

# Enhancing Young Students' Comprehension: Text Talk



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# Comprehension in Early Grades

What are the issues?

Goals of reading instruction are different:

- Recognition of printed forms of words they know orally
- Making sense of printed text containing familiar ideas

*Where does comprehension fit in?*

# **Finding a Vehicle for Comprehension**

**Simple texts do not challenge their thinking**

**Their thinking capacities are ahead of their reading abilities**

**We need not hold back the development of their language and comprehension abilities**

**Use experiences with *decontextualized* language through read-alouds**

# **What Children Know: Contextualized Language**

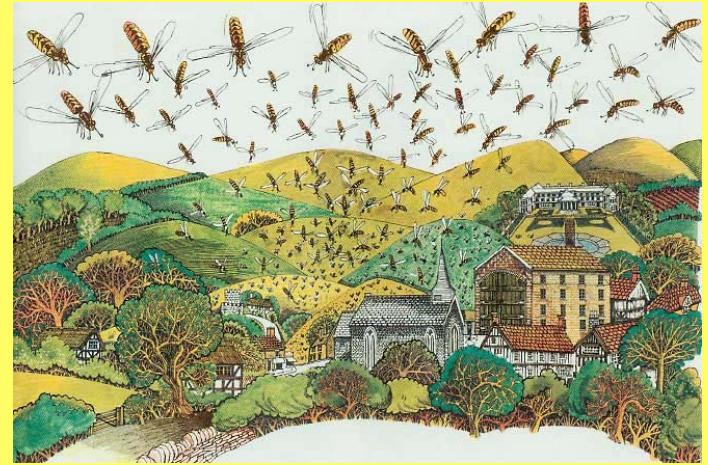
- **Children understand the here and now.**
- **Children can talk and think about what is right in front of them.**
- **Children can talk and think about familiar situations.**

# **What Children Need Help With: Decontextualized Language**

- **Ideas in books are presented through decontextualized language.**
- **Decontextualized language requires building ideas based only on language.**
- **Making meaning from decontextualized language is essential for comprehension.**

# Decontextualized Language is Hard for Young Children

*The Giant Jam Sandwich*  
--four million wasps flew  
into town!



*So they called a meeting in the village  
hall, And Mayor Muddlenut asked them  
all, “What can we do?” And they said “Good  
question!”*

*But nobody had a good suggestion.*

# **Decontextualized Language is Hard for Young Children cont.**

**T: What happened at the meeting?**

**S: Wasps flew into town.**

**T: OK, we know they're having trouble  
with wasps, but what happened at the  
meeting?**

**S: They were stinging.**

**T: At the meeting? What happened at  
the meeting?**

# **Taking Advantage of Read-alouds**

**Reading aloud is thought to benefit children's language development**

**The key to its benefits is the talk—interactions about story ideas during the read-aloud**

# What Kind of Talk?

- Deal with ideas as they are encountered
- Focus on major story ideas
- Prompt children to talk about the story

# Common Problems

- **Overreliance on background knowledge**
- **Overreliance on pictures**
- **Difficulty sorting out characters**
- **Missing the point of the story**

# Relying on Background Knowledge



**This is George. He lives in the zoo. George is a good little monkey, but he is always very curious.**

**What do we know about George so far?**

# Relying on Pictures



**Socrates was an orphan. His parents had been snatched up by the dogcatcher and taken to the pound, leaving Socrates to live alone on the streets.**

**What do we know about Socrates?**

# **Text Talk**

- **a read-aloud approach**
- **aimed to enhance children's language and comprehension abilities**

**Developed by  
Isabel Beck & Margaret McKeown  
University of Pittsburgh**

# **Purpose of Text Talk**

**--> involve children in building understanding of story ideas**

**Interactions are based on open questions that:**

**ask children to consider and talk about the ideas in the story**

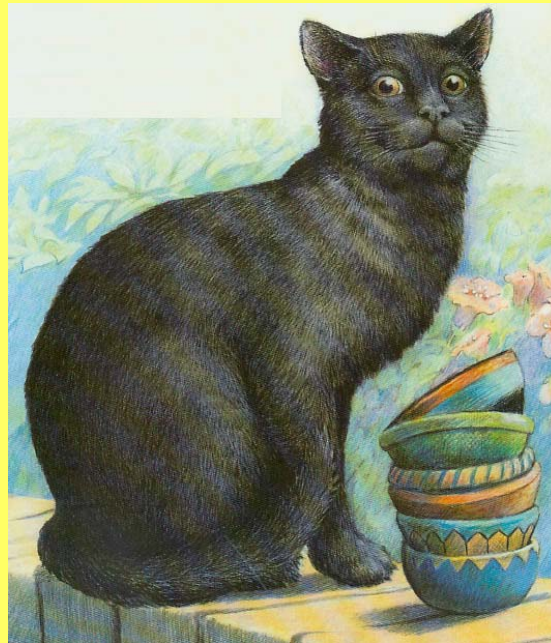
**and connect them as the story moves along.**

# Hearing a Story via Text Talk

## *Six-Dinner Sid*

by

Inga Moore



# Introducing the Story

- **Not too much said before story**
- **If too much upfront**
  - **not remembered when needed**
  - **children have difficulty separating story ideas from upfront talk**
- **". . . but they won't know some things"**
  - **short parenthetical explanations at point needed**

