

Reading Options (Excerpted from *A Natural Approach to Stories* by Ben Slavic with Tina Hargaden, available from Teacher's Discovery)

Readings are of a much higher quality when they are made from stories about Invisibles. In fact, the readings are so compelling that I now believe that we should stop our forced marches, stop plowing through leveled readers and knocking ourselves out trying to make whole-class novels comprehensible and fun, and simply read class-created texts based on the students' stories.

This is because the excitement from the stories just naturally carries over into the readings. The language in the stories is exactly what is needed by the class to express their unique vision and creativity. Why use anything else for whole-class readings, at least at the beginning levels?

Once, in response to my amazement that he could read a certain story so easily, a student responded as if it were the most natural thing in the world, "It's easy for us because we're the ones who made up the story!" Correct!

Reading days happen on the next day after the story and thus represent roughly 50% of use of instructional minutes over the course of the year. One could say accurately that the stories are merely there to set up the reading, where the really massive input gains occur.

If we plan on doing readings in our classes starting in the first week of the year, which is highly recommended, we must remember to locate our story writer right away, as per the previous chapter on student jobs.

Reading (a) information gathered from the questionnaires first, then a few weeks later from (b) the one word images, perfectly sets up (c) the reading of the stories three or four weeks into the year.

Presented below is a list of the twenty reading options currently in use with great success in many CI classrooms. The problem with the long version is that it takes from 2-3 class periods to complete, at least. I therefore use it only when my students need a break from auditory input, roughly once every three or four weeks. Next, a short list of only three but very powerful reading options is presented that can be completed in just one class period.

I typically only use the short version of these reading options, since my goal is to provide my students with a balanced amount of auditory and reading input, one day on auditory input with the story, and one day on reading input with the reading of the story.

Reading Options – Long Version:

1. Silent Reading: The story, given to the teacher in L1 from the story writer at the end of the story on the previous day, now in L2, is projected. The students read the story silently. They do so with interest because they created it.
2. Teacher Reads: Read the projected story aloud to the class. Just read, do not ask questions, just read with feeling and emotion, to let the sounds of the language sink into the students' minds. This might be the first time they have heard the OWI description or story from beginning to end without interruption. Resist the temptation to interrupt yourself or to ask questions. Simply read slowly and clearly, with emotion.

3. Pair Work: The students translate together. I only do this if being observed, to get the box checked. One technique with paired students is “Volleyball Reading”. Student 1 reads the first sentence in L2, for example French. Student 2 then reads the first sentence in L1, for example English. Then the same student, Student 2, reads the next sentence from the text in L2, French. Then Student 1 takes another turn, translating into L1 the sentence that her partner just read in French and then reading the next sentence in L2, French, and so on.

This is not the best use of instructional minutes, but teaching a foreign language is first about the mental health of everyone in the classroom. And only second about language gains. It gets the box checked, gives the instructor a nice break, and, most importantly, the kids enjoy it.

Note: The following steps – 4 and 5 – in this long version of the reading options, happen simultaneously, in L1. Basically, as the class chorally translates into L1, the teacher stops periodically to point out grammar features.

4. Choral Translation: Use the laser pointer or put your hand on the projected words as the students read through the text in L1 with loud voices. The Reader Leader (see chapter on student jobs) guides the class along with a strong and measured voice. If there is no student doing that job, the teacher leads the class. Sometimes it is necessary to move the pointer in a non-linear way to make English word order happen in the translation. This is an opportunity to point out differences in word order in your L2.

5. Discussion of Grammar in L1: While the class is translating the text out loud, the teacher stops from time to time to *very briefly* point out grammar features. Finally, we can explain grammar to the two kids in the classroom who care. Ask students what certain words mean. Point out adjective agreement and even spelling changes in boot verbs. Explain possessive adjectives. Use English. Go for it, but quickly, keeping the grammar explanations down to under four seconds.

Never mention the actual grammar terms, since most kids won't understand, caring only to know what the text means. *Don't test your students on any of it.* Over time, they will see patterns. This will lead to true acquisition of grammar, but much later, for those few who are interested.

Note: Steps 6, 7 and 8 happen simultaneously, in L2.

6. Reading from the Back of the Classroom: Each reading option presented here has significant pedagogical value. But this step is the best. With the story still projected in front of the class, turn the kids away from it to face you in the back of the classroom as you face the text. Then start an in-depth repetition of the first paragraph, stopping only to ask slow yes/no questions to *individual* students. Allow students during this time to turn and refer to the text for a moment if needed.

This process piles up repetition upon repetition. We milk each line in many ways, asking direct content questions about the text but also bringing in discussion of how a student in our class may compare or not with the characters in the story. Slowly we work our way through the text.

