

Extract from: *Tell Me: Children, Reading and Talk with The Reading Environment*, by Aidan Chambers, published by The Thimble Press, UK, 2011. Pages 177 to 181.
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THE FRAMEWORK

WARNING: The 'Tell me' approach is *not* a mechanical textbook programme. It is not intended that readers of any age should be given lists of questions and be required to answer them one after another in speech or in writing.

The following list is intended solely for the teacher's own convenience and should not even be shown to students. It is provided only as an aid to memory. It is not meant to be slavishly followed. Questions should be rephrased to suit the readers involved.

The 'main' question, printed in italics, is followed by subsidiary or follow-on questions. Throughout, the word 'book' is used in place of story, poem, or whatever other more specific name applies to the text in hand.

Tell Me ... The Basic Questions

Was there anything you liked about this book?

What especially caught your attention?

What would you have liked more of?

Was there anything you disliked?

Were there parts that bored you?

Did you skip parts? Which ones?

If you gave up, where did you stop and what stopped you?

Was there anything that puzzled you or you thought strange?

Was there anything that you'd never found in a book before?

Was there anything that took you completely by surprise?

Did you notice any apparent inconsistencies?

Were there any patterns – any connections – that you noticed?

The General Questions

When you first saw the book, even before you read it, what kind of book did you think it was going to be?

What made you think this?

Now you've read it, is it as you expected?

Have you read other books like it?

How is this one the same?

How is it different?

Have you read this book before? [If so:] Was it different this time?

Did you notice anything this time you didn't notice the first time?

Did you enjoy it more or less?

Because of what happened to you when reading it again, would you recommend other people to read it more than once, or isn't it worth it?

While you were reading, or now when you think about it, were there words or phrases or other things to do with the language that you liked? Or didn't like?

You know how, when people speak, they often use some words or phrases or talk in a way that you recognize as theirs: are some words or phrases used like that in this book?

Have you noticed anything special about the way language is used in this book?

If the writer asked you what could be improved in the book, what would you say?

[Alternatively] If you had written this book, how would you have made it better?

Has anything that happens in this book ever happened to you?

In what ways was it the same or different for you?

Which parts in the book seem to you to be most true-to-life?

Did the book make you think differently about your own similar experience?

When you were reading, did you 'see' the story happening in your imagination?

Which details - which passages - helped you 'see' it best?

Which passages stay in your mind most vividly?

How many different stories [kinds of story] can you find in this story? Was this a book you read quickly or slowly? In one go, or in separate sessions?

Would you like to read it again?

What will you tell your friends about this book?

What won't you tell them because it might spoil the book for them? Or might mislead them about what it is like?

Do you know people who you think would especially like it?

What would you suggest I tell other people about it that will help them decide whether they want to read it or not?

Which people would be the ones who should read it?

Older than you? Younger?

How should I give it to them? For example, should I read it aloud or tell them about it and let them read it for themselves?

Is it a good thing to talk about it after we've all read it?

We've listened to each other's thoughts and heard all sorts of things that each of us has noticed. Are you surprised by anything someone else said?

Has anyone said anything that has changed your mind in any way about this book?
Or helped you understand it better?

Tell me about the things people said that struck you most.

When you think about the book now, after all we've said, what is the most important thing about it for you?

Does anyone know anything about the writer? Or about how the story came to be written? Or where? Or when? Would you like to find out?

The Special Questions

How long did it take the story to happen?

Did we find out about the story in the order in which the events actually happened?

When you talk about things that happen to you, do you always tell your story in the order in which they happened?

Or are there sometimes reasons why you don't?

What are the reasons?

Are there parts of the story that took a long time to happen but were told about quickly or in a few words? And are there parts that happened very quickly but took a lot of space to tell about?

Were there parts that took the same time to tell as they would have taken to happen?

Where did the story happen?

Did it matter where it was set? Could it just as well have been set anywhere? Or could it have been better set somewhere else? Did you think about the place as you were reading? Are there passages in the book that are especially about the place where the story is set? What did you like, or dislike, about them?

Was the setting interesting in itself? Would you like to know more about it?

Which character interested you the most?

Is that character the most important in the story? Or is it really about someone else?

Which character(s) didn't you like?

Did any of the characters remind you of people you know? Or remind you of characters in other books?

Was there anyone not mentioned in the story but without whom it couldn't have happened?

Can you think of any reason why s/he doesn't appear or isn't mentioned?

Would the story have been different if s/he had appeared or been mentioned?

Who was telling - who was narrating - the story? Do we know? And how do we know?

Is the story told in the first person (and if so, who is the person)? Or the third person? By someone we know about in the story or by someone we know or don't know about outside the story?

What does the person telling the story - the narrator – think or feel about the characters? Does s/he like or dislike them?

How do you know?

Does the narrator approve or disapprove of the things that happen and that the characters do? Do you approve or disapprove of them?

Think of yourself as a spectator. With whose eyes did you see the story? Did you only see what one character in the story saw, or did you see things sometimes as one character saw them, and sometimes as another, and so on?

Were you, as it were, inside the head of one of the characters, only knowing what s/he knew, or did the story take you inside a number of characters?

Did we ever get to know what the characters were thinking about? Were we ever told what they were feeling? Or was the story told all the time from outside the characters, watching what they did and hearing what they said, but never knowing what they were thinking or feeling?

When you were reading the story did you feel it was happening now? Or did you feel it was happening in the past and being remembered? Can you tell me anything in the writing that made you feel like that?

Did you feel as if everything was happening to you, as if you were one of the characters? Or did you feel as if you were an observer, watching what was happening but not part of the action?

If you were an observer, where were you watching from? Did you seem to watch from different places – sometimes, perhaps, from beside the characters, sometimes from above them as if you were in a helicopter? Can you tell me places in the book where you felt like that?

This is a long list, so let me repeat: **it is not intended that every question should be asked every time.** Nor that the selected questions should be doggedly plodded through in the order set out there.

Our experience of using the 'Tell me' approach is that after a while the Framework sinks into the back of the mind; then we don't consciously use it. We begin to listen more attentively to the questions children generate themselves – and use those as springboards.