# What kind of Questions

**Use open questions that:**

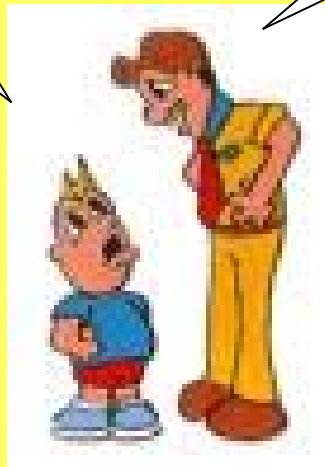
- **require students to work with ideas in the text**
- **push students beyond literal or one word answers**
- **encourage students to connect ideas and see the “big picture”**

# Why Open Questions

The kinds of questions we ask  
frame the responses children give

**Good.**

**How did  
he feel?**



# Children's Responses to Constrained Questions

**Harry likes everything except  
what?**

**a bath**

**As they started scrubbing what  
came off?**

**dirt**

**How have things turned out for  
George?**

**good**

**George looks like he's in a lot  
of what?**

**trouble**

# Children's Responses to Open Questions

**They called Harry 'this little doggie.' What does that tell us?**

**That means that they don't know that it's their doggie, they don't know its name, so they just call him little doggie.**

**What's Harry up to now?**

**He decided to dig a hole and get the brush so he could wash and then they would recognize him.**

**Why do you think the children shouted, 'Come quick?'**

**Because the kids knew that that's the dog they had.**

# **Open Questions Caution**

**Children's early responses may:**

- be incomplete**
- parrot text words**
- come only from the picture**

**So . . . there is great need to  
follow up children's responses**

# Following Up an Incomplete Idea

**T: What's happening?**

**S: The vet is calling the owners.**

**T: What do you mean he's calling the owners? What's that all about?**

**S: There were owners in his book and there were six and all one cat.**

# Following Up “Retrieved” Responses

**S:** The chicken opened up the door and she said, “Oh, it's you, Mr. Wolf.”

**T:** Why do you think she said, “Oh it was you, Mr. Wolf?”

**S:** Because the chicken knew he was sending the food.

# Following Up By Rereading

**T: What do we know about the neighbors?**

**S: They talked to each other and they didn't know Sid.**

**T: Let's listen to that part again:**

**“Since the neighbors did not talk to each other on Aristotle Street, they did not know what Sid was up to.”**

**So what does that tell us about the neighbors?**

# **When Following Up Avoid**

- ❖ What else?**
- ❖ Who has something to add?**
- ❖ How are the bears feeling?**
- ❖ Is George getting into trouble?**

# **Follow Up Wording to Help Students Extend Their Thinking**

- **What does that mean [*no one had a suggestion*] . . . ?**
- **What's that tell you, if [*the neighbors didn't talk to each other*] . . . ?**
- **[*The vet checked his book*]. . . what's that about?**
- **So we know [*Harry had to leave the party*] but why does it say [*he was a lucky dog*]. . . ?**

# **Leading Children Not Leading Questions**

**The aim is not necessarily to ask questions children can answer.**

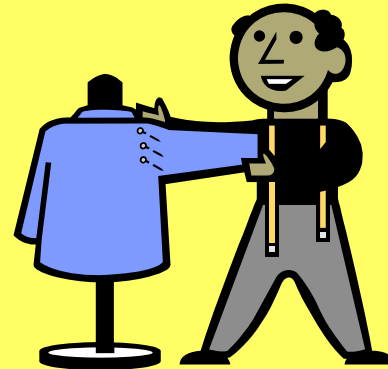
**The aim is to develop children's ability to respond to questions that help them**

- think**
- organize their thoughts**
- produce language**

# Trying Your Hand

In your packet . . .

Read *The Tailor*



# **Working with The Tailor**

**What's the story about?**

**What do you want to be sure students notice? What do you want them to talk about?**

**Getting started: “What do we know about this tailor?”**

***Try a few questions***

# ***Tailor Discussion***

**What did you come up with?**

**Where did you stop?**

**Was it hard?**

# **When Discussion Gets Stuck**

**Reread . . . and ask “What’s that all about?” OR “What’s going on there?”**

**Probe Student’s response:**

**“What do you mean by . . . ?”**

**“What makes you think that?”**

**“How do you know?”**

# ***The Tailor: Vocabulary freebie!***

**Words to deal with:**

**tailor – just quick explanation**

**Tier 2 words to focus on:**

**FROM the story:**

**clever**

**splendid**

**ABOUT the story:**

**frugal**

**appreciate**

# **Vocabulary: Another Benefit of Read-alouds**

**Read-alouds are a rich source of vocabulary development**

**To get the benefit, direct instruction is needed**

# **Vocabulary in a Nutshell**

**Choose sophisticated words – beyond children's oral vocabulary**

- **reluctant, absurd, commotion, nuisance**

**Introduce after reading**

- **Contextualize within the story**
- **Explain meaning**
- **Give examples**

**Follow-up with activities**

# Vocabulary Lesson

--for after reading

**Word introductions**

- **Contextualize the word**
- **Friendly explanation**
- **Additional context**
- **Interaction**

**Further activities – keep vocabulary going**

- **Questions**
- **Example-nonexample**
- **Moving Story**

# **Developing Read Aloud Discussions for Young Children**

**Keep in mind:**

- ◆ **The distinction between developing ideas from the text and retrieving information from the text.**
- ◆ **Children's ability to talk about text may be limited, but can be developed.**

# Thank You!

