

Promoting Deep Understanding through Classroom Literacy Events

1. When do you bring the classroom community together? What texts do you use for read-alouds and think-alouds?

- Do you include fiction, newspaper columns, letters, and poems?
- How do you incorporate think-alouds while reading aloud to the students?
- Do you reveal your own comprehension strategies, and show how they deepen your meaning making with the text?
- Do you include texts for shared reading, such as choral speaking or Readers theatre?
- Do students share their own writing and research findings, as well as presenting carefully prepared units for other students?
- Do students reflect on their progress in using strategies, do they articulate their knowledge of strategic reading, and do they help others to see the impact of strategic reading?

2. What texts do you use for modelling your own literacy life?

- How do you reveal your own text preferences concerning authors, style, and content, both in print and on screen? Do you approach issues critically, explaining your data and research?
- Do you keep dialogue journals with your students, on paper or online, where you share and model your own views and responses?

3. Are your demonstrations helpful in showing students how effective readers and writers function?

- Do you present “run-throughs” of useful processes for selecting resources, working in small groups, having thoughtful conversations about a shared text, or incorporating a variety of response modes for deepening understanding?
- Do you demonstrate a variety of instructional strategies for students, providing lessons in how readers and writers use the tools of their crafts?
- Do you model how to write for different audiences — colleagues, parents, critics, politicians, reporters, and principals?
- Do you create an environment where literacy texts and events surround the students, where records of their thinking about the literacy strategies are displayed, and where their own inquiry projects and writings are available?

4. How do you organize the students for literacy activities in groups?

- Do you organize literature circles and guided reading groups, especially for focused instruction to meet specific learning needs?
- What texts do you use for group activities? Who chooses them?
- What role do you play during group literacy activities? How do you encourage group members to stretch their thinking, to elaborate on each other’s ideas, to challenge the text, to alter their opinions, and to think deeply?

5. What texts do you provide for independent reading?

- Do students choose their own texts, or do they negotiate with you?
- What role do you play during independent reading time? Do you confer with individuals, promoting reflective thinking about their reading strengths and progress, their choice of text, and their insights about their literacy lives?

6. Which response modes work best for your students? Which new ones could you try?

- Do your students make explicit their thinking about the text they have read or viewed? How do you connect the reading and writing processes?

- How does talking with others before, during, and after working on a draft of writing affect student writing?
- How do you incorporate technology in your literacy work? Are a variety of text forms representing the new literacies available in your classroom?
- Are students constructing and creating different types of texts in their responses to model texts?
- What role can the Arts play in helping students to reveal and construct their thinking about a text?

7. How are you building language muscles with your children, so that they have the word and sentence power necessary for effective reading and writing?

- Are they increasing their word banks of recognizable words in fluent reading and in spelling?
- Are they growing in their use of word analysis strategies, such as words within words, root words, prefixes and suffixes?
- Are they retaining and building vocabulary from their reading and listening experiences?
- Are they becoming aware of different variations and patterns of English, from standard to colloquial to argot, and learning when to use them?
- Are they using increasingly complex sentence and text structures in their writing?

8. What ways have you found to provide differentiated literacy opportunities?

- What kind of record keeping helps you to track the literacy progress of each child as a reader and a writer?
- How do you mentor struggling readers?
- Do students keep individual portfolios of their work and their progress, on paper and online?

9. Is the inquiry process at the heart of your teaching/learning dynamic in other areas of the curriculum?

- How do you assist students in working with the texts used in the content areas?
- How do you promote the reading of a variety of genres?
- Do students notice and identify their literacy strategies during reading?
- Are students moving towards a deepened understanding of the texts they encounter?
- How do you support and encourage intertextuality among the different texts they experience?
- Are students approaching a variety of texts with a critical lens?
- How does reading, discussing and responding affect the thinking and social action of the students about a theme or an issue?
- Do the students read different text types with effective strategies for deepening their understanding? Do they share the results of their inquiries using PowerPoint and SMART Boards?

10. Do your students have a sense of ownership and satisfaction with their literacy work?

- Is there a culture of literacy developing in your classroom, with a predictable and supportive schedule conducive to having students work together as a community, in small groups, and independently? Do you incorporate the school and public libraries into your classroom program?

11. Do you create opportunities for moving critical learning experiences into greater engagement with the outside community, as in interacting with parents/guardians, working with volunteers, inviting guests into the classroom, going on field trips, interviewing authorities, using technology, and taking part in social action programs?

12. Do you share with your colleagues professional books, journal articles, and reports that offer strategies and structures for helping students deepen their literacy experiences?