

## Using *i-read* to meet the demands of the renewed Primary Framework for Teaching Literacy

*i-read* is first and foremost an electronic resource for the direct teaching of reading. However, it does so much more – and in ways which link firmly with the ideas emerging from the renewed Primary Framework. You will find:

- rich and interesting texts to provide a firm foundation for **reading**
- high emphasis on all aspects of **speaking and listening**
- a platform which can be developed to move into **writing**

### A FIRM FOUNDATION FOR READING

The new strategy's end-of-year statements refer to:

- word reading skills and strategies
- understanding and interpreting texts
- engaging and responding to texts

**Shared reading** is obviously the starting point. *i-read* texts are challenging, genre specific, varied and full of interest. Children will enjoy stories and poems by many well known authors, including Michael Morpurgo and Michaela Morgan, as well as reading fascinating non-fiction about extreme sports and explorers.

An electronic text has a distinct advantage in being able to use the technology to actively assist the teaching of reading. I think this is very important because the emphasis on writing has meant that the reading part of the teaching sequence has tended to be shortened. Everyone is anxious to get children writing – but, of course, they can't do that unless they have been thoroughly immersed in examples of well written texts.

*i-read* has the following features to support shared reading:

**Question buttons** will help you teach different aspects of reading comprehension. My experience has shown me that written comprehension exercises do not teach children anything, they simply confirm a level of understanding. If a child answers a question wrongly, they are no further forward. This is why the teacher's role in shared reading is so vital.

Using the whiteboard, you can explore literal, inferential, deductive, evaluative and response style questions – all these have been built in – and **demonstrate** how to find the answers if the children do not immediately understand. In this way they are learning and moving on.

**Focus buttons** allow you to highlight significant words or phrases, aspects of genre or features of a text. A quick click of a button can reveal present tense verbs, examples of alliteration or words which describe a fantasy setting. Glossary buttons are also available.

**On screen activities** help you teach directly to the focus of the session. The simple principle is that you first demonstrate an activity, modelling the 'thinking aloud' that is so important in helping the children become independent, and the children then carry out a related task in order to practise the reading objective.

**Independent work** then relates to the main teaching objective in different ways:

- a group discussion or role play activity
- a worksheet for independent or paired work
- independent writing

**Shadow texts** are designed for the more able in the class and they provide a degree of challenge because, having read the shared text and carried out related on screen activities, these children work independently on another text of the same type. This means they have to apply the teaching to a new situation. Other children can work independently or in a guided group using the original shared text. Although this will always be challenging at their own reading level, it is already familiar because of time spent shared reading and carrying out on-screen reading activities.

## **ALL ASPECTS OF SPEAKING AND LISTENING**

The first four strands of the new literacy strategy involve speaking, listening and responding, group discussion and interaction and drama. Their position indicates their importance in a teaching sequence. Children cannot fully understand something that they cannot explore out loud.

The reading activities on screen provide opportunities for a lot of discussion. This could be:

- whole class
- small group
- pairs

You might want to make use of write-on/wipe-off whiteboards at times so that children can make notes before you take feedback. This is one way of involving everyone and ensuring that the same few children do not dominate.

You'll want the children to talk about:

- **the 'starter'**. This is designed to draw the children into the subject and to provoke some initial discussion. The discussion point might be on screen, in the teacher's notes or both.

- **the questions.** Some ‘closed’ questions need a quick response but other ‘open’ questions could result in valuable talking with a partner or small group.
- **the on-screen activities.** After you have demonstrated the task, the children will ‘have a go’. Whether children come to the board or write suggestions on their write-on/wipe-off whiteboards, there will be lots of talking. Children will need to justify and explain their choices and you can make them do this by referring directly back to the text. In this way, you are emphasising the specific skill and underlining the session’s reading objectives.

### **Other opportunities for speaking, listening and drama**

- Sessions sometimes begin with a suggestion that children work in pairs or a group to **recap what they know or re-tell a story**. If we put a high priority on insisting that children speak clearly, we are also helping the move into writing.
- There are many examples of **role play** as part of the independent work – where the children are examining character in detail or storytelling after planning.
- Each unit includes at least one session in which speaking and listening is the **main focus of the independent work**.
- The **poetry units** provide wonderful opportunities for reading and then performing. Children can practise the important skills of reading aloud, collaborating with others in a group or class performance and adding the use of expression, movement and gesture to the end product. Some poems lend themselves to extra drama or the addition of music and the teacher’s notes will make suggestions where appropriate.

## **MAKING THE MOVE INTO WRITING**

The new strategy emphasises ‘**phases**’ in the **planning** – a series of lessons with related objectives. Broadly these are:

- Reading and discussing – immersion in text.
- Analysing and practice (word and sentence, genre related work etc)
- Planning, speaking and writing

*i-read* does not attempt to cover all these phases in the same detail. It is a reading resource and, as such, concentrates on the first phase in the sequence. However, it is inevitable that when text is discussed and features found, the reader starts to look with the ‘eye of the writer’. In particular, sessions relate to the way texts are put together and the kind of language which is appropriate, for example:

- Chronological or non-chronological organisation
- Words which show character or setting
- Use of a particular tense

- Subject specific vocabulary
- Relevant connectives
- Figurative language

All this leads directly into writing.

You can **adapt the materials** in order to add more writing practice and lead more directly to the planning and mini-writing sessions at the end of each unit.

Highlighting might have indicated that an important feature in non-fiction writing is the topic sentence. You would probably decide that it was not enough simply to read them. The children need to practise writing and so – again based on assessment for learning – you might add a session to the unit in order to develop that skill before writing.

### **Planning and the final writing outcome**

All the units end with a session which introduces a final writing task. This might involve a planning activity such as a story-map, story mountain plan or a non-fiction plan on a skeleton diagram. It might also involve some talk before writing – telling the story or formally speaking some information. (As I mentioned above, children cannot write what they cannot speak!). At this point you can decide whether to:

- Use the last session as a planning activity only.
- Extend the unit by adding time for modelled or shared writing and independent work. This would link back to the features of the text and complete the sequence.

The poetry units all include opportunities to write short poems in the same style and in this case the sequence can be completed. Writing the poems does not always come at the end and children can write throughout the unit, where relevant.

### **Conclusion**

I think reading is the number one activity in any primary classroom. We should be reading short stories and novels for pleasure. We should also be looking more closely at well chosen texts to develop reading skills. *i-read* is an important tool in achieving the latter and deals with the important statements outlined in the new strategy.

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