Assisting the Reading and Learning Process at Home with Children through Chatting and Questioning.

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I appreciate how challenging a time this is for all families. Assisting your child with their learning can be a daunting task, particularly if you have several children all at different stages. However, one of the most valuable and easy endeavours that you can do with your child at this time is to engage in language activities – ie: reading, communicating through speech and writing. (Not a workbook, copy, worksheet or laptop in sight!) The efforts that are made in this area translate to all subjects and will really reap rewards if it is done consistently. You can use language based approaches to tackle most subjects, activities and topics and the approach below also applies to fiction and fact based books. Thankfully, it is not as difficult a task as it might seem – it simply involves chatting to your child about what they are learning and reading and engaging in clever, well thought out questioning. There is no special training required - all you need to do is to interact with them meaningfully with the clear intention of encouraging them to think more clearly, understand what they are learning, consolidate their own thoughts and to articulate them appropriately.

The process of "chatting" and questioning can be done quite informally. The questioning that you engage in must not come across as an interrogation or a round of quick fire questions. You must appear genuinely interested in their responses and be willing to answer questions yourself and share your own thoughts without domineering the interaction. The whole experience has to be a positive one for both parent and child for it to work. Try to let the child's answers and questions lead the interaction rather than you coming across as if you have all the "right" answers. Be prepared to tease out their answers and ask them to elaborate on them whenever you can. If they are clearly confused or off the mark, help them to find from the text or the information provided where the answers can be found, rather than just telling them.

 Remember, most children actually love chatting to an adult and really value having their opinions listened to. Don't be afraid that engaging in this chatting and questioning will make the reading of the text or the completion of the topic too slow. Yes, it will take much longer, but the process will be far more enjoyable and rewarding and the learning will be significantly more meaningful regardless of your child's ability. I have found that this process is the single most effective tool in helping any child to enjoy reading and learning, even those who are extremely reluctant to initially engage. The supported process and the communicative element involving the adult is the key to success.

The real efficacy of this process depends on the type of questions that you ask and how you ask them. So whether your child is reading a book with you, completing an activity, learning about a new topic, doing a project or simply having a conversation on current affairs with you, enrich the process by asking questions as outlined below. Questions to aid learning fall into 3 main categories - literal questions, inferential questions and evaluative questions. Effective learning includes questions from all three categories but particularly **must include inferential and evaluative questions** if the learning is to be meaningful. The following information explains it more clearly. You can always print out the examples of the 3 types of questions on the following pages and refer to them as you "chat" with your child. Eventually, as they become more familiar, you will know what to ask instinctively.

Hope this is helpful! Stay well.

A. Carey

Let's Begin....

NB: Questions should be asked before, during and after the event – don't be afraid to stop the process every couple of minutes (or even more frequently) to question and chat.

1. Start at the beginning of the book/chapter/project/activity by asking the most basic questions which are called **Literal Questions**. Literal Questions involve:

Literal Questions

- **Creating Images** (helping the child to visualise what they are focusing on)
- **Skimming** (quickly glancing through the material to get an impression of it)
- **Scanning** (glancing through material to retrieve specific information)
- **Self-Questioning** (the child is encouraged to ask and answer questions to help them understand)

(Specific examples of literal questions are given in the pages that follow and I have also included games and activities that further develop the child's knowledge.)

2. Then move on to asking **Inferential Questions**. (Each session will involve questions from all 3 categories.) Inferential questions are **key** to the process. Inferential Questions require more thinking and engagement and involve:

Inferential Questions

- **Connecting** (making connections between what the child already knows on this topic and the new information to be encountered)
- **Comparing** (making comparisons and identifying similarities and differences)
- **Inferring** (make assumptions about what is not explicitly stated in the text. It can involve making conclusions and interpretations)
- **Predicting:** (Predicting based on clues in the text such as pictures, illustrations, subtitles and plot.

(Again, specific examples of these type of questions are given in the pages that follow including some activities that further develop the child's knowledge.)

3. Lastly move on to **Evaluative** Questions. Evaluative questions require more higher-order thinking and really demonstrate how much your child is learning and how meaningful their learning has been.

Evaluative Questions

- **Synthesising** (piecing information that they have gleaned together, like putting together a jigsaw.)
- **Determining Importance** (determining themselves what is important in a phrase, sentence, paragraph, chapter , whole text or topic)
- **Summarising and Paraphrasing** (reducing all the information they have received so the focus is on the most important elements).

1) Examples of Literal Questions:

These can be asked before they start to read, learn or discuss a topic. Some of the latter questions can also be asked when recapping or at points in the activity if the child seems confused or lost. You don't have to necessarily ask all of the questions every time you read.

