

# Talking with Children About Books (and Other Types of Texts)

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## The Reading Workshop

The Primary Goal of the Reading Workshop is to Expand the Ways Teachers & Students  
**Think & Talk** About Texts

## 2 Key Dimensions

**WHAT to talk about:** reading as a content area / reading as a cognitive process

**HOW to talk about it:** reading as a social practice

## Conceptualizing Reading

**As a Content Area:** a focus on the visual and textual devices and structures that makes up narrative and expository texts.

**As a Meaning-Making Process:** a focus on the process of transacting with text, visual images, and design features to generate meanings.

**As a Social Practice:** a focus on the contexts, interactions, and purposes humans use reading for in the course of their lives and culture.

## **PART 1: What to Talk About: Reading as a Content Area**

### **Textual Elements**

Literary Elements

Narrative Structures & Devices

Literary Theories

### **Multimodal Elements**

Visual Design Features

Typography

Peritextual Features

Artistic Representations

### **Focus on TEXT: Literary Elements**

Literary Elements; Plot; Setting; Character; Mood; Theme; Symbolism; Figurative Language

### **Learning the elements of Literature in context**

- Learning the vocabulary of literary elements is intended to **focus attention** on the important structures and devices used in literature.
- Should be done in the **context** of reading and discussing literature, not on worksheets.
- Should **improve readers' experiences** with literature, not to burden them with extraneous "activities."
- The more you know, the greater your appreciation – **connoisseurship**.

## Focus on TEXT: Narrative Structures

Traditional Plot

Hero Cycle

Chronological

Parallel Structures

## Narrative Structures

- A focus on narrative structures helps young readers see the **big picture** of a story.
- Know **HOW** stories work is an important aspect of reading comprehension.
- **Non-traditional** narrative structures are being used in children's literature with more frequency.
- Helping young readers **briefly preview** a text can support their comprehension of non-traditional structures.

## Other Narrative Devices Worth Teaching

- Flashback and Foreshadowing
- Metaleptic Transgressions
- Multiple Perspective Novels
- Transmedial Narratives
- Archetypes
- Postmodern Elements...

## Focus on TEXT: Literary Theories

- Possible Literary theories
- Feminist – (Gender Influences)
- Biographical - Historical (Author Influences)
- Marxist (Power)
- Reader Response (Personal Experience)
- Critical Theories (Social – Political Influences)
- Narrative Theories (Narratology)

## Introducing Literary Theories

- Discuss literary theories as **perspectives** that can be used to call attention to different aspects of narrative.
- Don't get bogged down with the jargon associated with some literary theories; use **child friendly language** to introduce these concepts.
- Different literary theories have different **warrants** for evaluating the processes and assertions associated with readers' acts of interpretation.

## Literary Theories References

Appleman – Critical Encounters

Gillespie – Doing Literary Criticism

Lukens – Critical Handbook of Children's Literature

Culler – Introduction to Literary Theory

## **Focus on MULTIMODAL ELEMENTS: Visual Design Features**

- Speech / Thought Bubbles
- Upfixes
- Impact Stars
- Motion Lines
- Reduplication

## **Visual Design Features**

- Teachers need to call attention to these elements and develop a vocabulary for discussing them with children.
- Allow students to talk about how these elements support their interpretations.
- Readers of comics and graphic novels are often more aware of these visual conventions.

## **Focus on MULTIMODAL ELEMENTS: Typography**

- the art and process of [selecting] and arranging type on a page
- encompasses typeface selection, typesetting, and typeface design
- the style, arrangement, or appearance of printed letters on a page
- tool for doing things *with* text

## **Typeface**

- Bold vs. Timid - Modern vs. Classic - Playful vs. Serious

## **Typeface Feature: Weight**

- Used to create emphasis – bold to thin
- Can be used to call attention to particular words.
- Can be used by readers to determine significance

## **Typeface Feature: Color**

- Color can be used for classifying elements and developing associations among elements.
- Color has been associated with particular meanings or emotions in social contexts.

