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To encourage critical reading, teachers should ask students questions about the text before, during, and after they read. This method is useful for most subjects, from reading to social studies, and is an excellent way to structure literature homework.

Questions Before, During, and After Reading

What Is It?

To aid their comprehension, skillful readers ask themselves questions before, during, and after they read. You can help students become more proficient by modeling this process for them and encouraging them to use it when they read independently.

Why Is It Important?

Dolores Durkin's research in 1979 showed that most teachers asked students questions after they had read, as opposed to questioning to improve comprehension before or while they read. In the late 1990s, further research (Pressley, et al. 1998) revealed that despite the abundance of research supporting questioning before, during, and after reading to help comprehension, teachers still favored post-reading comprehension questions.

Researchers have also found that when adult readers are asked to "think aloud" as they read, they employ a wide variety of comprehension strategies, including asking and answering questions before, during, and after reading (Pressley and Afflerbach 1995). Proficient adult readers:

- Are aware of why they are reading the text

- Preview and make predictions

- Read selectively

- Make connections and associations with the text based on what they already know

- Refine predictions and expectations

- Use context to identify unfamiliar words

- Reread and make notes

- Evaluate the quality of the text

- Review important points in the text

- Consider how the information might be used in the future

Successful reading is not simply the mechanical process of "decoding" text. Rather, it is a process of active inquiry. Good readers approach a text with questions and develop new questions as they read, for example:

> "What is this story about?"
> "What does the main character want?"
> "Will she get it?" "If so, how?"

Even after reading, engaged readers still ask questions:

> "What is the meaning of what I have read?"
> "Why did the author end the paragraph (or chapter, or book) in this way?"
> "What was the author's purpose in writing this?"

Good authors anticipate the reader's questions and plant questions in the reader's mind (think of a title such as, *Are You My Mother?* by P.D. Eastman). In this way, reading becomes a collaboration between the reader and the author. The author's job is to raise questions and then answer them — or provide several possible answers. Readers cooperate by asking the right questions, paying careful attention to the author's answers, and asking questions of their own.

How Can You Make It Happen?

To help readers learn to ask questions before, during, and after reading, think aloud the next time you are reading a book, article, or set of directions. Write each question on a post-it note and stick it on the text you have the question about. You may be surprised at how many typically unspoken questions you ponder, ask, and answer as you read. You may wonder as you read or after you read at the author's choice of title, at a vocabulary word, or about how you will use this information in the future.

You should begin to model these kinds of questions in the primary grades during read-aloud times, when you can say out loud what you are thinking and asking. Read a book or text to the class, and model your thinking and questioning. Emphasize that even though you are an adult reader, questions before, during, and after reading continue to help you gain an understanding of the text you are reading. Ask questions such as:

> "What clues does the title give me about the story?"
> "Is this a real or imaginary story?"
> "Why am I reading this?"

"What do I already know about___?"
"What predictions can I make?"

Pre-select several stopping points within the text to ask and answer reading questions. Stopping points should not be so frequent that they hinder comprehension or fluid reading of a text. This is also an excellent time to model "repair strategies" to correct miscomprehension. Start reading the text, and ask yourself questions while reading:

"What do I understand from what I just read?"
"What is the main idea?"
"What picture is the author painting in my head?"
"Do I need to reread so that I understand?"

Then reread the text, asking the following questions when you are finished:

"Which of my predictions were right? What information from the text tells me that I am correct?"
"What were the main ideas?"
"What connections can I make to the text? How do I feel about it?"

Encourage students to ask their own questions after you have modeled this strategy, and write all their questions on chart paper. Students can be grouped to answer one another's questions and generate new ones based on discussions. Be sure the focus is not on finding the correct answers, because many questions may be subjective, but on curiosity, wondering, and asking thoughtful questions.

After students become aware of the best times to ask questions during the reading process, be sure to ask them a variety of questions that:

- Can be used to gain a deeper understanding of the text

- Have answers that might be different for everyone

- Have answers that can be found in the text

- Clarify the author's intent

- Can help clarify meaning

- Help them make inferences

- Help them make predictions

- Help them make connections to other texts or prior knowledge

As students begin to read text independently, you should continue to model the questioning process and encourage students to use it often. In the upper elementary and middle school grades, a [framework](#) for questions to ask before, during, and after reading can serve as a guide as students work with more challenging texts and begin to internalize comprehension strategies. You can use an overhead projector to jot notes on the framework as you "think aloud" while reading a text. As students become comfortable with the questioning strategy, they may use the guide independently while reading, with the goal of generating questions before, during, and after reading to increase comprehension.