

DARTS

Directed Activities Related to Texts



What are DARTS?

DARTS are activities that are designed to challenge pupils to engage with texts. They ask them to read closely and to interpret the information carefully. They can often go beyond the comprehension question, which can sometimes only ask pupils to move information, rather than to understand it.

The advantages of DARTS activities are many:

1. They are problem-solving activities and therefore they promote and develop thinking skills.
2. They can be linked to physical activities, as pupils manipulate the text. This may increase engagement.
3. They provide active learning situations, in which pupils collaborate and cooperate to solve problems.
4. They help to internalise learning and so support the subject teacher's aims.
5. Pupils are encouraged to be analytical.
6. Pupils are interacting with text and not practising poor reading skills, if they are weak readers.
7. The work is shared and supportive and so aids the less able.
8. The tasks enable pupils to go beyond the literal level of understanding.
9. They provide many ICT opportunities, as pupils manipulate text.
10. They are an excellent way to introduce a new topic or to revise and consolidate a topic at the end of a unit.

They combine the development of literacy and the promotion of thinking skills within the context of the subject.

Some DARTs activities can take time to prepare, but are invaluable resources once they have been produced. Pupils take time to learn how to debate and discuss so the teacher needs to draw their attention to the rules of good group work. Finally, to ensure that the learning goals have been reached draw out the explicit teaching.

THE RIGHT DART

Choosing the right DART activity to suit the learning intention is essential if the learning is to be well assimilated.

Ask yourself if you are:

- Helping pupils to see the structure of a text
- Helping pupils to select and interpret information
- Helping pupils to confront the range of information or to see the big picture



THE STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

Sequencing

Establish cause and effect; think logically



Sequencing involves the teacher cutting a text into lines, sentences or paragraphs and asking the pupils to reorganise it so that it makes sense. To do this correctly they must pay close attention to the discourse markers and connectives and to the logical organisation of the material, so that they can structure the text. It can be used to illustrate the concept of chronology, the importance of clearly sequenced instructions or the structure of any text. Information texts can also be cut up to help pupils to see how the component parts fit together to lead the reader through the text. Therefore, it can be used to introduce pupils to the pattern of a textbook used throughout the year.

Pupils do not have to cut and paste, they can write the sequence down or move the pieces around.

Cloze Procedure / Deletions

Generate ideas; seek patterns; consider evidence.



This is a commonly used activity. In pairs, pupils decide which word or phrase goes in the space. The deleted word should be carefully chosen, as the discussion which accompanies this exercise is

extremely useful. The chosen words should fit the grammar, style and sense of the original.

Cloze procedure can be easily differentiated, either by the number of deletions or by the help given. The less able can be given the key words to select from. The middle ability pupils can be given the words with a number of red herrings to promote discussion and the more able can work independently. Pupils can be asked to come up with their own words or they can be directed to subject specific words, which tests their understanding of these words and the concepts behind them.

Pupils should never be given the first letter of the deleted word, as this becomes a low-level exercise about the alphabet.

Prediction

Ask questions; activate prior knowledge; examine cause and effect; form opinions



On the surface, this can look like an easy activity. However, the purpose of the task, predicting what happens next, is not to guess, but to evaluate and synthesise the information available to reach a logical conclusion. Pupils must be able to support their theory with close reference to the text / the ideas and should be able to provide reasons, evidence and explanations in defence of their prediction.

They can play Sherlock Holmes, or any other contemporary detective, to hypothesise and reflect. They can then be asked to compare their prediction with the text, the historical event or the actual outcome of the experiment.

Boundaries

Gather information; ask questions; think logically;
consider the evidence



Sub-headings

The pupils are given a text, which has been written in paragraphs. They then decide on a suitable title and sub-headings to explain the actions of the text. The less able can be given the titles and can be asked to allocate them to the correct section.

Segmenting

This is a harder version of the task. Pupils are given a text that has no paragraphs. They are asked to break the text up into paragraphs using the new paragraph symbol (//) and to write appropriate sub-headings for the text. This tests their understanding of the structure of the text and the subject specific components of the material.