This is big work. I feel that when I am doing this step I am doing the best possible job of teaching language that I can possibly do. The students look at me and provide answers to some very sophisticated questions in the target language. They can do so only because of the amount of preparation work that has preceded this point in the reading options. Each student is held accountable and has nowhere to run. Anyone observing the classroom during this time would have to admit that the students are learning the language.

There is an entirely different dynamic when the students face you and not the projected text. When they can't see the text, they simply *interact with you verbally in the language.* This is real conversation in the TL, set up beautifully by all the narrow and deep repetitions gotten up to this point in the story creation

and reading options. When they face you and discuss the text behind them, it is the real deal. You're teaching for output, and it feels thrilling!

7. Reader's Theatre: During Step 6, you will come to points where certain lines of dialogue are said. Some of the lines are so good that you will want to temporarily suspend the discussion you are leading from the back of the room and re-create a scene from the story by bringing up the student actors who originally created the dialogue when the story was made. Ask them to sit on a stool (leaving the stools in their place in Hub C), and direct them from across the room to read their lines in dramatic ways. To do this, you will need to refer to the Director's Cues poster that is above the whiteboard directly over the projected text at the front of the room. Once the actors have had a turn, allow other students to try their hand at saying the actors' lines. It will make you glad that you are a teacher as you watch the kids try to outdo each other in how they say their lines during this Readers Theatre re-enactment of the scene from the original story. How to use the Director's Cues? Let's assume Jason's line from the story was, "You're fired! Leave now!" At this point you tell Jason, just like the director of a play would, to say his line in different ways - angrily, quickly, holding one hand out, in a quiet voice, as per the list of Director's Cues provided in the Appendices.

After a student speaks a line, you can invite the class to see if anyone else can say the line with more gusto, more romantically, more quietly, more to the left, more to the right, more with one foot off the ground. Even the shiest kids want in on this and it can be marvelously entertaining. So what if it takes a half hour to do one scene, with everyone getting a chance to show off? Our work is about mental health and fun and community first, and language gains second. Moreover, when we work with the Director's Cue, we are piling on repetitions of language in a way that everyone wants to listen to.

8. Jump into the Space!: This technique encourages speech output without force. It is for the strongest students and can really challenge them.

With the story projected, as you are proceeding along with Steps 6 and 7 above, instead of accepting one word answers, invite certain students to answer in fuller sentences, as they wish. Ask them to respond with L2 sentences that mimic the words in the text.

Example (from step 6, as you are reading from the back of the room):

Teacher: Class, in our story, does Ann have a very small light blue castle in Italy, in the suburbs of Rome?

Student: (Knowing that in the text we are reading the castle is indeed in Italy) No! The castle is in France!

Teacher: You think it's in France?

Student: Yes!

Another student: It's in Germany!

Teacher: You think it's in Germany! It says here (pointing to Italy in the text) that it's in Italy!

Of course, the kids know that the castle is in Italy, but you have trained them to make up things in a spirit of play during steps 6 and 7, as a sort of parallel step 8.

How to invite such interaction? I use the expression, said in either L1 or L2 depending on the level of the class, "Jump into the space!" from time to time and hold out my

hands to the common open space in front of me there in class and invite them to fill it and then I wait. This reminds the class of the activity.

If there are no takers, I let it go, but with certain talent-filled classes, they accept the challenge. Obviously, this is differentiation towards the really high achievers. In that sense, it is an excellent thing to keep in mind when parents of such kids complain that their child is not being challenged in your class. You can ask them if their child is “jumping into the space”. Usually they aren’t, because such parents think of differentiation as more work, not as higher level interaction with the teacher in class. Far from thinking about accent or proper construction of the language, the kids just try to communicate for meaning. I encourage them to put style and swagger into their sentences. When this happens it is a thing of beauty.

The kids like it because they finally see the payoff of all the listening and because some kids have a natural inclination to express themselves in class. Since the output is not forced, there is no harm and plenty of benefit on the very important confidence building level. Whenever a student pulls off a successful jump, I heap on the praise.

The big caution, as usual, is about English blurting. Only teachers who can keep L1 blurting out of their class will see this activity work. *L1 blurting destroys the atmosphere necessary for jumping during the steps 6, 7 and 8 blended activity sequence.*

9. Running Dictation: This activity provides an excellent physical break from all the sitting and listening that goes on in our classrooms. Here is how to set up it up:

1. Take three or six sentences – depending on the level of the class – from a completed story and write them on paper, putting each L2 sentence up around the room, or even down the hall, in random places on the walls.
2. Pair up the students. The students take turns - one writes and one runs. The runner finds *any* of the available sentences on the wall and runs back to tell the writer what the sentence is, who then writes it in L2. If the runner forgets some of the sentence, she

needs to run back to the wall, re-read the sentence and then return to the writer to complete the writing down of the sentence.

