

Constructing Meaning

During-Reading Strategies

Dear George,

Several days a week, people looking in our classroom would have seen students reading, or at least pretending to read. I thought I was very progressive by letting you all sit wherever you wanted to sit—sprawled on the floor, at the conference table, leaning against walls, or even in your seats. And I was so impressed with how quiet the room was while you were all reading. Except for an occasional cough or the crackle of a turning page, there was very little noise. I realize now that might have meant there was very little thinking as well.

“You Mean You *Make* It Make Sense?”

Dependent readers often fail to see reading as an active process. As Gene, a twelfth grader, said, “What do you mean *active*? You sit. You stare. You turn pages. What’s active about that?” I asked him what he thought good readers did while reading. He responded, “Do? I don’t know. They just read it. And then they answer all the questions. That’s what makes them good readers, because they can answer the questions.”

“So why do you think they can answer the questions?” I asked.

“I don’t know. Why do some people win the lottery? Why are some people always invited to the really popular parties? Why did Gore really lose the election? There are just some things we aren’t supposed to know the answer to. It’s just the way things are.”

Gene's response, sadly, offers an explanation many dependent readers support: "It's just the way things are." In part, that attitude develops as struggling readers watch some students in class move easily (and apparently effortlessly) through a text. They only see the outward signs of comprehension—peers correctly answering questions. What they don't observe are all the times good readers reread a passage or a sentence, all the times they ask themselves, "What's going on here?" They don't hear that internal dialogue a good reader has with the text or with herself while reading.

Step Inside a Classroom

I gave three eleventh graders a difficult poem titled "Huswifery" (the full text of this poem appears on page 114 in Figure 7.3) and asked them to read it and then answer this question: "What did you do to make it make sense?"

KAREN: After I read it the first time, I thought, "Boy, I don't get it." I decided to read it again, and this time much more slowly. That second time, I found all these words I didn't know. I decided to look at the footnotes to see what they could tell me. They explained some of the terms, especially the terms about a spinning wheel. That helped a lot. Then, I decided to sketch a spinning wheel and see if I could label the parts. After I did that, I read it again. Some of it made more sense, but I still kept asking myself, "What is he really trying to say?" All the way through, I kept saying, "How is this part related to that part?" It was a hard poem.

AMA: This poem makes you think all the way through it. I started reading it and thought I'd better slow down. By the time I got to the end of the fourth line, I knew I was lost. At first, I went back and just started trying to reread each little part, each word, until I figured it out. But then I decided I needed a big picture of the whole thing, even if there was a lot I didn't understand. So, I just read all the way through it, just to get an idea of what it was about. Then I went back and started rereading. I could see right away that a big part of my problem was not knowing all the words. Some of the words were spinning wheel terms, and I saw that those were defined at the bottom of the page. But some of the words were just regular words but used in a different way—like *affection*. And I kept wondering why there were capital letters in the middle of sentences. That bothered me a lot because I never could figure it out. I finally made a list of what I didn't understand and then tried to figure out each part.

LAVERN: This poem was too hard. It made no sense. None at all. I read it, but it made no sense. I'm not sure what you want me to say because I don't know what you mean—"What did you do to make this make sense?" I read it. But it didn't make any sense. I hate it when they do that—give you poems and stories and stuff that don't make any sense. That is so boring.

The next day, I shared Karen's and Ama's responses with Lavern. He was amazed. "They did all that? I just read it. That's all you said to do. Just read it. You didn't say anything about doing that other stuff." Then Lavern talked with Ama and Karen about what they did to make this poem make sense.

LAVERN: I can't believe you did all that.

AMA: But that's what you do when you try to make something make sense, you know? You have to reread it and figure out definitions and figure out what you don't know. I like the way Karen said she drew a picture. I should have done that.

LAVERN: But she just said read it.

KAREN: But that's part of reading, you know. Figuring it out is reading.

Classroom Talk *During* Reading

It is more critical for dependent readers to talk about texts during the reading experience than after it.

Robert Probst and I wrote an article titled "Classroom Talk About Literature: The Social Dimensions of a Solitary Act" (1998). In that article, we make a case for encouraging students to talk about what they have read. Building on that premise that classroom talk about literature is important, I'd like to suggest that it is more critical for dependent readers to talk about texts *during* the reading experience than *after* it.