- What do you think this story/chapter is about?
- What do you learn from the blurb at the back?
- What can you learn by quickly flicking through the text/looking at the pictures?
- What can you learn from the headings/chapter titles?
- Are there illustrations – what do they tell us?
- From what you already know about X, what do you think this will be about/will happen?
- What do you think will not happen based on what you already know about this topic?
- Have a quick look – what are the characters names/places mentioned in the story etc
- What do you think the main character (or other character) looks like?
- If by some magic you were transported into this book/topic etc…what would you see/hear /smell? Describe.
- What happened in that bit we just did?
- What do you think will happen next?
- Who did that/said that etc
- What does that word/sentence/paragraph mean?
- How could that be/happen?
- Why do you think……..?
- Where did/is etc …. any "where" question is usually a literal question.
- What questions do you have after reading that part?
- If you could ask a character a question, what would it be?
- What words did you find hard or confusing?
- What part of what you read did you find hard to understand?
- Is there any part of that you would like us to look at again to help you understand?

# 2) Examples of Inferential Questions:

(Choose some of the questions below as appropriate and as needed and as relevant to the process as it unfolds)

- After reading that bit of text/hearing that bit of information what do you now know or think?
- Using the clues given in that piece of text/or what I just told you, what can you infer?
- What could that mean?
- Maybe…… (get the child to finish the sentence and then discuss)
- Perhaps….. (get the child to finish the sentence and then discuss)
- What does this remind you of?
- Can you think of a time that something like that happened to you?
- Who does that remind you of?
- If you were character X in the story what would you do/think/say?
- Can you remember when you were younger and something like this happened to you?
- Compare these two characters… how are they different/similar?
- Compare these two events… how are they different/similar?
- What other book/topic does this remind you of?
- Compare this chapter/book to X ….how is it different/similar?
- What is this event the same as?
- Now, what do you think will happen next and why?
- Why do you think…..?
- Why did that character…..?
- What is the problem?
- What can you conclude about…?
- What would happen if…..?
- What will happen when….?
- What is most likely true about….?
- How do you know that….?
- Predict what would happen if….?
- How did X character feel when….?
- What did that character learn from X?
- What do you think the author feels about X?
- What lesson does this text/topic teach?
- What would happen in the sequel to this story?

3) Examples of Evaluative Questions:

- So you're stuck on this word/part/sentence/paragraph …. What can <u>you</u> do to help you to find the answer? (hint: reread, use what I know to think about it might mean, read onto see if I can find the answer, stop and ask myself questions and try to make connections)
- The part was mostly about...
- The important details were...
- Can you underline what you think are the key words...
- I think .... and ....are important because….
- What happened first, next, after that, last in this story/chapter/lesson?
- Retell the most important parts of the story/the most important facts that you have learned in your own words.
- I think the purpose of this text was to...
- What did you not understand at first but now you get it?
- What helped you understand it?
- What did X in the book/chapter/lesson/project make you think of?
- I learned that...
- Using all the strategies you know, what do you think this is about?
- So, what does this bit help you understand?
- What is your opinion of……?
- Do you think ---- is a good or bad thing…. Why?
- What changes would you recommend to this chapter/book/lesson/activity/project …why?
- Judge the value of….. why do you think this?
- How would you feel if…..?
- How effective are… ?
- How did you feel about…..?
- What would you have done differently in that situation?
- Do you agree with the character's behaviour in a particular situation?
- Has the author shown any prejudices/bias or made any assumptions about………..?
- Do you agree with the author's point of view on a particular topic?
- What kind of person wrote this text do you think?
- Why would the author write this particular text?
- What is the text trying to make you believe/think?
- Were there any great examples of …….. used? How?
- What is the author not telling you in this text?
- How did this text make you feel?
- What would you change about the text if you were the author?
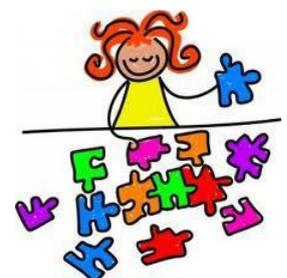
25 Games and Fun Activities that Enhance the Learning Done Above.

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In addition to chatting to your child using the 3 types of questioning above to lead the process, you can extend the activity (particularly if the child is enjoying the interaction and learning) by engaging in some of the following games and activities. They don't all have to be done with a parent (although they are more effective when an adult is involved), but perhaps an older sibling can get involved? They mostly just involve paper and pencils or simple chatting! No printers, I.T., or worksheets in sight!!!!

1. **Picture This**: Parent reads a section of a text without showing any illustrations and child draws a visual representation of their interpretation of the character/ setting/ event from that piece of text.
2. **Changing Images:** Parent reads a section of a text without showing any illustrations (if there are any). Parent stops reading at a selected place in the text and asks child to sketch or write the mental image they have created. Child labels this, Image 1- My First Image. Parent then reads more of the text and child is given time to re-create their image based on the new information. Child labels this, Image 2- My Second Image. Child should be asked to discuss any changes made to the second image.
3. **Open Mind Portrait:** Child is asked to create character portraits and include key words to describe the character's thoughts and feelings.
4. **Information Images:** (if reading a factual text or doing a factual activity) - Child creates key images based on informational they have read/learned and labels them. Can be done as a poster or information sheet.
5. **Clouds of wonder:** Child discusses text or what they have learned and generates "I wonder" questions represented on cloud shapes on a sheet or on post its. This can be done at regular intervals throughout the reading of a text or learning about a

topic. When they find the answers as they progress through the reading/activity they can tick them off and answer them for you.

