

Whole class discussions are opportunities for the joint construction of comprehension and knowledge between a group of children and a teacher. For such discussions to be successful, they need to be collaborative; that is, they need to entail an exchange of ideas between all parties involved. One way to teach children to do this is by establishing a collaborative whole group discussion routine, such as **Questioning the Author (QTA)**.

What and Why

This routine was developed by a group of researchers and teachers in the 90s and is still recommended as an effective approach to supporting comprehension (Beck et al., 1996) (Duke et al., 2011). The premise behind QTA is that, as readers, we are always trying to figure out what the author had in mind in writing a text.

QTA questions are meant to support the development of collaborative discussions by encouraging children to respond to and build on each other's ideas, as they grapple to make meaning of the text together. As teachers move through a sequence of QTA questions like those below, they tend to revoice, bundle, or summarize different children's ideas to build joint understanding of the text.

How

Before a QTA discussion, the teacher breaks the text into sections, and chooses questions about the author's intentions to discuss collaboratively with children in each section of the text. Thinking about and discussing the author's intentions then becomes the lens through which the class interprets the text. Some common questions and queries used in QTA include the following:

- What is the author trying to say? What is the author talking about?
- That is what the author says, but what does the author mean?
- How does that connect with what the author already told us?
- What information has the author added here that connects to or fits in with ...?
- Does that make sense? Is that said in a clear way? Did the author explain that clearly?
- Did the author tell us that? Did the author give us the answer to that?
- Did the author tell us that? Did the author give us the answer to that?

QTA questions are not asked to simply elicit right or wrong answers. Rather they are intended to **spark dialogue** between children and to help them focus on:

- recognizing the author's message
- linking information
- identifying difficulties with the way information is presented
- recognizing moments when inferences are made, or interpretations move away from the text intentionally or unintentionally

Adapted from: Duke, Nell K., et al. "Essential Elements of Fostering and Teaching Reading Comprehension." *What Research Has to Say about Reading Instruction, Fourth Edition*, edited by S. Jay Samuels and Alan A. Farstrup, International Reading Association, 2011, pp. 286–314.

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