## **Typeface Feature: Size**

- Size can add emphasis or importance to certain words.
- Relatively equal sizes can suggest association or decrease emphasis.

## **Typeface Feature: Formality**

- Formal and informal fonts suggest status, personality and power relations. Can also relate to thematic elements.

## **Typography**

- Typography is no longer an aspect of text made to become invisible
- Authors and illustrators are now involved in using typography to add meaning potential to their stories through the use of typographical elements.
- Teachers need to call students' attention to the typographical elements and develop vocabularies for discussing them.

### Focus on MULTIMODAL ELEMENTS: Peritextual Elements

- Serve as a **threshold** between the world outside the book and the world inside the book.
- Created by publishers to **provide information** about the book, author, series, illustrator...
- Can be used for **advertising** or as a book teaser.
- Place where the author or illustrator can **speak directly** to potential readers.
- Are being used in more **imaginative ways** to connect or add to the story.

### An Example: Endpapers

- Serve as a **boundary** between storyworld and real world of reader.
- Act as **curtains** that open and close the narrative.
- May serve an **aesthetic purpose** as well as a narrative one.
- Are **connected** to the story in different ways.

### Types of Endpapers:

Color, Palette, Objects, Patterns, Thematic, Narrative

### Other peritextual elements to consider

- Covers
- Typography
- Dedications
- Author or Illustrator Notes
- Book Jackets
- Author Interviews...

### Peritextual Elements

- Are often overlooked by young readers.
- Teachers need to spend some time talking about these elements if they will go unnoticed.
- Space for authors and illustrators to talk directly to the reader.
- Can include epitextual (outside the text) elements as well.

### Focus on MULTIMODAL ELEMENTS: Image-Text Interplay

- **Symmetrical** - images parallel the information provided in the text and vice versa
- **Enhancing** - illustrations enhance the text and vice versa
- **Counterpoint** - images provide information that is contradicted by the text and vice versa

### Text-Image Interplay

- You can't tell a reader to look at the picture for clues to reading words in a counterpoint text.
- Both Symmetrical AND Enhancing texts should be part of primary classrooms.
- Avoid Picture Walks - they treat the illustrations as prompts for reading texts rather than as a system of meaning.

## Modes of Artistic Representations

1. Realism
2. Folk Art
3. Modern Art
4. Surrealism

## Artistic Representations: Questions to Ask

1. How does the artistic style add to the theme, mood, or setting of the story?
2. What aspects of the artistic style or movement can be used to better understand the narrative?
3. How would your interpretations change if the art style changed?

Design Elements	Noticings	Potential Meanings	Ways to USE Features
Endpapers			
Typography			
Peritextual Features			
Artistic Styles			
Text-Image Interplay			

## PART 2: What to Talk About: Reading as a Meaning-Making Process

- **Selecting** Texts
- **Approaching** Texts
- **Navigating** Texts
- **Interpreting** Texts

### Selecting Texts: Supporting Selections

- Familiar Genres, Topics, Authors...
- Book Reviews
- Peer / Librarian / Teacher Recommendations
- Bestseller Lists
- Supportive Browsing
- Book Shopping

## Selecting Texts

- In order for teachers to truly **support students'** selections, they must spend some time reading what their students are reading.
- Students who read less, know less about what is **available** to read.
- Selecting what to read may be the single-most **defining action** of life-long readers.