3. Once the students have found and recorded all of the sentences, they try together to arrange them in the proper order. Once that has been done, they call the teacher who praises them for completing the task.

This activity forces students to hold onto larger chunks of language in their memories. It is good for their brains. It is also a good activity to do when observed, as it gets the kids out of their seats and moving, so you can get that box checked.

10. Work on Accent: Just read to the kids and let them repeat the word chunks you say. This can be a very special time. It is too early to expect anything exact in terms of their accents, and Stephen Krashen has rightly said that doing this is not a productive way to acquire a language. But as I have said, in my view what we do is only secondarily about language gains and primarily about having fun and enjoying oneself in class, the kids love doing this, so that is enough reason to do it. Just be sure to make this not feel like a forced activity.

11. 5 Minute Write: Students write in their composition books for five minutes to answer the questions: title, who, where, what happens, what is the problem. I give them the following template in the TL to fill in each time:

This is the _____ story (fourth, tenth, etc. - teaches them to write ordinal numbers). The name of the story is _____. The main character is _____. The story takes place _____. What happens in this story?
 _____ . At the end of the story,
 _____ .

This step is just a chance to practice writing.

12. Cloze work on the drawing: We generally process the artist's drawing right after we create the story, but we can sneak in more language if we use it once again during the reading options. This time, however, we do it as a cloze activity in which we invite the

students to fill in the spaces we leave in our speech. We don't spend a lot of time on this. It is a chance to practice preliminary speech patterns that at this point are easy for the students. It is a way to build preliminary confidence in speech.

13. Dictée: This is a powerful metacognitive tool that helps students attempt to match up the sounds of the language with what they can write. Again, we do not get a lot of language gains with this activity, but it has three huge benefits that I have noticed ever since introducing it into my classroom instruction fifteen years ago: (1) it gets the students into another part of their brain, (2) it quiets down a classroom almost instantly, and (3) the students enjoy it.

Students write in absolute silence. I end the activity if even one child speaks one word and you will see why if you don't do that yourself. The activity doesn't work unless it is done in absolute silence from beginning to end.

On line 1 of the lined paper in their composition books I read chunks of sentences and give the students time to write each chunk. I read each sentence chunk three times. The first time I read at a normal pace and they listen. The second time I read it slowly as they write. The third time I read at a normal pace while they look over what they have written. I do not read it a fourth time. You will learn how to pace this.

Next, I reveal to the students the correct version of the (hidden) projected text, phrase by phrase, or chunk by chunk, and not sentence by sentence, which is too complex. They look at each chunk as it is revealed and make their corrections on line 2, bringing down onto line 2 any corrections of the text only if any are needed.

An option is to require that they copy the entire correct text on line 2. I grade both lines, whatever is correct from line 1 as well as any corrections made on line 2. In this way, the students are graded on what is correct, and not on what is wrong. They are graded on how well they can copy!

Line 3 can be used in two ways. I just use it as a blank line space to make everything clearer and easier to read, but another option is to have them write the English

translation on that third line.

The dictated sentences don't have to align perfectly with the story passage. In fact, small changes force deeper thinking by the students, and allow you to perhaps introduce a bit of new vocabulary. Just have any such changes in the text done before you begin this activity.

Dictée is one of the great ways to hit the reset button in a class, and that is why I use it often, up to two times per week, whenever needed. A dictée should last from about ten to no more than fifteen minutes each time.

14. Textivate: Download this program for \$40 from www.textivate.com - it's well worth it - to work more deeply with the written story. You import the text right in from your computer and you can fill up lots of class minutes with all the fine reading activities Textivate offers.

15. Sacred Reading: After all the opportunities they have had to both listen to and now read the same text, the students know the material. This is a most special follow up time with your students. Read the story to them slowly with meaning, dramatic tone, and artistry, in a quiet, sacred kind of setting, as if you are gently reciting poetry. I was told by a teacher that one day she read with such drama and emotion that her students told her that she should have been an actor! I generally do this without the text in front of the students, so that they can just focus on listening. The students are really pleased when they can understand a foreign language read to them in this way. They enjoy it so much.

16. Translation Quiz: Pick any paragraph from the reading and have the students translate it into English for a quick and easy grade.

