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Students' learning problems in reading comprehension

According to the TSA results, our students did not perform well in the following skills:

1. connection between ideas
2. guessing meaning of unfamiliar words
3. locating specific information
4. making inferences

Focus Areas

1. To improve reading skills, strategies, attitudes and behavior in tackling comprehension questions

2. To set quality questions that allow students to practise inference skills

   a. reasoning skills. E.g. Primary 6 making inferences about causes and effects

   b. guessing meanings of guessable words

3. To align learning and teaching with assessment

4. To ensure students understand the success criteria and practise self/peer assessment accordingly

The HOT Questions

Longman Elect (6A Ch.3)

- It's about a girl , Kaisong and her family who
   face the living problems
  in Loas.

Part A. Mark and circle the answers in the textbook.

Question	Answer	Question-Answer Relationship strategy (QAR)	Question type
1. What are you reading?	Magazine article	The right there (explicit)	Factual
2. How often is the magazine published?	Monthly	The right there (explicit)	Factual
3. Where is Loas?	Southeast Asia	The right there (explicit)	Factual
4. What food does Kaisong eat?	Tiny frogs and beetles	The right there (explicit)	Factual
5. Who do you think does the work in Kaisong's family?	Kaisong (and her sister)	Think and search (Implicit)	Inference (only collecting water & firewood mentioned in the text)
6. Are her neighbours rich or poor? Why?	Poor. Cannot help the girl because the land is too dry and they can grow very little food.	The right there (explicit)	Factual

Primary 5 & 6
*This section has become
a must-have now!*

Part B
Guess meaning of the unfamiliar words. Copy the clues you used.

New words	Meaning	Clue
tiny *(Line 5)*	very small	• The hut is very crowded. • It is only the size of a double bed.
sore *(Line 30)*	bad / painful	• … made them cry • … may become blind

Part C
Understanding connection between ideas (Find out reasons for the problems)

	Problems in Kaisong's family	Reasons (Why?)
1.	e.g. They have not enough money to buy food or medicine .	No __animals__ or ___rice___ fields for them earn a living. (can't earn any money)
2.	Her home is very crowded.	It is only the size of a double bed. / She lives in a tiny hut.
3.	Kaisong's back hurt_.	The water buckets are too heavy for her. Kaisong needs to collect firewood and get water from the well.
4.	People in Kaisong's family often get sick.	They do not get enough food & drinking water is so dirty.

Pay attention to the **connecting words** that show cause and effect: **so**, **because**

What happened

- Students had problems understanding the cause-and-effect relationship ("problem and reason").

- Teachers needed to specify the location of the answers. Some students simply copied the model answers given.

More practice was needed

An article on typhoons

Read the article about typhoons and answer the questions.

Typhoon

1   What are typhoons?
A typhoon is a storm that moves around the Pacific Ocean. A storm that moves around the Atlantic Ocean is called a hurricane. A storm that moves over the Indian Ocean is called a cyclone. Typhoons, hurricanes and cyclones are formed in different places so **5** they have different names. A meteorologist will often give a typhoon a name so it is easy to remember and measure how strong it is. An easy name helps reporters and TV channels to warn people about the typhoon. A meteorologist is a person that studies weather. Typhoons are measured by how strong the wind blows.

What causes typhoon?
10 Typhoons are caused when warm wind and c____ wind that blows to different places. Typhoon typhoon moves to a city or town, the people

What problems do typhoons create?
Typhoons cause many problems when it comes and goes. The strong wind blows things away. There are floods in the street because it may rain very heavily. A flood on a farm **15** kills the **crops** so there will be too little food after a typhoon. Lots of rain on mountains makes landslides. Landslides carry mud and water down the mountain. They wash down houses so some people are **homeless** after a typhoon. Besides, the mud makes drinking water dirty. Many people often drink dirty water and get sick.

How can we prepare for typhoons?
20 A typhoon cannot be stopped because it ____ re and keep safe. People should stay indoors in a typ____ ying objects. Cities can prepare for typhoons by build____ not be blown away.

What problems do typhoons create?

because, so

Learning objectives:

- Identify the problems caused by a typhoon.

- Find out the reasons for the problems by recognizing the connecting words, 'so' and 'because', in a sentence.

- Find out the reasons for the problems even when the connecting words are NOT used.

