

Connectors: Teachers' notes

Introduction

A variety of resources and a balance of approaches are the key to effective literacy teaching. *Connectors* is a series of books that use the approach of small group peer learning with the reciprocal teaching method (see below). This approach allows children to practise their speaking and listening skills in conversations and discussions. It helps them to learn active listening, questioning and prediction skills and to apply comprehension strategies. The approach should not replace guided reading sessions but should be used with other literacy resources and alongside other strategies, including guided reading, shared reading, independent reading and reading to children.

Reciprocal reading

The *Connectors* books are based on the reciprocal reading approach, that is, using predicting, clarifying, questioning and summarising techniques to comprehend. Reciprocal reading has been shown to increase both reading and listening comprehension and it has been demonstrated that children using this approach transfer their learning into other contexts. It has also been effective in improving the achievement of learners from diverse backgrounds. Reciprocal reading requires children to use oral language skills. Oral language is the foundation for all other language learning and involves not only communicating, but also thinking critically and creatively, so using this series will have an impact across the curriculum.

Peer learning

Reciprocal reading requires children to work cooperatively and collaboratively. Peer learning, where children support each other, is a very effective and natural form of learning. Children's peers are among the most significant people in their lives. By working together in a cooperative atmosphere, where social learning, listening to each other, learning to take turns and building on what others say, are valued, children learn to interact and motivate each other to interpret, analyse, evaluate and make connections.

Before using *Connectors*

Children need to be familiar with the comprehension strategies and know how to apply these to their own reading. They also need to be able to work independently of the teacher. Before using *Connectors*, model the strategies and allow children time to practise them. Be careful not to do this so much or so explicitly that it becomes boring. Observe the children to ensure that they remain enthusiastic and interested. Children will learn to apply the strategies as they practise them in context, and will gain confidence and understanding as they use the books.

Teacher explicitly **models** the **strategies**



Children practise applying the **strategies**

Learning goals

After the initial teacher-led instruction and strategy demonstration, the children will:

- work in a small group, independent of the teacher, to analyse and evaluate a variety of different texts, through conversation and discussion
- practise the comprehension strategies of: predicting, clarifying, asking questions, summarising, making connections,
- creating mental images and evaluating
- practise stating their opinions and justifying the reasons for these opinions
- practise oral language skills – both listening and speaking
- show responsibility while working in a leadership role when appropriate and as a group participant
- be encouraged and motivated to research and read further for more information.

Strategy – predicting

When predicting, readers:

- combine new material with what they already know
- anticipate what the text might be about or what they might find out next.

To predict, readers:

- use information from the text and their prior knowledge
- should be able to justify the source of their predictions
- should be able to confirm their predictions after reading.

Helping children to apply the strategy

- Model the prediction strategy with the children using a non-fiction text.

- Introduce the strategy by 'thinking out loud', using statements such as: *I think this could be about... because... I predict this is going to tell me... because...*
- Show the children a photograph in a non-fiction text that has captions and other appropriate visual information. Cover the main text.
- Give the children time to discuss the visual information they can see.
- Ask the children to create a bullet-pointed list of what the text might be about, based on the information available.
- Ask the children to share their lists.
- Invite the children to make some predictions using their prior knowledge.
- Now read the text and compare the children's versions. Were the children's predictions right or wrong?

Strategy – clarifying

Discuss with the children what 'clarify' means (to understand or make clear something that is not known).

Helping children to apply the strategy

- Choose a short text and read it to the children. Stop when you come to a difficult word. Show them, by 'thinking out loud' how you might find out what the word means, for example: *I don't know what this word means. I will read on to see if I can find clues. This word is tricky because I am not sure how to say it. I will try to blend the sounds together. I have read on but I still can't work out what this word means. I will look up the meaning in the dictionary.*
- Give the children a text that contains some challenging words. Ask them to highlight

words they don't know the meaning of or how to say. Let them work with a partner to discuss what the words might mean in context.

- Give out copies of a school dictionary. Look up one of the words that the children have highlighted and choose the meaning that best fits the text.
- Ask the children to turn to a particular page in the dictionary. Call out some words from that page and invite the children to find them. Dictate a sentence that includes one of the words on the page and ask them to find the meaning.
- Clarify geographical locations with the use of an atlas. Invite children to find and talk about the ones they know.

Strategy – asking questions

Explain to the children that good readers think of questions as they read a text, which helps them to understand what is being read. Sometimes the answers to these questions can be found in the text – but not always.

