

TEACHING GUIDE

6 Tips for Successful Close Reading with Young Learners

A practical guide to helping young children extract meaning from procedural texts — recipes, experiments, and step-by-step instructions — through close, active reading.

Close reading is “an approach to teaching comprehension that insists students extract meaning from text by examining carefully how language is used in the passage itself” (Snow and O’Connor, 2013). This approach can be used with young children and will help develop their understanding of a particular text. Below are six tips for successful close reading of a procedure, such as the reading of a recipe or an experiment.

1. Present the various materials and ingredients

Prior to the close reading of a procedure, present to the children the various materials and ingredients. The close reading will then illustrate to them the actions and sequences of actions.

Use whatever meaning-making resources are necessary for the children to understand the materials and ingredients.

2. Set up opportunities for recycling language

Set up opportunities for the children to recycle what you are saying, typically by asking them what the thing is and what it does (what it is used for). With increasing familiarity with how you operate in the class, the children are likely to spontaneously recycle what you say in some way or other.

At the same time as labelling the items and actions, make sure the children are touching the objects by, perhaps, handing them over or moving them from one side (the new, not-yet-mentioned things) to another side (the mentioned things).

3. Include children in non-verbal participation

Include children who cannot or choose not to participate verbally in English yet by involving them in non-verbal participation. There is typically ‘internal rehearsing’ going on. As evidence for this, parents often comment that their child is very vocal at home saying what has gone on in the class or singing the class songs

4. Use language as 'object'

Interact with language as physically as possible by asking the children to point to words and associated images as they are read, to circle words and, if the text is written on strips of card or if the text has been cut up into groups of meanings, to move around the cards to focus on specific meanings.

5. Use physical space to vary demand

Move the children close enough to the objects being talked about if you want the children to touch the objects rather than use language.

Increase the space by moving yourself or the children away from the objects if you want to increase the demand on the children to speak.

Whichever decision you make depends on what individual children are striving to do as they work within their challenge zone.

6. Use visual space to vary demand

Allow the children to see the materials or language if you want the demand to be lower.

'Hide' the materials or the language if you want to increase the demand on the students to use language. For example, you could wear a blindfold and then ask the children to hand over the materials needing to be used. Language is then the dominant meaning-making resource available to you and the children. Once the material is delivered, you can touch it to verify the choice by the child. This can be varied, of course, by having children in the teacher role.

REFERENCE

Snow, C. and O'Connor, C. (2013) "Close Reading and Far-Reaching Classroom Discussion: Fostering a Vital Connection". Literacy Research Panel of the International Reading Association. Accessed Oct 2019 from www.literacyworldwide.org