

What is an Interactive Read Aloud?

An interactive read aloud is a teaching structure consisting of a series of purposeful teaching actions. The interactive read-aloud enables the teacher to model thinking processes essential to the reading processes, and demonstrate how to recruit skills and strategies one uses when reading to make meaning.

The major goal is for students to understand that reading is a thinking and problem solving process. The structure helps young readers “see” how an expert reader (the teacher) thinks about the text to make meaning. In this form of the read-aloud the teacher invites students to actively participate to make meaning.

Planning an Interactive Read-Aloud

Choosing Mentor Texts

To start, begin by selecting Mentor Texts. Mentor texts are a collection of texts to include narrative and expository texts of all types-picture books, poems, magazines, etc. Teachers use mentor texts for interactive read-alouds throughout the school year, but it is especially important to introduce all the mentor texts at the start of the school year. Subsequently, mentor texts are reused at point-of-need to teach specific skills and strategies directly and explicitly.

There are many considerations for selecting a mentor text for a read-aloud; among the options are the following to consider:

- Will students enjoy the text?
- Is there a big idea to explore?
- Are there opportunities for thinking deeply?
- Do students have the necessary background knowledge?
- What are the vocabulary demands? What words, if any, should be addressed before reading?
- Are the illustrations compelling?

Using Mentor Texts For Instruction

Mentor texts are used repeatedly throughout the school year. Following introduction, the texts are used to teach reading strategies, skills, text type, or an author’s purpose for example. There are two important reasons why mentor texts are reused to teach skills and strategies: students are familiar with the text and can focus on the target skill or strategy being taught; the second reason is teaching a target skill or strategy is made easier when students are familiar with a text and the context used to teach the target skill or strategy. Familiarity with the text enables students to better gain an understanding of when, why, and how to utilize the skill or strategy.

It is recommended that mentor texts be organized in a continuum or learning pathway. Pathways are characterized by a sequence that progresses from concrete to more abstract examples. For instance, characters in some texts, especially at lower reading levels, are fairly static. They do not change much from the start of the story to the end. Their behaviors are essentially consistent and predictable. In most of these texts, the character typically learns a lesson but does not change much if at all. In more advanced texts, characters are much more complicated.

How Many Mentor Texts?

Select about a dozen picture books and other types of text such as textbooks, magazine, etc. to serve as mentor texts. The texts should be short. Ideally no more than 32 pages for a picture books and fewer pages for an informational text.

How To Read The Text To Students

When reading to students, use your voice to highlight key thinking/problem solving stopping points. “Underline” the vocabulary by using voice to suggest a new or interesting word or phrase and call attention to its use by the author. Notice and talk about key text elements, clues, and key ideas found in the text.

To start, establish and work backwards from the big idea in a narrative text (theme). For informational text, identify what the author is trying to teach the reader (main reason for writing the piece). Going forward in this document, the term Big Idea will be used for both narrative and informational text.

The next planning move is to locate key **Stopping Points** in the text that will help students deduce meaning. Locate FACT! clues for narrative text and 5WH stopping points for expository text.

Think-aloud to demonstrate your thinking for these aspects of the text. Show students by modeling how authors of narrative text deliberately provide clues to meaning without directly stating what they want readers to infer. These signals help students understand the important elements that go into understanding and thinking deeply about text.

Think-alouds stopping points should be scripted and use familiar and friendly student language that makes clear the clues the teacher noticed concerning the FACT! and 5WH stopping points.

There can be any number of places the teacher can choose to stop and think but it is suggested that the teacher choose three stopping points. Three stopping points are generally sufficient for teacher think-alouds. Other stopping points should be selected for when teachers bring students into the thinking work to help the meaning making process.

Front Loading an Interactive Read-aloud

It is sometimes necessary to “front load” an interactive read-alouds students need supportive background knowledge or vocabulary support to process the text. Front loading activates and builds knowledge that students need before reading to comprehend the text’s key or big ideas.

