(F) Clarifying the meanings of unknown words and phrases

Thoughtful readers clarify the meanings of unknown words or phrases when reading. However, many students do not monitor their comprehension and are willing to continue reading, merely saying a word or phrase, without understanding its meaning.

Since knowledge of vocabulary is fundamental to comprehension, it is essential students are taught strategies to clarify meanings of words and phrases they can ‘read’, but do not comprehend. This is regardless of the texts being read – texts students read in their daily lives, in school, and test passages in standardised tests.

One way of teaching students to clarify the meanings of unknown words and phrases is provided in the following notes on the Shared Reading session, ‘Clues are in the Context’.

Shared Reading: Clues are in the Context

Factual texts you read with your students during Shared Reading can be used to help your students use context clues and word parts to predict the meaning of specialised topic-specific vocabulary.

Note: The suggested Shared Reading session shows how to help your students predict the meaning of unknown specialised vocabulary when explicit context clues are available.

Steps

1. Before your Shared Reading session, prepare the following class chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word/Phrase</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
<th>Context clues/word parts that help me predict</th>
<th>My explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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2. Explain to the students why you are focusing on clarifying the meanings of unknown words or phrases – because you notice that when reading many of them do not stop reading when they do not know, or are confused about, the meaning of a word.

Take this opportunity to discuss with them how thoughtful readers stop when they don’t the meaning of a word, and try to figure it out using context clues and word parts, such as base words, Greek, Latin or French roots, and prefixes. They do not keep on reading! Make sure they know what you mean by context clues.

3. Introduce the text, and ask your students to predict what it might be about using their different types of prior knowledge, for example, text structures and text features, literary knowledge, background knowledge of personal and world experiences, words and parts of words, high frequency words, context clues, language patterns, and tense.

4. Then read the section of the text you selected to your students, then read it with them.

5. Ask them to tell you the words they could ‘read’ but didn’t know the meanings of. Use your chart and list a couple of students’ words or phrases in the left-hand column and the page number (for later reference) in the next column.
Then deal with one word or phrase at a time. Ask your students to predict their meanings, identify and explain the context clues and word parts they used to predict the meaning of the word or phrase, and write these in the Context clues/Word parts column.

6. Then ask them to explain in their own words the meaning of the word. Encourage all students to discuss the accuracy of the explanations given. When accurate, write their explanation in the appropriate column on the chart.

7. Ask your students to reread the text now they know the meanings of the words, and ask them to reflect on how using context clues and word parts helped them understand what they read.

8. Talk with your students about how they can transfer and apply this strategy when they read all texts – factual, narrative and test passages.

   In conversations that follow, help your students assess how well they use their knowledge of context clues and word parts to predict and comprehend when they read. Help them set personal goals about what they would like to do better when predicting using context clues and word parts, and ask them to record their comments in their Reading Logs. You can refer back to these notes during Individual Reading Conferences.

9. Since you may only have time to deal with two or three unknown words in each Shared Reading session, you will probably need to repeat this Shared Reading session for several days.

Note: Clarifying is one of the strategies students employ when engaged in Reciprocal Teaching (for further information on Reciprocal Teaching refer to page 00).
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