Helping children to apply the strategy

- Read a selected text, stopping where appropriate, to model a question by thinking out loud. You can use language such as:
 - *Why do you think...?*
 - *How do you know...?*
 - *What do you think would happen if...?*
 - *Do you think... Why/why not?*
 - *I wonder why...?*
 - *I think that this is the case, but I'm not sure...*
 - *I think this is why it happened...*
- Use headlines from magazines or newspapers. Ask the children to make a list of all the questions they can think of about the text.
- Give the children a large piece of paper and a piece of text. Ask them to make columns using the different question starters: *what, when, how, why, where*.
- Now they should work in pairs to generate questions and write them in the appropriate columns.
- Read aloud a text from a non-fiction book. Ask the children to role play being a newspaper reporter and to formulate questions that they could ask about the topic.
- Working in pairs, let the children use their questions in a role-play interview, with one child playing the role of reporter and the other an 'expert' on the topic.

Bright ideas

Predicting: Set up a 'Prediction board' in the classroom. Choose two or three children to make predictions each day. They should look for things to make predictions about during the day. For example: the weather, sporting events, news, reading. Ask the children to write their predictions on the board. At an appropriate time, ask the children to justify their predictions.

Clarifying: Establish a 'Work this out' board in the classroom. Choose two children to be word sleuths for the week. The word sleuths should look for difficult/interesting words from a variety of sources throughout the week. They should write the words and phrases on the board. Other children can try to work out what the word or phrase might mean, and write it on the board. At an appropriate time, confirm the meaning of the words or phrases. Then select new word sleuths for the following week.

Asking questions: Each day, place a picture, photograph or article on the 'Question board'. In any spare moment during the week, the children can formulate a question and place it around the picture or a photograph. (No questions can be the same.) At the end of the week, review the questions. Categorise them into open questions and closed questions. As the children become more proficient questioners, categorise the questions into question type, for example, literal or inferential. Invite the children to think of as many different ways as they can to ask questions, for example: *How do you think...? Why do you think...? How do you know...? I wonder why...? What do you think of...? What could happen if...?*

Strategy – summarising

Talk to the children about what summarising means – recalling main ideas, key points or the most important information, and arranging them in order, in their own words, to make sense.

Helping children to apply the strategy

- Read short examples of text to the children, then orally model a summary of what you read. You can use language such as:
 - *I think this text was mainly about...*
 - *Two important facts were...*
- After reading a selected text, encourage the children to make lists of important ideas and interesting facts.
- Discuss with the children how visual features in information texts can help them separate important information from less-important information. Give the children an article from a newspaper or a magazine. Ask them to highlight titles, headings, subheadings, bold text, changes in font sizes, icons and so on. Discuss what these things show.
- Give the children a selected text to read and discuss. In pairs, the children should create a newspaper report based on the text. They can use headlines, subheads and so on. The report should illustrate the main points of the text they read.

Strategy – making connections

Explain to the children that making connections when reading helps with comprehension. There are three main ways the reader can make connections:

- Text-to-self – reader connects information to their own experience.
 - Text-to-text – reader is reminded of another similar text.
 - Text-to-world – reader makes connections to the world beyond their own experience.
- Helping children to apply the strategy**
- When reading to the children, model by stopping at a part that makes a connection for you and ‘think out loud’. You could use language such as:
 - *This reminds me of when I...*
 - *I have read another book that...*
 - *This reminds me of... in the world...*
 - Give the children a selected text. Encourage them to highlight words, information or ideas that make a connection for them. Ask them to share their connection with the group.
 - Give the children a list of words, for example, storm, darkness, happy, embarrassed, fear, celebration and bossiness. Tell them to discuss the words and any connections with either themselves, a person, a character from another text or a world event that the words might have triggered.

Strategy – visualising

Discuss with the children what it means to visualise a picture. Talk about how readers can create images using their senses.

Helping children to apply the strategy

- When you are reading to the children, stop at an appropriate place and model what you are seeing as you read. You can use language such as:
 - *When I read... I get a picture in my head. This is the picture I get...(describe it to the children).*
 - *Or: This is the picture I get... (then sketch it).*

Expressing opinions

Encouraging children to express a point of view helps them to evaluate, and make judgements and inferences.

Talking about points of view

- Discuss the fact that an opinion is not necessarily based on certainty or proof. Explain that people have different opinions and that one opinion is not necessarily right.
- When reading to children, stop at an appropriate place and give an opinion about something stated in the text.
- Encourage children to respond with their own opinions, setting up a 'mini-debate' (collaborative reasoning) about the topic. Children need to be able to justify their reasoning.

Bright ideas

Summarising: Select one of the children to be a news reporter for the day. At the end of the day, ask the news reporter to present a summary of the day's events in a television-style news report. The class can evaluate the report and categorise it into: important information, less-important information. They should justify their reasons for the category.

Making connections: Each week, place a word or a statement in a spidergram. Ask the children to add any connections they can make. Review the connections at the end of the week.

Visualising: Provide an area titled 'Painting pictures with words'. Encourage the children find images that are described in text, or to create their own, and place these in the area. Take time once a week to review the images. Ask the children to sketch one they liked. Create a class book from the text-images and sketches.

