

Reading to Learn in Carpentry

The following scenario illustrates a Building Trades Instructor using the process of Reading to Learn to support the inspection of a wooden deck that a potential client wishes repaired and modified to support a hot tub.

Reading an Existing Wood Structure to Make Suggestions for Repairing and Modifying

The eight students in Mr. Archembault's class poured out of the van the moment it came to a stop in front of a two-story blue house in a residential section of town. Many held coffee cups from Dunkin Donuts in their hands. A few munched on egg sandwiches. When all of the students were standing in a circle on the lawn around the instructor, Mr. A addressed the group.

"Good morning everyone. I know it was a little bit of a ride to get to here, so I hope you are fresh and ready to go. As I told you last week, we are visiting a potential client who would like to buy a hot tub and put it on his porch. Your task will be to work with a partner to read and analyze the existing deck. You will use the note taking sheet you have developed to record your observations and generate a list of questions to ask the client. Then you and your partner will discuss what needs to be done and what recommendations you will make. Your final task will be to write a quote. The client will pick one or perhaps none of your quotes." Mr. A paused for a moment. "Are there any questions at this point?"

A female student to Mr. A's left raised her hand. "Who will we be partnered with?"

Mr. A smiled, "Thanks for asking Lacey. I was just about to get to that." Pulling a piece of paper from a folder he was carrying, Mr. Archembault began to read off the names. "Lacey, you are with Jordan. Bill you are with Tyler. Sam and Walker are partners. Finally, Kyle and Carter will be together." After the names were read, a couple students gave high-fives. One student groaned in fake annoyance.

Smiling at the good-natured camaraderie, Mr. Archembault cleared his throat. "Okay, enough goofing around. Before I set you free there are few things I want to discuss to make sure you are ready to do your reading and analysis. First, take a few moments to discuss with your partner what things you might expect to find when you look at the deck. Go ahead. Confer."

The students found their partners and began to discuss in soft voices. One student paused and called out. "Mr. A - how old is the deck?"

"That is a good question to ask the client, Billy - we'll get to that in a bit - but it is over fifteen years old." Billy nodded and returned to talking with his partner.

Carpentry Scenario

After a couple of minutes, Mr. A asked the students to share some of the things they expected to find when they began looking at the deck. Some of the pairs mentioned the type of materials they expected to find and different styles of decking. One pair predicted that the deck would be connected to a second floor bedroom and they expected to find long beams resting on cement footings.

After the students discussed a variety of features they expected to find on the deck, Mr. A asked them another question. "Okay, you have thought a little bit about what you might find when you look at the deck. How about some key information you need to know beforehand. Based on what I told you, is there any information that would be helpful before examining the deck?"

A few students raised their hands. Mr. Archembault pointed to a boy in a baseball cap to his left. "Carter. Go ahead."

"Well. If they want to put a hot tub on the deck, we need to know how big it is."

Mr. A pressed for more information. "What do you mean? What does it matter how big it is?"

Carter paused for a second. "Well, we need to know how much water it holds to figure out the weight."

Mr. A pushed some more, "So?"

"Knowing the weight will tell us how much support is needed and if the deck is designed to hold the weight. We might need to add support."

Mr. A smiled. "Good thinking!"

Another student called out. "We'll also need to know how many people the tub is designed to hold so that we include that weight as well."

"Another good thought!" Mr. A commented.

For the next few minutes, the students shared other thoughts and ideas. When this discussion had finished, Mr. Archembault gave them their next task.

"Okay everyone! Gather around again. Alright. In a minute or so, you can grab your clipboards and pencils and go around the back to begin inspecting the deck. I have already spoken to the owner so we can head around back. Oh! They have a German shepherd and it is inside - so do not be afraid if you hear it barking. I have met the dog though. His name is Spunky. He is friendly. As you know - sometimes dogs get out! Okay - go ahead!"

In their pairs, the students began to make their way through the gate and walk to the back of the house. Once in the back yard, they saw the deck. It was connected to the main door in the back, but because the house was on a slope, much of the deck was elevated over five feet above the ground. The students walked around and under the deck. In their pairs they analyzed the deck and recorded notes on their clipboards. As the students inspected, the instructor went from group to group pointing out aspects of the deck and asking questions.

Carpentry Scenario

Twenty minutes later, Mr. A called the group together again. “Alright everyone, I am now going to give you a couple of minutes with your partners to generate a list of questions to ask the client - Mr. Caldwell. He will come outside in a few minutes and you can then ask him your questions. Take good notes. After you get your information, we will head back to school where you will work on putting together a list of recommendations and a quote.