Session 5: Before Reading Text: Building Knowledge and Language

Session Summary

The more students know about a topic before they read, the more they will comprehend. Sometimes middle school students have little or no background knowledge about topics. This is true for both fiction and nonfiction. The teacher can help them improve comprehension by building background before students read.

Session Objectives

At the end of the session, teachers will be able to:

■ define mental models and understand their role in building knowledge, language, and comprehension.

■ use a Smart Chart to activate and build students' mental models.

■ learn to preview a text to anticipate places where students might struggle and provide appropriate support.

Note: To record your impressions of your Learning Snapshot visit, copy the whole page.

Learning Snapshot Question:

Which instructional strategies is the teacher using to help students build background before reading?

What to Look For

✔ Is there evidence of students using their personal background knowledge in their work or in conversations among peers or with the teacher?

✔ Are Smart Charts or KWL charts displayed in the classroom?

✔ Is the teacher encouraging students to articulate what they know about a topic before they begin to read?

✔ Is the teacher making sure that all students participate in the before-reading activities?

✔ Can students describe how they are using mental models to help them build comprehension?

Describe an incident you observed in which a student applied background knowledge to help comprehend a reading passage. Which strategy did the student employ?

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