Expressing opinions: Create an opinion board. On one half write *I agree*; on the other half write *I do not agree*. Each week, write a statement on the board, for example: *No children should be out after 8 o'clock*. Encourage the children to add their opinions in the appropriate column and justify their reasoning. At the end of the week, discuss the opinions.

Strategy – making an inference

Discuss with the children that inference means that readers use prior knowledge to 'read between the lines' or interpret what the writer might mean. Explain that sometimes not everything is said in words. Readers must use their background knowledge, combined with the information in the text, to work out what is meant, or to arrive at some conclusions or understandings. Model the strategy orally during reading aloud to the children.

Helping children to apply the strategy

- Talk to the children about how authors imply and readers infer. Read selected passages to the children, for example:
 - *Samuel glanced out of the window. He could see people huddled in coats – heads down and moving quickly along the footpath.*

Give the children paper divided into three columns: *Author implies that; Reader infers that; Evidence*. In pairs, ask them to fill in the columns and to share and discuss their inferences.

- Give the children copies of magazine or newspaper articles and highlighter pens. Ask them to highlight all the places where the author has implied something. Working in pairs, they should make a list of all the different inferences they could make from what the author has implied.

- Provide samples of comics, graphic novels and cartoons. Discuss how the writers of this genre use implied information needed to understand the message. Look at how humour is applied in humorous cartoons. List the background information needed to understand the message. Ask the children to find cartoons or comic strips where they don't understand the message. Discuss the importance of background knowledge in being able to make inferences.
- Find implied information in visual information, such as pictures and advertisements. Make a list of the inferences and the evidence. Perform mimes or play charades and invite the children to make inferences.
 - *I can infer that you are... because...*

Bright ideas

Making an inference: Create an inference board. Ask the children to create a passage of text that contains a hidden message and place it on the board, or to find examples in newspaper headlines, articles, political cartoons and so on. At the end of the week ask the children to work in pairs or small groups to find the hidden messages.

Working with *Connectors*

Step 1

- Select a text and choose six children whose reading level matches the text level to work together in a group, with you as a guide.
- Talk to the children about the purpose of the books and their learning goals (see page 1 of these teachers' notes).
- Give each child a copy of the book and discuss 'What to do' on pages 2–3. Go through the procedure on these pages, ensuring that the children understand the instructions and the icons.
- Look at and discuss pages 28–29 ('Something to think about').
- Return to page 2 and ask the children to each select a coloured icon then turn to pages 4–5. Guide the first child through the process of being a leader.
- Encourage children who try to clarify and give feedback on good questions.
- Work through the pages, guiding each new leader and giving encouragement, feedback and help where needed.
- At the end of the book, ensure that the children understand the independent or partner work suggestions on pages 28–31.

Step 2

- Choose another text. Remain in the group but as an observer only. During this time, fill in the initial observations column of the observation sheet (page 8 of these teachers' notes).

Step 3

- The children should work through the *Connectors* books independently. Retain one book however, in each age-grouped set, for a final observation. During this final observation, remain in the group for the entire time as observer only. Fill in final observations column of the observation sheet (page 8 of these teachers' notes).

Collecting data

For effective literacy teaching, assessment procedures should focus on gathering information about learning. The assessment procedure for *Connectors* is based on formative assessment, for which feedback is central. It consists of the following: sharing learning goals with the children; observing children in group and independent activities; feeding back to children about their next steps in learning. Use the observation sheet on page 8 to help with this process.

| Possible issues | Solutions |
|---|---|
| Some children complete the reading before others or dominate the discussion | Ensure that the groups of children are well matched in ability. Emphasise the importance of taking turns and listening to everyone's ideas. |
| Children not staying on task | Establish all routines firmly from the beginning. Keep an eye on the group, and step in when routines or behaviour are not as they should be. Children who continually disrupt a group need to stay on other independent tasks or in guided reading groups until they are able to participate in this approach. |
| Some children are reluctant to participate | Encourage and give feedback to reluctant participators, and involve these children in other oral activities in the classroom. |
| No one knows how to clarify a word or phrase | If no one knows a word or phrase, the leader can record this and ask an 'expert' later, (for example: teacher, parent, the internet). |

Observation sheet

Child's name:

| | Initial observation Date: | Final observation Date: |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Confident in leadership role | | |
| Participates in the group, listening and responding to the contributions of others | | |
| Shows interest and response with enthusiasm | | |
| Stays on task and works well in an independent group | | |
| Will ask for clarification, if needed (AF2) | | |
| Uses prediction to help understand the text: – uses information in the text – uses prior knowledge – checks understanding after reading (AF2) | | |
| Uses summary to confirm understanding (AF2) | | |
| Asks questions: – asks basic questions – asks inferential and deductive questions (AF2/3) | | |
| COMMENTS | | |