

## ***Frontloading for ELL Learners: Building Concepts and Vocabulary Before Reading***

English language learners encounter many challenges when faced with new, unfamiliar text. To help ensure that the text is comprehensible, it is important learners are given scaffolds before reading to help them set a purpose for reading, to spend time accessing and building background knowledge, to make connections from the known to the new and to emphasize key vocabulary.

This process naturally brings prior knowledge to a level where it is ready to apply, stimulates questions on the topic, builds interest, and most of all builds the content language that will support the reading (Hoyt, 2003).

There are a variety of ways to frontload information to maximize success for English language learners.

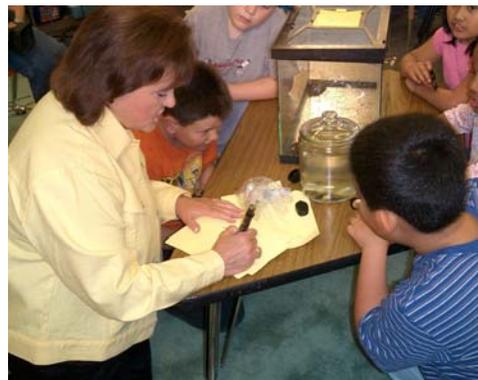
### **Realia**

Bring in the real thing! For example: when reading a text about the life cycles of fruits, bring in the fruits, seeds, branches and buds and allow students time to observe, touch and have oral language experiences prior to encountering the new vocabulary in the text.



FIGURE 47-1 Bringing in real objects helps language learners to build content knowledge and the English vocabulary to use in describing what they know.

FIGURE 47-2 Real objects stimulate conversation, questions, and set strong purposes for reading.



### **Video**

Provide rich visual imagery through video, with the sound on or off, to help students understand concepts from a text before they read. Establish a focus for viewing so students look for key points. Pause often to clarify, or have students turn to a partner and

discuss what they just saw. For example: when reading a text about extreme weather, view video clips of a variety of forms of weather so students have a context before reading.

### **Field Trip**

Why wait until the end of a unit or reading to take a field trip? You can frontload key concepts and vocabulary by going on a field trip prior to embarking on your study. Take photographs, then discuss and write about the experience when you return to the classroom. The information in a related text will be much more meaningful when it can be connected to shared real-life experiences.

### **Picture Observation Charts**

Collect a variety of pictures that connect to the text to be read. Post them on chart paper around the classroom and have students move from poster to poster, observing and discussing the pictures with a partner. Encourage students to write their questions, connections and observations on the posters. Students will begin thinking about the topic and you will have information to assess prior knowledge and plan for instruction.

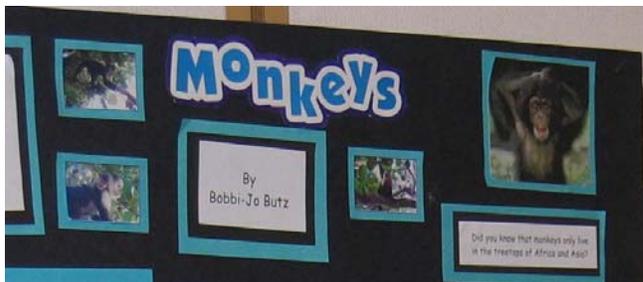


FIGURE 47-3 Photos and illustrations give visual support to language and concepts while encouraging observations and questions.

### **Text Bits**

Using pictures from the text to be read, or related pictures, pass one to each student and ask them to face one other person. Students describe their picture, predict what the book may be about and listen to the same from their partner. They then move to another student and repeat the process. When pictures have been shared, students write a quick prediction of the book's content, based on the pictures. A whole class discussion follows. Text Bits can also occur with actual text from the book to be read. Select key sentences or phrases from the text and write each on a strip of paper. Pass one to each student. Students move around the room reading their strip and listening to each partner. Again you may wish to have them write what they remember or predict the content of the book to be read.

As they gain proficiency with this scaffold, they can carry a book or newsmagazine around as they engage in partner conversations about possible content.



FIGURE 47-4

Students work in partners to generate predictions about the text, about vocabulary they expect to see and relate their prior knowledge on the topic.



### **Read Aloud and Shared Reading Connections to Student Reading**

Prior to having students read a selection independently, read aloud a book with related content and use a think aloud strategy to discuss the concepts and vocabulary that are common to both texts. This helps the learners pull background knowledge forward and activate content vocabulary that is likely to appear in their own reading.

You might also consider a big book on the same topic as the students will be reading individually as the large illustrations and photographs may assist the ELL learners in solidifying the concepts and language.

FIGURE 47-5 Read alouds and big books, when partnered by topic with the books students will read individually provide strong levels of support for concepts and language development.



### **KW....E Focus on Questions**

Use the familiar KWL format, but consider changing the K to “what I *think* I know” and W to “what I wonder.” The last column could be E for “what ELSE do you want to know now, after reading?” This keeps the learners focused on questions before, during and after reading which stimulates language and conversation.

### **Word Sorts**

Identify key vocabulary from the text to be read. Provide a list of words to students to sort into categories determined by either the teacher or the students. Encourage metacognition by asking them to provide the rationale for placing words in certain categories. If the selection to be read is a narrative, students can sequence the words in a way that makes sense and use the words to tell the story, based on their prediction of

what they story will be about. The words can be resorted to reflect the actual story as the reading occurs, and can be sorted again at the end of the reading to aid in retelling.

### **Cloze**

Select a paragraph from the text to be read. Delete some of the words that provide multiple possibilities for substitutions. Ask students to read through the passage and insert words that make sense. When finished, ask students to share with a partner and then with the whole group. By interacting with the cloze activity prior to reading the text, students are introduced to key vocabulary, they have a chance to negotiate meaning with a partner and their interest in the reading is piqued. Then, as they enter the author's version of the text, they have strong personal purposes for reading.

### **Expert/Guest Speaker**

Invite an expert to your class to present information on the topic of study. Encourage the expert to bring the "tools of the trade." For example: invite a meteorologist to bring weather instruments and present information about forecasting the weather. Students will read texts about the weather with a new understanding after their experience with an expert.

### **Partner Preview: I Notice**

When introducing new nonfiction, ask students to turn to a partner with their text in hand and begin to preview the text by saying "I notice..." Have them take turns as they page through the book noticing text features, structures or key vocabulary. When they have finished, debrief with the whole class. You can create a visual roadmap of the text on chart paper as they share what they have noticed.

The importance of accessing and building background for all learners has been well documented. Taking a few minutes to jump-start students' schema, finding out what they know or have experienced about a topic and linking their knowledge directly to the lesson's objective will result in greater understanding for English learners (Echevarria, Vogt and Short, 2004).

Sources:

Brechtel, M. 2001. *Bringing It All Together: Language and Literacy in the Multilingual Classroom*. Dominie Press, Inc.

Echevarria, J., Vogt, M., and Short, D., 2004. *Making Content Comprehensible For English Language Learners: The SIOP Model*. Pearson.

Hoyt, L. 2003. *Make It Real*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.