Substitution

Determine success criteria; generate and develop
ideas; form opinions



Students are given a text in which some words or phrases, indicated by a different typeface, have been replaced by less effective alternatives. These could be weaker words or long-

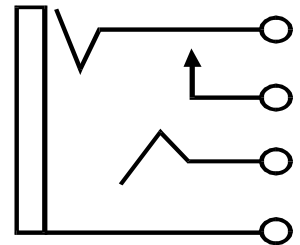
winded descriptions of events or processes, which would be better explained by subject specific vocabulary. In pairs, pupils discuss what words they should replace them with and why their chosen words are an improvement.

Graphic Outlines

This exercise is most useful in the early stages of KS3 when teaching layout and the composition of texts, as it allows pupils to consider the presentation of non-fiction texts. It demonstrates that they are not always logically presented and that the pupil has to make decisions about how to read the text in order to establish meaning.

Either pupils can draw the outline of the text or the teacher can provide them with a grid to complete. The pupils then identify the feature that is found in each block of the text. The activity would work with older pupils as part of a sequencing activity.

Labelling / Diagram Completion



Gather information; generate and develop ideas; establish cause and effect; think logically and seek patterns; form opinions



Too often texts books give pupils all of the information and provide labelled diagrams, charts and other visual aids to show pupils the processes that they are describing. Unfortunately, this is all that they do - they *show* them the processes. As the expert has done

the thinking there is little left for the pupils to do. If you have diagrams like this, it is best to cut them up and remove the labels or explanations and ask the pupils to do the exercise themselves. You can then guarantee that they have *processed* the information for themselves - far more valuable than looking at a text!

INTERROGATING OR TRANSFORMING TEXTS












Transformation

Gather information; determine success criteria;
generate and develop ideas; make inferences;
consider evidence; form opinions; monitor
progress; evaluate thinking and learning;
review outcomes



This really tests pupils' understanding of the material of a text. Not only do they need to understand the information in the text, but also they have to rework it to make a new, sensible text.

Opportunities for transformation into new written and oral texts are numerous. A text can be transformed into:

-  A newspaper
-  An article for a specialist magazine
-  A website
-  An advice leaflet
-  A guide
-  An instruction manual
-  A textbook
-  A personal letter or a diary extract
-  A poster
-  A storyboard
-  An advertisement

Oral tasks include:

- Oral presentations
- Drama activities - like hot seating and forum theatre
- Debates
- Radio phone-in programmes
- Jerry Springer style programmes
- Power points and lectures

It needs to be remembered that writing or speaking frames need to accompany these activities and that the new style needs to be scaffolded and taught if the most is going to be made of this activity.

Open-ended Questions



Ask questions; gather information; generate and develop ideas; think logically; consider the evidence



A few challenging questions are set by the teacher for which the text offers no single correct answer. Pupils have to make considered decisions that they then have to be able to justify.

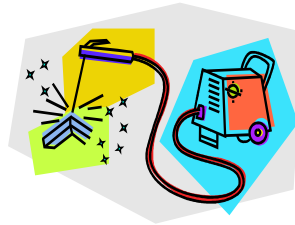
Graphic Organisers

Ask questions; activate prior knowledge; gather information; determine process; generate and develop ideas; infer; think logically and seek patterns; consider evidence; form opinions; linking and lateral thinking; evaluate thinking and learning



A wealth of material is available and any internet search will provide many variations on a common theme. They are useful as they focus on the reading and understanding of the text and as the pupils do little writing, usually in note form, they can concentrate on the material in the text. This often benefits from being a paired activity to promote discussion. Examples include: venn diagrams, spider diagrams, mind maps, tree diagrams, flow diagrams, storyboards, charts and fishbone diagrams. Concept maps help pupils to make links and connections between ideas and to overview the topic.