The issue is that Lavern and Gene are not alone in their misunderstanding of what it means to construct meaning. What we must do is show them how skilled readers build meaning. That means we must pull the invisible process of comprehension out to the visible level—and that suggests bringing conversation into the classroom *as* students are reading. That conversation needs to be about readers' responses to what they are reading *as well as* how they are making the reading make sense. Consequently, the conversation doesn't focus only on characters or setting or plot development but also on predictions, clarifications, questions, or connections that readers are making.

This chapter examines approaches that help students focus on constructing meaning while reading a text. These strategies encourage students to

- ◆ predict what will happen next
- ◆ question what they don't understand or what is confusing in the text
- ◆ monitor their understanding of the text
- ◆ identify ways to fix up what has confused them in the text
- ◆ clarify what has confused them
- ◆ comment on the text or their understanding of the text
- ◆ connect what they are reading to other texts or personal experiences
- ◆ visualize the text

To find out more about helping students construct meaning, take a look at *Mosaic of Thought* by Ellin Oliver Keene and Susan Zimmerman (1997), *Strategic Reading: Guiding Students to Lifelong Literacy* by Jeffrey Wilhelm, Tanya Baker, and Julie Dube (2001), and *Strategies That Work* by Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis (2000).

Say Something

Often struggling readers struggle because while they read, their eyes move over the words but their minds move to thoughts of weekend plans, last night's phone conversations, or after-school sports events. They don't focus on what they are reading, confusing page turning with comprehending. To help those students break that habit, we need to help them attend to what they are reading. One such during-reading strategy is called Say Something.

Say Something (Harste, Short, and Burke, 1988) is a very simple strategy that interrupts a student's reading of a text, giving her a chance to think about what she is reading. Students get into groups of two or three and take turns reading a portion of a text aloud. As they read, they occasionally pause to "say something" about what was read. They make a prediction, ask a question, clarify a confusion, comment on what's happening, or connect what's in the text to something they know. The reading partners offer a response to what was said, then a different student continues the reading until the next time they pause to say something.

Step Inside a Classroom

Everyone in the fifth-period English class was reading. Really reading. No passing notes to a friend. No combing hair or filing nails. No trying to do math homework, digging through backpacks, or making trips to the pencil sharpener. Just reading. Suddenly, a student tapped another on the shoulder and whispered, "You there yet?" When the other said yes, their heads bent close and some whispering began.

JOSIE: I'll go first.

LUCI: Okay.

Josie is offering a clarification.

Next Josie tries to figure out something about the setting by connecting what the author says about lanterns to what she knows about lanterns.

Luci rejects Josie's connection and offers a clarification.
Now she's moved to questioning.

What's Josie doing at this point?

Bruce has recognized that he doesn't understand what he's read and is questioning a specific part of the text.

Eric is a read-on-through reader—one of those readers who just turns pages whether he gets it or not. Bruce's question has given Eric an opportunity to reread for understanding.

JOSIE: I didn't get it until this part here. [She points to the second paragraph of "The Tell-Tale Heart."] See this where he says, "You fancy me mad"? Well, then I thought, I get it—he is crazy. And then I decided at this part here that this is taking place a long time ago because see, he is using a lantern and I thought maybe this was like in western times.

LUCI: I don't think so. He doesn't sound like a rancher or anything. But I think he is crazy. Do you think that when he says "his evil eye," he means the man is evil? Like maybe that is his name. See how it's in capital letters?

JOSIE: Uh-uh. I don't think so. I think like you say, "Don't give me the evil eye," that the guy was giving him the evil eye, so he's like calling his eye that.

Josie and Luci went back to reading. At the same time they were having their conversation, two other students had also stopped reading.

BRUCE: I just don't get it.

ERIC: Get what?

BRUCE: Any of it. Like here—what does this mean? "Object there was none. Passion there was none."

ERIC: I guess I didn't see that part. [Eric starts to reread. Looks up.] Give me just a minute.

These quiet conversations continued throughout the room as students read, stopped, talked, and then continued reading. Occasionally, students like Eric could be seen turning back a few pages and rereading. Sometimes students jotted down notes on a piece of paper. Most conversations lasted three to four minutes. Seven students never stopped to talk; they just read.

Debriefing the Strategy

The students in this class were using a strategy called Say Something. The purpose of Say Something is to help students comprehend what they are reading as they predict, question, clarify, connect, or comment. Telling students to say something about the text, or, as I've found, giving them specific types of things they can say, keeps students interacting with the text, and from that interaction comes meaning.