## Supportive Browsing

- **Browsing** is what readers do naturally, not something students do to waste time.
- Keep current with children's and young adult literature (Hornbook, IRA)
- Conduct book talks daily
- Interview students about interests
- Demonstrate how to browse
- Share criteria for selecting texts
- Invite students to share favorites
- Recommendations (Amazon)

## Approaching Picturebooks

- Attend to Visual, Textual, & Design Elements
- Set Expectations & Purpose for Reading
- Activate Relevant Prior Knowledge
- Make Connections before Reading
- BRIEFLY Preview the Text, Images, and Designs
- Determine what may be Significant

## The Lesson Continues...

- In pairs, approach the texts provided in the same manner as demonstrated.
- Keep track of what you do, what works, and what challenges arise.
- Be ready to report to the group about what you did.
- Make Visual Display of Ideas

## Navigating texts

- As text structures and designs get more complex, it is important for readers to have experiences exploring out how they work.
- Exploring digital platforms and devices requires new strategies for understanding how to navigate them.
- Navigating Non-Fictional texts requires different navigational strategies than Fiction texts.

## Comprehension as NOUN / Comprehending as VERB

### Reading as a Meaning-Making Process of

- **Constructing** viable interpretations
- **Utilizing** background knowledge
- **Considering** multiple perspectives
- **Understanding** "Official" meanings
- **Suspending Closure** to consider alternative interpretations

### Making Sense of Texts: Interpretative strategies

- **Noticing:** What elements do you notice in the text, images, or designs? What elements do you not pay attention to usually?
- **Naming (Annotating):** What are some of these elements called? Do we have some vocabulary to name these elements?
- **Considering:** What do these elements DO for us as readers? What functions do they serve?
- **Interpreting:** What potential meanings do these elements offer? How might you interpret these elements?
- **Utilizing:** How might you use these elements in your own writing or work? What functions might these elements serve?

Things to Consider	Text	Image	Design Elements
Noticings			
Potential Meanings			
Wonderings			

## PART 3: How to Talk About Texts: Reading as a Social Practice

What do we expect children to DO with Texts?

What Do We DO with texts?

Read – Share - Carry around – Display – Collect – Write – Use – Perform – Analyze - **Discuss**

Where We talk About Texts

- Whole Group Read Alouds
- Partner Readings
- Reading Conferences
- Reader Response Notebooks
- Online Platforms (Goodreads.com)
- Literature Study Groups or Book Clubs
- Comprehension Strategy Groups

Groupings	Teacher's Roles	Students' Roles
Whole Group	Presenter	Observer
Small Group	Facilitator	Participant
Independent	Observer	Reader

## Two Ethos

Engagement

Intellectualism

## When Do We Really Listen?

- When we have some **Respect** for Group Members
- When we have Enough **Time** to Talk
- When the topic Fits Our **Purposes or Needs**
- When we can **Relate** to Group Members
- When it is a Topic of **Interest** or Importance to Us
- When we have suitable **Spaces to Interact**
- When we enter the discussion with some degree of **Knowledgeable Uncertainty**

## Three Types of Talk:

- **Efferent Talk** – focus on literal details of text (most common)
- **Aesthetic Talk** - expressing what readers like and dislike
- **Analytic Talk** - Interrogating structures, implications & perspectives (least common)

## Interactive Discussions

- Each student is responsible for **Articulating** their interpretations & ideas to other students (Multiple Voices)
- The **Lines of Communication** are from student to student as well as from student to teacher (Two Way Interactions)
- Readers need to be **Active Listeners** during discussions (Attention to Other Readers)
- Meaning is **Negotiated** through interactions (Suspend Closure)

## Setting Expectations for Discussion

- Honestly Report What You Think
- Listening Well & Thinking is As Important As Talking Well
- Address Other Students as Well as the Teacher
- Avoid Interrupting and Over-Talking
- Half Baked Ideas are Accepted and Encouraged
- Show Respect when Disagreeing

## **Whole Group Interactive Discussions**

### **Reading Aloud *with* Readers**

- Includes Teacher as Co-Reader
- Sets Expectations for Response
- Develops Common Vocabulary
- Involves Negotiation of Meaning
- Allows the Literature to “Speak First”
- Generates Curriculum
- Demands Respect for Literature as a Work of Art

### **Questions About reading aloud**

- Should I Strive for Word “Perfect” Reading?
- How Long Do I Show the Illustrations?
- Should Students have a Copy of the Book?
- How Often Do I Stop and Ask Questions, or Should I Just Read the Book Straight Through?
- Should I Re-Visit Our Favorite Stories or Should I Always Read New Ones?
- Do I Stand or Sit? Where Do Students Sit?
- How Do I Introduce the Book?

