

## Tips for organizing reading activities

Here below you can find tips on working with books/stories activities (including the books suggestions), approaching books and stories and using those with the children, focusing on the following:

- improving literacy competencies,
- enthusing young people to become lifelong readers

### TIPS

#### Choose the story children will enjoy

Choose stories your children will enjoy or involve the children in the selection of the text. Choose short stories which can be read in about 10 minutes, so that children don't lose their concentration. Alternately, spread longer stories over the session and engage children in pre- and post-listening/reading tasks in between (i.e. guessing what will happen next in the story). Consider the children's language level when you choose stories. Pre-teach some of the words or phrases that are essential for children to understand the content.

#### Stir children's interest

Start by stirring children's interest (show them some pictures, the title etc. and ask children to guess what the story is about. What characters could they meet?).

#### Create the atmosphere

Play quiet background music, which will help children to become immersed in the story. Create a pleasant and supportive learning environment. Establish ground rules between yourself and the children regarding behaviour, to which everyone agrees. Encourage peer support groups which recognise individual pupils' interests, skills, etc.

#### Use drama techniques

Put on different voices for different characters when you read the story; read it with enthusiasm and drama. Use facial expressions and gestures to help children to understand the story.

#### Take your time

Read slowly and pause often to give children time to process the content. Ask checking questions to keep students engaged and make sure they are following the story.

## Be active

Encourage the children to participate in the story. Some children lose focus when sitting and listening, so it's important to find ways to keep them engaged (funny, diverse activities). Add variety to the types of activities you do alongside the story reading.

## Relate real life experiences to stories you read

Find opportunities to relate situations and problems children encounter in real life to the stories you read.

Read aloud as a family. Reading together implies several different opinions and perspectives. Pause at important parts of the story and let each person open up and share their thoughts.

## Reading strategies

Here below you can find some reading strategies for improving children's reading skills and enthusing them to become lifelong readers

### 1. Predicting

Encourage children to predict what is going to happen in the story. Predicting requires the child / reader / listener to do two things: to use the clues the author provides in the text and to use what he/she knows from personal experience or knowledge. When readers combine these two things, they can make relevant, logical predictions. Predicting is a complex strategy: when looking for evidence in the text to support their assumptions, children also ask questions, reread, interpret, draw conclusions, and, as a result, comprehend the text better. It is also a fun activity. Children talk about what is happening in the story, which stimulates their motivation to listen to or read the story and check if their predictions come true or not. You can start with the title of the book, front and back covers, illustrations, a specific passage, or personal experience or knowledge.

Also, use this strategy during the reading time, invite children to predict and support their predictions: "What made you say that?" or "Can you find an example from the text or pictures?"

Making predictions activates students' prior knowledge about the text and helps them make connections between new information and what they already know. Predicting encourages children to think ahead and ask questions. It also allows students to interact with the text and understand the story better. Predicting what is going to happen when reading a story gives

them a reason to read (to find out if their predictions were right), activates language or vocabulary and also improves their comprehension. Thus, they make the first steps for developing a love for literature.

Activities to develop prediction

Asking questions

Before Reading - What will the book be about? Who will the main characters be? What big events will happen in the story? Where will the events take place?

During Reading - How will a character respond to the problem? Who might help the character solve the problem?

After Reading - Which predictions were correct? Which predictions were incorrect? Why were the predictions incorrect?

Use book titles - Read the children the titles of books they've never read before and ask them to make a prediction what the books are about. Then read the back cover or inside flap of the book out loud to see how close they came to the mark.

Bring an unusual object to class. Show children the object and have them predict what it could be used for and how it works. While showing the object, point out structures or components that could be clues as to what it is without actually explaining how it works.

Read a section / a paragraph of the text and then have children predict what is going to happen next. Have them write their predictions on sentence strips and place each prediction on the wall. Revisit the predictions once the action has been revealed in the story.

Explain to the children that making predictions is like being a detective: finding clues in the book title, the illustration on the front cover, as well as pictures inside the book to predict what the story is about.

## 2. Asking open thought-provoking questions which guide children through the story

Use open, thought-provoking questions (interpretive and evaluative questions) which allow the children to make connections, think more deeply and relate events to their lives and experiences.

An interpretive question has more than one answer that can be supported with evidence from the text. What does X mean by...? / Why is Tess sad? / Do you think C should marry the prince? Why?



Evaluative questions ask the reader to decide if they agree with the writer's ideas or point of view. The answers can be supported from real experiences. What is your opinion of...? Do you think ... is a good or bad thing? What changes would you recommend... Why? Judge the value of... Why do you think this? How would you feel if...? How effective are...? How did you feel about...? What would you have done in that situation? Do you agree with the character's behaviour in a particular situation?

