

Before Reading – Setting Purpose



PROBLEMATIC SITUATIONS

What? A problematic situation is a scenario presented to students to activate background knowledge and focus attention to key elements of a reading or lesson.

Why? Problematic situations can increase student interest and motivation to find out if solutions will be confirmed. It also reinforces the practice of prediction, a key comprehension strategy.

How? Develop a situation that provides students with enough relevant information so that they are able to identify key ideas in passage or presented material. The context of the problem must be clearly defined.

Pose the problem to students in cooperative groups. Have them generate possible results or solutions and then explain why their choices are appropriate.

Group selects most likely result or solution.

Students test their solutions by reading or considering presented materials. They then compare their predictions and discuss whether student solutions might be better than the author's.

Adapted from Buehl, D. (2001). *Classroom strategies for interactive learning*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Examples:

Language Arts – Before reading Richard Connell's "The Most Dangerous Game"

A man is trapped on a small island covered with jungle vegetation. He has a 3-hour start on someone who is trying to kill him. The killer is well armed, but the man has only a knife. The killer will be pursuing the man with trained hunting dogs. What can this man do to try to save himself?

(Buehl, 2001)

Health/Science – Before reading a passage on nutrition and how different nutrients affect the body

You are the conditioning coach for a national Olympics team. Two athletes come to you for advice about what foods they should be eating to stay in the best performing condition. One is a 180-pound sprinter, the other is a 275-pound heavyweight wrestler. What training suggestions would you give each athlete?

(Buehl, 2001)

Social Studies – Recession

A recession is when business activity slows down for at least six months. It is characterized by a decline in the gross domestic product and can include rising unemployment and a decrease in the standard of living. The United States has experienced several recessions in its history. Various administrations have attempted to shorten or end recessions by stimulating the economy. These attempts have relied on a variety of strategies.

What strategies would you want the current President to take if the nation was facing a recession?

(From Doty, J.K., Cameron, G.N., & Barton, M.L. (2003). *Teaching reading in social studies: A supplement to teaching reading in the content areas*. Aurora, CO: McRel.)

Science – Global Warming

Some gases produced on Earth are helpful to the environment. Carbon dioxide exists naturally in the atmosphere; it covers the Earth and traps heat from the sun. Without carbon dioxide in the air, the temperature on the Earth would be too cold for living things. However, because people are burning vast amounts of fossil fuels, huge amounts of carbon dioxide are being released into the air. By 2060, some scientists predict that average temperatures will rise 1.5 to 4.5 degrees Celsius. This could mean droughts, severe storms, and flooding. What steps would you take to prevent this situation?

(From Barton, M.L. & Jordan, D.L. (2001). *Teaching reading in science*. Aurora, CO: McRel.)

Math – Package Design

Your firm has been selected to design a new package for the STARBAR Candy Company. The company is planning to reduce by 10% the size of the current candy bar it sells. The dimensions of the current unwrapped candy bar are 6 inches by 2 inches by 1 inch. The company must reduce the size to cut costs, but management recognizes that reducing the size may affect sales. Your task is to design the packaging so that it will minimize the appearance of the reduction in size. Write your response in the form of a proposal to the chairman of the board of STARBAR Candy Company.

(From Barton, M.L. & Heidema, C. (2002). *Teaching reading in mathematics*. Aurora, CO: McRel.)