

Question Generating and Answering

Description

Question generating and answering is often taught as part of *Reciprocal Teaching*, a powerful set of techniques that also includes peer-to-peer strategies for summarizing, predicting, and clarifying. Students are invited to generate questions about a text (oral or written) and work with others to find the answers in the text. Students can work in pairs or in teams, with individual students leading the team and asking questions while the rest of the group finds and discusses the answers.

Question formation can be difficult for students who have not been actively engaged in learning for some time. The structure of questions may need to be pre-taught and may require practice before they can form questions easily and clearly focus on the content of the text. Informational texts work well, but for low level readers, personal narratives can be used. Some teachers use question generating to help students focus on literature concepts (character, plot, sequence, conflict, etc.).

Purpose

Question generating (or asking) encourages students to engage the text and pay attention to key content information. It is part of a set of strategies found to be effective in increasing comprehension of texts. Asking and answering questions with a partner or as part of a group engages all students, and students get significantly more time on task and opportunities to grapple with the text. Shyer students are more likely to participate since their answers (and possible mistakes) are not made public. Using team leaders as “experts” who ask comprehension questions for others to answer provides more proficient students with a challenge and offers examples of “cognitive apprenticeship” to others as they listen to their peers formulate questions.

What to Do

1. To introduce Question Generating and Answering, use a text that is slightly above the skill level of the students and contains interesting information.
2. Let students know that question asking and answering is a great way to help them understand and remember what they are reading.
3. Model the strategy first with the entire class asking questions about both literal content and information to be inferred. Use the *Think Aloud* technique to allow students to see how you select a question to be asked. Be sure to include both “yes/no” and open-ended questions. For example, when reading “The 7 Habits of Successful Readers”, you could begin with a warm-up question such as “Yes or No: The article discusses the habits of struggling readers.” or “How many habits are discussed in the article?” and move on to “What are 3 things that successful readers do?” Ask the class to answer either orally or in writing. Provide feedback.

4. Select another section of the text and ask a question (e.g., What do successful readers do before they start to read?). After students answer, invite a student to ask a question using the same or the next section of the text. Help the student formulate the question if necessary by gently rephrasing. Invite the class to answer. Emphasize that this is a comprehension activity and questions have to be such that the answers can be found in the text.
5. Introduce the text to be read. Break the class into pairs or teams and designate a student to ask questions for others to answer.
6. Debrief by asking selected teams to report out. Reemphasize both the structure and purpose of the activity and discuss with students the benefit of learning with this strategy.