Interpretive and evaluative questions are closely related to each other. A question could be either evaluative or interpretive depending on the answer you get. It is interpretive when the answer is supported by the story and evaluative when the answer is supported by real life experiences.

Think of some thought-provoking questions to ask children the next time they finish a book:

If you could give the book another title, what would it be?

Which characters would you like to meet in real life?

What do you wish was different about the ending?

Would the book make a cool movie? Video game? TV show?

What is one thing you would ask the author if you could talk to him or her?

What do you think the author wants readers to remember most from this book?

What feelings did you have during the telling?

Did you "become" any of the characters?

Did this story remind you of other stories you know?

Did any of the characters seem like people you know?

Can you think of someone in this group who may have disliked the story?

Would your brother / mother / daughter / father like this story? Why would they like it?

At which point in the story did you really start listening?

Which was the most vivid bit for you?

At which points in the story did you think of other things?



### 3. Identifying and discussing the key messages of the stories

The key message of a story is the main idea or the lesson that the author wanted to convey to the readers. Books convey values that are worth exploring with children. This process not only helps children build knowledge about the construction of texts, but also encourages children to reflect on the texts and the values the writer conveys to his readers (inclusion, equality, friendship, empathy, honesty etc).

What do you think the author is trying to tell us?

Who's got a really good idea about what this story is trying to tell us?

What do you think is the message of this book?

What do you think is the big idea of this story? How do you know?

### 4. Making connections to children's prior knowledge and experiences

This strategy helps children comprehend the ideas in the stories and reflect on their real life experiences.

Relate situations happening in the story to children's personal life experiences. What does that mean when you say X (i.e. panic)? How does someone feel when...?', Can you remember...?', and What do you think about...?', are open questions aimed at inviting children to relate to their prior knowledge and experiences and reflect on their own thoughts about the message the story conveys.

### 5. Organising peer discussion

Stories provide opportunities for children to talk and interact with their peers. This interaction enables children to see other people's perspectives, which may trigger the development of 'the theory of mind' (Mitchell and Riggs, 2000); it helps them understand that other people can have different opinions from their own.

Peer discussions allow children to share their opinions about the story, to share their experiences, to discuss the story and develop understanding that texts can be interpreted differently by different people.

### 6. Exploring words and pictures

Reading is an excellent opportunity to discuss pictures and explore new words. Picture books are invaluable tools for classroom discussions: children make meanings about the story from what they hear from the words and what they see from the pictures.

## Reading activities

READING ACTIVITIES to do before, during, or after Reading

### **Before reading / getting in contact with the story**

Photographs / drawings: having a look at the pictures children are asked to predict what the story will be about.

Brainstorming: Children are given the title of the story and asked to write the words they associate with the topic: e.g. The Rock. What do you associate the ROCK with?

Anticipation through keywords: Select the key words of the story and ask children to create their own story; invite them to compare their story with the original version.

Anticipation through main ideas / summary: Give children the handout with the main ideas / summary of the book and ask them to suggest a possible plot line / a possible title.

Reconstruct the story being given the introduction / the ending / main ideas / main ideas in the form of questions. Children are given the first lines of the story / the ending / the main ideas and asked to write their own story. Invite them to compare the original with their story.

Start thinking about a story with the following beginning / ending: Children are given the beginning or ending of the story. Invite them to compare the original with their story.

Jigsaw reading: Each group has different information from a different part of the text and they must tell other children about the part of the text they have read. This way the children construct meaning from the text collectively. Read the story to check.

Unjumbling sentences: Select some simple sentences from different parts of the text and write them on the board. Children put them in the correct order and predict the story in groups. If it's an action story, get children to act out or mime the sentences in groups.



### While reading the story

Find a title Children read / listen to the story and find a title to the given story.

Find an introduction / an ending to the story Children read / listen to the story without the introduction / the ending. They have to find an introduction/an ending to the story.

A found poem Children read the story and write a FOUND POEM.

A “found poem” is created using only the words, phrases, or quotations that have been selected and rearranged from another text. To create found poems, children must choose words or phrases that are meaningful or interesting to them and organize the language around a theme or message. Then they have to arrange the language they have selected to create their poems. Children share their poems and comment on the poems created by their classmates.

### After reading the story

Your cover of the story: Children are asked to draw a cover to the story and organise a picture gallery (role play: critics / parents / children comment on their favourite cover).

Another ending: Children are asked to give another ending to the given story.

Character poster / Wanted / Missing: Children are asked to draw a Wanted / Missing character poster. Children have to take what they know about a character in the story and turn the details into a wanted poster. First, children should write some information that could be useful on a wanted poster and make a list of the character’s traits. When the list is finished, the children work on the poster by drawing a picture of the character, writing his / her name, and all the other information on the list. Organise a gallery and have children compare their posters. What do the posters have in common? How are they different?

