

Tea Party Pre-Reading Strategy

“The more we frontload students’ knowledge of a text and help them become actively involved in constructing meaning prior to reading, the more engaged they are likely to be as they read the text. Dependent readers must be reminded often that comprehension begins prior to reading and extends into the discussions they have after they’ve finished.”

— Kyleene Beers (2002), *When Kids Can’t Read—What Teachers Can Do*

What is it?

The **Tea Party** strategy is an interactive, out-of-seat *before-reading* protocol that allows students to preview a text by socializing with carefully selected words, phrases, or sentences taken directly from the text. Students use these snippets to make predictions, notice relationships, and construct meaning *before* reading the full passage.

Rather than starting with a cold read, students enter the text as thinkers, actively predicting, questioning, and building purpose for reading.

Purpose

The Tea Party provides an active entry point into complex text, encouraging students to become “text detectives.” It allows students to:

- Activate and build background knowledge
- Practice predicting, inferring, and questioning
- Notice cause-and-effect, sequencing, and text structure
- Engage with academic vocabulary and signal words in context
- Set a clear purpose for reading
- Increase motivation through movement and conversation

This strategy is especially supportive for striving readers and multilingual learners because it lowers cognitive load while maintaining rigorous thinking.

Steps in the Process

1. **Select Text Snippets**

Choose key words, phrases, or sentences *directly from the text*. Do not paraphrase. You may shorten sentences by omitting words, but keep the author’s language intact. Include signal words when possible.

2. **Prepare the Cards**

Write one snippet per index card or strip of paper. Some snippets should be duplicated so multiple students hold the same text.

3. Independent Thinking

Distribute one card to each student. Students read their snippet independently and write a quick prediction on a recording sheet (e.g., *I think this text might be about...*).

4. The “Tea Party” (Mingle)

Students move around the room reading their snippets aloud to classmates. As they listen, they discuss possible connections, ideas, and emerging predictions.

5. Small-Group Synthesis

Students return to groups of 4–5. Together they write a group prediction using the frame: *We think this text will be about _____ because _____*. Groups also list questions they have.

6. Read the Text

Students read the full text independently, with partners, or as a class. They highlight or annotate information that confirms or changes their predictions.

7. Revisit Predictions

Students revise their thinking on the recording sheet and add any lingering questions.

8. Debrief & Reflection

Use discussion questions such as:

- How did your predictions compare to the actual text?
- Which words or phrases influenced your thinking the most?
- What signal words helped you identify the text structure?
- How did previewing the text this way affect your comprehension?

Digital Adaptations

• Padlet, Wakelet, FigJam:

Post each text snippet as a separate Padlet card. Students comment on multiple cards during the “Tea Party,” making connections and predictions. Use columns such as *Predictions*, *Connections*, and *Questions* to structure thinking.

• Google Slides, PowerPoint Online:

Provide each group with a shared slide that includes space to paste snippets, identify signal words, draft a group prediction, and list questions. This supports collaboration and makes thinking visible for review.

• Google Docs, Microsoft Word Online:

Students paste their snippet into a shared document and use comments or highlighting to note signal words, inferred text structure, and how their predictions evolve before and after reading.

• Canva, Google Drawings:

- Students arrange snippets visually on a Canva template to show perceived relationships (cause/effect, sequence, comparison). This is especially effective for visual learners and whole-class synthesis.
- **Google Meet, Zoom, Microsoft Teams:**
Use short, rotating breakout rooms (1–2 minutes) to simulate mingling. Students share their snippet and prediction before rotating to a new partner.
- **Flip, Seesaw, Microsoft Reflect:**
Students record a brief video explaining how their predictions changed after reading and which words or phrases influenced their thinking most.

Example 1: Elementary School – Science (Cause and Effect)

- **Topic:** Weather Events and Their Impact
- **Learning Goal:** Identify causes and effects in a text and explain how one event leads to another using signal words.
- **Text Type:** Informational text
- **Possible Snippets:**
 - “Because the rain would not stop...”
 - “As a result, the playground flooded.”
 - “This caused the animals to move.”
 - “The next morning, everything had changed.”
 - “The problem began when...”
- **Teacher Tip:** After the Tea Party, use a familiar picture book or short passage to *explicitly reteach cause and effect*. Create an anchor chart with signal words (because, so, as a result) and model how to transfer this thinking to grade-level text using a graphic organizer.

Example 2: Middle School – Social Studies (Informational)

- **Topic:** Industrialization and Its Effects on Society
- **Learning Goal:** Analyze how ideas, events, or decisions are related and explain cause-and-effect relationships using evidence from the text.
- **Text Type:** Informational text
- **Possible Snippets:**
 - “One consequence of industrialization was...”
 - “As factories expanded, working conditions...”
 - “This led to widespread changes in...”
 - “The primary factor contributing to...”
 - “As a result of this decision...”
- **Teacher Tip:** Have students skim the snippets for signal words to predict text structure (cause/effect, compare/contrast). After reading, revisit how those signal words helped, or misled, their predictions.