- Present cause-and-effect information using the "problem and reason" activity sheet.

Communicate learning targets with students

Let's read an article about typhoons.

Silent Reading (First Reading):

1. Read the text silently.

2. Concentrate on what you are reading.

3. Try to guess the meaning of new words by using the known words around them.

4. Create pictures/images as you read.

5. Do parts A and B of the activity sheet.

Part A
Answer the questions. Mark and circle the answer clues in the article.

1.

    1.   What is a typhoon? (*the right there* Q)

- A typhoon is a storm that moves around the Pacific Ocean.

1.   Why do storms have different names? (t*hink and search* Q)

  •That is because they are formed in different places. (Students need to connect storms with the 3 types of storms mentioned in order to locate the answer.)

1.   Who gives names to typhoons? (*the right there* Q)

- A meteorologist gives names to typhoons.

1.   Why are there typhoons? *Think and search Q*

- There are typhoons when warm wind and cold wind mixes. (The wording used in the text are not the same as those used in the question.

“The right there”
+
“Think and Search”

Part B
Guess word meaning. Write down the clues you used.

Line No.:	New word	Meaning	Clue
Line 16	crops	food (any answers in relation to crops such as rice, vegetables. All should be accepted.	a flood on a farm kills the crop so there will be too little food.
Line 19	homeless	people who have no home to live	Mud and water washed houses away. Homeless, -less means without

Part C
Fill in the table below to show what **problems** typhoons cause and the **reasons** for them.

Natural Disaster	Problem	Reason
Typhoon	E.g. blows things away	strong wind
	1. heavy rain	a flood / flooding
	2. too little food	crops killed by a flood
	3. landslides	lots of rains / heavy rain
	4. makes people homeless	mud and water / (landslides) wash away houses
	5. people get sick	people drink dirty water because of the mud

Problems teachers faced

1. Students had problems identifying the problems and their causes.
2. Even teachers had different answers for the questions of part C. For example landslides can be the problem caused by a typhoon but it can also be a reason for making people homeless.

What problems do typhoons make?

Typhoons cause many problems when it arrives and after it leaves. The strong wind **blows things away**. There are **floods** in the streets **because** of the **heavy rain**. A **flood** on a farm **kills the crops so** there will be **too little food**. **Lots of rain** on mountains makes **landslides**. Mud and water washes into homes **so** some people are **homeless**. The mud **makes drinking water dirty**. Many people often drink **dirty water** and **get sick**.

What teachers did to solve the problems

1. Discussed possible answers before the lessons.

2. Predicted how students came up with their answers and the questions they might raise.

3. Added easy-to-understand examples (the bridging questions) to help students grasp the concepts of cause and effect (problem and reason).

Using bridging questions
(Easy-to-understand examples)

1 Mary was late for school.

Mary missed the bus.

Mary was late for school because she missed the bus.

Mary missed the bus so she was late for school.

1 Mary was late for school.

She missed the bus.

Problem (bad situation)	Reason (Why?)
Mary was late for school.	She missed the bus.

Students need to learn that even when the connecting words are **NOT** used, the **connection of ideas** are **implicitly shown**. They need to **read and think** to get the answers right.

Using bridging questions (Easy-to-understand examples)

Example	Read the each pair of sentences carefully. Find out which is the problem and which is its reason.	
1.	Mary was late for school. (problem) Mary missed the bus. (reason)	Easy
2.	Tom eats little food. Tom is too thin.	Easy
3.	The weather is too dry. People can't grow the crops.	Easy
4.	Lily can't take a shower. There is no water supply in the building. Lily is dirty.	More challenging

A more challenging question

Lily can't take a shower. There is no water supply in the building. Lily is dirty.

Problem (bad situation)	Reason (Why?)

What are the answers?

