

Anticipation Guide

When to Use

✗ Before Reading

During Reading

After Reading

DESCRIPTION

Too bad the name is kind of clunky, because it doesn't really communicate the power of this strategy. Anticipation guides are brief sets of questions (3-to-5 items) that help kids activate their prior knowledge (including misconceptions), make predictions, engage important issues that will surface in the reading, and enter a text thinking. Students simply circle their answers or jot brief responses, and may talk them over with classmates before reading. The most powerful anticipation questions aren't factual recall, but invite students to take a stand on a controversy or a big idea in the reading.

WHY USE IT?

Getting students to think about key concepts *before they read about them* provides a tangible purpose for reading: namely, to compare what I believe with what actually turns up in the text. This process is sometimes called "frontloading" (Wilhelm and Smith), a great term for investing class time in activities that launch kids into the text with their brains switched on. Reading becomes a support for, or a challenge to, the positions students have taken. The questions guide students to focus on the big ideas in the reading. Instead of simply an assignment, reading becomes part of an ongoing conversation students have joined—maybe partly accidentally. Of course, some topics, like "kinetic molecular theory," will call just for simple prediction about the content. Others, like "the discovery of radioactivity" more readily invite controversy and expression of important beliefs. But even the simpler prediction questions still help students think as they read.

Anticipation guides are easy to prepare and take little class time—they are a great way to dip your toe into pre-reading activities. A five-item guide might take two minutes for students to respond, two minutes to compare answers in pairs, and another two minutes to hear what one volunteer per question says about his or her answer.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

1. Create a few (3–5) short questions or statements related to the text, using true/false, yes/no, or agree/disagree formats. The best questions pose big, open-ended issues, rather than previewing micro-details from the text. If your students are reading Orwell's *Animal Farm*, you might ask: "It's never O.K. to have just a few people in charge of a government or organization—true or false?" Studying earth's biosphere, you might offer "Human pollution of the atmosphere is always wrong—agree or disagree." For a Civil War unit: "Suppose you were in Lincoln's cabinet deciding whether to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, and a poll showed he would lose the next election if he signed it. Would you vote to: a) sign it anyway; b) not sign it; c) wait a few months and decide later?"
2. Kids can go right into the selection after completing the anticipation guide. This is meant to be a brief get-ready activity—correct answers are not what it's about. The questions you pose should not have single correct answers. All we are trying to do is activate prior knowledge, beliefs, and ideas, and send students into the text thinking.

Variation: With a little more time, you can deepen this strategy by having kids discuss their answers with a partner or small group. Then call the class back from these conversations to make some consensus predictions or surface a core disagreement, before reading. If kids are slow to talk, have them jot down their justifications first.

Variation: After reading, come back to the anticipation guide and compare the original responses with the students' deepened or changed thinking.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

H. Herber. 1978. *Teaching Reading in Content Areas* (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall; Michael Smith and Jeff Wilhelm. 2002. *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, pp. 84–87; Kylene Beers. 2003. *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, pp. 74–80.