DARTs

'DARTs' stands for Directed Activities Related to Text. DARTs provide an alternative to traditional comprehension questions. It is often possible to complete a comprehension task without fully understanding the text, but using DARTs encourages EAL learners to engage with texts in a way that promotes greater understanding. DARTs are appropriate for fiction or non-fiction texts, and can be used to check the learner has understood the main points of a specific topic. They can provide an opportunity to go beyond the literal, and look at meaning that is implied in the text rather than overtly stated, and support learners learning how to reconstruct and interrogate texts.

As well as being useful for independent learning, DARTs can also be carried out by pairs or small groups of learners and this turns them into active, collaborative learning situations giving opportunities for exploratory talk. (*Read more about collaborative learning*)

Types of DARTs

There are two main types of DARTs:

DARTs using modified texts (the teacher modifies the original text, e.g. taking out words, phrases or sentences, cutting the text into segments):

- Gap-filling - missing words, phrases or sentences
- Sequencing – words, sentences or short paragraphs
- Grouping segments of text according to categories
- Completing a table, grid, flow chart etc.
- Labelling a diagram
- Predicting – writing the next step or an end to the text

DARTs using unmodified texts (the teacher photocopies the original text so the learner can annotate or manipulate the photocopy), e.g.

- Underline or highlight particular sections of text (descriptive language, nouns, connectives, topic sentences etc.)
- Break the text into chunks and devise a heading for each chunk
- Use the information in the text to draw a table, diagram, flow chart etc.

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- Devise questions about the texts – pairs can devise questions for each other

Practical ideas for using DARTs

✔ **Top tip:** Choose the right activity to meet the learning intention

? **To consider:** Collaboration encourages purposeful talk: if learners have to explain to others, it helps their own understanding

To help learners to see how a text is structured:

- Cut up a text for learners to sequence correctly.
- Blank out words (e.g. nouns, verbs, every tenth word, etc) for learners to decide what to put in (also known as cloze procedure).
- Ask learners to think of a sub-heading for each paragraph to show they have understood its meaning.
- Write labels or annotations for a diagram.
- Change the text into a picture or flow chart.

To help learners choose and analyse information:

- Highlight key words in a text.
- Use different colours to highlight different characters' views; or speech and action ready for converting into a play script.
- Recast information using graphic organisers, for example: tables, Venn diagrams, hierarchy pyramids, life cycles, tree diagrams.
- Transform text into other formats, e.g. letter, instructions, diary, article, advert, web page, storyboard.

Good for EAL, Good for All: Can I use DARTs with the whole class?

Yes, they support everyone. They aid comprehension of texts and can encourage speaking and listening. They deepen understanding of the language features of different genres, which can be a model for learners preparing for writing.

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