Meaning making requires students to call up deeper thinking processes such as inference, synthesis, and drawing conclusions because authors may present the character’s thoughts, actions, feelings directly in narrative text. Similarly, writers of expository text may provide a detail but not explain its significance that requires students to make an inference.

What Vocabulary Is Taught Before, During, and After Reading

Begin by considering the speaking vocabulary of the class. A read aloud text, or mentor text, should engage students at the edge of their speaking vocabulary, usually a grade or two above their grade-level. When planning, identify words to be targeted for vocabulary develop-

ment. Technical words, or unfamiliar words essential to understanding the text ,can be addressed before reading. The number of words addressed before reading should be limited in number with others addressed in context during reading.

Target vocabulary words should be those unfamiliar words that are useful words that have different levels of utility. These words are words found across a variety of texts and are words that characterize mature language users. Examples are conclude, coincidence, absurd, industrious, and fortunate. Also, include words FOR DIRECT INSTRUCTION that are found in STAAR questions.

Moreover, when the text has few unfamiliar or candidate words for instruction, teachers should consider including words not in the text but those about the text or topic. Select interesting words that relate to the topic or some other aspect of the text. Such words can be introduced by describing that feature of the text and offering another word that fits the text.

For example, in the text *Fly Away Home* Andrew, the main character, is careful not to get notice. A good word that captures his behavior not to get noticed is vigilant. The word vigilant is not in the text. The teacher could say, “Another way to say that Andrew was careful not to get noticed is to say he was vigilant about his behavior not to get noticed.

Target vocabulary words should be quickly covered in context during reading, and taught directly and explicitly after reading. Such words should be taught in the context in which they were used in the text using words students already know and use to explain the meaning of the target word. It is suggested that students keep a reading journal or, in addition, a vocabulary journal. Avoid the temptation to provide multiple meanings and homographs for the target word.

Introducing a Narrative Text

When introducing a **narrative** mentor text, the primary goal is for students to develop an understanding of the text’s big idea(,e.g., the author’s message). The big idea is an important understanding that the author wants the students to apply to their own lives. Students should come to understand that characters have wants, needs, and goals. That sometimes those are obvious, but sometimes not so easily perceived. Attention should be directed to notice the motives, actions, and behaviors that make clear what drives the characters as they struggle to pursue their goals. Additionally, students should begin to “see” how story grammar works. Attention should be directed to other story grammar elements such as how setting affects the story line, how the plot develops and changes, and how the resolution plays out. Instruction in more complex texts should be directed to how some resolutions must be inferred because a resolution is not clearly presented.

Introducing an Informational Text

For informational text, students need to be able to identify the text type, understand how it works, and discern the author’s purpose for writing the text. The use of the 5WH Smart Strategy™ has proven to support deeper understanding of the author’s purpose and the main idea of the text.

to deduce that Andrew feels trapped in the airport just as the bird is trapped. This is a pivotal point in the story that helps the young reader begin to understand that Andrew doesn’t want to live in the airport. This scene helps readers understand that Andrew and does not want to live in the airport(some students actually think it would be cool to live in an airport). Additionally,

Mentor texts are revisited often to teach specific skills and strategies. The reason that mentor texts are reused instead of an unfamiliar text is because students know the story line. They know the author's message and understand why the author wrote the text. This enables the reader to focus on the skill or strategy that is being taught and not think about the story line.

When recruited for additional use, the entire mentor text is not read. Instead, only the section of the text that is to be used for the current lesson is reread by the teacher. Teachers may find it necessary to remind students of how the context fits the entire story, but the only parts of the text that are reread is the section needed to teach the lesson.

Think-aouds “show” students the thinking an ideal reader does when reading. Construct the TA to show when and why you stopped to think aloud, and how you thought about that strategic stopping point.

In addition, write questions using STAAR Question Language on sticky notes that you want your students to discuss when they are invited in to interact with the reading. The key point is to develop questions that support deeper thinking, but also imbue the “Language of the STAAR” into the instruction.