Putting the Strategy to Work

1. *First, model the strategy.* If I've been able to recruit a colleague to help me, I demonstrate a Say Something to students. My colleague and I

read a brief passage and then pause and say something about what we've read. We purposefully say a range of things—from asking very specific questions, such as how to say a certain word, to making connections as we discuss similar texts to clarifying something that confused us in the text. If I can't convince someone to join me for a moment or two, then I type out our dialogue instead, make a transparency of it, and put it on the overhead projector.

2. *Explain the procedure to students.* After I "show" a Say Something, we go over the rules (which I've put on a poster that hangs in the room) until students get the idea of how to do the strategy (see Figure 7.1). I tell students that when they stop to say something (after every three to four paragraphs or so), they must make a prediction, ask a question, clarify a misunderstanding, make a comment, or make a connection. These five general areas give them enough direction to begin the conversations with their partners, yet allow enough latitude for their own needs to emerge.

Rules for Say Something

1. With your partner, decide who will say something first.
2. When you say something, do one or more of the following:
 - ◆ make a prediction
 - ◆ ask a question
 - ◆ clarify something you had misunderstood
 - ◆ make a comment
 - ◆ make a connection
3. If you can't do one of those five things, then you need to reread.

FIGURE 7.1 *Rules for Say Something*

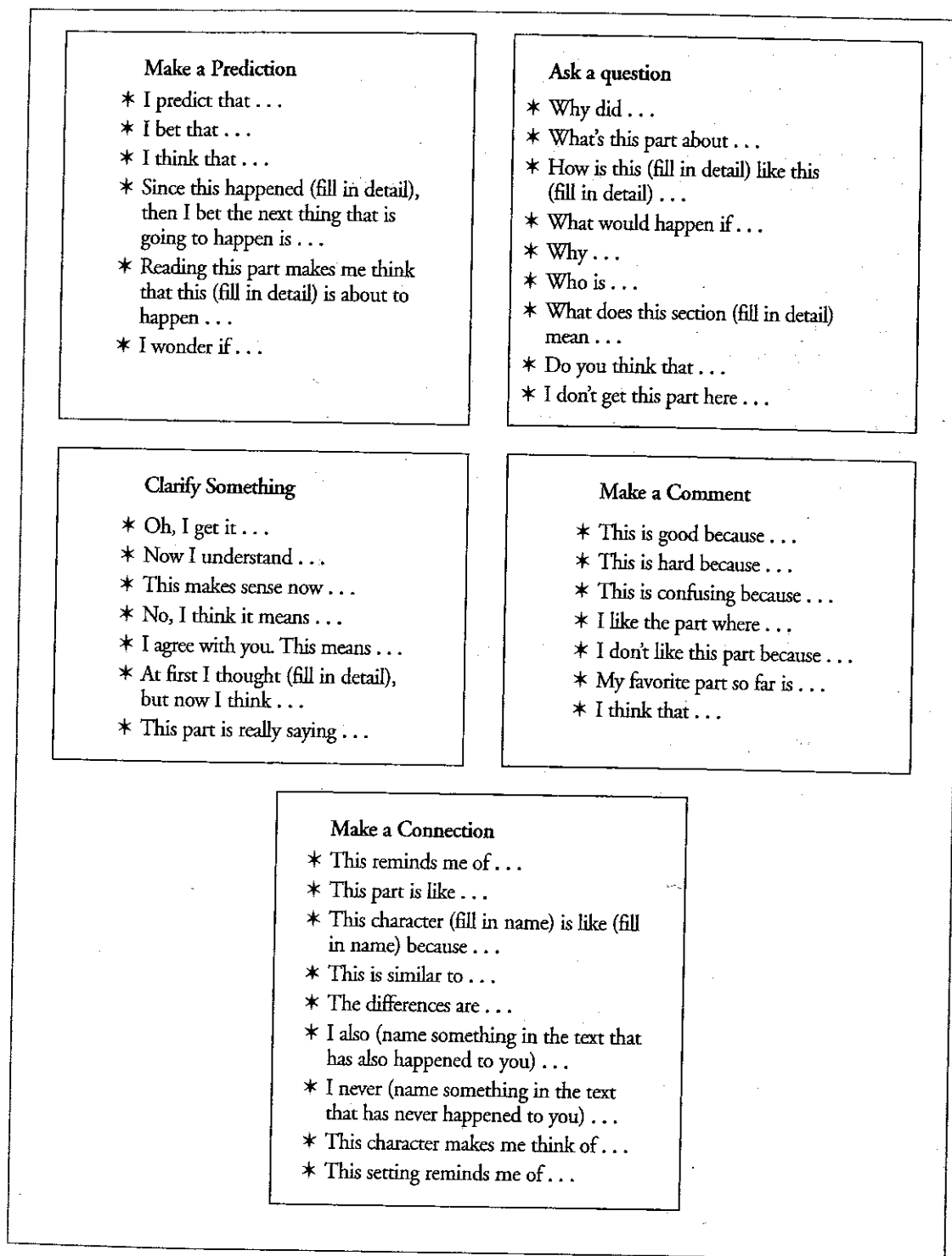


FIGURE 7.2 *Stem starters for Say Something comments*

3. *The partner's job is to offer a response to what was said.* In particular, the partner should try to answer questions. Any questions that can't be answered should be noted on paper so they can be brought to the entire class.
4. *Dependent readers often need help in making their Say Something comments.* Unlike skilled readers, they often have nothing to say about what they've read. So don't think that simply because you've told them to "say something," they'll immediately start having insightful conversations about the text. I find that if I provide beginnings of statements, what I call *stem starters*, students are more likely to make a comment. Figure 7.2 offers a list of stem starters for each category.
5. *Students first need to practice using Say Something on very short texts*—just a few paragraphs or short poems. This allows them to become familiar with the strategy before they start using it with assignments.
6. Remember, as with all strategies, you must model often how to do it. Modeling a Say Something one time is not enough.

