

Rich discussion during read alouds supports comprehension, language development, and deep learning. Initiating and sustaining such rich discussions during read aloud depends on being as responsive as possible to children's ideas, thoughts, and comments in ways that build joint understanding, and move beyond simple initiation-response-evaluation forms of questioning, where there may be little real dialogue between children, and one idea may not be connected to another. When we are responsive and pay attention to children's contributions during read alouds, "the talk can move away from an initiation-response-evaluation sequence toward true discussion and joint construction of meaning" (Price et al., 2016).

Below are concrete suggestions for **responsive questioning** and **responsive scaffolding**, two approaches that can help us foster the responsiveness that enables rich discussion during read alouds. **Responsive questioning** can be thought of as a way to initiate and sustain read aloud discussions in general, and **responsive scaffolding** can be thought of as a method for improving, trouble-shooting, or building up read aloud discussions when children are not as responsive as we might hope to our initial open questions and follow-up questions.

## Responsive Questioning

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Responsive questioning happens when we combine initial open questions, with follow-up questions to build on and develop children's first tentative responses and ideas to our initial inquiries.

### • Initial Open Questions

Initiate discussion at important points in the story with open questions that require children to describe and explain text ideas, rather than simply recall or retrieve words from the text.

Some examples of open questions for eliciting ideas include (from a kindergarten Text Talk read aloud of *Harry the Dirty Dog*) (Beck and McKeown, 2001):

- How does what Harry did fit in with what we already know about him?
- When the family looked out and said, "There's a strange dog in the backyard," why did they call Harry a strange dog?
- They called Harry "this little doggie." What does that tell us? Why do you think the children shouted "Come quick"?

### • Follow-Up Questions

Follow-up questions are usually necessary to get children to respond well to initial open questions:

"Helping students to construct meaning requires teachers to take cues from a student's initial response, which with young children is often very limited, and precede from there" (Beck and McKeown, 2001).

Follow-up questions enable teachers to help children transform initial sparse responses to open questions into elaborated constructed responses, which build language and comprehension. The following kinds of follow-up responses and questions are recommended:

- Repeat and rephrase what children are saying in their initial response to encourage them to elaborate on it and connect it to other ideas.

- Use “uptake,” the incorporation of previous student responses into subsequent questions.
- Included generic probes that encourage children to explain their thinking around a terse or brief initial response (“What’s that all about?” “What’s that mean?”). To further support such probes, and focus children on using the language of the text, reread the relevant passage and repeat the question.

**Adapted from:** Beck, Isabel L., and Margaret G. McKeown. “Text Talk: Capturing the Benefits of Read-Aloud Experiences for Young Children.” *The Reading Teacher*, volume 55, issue 1, 2001, pp. 10–20.

## Responsive Scaffolding

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Responsive scaffolding entails differentiating the support we offer children during a read aloud discussion, as we match the level of support we provide to what children need, always remembering that our aim is for them to do as much of the idea generation and even question initiating in the discussion as possible. We can select three levels of scaffolding strategies—high-support, low-support, and raise-the bar support—based on the type of responses we are seeing from children during a read aloud discussion.

- **High-Support Scaffolding Strategies**

Use high-support scaffolding strategies when the content of children’s response is incorrect or confused, and when children appear not to have the language to express what they are trying to say.

- Model, define, or explain correct content.
- Ask supportive close-ended questions to increase success (Price et al., 2016):
  - “Initiate choral or imitation responses.”
  - “Ask students to point, gesture, or pantomime.”
  - “Ask students to fill in the blank.”
  - “Ask yes/no or ‘forced choice’ questions.”
  - “Ask comprehension-check questions.”

- **Low-Support Scaffolding Strategies**

Use low-support scaffolding strategies when content of children’s responses is inaccurate or ambiguous and there is minor confusion, and when children’s language is vague.

- Provide a second chance to respond (Price et al., 2016):
  - “Repeat the question.”
  - “Reread a segment of text or point to an illustration of diagram.”
- Request clarification (Price et al., 2016):
  - “Repeat or rephrase the children’s words, and check accuracy ... (“Do you mean ...?”).”
  - “Request more information with ‘tell me more.’”
  - “Ask questions to elicit specific responses.”

- **Raise-the-Bar Scaffolding Strategies**

Use raise-the-bar scaffolding strategies when the content of children’s responses is correct and language makes sense (Price et al., 2016).

- “Ask questions at high level of cognitive demand.”
  - These might include questions that require inferences or predictions, the explaining of ideas, the comparing and contrasting of information, or the interpretation of points of view.
- “Make comments that require reflection.”

**Adapted from:** Price, Lisa Hammett, and Barbara A. Bradley. *Revitalizing Read Alouds: Interactive Talk About Books with Young Children, PreK–2*. Teachers College Press, 2016.

### **Works Cited:**

Beck, Isabel L., and Margaret G. McKeown. "Text Talk: Capturing the Benefits of Read-Aloud Experiences for Young Children." *The Reading Teacher*, volume 55, issue 1, 2001, pp. 10–20.

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