

In this article I hope to offer practical advice and suggestions on the use of class sets of supplementary readers. Of course, not all schools in Malaysia are fortunate enough to have class sets of readers though many have the individual supplementary readers provided by the Ministry of Education. Unlike the individual titles in the reading kit, class readers are not normally taken out of the classroom. Further, while the 'home' reader should be easy enough for the pupil to read on his own, the class reader can be slightly more difficult and demanding since it is to be studied in the classroom under the guidance of the teacher.

The main aim of introducing any kind of reader should be to develop the pupils' interest in reading. But, of course, reading can be treated as an aid to comprehension skills, consolidation of grammar, oral work and even speed reading.

A good supplementary reader interests pupils through its story, its characters and even through its language. Pupils can learn all sorts of things from a reader about people and life. Hopefully they will enjoy themselves as they read.

There are certain activities associated with class readers that kill the pupils' interest. These include having to look up every new word in the dictionary, being told to underline certain parts of the text, making footnotes in Malay or in some other language, remembering too many details of the story.

How to start on a class reader

It is most important that the teacher familiarize himself with the reader. He should have read it through several times and thoroughly understood it so that he can exploit it to the full. The teacher might like to use some of these suggestions to develop the pupils' interest in a reader or part of a reader so that pupils will want to read on.

1. The teacher can begin reading aloud for a short while, reading with as much expression as possible, and then stopping when he feels he has caught the attention of the pupils.
2. It is often a good idea to concentrate on short sections of dialogue so that the teacher can employ his dramatic skills. Characterization and feeling often cast a spell on pupils.
3. The teacher can ask questions that direct the attention of the pupils to the 'plot' or the characters. These can be written on the blackboard or given orally before the class starts reading. If given orally, pupils are keen to look out for the answers. Pupils can be told to read silently and to find the answers to the questions as quickly as possible.
4. The teacher can tell pupils to read on and then stop them briefly to draw their attention to the key points of the story. Questions can be framed like this:
 - (a) Who have we met so far?
 - (b) What do we know about them?
 - (c) Where does the action take place?
 - (d) When does it take place?
 - (e) Who are the main characters?It is often a good idea to ask 'speculative' questions: 'What do you think will happen next?' etc.
The teacher can stimulate further reading by making statements such as: 'Now read on and find out why' or 'Now read on to find out who'
5. If the teacher feels that some parts of the story are related to the pupils' own experiences, he may like to encourage a discussion. This is often a helpful way of encouraging interest in the reader.
6. Sometimes pupils like to be told a little about the author and his background. This will require some research on the teacher's part but if he can find some colourful information about the author or even about the background of the story, the pupils' interest is aroused.
7. Although not commonly available, audio-visual aids such as records, films and photographs of the supplementary reader or of the author can be a starting point for discussion. This may also

stimulate the pupils' interest in looking for further material to read themselves.

Follow-up activities

1. Part of a supplementary reader can lend itself to dramatization. Some of the dialogues can be acted out or a particularly interesting scene from the book can be dramatized with the pupils providing their own words.
2. Pupils can mine the action of a particular scene. Perhaps later pupils could improvise the dialogue the characters in the mime might have used.
3. Interesting dialogues can be developed through class discussion. Build up dialogues on the blackboard with the students. Concentrate on parts of the reader where there is no direct speech but where there is plenty of action. Start off like this: 'On page X, A meets B at the What do you think A says when he first meets B? How does B reply?' etc.
4. It is often helpful to build up a diagrammatic representation of the story with the pupils' help. Time-lines can be drawn and the main events slotted in.
5. Better pupils may be asked to compare and contrast two different characters in the story.
6. More challenging exercises include
 - (a) having individual pupils re-tell part of the story to the class

- (b) having the story re-told as if by an eye-witness
- (c) pretending to be a character in the story and telling a part of the story from his point of view
- (d) making suggestions as to how the story could be improved.

Testing the pupils' understanding of a reader

Nothing will dampen the pupils' enthusiasm for the story than testing rote learning and mechanical recall of facts. Pupils should be 'tested' on the main features of the story. Any questions set should make them think.

Short paragraph-type questions can be set, for example:

- (a) Would you like to have a friend like X? Why?
- (b) Do you find the life of X exciting? Which part of the story did you find most exciting?
- (c) Do you like the happy ending to the story? Why/Why not?
- (d) How would you feel if you met X?
- (e) Which character in the story do you like most? Give your reasons.
- (f) Why did X do?
- (g) Do you think X was happy to? Give your reasons.
- (h) Describe an incident that shows

You will notice that most of these questions are 'Why' questions. They are designed to make students *think*. It does not matter too much if the pupils' answers are not grammatically perfect. What matters is that the teacher has encouraged the pupils to give a personal opinion, and that personal opinion can only be given if the story has been both understood and enjoyed.