

## Activating and Building Schema

### Readers

- Activate relevant prior knowledge before, during, and after reading
- Decide if they need additional background information about the topic, format, or language of the text they will be reading
- Use their schema to enhance their understandings and to provide a framework for learning new information
- Add to / change their schema as they discover new ideas and / or information in their reading

Pearson, Dole, Roeler, and Duffy say, "Reading is a process of actively constructing of meaning and connecting prior knowledge with new information."

There are three kinds of prior knowledge or schema:

- Specific knowledge about topic of the text
- General world knowledge about social relationships and casual structures
- Knowledge about the text's organization (genre)

Good readers use their prior knowledge to:

- make predictions
- visualize
- ask questions to monitor comprehension
- draw inferences
- confirm hypothesis... that's what I expected
- determine what is important in the text
- demonstrate to others that they have understood what they have read

*Strategies That Work*, Chapter 6 Making Connections: A Bridge from the New to the Known

"When we begin strategy instruction with children, stories close to their own lives and experiences are helpful for introducing new ways of thinking about reading. Readers naturally make connections between books and their own lives. Once they have heard a wealth of stories and narratives, they begin to connect themes, characters, and issues from one book to another. When children understand how to connect the texts they read to their lives, they begin to make connections between what they read and the larger world. This nudges them into thinking about bigger, more expansive issues beyond their universe of home, school, and neighborhood *Strategies That Work*."

## Two Column Chart

Encouraging the students to fill in a chart helps them to summarize the story in the first column and respond to a memory, some prior knowledge, or a past experience in the second column.

For example:

What the Story is about...	What it reminds me of...
The turtle swims in the water.	I once saw a turtle swimming in a pond at my grandma's house.
The turtle eats insects.	We fed the turtle at school flakes the teacher bought at the store in Kindergarten.

After several books, the teacher should introduce the idea of coding the responses.

R     this reminds me of...  
T-S   text to self  
T-T   text to text  
T-W   text to world

Just making a connection won't do. Make sure your students are not so busy trying to make a connection that they create one (in other words, lie). Also, the purpose for coding the text is to monitor comprehension, think about meaning, and enhance understanding.

Remember to ask your students, "How does that connection help you understand?"

What the Story is about...	What it reminds me of...

## Activating and Building Schema Making Connections

Readers can make connections while reading, synthesizing new information, deepening existing understandings, broadening beliefs and informing misconceptions.

There are three types of connections:

Text to Self	Connections between different books and the reader's current personal background knowledge and experience base <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- choose texts with characters the same age as the students, or had similar problems and experiences</li><li>- share connections from past experiences</li></ul>
Text to Text	Connections between books and different authors <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- comparing characters, their personalities, and actions</li><li>- comparing story events and plot lines</li><li>- comparing lessons, themes, or messages in stories</li><li>- finding common themes, writing style, or perspectives in the work of a single author</li><li>- comparing treatment of common themes by different authors</li><li>- comparing different versions of familiar stories</li></ul>
Text to World	Connections between books and information about the world around us <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- We must build background knowledge to help our students be successful with gaining new information.</li><li>- Encouraging our students to build text to world connections supports our efforts to teach students social studies</li></ul>

### Book Title Suggestions:

Text to Self	Harvey Moon Clean Your Room Owen, Chrysanthemum, and Julius, the Baby of the World
Text to Text	Oliver Button is a Sissy and Amazing Grace Author studies: Eve Bunting books work well
Text to World	Night in the Country

## Activating and Building Schema Think-Alouds

This is a paraphrasing from Debbie Miller's book, *Reading With Meaning*, pages 54-57.

Think Alouds are a wonderful way to show our students how to build schema, but we must be genuine. We must be deliberate. Our think alouds must be genuine, with precise language, with thoughtful responses.

We require proper planning. What do I want students to understand about this strategy? Of all the places in the text where I could authentically think out loud, which two or three would best illustrate my point? Mark those places before your lesson, and think about what you will say and how you will say it. Only model the point you are trying to make, don't model another thinking strategy during this read aloud. Be aware of your focus and keep it.

