

Newspaper Highlighting Strengthens Textual Awareness

By Sheila Jones

Before you discard tonight's copy of your local paper, think about the advantages it offers learners, especially learners practicing their reading. And instead of just asking learners to simply read an article or two here and there, we should invest in an assortment of highlighters and try out one or all of the following activities:

- 1) Ask readers to locate the newspaper's name, highlight it in yellow, and then read it aloud.
- 2) Have the readers skim through headlines, and choose at least two of the most interesting articles. Then ask them to use a green highlighter to mark the titles of each selection. This not only helps in the recognition of different fonts and contrasts in their letter sizes, but also helps reinforce left to right skimming and word segment chunking.
- 3) Ask readers to highlight in orange the first sentence in each paragraph, and follow that with predictions about the content of the article. This may be expanded with an art activity as readers create an illustration to accompany the article and are asked to explain the illustration.
- 4) After locating the newspaper's Index, readers can highlight in blue the page number for the Comics page. Additionally, they are developing their research skills as they then find the Comics page. Younger readers can highlight in blue the dialogue bubbles, and can predict what may happen next in serialized comics. Older readers can focus on political cartoons for higher level inferential skills. [A good question might be: What underlying message do you think the author is trying to send to the reader?]
- 5) Returning to the Index, ask readers to find other, specific sections or pages. The weather page is usually in color and is excellent for caption reading with a good combination of texts and maps providing an opportunity for practice with comprehension connections between contrasting visual media. This practice will transfer to any tasks involving reading ads, graphics, figures, tables, and other types of illustrations.
- 6) Still working within the Index, have readers find the Letters to the Editor section. After highlighting the first sentence or two in a few letters and the first sentence or two in a commentary piece, readers should be able to identify the point of view of the writer, e.g. first, second, or third person. Often, standardized essay assignments provide prompts designed to elicit a first person point of view, but most students have more experience with traditional narratives written in third person. Writing a response to a letter-writer or an Editor provides practice with the first person point of view. Such responses also provide opportunities for revision and editing with an eye toward overall essay construction, supporting arguments, and coherence. If well reasoned and well written, these responses should certainly be mailed to the paper.

Certainly, traditional narrative and textbook reading serves an important role in helping readers develop speed and concentration (and endurance) for reading longer passages and selections, readers who want to improve their comprehension can gain a great deal by practicing at least one or two of the above strategies with each day's newspaper. And newspaper-style reading helps develop important scanning skills while offering readers a multitude of choices about which articles or sections to read, and is an invaluable source of explicit reading for readers at all ability levels.

Sheila M. Jones is a reading specialist at Lowes Island Elementary in Loudoun County. She has focused much of her teaching effort on kids with lower reading ability such as Second Language Learners, students with cognitive disabilities, and those less motivated to do well in school.