

that's the way that *air* is spelled in England!  
Now, ladies and gentlemen, is that the truth...or is it a lie?

Students will be directed to write their responses on paper and put them in a specially marked box in the media center. If they believe the book talk, they should write "The *Jane Eyre* book talk was the truth" and then sign their name. If they think it was a lie, they should write "The *Jane Eyre* book talk was a lie. *Jane Eyre* is really about..." and then sign their name. The lucky winner of the weekly drawing will receive a prize.

You too can market books effectively and have a great time doing so. At the close of each book talk/marketing campaign, I tell students that the books I have described will be on reserve *just for them*, on a *first come-first served basis*, and for a *limited time only*!

*Shiflett is a reading resource specialist at Turkey Creek Middle School in Plant City, Florida, USA.*

## Previewing challenging reading selections for ESL students

Hsiu-Chieh Sophia Chen  
Michael F. Graves

At the present time, over 2 million students enrolled in U.S. schools speak English as their second language, and this group of students is growing several times faster than the general school population. They offer a tremendous resource of cultural and linguistic diversity that can enrich classrooms. At the same time, many of these students, those who are less than fully proficient in English, pose a considerable challenge to teachers.

Guiding these students toward successful reading experiences is a task that more and more teachers face.

Here we describe a simple, easily implemented, and empirically validated procedure that we have found to be very effective—previewing. We describe a preview, give an example, suggest why previews are effective, summarize the results of a study validating previewing for ESL students, and conclude with some suggestions for using previews in your classroom.

### What is a preview?

A preview is introductory material presented to students immediately before reading in order to provide them with specific information about the contents of the selection. Typically, previews begin with a few statements or rhetorical questions designed to catch readers' interest and relate the selection they are about to read to that with which they are familiar. Next comes a brief discussion question to elicit some student involvement. After that comes an overview of the upcoming selection—the selection is named, the characters are introduced, and the plot is described up to its climax. Finally, students are given brief directions for reading the selection.

### A sample preview

Following is a preview for O. Henry's "The Gift of the Magi," one we have used with college-age students reading English as a second language.

I imagine that we all have experienced the problem of finding a nice gift for someone we love or like very much. How would you feel and what would you do if you could not afford a nice gift for a close friend or person you loved?

The story which you are about to read is called "The Gift of the Magi." In the story, you will meet a young couple, Jim and Della. Della was a sweet and caring girl, and in Della's eyes, Jim was a man of quietness and value. Della and Jim loved each other very much. But Jim and Della had a problem. Jim's income was \$20 per

week. Della did not work, and the furnished flat they lived in cost \$8 per week. In short, Jim and Della were poor and had very little extra money to spend.

However, they did have two things which they were very proud of. One was Jim's gold watch, which he had inherited from his father; the other was Della's beautiful brown hair, which was very long.

It was the day before Christmas. Della wanted to buy a present for Jim, something fine and rare, something that was worthy of the honor of being his wife. Della was counting all the pennies that she had been able to save. There was only \$1.87, far too little to buy something nice for Jim. This made her cry.

After a while, Della stopped crying. Suddenly, she whirled from the window and stood before the mirror between the windows of the room. She pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length. Then she went out and stopped in front of a shop where the sign read: "Mme. Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds." After reading the sign, Della went into the shop.

Now, read the story and find out why Della went into this shop, what she did there, and what happened later to the young couple on this Christmas Eve.

As this example indicates, previews are substantial introductions and overviews to the upcoming selection. They tell students a good deal about what they are about to read. Because of this, previews serve as a very sturdy scaffold to support students' reading.

### Why is previewing effective?

The use of previews is supported by common sense and by several cognitive theories. The model Keith Stanovich describes in "Toward an Interactive-Compensatory Model of Reading" (1980, *Reading Research Quarterly*, 16, pp. 32–71) is one such theory. According to this well-known model, reading is an interactive process in which the reader uses both bottom-up and top-down processing and in which having additional information of one sort can compensate for lacking information of another sort.

Previews provide readers with top-down semantic and structural information before reading, and this can compensate for some of the information they may not acquire from bottom-up processing of the text.

Further support for previewing comes from Sandra McCormick's "Effects of Previews on More Skilled and Less Skilled Readers' Comprehension of Expository Text" (1989, *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 21, pp. 219–239) in which McCormick suggests that previews are helpful because the questions or directions in previews imply what is significant and can elicit predictions and help students relate text information to prior knowledge. Additional support comes from Janice Dole, Sheila Valencia, Eunice Ann Greer, and James L. Wardrop's "Effects of Two Types of Prereading Instruction on the Comprehension of Narrative and Expository Text" (1991, *Reading Research Quarterly*, 26, pp. 142–156) in which the authors point out that previewing is particularly effective because it focuses students' attention on only the most important information and because it includes explicit instruction.

### Our recent study

In a recently completed study, we investigated the effects of previewing on Taiwanese college students' comprehension of U.S. short stories and on their attitudes toward receiving previews. A complete and more technical report on the study is given in "Effects of Previewing and Providing Background Knowledge on Taiwanese College Students' Comprehension of American Short Stories" (1995, *TESOL Quarterly*, 29, pp. 663–686).

Results on a short-answer test showed that students receiving the previews scored over 40% higher than students who did not receive them. That is a substantial improvement, a gain in comprehension that could make the difference between frustration and success. Results of a questionnaire indicated that students felt quite positive about receiving the previews. For example, 81% indicated that previews should be given before most difficult stories, and 79% indicated that knowing the characters helped them understand the stories. Also, 76% reported that the previews as a whole helped them understand the stories, and 67% reported that the previews invited them to find out what happened in the stories.

### Using previews with second-language students

The results of our work with previewing are straightforward and have definite implications for classroom teachers. Previews offer a promising option for teachers with second-language students in their classrooms to use in helping students read English texts. Because previews are relatively easy to prepare and take little class time to present, they can be used quite frequently when ESL students face challenging texts.

In the study we just mentioned, the previews were presented in English. For students whose oral English skills make it unlikely that they would profit from a preview in English, it may sometimes be useful to present previews in students' native language. In fact, we recently found very positive results in a study in which Taiwanese college students received previews of

upcoming U.S. short stories in Chinese and then read the stories in English.

Of course, previews should not be used all of the time. Teaching methods should be selected to fit particular situations. Thus, such techniques as previewing, providing background knowledge, preteaching vocabulary, and other sorts of prereading assistance can be effective. Just which techniques to use in a particular situation depends on the selection to be read, the students who will read it, and the purposes for reading it, as explained in Michael Graves and Bonnie Graves's *Scaffolding Reading Experiences: Designs for Student Success* (1994, Christopher-Gordon).

To sum up, previewing provides support for second-language students who are dealing with challenging selections. As students become better readers of English, previews generally become less necessary. At the same time, whenever upcoming selections are likely to be difficult for students, previewing is one viable option to increase their comprehension and enjoyment of what they read, which will greatly facilitate students' becoming accomplished readers. As Rebecca Constantino points out in the title of a recent *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* article, "Learning To Read in a Second Language Doesn't Have To Hurt" (1995, p. 68). If we provide students with appropriate scaffolding when they are reading challenging texts, it won't hurt; and reading English will become the pleasurable and rewarding experience it should be.

Chen teaches at Tamkang University, Tamsui, Taiwan. Graves teaches at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, USA.