Authenticity matters. The teacher's connections, questions, inferences, must be genuine. That's why book selection is key. The book won't be perfect for your lesson unless you can connect with it and put your personal stamp on it in some way.

Use precise language. Be precise when you share your thinking. Say what you need to say as clearly and concisely as you can, then move on. Use real language and standard terminology. Define the strategy. Decide how you'll format your responses to the reading.

As we teach the students to think through the text we encourage the students to respond using this terminology:

"When I read [of heard] these words... it reminded me of..."

"When I saw the picture of... it made me think about..."

Teachers should encourage the students to explain why they are thinking about that connection. "What were the words in the story that made you think about..." It is important for teachers to become aware of what's going on inside their heads as they read, to learn how to articulate their thinking for themselves and others, and think aloud about their connections and mental images. As children's thinking grows, the students construct meaning, the ability to reflect on what they read, and opportunities to share their insight.

Building Background Knowledge for Literary Elements  
*Strategies That Work*, pages 76-77

If students know what to expect, they can read easier.

Literary Elements	What we know about the element
Genre	Nonfiction, fiction, poetry, and so on vary. With exposure, readers become familiar with the special characteristics and conventions of each genre.
Format	Readers learn the differences among picture books, novels, nonfiction trade books, etc. They rely on these differences to better understand what is read.
Form	Readers learn to distinguish among essays, editorials, manuals, feature articles, and so on. This awareness heightens their understanding when they different forms.
Author	Readers learn that certain authors carry similar themes, issues and topics throughout their writing. Readers come to expect that.
Text Structure	Readers recognize the differences between narrative and expository text and other structures, and learn the characteristics of each to better comprehend.
Cue Words	Readers learn to identify cue words that alert them about what's to come. For example, but suggests a coming change, in other words is followed by a definition, and most important means exactly that.
Writing Style	Readers notice the various writing styles of different authors, develop an appreciation of them, and begin to make connections between them.
Literary Features	Readers learn to search for themes, identify problems, and recognize settings when they read. They develop background knowledge to the features of text.

## Thinking about which connections help us comprehend the text

*Reading With Meaning*, pages 60-61

Day one

Read a book.

Record all the connections the children make.

Day two

Read the connections one by one.

Decide if the response helped us with the text. Mark it with a 1.

Decide if the response didn't help us with the text. Mark it with a 2.

If the child who made the response disagrees, let them explain their thinking.

Then lead a discussion, "What can we learn from all this great thinking we just did?"

Comments by Debbie Miller's students:

- If the connection is to only one page, it is a little connection and not gonna help you much.
- How about if we connect to a word, that doesn't really help us, but if we connect to a bigger thing, like if it's on almost all the pages and it's what the book is really about, like an idea or something, then it can help you.

When reflecting on the student's ability to make connections the teacher needs to think about:

- Are children making real connections to the story?
- Do they understand how these connections help them?
- What kind of language do they use when they talk to each other?

## Talking Drawings

### Purpose:

To activate schema

To provide information that shapes future teaching

To provide a vehicle for students to measure learning

### Process:

Invite students to draw or sketch a picture that shows everything they know about the subject they are going to explore. Ask them to let their drawings carry their entire background knowledge. Provide a short time for sketching.

Once everyone has their schema represented in their drawing, have the students turn to a neighbor and tell the neighbor about their drawings and all about the topic. The students can look for differences between their drawings. The students can also discuss how they know what they know. The students can now add one or two word labels to their drawings, which capture major concepts from their background knowledge.

Collect the drawings and use the information they contain to develop the unit of study. These initial drawings can also be used as a basis of comparison after the unit of study is completed and compare it to a post drawing.

Source: Talking Drawings: A Strategy for Assisting Learners by Suzanne McConnell, Journal of Reading, Dec.92-Jan. 93.