
DIRECTED READING THINKING ACTIVITY¹: A GRADUAL RELEASE METHOD TO DEMYSTIFY READING

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Abstract

The author describes an instructional strategy that deepens students' understanding of and engagement with texts.

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Whenever students begin to read something of any bulk for class, we work on pre-reading strategies this way: aloud, we wonder at the title, enumerating what the title evokes for us; we consider any artwork provided; and then we consider the publication date. Since no one writes in a vacuum, we remind ourselves of the zeitgeist of the moments our author was constructing the text. After that, I read aloud to the class, freely stopping myself to ask and answer questions. I wonder aloud as it were. I model my wonderings as not completely understanding all the information at a first go. I model that my wonderings and questions are important, and they will be answered in due time.

Students, even secondary ones, like to be read to. But they also get to see the teacher's own call and response method, which is there to manifest the teacher's thinking as said teacher, me, reads. It reinforces that these wonderings are what good readers enact for themselves in their heads when they are reading for an academic purpose.

After some time—a paragraph or a few, depending on the complexity of the text—I tell the class I will still read, but as I stop in sentences or phrases, I want to hear their own wonderings chorally. I ask specific questions first, e.g. “why does Fitzgerald’s narrator express the paradoxical sentiment that he and his father have always been communicative in a reserved way?” I want to hear *what* they are specifically thinking, *that* they are specifically thinking. So, I ask specific questions. Then, when the class is feeling comfortable, I continue reading, this time asking vague questions, e.g. “what’s going on here?”, hoping still for specific answers. It happens. I get specific answers.

This “we do” part following the “I do” is to set them up for success. They know that as a car burns more fuel backing out of the garage than from going to 30 to 40 mph, readers burn more cognitive energy going from inertia to exposition than already being in the thick of text.

Then it is time for students to take over the reading. I set them in partners and have them whisper read the next paragraphs with each other, and I roam the room listening to students demystifying the texts together. This part may take about five or ten minutes. I’m listening to hear that students are asking and answering questions and wonderings about the text with each other.

¹ For more information about the directed reading thinking activity, visit <https://www.readingrockets.org/classroom/classroom-strategies/directed-reading-thinking-activity-drta>

At last, I feel confident that these students can be fully released to read the text on their own, with ways to keep them engaged with the text.

Author Biography

LuAnn Fox has been a high school ELA teacher for over 25 years. Now she is an MTSS literacy support specialist in Olathe Public Schools, A KSDE Teacher Leader Consultant, Greater Kansas City Writing Project consultant, College Board ELA consultant (pre-AP), and a KATE board member. She can be reached at llfox@olatheschools.org.

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