

# Across The Border

THE 2005 NZRA CONFERENCE  
NEW ZEALAND READING ASSOCIATION  
National Conference 2005



The theme for the 2005 NZRA Conference, being hosted by the Southland Council, is: "Across the Border, Your Passport to Literacy." We intend for keynote and workshop presenters to address the many and varied literacies from the traditional, oral and written, to digital and visual.

We are **calling for workshop proposals** for the Conference Committee's consideration. Proposals will be considered on merit and overall balance of workshop themes. **Close off date will be Friday, April 15<sup>th</sup>.** This allows for workshops to be put on the NZRA Website, from which attendees will make their workshop selections. The duration of workshops will be one hour and be of a practical nature. The workshops will be run in the mornings and afternoons of Monday 26<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup>, and the morning of Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2005. We will photocopy **extra** material only, so please bring photocopies of handouts. In recognition presenters will receive a gift of appreciation. We will provide presenters with lunch, morning / afternoon tea on the day of their presentation.

E-mail to: [r.a.j.@xtra.co.nz](mailto:r.a.j.@xtra.co.nz)

Post to: Workshops  
Southland Council NZRA  
PO Box 6075  
Invercargill North.

PS: We do not provide 5\* accommodation, chauffeur driven limos or registration. All expenses are your responsibility.

## Activities that promote the development of comprehension strategies

*Tricia Kenyon & Barbara Griffith*

This article offers teacher-friendly activities that are practical and easy to implement. We are promoting them as we believe that answering questions at the end of a reading is not the appropriate way to respond to a text. Answering questions is merely a form of testing comprehension, not teaching or enhancing it.

Block, Gambrell & Pressley (2002) suggest that comprehension is the process of extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. We would like to agree with their suggestion that reading comprehension includes three dimensions: the reader, the text and the context or activity that links the first two. For this to happen, the reader needs to be challenged to think about their reading by responding to the text in some of the ways that are outlined below.

In creating links between the reader and the text, teachers need to prepare the reader by ensuring that the children know that the teacher is not always right and neither is the book. There may not be a right answer, or there may be more than one. Readers need to read and interpret the text from their own perspective and background and not be second guessing as to what they think the teacher wants them to say.

We also believe that learning is enhanced when activities involve fun, imagery, humour and children working collaboratively. The use of visual

frameworks allows the children to focus their thinking about the text in a specific way.

The teaching of comprehension strategies is an important part of the literacy programme. Pinnell & Scherer (2003) state that "Strategies are 'in-the-head' operations that we cannot see, but we know that they are there because students give us evidence of them through their behaviour while reading and after they read."

They can be seen when children are:

- Making connections between prior knowledge and the text;
- Forming and testing hypotheses about texts;
- Asking questions;
- Creating mental images, or visualising;
- Inferring;
- Identifying the author's purpose and point of view;
- Identifying and summarising main ideas;
- Analysing and synthesising ideas and information;
- Evaluating ideas and information.

(Ministry of Education, 2003)

This implies that teachers must refocus their comprehension lessons from testing understandings to clarifying, reinforcing and extending understandings. The following chart demonstrates, visually, how this change in focus could be implemented.

