

## ESL Developmental Continuum P–10

### Teaching strategy – Tell me (Aidan Chambers)

#### Focuses on

**Speaking Listening Reading Writing**

#### Most useful for students at stages

**A1 A2 BL B1 B2 B3 SL S1 S2 S3 S4**

#### Purpose of this activity

Tell me is a 'booktalk' strategy which involves individuals thinking about fictional texts, sharing their ideas with a group, and listening and responding to what others think. It can be used to help students think and talk about books that have been read to them or which they have read themselves.

#### How this helps ESL students in particular

Tell Me:

- gives a starting point for thinking, talking about and responding to texts
- requires students to express their own ideas as well as listen to and consider the thoughts of others
- extends the language students use to talk about texts
- allows students to compare texts, express opinions and information that assists their understanding of a text
- helps students to make text to self, text to text and text to world connections.

#### Procedure

##### The key steps of tell me are:

Select and read the text.

The first entry into thinking and talking about the text is what Chambers (1993) calls the Three Sharings:

- sharing enthusiasms – what the reader likes or doesn't like
- sharing puzzles (i.e. difficulties) – what the reader doesn't understand
- sharing connections (i.e. discovering patterns) – the connections that the reader makes, i.e. text to self, text to text, text to world connections.

Chambers (1993) provides a further list of questions to extend the initial discussion. These questions include a number of main questions and a series of subsidiary or related questions. The questions are NOT intended to be used as a list to be given to students, nor should every question be asked of every text. The lists are to be used as prompts or guides, and should be rephrased to suit the readers.

After reading a text, the text is discussed using open-ended questions to guide the talk. The questions are divided into categories: Basic Questions, General Questions, Special Questions. Examples of these are listed below; see Chambers (1993) for the full list.

**Basic Questions**

- Was there anything you liked about this book?
- Was there anything you disliked?
- Was there anything that puzzled you?
- Were there any patterns – any connections – that you noticed?

**General Questions**

- Have you read any other books like this one?
- Has anything that happened in this book ever happened to you?

**Special Questions**

- How long did it take for the story to happen?
- Who was telling – who was narrating – the story? Do we know? How do we know?

While the Basic Questions and General Questions can be used with almost any text, not all of the Special Questions are suitable for every text. The teacher should consider which questions are most appropriate for the selected text before engaging the students in discussion.

**Using tell me with ESL students**

Select texts to help students make connections, for example texts by the same author, around a theme, texts that explore culture and diversity.

Responses to the questions need not be in sentences.

Students might be more accustomed to responding to highly structured questions. If students are uncertain about how to respond to the questions, act as a model for the students by providing your own responses. Once the students become familiar with the process, the teacher's opinions should be left to later in the discussion to avoid any sense of a 'privileged' viewpoint.

Allow time for students to consider their responses to the questions.

List student responses to the Basic Questions. Discuss connections or links between likes, dislikes, puzzles and patterns.

Build up the kind of language that will support the students to engage in the discussion. For example:

- characters, setting, plot, narrator
- structures such as:
  - I think...
  - I wasn't sure why...
  - It made me think of...
  - I liked the way...
- language to express possibility or certainty: perhaps, maybe, definitely.

Provide some reference lists or visuals to support the discussion, for example:

- lists of the characters
- vocabulary that describes the characters or setting
- illustrations from the text.

### **Acknowledgments/reference**

For more details see:

Chambers, Aidan (1993). *Tell Me: Children, reading and talking* Newtown: PETA.