

## **S.M.A.R.T. Classrooms – Students Motivated About Reading Time**

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Comprehension is a critical component of all reading instruction. Strategies to enhance comprehension skills include utilizing student-created literature responses, kinesthetic reading instruction, nontraditional methods of literature response, and assessment strategies. This paper will study these various strategies.

### *Why Multi-Modal Reading Instruction is a Good Idea*

The research background and theory behind creating classrooms that are multi-modal in approach has been well documented. As long ago as 1985, when 'Becoming A Nation of Readers' was published, the recommendation for reading instruction has remained the same today as it was then.

“Children should spend less time completing workbooks and skills sheets. Workbook and skill activity sheets consume a large proportion of the time allocated to reading instruction in most American classrooms, despite the fact that there is little evidence that these activities are related to reading achievement. Workbook and skill sheet activities should be pared to the minimum...”

An old Chinese proverb states “Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember. Involve me and I understand.” William Glasser builds on this same theory and states that children understand only 10% of what is read but 80% of what is experienced. To increase reading comprehension, it is imperative that students have opportunities to work with and internalize, or experience, the reading passage. This can be achieved through multi-modal instruction. For the purposes of this paper, multi-modal is defined as having students use visual (seeing), auditory (hearing) and kinesthetic (tracing and other tactile responses) clues to develop reading comprehension skills. Children learn best when content is presented in several modalities (LDA) and, if possible collaboratively. Johnson, Johnson and Smith (1991) state "Learning is a social process that occurs through interpersonal interaction within a cooperative context. Individuals, working together, construct shared understandings and knowledge."

David Johnson, Roger Johnson and Karl Smith, *Active Learning: Cooperation in the College Classroom*, Edina, MN: Interaction Book Co., 1991.

### *Nontraditional Methods of Reading Response*

There are many strategies that can be utilized to accommodate student interests, learning styles, and rates of learning utilizing varied comprehension-building techniques. Examples of these include alternatives to traditional book reports and book-in-a-day. Some strategies for nontraditional book reports that boost reading comprehension include:

1. After studying newspaper headlines and identifying the 5 W's: who, what, when, where, and why (all critical reading skills), have students develop a front-page, headlined article that details the critical components of the book including characters and plot. For struggling students, first identify the five W's and then use these to develop one coherent paragraph. For advanced students, have them compose the article from the point of view of another character in the book or write an editorial after composing the headlined article.
2. Create a time-line of events for the book. Write about or present the timeline to the class and indicate why each event was chosen as being significant. For struggling students, create the timeline by writing the events on index cards as they read the story. At the completion of the story have the students place the cards in sequential order and glue on the timeline. For advanced students, have the timeline split at the point in the literature where the main character faces a conflict or must make a crucial decision into the author created ending and an alternate student generated ending. Give the significant events of both endings.
3. Complete an actual job application using information about the book's central character. Some information will have to be student generated; have students explain why they chose the information that they do and why their created information is supported by the story. For struggling students, focus on locating critical information about the main character in the story and discussing what techniques the author utilizes to make the character appear alive. For advanced students, have them use the job opportunities section of the newspaper and decide which position the character might apply for. Have students include a cover letter with the application detailing why their skills are appropriate for the position. For older students, this is an excellent introduction into applying for employment and completing job applications.

Another strategy is 'Book-In-a-Day' (Brevard County Public Schools). The teacher begins by reading the first two chapters of a book to the entire class (advanced students can read the book independently). The teacher then divides the class, or reading group, into smaller working groups and assigns each group a chapter of the book. The number of students in each group and the number of chapters assigned to the group can be modified to meet the level of the students. The group meets to read and discuss only their assigned chapters and prepares a brief (2-3 minute) summary. The group also generates a list of questions concerning chapters prior to theirs and predictions about subsequent chapters. As the groups present their chapter to the entire class, all students create a title for the chapter and either draw a picture concerning an event in that chapter or write a summary of the chapter. This strategy allows struggling students to concentrate on only a few chapters of a book, reducing the load to a manageable level. It allows them to

experience an entire chapter book, which can be a daunting task for a struggling reader. For advanced students, the presentation to the class can be modified to include more specific criteria including the creation of a mandala, chapter quilt, mosaic or by creating and dramatizing two letters that one character might write to another and the response.

