

Think-Aloud 1



Reading Skills

- Making predictions
- Comparing and contrasting
- Monitoring reading
- Visualizing the text
- Making connections

Overview of the “Think-Aloud” Strategy

Students need to think and ask questions while they read; however, struggling readers do not always know to ask the questions that good readers automatically ask. The “Think-Aloud” strategy helps students make predictions about the text; compare and contrast events, ideas, and characters; visualize the information that is described in the text; and make connections to prior knowledge.

Classroom Model/Situation

Have you ever encountered a student who was a wonderful oral reader, yet, when questioned about the content of the just-read selection, failed to give any indication that he or she had read anything at all? I remember one such student in my 10th-grade English class. I’ll call him Eric for this scenario. Whenever I asked for volunteers to read passages or selections from literature, all of the students would beg for Eric to read. In other words, they volunteered him. It was no wonder. Eric had a fabulous voice. The pitch was deep, and his words seemed to slide out of his mouth and float in the air, leaving us, the listeners, in an almost hypnotic state.

It was a mystery to me why such a seemingly competent reader was not meeting with success in the class. Usually after a reading, I ask questions of the class and allow anyone in the room to answer. One day, after a reading by Eric, I asked him to answer the questions. To my amazement, he did not know one answer. I said to him, “You just read the passage; you should know the answers.” He replied, “I read the words and make the sounds, but I don’t think about what I’m reading.”

His response surprised me. As a competent reader, I had never thought about the possibility of looking at words and making sounds yet not making meaning. The “Think-Aloud” strategy is for students like Eric. It will force them to think when they read.

Activities for the “Think-Aloud” Strategy

- Model the strategy before asking the students to try it. Read a line or two from a selection, then stop to think out loud. Many students have a difficult time paying attention when reading long passages of description. The “Think-Aloud” strategy helps students focus. For example, in chapter 18 of *Wish You Well*, Louisa has given the children a much-needed day off from the overwhelming chores of the farm. Diamond, Lou, and Oz take a long walk to town. While there, they meet Cotton and go on a tour of the courthouse and his office. Here’s how the strategy goes in an excerpt from chapter 18: (Lines from the book are in regular type, while the teacher’s verbal statements are in italics.)

On the walls were portraits of white-haired men in black robes. *[Um... Judges usually wear black robes. These are probably pictures of judges.]* The children ran their hands along the carved wood and took turns sitting in the witness and jury boxes. *[That was probably exciting. Imagine being able to sit on the stand and in the jury box!]*

Diamond asked to sit in the judge's chair, but Cotton didn't think that was a good idea and neither did Fred. *[Diamond probably doesn't know much about courts and judges.]* When they weren't looking, Diamond grabbed a seat anyway and came away puff-chested like a rooster, until Lou, who had seen this offense, poked him hard in the ribs. *[Diamond will try anything. At least Lou understands that some things are serious. I wonder if Diamond will get into trouble?]*

After modeling the strategy, give the students the opportunity to ask questions of the teacher. The most obvious question will probably be something like, "Do I have to stop and talk about every sentence?" Although this example models a think-aloud statement or question after every sentence, interrupting with think-aloud statements after longer passages is best. After all, it would take an extraordinary amount of time to stop and talk about every sentence in the novel! The students would never want to read again. However, in order for the students to practice, shorter passages work best in the beginning.

- Dr. Kylene Beers offers her students a bookmark (see next page) to use during the Think-Aloud activity. It lists the following six strategies for them to remember:
 - Identify the problem.
 - Predict what will happen next.
 - Fix the problem.
 - Make comparisons.
 - Picture the text.
 - Make comments.

In looking back at the "Think-Aloud" paragraph above, you will see the following:

- Making comments: *Um... Judges usually wear black robes. These are probably pictures of judges.*
 - Picturing the text: *That was probably exciting. Imagine being able to sit on the stand and in the jury box!*
 - Identifying the problem: *Diamond probably doesn't know much about courts and judges.*
 - Predicting what will happen next: *Diamond will try anything. At least Lou understands that some things are serious. I wonder if Diamond will get into trouble?*
- After modeling several passages for the students, have the students work with partners to "think-aloud" several additional passages. Either give the students bookmarks as Dr. Beers did, or write the strategies on the board for easy reference. Be sure to walk around and listen to the students. Praise often! Ask questions of your own to clarify for the students.
 - Provide many opportunities throughout the book for students to use the "Think-Aloud" strategy. Like anything else, this strategy takes practice. Students who are used to looking at words and making sounds but not meaning will need time to practice before reading and thinking happen all at once.

Bookmarks for Think-Aloud 1

<p>1. Identify the problem.</p>	<p>1. Identify the problem.</p>	<p>1. Identify the problem.</p>	<p>1. Identify the problem.</p>
<p>2. Fix the problem.</p>	<p>2. Fix the problem.</p>	<p>2. Fix the problem.</p>	<p>2. Fix the problem.</p>
<p>3. Picture the text.</p>	<p>3. Picture the text.</p>	<p>3. Picture the text.</p>	<p>3. Picture the text.</p>
<p>4. Predict what will happen next.</p>	<p>4. Predict what will happen next.</p>	<p>4. Predict what will happen next.</p>	<p>4. Predict what will happen next.</p>
<p>5. Make comparisons.</p>	<p>5. Make comparisons.</p>	<p>5. Make comparisons.</p>	<p>5. Make comparisons.</p>
<p>6. Make comments.</p>	<p>6. Make comments.</p>	<p>6. Make comments.</p>	<p>6. Make comments.</p>