



‘Tuning in’ to the Inner Process of Reading

Vocabulary, word recognition and reading fluency are important skills for reading, but they don’t cover the whole picture. **Jeffrey Pflaum** shares ideas for helping students understand the process of reading silently and visualising what they read.

don't think you can underestimate the complexity of the reading process. And I'm not just talking about sounding out words, word recognition, vocabulary, content area knowledge and fluency. The silent reading process compels readers to be totally focused. From first seeing the words in a book through to understanding it until its conclusion, they have to make sense out of it all. Reading is a multi-wired pathway with criss-crosses and interconnected tracks that need to be functioning and clear of 'inner noise' and the many distractions of the mind.

The following model isn't taught in schools and should be addressed. It gives students who struggle, the reluctant and unmotivated, a *framework* to lead them through opaque inner landscapes of reading. Imaginary and real worlds connected to reading require the mental-emotional energy and 'glue' of awareness to put the pieces of reading's puzzle back together.

The silent reading processes

What happens in the silent reading processes? What are its complications, challenges and pleasures? 'Processes' is used because silent reading involves diverse actions, routes, movements, progressions and engagements.

Steps for teaching students (Years 3 - 8) silent reading processes:

Step 1: The *real, physical eyes* see-and-read words from page with:

Step 2: The *silent inner reading voice* joining in simultaneously to see-read-speak the words silently from the page.

Note: The question becomes: Who's listening to the inner reading voice silently reading words 'out loud' in the 'mind's magic reading theatre'? Answer: Add...

Step 3: *Imaginary inner ears* listen to words read silently by an inner reading voice.

Note: You might think this is getting complex quickly. So far, words have left the page via the real eyes and inner reading voice, both working together to initiate the rest of the silent reading processes. And this see-read-speak experience takes on a listening dimension when imaginary inner ears hear the silent inner reading voice 'talking'. The process continues as:



Kids-as-readers have to navigate many paths and remain focused on the words read, interpreted and analysed in order to comprehend. And this doesn't include the distractions or inner noise that may keep them from figuring out what they're reading.

Note: Distractions are not shown in the diagram. Imagine this possible internal reality by visualising *wavy lines* going across the TV screen obscuring the projection and viewing of mind-pictures and *mind-movies*.

But we haven't completed the processes until the entire communication goes to:

Step 8: The *brain* for fine-tuning, because it will examine, scrutinise, organise and synthesise everything that happened before in the reader's mind and imagination. Call this action comprehension of the main idea(s) of what has been read.

Questions about reading requiring answers

How can kids read with distracted minds? How much inner noise distorts reading and *self-communication*? How well do students listen with their imaginary inner ears? Does inner noise or chatter interfere with the reading-speaking-listening-thinking process? What are students tuning into while reading silently? Are they on the 'Reading Channel'? How involved are they in reading?

Aspects of reading

According to the above model, **reading involves:**

- inner vision or imagining
- the mind's magic reading theatre with an imaginary TV screen
- an emotional universe
- thinking/reflecting on thoughts, ideas, meanings, experiences
- mind-pictures/movies, or, 'what you see is what you get'
- connections made between inside and outside worlds
- relating real-life experiences to the printed word
- integrating imagination, mind, heart and spirit to humanise the processes
- the brain assimilating, synthesising and organising internal/external worlds

The illustration of the tuned-in reader shows how they can *see-read-speak-listen-visualise-feel-think-reflect-comprehend-appreciate-and-motivate* themselves to read in a world of many wires, pathways and networks that need to stay open to: (1) keep inner-communication moving freely, (2) connect up with the mind, imagination, heart and spirit, and (3) go to the last stop—the *brain*—for understanding and greater pleasure.

Identifying reading issues and pumping up motivation

Once students understand the process and can engage with the steps, it is important to address whether lingering or ongoing problems are related to motivation or another issue.

Reflect on these questions when trying to impact students' reading lives:

How strong is their motivation to read? How much energy and effort do they use?

Are the structures and mechanisms of silent reading functioning at optimal levels?

Are the real, physical eyes, silent reading voice, imaginary eye/ears, the mind's magic reading theatre, as well as the imagination, mind, heart and spirit, working together with the brain?

Are loose 'wires' disrupting *inner- and self-communication* during silent reading?

Are the silent reading processes operating at a satisfactory *pace* where students comprehend, appreciate and stay motivated to read?

How do we answer these tough questions? Illustrate the silent reading processes to let students 'see' what happens while reading. With their newfound insights, probe further to discover what issues they face in reading. I will often put a question on the board for children to answer orally, or in writing and discuss responses with the class.