### **Book Talks**

- Give people a sense of what a book is about.
- Short – 2-3 minutes is plenty of time.
- Used as an advertisement or teaser.
- Connect the book being recommended to other books people may have read.
- Can be organized by genre, author, illustrator, topic, theme...
- Focus on books students may not have discovered.

### **Some Thoughts about Questions**

- Student Responses are Reflective of the Questions Teachers Ask and The Expectations Set for Discussion.
- Questions can be Confrontational, Rather Than Invitational.
- Too often Questions are Used to Control Rather than Inquire (Who’s Paying Attention?)
- Who Gets to ask Questions is Reflective of the Power Relations in the Classroom.

### **Using Questions More Effectively**

- Teachers should stop asking questions they know the answers to all the time.
- Teachers Should ask More Questions in Response to Students’ Ideas Than In Front of Them.
- Questions should allow for an acceptable range of answers, possibilities or interpretations
- Questions should provide opportunities for students to Confirm, Deny, Clarify or Extend.
- Allow Students to ask more questions.
- “Tell Me More” is Better Than “Why?”

## Responding to Literature in the world outside school

- Talk About Texts
- Read Another Connected Text
- Make Suggestions for Other Readers
- Sketch Ideas About Texts
- Research a Related Topic of Interest
- Question the Text / Ideas
- Re-Read Text
- Reflect in Writing
- Write to the Author / Illustrator

## Criteria for Response Activities

- **Relationship to Literature:** What is the connection between the activity and the reading?
- **Time Ratio:** Is the amount of time to respond greater than the time to read?
- **Objective / Purpose:** Does the activity become an end in itself?
- **Locus of Control:** Do students have any choice in the activity?
- **Relevance:** Does this activity remind you of anything that occurs in the “real” world?
- **Promotes Thinking:** How does this activity promote thinking about texts and reading?

## Working with picturebooks

- Micro-Texts - able to read and discuss complete text in a single session
- Contain a wide variety of genres, topics, themes, authors, illustrators, formats, literary devices
- Introduce strategies in familiar contexts
- Provide opportunities for discussion of significant topics
- Picturebooks draw upon several systems of meaning (text, image, design)

## 7 Interactive Discussion Strategies

**Discussion Strategy #1:** Turn, Pair, and Share

**Discussion Strategy #2:** Noticings / Connections / Wonderings

**Discussion Strategy #3:** Noticings / What Might It Mean? / So What?

**Noticing**

**What Might It Mean**

**So What?**



**Discussion Strategy #4: Four (4) Post-Its**

1. One Way a Character Changed
2. Something That Challenged You as a Reader
3. Something You Expected
4. Something that was Missing from the Story


**Discussion Strategy #6: Graffiti Boards**

**Discussion Strategy #7: Story Structures**

**Why So Many Charts?**

- Help Us Remember Where We Have Been
- Allow Students to Revisit Discussions and Lessons
- Provide Support for Future Discussions
- Create Archive of Our Teaching

### **Working with Novels: What Should children Get from Reading a Novel?**

- Willingness to Read Another
- Enjoyment
- Increased Knowledge of the World and Oneself
- Vicarious Experience
- Basic Literal Comprehension
- Cultural Capital
- Sense of Novel as a Genre
- Ability / Willingness to Discuss the Book
- Connections to Other People & Places

### **How I Have Used Novels**

- Students read novels or extended texts for homework reading each night.
- Reading Novels makes up about 33% of my Reading Life & Class Reading.
- Never have used them as whole class set, or round robin reading.
- Demonstrate how strategies learned in picturebooks work in novels.

