

Teaching Guided Reading

What is guided reading?

What are some guided reading activities?

How about guided reading demonstrations or guided reading lesson plans?

Using guided reading as a teaching strategy has become more and more popular as the emphasis in education continues to focus on how to increasing reading comprehension. As a teacher mentor, I often have teachers ask me questions about guided reading similar to those above. However, as with any other reading strategy, increasing reading comprehension depends highly on what the teacher does before the reading assignment.

First, though, what is guided reading? Simply put, in guided reading students are placed in small groups with similar reading levels. Children read either silently or aloud to themselves, but they do not read in unison. In early guided reading groups books are chosen based on a 90 accuracy level. Books should also match a child's interests and knowledge base.

Of course, two problems exist. First, to do all that guided reading suggests can be quite challenging and maybe even impossible since kids with similar reading levels do not necessarily have similar interests or knowledge bases. And second, the teacher still needs to tap into and build upon the student's prior knowledge of the subject matter (before reading) if the teacher truly wants to increase reading comprehension.

A great teaching strategy to overcome these obstacles and improve guided reading instruction is to do a three to five minute book introduction as a scaffold for the first reading of a text.

Here is an example from an historical fiction guided reading lesson I did with 8th graders during our unit on World War II. Eve Bunting's book, *So Far From the Sea*, is a beautiful story about the Iwasakis, a Japanese-American family that goes back to visit the "relocation" camp where the father was interned for three and a half years during World War II. While the content is serious, the book is actually a picture book written on a second grade level. Nevertheless, an introduction to the book is necessary to scaffold learning, clear up any comprehension concerns, and ultimately make the guided reading instruction more successful. I would start with the cover, both the title and the illustration. I would point out the mountains in the background and explain that the family is clearly very far from the sea. I would then ask a series of questions: Is the family happy or sad? Why are they standing next to a monument? What are monuments for? Why is the mother holding flowers? By answering these questions, the students conclude that the Iwasaki family has brought flowers to some solemn place, and at least one reason they are sad is that they are *so far from the sea*. Students can then predict where they think the Iwasaki family is on the cover and the goal of the guided reading can then be to discover if their predictions are correct.

However, I would not start the guided reading just yet. First, I would take the students on a "picture walk" through the book. The pictures in a book can go a long way towards increasing comprehension. In this particular book, the father often reflects back to his youth when he and his father were interned in the prison camp. This reflecting, however, can create problems for some readers. Fortunately, the illustrator, Chris K. Soentpiet, has drawn pictures in both color and black and white. The color pictures are present day (1972) at the abandoned prison camp. The black and white pictures are during World War II when 10,000 Japanese-Americans were interned at the Manzanar War Relocation Center in eastern California. The "picture walk" also provides a great opportunity to point out any words that the students may have trouble with. For example, I would certainly point out "Manzanar War Relocation Center" written on a sign in an early illustration in the book. These words come up often and the pictures provide a great opportunity to explain their meaning.

By "walking" through the pictures to introduce the book, a teacher can tap into students' prior knowledge and also have students predict what the text is about. Furthermore, teachers can clear up any comprehension concerns they may have about the book, such as "jumping" back and forth between 1943 to 1972. The "picture walk" will, in turn, increase students' interest in the book and therefore increase students' motivation to learn. This is all done prior to the actual guided reading. Remember, guided reading is a great reading strategy, however, teachers must

still activate prior knowledge and clear up any comprehension concerns if they really want to increase reading comprehension and get the most success from their the guided reading.

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Short note about the author

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