Question Generator



Ask questions; activate prior knowledge; gather information; value errors; generate ideas; evaluate cause and effect; consider the evidence; think logically; lateral thinking



In groups, pupils formulate the questions that want to be answered to understand the text. These could be questions about the words, the facts and figures or the actual concepts. This works best if pupils are used to using the Three Level Analysis and understand that questions can be open or closed. Deeper understanding will come from open questions. The question generator grid is useful to train pupils in how to use this activity.

Text Marking



Ask questions; gather information; determine success criteria; infer; seek patterns; consider evidence



This is probably the most widely used DART. Competent adult readers use it all of the time when they are researching and assimilating information. It is very simple, but its value cannot be underestimated. It helps pupils to see the key points and to find the substance of any text.

Some learners can find reading challenging - texts are remote objects and they can feel that they do not have the keys to unlock them or the skills to solve them. By allowing pupils to annotate a text, we are implicitly stating that it is theirs - they can interact with it. Simple text marking exercises help to break the text down into manageable chunks.

Pupils can underline key parts of the text. If there are options, they could be asked to find the five best examples. This can be expanded by underlining in different colours to show conflicting views or two perspectives.

It can be used to highlight bias and emotive words or phrases can be underlined to show how the writer is aiming to manipulate the reader.

Colour coding help pupils to see the information and is very valuable for visual readers.

Statement Sort / Disputing the Text

Ask questions; gather information; value unexpected outcomes; infer; think logically; consider the evidence; form opinions



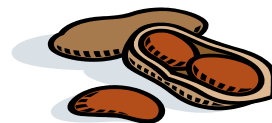
Pupils are provided with statements - some are appropriate and some are not. They select which ones are the most apt and why. The difficulty of these statements can be differentiated easily. Pupils are helped in this way to move towards an independent assessment of a text. As they are provided with alternative explanations, they hopefully will come to see that a text or issue does not have only one response. It helps to extend their thinking.



Card Sorts

Pupils can sort cards in many ways. They can group ideas; identify a process or identify the key points and the details that support them.

Summary / In A Nutshell



Pupils select the key points of a text and express them as briefly as possible. The lower the word limit the harder the task. Highlighting the text and the statement game can help them to prepare for this intensive task.

SEEING THE BIG PICTURE



Charts and Grids

Gather information; see cause and effect; think logically and seek patterns; consider the evidence; form opinions; review outcomes



Charts and grids encourage pupils to locate and organise information and to reject irrelevant information. They can also help to improve pupils' note-taking skills.

They can provide a framework for comparing ideas and as a preliminary for a compare / contrast style question.

Dicto Gloss

Pupils listen to a passage of text and complete no writing. The teacher reads it at a normal speed. The teacher reads the text again, pausing at significant intervals to allow pupils time to take notes. These could be written or pictures or any other personal form of recording information. It is valuable to encourage pupils to develop their own note-taking style. Once this has been completed, they compare and discuss notes made and check that they have the correct, relevant information. The text is then read again so that pupils can check their final version. After any alterations, they then present the information in graphic form or as a new written text. At all stages of this exercise, their understanding is being

checked and importantly they are involved in the checking process themselves.

Relevance Game

Ask questions; gather information; value errors and unexpected outcomes



Key facts are given to the pupils. Pupils then decide which ones are relevant to their topic and they explain their selection. As with other DARTS the pupils feedback, challenge and debate the issue. This stimulates pupils to investigate the text.

Jigsaw

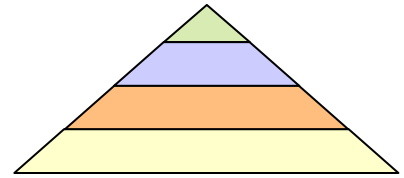


Pupils work in groups of four - six pupils. Each pupil in the group is either given a number or a topic to be discussed and they then move to work in their expert groups. Once in these groups they can research their given topic or read the text with one objective in mind. They return to their home group and teach their group their element of the task. Whenever pupils are asked to teach each other, their learning is very deeply embedded.

KWL Grids

These activate prior knowledge and help pupils to organise their thoughts as they work on a topic. They record what they know, what they want to learn and what they have learnt. QuADS Grids and KWHL Grids are variations on a theme.