### **Responding to novel reading**

- Character Timelines
- Open Coding
- Insider - Outsider coding
- Intertextual Connections
- Comparing Covers

### **Comparing Book Covers**

- Illustrated book covers are a publisher's or illustrator's interpretation of the characters or story elements.
- Using different covers opens up room for multiple interpretations of the story.
- Covers are a marketing device that responds to social influences.

### **Approaching Fictional Texts: Novels**

- Attend to Visual, Textual, & Design Elements
- Set Expectations & Purpose for Reading
- Activate Relevant Prior Knowledge
- Make Connections before Reading
- Preview the Text, Images, and Designs
- Determine what may be Significant

### **The Lesson Continues...**

- In pairs, approach the texts provided in the same manner as demonstrated.
- Keep track of what you do, what works, and what challenges arise.
- Be ready to report to the group about what you did.
- Make Visual Display of Ideas

## Reader Response Notebooks

- Designed to get readers to share ideas and reactions to what they have read
- Can become glorified book reports
- Need continued response from peers and teacher
- Not a writing assessment

### Example 1

Title-Author-Date-Genre

Retell What Happened 25%

React to What Happened 75%

### Example 2

Title / Author / Date / Genre

Noticings

Literary Connections

Personal Connections

Wonderings

Additional Thoughts

### Other Possibilities

Letter to Teacher

Blogs

Book Talks - Book Reviews

Elements of Literature Chart

Walking Journal

Online Platforms (Goodreads.com)

## Small Group Instruction

Types of Groups	Teacher Roles	Student Roles	Purpose	Texts
<b>Comp Strategy</b>	Set Objectives Choose Members	Reader Apply Strategy	Learn Reading Strategies	Purposefully Selected to Support Strategy
<b>Literature Study</b>	Reader Facilitator	Choose Text Reader Participates Discussion	Discuss Literature	Offered by Teacher - Selected by readers
<b>Book Club</b>	Observer Supporter	Selects texts Leads Discussion	Share Books with Fellow Readers	Chosen by Readers

<b>Types of Groups</b>	<b>Membership</b>	<b>Procedures</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
<b>Comp Strategy</b>	Determined by reading assessments and reading needs	Demonstrate Strategies Observe readers Teach into Reading Act	Application of reading strategies
<b>Literature Study</b>	Determined by student interest and discussion ability	Student-led Discussions Teacher facilitates discussion Meet until saturated	Deeper analysis of literature
<b>Book Club</b>	Determined by student interest	Students decide how much to read, when to meet and what to discuss	Enjoy a good book with friends

### **Comprehension Strategy Groups: Focus on Reading Abilities**

- Based on teacher observations and assessments of need
- Teacher decides objective of specific lesson
- Teacher selects texts
- Teacher focuses attention
- Students attempt strategies

### **Literature Study Groups: Focus on Interpreting Literature**

- Based on students' interests
- Students choose from available / selected texts
- Teacher *facilitates* discussion
- Students determine pace of reading
- Students determine focus of discussions – with help

## **2 Types of Comprehension Strategy Groups**

### **1. Shared Reading**

Teacher responsible for initial reading

Students decide how much to contribute (ie. choral reading)

Classroom "Lap"

Big books, chants and songs, charts, audiobooks

### **2. Guided Reading**

Students practice with instructional-level texts

Texts selected by the teacher.

Reader responsible for initial reading

Typical structure:

Book introduction - Reading along - Teaching points / discussion

## **Strategy Group Instructional Decisions**

On what basis are groups formed?

What concepts / skills / strategies are we teaching?

What will we use to demonstrate strategies?

How do we demonstrate the concepts?

How will we know if our teaching is successful?

## **Possible Lesson topics**

- **Close Reading** – literal elements and meanings
- **Inferential Thinking** – generating interpretations
- **Elements of Literature** – plot, setting, character, theme, mood...
- **Comprehension Strategies** – summarizing, visualizing, asking questions...
- **Literary Strategies** – character motive, plot twists, flashback-foreshadow, genre...

