



The BIG education issue: Reciprocal reading

Helen Freeman talks to literacy specialist, Sarah Snashall.

1. What is reciprocal reading?

Reciprocal reading is a method of teaching comprehension which explicitly teaches strategies for predicting, clarifying, questioning and summarising. It was originally described by Palinscar and Brown in the 1980s in the US, but has been adopted worldwide.

Reciprocal teaching has been shown to increase both reading and listening comprehension, and has demonstrated that learners transfer their learning into other contexts.

2. How does it differ from other comprehension/speaking and listening strategies?

Many comprehension exercises are taught and practised through writing answers to pre-prepared questions. The reciprocal teaching method encourages children to ask questions of the text themselves and to answer and build on the questions of their peers. Asking questions and peer discussion can be a powerful learning experience and requires a higher level of understanding and engagement with the text.

Speaking and listening skills are central to reciprocal reading. Speaking and listening development is crucial for creative and critical thinking. The reciprocal teaching approach gives children the opportunity to practise speaking and listening skills in a non-threatening environment.

3. What are the benefits to the teacher?

When the children are comfortable with their group and the process, they should be able to work independently of the teacher. This allows the teacher to work with other groups, confident that the children are working on a meaningful task.

4. What are the benefits for the children?

Reciprocal reading is framed in collaborative and cooperative learning. Through active collaboration children support and extend each others' ideas. They help each other to think and challenge each others'

thinking. When children work together, interacting and motivating each other to interpret, analyse, evaluate and make connections, a powerful learning experience can ensue. This is done in a cooperative atmosphere where social learning, listening to each other, learning to take your turn and building on what others have said are valued. Developing these skills builds confidence and self-esteem. The children learn that their opinions about a text are important.

5. Should this approach be used instead of, or in addition to, other comprehension/speaking and listening strategies?

As with any strategy, the reciprocal reading strategy should be combined with a variety of other comprehension and speaking and listening activities, such as small group reading activities, guided reading, literature circles, independent reading, maintaining a reading journal and so on.

6. Is there anyone I can talk to that has tried this method so that I can fully understand how it works in the classroom?

We visited a school in Birmingham that had been using reciprocal reading. Take a look at the video at www.scholastic.co.uk/childedplus to hear their experiences of this approach.

7. Why does this approach to reading seem to involve using books with such obscure subject matter?

For children to successfully be able to practice their comprehension skills within a meaningful discussion, they need to be given texts to work with that are engaging and at the right level for their reading age, and length for the time available. The texts also need to cover a subject that intrigues the children enough to want to ask questions, have enough intriguing information in it in order to generate queries but also be of a subject unknown to anyone in the group.



Reciprocal reading will benefit the children by:

- Increasing speaking and listening skills through discussion and listening to others
- Developing comprehension strategies
- Increasing opportunities for children to ask and answer their own questions
- Enriching vocabulary with high-interest words
- Encouraging cooperative learning: sharing, participating and valuing others
- Developing confidence in taking a leadership role
- Encouraging perseverance and risk-taking
- Stimulating interest in a variety of topics

8. What do I need to get started? Do I need to be trained in this approach or do I need to invest in resources?

Finding the right texts to use is the biggest challenge for the teacher. When the texts have been identified, the comprehension strategies do need to be taught and practised before the programme can be carried out. The children also need to be able to work independently of the teacher. Therefore the teacher should model the strategies in shared and guided reading, allowing time for the children to practise. Time should be spent carrying out activities that improve the questions that the children ask and the children should be reminded about the conventions of group discussion.

Are you looking for speaking and listening strategies that really work?

We've got an offer to smile about.

Visit: www.scholastic.co.uk/childedplus to take advantage of your 15% discount* on Connectors

*For one use only. Closing date: 22 January 2010





Literacy: Spelling simplified

Educational journalist, author and literacy specialist, Eileen Jones, offers a multi-sensory approach to teaching spelling.

Part 1 - Visual and auditory learning

English spelling has rules – but numerous exceptions. So there is no magical secret to teaching spelling. Nevertheless, recognising that children learn in different ways will simplify it. In our new series, we'll provide a multi-sensory approach to learning: visual (seeing) and auditory (hearing) this month; tactile (touching) and kinaesthetic (moving) in February 2010.

Begin with sounds. Set up a classroom spelling area, displaying written (graphemic) representations of vowel and consonant phonemes. Play regular sound-matching games as starter activities for literacy lessons. Encourage a positive attitude, the children supporting one another and regarding spelling as fun.



Top spelling tips!

- Concentrate on quality not quantity, picking out a few mistakes in the children's writing with them. Challenge them to: spot the mistake; find the correct spelling in a dictionary; write it correctly; think of a way to remember it.
- Suggest everyone keeps a spelling log, entering five words a week, personal mistakes from their writing. Over the next week, they can try to learn them.
- Teach and encourage the 'look, say, cover, write and check' method of learning. (LSCWC)
- Hold enjoyable, non-threatening small-group spelling bees.
- For tricky, rule-breaking words, collaborate with the children on silly mnemonics to write, illustrate and display. For example: Big Elephants Can Always Understand Small Elephants. (Because)
- Boost confidence by making learning targets manageable: differentiated spelling homework; limited spelling patterns; short lists.

