students in their contexts — including phases of learning — with the goal of supporting students to understand texts, particularly through the development of vocabulary knowledge and language comprehension.

Using the strategies across learning areas

The development of reading is a responsibility of teachers in all learning areas and subjects. Most of the strategies are suitable or can be adapted for use across several learning areas, e.g. in Humanities and Social Sciences, Health and Physical Education, and Science, students can use skimming and scanning to locate relevant information and the I-chart to support note-making.

While strategies such as dialogic thinking for stories may seem most suitable for English and The Arts, they can be adapted to support critical interpretations of texts in any learning area, e.g. articles about sustainability in product design in Years 5–6 Design and Technologies, primary sources about iconography in Mayan societies in Year 7 History, and texts about the impact of changes and transitions in relationships in Years 9–10 Health and Physical Education.

Using the strategies across phases of learning

Most strategies can provide opportunities to develop literacy skills at different levels of progression. For example, expert panel can be used to support students in important surface skills such as the identification of main ideas. However, for students with well-developed literacy skills, the same strategy can be used to support them in evaluating ethical positions taken in a text.

Developing understanding of texts

A reader's prior experience and background knowledge (cultural, general and discipline-specific) plays a key role in their comprehension. Current research suggests that readers are more likely to develop reading skills, such as inferring and locating main ideas, when they are acquiring knowledge (see Dombek et al. 2017; Cabell & HyeJin 2020; Smith et al. 2021).

As part of a broader reading program, teachers can promote wide, independent reading to provide skilled readers with the opportunity to use the knowledge they are acquiring and to add to their bank of knowledge and associated vocabulary. Extended, independent writing allows students to refine understandings and integrate new learnings with prior knowledge. This can assist with long-term retention and accessibility of knowledge (Fisher, Frey & Hattie 2017).

Selecting texts for reading

The ACARA (2010 to present) definition of texts states 'Texts include components of print, image, sound, animation and symbolic representations, in a range of forms including digital forms'. Texts used with students should contain relevant, discipline-specific vocabulary and involve appropriate stretch for all students.

For students still developing skills in reading, a cohesive, coherent text (e.g. a text that signals causal relationships explicitly and has a clearly defined structure) supports comprehension (Smith et al. 2021). Additionally, students will be more motivated to read if the topic is engaging, they can perceive relevance, the content is novel and surprising, the text is visually appealing and it matches their reading ability (Kim et al. 2017, Kim et al. 2020, Lepper et al. 2021). These texts can be read independently or shared with a teacher in a read aloud.

References

ACARA 2010 to present, 'Reading and viewing: Understanding texts', *Literacy general capability*, ACARA, Sydney, https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/literacy?element=1&sub-element=3

Cabell, S & HyeJin, H 2020, 'Building content knowledge to boost comprehension in the primary grades', *Reading Research Quarterly*, pp. S99–S107, https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.338.

Dombek, J, Elizabeth, C, Spencer, M, Tighe, E, Coffinger, S, Zargar, E, Wood, T & Yaacov, P 2017, 'Acquiring science and social studies knowledge in kindergarten through fourth grade: Conceptualisation, design, implementation, and efficacy testing of content-area literacy instruction (CALI)', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, pp. 1–44, https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000128.

Duke, N & Cartwright, K 2021, 'The science of reading progresses: Communicating advances beyond the simple view of reading', *Reading Research Quarterly*, pp. 1–20, https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.411.

Fisher, D, Frey, N & Hattie, J 2016, *Visible learning for literacy: Implementing the practices that work best to accelerate student learning*, Corwin, Thousand Oaks, California.

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Kim, J, Hemphill, L, Troyer, M, Thomson, J, Jones, S, LaRusso, M & Donovan, S 2017, 'Engaging struggling adolescent readers to improve reading skills', *Reading Research Quarterly*, pp. 357–382, www.jstor.org/stable/26622571.

Kim, J, Relyea, J, Burkhauser, M & Fitzgerald, J 2020, 'Improving reading comprehension, science domain knowledge and reading engagement through a first-grade content literacy intervention', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, pp. 1–67, https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000465.

Lepper, C, Stang, J & McElvany, N 2021, 'Gender differences in text-based interest: Text characteristics as underlying variables', *Reading Research Quarterly*, pp. 1–18, https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.420.

Smith, R, Snow, P, Serry, T & Hammond, L 2021, 'The role of background knowledge in reading comprehension: A critical review', *Reading Psychology*, pp. 214–240, https://doi.org/10.1080/02702711.2021.1888348.

Further reading

Fisher, D, Frey, N & Hattie, J 2017, *Teaching Literacy in the Visible Classroom*, Corwin, Thousand Oaks, California.

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Parkin, B 2020, 'Reading models: Putting the jigsaw together', PETAA paper 221, PETAA – Primary English Teaching Association Australia, Marrickville, Australia, www.petaa.edu.au/w/Teaching_Resources/PPs/PETAA-PAPER-221.aspx/#Simple.

Appendix: Strategy factsheet — annotated sample

ACiQ|v9.0

Name of strategy

Dialogic thinking for stories
ACiQ|v9.0

Teaching strategies for reading comprehension

Best for:

Deep learning · Years 5–9

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 Literacy general capability — Reading and viewing progression: Understanding texts)	**Comprehension** • recognise that texts can present different points of view (P7) • identify supporting evidence in a text (P7) • draw inferences and verifies using textual evidence (P8) • identify different interpretations of the text, citing evidence from a text (P9) • evaluate reasoning and evidence (P10) • analyse the author's perspectives in texts (P10) • analyse the credibility and validity of primary and secondary sources (P11) • evaluate the social, moral and ethical positions taken in texts (P11) **Processes** • identify language features used to present opinions or points of view (P8)
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.

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Outer ring
A green arrow indicates the level of learning as surface, deep or transfer.

Inner ring
The yellow circle indicates suitability of the strategy for particular year levels.

A brief description of the strategy is provided.

Learning focus
The learning focus is based on the Understanding texts element of the Literacy general capability and is written in the form of possible learning goals. In most cases, the strategy can be adapted to suit students at different levels of literacy development.

Teacher preparation
Preparation for implementing the strategy is suggested.

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

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Suggested implementation
Step-by-step guidance is provided for implementing the strategy. These are written from the perspective of teacher actions. Where relevant, resources and examples are provided.

Icons
A blue T or M icon indicates that a downloadable template or model (completed sample) is available.

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.

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Variations
Where relevant, variations (including extension work) will be suggested. However, teachers are encouraged to create further adaptations to suit their own context and purposes.

Further reading
Where relevant, suggestions about additional resources and readings are provided.

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

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Appendixes
Appendixes contain copies of templates and lengthy examples. These are also separately available as printable templates.

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