

Questioning Techniques

(with examples based on NEL K1 English Language Big Book –
Happy Ducks)

The Shared Book Approach depends on the effective use of questioning techniques.

Asking Questions

Teachers' questions are an important part in developing children's language skills because they provide opportunities to get information from the children's responses that can feed forward into the next teaching step. More specifically, teachers ask questions for the following purposes:

- provide opportunities for the children to talk
- stimulate thought and understanding
- direct the children's attention to a specific point
- provide a model for the children
- find out individual children's strengths and weaknesses

These are some types of questions that teachers ask:

Open-ended Questions

These questions do not require just one 'right' answer. There may be several possible and appropriate answers so children are given opportunities to think and come to their conclusions, e.g.,

How do you know? What do you think will happen? What would you do?

Tugging Questions

These questions challenge as well as stimulate thought. They pull additional information from the children, e.g.,

What is another reason? Why do you think so? What might happen next? Look at his face. What do you think has just happened?

Closed Questions

It is necessary sometimes to ask such questions, for example, for object identification or word recognition and teaching of language structures, e.g.,

What's this? What colour is it? Is it big or small?

Such questions are also necessary for the beginning language learner. When you do ask this type of question requiring only a short, sometimes one-word answer, try to include other questions as well to encourage longer responses, e.g.,

What's this? How can you tell? What makes you think so?

When asking any question,

DO

- think ahead of time what questions you want to ask.
- ask the questions clearly, slowly and direct them to the whole class.
- pause long enough to allow the children time to think of their responses.
- rephrase the question only if there is no response after a suitable pause. The question may be too difficult for the children.
- try to elicit longer responses from the children by extending the questions so as to encourage them to observe, think, and make a decision, for example, *Is she crying or laughing?* (using a picture) *Why do you say so?*

DON'T

- ask so many questions that the children lose all interest in the lesson.
- rephrase every question. It will confuse the children.
- use too many question tags. *That's a beautiful picture, isn't it?* requires only a yes or no response. Tag questions are also very confusing for young learners.

When the children respond to your questions,

DO

- acknowledge in some way all of their responses, e.g.,
if the response is correct – *Yes, that's right. Good.*
If the response is wrong – *That's a good try. Who can give another response?*

Note: You may have to rephrase the question for some children.

- be firm, fair and friendly, using a balance of praise and encouragement.

DON'T

- let the same few children respond to all of the questions or make fun of those who give incorrect responses. Instead, say:
(To the class) *He is trying very hard. Let's listen to him.*
(To the child) *That was a good try. Please continue.*
- ask the class, *Is he right or wrong, class?* (especially if the child is wrong)

Children's Questions

Children ask questions for the following reasons:

- clarify instructions and procedures
- extend their understanding of content
- communicate with the teacher and their peers about the text and other activities

DO

- encourage the children to ask questions.
- acknowledge the children's questions and answer them as best as you can.

DON'T

- ignore or dismiss the children's questions because you may be losing important information about their understanding.

Try using these questions for the **NEL K1 English Language Big Book**:

Happy Ducks

- Show the children a toy duck or a picture/video of a flock of ducks swimming together and ask:
 - *What is this?*
 - *Have you seen ducks swimming in a pond?*
- Ask the children what they like to do with their family to relate their personal experiences to the content and help them think about the ideas in the book, e.g.,
 - *How many people are there in your family?*
 - *Who are the people in your family?*
 - *What are some things you would like to do with your family?*
- Read the title of the book, the author's name and the illustrator's name on the cover page while gliding the pointer from left to right, top to bottom.
- Create opportunities for the children to predict parts of the story before showing pages 3, 7, 8, 12 and 15.
- Have children look at the title and the illustration on the cover page and make predictions about the story they are about to read.

First reading

- Use the suggested questions below to discuss the illustrations on each page or double page as specified **before** reading the text on that page.
- Use the questions to lead discussions and also provide opportunities for the children to ask questions.

Note: There is no need to ask all the questions below. However, you may ask other questions (e.g., to relate to children's personal experiences, or build oral vocabulary by pointing at selected pictures and getting the children to name them).

- Move your pointer fluidly as you read the text aloud with rhythm and expression.

Cover page

- Show the children the cover and ask them to look at the picture. Ask:
 - (Point to the ducks) *What animals are these?*
 - *What do you think this story is about?*
 - *What are the three big ducks doing?*
 - *What is the duckling doing?*
 - *Are they happy? Why do you say so?*

Title page

- *What are the ducks doing?*
- *How does the duckling feel?*
- *What do you think happened?*

<p>Page 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (Point to the duckling) <i>Where is the duckling?</i> - <i>What is it doing?</i> - (Point to the wheelbarrow) <i>What is this? Do you know what it is used for?</i>
<p>Page 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (Reveal page and point to the three ducks) <i>What do you think the three ducks are doing?</i>
<p>Pages 4-5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What are the ducks doing now?</i> - <i>What is the duckling doing?</i> <p>After reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Why are they flapping their wings?</i> - <i>What will they do next?</i>
<p>Page 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What are the ducks doing? What makes you say so?</i>
<p>Page 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (Reveal page) <i>What is the duckling doing?</i> - <i>What do you see on its tail?</i> - <i>What will the duckling do to it?</i> <p>After reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Why do you think the ducks are shaking their tails?</i> - <i>What will they do next?</i>
<p>Pages 8-9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (Reveal page) <i>Where are the ducks going?</i> - <i>How are the ducks feeling? What makes you say so?</i> <p>After reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What will the ducks do after jumping into the pond?</i> - <i>What do you think the duckling will do next?</i>
<p>Pages 10-11</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (Point to the ducks) <i>What are the ducks doing?</i> - (Point to the duckling) <i>What is the duckling looking at?</i> <p>After reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What will the ducks do after jumping into the pond?</i> - <i>What do you think the duckling will do next?</i>
<p>Pages 12-13</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (Reveal page and point to the duckling) <i>What is the duckling doing now?</i> - <i>Why do you think the bug is following the duckling?</i> - <i>Where are the other ducks?</i> - <i>How do you think the ducks feel now? Why do you say so?</i> <p>After reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What do you think the ducks are looking at?</i> - <i>Where will they swim to?</i>
<p>Page 14</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (Point to the duckling with the insect in its mouth) <i>What is happening here?</i> <p>After reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What will the other ducks do when they find out about the duckling eating the insect?</i>
<p>Page 15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (Reveal page and point to the open beaks) <i>Why are their beaks open?</i> - <i>What do you think they are saying?</i>
<p>Page 16</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What are the ducks doing now?</i> - <i>How do you know they are tired?</i> - <i>Do you think the ducks enjoyed themselves? Why do you say so?</i>

After reading:

- *Would you enjoy doing things together with your family?*
- *Do you like the duckling? Why do you say so?*

Second reading

- Reread the new Big Book without stopping and encourage the children to read with you if they are able to.

Lesson closure

- Extend learning by relating the story to the value of care and responsibility. Get children to recall what was discussed using the following questions:
 - *Why were the ducks angry with the duckling?*
 - *Do you think the ducks should take care of the duckling? Why?*
 - *Who takes care of you at home/in school?*
- Guide children to see how the older ducks help to take care of the younger duckling as part of their responsibility. Relate caring for the young to the responsibility of an adult or older sibling.

Remember:

- Depending on your children's needs, you may need to adjust your questions or ask different/additional questions to suit the children's interest and level of understanding.
- Be selective. Choose a few questions for each page; too many questions disrupt the flow of the story.