Working with summaries: Children read a summary of the story (prepared by the teacher) containing deliberate mistakes; children are asked to find the mistakes. Children have to prepare their own silly summaries for another student / group to correct.

Balloon debate: Ask children to imagine all the characters of the story in a balloon with a hole in it. One of the characters should be ejected to keep the balloon aloft. Children should choose and explain their choice.

Another perspective: Children are asked to tell the story from another perspective / an inanimate character (the rock).

Role play: Interview with a character - press conference with your favourite character: Children have to write an interview with a character.

A character's point of view: Children have to comment on the story from one of the characters' point of view

Comments with a task: Children have to comment on the story with different tasks (e.g. read the story and write a letter to the writer / write an email to the writer who is your friend)

A story map / chart: Children have to draw a story map of the story (if it is an adventure story happening in different places).

The morale of the story: Have a discussion with children on the morale of the story. Which is the lesson of the story?

The modern version of the story: Children are asked to give a modern version of the story. What elements would you keep? What would you change? Why?

Missing Persons: This is another game that does double-time to assess story comprehension. After reading a story aloud, ask a child volunteer to leave the room and return impersonating one of the characters from the story. The rest of the class should guess which character the child is pretending to be.

Draw pictures: The ability to use visual imagery (e.g. picturing what the setting and characters look like while reading a book) is helpful to children; ask your child to create drawings that represent different characters, scenes, or events.

### **Activities focused on enriching vocabulary**

Bingo is a game whereby each player matches numbers / words / pictures printed in different arrangements on cards with the numbers / words the caller draws at random. Hand out sheets of paper to the children with a list of words from the story you're reading to them. As you read the book, the children will circle the words from the sheet they hear. At the end of the chapter, have the class discuss what words they found.

Word Search is a game composed of the letters of words formatted in a grid. The goal is to find and highlight all of the words hidden in the puzzle. The words may be placed diagonally, horizontally, vertically, or backwards. All of the hidden words can be found in a list alongside the grid.

Story sequencing: Write a summary of the story and jumbled its sentences. Children have to order the jumbled sentences of the story (use WordWall for its online version).

**Spidergrams:** Children have to create spidergrams with keywords they associate with the topic of the story.

**Word families:** Children have to create word families with the keywords in the story.

**Taboo:** This is like a Hot Seat game where the person in the hot seat has to guess what is behind them on the board. This time, however, children need to guess as many words as they can from the story within a limited period of time.

**Disappearing words:** Children are shown a sentence that disappears in 2 seconds. They need to remember what they saw and write it down on a mini-whiteboard or paper. The fastest team to show the correct answer wins the round.

**First letter game:** Children have to discover a mystery word related to the story. They are shown different pictures and they need to take the first letter from each picture to identify the mystery word.

**Give me 5:** The teacher calls out a child to give 5 words on a given category / word family in 30 seconds.

**Running dictation:** Children work in pairs. One child is the runner and the other is the writer. The runner reads the sentence posted in the classroom walls and runs back to the writer and dictate the message. The sentence can be the key message of the story.

**Make other words out of a large word:** Take a large word say “Dictionary” and try to make smaller words out of it.

**Charades:** Charades is an activity which uses acting as an ideal way for children to demonstrate how well they understand the story. Ask student volunteers to act out a word for the other children to guess.

**Play the ABC game:** Starting from A, have children go through the alphabet and name one thing they come across in the story beginning with each letter.

**Use the title (older children).** Ask children to work in small groups and think of 5 words that may come up in the text. When they have done this, 'secretaries' can come to the board and write up all the words. Then the learners scan the text and see how many of the words are in the text. Which group got most words right?

**Sentence Stretching:** Get children in groups of four or five. Start with a short sentence or group of words. Pass it around the group, with the rule that each person must add (a word or a group of words) or change ONE word (to another word or a group of words) to make the sentence more specific and more interesting.

### Activities focused on children reading out aloud

**Take turns reading:** You can invite children to reread the story. Start by reading one line and then let children read one line each line (use different ways to invite children to read).

**Silent reading:** When encouraging children to predict what will happen in the story, invite them to find out by reading the paragraph themselves, and then check within their group.

**Talk through stories:** Pause when reading to children to talk about what they think may happen next or how they felt about a certain character and what happened to them. Ask them to give evidence by reading out the supporting paragraph.

**Act out:** Most stories have a repetitive structure. Invite children to join reading the story (assign small roles and invite children to read short lines; choral reading).

**Different voices:** Ask children to read paragraphs or short lines and illustrate different feelings (joy, fear, anxiety, boredom etc). Discuss the difference.

**Role-playing:** After reading the story, get children in groups and invite children to act out the story. This also helps them think about how one event leads to another and why characters act and react the way they do.

