

First Lines

Background

First Lines is a strategy in which students read the beginning sentences from assigned readings and make predictions about the content of what they're about to read. This pre-reading technique helps students focus their attention on what they can tell from the first lines of a story, play, poem, or other text. As students read the text in its entirety they discuss, revisit and/or revise their original predictions.

Benefits

The First Lines strategy is a versatile and simple technique for improving students' reading comprehension. It requires students to 1) anticipate what the text is about before they begin reading, and 2) activate prior knowledge. First Lines helps students become active participants in learning and can include writing as a way of organizing predictions and/or thoughts generated from discussions. Monitoring each student's predictions provides teachers with information about how much the students already know about the topic. This allows teachers to tailor instruction accordingly.

Create and use the strategy

Choose the assigned reading and introduce the text to the students. Then describe the purpose of the strategy and provide guidelines for discussions about predictions. Explain that students will be looking at the first sentences from texts that they will be reading during the class or unit. You may wish to copy these first lines separately and give them to each student. As with all strategy instruction, you should model the procedure to ensure that students understand how to use the strategy. Monitor and support students as they work.

Create and use the strategy

To use the First Lines strategy, teachers should:

1. Ask students to begin reading the first line of the assigned text.
2. Ask students to make predictions for the reading based on what they see in the first sentence.
3. Explain that students should be ready to volunteer the ideas for their predictions.
4. Remind students that there is not a "right" or "wrong" way to make predictions about a text, but emphasize that readers should be able to support their predictions from the information in the sentence.
5. Engage the class in discussion about each student's predictions.

6. Ask students to review their predictions and to note any changes or additions to their predictions in a journal or on recording sheets before reading the text. Students might work in groups or individually.
7. Encourage students to return to their original predictions after reading the text, assessing their original predictions and building evidence to support those predictions which are accurate. Students can create new predictions as well.