Scaffolding Reading Comprehension Instruction for Struggling Readers

You can scaffold instruction to help struggling readers better understand and clearly express their ideas and feelings about texts they read.

☐ Incorporate small group discussions as often as possible to actively involve students.
  • When you scaffold discussions, teachers and students ask more questions and give more elaborated responses; students achieve greater understanding.
  • This is especially true for struggling readers and English language learners.

☐ Model different ways to respond to questions.
  • If students have difficulty answering questions, change the question to an answer. For example, change *How did Aunt Josie feel when she saved enough money to attend the family reunion?* to *Aunt Josie was very happy when she saved enough money to go to the family reunion. She danced around the room with her son and daughter.*
  • Follow up with another question and if necessary, help students with a response.

☐ Use questions and prompts.
  • Different types and levels of questions help students express their ideas and feelings.
  • Questions should elicit more than a simple “yes” or “no” response.
  • Prompt students who are having difficulty responding.
    – For example, “Aunt Josie was dancing around the room. How do you think she felt?”

☐ Paraphrase and expand what students say during discussions.
  • Repeat the main idea using new vocabulary.
  • Take students’ responses and paraphrase them by including additional vocabulary and ideas.
Request clarification.
- Ask “why” and “how” questions to help students make inferences and explain what they are thinking and feeling.

Promote questions and conversation among students.
- Allow students to converse with each other about what they read.
- Encourage students to ask each other questions during discussions using the various types of questions.
- Provide questions to think about using the levels of questions and time to answer the questions.

Provide appropriate feedback.
- Encourage ALL students to join in.
- Give positive feedback for all types of responses.
- Spotlight what someone has contributed to a discussion, such as “Mary noticed that the policeman was angry.” If students understand that their ideas and responses are valued, they are more likely to participate.
- Pose questions that turn the thinking back to the students for further consideration, such as “John thinks the girl is unhappy. Does anyone know why she is unhappy?”

Give sufficient wait time for students to think and respond.
- Be patient. Struggling readers often need more time.
- Ask questions in different ways to provide more time to respond.

(ITOR, 2000; 2TRA, 2001)