Read the text several times and practice reading the text aloud. Use your voice to “underline” the vocabulary, key elements, clues, and key ideas found in the text. These signals help students understand the important elements that go into understanding and thinking deeply about text. The read-aloud should take 15-20 minutes if the focus skills/strategies are familiar but may take longer if students are unfamiliar with the target skills or strategies.

Before Reading

Depending on the role of the word in a text, readers can tolerate some unknown words without a decrease in comprehension. Pre-teaching should be brief because elaborate attention to a word may distract students' attention from the selection that is about to be read. For example, the word **girder** which means a steel beam typically found in large structures with high ceilings is a word found in *Fly Away Home*. It is unlikely that most students know the meaning of girder. Discussing what a girder is and does before the read-aloud might involve distracting personal experiences, or the experiences of other students, and distract from the meaning of the story. Moreover, when words are taught before reading a selection, instruction cannot take advantage

of context in which the word is used. In this case, an illustration in the text clearly shows a girder and adequately provides a suitable understanding for the word during reading. Finally, it should be noted that if too many words are presented before reading without being contextualized the words become a random collect of words that opens the possibility that the meanings among the words are going to be confused as the story is read to the students.

During the Read-Aloud

Words necessary for comprehension should be clarified parenthetically right when the word is encountered during reading(e.g., “the bird perched on the girder”- a girder is a large beam that supports a building or structure. The goal of explaining the meaning of a word during reading is to prevent the lack of knowledge of an unknown word from getting in the way of understanding the idea being communicated. If the teacher wants more elaboration of the word explained during reading that can be done after reading. When reading a short selection, for example a section of the text, an option is the teacher can do some quick pre-teaching(e.g., “you will come across the word girder in this section. “a girder is...””) So when it comes to words whose meanings are needed for comprehension of ideas, it is suggested that during reading clarification be used.

After Reading

In terms of the steps to introduce new words after reading, first introduce the word in context. Next, provide student friendly explanations. Friendly explanations provide a complete sentence that includes the target word framed with words such as someone, something, if, and you. Using such words anchors the explanation and makes it more concrete. To illustrate, “A girder is something usually made of steel or cement that is placed near the ceiling of a large building to provide support for the walls and ceiling to help keep them from falling down.”

The next step is to provide an additional context for the word to assure that students don't limit the use of the word to the contexts in which they were first introduced. In *Fly Away Home* the word girder appeared when the exhausted bird perched on it. From this singular context, students might develop a link between sitting on a girder when one is exhausted. So it would important to introduce other examples such as noting how the girders in the school building or other familiar structure somethings are used to hang banners from or some other such example.

Among the important steps are to provide opportunities for students to actively process word meaning by prompting students to make connections between new words and words already known and situations that may apply to the word. For example the word exhausted is also found in the same paragraph as girder, “(the bird)flew to a tall, metal girder, and perched there, exhausted.” So it would be important to introduce other examples of being exhausted such as being exhausted after running several miles. Deep processing occurs when when connections are made between new words and words students already know and are familiar with situations that may apply to the word. Asking, “What makes you feel exhausted?” invites students to connect exhausted with experiences in their own lives. Another way to promote deep processing is for student to figure out whether a connection could exist between words and explain their why they do or do not see a connection between target words.

“Would you be exhausted if you perched on a bench?”

“Would a bird be exhausted if it sat on a girder for an hour/“

A final step is to provide lots of more encounters with each target word. The encounters should include a variety of contexts and situations that encourage processing the words as described in the last two steps above. The encounters need to be going over the next several days.

Strategies for Reading Aloud

1. Previewing the Book

Previewing the book is the first step of an interactive read aloud. It means to look at the elements of the text before reading it. During the preview time, begin scaffolding the student's prior knowledge to those elements. This means taking what the students already know and helping them to use it to make sound predictions about the text. Each prediction should be based on what they see or hear in the preview. Always ask why they made the prediction.