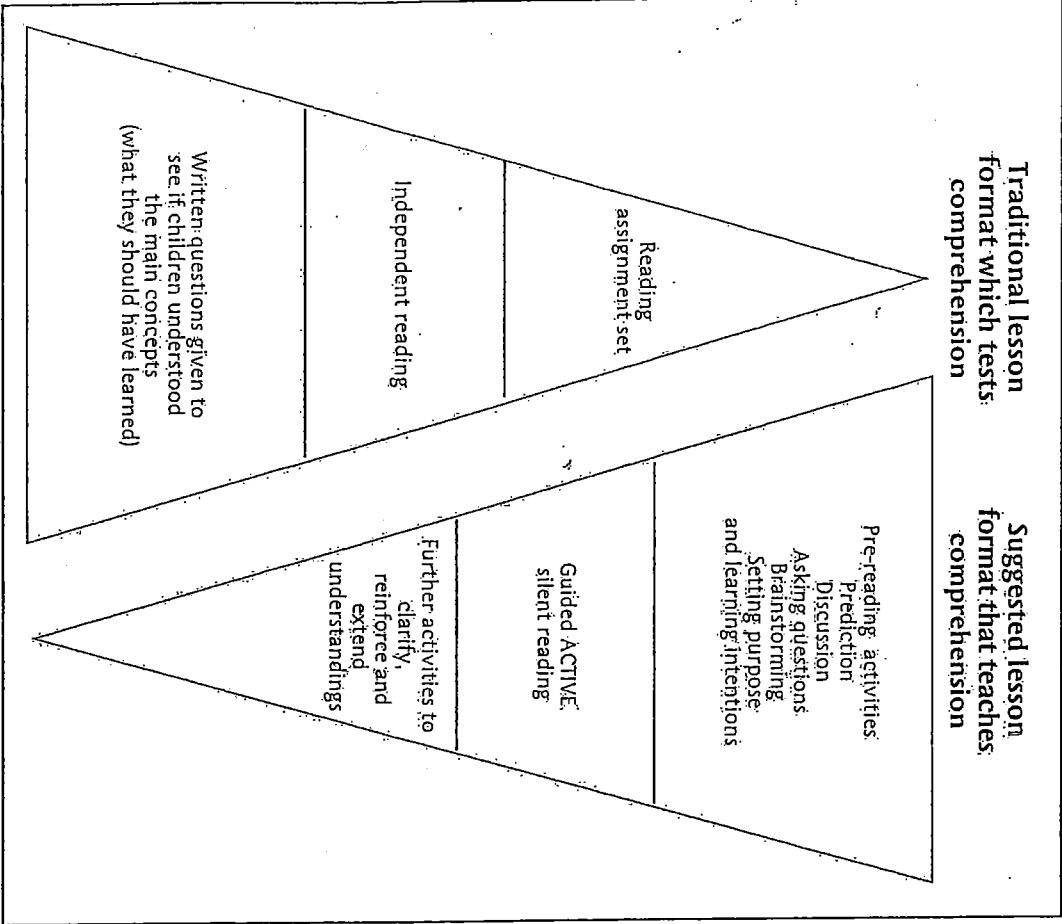


Figure 1

Teachers would find it advantageous to use the very familiar 'to, with, by' approaches when introducing these strategies to children. The new strategy needs to be described to the children including why it is a useful strategy and when it is appropriate to use it (to). The

can move into guided practice followed by opportunities to use the strategy independently (by).

The following strategies will enable children to respond to a text and to go beyond just decoding the words into the realm of a deep and satisfying understanding.

Prediction

A prediction chart (Figure 2) can be used as a framework for organising thinking (Robb, 1996) and for making links to students' prior knowledge. It enables children to predict and justify their prediction from either the book (cover, text, illustrations) or their prior knowledge. This activity is often used to activate prior knowledge. Teachers need to be familiar with the text to guide the children's interpretations and predictions along the right track. It can also be used during reading. However, ongoing predictions should not be adjusted until after the book has been completed, as it can affect the continuity of the text.

Searching for Signposts. (Non-fiction)

This activity enables the reader to obtain an overview of the structure and content

of a non-fiction text by skimming and focussing on the features or signposts of the text such as headings, index, glossary, charts, illustrations, bold text etc.

The teacher models a 'think aloud' walking through of the text, pointing out these significant features. Readers are then able use these features as 'coat-hangers' to hang the context on as they read.

Vocabulary Charts

Children benefit from the explicit teaching of vocabulary and when vocabulary is taught thoroughly, their comprehension improves (Pressley, 2000). We would suggest that pre-teaching the vocabulary by the building of charts or mind maps and the discussion of relevant vocabulary will strengthen comprehension. It also unlocks and engages the children's prior knowledge of the topic.

Before and After

This activates prior knowledge and allows the reader, initially, to record a visual representation of what they know about the topic or theme before they begin to read the text. After the text is read and discussed, further information, or knowledge gleaned from the text, is added to the mind map in a different colour. This

Figure 2

Predictions	Support	Based on
<i>What do you think will or might happen?</i>	<i>Why do you think that?</i>	<i>What evidence do you have to support your prediction?</i>

allows the reader to 'see' clearly how their knowledge of the topic has grown. It is particularly useful with a non-fiction text.

asked to imagine and describe it. Initially use one focus and increase this as the children become more competent. Later,

