

## LET'S READ TOGETHER!

Shared reading is a vital activity in any primary classroom because it allows specific teaching of:

- decoding text;
- reading aloud;
- higher order reading skills;
- how the text is put together – in other words, “reading like a writer” in order to move into independent writing;
- why writers choose particular words;
- the visual impact of the text and how this affects the reader.

Clearly some of these are more relevant at certain stages. However, once children have moved beyond the simple decoding stage, teachers can use their questioning skills to develop a deeper understanding of texts and how they are put together.

My experience has shown me that comprehension exercises do not teach children anything. They simply confirm a level of understanding. If a child answers a question wrongly, they are no further forward. This is why the teacher's role in shared reading is so vital.

It is important to choose challenging texts at each level of development. However, teachers need to differentiate in a shared session by targeting questions and by constant revision and reinforcement. Open ended questioning, which moves children beyond factual understanding, is essential.

- How did . . . feel? How do you know?
- Why did . . . ?
- What do you think will happen next? Why?
- What did you think about/when . . . ?

Careful and sustained questioning, linked to marking of the text by both teacher and children, will help pin point the evidence. In order to maintain the class's concentration and to vary the approach teachers might:

- Use talk partners – a very useful way of ensuring that everyone is having a go. (Talk to your partner for one minute about why you think . . . )
- Ask pairs to join other pairs in a more sustained discussion.
- Use text marking. (Underline all the evidence that shows us that . . . )
- Ask children to prepare an answer but not put hands up.

Shared reading also gives the opportunity to model how to:

- read on to confirm the meaning of a difficult word through context;

- search in more than one part of the text for evidence;
- look back to check detail;
- skim and scan for evidence.

These reading skills need to be demonstrated in the same way that teachers model writing. Clear and well constructed writing will emerge from careful examination of engaging yet challenging texts.

Today's children have been brought up in an "all-singing, all dancing" age when they expect more than "just a book". The emergence of the **interactive whiteboard** as another tool for teachers to use has increased the variety of teaching strategies and offered new ways to focus on key skills. Schemes which concentrate on looking at specific reading skills through interactive labelling, matching, storyboarding and other activities capitalise on the children's desire to "do" something while learning. Reading is not a passive activity. Simply decoding the text will not bring instant enlightenment. This has to be taught through careful modelling of skills. Research has shown that children respond to different learning styles and the use of pictures, colour, sound and movement on the interactive white board means that it can appeal to all children at many different levels.

The important thing is that children keep reading – keep enjoying – and keep learning!