

“I suggest that the only books that influence us are those for which we are ready, and which have gone a little further down our particular path than we have gone ourselves.”

E.M. Forster

Teaching Reading

Reading is not the first skill to be acquired. Children usually start reading foreign texts after they have learned reading in their native language first. Printed word becomes a valuable source of expanding children’s knowledge of a foreign language. The teacher must be happy if reading becomes an enjoyable activity because books open up a new world to young learners. Their natural curiosity makes them read. This is a chance for the teacher, which must be exploited. The teacher should bring interesting texts of all kinds. We are surrounded with books, comics and magazines, texts on a computer screen, on a mobile display, inscriptions and labels. These texts work in our native language and make our native world. Foreign language texts open the door into another world and enlarge our horizons. Students should be exposed to many kinds of texts. However, meeting with literature is essential. “Literature has a social and emotional value that is a vital part of its role in the development of children’s language and literacy.” (D.Vale with A.Feunteun: Teaching Children English, CUP 1995).

Students are active, creative elements in the process of reading. When they read or listen to a story, they imagine and create a mental picture of what they comprehend. They try to predict what will happen next, and they recall what has happened previously. They identify with the situations or with the characters in the text thanks to their own life experience. They also try to make judgements and find useful values in the text.

At the very earliest stages of learning to read learners need practice in recognizing words. Wordcards seem to be a very useful teaching aid at this stage. The teacher shows and pronounces the word in the card, and the class repeats. Wordcards can be shown in combinations and in different sequences. This technique belongs to **look and say** approach. As soon as we combine the wordcard into a simple sentence, we may apply so called **look and do** approach. Students read and do what the sentence says. This enables the teacher to control if learners understand. They discover this way that words don’t exist in isolation, but as whole phrases or sentences. Later the sentences form a story that the children read for the first time themselves after the whole text is familiar to them.

Pre-reading activities

We bring tasks for learners before they start reading to make them involved in the process of reading, to make them focused and interested. Key words should be prepared in advance for students to understand the text afterwards, to make reading comprehension easier:

- 1 Say the word you read,
- 2 perform actions you read,
- 3 match words (sentences) with a picture,
- 4 match halves of sentences together,
- 5 draw a picture.

Activities during reading

When reading a story, we may interrupt from time to time asking students to predict what will come next. This technique might not be devoid of mother tongue. While reading students can:

- 1 Fill in the chart,
- 2 put the words or sentences in order,
- 3 fill in the missing words in sentences,
- 4 write words instead of pictures in the text,
- 5 complete the last word in a sentence or the last sentence in a story.

Activities after reading

Like people like to talk about the TV programme they have seen, students naturally want to talk about the story. Let's give them a chance. Of course at the beginning mother tongue can be allowed here a bit. Anyhow, they also can:

- 1 Draw a picture based on the text,
- 2 fill in the crossword where new words from the text appear
- 3 mime the story,
- 4 choose the right picture which suits the story from the set of pictures,
- 5 discover the mistake in the summary written by the teacher.

It is the teacher's responsibility to value his learners as readers. Success and progress should be accepted with joy and mistakes sometimes overlooked with a decent diplomacy. It is vital to offer a balance of reading activities, some of which enable a creative partnership with the text, and involve interest and the experience of a student.