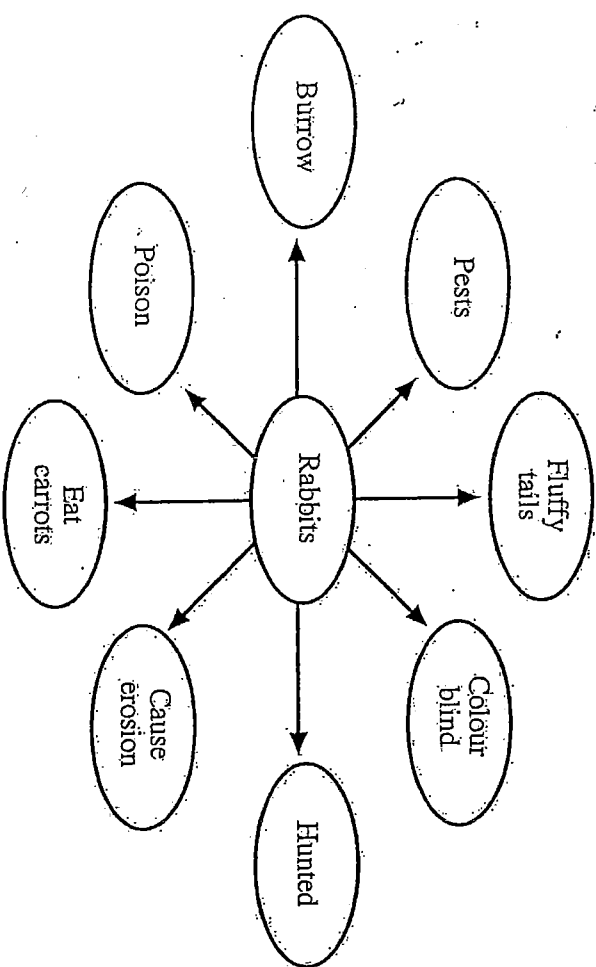


Figure 3

### 5.1.5 - Sensory Input Strategy

This activity allows the reader to think about a text from a multi-sensory perspective. It enhances and strengthens the images the reader makes as they read. If children have difficulties making images, it is suggested that teachers model a familiar situation such as eating dinner and asking each child to describe their home scene to their partner, from a sensory perspective. In translating this to use with a narrative, it is suggested that the setting be used first. What would the children expect to sense in a particular setting? A brief rich setting description could be read and the children

this activity could be expanded to include character descriptions. This activity could be completed in a pictorial form (figure 4).

### Visualisation

This comprehension activity enhances the reader's ability to relate to the text. This activity further develops Sensory Input Strategy by asking the children to create a picture in their mind that they can then discuss. We suggest that initially, the teacher models by selecting a short, rich descriptive piece with a particular focus, e.g. setting. The children are encouraged to "run a video in their mind" as the text

	Seeing	Hearing	Smelling	Tasting	Touching
The setting					
Character 1					
Character 2					

Figure 4

is read to them. On completion of the reading, the teacher asks the children to "press the pause button" and stop the video and to hold that still image. The children then describe the image to a partner, being aware that there are no right or wrong images, only different ones. Once children are competent with this process, a further step could be added. The children are asked to describe their still image from a different perspective, e.g. bird's eye view, rear, etc. This activity ties in with components of the visual language curriculum.

### Visual Frameworks

These are often referred to as graphic organisers.

Frameworks can be used to help children to organise their thinking as they collect data from a text. The use of visual frameworks allows the children to focus their thinking about the text for a specific purpose. There are many different frameworks such as cause and effect, compare and contrast, similarities and differences, life cycles, list structure and string structures. Depending on the

### List Framework

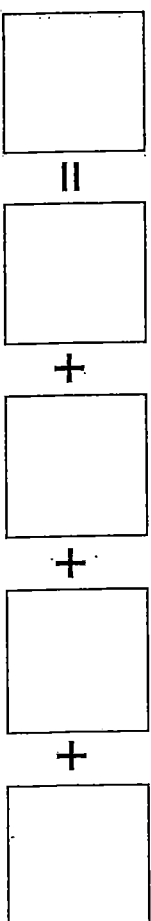


Figure 5

### Procedural Framework

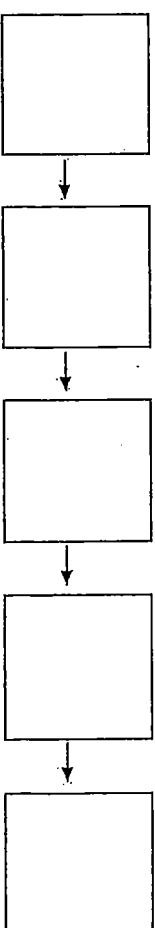


Figure 6

## Cycle Framework

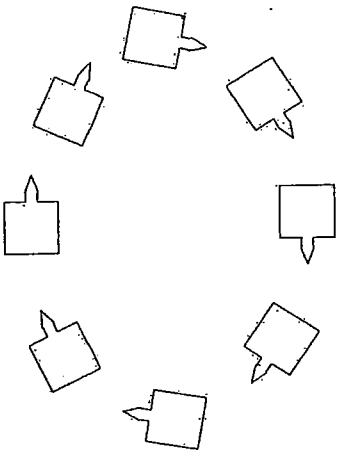


Figure 7

purpose and the text structure, this activity can be ongoing data collection during the reading of the text or afterwards as an information summary.

