

DIRECTED READING/THINKING ACTIVITY DRTA

Developing Purposes for Reading

The key step in a Directed Reading/Thinking Activity is developing purposes for reading. Purposes or questions represent the directional and motivating influences that get readers started, keep them on course, and produce the vigor and potency and push to carry them through to the end.

Purposes for reading represent the key element in versatility. Versatile readers adjust rate of reading according to their purposes for reading, and to the nature and difficulty of the material being read. By focusing on purposes for reading from the very beginning of formal instruction, the reader acquires an attitude toward reading and an appreciation of the use and value of purposes for directing the reading act. In the early phases of the instructional program the young readers will not be particularly articulate about what they are doing and how they are doing it, but by repeated experience they will, as they mature, begin to see how to be deliberate. Of all the reading skills, versatility is the one that authorities and teachers and readers find most frequently lacking. That students complete high school and college without accomplishing this high order reading skill reflects the use of inappropriate methodology from the very beginning of reading instruction.

Directed Reading/Thinking Activity (DRTA)

The directed reading/thinking activity (DRTA) encourages readers to engage actively in a three-step comprehension cycle.

1. Sample the text
2. Make predictions.
3. Sample the text to confirm or correct previous predictions.

To use the DRTA, teachers give students a text selection and ask them to read the title, a few sampled lines of text, and examine the pictures to develop hypotheses about the text. Children generate hypotheses as they read from the text and from their own experiential backgrounds.

Teachers may adapt the DRTA in such a way as to sample the most important elements of a narrative or exposition based on the text structure employed. If the children are assigned a narrative or story to read, the DRTA could be based on the important elements of a story grammar or map, as suggested by Beck and McKeown (1981). These elements include setting, characters, initiating events, problems, attempts to solve problems, outcomes or resolutions. For example, consider the sample DRTA lesson constructed using the story Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs by Judi Barrett (1978).

Example DRTA Lesson

The teacher begins the lesson by showing the book and saying:

The title of the book we're going to read today is Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs. What do this title and the picture make you think the story is about?

John: It might be about an old man that makes a magic spell on the sky so that meatballs come down when he wants to eat them.

Lisa: I think it might be about a place where any kind of food you want rains down from the sky.

Teacher: Let's read and see how close your predictions are.

The teacher then reads until the town of Chewandswallow is described.

Teacher: Now, do you still agree with your predictions?

Children: It sounds like it's going to be about a place like Lisa described.

Teacher: What makes you think so?

Jessica: Because they haven't talked at all about an old man, the author only described the town and how food rained down for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Teacher: Would you like to live in a town like Chewandswallow?

Susan: I think it would be fun because then you wouldn't have to wait for your mom to cook dinner. You could just catch some extra food and eat when you were hungry.

Tyler: I wouldn't like it cuz what would happen if it rained something heavy like barbecued ribs and you got hit on the head and got knocked out or died.

Teacher: Tyler brought up a good point. Could there be some problems with living in this town?

Jeff: It could rain heavy things and hurt you.

Maria: If there were a storm of ice cream or something mushy it would get really messy.

Teacher: Good, now that you're thinking about what a place like Chewandswallow would be like, let's read on to see what happens in the town.

She reads until the weather takes a turn for the worse.

Teacher: Now what do you think is going to happen in the story?

James: It's about a town that rains food for breakfast, lunch, and dinner and then one day the food starts coming down funny.

Teacher: What do you mean by funny?

James: I think that maybe too much food started coming down.

Teacher: What makes you think that maybe too much food started coming down?

James: Well, in the picture there is too much spaghetti in the road and the cars can't move.

Teacher: Good, now let's continue reading to see if you are right.

The teacher now reads until the story describes a tomato tornado and then stops and asks questions again.

Teacher: So, what happens in the town of Chewandswallow?

Kayla: All kinds of food starts coming down. Some of it is yucky like peanut butter, mayonnaise, and brussels sprouts. And sometimes just too much of it comes down, like when they had a tomato tornado. Everything was a mess because the food was going crazy.

Teacher: What do you think the town will do about it? Why do you think so?

Frank: I think that they will hire a magician to put a spell on the clouds so that the weather will get straightened out because sometimes in the stories they can do that.

Harold: I think that they have to leave if they can, before they all die. That's what I would do.

Nancy: I think they need to find out who is in charge of making it rain so that they can ask them to stop it and make things go back to normal.

Teacher: Those are good answers. Now I want you all to decide which of those you think is the most likely to happen and let's continue reading.

The teacher reads the rest of the book.

Teacher: Did the people do what you thought they would do? Did you like how they solved their problem?

Harold: Yes, that's what I thought they should do.

Frank: No, I still think they should've called on somebody to help them so that they wouldn't have to leave Chewandswallow and have to buy groceries in the store.

A DRTA could also be extended for use with expository texts such as those found in the classroom science, health, and social studies textbooks.

Source: Reutzel, Ray D. and Robert B. Cooter, Jr., Teaching Children to Read: From Basals to Books New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1992

Video tapes available from Language Arts Supervisor.