4 Lily can't take a shower. There is no water supply in the building. Lily is dirty.
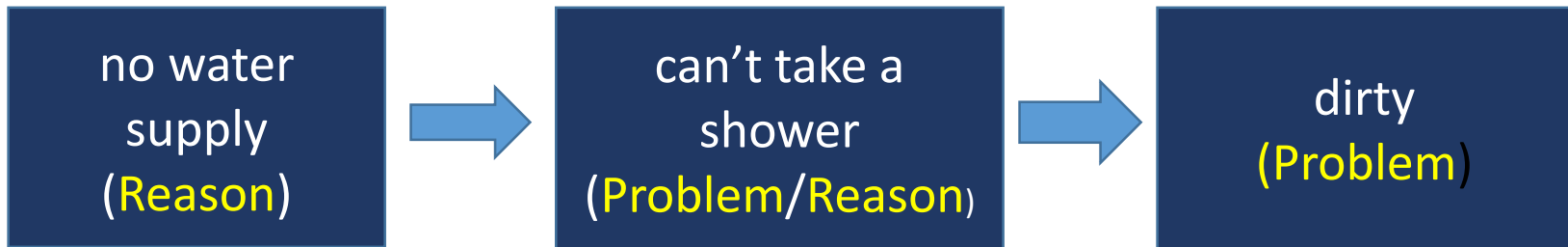
Problem (bad situation)	Reason (Why?)
Lily is dirty.	Lily can't take a shower.
Lily can't take a shower.	There is no water supply in the building.

Example 4:

Lily can't take a shower. There is no water supply in the building. She is dirty.

no water supply (Reason)	→	can't take a shower (Problem/Reason)	→	dirty (Problem)

During the teaching process, we teachers

- accepted all the possible answers and sensible guesses;

- guided students to think aloud to consolidate the process of figuring out the answers;

- always remembered we were teaching "reasoning", and guiding students to make inference using known knowledge was the target mission.

- Made students see that a 'problem' may also be a 'reason' for another 'problem'.

Work samples of students with moderate levels of English

Part C. According to the article, what problems does the typhoon cause? Read the article again and complete the table below.

Natural Disaster	Problems	Reasons
Typhoon	1. heavy rain	dirty water
	2. landslide	lots of rain
	3. floods	heavy rain
	4. homeless	strong wind
	5. kills the crops	flood
	6. dirty water	get sick

Part C. According to the article, what problems does the typhoon cause? Read the article again and complete the table below.

Natural Disaster	Problems	Reasons
Typhoon	1. There are floods of the heavy rain in the streets.	
	2. There will be too little food	a flood on farm hills lots of rain on mountains
	3. Makes landslides	
	4. Mud and water washes into homes	some people are homeless
	5. get sick	the mud makes drinking water dirty
	6. The strong wind blows things away	

Work samples of students with moderate levels of English

Part C. According to the article, what problems does the typhoon cause? Read the article again and complete the table below.

Natural Disaster	Problems	Reasons
Typhoon	1. floods;	heavy rain,
	2. little food.	floods.
	3. landslides.	lots of rain on mountains makes landslides.
	4. people are homeless	Mud and water washes into home.
	5. Mud and water washed into homes.	some people homeless, (not counted as reason
	6. get sick!	dirty water.

(Repeated idea)

Part C. According to the article, what problems does the typhoon cause? Read the article again and complete the table below.

Natural Disaster	Problems	Reasons	
Typhoon	1. They have different names.	Typhoons, hurricanes and cyclones are formed in different places.	They are not the problems and reasons.
	2. There are floods.	Of the heavy rain in the streets.	
	3. There will be too little food.	A flood on a farm kills the crops.	
	4. The crops are killed	A flood.	
	5. Too little food for people	The crops are killed	Repeated.
	6. It doesn't blow away.	Cities can prepare for typhoons by building stronger houses	

Not the problem.

It is the solution.

Reflection on teaching and assessing higher order reading skills

1. **Bridge the gap** : Help students grasp difficult concepts using easy-to-understand examples such as 'cause and effect' and 'problem and solution' relationships.

2. **Value practice**: Avoid urging students to complete the whole exercise and disclosing the answers too soon. Assign students to do just a few questions in class and make sure they learn the skills of getting the answers. Allow students to practise the skills they learned after the lesson within the day.

3. **Teach learning skills**: Teach students the skills of assessing their own learning outcomes. For example, ask students to combine the answers in the two columns using 'because' or 'so' to see if the ideas are connected sensibly with each another.

Reflection on teaching and assessing higher order reading skills (con't):

4. Boost motivation: Praise students' effort of trying to answer questions and explaining their thoughts rather than just their intelligence to get the right answers.

5. Encourage trial and error: Let students know the value of mistakes. Instead of simply writing down the correct answers, teachers should also highlight the skill notes that help to get the right answer.