**Approaches to teaching reading**

Information to support teachers in implementing a range of approaches that will help students to develop the knowledge, strategies, and awareness required to become effective readers.

**Reading to students**

Reading to students from the best of children’s and young adults’ literature should be a daily part of every classroom programme in years 5 to 8. Listening to a story told or read aloud can be a captivating experience.

Reading to students frees them from decoding and supports them in becoming more active listeners, totally immersed in the text. As students create meaning from a spoken text by visualising from the author’s words and making connections between what they already know and what they hear, they extend their literacy knowledge and awareness. They enrich their vocabulary by hearing and discussing new words in context and familiar words used in new ways. They develop new insights into the way language works (for example, how humour can be used) and into the features of different text forms. A lot of implicit learning occurs when students are read to.

Reading aloud gives teachers valuable opportunities to introduce and discuss complex or connected themes and ideas, to model reading strategies, to extend topic studies, and to explore sophisticated language features with students in a relaxed and familiar reading environment. These can later be examined more closely and in greater detail through shared and guided reading.

Reading to students also extends their oral language skills, especially their awareness of the sounds, rhythms, and patterns of language. Listening to texts read fluently, accurately, and with expression is particularly useful to students who need additional support in oral language development or who are learning English as a new language.

**Choosing texts**

When selecting texts for reading to students, teachers are guided by their instructional objectives and by the students’ interests and cultural values. Effective literacy teachers also ensure that they expose their students to new and challenging texts and unfamiliar authors. Teachers need to ensure that their repertoire of “read-to” texts is wide-ranging and is made up of texts that they themselves know and enjoy so that they can make each text come alive for their audience as they read it.

**Reading the text**

The way the teacher reads aloud is very important. The teacher should become familiar with the text in advance so that they can relax and concentrate on reading it fluently and expressively. Through their voice, they can make the information accessible, bring the characters to life, create the mood effectively, and express their own delight in reading. Such reading provides a good model for students and conveys many implicit messages about literacy learning. Above all, it demonstrates in the best possible way that reading is important and books are enjoyable and empowering.

**Supporting students’ responses**

Depending on their instructional objectives, the nature of the text, and the students’ interest, the teacher may encourage the students to respond to the text, to predict what may happen, or to discuss possible outcomes (when this can be done without interrupting the flow of the text and the listeners’ engagement). For example, the teacher may ask the listeners to create and share their mental images.

My students and I love sophisticated picture books – getting together on the mat and discussing both the text and the illustrations as I read to them. For instance, we devour picture books by Chris van Allsburg, Gary Crew, and Shaun Tan. The students enjoy listening and then putting the text and picture clues together to make meaning of some quite complex abstract concepts. The discussion and thinking that we share is very stimulating and gives them great ideas for their own writing. We also return to parts of the text and discuss what gives them impact, asking, “What makes this effective writing?”

*Teacher, year 8 class*

**Shared reading**

Shared reading is an essential component of the literacy programme in years 5 to 8. It allows for a high degree of interaction and is a great way for teachers to help students extend their understanding of themselves as effective text users. During shared reading, teachers and students can participate in collaborative reasoning to solve literacy-related problems.

Through this approach, teachers can deliberately extend their students’:

* understanding of themes and ideas;
* use of reading strategies;
* appreciation of literary devices, such as imagery;
* vocabulary;
* knowledge of the purposes and characteristic features of different text forms.

Shared reading can enable students to make meaning of texts that are too challenging for guided or independent reading. Teachers can also use this approach to enable a class or group to enjoy a rich text that is especially suitable for sharing. Shared reading can be used with both large and small groups. Sitting together as a group enables the readers to discuss the meaning and features of a shared text in a collaborative way and develops a sense of community.

Shared reading is a more explicitly instructional approach to reading than reading to students. Teachers select and use many instructional strategies – maybe all of them – as they lead a shared reading session. To meet their instructional objectives, they will question, prompt, model, tell, explain, direct, and/or give feedback to the students.

When teachers read to students, the students participate as active listeners. In shared reading, the teacher and the students read a text together. The teacher takes the greater responsibility for the reading and reads the text aloud, with expression, modelling the behaviour of a fluent, accurate reader. The teacher has an instructional objective, which is shared with students as their learning goal (refer to page 123). As the teacher reads, the students follow the text with their eyes and actively participate in making meaning. They can all see the text, whether as a computer-generated data show, a big book, an enlarged chart, an overhead transparency, or their own printed copy.

 The teacher’s support enables the students to behave like proficient readers and to understand even complex texts that they could not yet read silently to themselves.

