

# California Learning Trip

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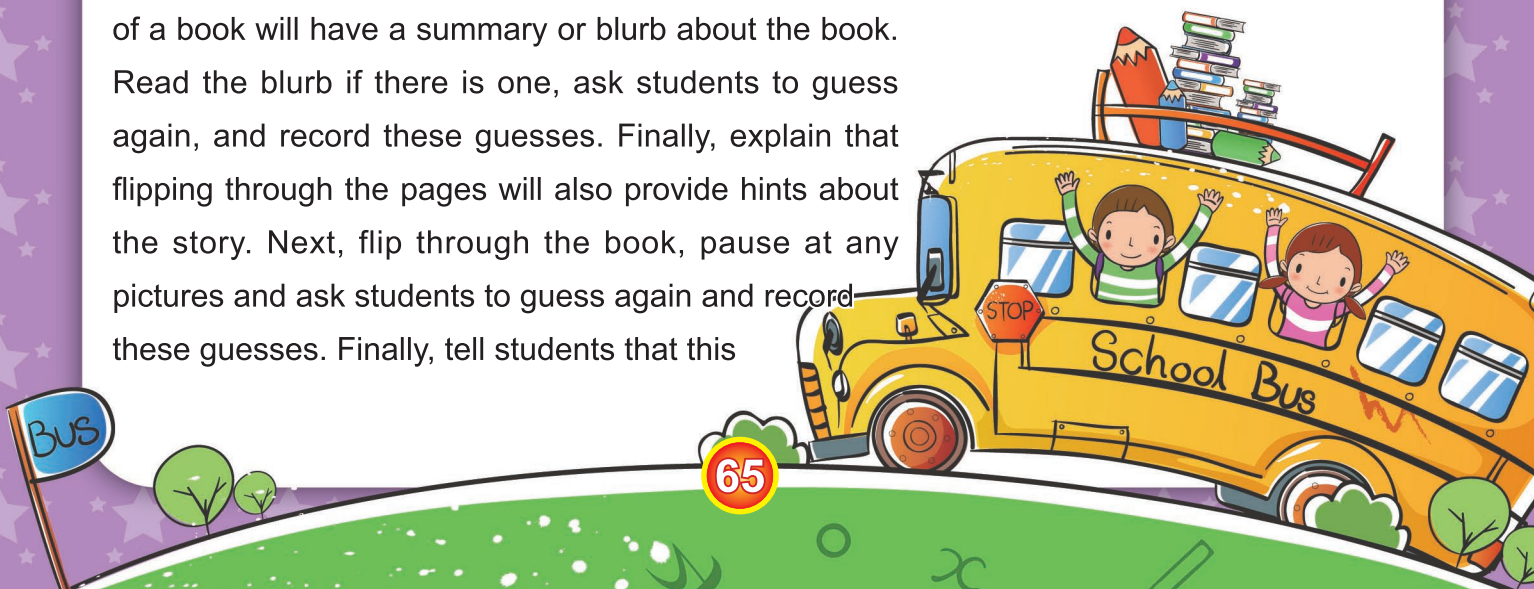
In October, I had a wonderful experience participating in the California Teacher Training Program. This two-week trip was so inspiring that we have benefited a lot from it. In this report, I would like to focus on how to enhance learners' reading comprehension.

In the second week of the trip, I was so lucky to have the opportunity to visit Palm Elementary School. The principal of the school claimed that reading is the foundation of everything. Children learn to see the world through reading. Besides, the amount of children's reading load will determine what they are going to be in the future. Therefore, I would like to share some strategies I've learned during the trip regarding how to enhance student's reading comprehension.

It's critical to teach students strategies they can implement before reading. Emerging readers need to learn how to use book covers, titles, pictures, etc., to improve their comprehension as well as natural reading behaviors, such as previewing, predicting, etc. These reading strategies are simple yet effective in aiding comprehension.

