

QAR: Question-Answer-Relationships

By Kathleen LeFevre, © 2006

In our work in intervention we often refer to the intervention toolkit. We can extend this metaphor to our work in reading comprehension. As Linda Hoyt writes, “Don’t we want every reader to climb into books with a toolbelt banging and clanging with tools for getting the most out of their reading?” (Hoyt, *Spotlight on Comprehension*, page 5) There needs to be a place in this toolbox for questions, especially for questions that are generated by students.

Self-questioning helps engage us as readers and keeps us involved. Proficient readers actively ask their own questions and make predictions as they read. Being able to generate questions not only helps proficient readers deepen their understanding of the text but helps them learn how to learn. Additionally, students’ understanding of text is shaped by the types of questions they have asked and been asked. How can we help our striving readers develop self-questioning strategies for deepening their comprehension of the text? And how can we ensure that student’s self-questioning embraces higher-order thinking?

There is significant research that shows explicitly teaching students comprehension strategies, including questioning, helps improve their comprehension. One research-based approach to helping students generate questions is the Question-Answer Relationship or Q.A.R., developed by Taffy Raphael. This strategy is “designed to demystify the questioning process, providing teachers and students with a common vocabulary to discuss different types of questions and sources of information for answering these questions.” (Anthony & Raphael, p. 319) The strategy is based on the relationships between questions and answers and is designed to help students recognize that asking and answering different kinds of questions require different reading behaviors and thought processes. When QAR is taught to students and practiced in class for eight weeks or longer, reading comprehension improves significantly, with average and below average students showing the greatest improvement.

Teaching QAR begins with helping students realize that questions come either from the text or from their own experience; both types of information are important for comprehension. There are four levels of questions that students engage in during use and practice of QAR. Questions based on the text are categorized as “Right There” and “Think and Search” questions, and questions that require students to use their background experience and prior knowledge are categorized as “Author and Me” and “On My Own.”

In The Book	In My Head
Right There The answer to <i>Right There</i> questions is in the textbook, usually in a single sentence. Response to these questions is on the literal level.	Author and Me Answers to <i>Author and Me</i> questions require the reader to use the information given in the text and combine it with what he or she already knows.
Think and Search Answers to <i>Think and Search</i> questions can be found by gathering information from different parts of the text. They require the reader to use inferential thinking skills.	On My Own The answer is not in the text. Readers need to draw on their own ideas and experience to answer these questions.

As we use this strategy, we must be mindful to encourage students to generate all four levels of questions. It is important that the “On My Own” questions are given equal consideration; these questions help students activate their prior knowledge and make connections of new learning to what they already know.

To teach QAR to students, begin with naming the strategy and describing why and when it should be used. The four levels of questions may be introduced over several days or longer, as necessary. Model the strategy in a meaningful context through think-alouds with shared text. Collaborate with your students to use QAR with authentic text, allowing for gradual release of responsibility to the students. Prior to asking students to attempt the strategy, model QAR for several weeks with several books in different genres. It is important to provide students with ample opportunities for independent practice with immediate feedback. As you implement these steps, ownership of questioning is transferred from you to your students.

QAR is a flexible strategy and can be used across grade levels and subject areas. It lends itself both to fiction and nonfiction. At the primary level, students initially respond best to a distinction between the two categories, “In the Book” and “In My Head.” Photographs or pictures can be used to introduce or practice QAR. Student questions about shared text can be posted with their names on chart paper. Listing student questions serves to honor the diverse student questions; it teaches students to value their questions and to see how their questions can increase their own understanding. QAR can also be used as a framework for students to sort into the four categories the questions they generate or that they encounter in their texts and in standardized assessments. Being able to recognize the different types of questions helps students answer the questions.

Before using QAR, consider the following: How can engaging in this strategy with your colleagues inform your work with students? How can the use of a common vocabulary help foster a culture of comprehension? What pieces of text will you use that lend themselves to QAR? How can you implement QAR with your students in your work in the classroom, in your work in intervention? What additional modifications or support do you need to make so that QAR is accessible to all your students? How will you use QAR to enable your students to think about how their questions help them with their understanding in reading and listening activities? Consider especially sharing what works with your colleagues.

Anthony, H.M & Raphael, T.E. 1996 Using questioning strategies to promote students’ active reading comprehension of content area material. In D. Lapp, J. Flood, & N. Farnan (Eds.), *Content area reading and learning: Instructional strategies* (pp. 307-322). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Billmeyer, R. & Barton. M.L. 1998. *Teaching reading in the content areas: if not me, then who?* 2nd Ed. Aurora, CO: McREL.

Raphael, T.E. & Wu, K.H. 2005 QAR: Enhancing comprehension and test taking across grades and content areas. *The Reading Teacher*, 59, (206-221).