Choral reading or reading in chorus is not shared reading. It may be appropriate at times when students read a poetic text aloud together. It may even, occasionally, be appropriate as a confidence-builder for some struggling readers. But it is primarily for presentation or performance.

Shared reading generally includes a conversation about the text. The teacher and students access information from the text to help them make meaning, identify relevant language features, discuss unfamiliar vocabulary, and think critically about the text. The teacher models how good readers process texts by “thinking aloud” from time to time. These “think-alouds” relate to the shared learning goal.

Shared reading provides a setting in which teachers can systematically, purposefully, and explicitly teach specific strategies for reading, especially (in years 5 to 8) for making meaning and thinking critically. They can then provide opportunities (for example, in guided reading or reciprocal teaching sessions) for their students to practise them and apply them to a range of other texts, including the increasingly complex literary texts that older students need to learn to read.

Shared reading can help students learn to process and comprehend the new kinds of texts that they need to master, for example, in science, social studies, mathematics, and technology. Used across the curriculum, the approach helps students learn to understand the words and structures of unfamiliar transactional texts and to think critically about their content. A shared reading of a text segment can show students how they can make meaning of and think critically about the rest of the text.

The shared reading approach enables the teacher to provide explicit instruction in reading strategies and to discuss these strategies with their students. This fosters the students’ development of metacognition. When students can distinguish the reading strategies and their different uses, they begin to select and use them purposefully to understand and respond to any text that they may want or need to read.

Students who are new learners of English can participate confidently in shared reading. It enables them to attend to the text, illustrations, diagrams, and photographs while hearing the language used in an authentic context.

After a series of planned observations, I decided that my students needed focused teaching to help them make meaning of instructions, especially by using visual features of texts. We were studying measurement in maths, so I decided to use shared reading and discussion of a two-page article about measurement – “How High Is That Tree?”, by Brian Birchall.

I put the article on OHT and explained the reading purpose (“to read and make meaning of a set of measurement instructions”) and the learning goal (“to interpret the directions by linking them closely to visual features of the text”). Our criteria related to whether we could follow the instructions in practice. Before reading, the students predicted (rather randomly) how you might estimate the height of a tree without measuring it. We looked at the visual information on the OHT and then tried again to work out how to estimate the height of a tree. I questioned them about the diagrams (“What is the boy with glasses doing?” “What might the relationship be between his eyes, the stick, and the height of the tree?” “What might his friend be doing?” “What might be the relationship between the two diagrams?”). Their predictions were more successful this time. One boy also pointed out the visual links between the design of the title and the subject of the text.

I led a shared reading of the text to test the students’ predictions and find out how useful the visual features had been. I modelled how I would make meaning of the instructions by rereading aloud the first two sentences of instruction 1, putting them into my own words, acting them out, and indicating what part of the first diagram they related to. Then the students worked in pairs, explaining the rest of the instructions to their partner and discussing how each related to the diagrams. I monitored my target students by listening closely to their explanations.

 The whole group discussed what they had learned as readers and talked about how they could apply this to reading other instructional texts.

*Teacher, year 6 class*

**Choosing texts**

A wide range of fiction and non-fiction (transactional) texts from across the curriculum, in both print and electronic form, should be selected. Some big books and charts are produced commercially especially for shared reading. Each text should be chosen carefully to suit one or more specific learning goals. For example, if the learning goal is to develop the comprehension strategy of making connections, the teacher should select a text with content that both they and the students can easily connect to so that they can make the strategy explicit to the students. Teachers should be aware of the challenges and supports for their students in any text selected for shared reading (see page 138).

**Shared reading sessions**

A shared reading session takes up to twenty minutes, depending on the purpose, the time of day, and the students’ engagement in the text.

Introducing the text

The text should be introduced in a way that builds students’ curiosity. Keeping the introduction brief helps the students to relate the text to their experience and to make some predictions about its content, structure, and features.

The learning goal for the session, which will be based on the students’ identified learning needs, should be shared with the students. The students can be given reading tasks that help them achieve their learning goal – for example, the goal might be “to identify comprehension strategies that help us to determine the mood of a text” and the initial task might be “to work out the mood of the text as we read the first two paragraphs together”.

Reading the text

The shared reading should enable the students to:

* engage purposefully with the text;
* make meaning from the text and think critically about it (the teacher may question, prompt, and probe to facilitate this);
* focus on meeting their learning goal, perhaps through a related task, for example, by identifying the words that indicate a particular character’s point of view.

The same text can be shared once, twice, or several times, depending on the students’ needs and learning goals, the content-related purpose for reading, and the length and complexity of the text.