## Sketch to stretch

This can be used to assist the children to summarise and/or predict a narrative text (Whitehead, 2001). Part of the text, possibly a third, is shared with the children.

They then draw a summary sketch of the text so far. It is possible to extend this by adding a section beneath the sketch to write key words as reminders.

It is also possible to ask the children to draw a sketch of what they think might happen next. *These are quick sketches, not detailed artwork.* The sketches are discussed in pairs or small groups to identify if they contain all of the major elements that the story has revealed so far (figure 8).

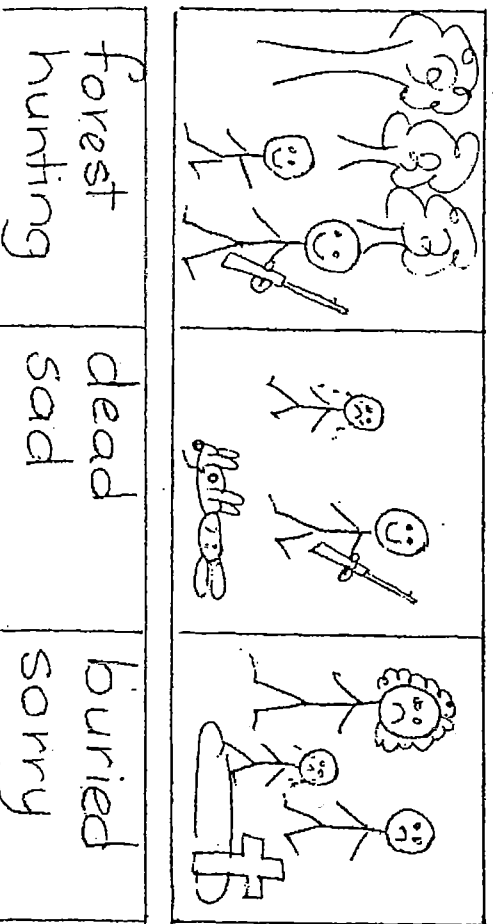


Figure 8

## Compare and Contrast

This activity uses a Venn diagram as a visual framework to organise the information. It can be used for comparing

characters, differing versions of a story and different settings. It could be used by a reader to compare the main character with him or herself.

