Creating Active Readers
Tom Sutliff
Albemarle County Public Schools
Seventh Grade

Mr. Sutliff has chosen a story, **"The Landlady," by Roald Dalh** , from the adopted literature series, but he anticipates that it may be beyond the instructional reading level for some of his students. He also knows that making inferences and reading fluently are both challenging, so he designs a lesson using Readers' Theater and a graphic organizer to help improve both.

Preparing Students to Read and Infer
Mr. Sutliff decides to focus his lesson on making inferences, so he begins his lesson by asking students to predict based on the title, the author, and the pictures in the text. Notice that his students already know some other books the author has written and will be able to use this prior knowledge to enhance their comprehension.

Preparing Students to Read and Infer
Mr. Sutliff prepares his students with a definition and a contrast for inference. He will ask his students to pause frequently to write, discuss, and modify their inferences based on careful reading of the text.

Using Readers' Theater
Because he wants the story to be read aloud, Mr. Sutliff prepared a Readers' Theater script for his students. With such a procedure, all students can participate and Mr. Sutliff can incorporate a rehearsal for his students. In this way, the students can preview and prepare their lines, learn to pronounce and understand any tricky words, and get comfortable with the text before being asked to read aloud to the group. Notice in the two film segments below how students preview the script and select their roles.

Rehearsing Before Reading Aloud
Mr. Sutliff knows that all readers need to prepare before reading aloud to a group. He incorporates a rehearsal for his students and instructs them to circle their lines and study them. This is a very powerful strategy as it provides an opportunity for clarification of tricky words and sends a message to students that rereading is helpful. Notice how the students rehearse and seek help from Mr. Sutliff.

Sharing Expectations for Readers' Theater
Mr. Sutliff shares with his students his expectations for the Readers' Theater activity. He compares the readers' jobs to the voices on radio, but then more appropriately to the voices in an animated film, since students have more prior knowledge of that medium. He also instructs the listeners to keep their eyes on the text since this is, first and foremost, a reading activity. He reminds them that the major focus for the lesson is making inferences and that he will cue them when it is time to pause and write.

Reading and Making Inferences
In the first segment, notice that the students are reading, but when a miscue is made, nobody points it out. Most miscues do not mislead the reader or the listeners who are watching the text. In the second segment, the students use Mr. Sutliff's cues and the text they have just heard to infer.

Reading and Inferring
The students assigned to the second scene read, not perfectly in some cases, but nobody corrects minor miscues. Notice the slight lift of an eyebrow when a student recognizes his own miscue of ***every*** for ***very***. This kind of self-monitoring is often difficult to spot.

When the students finish the scene, Mr. Sutliff directs them to make inferences about the title character and the protagonist's choice. This narrow focus helps students, who are just learning to make inferences, trust their own interpretations.

Continuing to Make Inferences
The students write and discuss. When Mr. Sutliff hears what he feels may be an inference important to comprehension, he asks the student to circle that idea on his graphic organizer. The students read on and again when Mr. Sutliff wants students to pay attention to a detail in the story, which might lead them to infer, he asks the student to read the line again.

Discussing and Modifying Inferences
After students have read on, they pause again to write and discuss their inferences. They use the details from the story, the knowledge of the author's other books, and their shared ideas to infer. Mr. Sutliff continues to focus their thinking and to compliment them when they make reasonable inferences. The students and Mr. Sutliff make reference to the details in the story that help them infer what the author implied.

Notice, also that Mr. Sutliff asks the students to check or modify inferences made earlier in the story as new implications are read.

Gaining Confidence With Making Inferences
The students are nearing the end of the script and gaining confidence with their reading and the inferring. Miscues are ignored and meaning is comprehended. Mr. Sutliff asks the students to infer and then to revisit earlier inferences that now might need to be altered as the students learn new information from reading.

Finishing the Script
Mr. Sutliff takes his turn to participate. But when the script is finished he asks the students to record and discuss their inferences and interpretations before he gives his. Notice that since most of the students didn't recognize the clue of the bitter almonds, Mr. Sutliff does tell them what it implies. Faulty inferences are frequently a result of lack of background knowledge.

Inferring Characterization and Character Development
Mr. Sutliff now asks the students to focus on one of the characters and write about or draw him or her at the beginning of the story and at the end of the story. This too is a task which requires making inferences.

Assigning Homework and Reinforcement
Mr. Sutliff assigns another story for homework. He expects the students to apply more independently the strategies learned in class.