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QUESTIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING IN AN INDIVIDUALIZED READING CONFERENCE

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Individualized reading conferences with children are essential for diagnosis, goal setting, and evaluation. During the conference the teacher and the pupil check the reading records which are kept by the pupil and by the teacher. They may also discuss plans for reports or other creative class presentations.

The major portion of the conference, however, is the interview about the selection which the child has read. The teacher asks several questions in order to determine if the pupil has comprehended the selection. The kinds of questions which are asked usually determine the kind of thinking the child employs in reacting to the questions.

Questions which ask the child to retell what he/she has read demand literal recall. Such questions are valuable when they indicate whether concepts have been grasped firmly enough to be reproduced. These are often the easiest for the teacher to formulate and for the child the easiest to answer. They are generally questions of detail, sequence, and the main idea ("What was the story about?").

Questions which require the reader to extend what has been actually stated are interpretive questions because the reader must use both obvious and subtle cues to move beyond literal interpretation. Interpretations can be evaluated for support or rejection by reference to what has been actually stated. This is a process we might call "gap-filling."

Questions that demand critical judgment through the use of external or internal criteria are designed to encourage critical thinking and critical reading. Since most children are hesitant to question the printed word, teachers need to foster more realistic attitudes by questioning and helping children recognize assumptions, distinguish fact from opinion, and judge the competence of authors.

Generally, questions that ask "why," "how," "because of," "in what way," and "what do you think," can lead to high levels of thinking than do questions that begin with "who," "what," "when," and "where".

The questions which are presented below have been proven successful for use in an individual reading interview. These may easily be placed on index cards for durability and easy use. They may also be posted in the classroom so that pupils can prepare for the interview. The most appealing feature of the questions is that they encourage critical thinking and foster development of interpretation and evaluation skills. Some require the pupil to apply imagination. Others ask the reader to relate reading to his/her own personal

experiences. Of course, the teacher may wish to interject other pertinent questions as the interview progresses and will certainly delete those which are not appropriate for the particular selection.

Questions for Books of Fiction

1. How can you tell where the story took place?
2. If you were to paint a picture of the setting, what would you include in your picture?
3. What gave you clues as to when it took place?
4. Is the main character like anyone you ever knew? In what ways?
5. Is the main character unlike anyone you ever knew? In what ways?
6. Would you choose the main character to be your friend? why?
7. Is he/she like you? how?
8. Describe the other people or characters or animals in the story.
9. How did they get along with one another?
10. What problems or troubles did the characters have to overcome?
11. How did they solve them, if they did?
12. Was there any part of the story that you think could not happen in real life? Why? (recognition of fantasy) If the story was real, what made it appear to be so?
13. Is there any way in which the characters changed during the story? how?
14. Does the title suit the book or story? why?
15. If you could give it a new title, what would you call it? why?
16. What caused the character to behave in the way he/she did?
17. In what part of the world did it take place? Could it happen anywhere? why?
18. Who told the story? How do you know?

These questions should evoke more enthusiasm and interest in the interview than the trite "Did you like the book? why?"

After the interview the pupil may select a passage to read aloud. If so, the teacher may ask evaluation questions which encourage judgment such as, "What passage do you think best describes the main character?" or "What passage best describes the problem?"

Non-fiction materials require a different set of questions and evoke a different set of responses. Questions for this interview should encourage the reader to explain some concepts and to apply what he/she has learned. Often pupils select books about topics they already know well. If so, they should be encouraged to dispute, disagree, or question the veracity of some aspect of the book. The following questions have proved to be successful in the non-fiction book interview.

Questions for Books of Non-Fiction

1. What new things did you learn from reading this book? Can you explain?
2. What questions did it answer for you?
3. How can you use what you have learned?
4. Is there any part of the book you would not agree with?
How? Why?
5. Can you compare this with any other books you have read on the same topic?
6. Would you read more books on the same subject? Why?

The individualized reading interview is an essential aspect of a good independent reading program. The quality of the interview depends on the nature of the teacher's questions. When properly conducted, the interview can foster critical thinking and critical reading skills. It will reinforce interest and enthusiasm for further reading.