Questions for probing the inner self and reading mind

Here are some questions and ideas to help your students discover their inner world in relation to their reading life.

Sample ideas for thinking and talking about reading

Visualise and draw a happy reader in her/his reading world.

What was the first book you remember reading by yourself?
What feelings and thoughts return?

Think of a word that makes you feel 'good'. Silently say the word over and over again to yourself. Describe what you experienced. (*Optional:* Words that make you feel 'bad'.)

Do you have to 'fight yourself' to read?
Why?

Athletes say they're 'playing-in-the-zone' when at their best. Describe your reading experience when you are 'reading-in-the-zone'.

"Reading everyday quietly changes your world." (Jeffrey Pflaum) How?

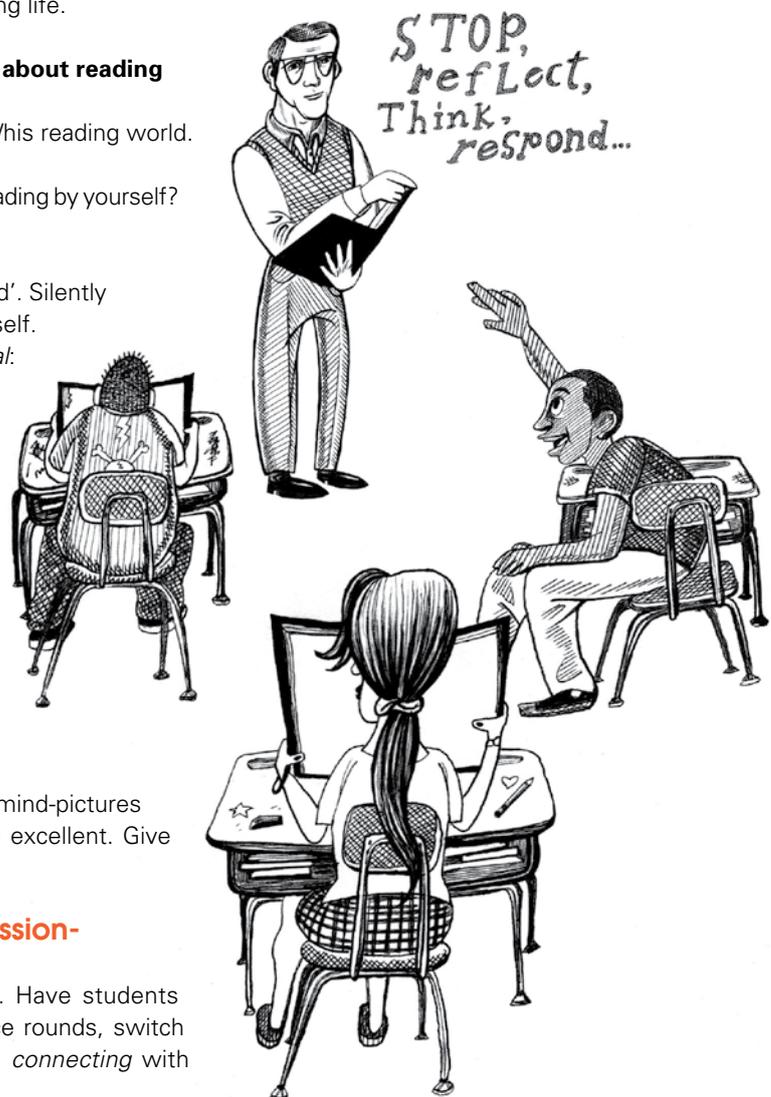
Rate your ability to change words into mind-pictures from 0 to 10, where 0 = poor and 10 = excellent. Give reasons for your rating.

Introducing an inquiry-and-passion-based technique

Throw out a sample question to class. Have students respond *orally*. After several oral practice rounds, switch to written responses. Select questions *connecting* with your class.

1. Present a quotation to entire class: "I read my eyes out and can't read half enough... The more one reads the more one sees we have to read". (John Adams) What does the quotation mean? Has this been your experience? Agree? Disagree? Why?

2. Divide the class into 6-student groups. Ask them to *brainstorm* answers to: 'Why read?' After groups finish, they discuss their responses with the class.



3. Students select partners. Have each pair brainstorm responses to a statement-question: *'Reading brings peace'*. Afterward, groups discuss their responses with entire class.

4. Create 3-student groups and present a question for brainstorming: *'What would be a ridiculous place to read? Visualise and sketch these places'*. 'Art show' and discussion follow.

Language as art: introducing visualisation techniques

In order to be able to connect the words on a page with what they represent and mean, it is important that students have the ability to visualise or imagine different scenes.

