

TEACHING READING IN THE FSL CLASSROOM

HOW TO USE THE BOOKS IN THIS SERIES

There are many pedagogical approaches to helping students learn to read and to enjoy FSL materials. The key is to choose the approach that best suits your teaching style, as well as the skill level and needs of your students. The approach outlined below is a generic one that has proven very effective in FSL classes. It is also one that is easily adaptable to your own particular circumstances.

I. PRE-READING

Pre-reading activities are meant to elicit interest, to motivate students, and to prepare them for what they are about to read. Start as follows:

A. Predicting the contents

Ask the students to predict the contents of the text that they will be reading. During this **prediction** step, the students' interest is piqued as they apply their own experiences and knowledge of the theme to envisage and discuss what they consider the theme of the book.

This activity might be approached as follows:

1. Examine the cover of the book

Ask the students to examine the illustration on the cover of the book, as well as the book's title.

Ask them to predict the genre of the story:

Is it fiction: adventure, romance, science fiction, fantasy, historical, biography, etc.?

Or is it non-fiction: historical, heroic, sports, scientific, travel, true adventure, etc.?

2. The flip test

Ask students to read the table of contents, then to flip through the book, **scanning** the story quickly. When they have examined the illustrations, characters, and settings, ask them to predict the story. What do they think happens? What is the theme? Is it school life, personal problems, pastimes etc.? What is the tone? Is the story sad, happy, funny, informative, etc.?

3. Be the author

Ask students to make up a story based on the clues with which they have been provided: the illustrations, characters, settings, etc.

B. Personalizing the theme

Establish with students what the theme of the book likely is. Discuss with them what they know about the theme, and what they would like to know.

In this **personalization** phase, assist students in making a connection between the book and their own lives. Discuss

- their personal experiences with the theme
- an experience of someone they know
- an experience they have witnessed
- an experience they have heard about
- other stories and reports they have read, or movies they have seen that treat the theme
- well-known events related to the theme

C. Building vocabulary

As you work with the students to predict the contents of the story and to personalize the theme, write key words on the board or on an acetate. You may wish to create a word web to provide students with the essential vocabulary they will need to glean an initial understanding of the story.

II DURING READING

De-coding the story

Figuring out the meaning of words

Reading activities are meant to help students develop their own abilities and the strategies necessary to decode a text. Your role is to assist the students by exposing them to a variety of strategies, so that each student can choose those which suit him or her best.

For students, the following strategies are key to developing reading comprehension:

1. Developing the ability to deduce the meaning of unknown words from the context;
2. Deciphering the meaning of a word based on its formation and recognizing its membership in a word family, e.g., *grand/grandeur/grandir*. Without complex explanation, you can show students the root of a word, and how it might change, e.g., by adding or removing a prefix or a suffix;
3. Searching for and detecting cognates, words that have the same spelling in both languages (*table, train, absent, minute, arrive*) or the same root (*magnifique/magnificent*). Cognates are great aids in the comprehension of the text. (A warning: “faux amis” – Not all words that are similar in both languages have the same meaning, e.g., *actuel/actual*);
4. Observing the place of a word in a sentence and its grammatical function. This can help with the understanding of the meaning of the word in context.
5. Learning to use the dictionary. This will require focused assistance from the teacher.

To teach the story, you may invite students to read it first on their own, **gisting** as much as they can. Then, have them read the story with you. Divide it into small manageable segments and read each out loud to the students in order to provide them with a model for accent and intonation. This is the **read aloud** phase. Next, invite them to dramatize each section. During this **shared reading** activity, assist them in pronouncing words correctly. Then point out key vocabulary in the passage and elicit synonyms, antonyms, words of the same family etc. Finally, ask content questions on the passage. This is the **guided reading** phase of the process.

To develop higher order thinking skills, you may wish to have students analyze the story and comment on the author’s motivation in telling it or that of the characters presented as the story unfolds.

As in all aspects of teaching and learning, **scaffolding** is a key technique. This entails the teacher dividing the reading strategy into small steps that are manageable for students. In the initial stages, the teacher supplies as much modeling and support as is required. As the skill level of the students increases, the responsibility for applying the strategy independently shifts gradually to the learners.

III POST-READING

After the students have read the story, you should verify their comprehension. This should first be done orally. Then, in order to consolidate their language acquisitions further, turn to the activities at the end of the book to have the students search the text for synonyms/antonyms, to unscramble words to form correct sentences, to answer questions etc.

In the context of learning French as a Second Language, the goal of all reading should be to add something new to the reader’s repertoire of knowledge, to awaken his or her emotions — not simply to memorize a text or to assume the point of view of the author. Therefore, upon completion of the reading of the text, you should confirm that the students have properly understood the material. Conduct a class discussion which will enable the reader to analyze the story beyond regurgitation of the facts, both to verify comprehension and to make connections with his or her own experiences.

Finally, students can write a brief essay on the theme of the story and on their own experience. You can also have the students invent a story continuation or a different ending, conduct interviews, role play the dialogues in the text or their own variations thereof, or dramatize their personal experiences.

Ultimately, with sufficient training, students will reach the stage of **independent reading** and be able to enjoy materials written at their level with no or minimal teacher assistance.