



# Think-Alouds

## Purpose

Think-Alouds are intended to help readers examine and develop reading behaviors and strategies.

Davey (1983) proposes that they might be used as a means of helping poor readers adopt a meaning orientation to print, monitor their comprehension, and apply self-correction strategies. With this in mind, Davey identifies five aspects of a skilled reader's thinking that studies have shown are frequently lacking among poor comprehenders (making predictions, visualizing, linking with prior knowledge, monitoring, and self-correction). Furthermore, she contends that recent work on self-monitoring and problem-solving suggests that teachers can help students acquire these skills through modeling by the teacher followed up by ample practice by the students. Such modeling is followed by practice which includes the use of checklists "to stimulate student involvement and verify that readers were using this procedure." Think-Alouds can be used with school-aged students at any level.

## Procedure

Davey offers only broad guidelines for the use of think-alouds. She suggests four basic steps:

- Teacher modeling
- Student partnerships for practice
- Independent student practice using checklists
- Integrated use with other materials

### 1. Teacher Modeling

Initially, Davey suggests that teachers should select passages that "contain points of difficulty, contradictions, ambiguities, or unknown words." These materials are read aloud together with the use of Think-Alouds by the teacher. As a guide for teachers she offers a number of examples of Think-Alouds.

- a. Making predictions or showing students how to develop hypotheses.

*"From the title I predict that this section will tell how airplane pilots adjust for winds."*

*"In this next part I think we'll find out what caused these plane crashes."*

*"I think this is a description of flight simulators."*

- b. Describing your visual images.

*“I have a picture of this man in my mind. He looks like a mild mannered, well-dressed business man.”*

*“I can see the horse kicking down the stable door as the flames come closer ....I can feel the heat of the fire and pressure of the moment.”*

- c. Sharing an analogy or showing how prior knowledge applies. Davey refers to this as the “like-a” step.

*“This is like a time when I was late for school and it began to thunderstorm.”*

- d. Verbalizing a confusing point or showing how you monitor developing understandings.

*“This seems to be confusing.”*

*“I am not sure how this fits in.”*

*“This is not what I expected.”*

- e. Demonstrating fix-up strategies.

*“I need to check this out. I’ll read ahead for a moment.”*

*“I need to think about this. Let me rethink what was happening.”*

*“Maybe I’ll reread this.”*

*“Perhaps I better change my picture of what is happening.”*

In conjunction with teacher modeling, Davey suggest that teachers might encourage their students to add their own thoughts.

## **2. Students Partnerships for Practice**

After several modeling experiences, Davey suggest that students might work together with partners to practice Think-Alouds. Each student takes a turn reading and thinking aloud with short passages. The partner listens and offers his or her thoughts. Davey stresses that carefully developed materials should be used initially prior to moving to school materials of various types and lengths.

## **3. Independent Student Practice with Checklists**

After working with partners, Davey suggests that students should practice independently with the use of checklists to ensure student involvement and verify the use of procedures.

#### 4. Integrated Use with Other Materials

After initial experiences with modeling and Think-Alouds, Davey suggests that teachers need to give ample practice with school materials and integrate the use of Think-Alouds with other lessons and content reading. To this end, she suggests occasional demonstrations of how to read, and why and when to use certain strategies. For example, she suggests that the teacher might illustrate his or her thinking prior to reading a content book: “Before I read this, let me think about what this is like and try to get a feel for what this will be about. I’ll look over the headings.”

Tierney, R.J., Reardon, J.E., & Dishner E.K. (1990). Reading strategies and practices. Needham Heights, Allyn & Bacon.

#### *Teacher Voices*

To demonstrate the Think Aloud procedure to his fourth graders, Michael used a legend from Eagle Walking Turtle’s *Full Moon Stories: Thirteen Native American Legends* (1997). Because the class was reading legends, he felt that the demonstration would better help students apply what they had learned to their actual reading experiences. After looking at the cover, he commented, “Just from reading this title, I can tell that this is going to be a book filled with legends. In fact, the author even tells me that there will be thirteen legends in this book.” He then stated, “I already know something about legends. Legends are stories that state traditions and beliefs of a given group of people. I’ll bet that these stories will be about some of the traditions and beliefs of Native American people.” He then provided students with a copy of *The Magpie*, the first legend in the book and the one that he would use for the remainder of his Think Aloud. He began reading aloud as the students followed along. He read the first two paragraphs, stopped, and commented, “I’m getting a picture of the house where the store is told. It is made of logs and it has a wood stove to keep everyone warm.” He then read the next paragraph and once again stopped and commented, “This reminds me of how my cousin used to tell me stories. Instead of sitting in a circle on the floor, though, we sat on the bed,” He read the next paragraph, stopped, and commented, “Wow! I am surprised that the Thunder-beings would think that the people were not worth saving. I expected them to believe this already,” He then continued reading and stopped after reading the word *astonished*, at which point he stated, “‘Astonished.’ Hmm. I wonder what that means. This is a new word for me. I better read that sentence again and see if the other words can help me figure out what it means.”

A close analysis of this scenario reveals that Michael focused on several strategies that poor comprehenders often need to be taught to use. The first comment helps students to see how an experienced reader *makes predictions*, whereas the second shows students how a reader uses *prior knowledge* to make connections with new reading material. The third shows that good readers form *visual images* when they read. The fourth comment once again shows how a reader uses *prior knowledge* to make connections with the

reading. The last two comments demonstrate *monitoring* one's comprehension and *fixing* a part that interferes with meaning.

*Extensions/Tips/Connections*

- While several strategies were modeled in Michael's Think Aloud, keep in mind that not all need to be present in all Think Aloud sessions. In fact, you may want to focus on one or two of the strategies to better help students use them when reading on their own—the ultimate goal of this instruction.
- *Reverse Think Alouds* (Block 1997) add some variety and can help you determine whether students are internalizing the specific strategies they need to use when reading. With this procedure, students ask you what you are thinking rather than being told. You ask the student(s) to follow along silently while you read orally and to stop you during your reading to ask questions about what you are thinking at a given time. These questions can focus on how you figured out a given word, clarify what the author is trying to say, or summarize a given section. The types of questions that students ask can reveal which strategies they are focusing on and which need to be developed further.

How Did I Do When Reading			
Name _____	Date _____		
Title of selection _____			
	never	sometimes	a lot
1. I made predictions	_____		
2. I was able to form a picture in my mind.	_____		
3. I made connections.	_____		
4. I knew when I was having problems.	_____		
5. I did something to fix my problems.	_____		



## Think Aloud Student Self-Assessment

While I was reading, how did I do? (Put an X in the appropriate column.)				
	Not very much	A little bit	Much of the time	All of the time
Predicting				
Picturing				
“Like-a”				
Identifying problems				
Using fix-up				

While I was reading, how did I do? (Put an X in the appropriate column.)				
	Not very much	A little bit	Much of the time	All of the time
Predicting				
Picturing				
“Like-a”				
Identifying problems				
Using fix-up				

While I was reading, how did I do? (Put an X in the appropriate column.)				
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Using fix-up				



## Record of Think-Aloud

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Text Read: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Place a check, tally, and/or write down examples of student's use of these reading-thinking behaviors.

	Frequently	Sometimes
Restates text ideas:		
- paraphrases		
- summarizes		
- uses own words		
Adds own ideas		
Recognizes when doesn't understand:		
- words		
- sentences		
- larger ideas		
Rereads		
Recalls prior knowledge		
Notices writing or text		
Hypothesizes, predicts, or reasons about text ideas		
Forms opinion about ideas or writing		
Other		