



**Talk About Reading** is a reading reminder excerpted from *Reading Reminders: Tools, Tips, and Techniques* by Jim Burke.

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# Talk About Reading

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## RATIONALE

We talk more than we will ever write or read. Conversation is one of the primary ways we make meaning: through sharing, asking, discussing, clarifying. As Jerome Bruner wrote somewhere, it is a human need “to share the objects of our attention with others.” Using talk for different purposes in different contexts allows students the important opportunity to figure out what they think by, in part, hearing what others think. Talking also helps a wide range of students whose verbal skills need practice and development. (See Reminders 93 and 94 about elaboration and reporting strategies). ESL students, for example, need to hear how English is used and have the chance to practice it for themselves in authentic academic contexts if they are to develop the academic literacy they need to succeed. Talking about reading also brings energy and vitality into the classroom as individual viewpoints are expressed.

## WHAT TO DO

- Encourage various configurations of classroom talk. Have students
  - Pair up to briefly discuss an idea that the class is studying in order to make connections and meaning.
  - Huddle into small groups for a discussion or to use talk for a specified purpose.
  - Gather around as a whole class to share what was said in individual groups.
- Use talk to explain, explore, share, comprehend, solve, process, and appreciate.
- Use talk in both formal and informal contexts to help students better understand and allow the teacher to evaluate understanding and performance.
- Sequence learning so that each stage prepares the student for the increased intellectual demands of the next. Stages include

I asked the kids to say what they thought about the story, and one after the other, they did. Then I was ready to move on—but they wouldn't let me. They kept talking. I wasn't refereeing. They stopped raising their hands. They talked to each other. At one point I was going to say something, but I decided no: keep quiet, I told myself. Be glad they are talking to each other, and to Tillie Olsen. That's what it was—a conversation between twenty-six Atlanta kids . . . and Tillie Olsen.

ROBERT COLES FROM *THE CALL OF STORIES*

