

Responding to Text

Much research suggests that the most frequently asked question after a read aloud is, “Did you like the book?” While this question typically elicits a lot of happy smiles and excited choruses of “yes,” the question doesn’t invite students to critically discuss the text. It merely requires readers to provide a “yes” or “no” answer. Another frequently asked question is, “What was your favorite part of the story?” This question requires only that listeners recall a portion of text; it does not ask students to discuss the qualities of the writing that made the text interesting to the reader. Teachers also often follow a reading of a book with an art activity: Draw a picture of your favorite part of the story. This activity, too, limits the kinds of critical responses students might make to a text.

Responses to text should take a variety of forms that allow listeners and readers opportunities to engage critically with a piece of writing. If students are to gain insights into authors’ techniques and use of vocabulary, teachers need to create activities that focus students on such handiwork. Following are some suggestions for responding to text:

Possible Questions

- What was your favorite sentence in the book? Why?
- What kinds of words did the author use?
- Who can find some (scary, funny, action, descriptive, onomatopoeic, etc.) words?
- What kind of mood did this book put you in? Do you think the author meant for you to feel this way? Why?
- Why do you think (a character) acted the way (he/she) did?
- (Who can tell me/What can you tell me) about the (beginning, middle, end) of the story?
- Can you think of other stories like this one?
- Are the things in this book like things that have happened in your lives? Can anyone tell me about an experience they’ve had that was like the one in the book?
- What new words did you learn in this story?
- Are there any words in this story that you don’t know the meaning for?
- If you were (a character), what would you have done if these things happened to you?
- Who can tell me the (plot, setting, etc.) of the story?

Extension Activities

- With a partner, choose several sentences from the book that use rich language. Be ready to tell why you think the author wrote these sentences. Be ready to tell why you think these sentences use rich language.
- Use a storyboard to sketch out the beginning, middle, and end of the story.
- With a partner, make a list of some (scary, funny, action, descriptive, onomatopoeic, etc.) words.
- Write a prequel or sequel to the book.
- Write another version of the book.
- Write a different ending to the book.