17. Content Quiz: Ask ten yes/no questions prepared before class or, if you employ one, the quiz writer. I concluded over the years that most quiz writers just don't write good quizzes. Teachers who do use them are reminded to have them write a few more questions than will be needed, so that the teacher has a few to throw out if they are not

good enough. For example, the quiz writer writes out 12 questions instead of 10, allowing the teacher to instantly throw out the bad questions. Once you find a student who does this well, keep them in that job for the year because a good quiz writer is hard to find - most students are just not quite accurate enough to write a good quiz.

18. Free Write: Students write for ten minutes as per the Free Write Rules described later in this book in Chapter 6. They enjoy making up their own stories based on the structures and plot of the story just completed. They enjoy graphing their progress.

One option for using free writes:

Divide classes into teams of four or five. Read three sentences from a free write (editing for correctness on the fly). The winning team is the one which listens the best and produces the drawing with the most correct details from what was read aloud. Students love this, especially the student whose free write was chosen for the drawing activity.

19. Retell the Artist's Work: Step 12 above was a cloze activity based on the drawing produced during the story. In this step we go back and discuss the drawing one more time, but this time the students know that after the discussion a few of them will be able to volunteer to retell the entire story based on the drawing. We hand them the laser pointer and off they go. This is a way to celebrate the fact that some students are able to retell the entire story as they look at the artwork.

20. Process the Work of the L2 Story Writer: If you have a native speaker or advanced student who wrote the story out in L2, now is the time to project their work up as you and the class fix their grammar. This is a time when the native speaker has to eat a portion of humble pie, since they are usually not able to write well in their first language. Therefore, it is important for you to heap on the praise of the student writer's language abilities while pointing out the errors. It helps to point out why the writer was tripped up, usually by some feature of the written language that does not match up with the spoken language, which is generally much stronger in a heritage learner or a child from an immersion background, including time spent abroad. As stated, some students'

writing is too riddled with errors to use in this way, and others are too sensitive or marginalized. But for the right writer and person, this is a powerful learning tool for themselves and their peers.

Reading Options – Short Version:

Up to three days or more would be needed to complete the twenty reading options presented above. Therefore, I normally use a much shorter version of those activities which can be completed in just one or two class periods:

1. Choral Translation with the Reader Leader (Step 4 above) combined with Discussion of the Grammar (Step 5 above).
2. Reading from the Back of the Room (Step 6 above) combined with Readers Theatre (Step 7 above)
3. Dictée (Step 13 above)

An Option: Write and Discuss the Next Day in Class

Instead of writing the story out the night before for the reading, the instructor can choose to write the story out *during* the next class period. If there is a time crunch on the teacher, and there always is, this is a valuable option for preparing the reading.

When the story is written out in class, the students observe the re-creation of the story. This is a co-creative process, as the students and the teacher share in the creation of the story as writing. The teacher simply leads the class through the story, line by line, questioning them on the details of the story, almost as if asking for their help in

“refreshing the teacher’s memory”.

The students are invited to simply call out the one or two-word answers as a group, to speed the process along and let them be more vocally involved, thus increasing their engagement.

Doing this runs the risk of the class losing some of its focus, as the writing-in-class process can be a bit slow. One way to encourage the class’ focus in the co-creation process is to inform them with good cheer and a supportive attitude that you will gladly write for them as long as they can listen and read along with good strong focus, as there is no real language acquisition need for them to write, only to read and listen and understand.

However, if they cannot focus in a pure way with 100% participation, you will have to get everyone to drag out paper and pencil and copy along with you as you write. For most classes, it only takes one time of your making good on your promise for them to get the message that listening and helping to reconstruct the story is much more enjoyable than copying.

Of course, if a class repeatedly fails at Write and Discuss, you will truly have no option but to type the story up ahead of time for that group of students. As in every aspect of teaching, the professional educator must decide which option works best for them. The Write and Discuss option takes a lot of prep work off the teacher and makes the Invisibles approach as close to a no-prep job as teaching can conceivably get.

Another advantage to writing the story out with the class on the day after the story is that the teacher, while looking at the notes provided by the story writer the day before,

can riff on the details, adding slightly bizarre or incorrect information, or asking the class to provide additional details that were not established in the story.

For a first-year class, these often take the form of “either-or” questions – “Was the Pop-Tart in Omaha, Nebraska, or Obama, Nebraska?” or one-word-answer questions – “What was the Pop-Tart’s brother’s name?” This has the effect of “catching” the attention of the students, as new or slightly different details focus their attention at a higher level.

An added benefit of processing readings in this way is that the students thereby learn to write. They can see words emerge on the screen that up until now they have only heard. They see them being spelled correctly, with each accent being added in.

It is an amazing thing to see a group of students reading attentively with a certain visible pride while their ideas come to life in another language on the screen in front of them.

Of course, it must be said here that the best way to teach writing is to *have the students read more*. It’s not even close.