

READING Strategy → Questioning the Author

Reading component

Comprehension

Overview of the strategy

The Questioning the Author (QtA) strategy, developed by Beck, McKeown, Hamilton, and Kucan, is based on the premise that authors are fallible and that readers must sometimes question the text in order to construct meaning. This is especially helpful for struggling readers, who often assume that their lack of skill is the sole cause of their comprehension problems. When teachers model by thinking aloud, students too can mull over and tease out the meaning from inconsiderate or challenging text. Readers who question the author become more strategic and critical readers.

Strategy procedure

1. Choose a text on the instructional or frustration reading level for demonstration and teacher Think-Aloud. Prepare for the lesson by reading the text carefully, perhaps more than once. Segment the text carefully by marking the places where the author is unclear or where comprehending requires more work by activating background knowledge or making inferences. Develop queries for each marked spot to facilitate understanding (see samples below).
2. Introduce the students to the idea that authors are fallible human beings who are sometimes not considerate of their readers. Distribute the text to students, and stress that it is challenging and will require all readers to work hard at comprehension.
3. Read the text aloud, and pause to question the author at the places marked during preparation. Use a Think-Aloud strategy, explaining carefully how to activate background, clarify unclear ideas, and paraphrase major points for better understanding. Use the queries developed during planning.
4. Demonstrate how to construct meaning based on the text, background knowledge, and queries. Try to answer the questions posed. Allow students to contribute queries and to articulate construction of meaning, as appropriate.
5. Choose and distribute another text on the instructional level of students. Distribute sticky notes, and have the students read the text and mark each place where comprehension requires extra work or where the text is unclear. Instruct students to write a query on each sticky note.
6. Assign partners, and instruct the pairs to question the author to construct meaning for each spot marked in the text. Circulate to assist.
7. If appropriate, share some of the successful QtAs with the entire class.
8. Repeat the strategy often.

Sample queries

- Initiating
 1. What is the author trying to say here?
 2. What is the author's message?
 3. What is the author talking about?
- Follow-up
 - What does the author mean here?
 - Does the author explain this clearly?
 - Does this make sense with what the author told us before?
 - How does this connect to what the author told us here?

- Does the author tell us why?
- Why do you think the author tells us this now?
- Narrative
 - How do things look for this character now?
 - Given what the author has already told us about the character, what do you think the character is up to?
 - How does the author let you know that something has changed?
 - How does the author settle this for us?

Source

- L. Beck, M. G. McKeown, R. L. Hamilton, and L. Kucan, *Questioning the Author: An Approach for Enhancing Student Engagement with Text* (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1997).