



Resource

What to Do Before a Read-Aloud or Close Reading to Build Prior Knowledge

This resource offers different activities that you can do to promote prior knowledge. Prior knowledge refers to when readers access what they know about the world in order to figure out text. It's an essential skill toward making inferences and fixing confusions. The best part is that the activities presented here are kid friendly!

PROVIDE VISUAL ANCHORS

Provide a visual anchor that is an analogy to the learning. Visual anchors can be props or an image on the projector. Mike, a teacher who taught eighth grade at KIPP Infinity, when trying to communicate that it's important to find the best textual proof rather than just any textual proof, linked it to the difference between an amazing chocolate bar and a bag of stale candy. He connected to what kids knew (old candy isn't as good as gourmet candy) in order to make his point.

ENGAGE IN ROLE-PLAYS OR DRAMA

Using drama as a means to build prior knowledge is kid friendly. Dependent readers often don't see themselves as participants with the text; words are merely decoded on the page and meaning isn't deciphered. They often get bored because they are unable to coproduce the text. Dependent readers' approach to reading is passive. Drama allows dependent readers to interact with the text, join characters, role-play the story line, and become a part of the story, thus building more elaborate text meaning. Here are some of my favorites to use before a read-aloud/think-aloud, and I use the young adult book *Hatchet*, a story of a boy stranded in nature after a plane crash, to explain.¹⁰⁷

TWO VOICES ROLE-PLAY TO ANALYZE CHARACTER

Put students in roles that occur in the book. "You are going to be playing two versions of the same character. Student A is stuck in the wilderness. There was a terrible crash and you can't find any food. You are desperate, scared, and freaking out. Student B is the voice inside your head that is rational and calm. You offer good advice to yourself, and are trying to help yourself survive. Turn and talk: what do you say to each other?"

USE GUIDED IMAGERY TO MAKE PREDICTIONS

Guided Imagery¹⁰⁸ capitalizes on students' active imaginations. Tell students to close their eyes. You are going to put them in a scene similar to the one they are about to read as a class, and they need to imagine that they are in the scene. "You're all alone and hungry. You feel your stomach rumbling, but are becoming more desperate because you can't find food. Your heart is pounding and you can't concentrate on anything besides eating. You decide to forage across the field to see if there is a stream, so at least you can get water. Maybe you'll see if there are any animals around so you can catch something. How are you going to do that? You are so weak, the cuts on

your arm are really hurting, and you don't know how to catch an animal. But you're going to have to figure it out, or you might starve. . . What's going on? Where are you? What could have happened? What do you think you should do?" Students make predictions based on evidence from guided imagery. Then begin the read-aloud.

DEBATE OVER CAUSAL OUTCOMES

Present a conflict that happens in the story with two possible outcomes. Student A argues one outcome while Student B argues the other. "You're starving and becoming weak. You spot a nest of turtle eggs. Student A wants to eat them right away, even though they are raw. Student B wants to exercise patience by starting a fire and cooking the eggs."

TEA PARTY

This strategy is from Kylene Beers, author of several books for struggling readers. Give students a different line from the upcoming chapter. Ask them to mingle and move around the room, sharing their lines, and creating a prediction about the upcoming text.¹⁰⁹

RUMORS

Jeffrey Wilhelm, education researcher and author, suggests rumors as a fun prereading activity. Give students a hint about the general conflict that they will discover in the upcoming chapter. Then they pass around "gossip" (or predictions) about that conflict.

ANTICIPATION GUIDES

The purpose of an anticipation guide is to focus your kids' attention on key concepts prior to reading. It can also be motivating and help you uncover misunderstandings.¹¹⁰ The following is an anticipation guide for *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine.

1. Identify the concepts that you want students to understand
2. Create very debatable statements about those concepts

Read each statement. If you agree, put a check next to it.

- People should stand up for what they believe in, even if it means becoming violent.
- Taxes are necessary for a society.
- Soldiers should always be treated with respect and given our help if they need it.
- The best way to communicate dissatisfaction with your government is through peaceful communication.

SURVEY

Teach this prereading strategy, and you can increase comprehension as much as 100 percent!¹¹¹ It's really simple, so don't underestimate it. If you ensure your students do this before they read nonfiction, it will have dramatic payoffs.¹¹²

1. Analyze title and subheadings, make predictions, and turn each subheading into a question
2. Tell how illustrations contribute to the chapter
3. Read and discuss the introductory and concluding paragraph
4. Generate a main idea statement, ensuring that it addresses each of the subheading questions

107. R. Barthes. *Image-Music-Text*. (New York, New York: Hill and Wang, 1986); Jeffrey Wilhelm, *Action Strategies for Deepening Comprehension: Role Plays, Text Structure Tableaux, Talking Statues, and Other Enrichment Techniques That Engage Students with Text*. (New York, New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 2002).
108. Linda Gambrell, Barbara Kapinus, and Robert Wilson. "Using Mental Imagery and Summarization to Achieve Independence in Comprehension." *Journal of Reading*, no. 30 (1987): 638–642.
109. Kylene Beers. *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do*. (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 2003).
110. Laura Robb, *Teaching Reading in Social Studies, Science and Math*. (New York, New York: Scholastic, 2003).
111. Robert J. Tierney, *Readance, John E. Reading Strategies and Practices: A Compendium*. 5. (Boston, Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon, 2000).
112. Thomas Gunning. *Building Literacy in the Content Areas*. (Boston, Massachusetts: Pearson Education, 2003).