This strategy is helpful to dependent readers, though it often starts slowly. The following recorded conversation shows you what happened the first time I ever had students try this strategy:

GARY: You first.

LONNIE: Not me. [Long pause.]

GARY: You going to tonight's game?

LONNIE: Yeah. You?

GARY: Yeah. Read?

LONNIE: Yeah.

Questions and Answers

1. *Should students be allowed to choose their Say Something partners?*
Sometimes yes, sometimes no. I make sure that students understand that this is work time, not visit time. If I see students together and know that they are saying something about anything other than the text, then they know they've lost the privilege of working together again for a while. But I try to let friends work together. Secondary students are so connected to their friends that putting them with someone they never hang out with almost assures failure for the strategy.
2. *Should everyone do a Say Something?*
No. This strategy is for students who don't think about the text or what they understand (or don't understand) as they read the text. Independent readers already question the text, predict what will happen next, clarify their understanding, comment to themselves or others, and make connections as they read.
3. *Is the strategy graded?*
You can't get a 100 or an 88 on a Say Something. But sometimes students are more likely to do something if they believe that they are getting graded, so I give participation grades. Plus, I have them reflect on their

own Say Somethings after about every third one by answering these questions:

- a. How has using Say Something changed how you read?
- b. What's something you discovered through Say Something with the story you just finished?
- c. What type of comment do you make the least often? The most often?
- d. What do you want to do to make your Say Something comments more powerful?
- e. What do you need me to do to help you use this strategy more effectively?

4. *Can Say Something be done without a partner?*

It certainly works best with a partner, but it can be done alone. Wallis (1998) calls this type of Say Something a Say Something—Silently and explains that with this variation, students decide where they will stop and then, when reaching that point, write their comment. Then they exchange papers and respond to each other's comments, again in writing. Students can also say something silently by writing notes to themselves. They can later reflect on what they have written.

Rereading

ME: What's wrong, Ben?

BEN: I didn't get the story.

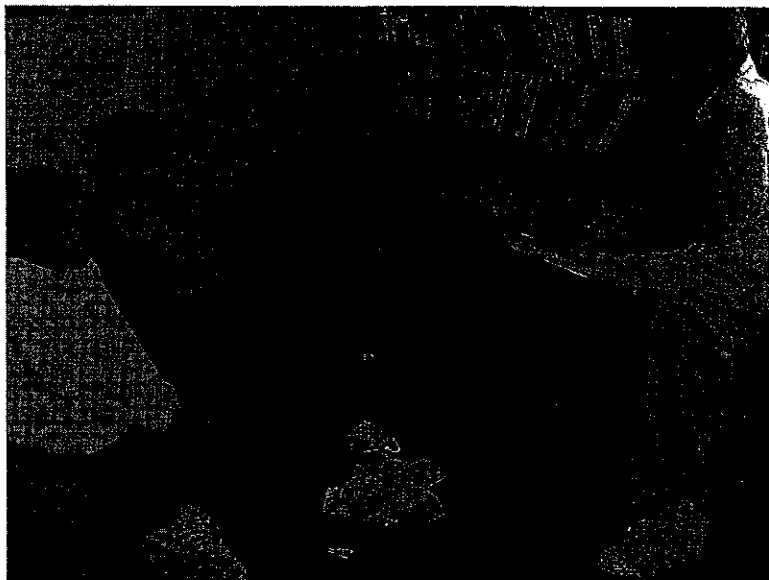
ME: Did you reread the parts you didn't get?