## Pre-Reading Strategies: Preview

Many young readers will simply open the first page of a book and begin reading without the benefits of previewing. Previewing is critical for emerging readers because they need to learn what to look for when choosing books and also because it will help them understand the books they choose. Show a picture book to the students and then ask them to describe what they see on the cover. Explain to students that these pictures will give them clues about the text. Have them guess what the book is about. Write their guesses on the board, and then read the title aloud to students, noting that the title will also give a big clue about the story. Ask students to make new guesses based on the pictures and the title. Write these guesses below the previous ones. Next, tell students that sometimes the back of a book will have a summary or blurb about the book. Read the blurb if there is one, ask students to guess again, and record these guesses. Finally, explain that flipping through the pages will also provide hints about the story. Next, flip through the book, pause at any pictures and ask students to guess again and record these guesses. Finally, tell students that this





process that they have just gone through is called previewing, and it helps their brains “get ready” to read, understand, and enjoy the text. After reading the story, revisit the guesses. Discuss the accuracy of the guesses and whether they helped students understand the story and know what to expect. Compare the accuracy of the last set of guesses-which were based on the pictures, title, blurb, and flipping through the book-with the first guesses, which were only based on the cover’s pictures. Be sure to preview before reading books throughout the year.

### **Pre-Reading Strategies: Set the Purpose for Reading**

Students’ comprehension increases when they read with a set purpose. You can set a purpose for students in several ways, depending on the reading material and academic objective. One simple way to set the purpose for reading is through making predictions. The purpose for reading can also be based on the reading material. For example, if students will read a science article about plants, then write “our purpose for reading this article is to find out how a seed turns into a plant.” Always tell students to keep their purposes in mind while reading and revisit their purposes after reading.

### **Pre-Reading Strategies: Predictions**

Predicting is a simple but powerful reading strategy that helps the readers comprehend the text by giving them something to look for. A prediction can be as simple as asking students what they think the story will be about. It can also be more complex, requiring them to think about more specific questions. Students must understand that predictions are about helping them understand the story, not about being right or wrong. Young students dare not guess for the fear of being wrong, but they need to be imaginative in making predictions and think about the possibilities of a story line.



Additionally, young readers tend to predict very superficially. For example, for the above story, a student might say, "I think the story will be about a dog." Then, teacher should model detailed predictions by giving examples like, "I also think this story will be about a dog. I predict that the dog will be unhappy in his home and will run away. What do you think the story will say about the dog?" Detailed predictions force students to be more thoughtful and also help them identify details in the text. Predictions can be made orally or in writing, but allow students to revisit their predictions during and after reading to confirm them. Below are more specific suggestions for prediction activities.

- ★ Record students' story predictions and revisit them after reading. First, show the cover and read the title. Briefly write down what the story is about.
- ★ Help each student illustrate her/his prediction about what will happen in the book. Tell students to save these for later. After reading the book, have students share what they predicted in their illustrations.
- ★ Help students make personal connections when predicting by asking them to use prior knowledge.
- ★ Use the predictions worksheet to record students' predictions and review the content of the story. After previewing, have students write or dictate what they think the story will be about and draw pictures. After reading, have students circle whether their predictions were right, kind of right, or wrong, and draw pictures of what the story was really about. It's of great importance to remind students that being right are not important and discuss how predictions helped them understand what they are reading.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ Comprehension

## Predictions

book Title: \_\_\_\_\_

I predict that the book will be about \_\_\_\_\_

Draw what you think will happen in the box below.

My prediction was: right, kind of right, wrong.

How what really happened in the story in the box below.

## Monitoring Comprehension: What Do I Know So Far?

This is a great activity to help students monitor their comprehension in small steps. Explain that good readers make sure they understand what they are reading as they read. While reading, students should ask themselves, "What do I know so far?" every few pages. For example, after reading the first couple of pages of *Where the Wild Things Are?* by Maurice Sendak (HarperCollins, 1988), stop and say, "What do I know so far?" Have



students answer aloud, "The story is about a boy named Max who got in trouble for being wild. He was sent to his room without supper." Pause after a few more pages and ask again, "What do you know so far?" Help students summarize the events. Repeat this for every few pages. In the end, ask students to retell the story. Explain that if students cannot answer the question at any point, they should reread parts of the book. If possible, have students independently monitor their comprehension as you read.