Also see: Jigsaw reading, Unjumbling sentences

### Activities focused on exploiting texts / introducing story elements

Discussions about story elements should start as early as preschool and continue through high school. For younger children, use simple terms such as beginning, middle, and end. For older children, more complex elements such as character, setting, events, problem, and resolution should be introduced to increase difficulty.

**Title (covers):** Discussion on the significance of the title. Give them the title and ask them to predict the story.

**Setting / first paragraph:** Discussion on the part that introduction plays in a story.

Read the first paragraph of a story and ask children what details they found and think are revealing for the development of the story; invite them to predict what is going to happen from these details.

Read a story without the introduction and ask them to come up with an appropriate introduction.

Storyline: Help children identify the main elements of the storyline.

Create a Storyboard: Storyboarding is a wonderful way to integrate art with story reading. To make your own storyboard, simply list the elements of basic story structure you want to focus on (e.g., beginning, middle, and end) on a page with a large empty box next to each element. In each box, have children draw a scene from a text you've read recently that illustrates that element.

Use the "SWBST" Strategy: The "Somebody Wanted But So Then" exercise provides children with a framework to summarize a story after identifying and describing key story elements. Using a table like the one below, have children fill in each box with a brief summary from the story. For older children, use more elements and increase the level of detail required for each element.

*Somebody* (Main character)

*Wanted* (His dreams)

*But* (Problem / conflict)

*So,* (Solution)

*Then* (Ending)

### Build Out Story Maps

A story map is another visual tool that helps children to summarize story structure to improve reading comprehension. Use a text you've read and have children describe the main story components.

### Sample Story Map Card

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Setting:

Characters:

Time:

Place:

Problem:

Events:

Resolution:

Also see: A story map / chart; Anticipation through main ideas / summary; Brainstorm solutions to problems and dilemmas.

Characters:

Have a discussion about the characters in the story. Ask children who they liked and who they didn't and why. Depending on the age of the children discuss how the characters are described in the story (direct description, through their actions and behaviour). Revise adjectives that we use when describing characters. Ask children to find information about characters from the text and putting it next to the name of the right character. Encourage children to understand multiple viewpoints. After you read a story, talk about how certain events might impact different characters.

Also see: Character poster / Wanted / Missing; Role play: Interview with a character - press conference with your favourite character; Another perspective; A character's point of view; Balloon debate; Missing Persons.

Ending: Another ending / Find an ending to the story

Follow up

Also see: The morale of the story; The modern version of the story; A found poem

Story cubes / dice: You can create a story cube having six general questions related to stories on all its sides (What is the story about? What is its key message? Who are the main characters? What happens in the story? What is the problem? What is the solution? Etc.). Get children in pairs and encourage them to talk about the story by using the cube like a dice.

A reading diary Encourage positive self-evaluation. You can encourage children to keep a reading diary including children's reflection on some of the following prompts:

Was the book enjoyable for you? Why or why not?



What were your favourite or least favourite moments?

Who were your favourite or least favourite characters?

Was the book easy for you to read? Why or why not?

Would you recommend it to your friends? Why or why not?

What did you learn from the book? For example, useful language, factual, cultural, historical, geographical information, etc.

Would you like to read another story by the same author? Why or why not?

### Additional exercises for encouraging children to work with books

**Matching covers:** A fun activity where students must discover which cover belongs to which synopsis. It is a way to promote the curiosity of the different novels that can be read. If we are interested in increased difficulty, only the covers of the books can be presented. And the students themselves, individually or in small groups, will predict the synopsis.

**Booktrailer/teaser:** New technologies provide us with great tools to encourage reading. This activity consists of summarizing, in just over a minute, through images and audios, the book students have read. Later they can be visualized in class to recommend reading these books to their classmates.

**How does your work end?:** A great activity with which your students will put their creativity and imagination into practice. Once a specific story is read, it will be interesting to propose a different ending. Perhaps that ending is more interesting and incredible than that of the story itself.

**Booktubers for a day:** Students become Booktubers for a day. They can record themselves either reviewing a book or recommending their favourite readings.

**Inventing a publisher:** How are we going to star a publishing house? What kind of books are we going to publish? What target are we going to aim at? How are we going to promote our books?

**Do it Yourself:** Brainstorming about how students would try to engage their peers in reading. In fact this would be a rehearsal for the project's aims. Students can be invited to share their own experience. How they started reading. What is their favourite book/ film, series, piece of art, etc/.



**Word Tree:** Generate a list of words related to the topic (gender equality, inclusion and diversity). For example, if defining diversity is discussed, ask participants to give you words related to the topic. Participants can suggest „different cultures“, „borders“, „prejudices“, „racism“, „intercultural dialogue“, etc. Write all the suggestions on the board, grouped by topic if possible. You can use this opportunity to introduce essential terms as well and discuss each topic with examples.