

Questioning Strategies with Texts in a 1st Grade Classroom

Rachel Brick: Today's book is Uncle Jed's Barbershop. It's a realistic fiction story of another family and we are going to hear their story, the timeline of this family, told from their past through their present.

I think the value in asking students text dependent questions is really empowering students to be able to understand a book or an article that's outside of the life that they lead and to find a way to relate to it.

As we read today, we are practicing using the information that is in the book, even if the words don't tell us directly what's going on, to solve tricky words, to make predictions and to answer some pretty tricky questions.

By teaching them how to go back to their text to support all of their thoughts, my hope is that when they are reading independently they now have the skill to say, well you know I don't have the personal experience but I can still support my answer because I have something in the words.

And what about the hard time right now, what's going on, on this page that we just finished reading, what's going on that also makes her say talk about some hard times?

Student: Because she would -- like right now when he lost the money.

Rachel Brick: The most basic strategy I use is being direct with the students and saying "We are going to go back to the book".

Student: I just want to say that only because people are paying him a lot of money.

Rachel Brick: Where did it tell us in the book that people are paying him lots and lots of money for their haircuts? Let's read it again and listen really carefully. "Uncle Jed kept going around to his customers cutting their hair even though they couldn't pay him. His customers shared with him whatever they had, a hot meal, fresh eggs, vegetables from the garden, and when they were able to pay again they did." Did anyone change their mind reading this page – hearing that page for the second time.

Student: Yes.

Rachel Brick: What changed your mind?

Student: Because when you were reading the page it said "couldn't pay him".

Rachel Brick: I think a particular trend with first graders is that developmentally they are still very much focused on themselves and on their personal experiences. I think their schema building is still incredibly important particularly at such a young age. It facilitates text based questioning when students aren't able to use as much of their prior knowledge. They can build their schema by understanding that Sarah Jean is a little girl and she has a family that loves her. They all can relate to that. I like to try to choose a book that pushes the kids past "well, I remember this happened to me" to "I remember this story I was told into in this book, here is what the text has told me, here is what the character has said".

Student: I think her family is feeling mad because when the doctor said it would cost \$300.

Rachel Brick: Is there anything else happening in the book, Scarlet?

Student: Maybe they are sad because if they don't get the money so quickly, maybe they think she'll die.

Rachel Brick: So maybe they are also worried that they can't get the money quickly enough.

I choose where I am going to stop to ask questions based on the flow of the story, in terms of not wanting the kids to sit for too long without stopping and writing or stopping to turn to talk to each other. I also try to think about where I want them to end up in terms of the author's message.

We are going to stop and jot and I want you to think about two things: how do you think her family felt? But let's really think about what this page has told us. I am going to read you the page again because I want you to look for clues in the text of what's happening. Not just how we think we would feel or our family would feel, but what does the book tell us about how her family might feel right now.

As I do the check-ins with the students, as I listen in to their turn and talk, that's when I really think about rephrasing the question, asking it again, perhaps supplying a little bit more information in the question as the students need it.

Overall I would say that the students really like being asked to go back to the text. That kind of evens the playing field for all of them, whether it's through their life experience, through their independent reading ability. Knowing that they are all being asked to use the same set of words to support themselves, I think, it makes it easier for most students.