

## Cooperative Retelling



### Why Use the Strategy

One easy, powerful way to assess whether students are able to understand and reconstruct meaning of a selection they read is to have them retell the story. Retelling provides opportunities for students to synthesize, interpret, and personally recast the texts and stories they read. The instructional value of retellings has been well documented with students of various ages and abilities. Practice with retellings results in greater oral language complexity, improved comprehension, and increased awareness of different text structures (Anthony, Johnson, Mickelson, and Preece, 1991).

A cooperative retelling requires students to predict the content of a passage, read the passage, and then retell it in their own words. Students can compare their individual predictions in a cooperative context. When students share in a cooperative context they can check their understanding with that of their group members.

### How to Use the Strategy

#### Prepare

- 1) Immerse students in the genre which you want them to be able to retell or paraphrase.
- 2) Select a text which suits the purpose of the retelling. If the focus is on text structure, determine if narrative or informational text is appropriate.
- 3) Prepare a copy of the text for each student and fold the copy so that only the title is visible.
- 4) Place students in groups of four to six and have them:
  - Read the title
  - Each write or draw a prediction of what the text might be about
  - List words and phrases they would expect to find in the text
  - Share perceptions

#### Listen and Read

- 1) Tell students to unfold their copies and follow along as the teacher reads aloud.
- 2) Encourage students to reread the text silently as many times as they like.
- 3) Specify the audience and intent of the retelling.
- 4) Have students put text away and work on their own to retell the text in writing without looking back.
- 5) Remind the students to write quickly.

#### Share and Compare in Pairs

- 1) Have the students compare and contrast their retellings, looking for similarities, differences, paraphrases, and confusions.





- 2) Provide prompt questions which support rather than criticize one another such as:
  - What did I leave out that is different from what you did not include?
  - Why did you not include this part?
  - Does leaving something out change the meaning?

#### Write a Collaborative Retelling

- 1) Have students return to their groups and write the best possible group product drawing upon the strengths of each other's original work.
- 2) If students are not proficient writers have them present their retellings orally through a dramatization or with pictures.

### **When to Use the Strategy**

Cooperative retelling should be used with students who have a grasp of the reading and writing processes. The strategy can be used with all genres and is effective whenever it is appropriate for students to paraphrase their understandings of a text. It works well with informational text and can be used to highlight specific vocabulary, structures, and features of texts found in particular content area. It assists readers in identifying authors' organizational patterns such as time-lapse, near to far, cause-effect, or step-by-step process.

### **Link to Assessment**

When used as an assessment technique, retellings can be richly informative. However, the students should become familiar with what is expected of them during a retelling, and have practiced to gain experience with the procedure before retellings are used for assessment purposes.

Teachers can use both the process and the product of a cooperative retelling as tools for evaluation. It is important that teachers collect data on retellings over a period of time and not make judgments about readers based on one telling.