Start with words: Develop imagination with basic exercises where students change words—nouns, verbs, adjectives—into images. *Say to class:* "Close your eyes and visualise these words in your mind."

For example, have them read the word 'dog' and say:

- Visualise the word 'dog' in your mind.
- What picture(s) do you imagine?
- Describe each.
- Sketch what you see.
- What thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences are triggered by the images?

Draw out details of what they visualise: type of dog, colour(s), shape/size, behaviour. The more they can imagine, the greater the engagement and motivation. *Say:* "Find 'dogs' by scanning—looking with the inner eye—at your experiences. Locate images and write your answers. Draw what you imagined."

Continue with phrases, 2-word sentences and complex sentences:

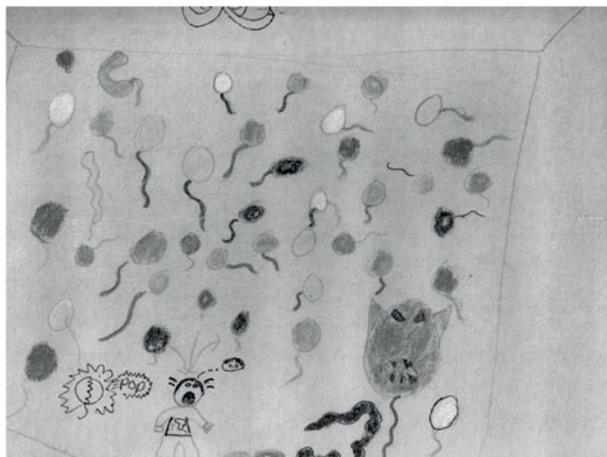
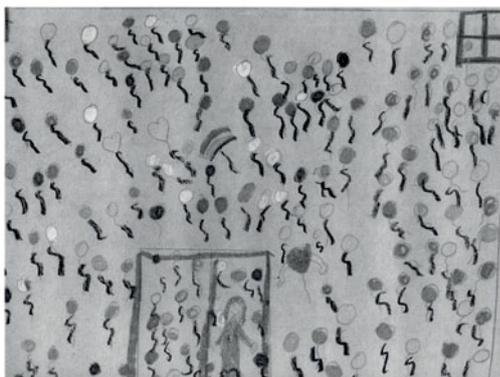
1. Try phrases such as 'sunflower field' and 'abandoned shack' following the same approach for visualising words.

2. Use 2-word sentences, however, throw in real and *absurd* examples: Switch from 'Children play' to 'Children float' and ask: "Describe the mind-picture(s) and triggered feelings and thoughts".

3. Go to longer and more complex sentences

The father teaches his daughter how to ride a bicycle.

As I stepped into the room I saw hundreds of red, green, yellow, blue, orange and white balloons, bouncing off each other, banging against my head, jumping off the wall and floating together like they were good friends.



2. Aesop's Fables connects life and values to reading. Ask students to describe each mind-picture visualised in a fable using M-P #1, M-P #2 and so on, creating a *mind-movie* of events. Have them sum up their M-P list with a moral or main idea of what they think the fable is trying to teach.

3. Advance to reading and visualising poetry. I read poetry orally for 5 minutes daily with no questions asked. Chinese, Japanese, Native American, Latino and African-American free-verse poems as well as works by Robert Frost and e.e. cummings have worked well, offering a wide variety of imagery for students to work with.



Conclusion

It is possible to reinvent and revitalise young people's reading lives by modelling how inner reading processes can, ideally, create a 3-D show in which the reader has a front-row seat. Inside the mind's magic reading theatre, students navigate twilight zones of writers' infinite worlds. Isn't this 'reading magic,' that is, when a child's mind/imagination connect with a writer's mind/imagination? Isn't this telepathic communication magical?

The magic reading theatre is a window into deeper, pleasurable reading worlds. I describe the theatre as an *imaginary TV screen* in the mind where stories, poetry, fantasies, documentaries, including history, math, science and even animated cartoons take place.

These inner world structures and visualisations are frameworks that enable all students, including those who are struggling, reluctant and unmotivated to see the light of self-motivation and to understand, step-by-step, what they experience inside while reading words from a page. Giving children more information about the silent reading processes will help them identify what worlds they are traveling in and make reading enjoyable, thought-provoking and meaningful.

Jeffrey Pflaum is a writer and former teacher with 34 years of experience teaching inner-city elementary school children in New York City. He is a blogger on The BAM Radio Network (www.bamradionetwork.com) and also does a podcast on BAM Radio's show, PULSE. Visit his website at www.jeffreypflaum.com for more information or contact Jeffrey at jeffreypflaum@gmail.com.

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