

Review books to assess understanding

7B – Review books for understanding and evidence of metacognitive strategies

Following the teaching of a text, as teachers, we can review books to assess the understanding pupils have of the text, and the use of metacognitive strategies in action. Success and misconceptions or errors will inform our future teaching.

How can metacognitive strategies aid understanding of texts?

| Metacognitive strategy | Possible evidence to review and how it can convey understanding |
|------------------------|--|
| Summarise key points | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evidence of correct interpretation ▪ Shows pupils know which information is important and which is not ▪ Reduces text to aid consolidation |
| Making connections | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Offers opportunity to check prior learning ▪ Finding relevant links shows accurate understanding of vocabulary ▪ To make links to their own emotions or processes, pupils must be able to comprehend the text they have read |
| Asking questions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pupils know how to guide the process to unlock the meaning of a text independently ▪ Generating a relevant and important question independently conveys accurate engagement with the text ▪ Accurate answers show understanding of key vocabulary and concepts |

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Examples of reviewing books in the English classroom

Let's look at the annotations of a fiction extract from English Language GCSE. Pupils read the text a paragraph at a time and the teacher underlined some key moments to guide them. Pupils then had five minutes to annotate independently.

Example: Student A

Mood | tone: factual, polite, important

Extract One: Girl with a Pearl Earring

This extract is taken from the beginning of the novel. The protagonist, Griet, describes the morning when she meets her future employers for the first time, for whom she will work as a maid.

Annotations for Student A:

- Set up for the rest of it (pointing to 'beginning')
- Main character (pointing to 'protagonist')
- People she will work for (pointing to 'employers')

Example: Student B

Extract One: Girl with a Pearl Earring

This extract is taken from the beginning of the novel. The protagonist, Griet, describes the morning when she meets her future employers for the first time, for whom she will work as a maid.

Annotations for Student B:

- introduce characters and plot/setting (pointing to 'beginning')
- Main character (pointing to 'protagonist')
- ↳ bosses (pointing to 'employers')
- ↳ her job (pointing to 'work as a maid')

Pupils began by **summarising** the key points from the blurb. By looking at these annotations, we can observe that both pupil A and B showed their comprehension by picking the key information about character, setting and plot. Both **made connections** by predicting the emotions of the text based on the initial information provided.

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Example: Student A

5 surprise - My mother did not tell me they were coming. Afterwards she said she did not want me to appear nervous. I was surprised, for I thought she knew me well. Strangers would think I was calm. I did not cry as a baby. Only my mother would note the tightness along my jaw, the widening of my already wide eyes.

10 chopping - I was chopping vegetables in the kitchen when I heard voices outside our front door—a woman's, bright as polished brass, and a man's, low and dark like the wood of the table I was working on. They were the kind of voices we heard rarely in our house. I could hear rich carpets in their voices, books and pearls and fur.

15 people coming - I was glad that earlier I had scrubbed the front steps so hard. My mother's voice—a cooking pot, a flagon—approached from the front room. They were coming to the kitchen. I pushed the leeks I had been chopping into place, then set the knife on the table, wiped my hands on my apron and pressed my lips together to smooth them.

20 mother warning her - My mother appeared in the doorway, her eyes two warnings. Behind her the woman had to duck her head because she was so tall, taller than the man following her.

25 All of our family, even my father and brother, were small. The woman looked as if she had been blown about by the wind, although it was a calm day. Her cap was askew so that tiny blond curls escaped and hung about her forehead like bees which she swatted at impatiently several times. Her collar needed straightening and was not as crisp as it could be. She pushed her gray mantle back from her shoulders, and I saw then that under her dark blue dress a baby was growing. It would arrive by the year's end, or before.

30 The woman's face was like an oval serving plate, flashing at times, dull at others. Her eyes were two light brown buttons, a color I had rarely seen coupled with blond hair. She made a show of watching me hard, but could not fix her attention on me, her eyes darting about the room.

looks shocked at them coming

Metal

large jug

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Example: Student B

My mother did not tell me they were coming. Afterwards she said she did not want me to appear nervous. I was surprised, for I thought she knew me well. Strangers would think I was calm. I did not cry as a baby. Only my mother would note the tightness along my jaw, the widening of my already wide eyes.

I was chopping vegetables in the kitchen when I heard voices outside our front door—a woman's, bright as polished brass, and a man's, low and dark like the wood of the table I was working on. They were the kind of voices we heard rarely in our house. I could hear rich carpets in their voices, books and pearls and fur.

I was glad that earlier I had scrubbed the front steps so hard. My mother's voice—a cooking pot, a flagon—approached from the front room. They were coming to the kitchen. I pushed the leeks I had been chopping into place, then set the knife on the table, wiped my hands on my apron and pressed my lips together to smooth them.

My mother appeared in the doorway, her eyes two warnings. Behind her the woman had to duck her head because she was so tall, taller than the man following her.

All of our family, even my father and brother, were small. The woman looked as if she had been blown about by the wind, although it was a calm day. Her cap was askew so that tiny blond curls escaped and hung about her forehead like bees which she swatted at impatiently several times. Her collar needed straightening and was not as crisp as it could be. She pushed her gray mantle back from her shoulders, and I saw then that under her dark blue dress a baby was growing. It would arrive by the year's end, or before.

The woman's face was like an oval serving plate, flashing at times, dull at others. Her eyes were two light brown buttons, a color I had rarely seen coupled with blond hair. She made a show of watching me hard, but could not fix her attention on me, her eyes darting about the room.

Handwritten annotations:

- Didn't know her employers were coming
- looked calm as a baby, even if not.
- 10 rich man and woman arrive,
- 15 prepares for them to come in
- 20 Employers = tall Her family = small
- 25 woman looks messy and is pregnant
- 30
- why did she not? - is she well looked after?
- type of metal
- metaphore - it is obvious richer than her family
- grief is why proud
- a large jug
- is she doing this?
- very important chat - grief impresses them
- knocked off
- to try and impress them.
- seems to be a real contrast between her and the family.

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By reviewing the left hand margin of the extract, pupils have used the summarising process to attempt to capture what is happening in each paragraph of the text.

However, Student B has achieved this much more successfully by picking out pertinent information which conveys accurate comprehension about the narrative.

On the other hand, Student A has simply picked out a word for in the first two paragraphs and has not provided enough context to confirm understanding. As a teacher, you would intervene and ask Student A to add further information to ensure there are no plot misconceptions.

The process of pupils asking questions can be seen on the right hand side of the extract. The question from Student A 'Why did she not cry as a baby?' and possible consideration 'is she well looked after?' conveys a confidence in making supported inferences, using the text in this way confirms their understanding.

The remaining annotations for both pupils return to the strategy of making connections. However, the annotations of Student A reveal a misunderstanding: they seem to interpret the 'wide eyes' of the child to be the eyes of the mother as the visitors come to the house. The teacher can correct this through live feedback and get her to connect the earlier references in the text.