6. **Written Conversation:** The child is asked to write a conversation that may have happened (imaginary is best) between two characters. You then act it out with you reading the lines from the character that you have been given by your child (could be fun!)

7. **Hunt the Text Challenge:** Parent takes book and opens it on a page that is unseen by the child and then thinks of a question based on the text on that page. The book is then handed back to the child who is tasked with finding the text that has been referred to. (A clue can be given that will limit the search for the answer.eg: the answer is somewhere in chapter 1/ between pages x –y etc.)
Some sample questions could be: find the word that means X/ find the phrase that means X/ find the sentence that tells you X/find the word that means the opposite to X/find the lines that explain X etc

8. **Beat the Buzzer:** Similar to above but the child is given a specific time limit that is challenging – they should be able to find what you are asking them about 70-80% of the time or else they will get discouraged.

9. **Call my Bluff:** Ask the child to find some difficult words that they are not familiar with and that they don't know the meaning of. Parent presents 3 possible meanings - 2 of which will be false and the child has to pick which meaning that s/he thinks is real, explaining their thinking (try to make all 3 options believable). Then tell them the truth, or if in an older class, they can use their dictionary to find out if they are right.

10. **Split Images:** The parent finds an illustration from the book/activity/project that the child has not yet seen and describes the picture to the child who has to draw what you describe without seeing it at any point. The aim is to get as close a likeness to the actual illustration as possible.

11. **Check the Text:** Parent turns to a page that is unread to date that has illustrations/diagrams etc and keeping the text hidden (cover it with a piece of paper or post it) asks the child to say or preferably write the text that they think goes with that page.

12. **Crystal Ball :** After whole text has been read, choose a character and discuss the character with your child i.e. likes, dislikes, interests, personality traits that were stated explicitly or implicitly in the text. Then ask your child to predict the future for their character based on evidence from the original text and then deliver their verdict pretending to see it in a crystal ball.

13. **Character Horoscope:** Similar to the previous question, but your child must write a horoscope for the character that might make sense knowing what they know about the character.

14. **True/False Game:** Parent makes up statements about word meanings/sentences/events etc in the upcoming reading or part of the activity not

covered yet and the child has to guess if they are true or false. Try to make them fun but not too ridiculous as the aim is to get the child really considering what they know and what could reasonably be the answer. Get them to explain their thinking.

15. **Making Connections:** The child and the parent each takes 3 post-its or pieces of paper and inserts them at the appropriate pages in the story which they personally really connected with having written on the post its why they were so resonant with them. The child finds and reads yours and you read theirs. Discuss.

16. **Linking texts:** After a number of texts are read, child is asked to design a mind map, web chart or Venn diagram that illustrates the commonalties or differences between the texts by drawing in linking lines. Make the mind map/diagram, as attractive and creative as possible.

17. **Just Like:** Child compares characters with themselves, or with similar characters in other texts or with people the child child knows e.g. a sibling, friend, classmate, cousin, Grandma, YOU! Discuss why they are just like X.

18. **Interviews:** Child and parent conduct interviews where one person takes on a character and the other composes questions to ask the character. Parent should go first at being the interviewer so that you can model the type of questions required – ones which will focus on finding out more about the character than is explicit in the text. Hold a mic and make it like a news interview if wanted.

19. **Character Top Trumps:** Rating Scales: Child and parent choose a character to rate. The characters traits are discussed and recorded eg:. Rude, Cowardly, Kind, Brave, Intelligent, Sociable etc.
Using a simple rating scale of 1-10, each character is rated. Child needs to justify their rating with evidence from the text. If wished you can make it more interesting by adding characters from other books that have been read so that you have more than 20 characters to compare. The more the better. Then ask your child to create Top Trump cards for the characters with an illustration of the character and the named features and scores underneath (could fill many a long day!). Play Top Trumps then with them with a reward to raise the stakes.

20. **Report Card:** Child prepares a report card for a character in the text based on a number of "subjects" i.e. cooking, making friends, helping out or you can use real school subjects if they are appropriate. Child decides on a grade to give the character for that trait and provides a supporting comment that shows engagement with the text that they have read.

21. **What's my Point of View?:** Parent identifies four or five key events from a text. The child and parent each adopt a character and discuss each of the key events through the perspective of their adopted character. Alternatively, you could use a controversial current affair issue and each person discusses the topic through the lens of the character they are representing. Covid 19 will surely be relevant to this one!

22.**Great Debate:** Parent comes up with an open-ended statement related to topic/text read. The child and yourself formulate affirmative or negative responses to the statement and justify your position on the matter.

23.**Write an Alternative Blurb:** The child writes an alternative blurb that is truthful and factual, but that they think would be more attractive than the one that is on the book and that would convince a person to buy the book more than the existing one.

24. **Alternative Cover:** Draw and colour an alternative cover for the book that would illustrate an alternative event that the one depicted.

25.**Comic Strip:** Draw a comic strip to illustrate an event in the story or the whole story itself (after creating a synopsis of the book first) or even do a comic strip to illustrate an even that might happen after the book ends or in a sequel.