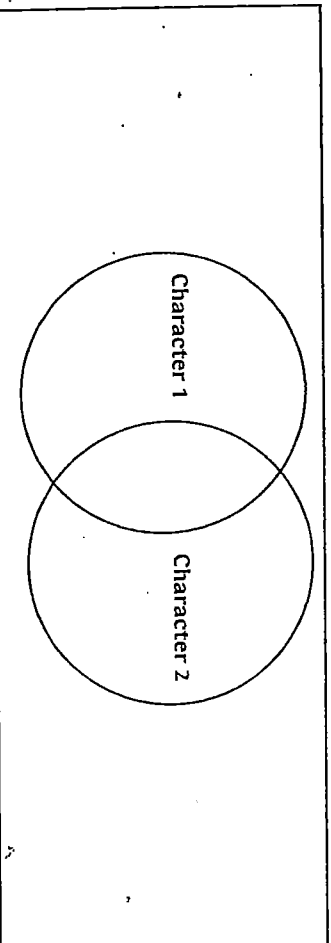


Figure 9

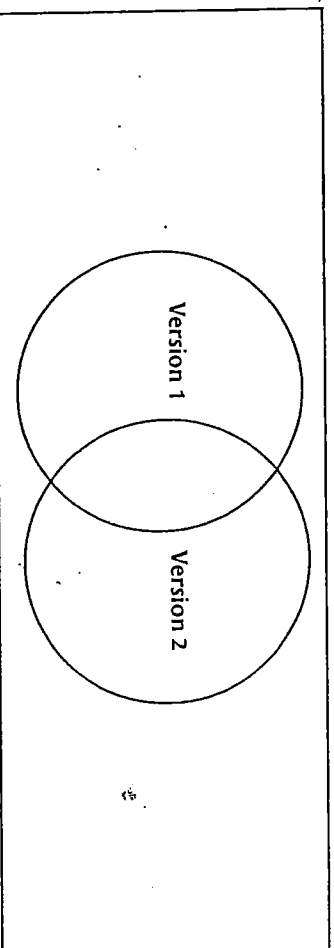


Figure 10

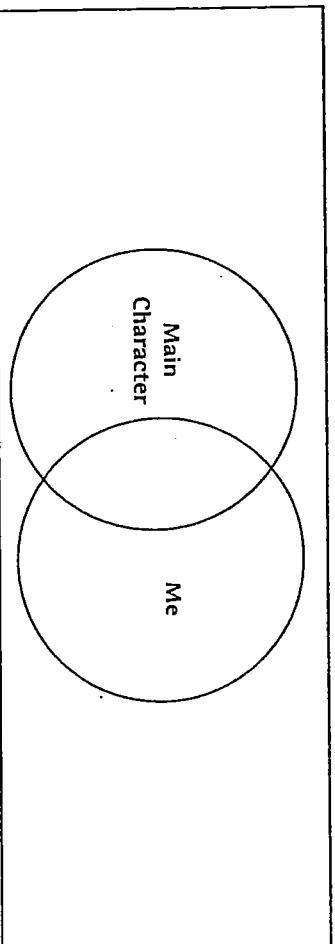


Figure 11

## Sociogram

A sociogram is used to show the relationships between characters and the reaction of one character to another (Carter, 1990). It can be used either with the main character as the central focus of the other characters or showing all characters and their relationships with each other (figures 12, 13).

## True, False or Fact,

## Opinion

Initially, the teacher creates a series of true and false statements about the text. It is important to clarify for the children the difference between a statement and a question.

These statements are used to promote discussion and the children need to be able to justify their answers by referring to the text. An extension from this could

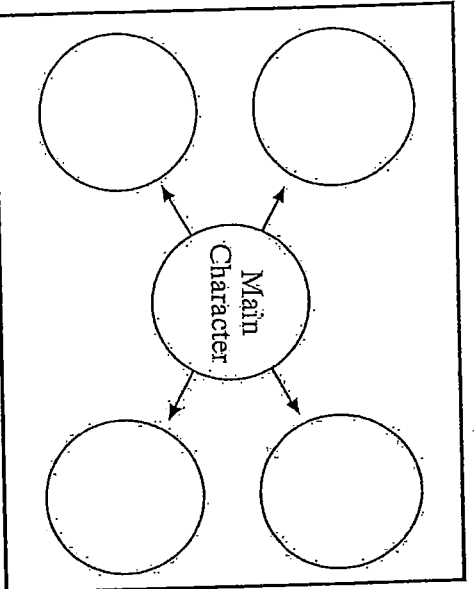


Figure 12

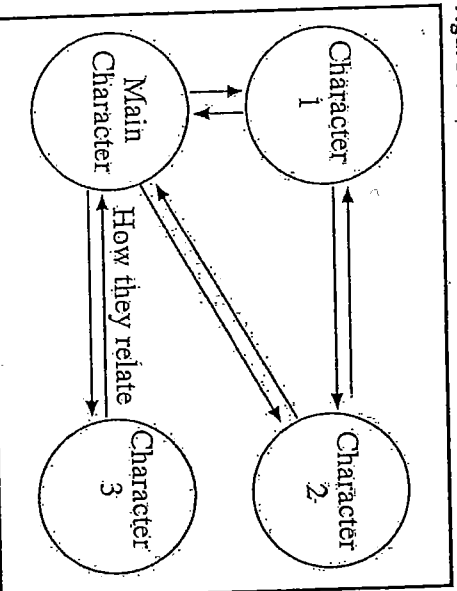


Figure 13

T F	True / False	F O	Fact / Opinion
	Statements		Statements

Figure 14

be to have statements which are fact and others which are an opinion. As the children become familiar with this activity they can be encouraged to create their own statements to share with the others (figure 14).

The above activities promote the development of reading strategies. The strategies will become part of the child's thinking and processing to help them gain understanding from text. These in-the-head thought processes are hidden from our view and the evidence of their use is observed only, in the types of reading comprehension behaviours the child uses as they read.

The aim of this article is to encourage teachers to go beyond comprehension questions at the end of reading a text. We would like to see teachers move on to challenging the readers to respond to the text at a personal level before, during and after reading.

The strategies should be used purposefully, not at random. Children should know why they are using them, and learn which strategies are the most effective to use on particular occasions.

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