## Using Graphic and Semantic Organizers: Story Map

We have to remind ourselves to keep students progress as we teach them to recognize simple story elements, such as characters, setting, and plot. Copy a large version of the Story Map worksheet on the blackboard. Read a story aloud. After the reading, ask a volunteer to name one character. Write the character on the board and have that student stand at the front of the classroom. Students will see this as a reward and will want to participate. Ask another volunteer to name another character, then allow that volunteer to stand with the other student. Continue until all characters are listed. Then, ask additional volunteers to name details about the setting and join their classmates at the front of the classroom. Repeat with details about the plot. Continue to let students add details until all are standing. The next time you share a story, let students draw or write details on their own.

A worksheet titled "Story Map" with three sections for writing details about a story. The first section is labeled "Who was in the story?" and has a small drawing of a map. The second section is labeled "Where did the story happen?" and the third is labeled "What was the story about?".

## Answering and Generating Comprehension Questions: Teaching the Difference between Lower and Higher Order Question

Speaking of answering and generating comprehension questions, defining higher- and lower-order questions for students is a simplified but crucial way of explaining the different types of questions used in Question-Answer Relationships (QAR), an idea developed by Taffy Raphael. Lower-order questions have answers that can be found explicitly in the text, while higher-order questions require students to think critically in order to supply the answers. Although the concept is abstract, readers can begin to understand the differences and benefits from exposure to higher-order questions, which make the reader interact with text, infer, and think critically. Many young readers have only been exposed to lower-order questions, which require little thinking and less searching through text. In order to teach students the differences between these types of questions, begin with examples of the terms higher and lower. For example, ask, "Which is harder? The higher level of a video game or the lower level? Which is harder? Being in a higher grade, like fifth, or being in a lower grade, like kindergarten?" Tell students that some reading questions are like that, too. Some are lower because they can have their brains on "lower power." Demonstrate this with a familiar book. For example, if students are reading *The Napping House* by Audrey Wood (Red Wagon Books, 2000), first tell them to turn their brains on low power because they will be answering some lower-order questions about the story. Ask, "Who is napping in the napping house? What time of day is it? Who fell asleep last?" Guide students to comment on whether the questions were hard to answer. Then, tell students to turn their brains to high power in order to answer higher-order questions that will make them think harder. Explain that the answers will not be word-for-word in the text of the story. Ask, "What do you think the characters did after they all woke up? Why do you think everyone got in the same bed?" As students answer these questions, point out how their answers might vary because the answers to these questions are not in the book. Even though they refer to the book, students have to think for their own answers. Repeat these discussions when you answer questions about other reading material. Use the terms "higher" and "lower" often so that students will get more used to them and become more familiar with them for future grade levels.



## Generating and Answering Comprehension Questions

Students benefit from learning how to create their own questions. First, if they understand the thinking process required to create a question, they can go through the thinking process required to answer a question. Second, generating questions requires critical and higher-order thinking. Finally, generating questions requires students to reconsider the text. After students have demonstrated an adequate understanding of the differences between lower and higher-order questions, challenge them to create their own questions, either as a whole group or in small groups.

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### Question Generating ?

Book Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Write a question about the characters in the story. \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_ ?