### Responding to Literature in Different Ways

Make-A-Book is one method of having students respond to literature. The use of make-a-book techniques including story illustrations, book pamphlets, and student created books creates enthusiasm for reading and further develops reading comprehension. Integrating the arts, including creative responses, also creates interest and helps meet the needs of students with a strong Musical or Spatial/Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence (Gardner). Make-a-book ideas that help with reading comprehension include:

1. Step Book – Take total number of chapters in the book, add 2 and then divide total by 2. This is how many sheets of paper needed (using several different colors makes this more visually pleasing). Lay pages flat with a small amount of the previous page showing (should look like stairs) at bottom. Fold top forward until it has the same spacing as the ‘steps’. Staple at the fold. On the first page, have students write the title of the book and illustrate. On each step, have students write ‘Chapter One’, ‘Chapter Two’, etc. (For books with less pages, chapters can be clustered (chapter one-three, chapters four –sic, etc.) As students read each chapter, have them write a summary on the chapter’s page. Younger students might draw an illustration and complete one sentence. Advanced students may use the page to journal their responses to the story. At the conclusion of the book, students can illustrate the pages or use the completed book and share with others.
2. Students can create word searches and crossword puzzles for their books at [www.puzzlemaker.com](http://www.puzzlemaker.com). Have students identify critical information from the book. For struggling students use word searches; these can be one-word descriptions or labels for characters, places, emotions, and events that occur during the story. For advanced students use crossword puzzles where the students will need to create definitions or clues for the word. Exchange the puzzles and allow time for students to respond to each other’s creation.

Another instructional strategy is to utilize literature circles in the classroom. Literature circles allow small groups of three to five students to meet to discuss assigned chapters of a book. Literature circles allow students an opportunity to communicate with their peers to question the author’s purpose, character development, interesting word usage, and more clearly develop story comprehension. Literature circles are

heterogeneously grouped so that students of different talents and abilities have an opportunity to work collaboratively and develop their individual talents.

Integrating the arts allows students with strong dramatic, verbal or visual skills to respond to literature in a creative manner. Activities include:

1. Students can write a song about the book and share it with the class. They may want to use a melody from another song or create their own. Students should prepare a copy of the song for class members so they can sing along with you the second time around.
2. Have students choose an important scene from the book in which there is action but limited dialogue. Use this scene to create a mime of the character's actions including the important details in the dramatization. More advanced students write a brief summary of the entire book with an explanation of why they chose the scene to mime. The summary is read to the audience before the performance. Struggling students may verbally share what the scene will be and why it had meaning towards the development of the plot.
3. Another technique for students to utilize is to have them take the role of a radio announcer or talk show host/hostess. Students develop a script of questions the interviewer will ask a key character in the book. The characters should then respond from their point of view. Either video, tape-record, or role-play the interview for the class.
4. Students with a strong artistic ability might develop a pop-up book of memorable aspects of the book. They should include a written explanation for each page, sharing their personal reaction to the event or writing a brief summary explaining what has occurred.

### Conclusion

Schlechty (1990) states that schools must “provide schoolwork at which students are successful and from which children learn to read. Schools do not teach children to read; schools provide children with activities that, if they can accomplish them, will result in their learning to read. Reading is a consequence of doing schoolwork. Reading, in itself, is not schoolwork.” Enhancing reading comprehension through multi-modal instructional strategies requires the teacher to structure and plan activities where children can be successful prior to the time the students ever approaches the literature. This is the primary role of the teacher. This planning, however, has considerable rewards because reteaching is minimal since students grasp the concept more quickly through manipulation of critical points. Additionally, the needs of all levels of students can be met utilizing one lesson format.

Multi-modal reading instruction creates classrooms where students are motivated and reading comprehension soars. It is a strategy that can be used in any classroom with significant academic success!

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