Activities

1. Magic 'e'

Put the children into fours with cut-out rows of letters from the photocopiable activity sheet 1. Suggest taking turns making three-letter words, the vowel always standing between two consonants (CVC words). Encourage the vowel to notice its sound as the word is said. Repeat the activity, but after a word is made, let the fourth member of the group write 'e' on their individual whiteboard and stand at the end. What does the four-letter word say? Can the vowel tell the group how its sound has changed? Emphasise that the final 'e' is responsible.

2. Word sums

Point out words within words by asking the children to write and hold up answers on individual whiteboards to spelling subtractions:

table-t=; ford-d=; seat-s=; card-d=; fork-k=; hand-h=; window-ow=.

Challenge them to add letters in the correct places: **and+h=; bin+ro=; far+m=; earn+l=; able+c=; can+ary=; each+t=.**

3. Spelling Bee

Revise the sounds made by *ar*, *oy*, *ow*, *oo* (pronounced as in 'good'). Invite the children to the virtual classroom and use the online interactive resource. As in a spelling bee, they should say their completed answers aloud.

4. Hear the difference

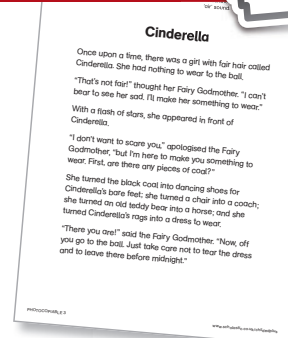
Put the children into pairs, one writing *ear* on their individual whiteboard, one *ea*. Say words (*bread*, *fear*, *hear*, *head*, *read*) and allow partners a minute to confer before one displays their whiteboard. Confirm the correct choice. Give the children the word search (photocopiable 2) and ask them to complete the word search, afterwards saying and grouping the words in phoneme sacks.

5. Listen, look and match

Display *air* for the children to say. Ask them to close their eyes and make a thumbs-up sign every time they hear the *air* sound in your oral sentences: *Cinderella was small with fair hair. She had only rags to wear to the ball.* Display the sentences and repeat the listening and thumbs-up activity. What do the children notice? (The 'air' sound can be made by other letter combinations.) Put the children into pairs, giving everyone photocopiable activity sheet 3. As one partner reads the text aloud, the other listens for and circles words with the 'air' sound. Afterwards, do partners agree on totals?



Interactive
Online spelling game





A space trip to the stars

Session 1: Getting ready for the trip

The day before the activity send a letter home asking each child to bring in a T-shirt.

Take a look at astronauts living on a spacecraft. Use books or visit: www.spaceflight.nasa.gov/gallery and click on 'Shuttle' or 'Station' to see images of the Space Shuttle and International Space Station.

They will see that astronauts wear casual clothes in their spacecraft for maximum comfort (they only wear spacesuits when they go outside into space). Ask the children to put on their T-shirts as their 'indoor space clothes'.

Ask the children what their classroom would look like if it were a spaceship. You can view an Apple® QuickTime® panoramic movie of the interior of a space shuttle at

www.panoscan.com/CubicDemos/shuttle.html

(use the zoom out feature to show the above-head controls). Alternatively, search the internet for 'Space Shuttle flight deck' to find appropriate images.

Tell the children they are going to make a Space Shuttle flight deck in their classroom. Provide them with boxes, bottle tops, black and grey card, and other items that you think suitable. Then help them create a flight deck and let the children take turns at taking the controls.

Ask the children to describe what astronauts wear when they go outside their spacecraft and let them try activity Photocopiable 1 on the back of the poster.



Session 2: Making and 'flying' a spacecraft

Ask the children what they think their spacecraft would look like and examine pictures of spacecraft in books or using the poster. Let them create their own rocket or Space Shuttle. You can use our diagram of different spacecraft to help the children plan their rocket or shuttle.

When their models are ready use the countdown sound effect we've provided (www.scholastic.co.uk/childedplus)

to get the children to launch their spacecraft slowly into the air.

Using the whooshing sound effect let the children move their spacecraft faster and faster, taking a few steps around the room (but avoiding collisions!). Stop the children in mid space and ask them where they might be going in their rockets and ask them to keep their ideas until next time. Let the children try activity Photocopiable 2 on the back of the poster.

Session 3: The Solar System

Ask the children where they are in space. Jump up and down and ask what you keep landing on. Look for an answer about the Earth. Ask the children to name other objects they know that are in space and look for answers about the Sun and Moon and the names of some planets. Show the children a poster of the Solar System and help them to learn the order of the planets.

Check their knowledge by setting out the fruit bowl Solar System. Set out the 'fruit' in a line in the following way – a large yellow melon (Sun) four very small currants

(Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars) a grapefruit (Jupiter) an apple plus a cardboard ring (Saturn), two plums (Uranus and Neptune). Put a label next to each one, let the children look at the model carefully then mix up the fruit and see if anyone can re-make the Solar System.

Tell the children that the planets do not stay in a line but move around the Sun all the time. Use this website to show the movement of the planets:

www.kidsastronomy.com/solar_system.htm

Interactive

See overleaf for online resources linked to this topic