Whatever the learning goals, the teacher can promote them by modelling the behaviour to be learned (for example, by “thinking aloud” while modelling the use of an appropriate graphic organiser and explaining it to the students or by questioning the students and discussing their understanding of what they are learning).

Concluding the session

At the end of a shared reading session, teacher and students review their learning goals and decide how far they have achieved their objectives. This may involve discussing the theme or overall meaning of the text, its effectiveness as a piece of writing, or the strategies the students used in reading the text. Effective teachers ensure that their students understand exactly which strategies they used to process and comprehend the text and encourage them to think about how they can apply this knowledge and awareness when reading other texts.

I use shared reading to introduce my students to a literacy strategy or skill that we haven’t focused on before or one that needs revisiting. It’s the approach I use to teach the strategy or skill explicitly before we look at it more closely in guided reading or writing.

Many of my students were finding it hard to work out the meaning of technical vocabulary in reports and explanations. They needed to know how to identify such vocabulary in a text and how to work out the meaning of words from surrounding textual evidence. These were skills they would need increasingly as they moved up through the school.

The text I selected was an enlarged chart on survival in the rainforest. I asked the students to note any unfamiliar words, and they found the word “predators” in the first paragraph. Together, we searched for surrounding phrases and sentences that gave clues about what “predators” might mean. For example, we read that animals “protect themselves from predators by using poison or stinging hairs”. I questioned them closely about possible links between “predators” and “protect”, “poison”, and “stinging hairs”, asking “What mental image does this give you?” They decided, “If you have to protect yourself by using poison or stinging hairs, predators must be pretty bad – they must be enemies that can attack.”

So I encouraged the students to infer, make connections, and visualise in order to make meaning of unfamiliar terms. We discussed how the visualisation strategy had helped them deepen their understanding of the text.

*Teacher, year 5 class*

Shared reading should be enjoyable for both teacher and students. The end of the session can be a good time to savour a subtle use of humour or a fascinating piece of information in the text.

Following up

The follow-up to any shared reading session will depend on the instructional objective(s) for the session. Follow-up activities may include:

* the teacher rereading the text with a small group of students (as a shared reading mini-lesson or as part of a guided reading session);
* students rereading the text individually or in small groups to practise making meaning or using the new strategies they have learned;
* students applying the strategies they have learned to another text and explaining what they have done;
* students engaging in shared, guided, or independent writing modelled on the shared reading text;
* further exploration of the content or features of the text. For example, students might engage in further research on the topic for a cross-curricular purpose or analyse the text features independently.

Shared reading need not always be followed by a related activity. Often the teacher will build on the learning simply by referring back to it in subsequent literacy learning sessions.

**Guided reading**

In any literacy programme, guided reading has a central role in leading students towards independence in reading. The focused small-group setting enables the teacher to give strategic instruction in making meaning from and thinking critically about increasingly complex texts (and to teach or reinforce decoding strategies when necessary). The teacher can work with each student at an appropriate level to meet their specific learning needs, as identified by assessment evidence. Further benefits of this approach are described on page 7 of *Guided Reading: Years 5 to 8.*

Guided reading and shared reading have much in common. Both approaches aim to make reading purposeful and enjoyable for students by helping them make meaning from texts, deepening their comprehension, and developing their critical-thinking skills. The key distinction between the two approaches is this: in shared reading, the teacher takes greater responsibility for the reading and reads the text aloud, whereas in guided reading the teacher helps the students read the text themselves. During guided reading, students often apply or practise reading strategies and skills that have been introduced to them through shared reading.

In a guided reading session, the teacher works with a small group of students who have similar instructional needs so that they are supported in reading a text successfully by themselves. Each student has a copy of the text. It should contain some challenges at a level that the students can manage as they individually read the text in the supportive situation. It would generally contain fewer challenges than a shared reading text for that group.

**Instructional Strategies**

Guided reading sessions vary in length, and teachers generally schedule more sessions per week for students who need more support. Forming groups for guided reading requires thought and judgment. (*Guided Reading: Years 5 to 8* gives advice about grouping on pages 18–19 and on the duration and frequency of guided reading sessions on page 17.)

**Before the session**

Deciding on the purpose of the session

Both the teacher and the students need to be clear about why they are reading the text. The teacher’s instructional objective will be based on their analysis of information about these students’ current achievement in reading. Sometimes the same objective may be explored over several sessions, using the same text or different texts. (For examples of teachers’ objectives or purposes for guided reading, refer to *Guided Reading: Years 5 to 8*, pages 33–34.)

