

## Covered cloze — teaching effective reading strategies

### What is it?

Covered cloze is a strategy for teaching effective reading strategies. It is designed for a teacher to use with the whole class or a small group of students. It involves reading in context and integrates the use of semantic (meaning), syntactic (grammar) and graphophonic (print) cues, making the use of each cuing system explicit while focusing on the meaning of what is read.

A cloze passage is one in which the text is presented with some words deleted. Readers use their knowledge of the text and their understanding of sentence structure to predict the “missing” words.

In covered cloze the words are not deleted but covered. Readers still use their knowledge of the text and their understanding of sentence structure to predict the covered words, but this time they are able to use their knowledge of letters and sounds to confirm or reconsider their predictions.

### Benefits of the strategy

If used effectively this strategy has numerous benefits, including:

- Reading skills are taught in context and other available cues, such as illustrations, can be used.
- An effective reading strategy using all three cuing systems: semantics, syntax and graphophonics is developed.
- The focus is on meaning with a sampling of the print used to confirm or reject and revise predictions.
- Skills developed are transferrable and directly applicable to any reading situation.
- Knowledge of word structure (spelling) is developed, including knowledge of irregularities when children discover discrepancies between the expected and actual spelling.
- Students develop the ability to recognise whether a word “looks right” and to identify the letters that distinguish one word from another.
- Students develop the ability to group letters into clusters and syllables when predicting words; e.g. “You think the word is ‘running’. What three letters can you see at the end of ‘running’?”
- Vocabularies can be expanded through discussions of synonyms and alternative words, including making comparisons between the author’s and children’s choice of words.
- Unfamiliar or “new” words become familiar, facilitating their transition into a bank of words recognised by sight.
- Discussion of strategies provides children with explicit knowledge of how to process words encountered in independent reading and arms them with the metalanguage to talk about it.
- Participation in a group reading task provides practice in a non-threatening situation which supports learners whether they could read the text independently or not.

### How does it work?

The teacher presents the text to the class, reading the title and discussing any introductory illustrations in order to engage students, create interest in the text and develop expectations of what the text might be about.

The teacher explains that:

- they, teacher and students, will read the story together
- some words in the story are covered
- they are to use their effective reading strategies to work out the words that are covered

and revises reading strategies with the students:

- *Does it make sense?*
- *Does it sound right?*
- *Does it look right?*

Teacher and students read the text together, informally discussing the text, asking questions and making predictions.

When a covered word is encountered, the teacher:

- stops the reading and asks the students, *“What do you think the word is?”*
- accepts any suggestion without offering judgement as to suitability or correctness
- with the class, tries out each suggested word in the sentence, asking,
  - *Does it make sense?*
  - *Does it sound right?*
- confirms with students which suggestions make sense and sound right
- asks students to identify the letters in the suggested word; e.g.
  - *If it is “x”, what would it begin with?*

or

- *What would it end with?*

and reveals the letter or letter group for each suggestion.

- if the letter is correct, asks:
  - *What would the next letter be?*
- if the letter is incorrect, says:
  - *So the word is not “x”. What else could it be? What word starts with this letter?*

When the entire word is revealed, the sentence is re-read and the reading continues.

Some words may require more or less discussion than others. Sometimes just one letter is enough to clinch the word. Sometimes more letters are required to differentiate between two suggestions. Other times a more detailed investigation and discussion of the spelling is needed (e.g. weight). However it is important to vary the approach with each word and not belabour the process, or children’s interest may be lost.