The Pyramid / Rank Ordering



Gather information; see cause and effect;
consider evidence



This allows pupils to record and organise important information. It asks pupils to create, explain and justify a rank order. As it is a visual strategy, it is useful for pupils of all abilities.

It can be used to identify:

- The subject or main idea
- Relevant supporting details
- Irrelevancy / interesting information

The Sociogram

A sociogram encourages pupils to map the development of a relationship or the evolution of a personality, real or fictional. It asks pupils to move beyond the literal comprehension into the inferential and to discuss what motivates people. It is again an excellent strategy to promote talk and focuses pupils on the text, thereby fostering close reading. It is best as a paired or group activity as its greatest benefit lies in the talk necessary to its production.

List all of the characters to be discussed on card, so that pupils can move the central players around. Place the central character in the middle of a circle. Place the other characters / people around to show good and bad relationships by their proximity to the central character. Using arrows pupils trace the relationships and annotate the chart to show reasons for the state of their

relationship. Different colours can show inferred or changing relationships, depending on the people in the activity.

Washing Lines / Continuums

Gather information; see cause and effect;
seek patterns; consider evidence



As with many DARTS, the main benefit of this strategy is in allowing pupils to debate and challenge each other. Pupils work on the washing line, which they present to the rest of the class. Mini whiteboards are very useful here. Pupils can write their own features or sort cards given to them by the teacher.

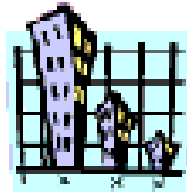
They could rank order a number of the things, like the causes of an event, the consequences of an action, words to describe something or someone - the list goes on. The main learning comes when pupils are at the front of the class and the other pupils can move them around to sort their ideas.

Graphic Modelling

Most simply this is drawing a text or creating a model based on the information in a text. It works especially well when there is a description of a place, a scene or a sequence of events and pupils draw what is in the text. Pupils should be encouraged to focus on the text and not on the quality of their drawing of, for example, the Roman fort.

It is surprising what this DART reveals about the pupils' reading. Sometimes pupils find it difficult to visualise or mentally recreate

a person or a place. Sometimes they can be confused by the writer's use of prepositions or discourse markers or simply find non-chronological texts difficult. It is not just a useful tool to promote close reading, but also a good evaluative tool for the class teacher. Often when pupils have drawings or sketches of text they can find it easier to make inferences or judgments. For example, why is site X a good / bad place to build houses? How would you attack this castle?



Graphs

Gather information; see cause and effect;
think logically and seek patterns; form opinions



These are excellent tools to trace the development of a text or to capture information across a text. When pupils plot their response on a graph, they are developing an overview of the text. This visual representation helps them to explore changes and to trace developments. Visual representations are easier to remember than written texts and so make a good revision aid. For example, pupils could be asked to plot five points in the life of a character and to trace sympathy or greatness. Any text that charts significant changes can be plotted on a graph.

Distillation

Draw a funnel with a filter on the board. In pairs pupils list 5-10 of the most important features, events etc. One of the pair writes their words in the funnel. They cannot repeat words / ideas that are already on the board. In class discussion, they decide which

words to keep - these are then filtered into the beaker and become the key words for the topic.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DARTS

Lunzer et al (1984) identified these text types.

These are the DARTS recommended for them.

TEXT TYPE	SUGGESTED DARTS
Narrative	Underlining, labelling, diagram completion, sociogram , graphs, prediction, sequencing, question generation, washing lines, transformations
Structure or Mechanism	Underlining, completion, diagram labelling, flow chart, sequencing
Process	Segmenting, tabulation, flow diagram, sequencing, prediction, question generation
Principle	Tabulation, hierarchical diagrams, completion
Theory	Tabulation, underlining
Problem-solution	Segmenting, labelling, completion, prediction, diagram completion
Historical Situation	Underlining, listing, flow diagram, diagram completion, prediction
Classification	Labelling, tree diagrams, segmenting, card sorts, tabulation
Instructions	Flow diagram, tabulation, sequencing
Theme	Listing, diagrams