Classroom Conversations Research Study
ELA Content Module 1, Session 6

Excerpt: "The Fun They Had"

Isaac Asimov, 1951

Margie even wrote about it that night in her diary. On the page headed May 17, 2157, she wrote, "Today Tommy found a real book!" It was a very old book. Margie's grandfather once said that when he was a little boy his grandfather told him that there was a time when all stories were printed on paper.

They turned the pages, which were yellow and crinkly, and it was awfully funny to read words that stood still instead of moving the way they were supposed to--on a screen, you know. And then, when they turned back to the page before, it had the same words on it that it had had when they read it the first time.

"Gee," said Tommy, "what a waste. When you're through with the book, you just throw it away, I guess. Our television screen must have a million books on it, and it's good for plenty more. I wouldn't throw it away."

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Conversation 1: Strategies Approach

Teacher: Oh, good. Stop there, honey. This is a good place to stop and check our understanding. What might be confusing here? Holly.

Holly: On the page headed May 17, 2157.

Teacher: Oh, 2157. That might be confusing to a person reading this and what could you do to help yourself understand 2157?

Student: Ask a question.

Kyle: Maybe you could like to tell if it's a date or what. Just like if it's a date, you could um, see how many years from now it is.

Teacher: In the future, good. You made an inference. Did the author say this is taking place in the future? Did the author state that?

Students: No.

Teacher: But yet you knew it, didn't you, Kyle?

Kyle: Yeah.

Teacher: Based on what you read. And then you even did some work in your mind, trying to figure out how far into the future it was so that was good. Is anyone in the room confused about anything we read here? What did you think about that business with the books having print?

Student: I was confused about moving on the television screen…

Student: Yeah, that one.

Student: …the part when it said they turned the pages, which were yellow and crinkly, and it wasn't, it was awfully funny to read the words that stood still instead of moving the way that they were supposed to on a screen.

Teacher: That was confusing to you, huh? What did you do to clear up your confusion?

Student: Ask a question, read on, reread.

Teacher: You could do…which one would you pick?

Student: Ask a question.

Teacher: Yeah. What would you be asking yourself?

Student: What the heck are they talking about?

Source: Beck, I., Blake, R., and McKeown, M. (2009). Rethinking Reading Comprehension Instruction: A Comparison of Instruction for Strategies and Content Approaches. University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA: International Reading Association.

Conversation 2: Content-Based Approach

Teacher: So what's, what's this all about? What's going on here? What's going on? Tajae, what's going on?

Tajae: Tommy found a book and they're looking in it and they're saying the pages are crinkly and stuff and they're thinking that if you read the book, you can go back in and it will be totally different about it but it's all still the same and they say that after you read it one time, you might as well throw it away cause you'll, cause if you read it and you know what it's about, if [inaudible] TV one cause if you turn on the TV and then you watch something, the next day it won't be on the same page.

Teacher: Yeah, all that's very true. Catherine.

Catherine: It's in the future. It says that it's 2157, so the book is really old because now, like in the future, it's saying that they don't read, um, books. They don't read books. They read like on television screens and they're shocked because the book is really old and stuff.

Teacher: Yeah, and you, you added to what Tajae already said. Yeah, this is set in the future. And the book and the screen are two totally different things.

Student: Um, the words don't, um, move around when they're like…the way, um, they think they're, they were supposed to.

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