Choosing an appropriate text

Text selection is a crucial step. Teachers base their selection on their instructional objectives and on their knowledge of the learners in the group, checking that the texts are appropriate to the students’ learning needs and to their backgrounds, interests, and experiences. The chosen text may also have links to current crosscurricular topics. Usually the text will be new to the students, although texts can be revisited for a particular learning purpose. Texts for guided reading should generally be at a level where the students have no more than five to ten difficulties in every hundred words. (For more information about choosing appropriate texts and identifying supports and challenges, refer to Guided Reading: Years 5 to 8, pages 34–40.)

Planning for the session

Planning for the session is based on the instructional objective(s) and includes:

* deciding how to introduce the text;
* identifying the supports and challenges that the text might present and deciding how to address the challenges (for example, by “chunking” the text into manageable sections or by discussion of challenging vocabulary);
* considering how to generate discussion to take the students further into the text (for example, by planning key questions and prompts);
* deciding on related follow-up tasks or activities if appropriate.

See also *Guided Reading: Years 5 to 8*, pages 41–42.

**During the session**

Introducing the text

The introduction to the session should be brief and build a sense of expectancy. The teacher shares the learning goal and the content-related purpose for reading and relates the text to the students’ backgrounds, interests, and experiences or to the current classroom topic. “At times, it is useful to involve the students in establishing [the learning goal] for the reading” (*Guided Reading: Years 5 to 8*, page 43).

The teacher may discuss or explain key text features or potential challenges in the text, such as unfamiliar names, relevant background information, or technical terms. A chart or whiteboard can be used to provide visual support. For example, key words can be written on the board for reference during the reading and discussion. The teacher might also have the students predict the possible content of the text or make links to the relevant background and literacy experiences that they bring to the text.

The teacher then sets a reading task by directing the group to read the text or a section of it and telling them what they are to think about or find out. If the text has been chunked, the students need a different task that links to the shared goal for reading each section of the text. By the time the students begin reading the text, they should be motivated and enthusiastic.

Reading and discussing the text

The students take responsibility for reading the text by themselves. It is generally expected that year 5 to 8 students read silently during guided reading. In general, students in a guided reading group should read aloud only when they are citing evidence to support their opinion or comment or when the teacher asks one child to read to them quietly, for monitoring purposes. The reading will usually be chunked into two or more sections, with a brief discussion between sections to sustain comprehension and encourage critical thinking. The discussion will relate to the learning goal(s) and/or the purpose(s) for reading.

During the reading, while monitoring each member of the group, the teacher should intervene only when necessary. A short, purposeful task for those who are likely to finish earlier than others is useful. For example, early finishers could find and think about a part of the text they really like or form questions to ask others about the text.

Generating purposeful and stimulating conversation is perhaps the greatest challenge in guided reading. Discussing each section as it is read helps students to gradually develop an overall understanding of the text. Using an easel or whiteboard in guided reading gives a visual focus.
The teacher’s role in discussion is to:

* foster enjoyment of the text and a sense of discovery;
* maintain the focus by skilled use of instructional strategies such as questioning, prompting, explaining, or modelling;
* encourage discussion that relates to the content-related purpose for reading and to the goal-related strategies that students are learning or practising;
* encourage students’ personal responses and sharing of insights;
* ask students to clarify points they make and to justify them using text-based evidence, for example, by quoting directly from the text, talking about the relevant part of the text, or pointing to the part (words, phrases, or sentences) as they talk;
* encourage students to help one another and to develop their metacognition by sharing the strategies they use (using their first languages where possible);
* encourage students to ask their own questions of the text, to discover answers to their questions, and to think critically, for example, by querying the author’s inclusions and omissions;
* extend students’ awareness of relevant features of texts, for example, by discussing the text’s structure, interesting or unusual vocabulary, or the use of the author’s voice in the text;
* give feedback that is specific, informative, and builds further understanding;
* engage in genuine conversations about texts with students and encourage such conversations among them, for example, by using “think, pair, share”. There should be an exchange of questions and responses, with all points of view valued and explored.

It is important that the teacher closely monitors the progress of any students who are still establishing their decoding skills and developing basic reading strategies or who are new learners of English. At a time when the rest of the guided reading group is reading a set part of the text silently, the target student can be asked to read the set part quietly aloud to the teacher.

Reading aloud does not mean “round robin” reading. “Round robin” reading, where each student takes a turn at reading aloud, is never appropriate in guided reading. It prevents each student from processing the text and constructing meaning independently, distracts and bores other students, and obscures meaning.

Concluding the session

At the end of a guided reading session, it is important to review, with the group, their learning goal and purpose for reading and to ensure that both have been met. This may include revisiting the group’s initial predictions about the text and reconsidering them in the light of subsequent reading, or it may include reflecting on the overall theme of the text.