## **Literature Study Groups: Focus on Literature**

- Students select texts from teacher offerings
- Focus on analysis, as well as enjoyment
- Students' preparation for discussion is essential
- Teacher facilitated discussions

## **Selecting Texts**

- Based on Interest
- What is an Appropriate Text?
- What is an Appropriate Level of Challenge?
- Book Reviews and Recommendations
- Audiobooks (oral support)
- Partner Reading (peer support)
- Parent Volunteers (support from more proficient readers)

## **Preparations**

- Book Talks
- Reviews and Recommendations
- Choosing Books - Signing Up
- Signing a Contract
- Coding Literature
- Checking for Challenges

## **Lit Study Contract**

I agree to read the book (insert title of book here).

I will finish the book by the time the group decides.

I will take notes in my book log and use them to help me in our discussion of the book.

I will bring my book and book log to class EVERYDAY!!!

I will PARTICIPATE in the discussion of the book.

I agree to help other students to better understand the book we have read.

I agree to work together in a group to celebrate finishing the book by creating a presentation for the class.

## Coding Literature

- **Noticings** – things readers notice as they are reading, including illustrations, language, book design elements, or genre characteristics.
- **Connections** – things readers connect to themselves from personal experiences or connections to other literary texts.
- **Interpretations** – potential meanings associated with what the reader notices, including character motives, inferences about themes, mood, symbols, or social issues.
- **Wonderings** – questions readers have.
- **Confusions** – things readers find confusing.
- **Narrative Elements** – aspects of the plot, setting, or characters that seem relevant for understanding the story.
- **Literary Devices** – aspects of the writer’s style or craft, including figurative language, metaphors and others.

## Discussions

Begins like a Cocktail Party

Modeling the Process - The Goldfish Bowl

Passionate Attention

Moving From Conversation to Dialogue

Teacher as Facilitator / Listener

Taking Discussion Notes

Supporting & Challenging

Pulling Ideas Together

Setting Agendas

## Book Clubs: Focus on Building a Community of Readers

Self-selected groups and books

More enjoyment than analysis

Discussions are student-led

Goal is to build a community of readers willing to share ideas with other readers

Instilling a ***Love of Reading*** is as important as teaching fluency and decoding

## Partner Reading Chart:

- Stay in your book
- Use soft voices
- Choose a just right spot
- Stay in your spot
- Get started as soon as you can
- Share reading
- Retell and discuss
- Have fun

### **Supporting Independent reading**

- Assessing Readers - know readers abilities to support selections and strategies
- Book “Baskets” - novels, poems, picturebooks, non-fictions, magazines, etc.
- Accountability - reader response notebooks, discussions, conferences
- Access – opportunities to choose texts at levels of manageable challenge
- Reduce Extrinsic Reward Systems
- Daniel Pennac’s – Readers’ Bill of Rights

### **3 Types of Reading Conferences**

Checking In / Assessment / Instruction

#### **Reading Conferences**

Conferences should occur on a regular basis to support readers.

Conferences should begin with teachers listening to what students are working on.

Conferences should include some praise and some suggestions.

Making observational records can help teachers assess student progress.

#### **What is the Role of the Teacher in Classroom Discussions?**

- Establish An Ethos of Engagement and Intellectualism
- Listen First, Talk Later
- Stop Expecting Students to Guess What is In Our Heads
- Utilize Charts to Move Discussion Forward
- Take Students’ Ideas Seriously
- Learn More About the Books We Discuss
- Become a Reader FIRST, and a Teacher SECOND

#### **Supporting the Act of Reading**

Places to Read, Time to Read, Things to Read, Purposes for Reading

#### **Resources**

Bang, M. (2000). *Picture this: How pictures work*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.

Gonyea, M. (2005). *A book about design: Complicated doesn't make it better*. New York: Henry Holt.

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**Thank You!**

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