

Think Aloud

The Think Aloud strategy is used to encourage students to voice their internal thoughts as they read. Reading short units of text cumulatively readers consider what individual words mean and how meanings shift and are firm up as more information is provided. Students connect reading with their prior knowledge and complex thought processes are made visible.

Good teachers model thinking aloud, speculation and problem solving as part of their everyday teaching. The next step is to explicitly show students how they can use this strategy to monitor their own comprehension.

Here's an example of what a student Think Aloud looks like. The passage is taken from Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.

TEXT	The chain he drew
STUDENT	I think this person is an artist and he has just made a drawing of a chain around a lady's neck. Like a locket.
TEXT	was clasped about his middle.
STUDENT	Oh, that can't be right because this chain is clasped around is middle. Clasped is when you hold something.
TEACHER	Just hold, or is clasp more than hold?
STUDENT	It's when you hold it really tight, like gripped and this chain is round his middle like his waist. I think drawn means when you take something out like a sword, like this (makes a gesture as though drawing a sword from a scabbard) It could be that he's drawing the chain as though he is going to hit someone with it.
TEXT	It was long, and wound about him like a tail; and it was made
STUDENT	Yes, I think it's a big metal chain and is wrapped round him
TEACHER	Why is it like a tail?
STUDENT	I think it's because it's really long and it's dragging behind him like a tail. Or maybe it's because he looks half like a human and half like an animal.
TEXT	(for Scrooge observed it closely)
STUDENT	Oh, I know Scrooge. This is from our Christmas production, A Christmas Carol. I think it's Jacob Marley,
TEACHER	What do you notice about the punctuation?
STUDENT	It's in brackets. You say it like this (reads with expression). It's extra information in the sentence. It means that Scrooge is watching what's happening. He's looking really carefully.
TEACHER	Why do you think he is 'watching carefully'?
STUDENT	He's frightened and he isn't sure what it's going to do next. I think he might be horrified.
TEXT	of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel.

TEACHER	Remember to go back and read it from the beginning so you get a complete picture of what is happening.
STUDENT	The chain has got lots of things on it like keys and padlocks. I don't know what a ledger is. Deeds are things that you do like daring deeds but I don't think that makes sense. Everything IS made out of metal – steel.
TEACHER	A ledger is an account book. It's where you write down all the money that is paid to you and all the money you have to pay to someone else. Deeds are official documents that show that you own property, like the title deeds of your house or land. The piece of paper is proof that you own it
STUDENT	So his chain has lots of thins attached to it. It's like a charm bracelet but all the things are really bad. They are all to do with money.

Think Alouds are used to model comprehension processes such as making connections with prior knowledge, predicting and visualising. In the above example the student initially thinks that the chain is made out of metal and then confirms this when she learns that everything is wrought in steel.

Misconceptions become evident and assessment is facilitated as teachers listen in on student thought processes. Students articulate their ideas and teachers support their thinking by prompting e.g. 'is clasp more than hold?' or directing attention to bits of the text that appear to have been overlooked e.g. 'Why is it like a tail?'. Where appropriate, information is simply supplied e.g. ledger, deed.

Using the Think Aloud Strategy

Think Aloud discussions need to be used analytically. It is important to model trial and error and speculative thinking. The teacher models language such as:

OK, so I will just re-read from the beginning to check what's going on here...

So far, I think I have learned that...

I don't understand what this bit means...

Ah, now I see why the author said... that makes sense now

This bit made me think of something I read... (or have seen, or happened to me)

I wonder why...

Once the students are familiar with the teacher using this type of thinking, they can begin to use Think Aloud working with a partner. One student A reads the text and B thinks aloud. They alternate with each section of text. Older students might take notes and record the processes their partner uses. Finally, they reflect on the learning process together.

Another way of using Think Aloud is to have individual students use the strategy when tackling a complex text. The teacher observes and makes notes of what the students are able to do independently and notes any particular challenges or difficulties.

Before, After and During Reading

The think aloud strategy can be adapted and used at all stages of reading. In pre-reading the teacher might demonstrate accessing prior knowledge, or how to make informed predictions about the text. During reading the focus may shift to demonstrate how individual words, syntax, punctuation and

text structure affect how meaning is constructed. After reading the emphasis will shift to how we look for evidence in the text to support opinions, weigh up an argument, or identify authorial point of view.