- **Look:** at the covers and predict if the book is fiction or non-fiction and why. Older grades should predict what specific genre they think the book is. What story elements would they expect to find in this particular genre (i.e. fairy tales have animals that talk).
- **Ask:** how the title informs or does not inform the reader, who the author is and if there is an illustrator shown. This is especially important for struggling readers who need continual reinforcement of basic story elements and text structures.
- **Discuss:** the type of artwork used on the cover. The artwork is often a clue to the type of genre.
- **Read;** the blurbs on the back cover. This is a great teaching moment for discussing a "hook" that draws readers into the story and allows an opportunity for refining predictions.
- **Take a picture walk:** that means do not read any of the text! Give the students a chance to look at the pictures to begin to construct meaning. If it is not a picture book, take a chapter walk - use the chapter titles in the table of contents to make predictions about each part of the book.

2. Scaffolding on Prior Knowledge

Scaffolding on prior knowledge means that the teacher is helping students to make predictions and connections to what they already know. This is critical for deep comprehension. Think about it: if I was asked to read a book about biochemical engineering, I can guarantee you that I would understand very little of it. If students have limited background knowledge about the topic, provide a detailed and comprehensive book introduction. These students need help to relate to the text in order to make concise, accurate predictions and connections. This is also the time to introduce rich vocabulary words found in the text needed for understanding the topic. As discussed, most vocabulary can be addressed briefly during the reading and then in more detail after reading.

3. Emphasizing Elements of the Story

When you choose a book to use as an interactive read aloud, be aware of the elements of the story. Elements of a story are generally concerned with setting, characters, and the plot (problem and solution) in the primary grades. If you are working with older students, you then need to address exposition and climax, as well as introducing the terms conflict and resolution instead of problem and solution. Students in the intermediate grades should become fluent in knowing how text goes-how authors write fictional text for example. They should use the structure of text as a blueprint to reach deeper understanding.

This is also the appropriate place to discuss what readers would expect to find within certain genres. These elements should be discussed through predictions, scaffolding and as you read the story.

4. Asking Purposeful Questions

Gear questions towards a specific comprehension skill you are working on, such as inferring or recalling a sequence of events. Kids learn to read and comprehend when they hear the teacher model purposeful thinking using Think Alouds and are given opportunities to respond either orally or in writing.

- "I wonder why did the character said that?"
- "Who is going to be the hero in this situation? Why?"
- "That is a great word the author used to describe the character! It must mean _____, because I remember he did this earlier."
- "This story reminds me of another one I read..."
- "What do you think the author is trying to tell us on this page?"

5. Summarizing and Sharing Thoughts About the Story Summarizing the story is essential to solidify your students' comprehension of the text. An **interactive read aloud** should always include how the students related to the story.

Teacher “Look Fors”

There are many teaching moves to notice “Look Fors” when observing the interactive read-aloud conducted by Dr. Campanaro today; however, the essential ones to notice are among the following:

Before Reading Planning
Text Selection:

- Select a text that is engaging and compelling for students. Choose a text that students will want to read over and over again. While the topic is important it is less important than one that is compelling and pulls the students into the story.
- The reading level of the text can be several grade levels above the reading level of the students.

Vocabulary and Concepts:

- Check vocabulary and concept density in advance to determine appropriateness for the readers. Some vocabulary and concepts may need to be addressed before the read-aloud as needed.
- Teachers may need to frontload essential vocabulary and selected concepts needed for understanding. Most vocabulary, however, should be treated in context or after the reading.
- Additional background knowledge may be provided before the read-aloud.

Preview the Text:

- Strong text preview with emphasis, making strong reasoned predictions, and setting a purpose for reading. Activating background knowledge, checking the title and cover art, including the blurbs, are essential to making good predictions and setting a purpose for reading.

Routines:

- Partners.
- Sitting close and proper posture.
- Tune In.

During Reading Teaching Moves:

- Model thinking-angle student's thinking by "showing" not telling.
- Turn and Talk. Direct students to respond to the text.
- Demonstrate importance of updating predictions and repredicting.
- Share good thinking that you have heard from students:, or teacher provides good thinking..." I heard someone say..."
- Slant and direct thinking to the author's big idea.

After Reading

- Reflect-very important.
- Summarize what was learned.

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