It’s also valuable to encourage the students to think and talk about their learning so that they extend their awareness of how to use and control what they know and can do as developing readers. Students in years 5 to 8 need to be able to describe the reading strategies that they use and, increasingly, to monitor their own progress.

**After the session**

After a guided reading session, the teacher usually jots down observations on individual students’ progress and teaching points for the future. The students often go on to independent literacy activities to reinforce or extend what they have learned from the reading. (For examples of follow-up activities, refer to *Guided Reading: Years 5 to 8*, pages 55–56.)

Generally, the teacher plans all of these activities beforehand to help meet the objectives of the session. Sometimes a teacher identifies an immediate need during the session and adapts the plan to take in this need. However, the reading is often sufficient in itself, and the best follow-up activity may be an independent rereading of the text.

**What about the others?**

In guided reading sessions, the teacher works with one reading group at a time. This means that the other students need to be engaged, independently or in pairs or groups, in well-planned activities that reinforce their literacy knowledge, strategies, and awareness. Some of these activities will arise from previous learning in shared or guided reading. For example, the students could work on a computer, perhaps using a commercially produced CD-ROM, with the goal of developing and demonstrating specific reading or writing skills that they will need for research in social studies. (For more examples of independent literacy tasks for students, refer to *Guided Reading: Years 5 to 8*, pages 20–22.)

**Independent reading**

Independent reading should be relaxed and enjoyable. Teachers demonstrate that they value independent reading when they read themselves and also make sure that students have time to enjoy independent reading.

For students, independent reading of material they choose themselves:

* builds and sustains the habit of reading;
* helps them develop their reading preferences;
* extends their background knowledge, including topic-related knowledge;
* allows them to practise and extend reading strategies with texts of their own choice;
* extends their vocabulary and develops their comprehension skills;
* helps them to sustain concentrated reading for a set time;
* puts the responsibility for solving problems involving words, meanings, and text features into their own hands;
* builds their confidence in attempting more complex and challenging texts.

Studies have documented evidence linking students’ access to texts, and the amount of reading that they do, to their achievement in reading. Choosing to read recreationally is also associated with high rates of achievement.

A set time in the daily routine for independent reading is an essential part of the classroom literacy programme. If they are to become lifelong readers, students need opportunities to select their own texts, read them, and share what they have read. Ready access to a wide range of interesting and challenging texts (including fiction and non-fiction texts in various print and electronic forms) enables students to choose to read independently when opportunities arise. Teachers need to make it clear that students benefit when they read for pleasure, whether in or out of school. Students achieve better when they see their teacher reading independently for pleasure.

The teacher needs to establish routines and expectations for any regular independent reading sessions. For example, students should be able to select enjoyable texts at an appropriate level, sustain their engagement in the text during the session, and read silently or join in focused conversation if appropriate. It is good practice to give students opportunities to share their views on self-selected texts. Most year 5 to 8 students can be expected to focus closely on a carefully selected text for at least twenty minutes.

While the class reads silently, the teacher can take the opportunity to observe their students’ reading behaviour and to monitor their interest and enthusiasm, their selection of texts, their understanding of what they read, and the amount of reading they do. This will inform the teacher’s further guidance of each student’s reading.The teacher may rove and have quiet conversations with students during independent reading.

The teacher’s conversations, interviews, and conferences with groups and with individual students can yield valuable information about what the students are reading, whether they are setting themselves new challenges, and how they are enjoying the books they choose. The teacher may use a student’s reading log or record of borrowing from the library to draw the student’s attention to their patterns of reading and to ways of extending these patterns. For this to be effective, the teacher needs a good knowledge of the fiction and non-fiction texts that are available to the students outside school. However, it’s important at all times for the teacher to avoid being intrusive – independent reading is intensely personal and should focus on enjoyment and empowerment.

**Reciprocal teaching of reading**

Reciprocal teaching of reading is a useful small-group procedure that helps develop the comprehension and critical thinking of fluent and independent readers. Studies have shown that when students take part in reciprocal teaching, their comprehension (including their listening comprehension) improves and they apply the learning to other reading contexts. Reciprocal teaching has been found to be effective in improving the achievement of learners from diverse backgrounds. It involves four explicit strategies for reading comprehension:

* formulating questions to stimulate thoughtful discussion;
* clarifying ideas and information in the text;
* predicting what might follow, using prior knowledge and information in the text;
* summarising information in the text.

The teacher initially leads the group, explaining and modelling the strategies to show how the reader actively constructs meaning. The students gradually take over more and more of the responsibility by taking turns to lead the group and generate discussion as the group members jointly examine and interpret the text.