Write a question about what happened in the story. \_\_\_\_\_

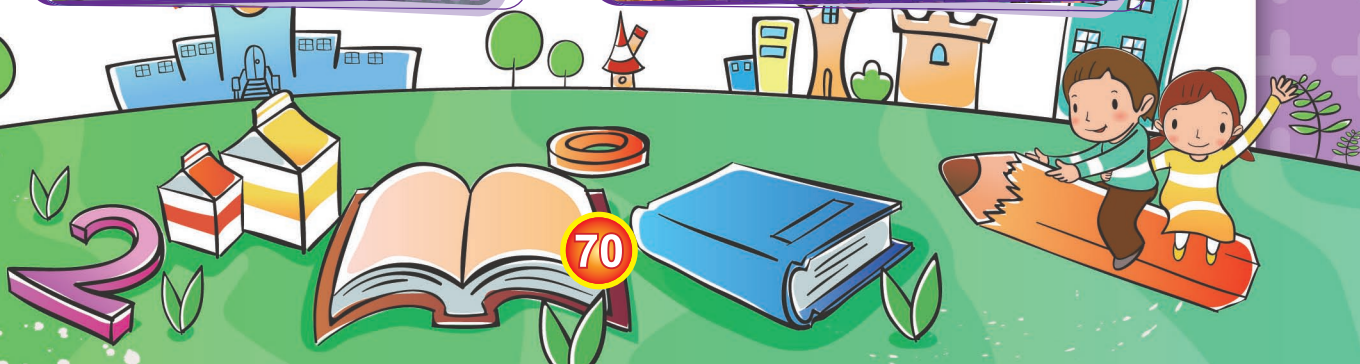
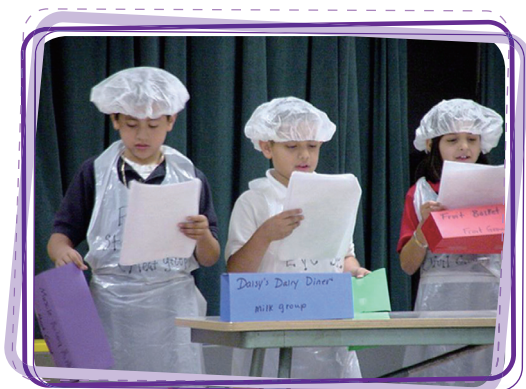
Answer: \_\_\_\_\_ ?

## Summarizing: Readers' Theater/Dramatization

Summarizing is also a way to enhance learners' reading comprehension. An excellent and fun way to practice summarizing is through readers' theater and other types of dramatization.

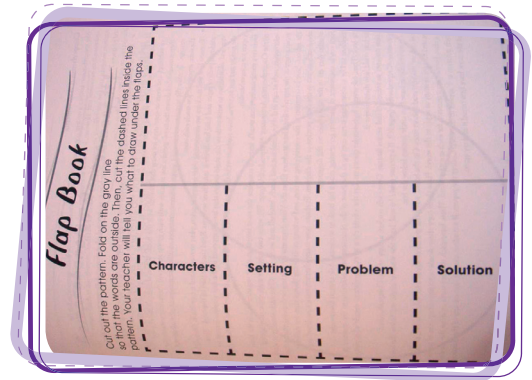
However, in order to let students feel more relax to do so, we have to explain that each of these methods is simply a way of retelling main events in a story.

- ✦ Make puppets or masks and retell the story in a play format.
- ✦ Have students act out the story without speaking (pantomime). Challenge them to be descriptive enough for the class to be able to "follow along."
- ✦ Assign students to read different characters, or parts. Act as the narrator or let a very proficient reader be the narrator. Let the "actors" speak for the characters.
- ✦ Have students work in small groups to create simple puppets and retell the story as a puppet show.



## Summarizing: Flap Books

Flap books are good, concrete tools to summarize main story elements in fiction. Use the flap book worksheet to summarize characters, setting, problem, and solution. Have each student cut out the pattern, fold the pattern in half on the gray line, and cut on the dotted lines. Instruct them to summarize the story elements by drawing each element under the flap. Model students exactly what these steps are when first doing this activity. Once students are more familiar with the procedures, we can let them do them on their own. In addition, after finishing the task, we have to explain each element as follows:



Characters: WHO is in the story?

Setting: WHERE does the story happen?

Problem: WHAT is happening in the story? WHAT is the problem?

Solution: HOW is the problem solved? HOW does the story end?

Post the completed flap books on a bulletin board. Consider creating new flap books each time you begin a new book with students.

Last but not the least, I am grateful for this teacher training program to California. It allows me to reinforce my background in English teaching, cultivate my skills in this field, and develop my perspectives on people and the world, thus it will benefit more students in the long run.