BEN: Why?

ME: To help you understand them.

BEN: Why would reading the same stuff again help me get it?

Just like Ben, many dependent readers don't think "reading the same stuff again" does them any good. That is partly because they operate under the misconception that skilled readers read something once, read it somewhat effortlessly, and "get it" the first time, every time. Rereading doesn't look any different from reading, so struggling readers don't see how many times proficient readers pause, loop back a few sentences, reread up to a point, reflect, start over completely, and then perhaps proceed slowly. Moreover, as we discuss texts with students, we rarely bring up the issue of how often we reread, why we reread, how the rereading differs from the reading, or how we know what sections to reread. Therefore, dependent



Take time to reread sections of a novel

readers don't hear teachers or other more skilled readers talk about the sentences, passages, or even chapters that they sometimes reread several times to construct meaning. We need to help these students understand that rereading is something that all good readers do and that it is an important strategy to use when trying to understand a text.

Step Inside a Classroom

MR. BELL: Alright guys, let's look at the beginning of Chapter 5; that's what you're going to read tonight. [The students are reading a novel titled *Stick and Whittle* by Sid White.] Before you get into your literature circles to discuss what you read last night, I want us to talk a moment about something I want you to do tonight as you read this chapter. Okay, this chapter is only eight pages so I want you to read it three times tonight. When you get to the end the first time, I want you to stop and jot down any questions you have, predictions you have, or responses you have. Then read that same chapter. This time, I want you paying specific attention to information about Stick. What do you know about him at the end of that chapter that you didn't know before? Finally, I want you to read the chapter one more time, this time focusing on finding out about Whittle. After each reading, jot down notes about what you learned about those two characters.

S1: Why can't we just do that all the first time, Mr. Bell? This is boring.

MR. BELL: Sometimes you can. But right now, just for these eight pages, I want you to practice rereading, to see how each time you reread you can pick up new information. It's like this. How many of you can name at least three songs that you love to hear on the radio? [Almost all students nod their heads or raise their hands. Several start talking about those songs.] Good. Now, how many of you know the words to those songs? [Students nod. Some start singing.] Alright guys. Now, how many of you learned all those words the first time you heard it? [Students shake their heads no.] Now, how many of you discovered you could sing the words but still didn't really know what those words were saying?

S2: Oh my gosh. That is so true. There was this one song and I just loved it because of the melody I guess but then I learned all the words, I mean really learned them, you know started thinking about them, and then, like I couldn't believe what they were saying, you know? Then I didn't like it at all.

MR. BELL: That's right. The more you heard the song, the more you learned about it. The same thing happens with reading, guys. The more you read something, the more you learn about it. And as we read the same thing, we can shift our attention. Like you shifted from just hearing the melody to memorizing the words to really understanding what the words were saying.

S1: So you want us to memorize the chapter?

MR. BELL: Not hardly. I want you to shift your attention as you read the chapter each time. The first time, read it to get an overall impression, to see if there is something you don't understand. The second time, focus on Stick and the third time, focus on Whittle.

Students then moved into literature circles and began discussing the book up to that point. The next day, students had interesting comments about their rereadings.

MR. BELL: Alright guys. Who did their rereading? [Most hands go up.] Okay. What happened each time you reread?

S3: The first time I read it, I didn't get any of what was going on on page, page 82. But then, by the third time, I had figured it out. I was impressed.

S4: It was weird, like the first time, I thought I had understood everything and then when I read it again, even though you said to focus on Stick, I was really thinking about Brings the Rain and about that battle at Sand Creek and I hadn't thought about that at all the first time I read it. It was like it was there for the first time.

S5: You know, here, here on page 79 where it says, "Whittle stepped forward, doffing his derby and bowing to the girl," well the first time and maybe even the second time I don't think I even noticed that because, well because I think like doffing, you know what is that, so since I didn't understand it, I just went on over it. But by the third time, well you know you said to focus on Whittle and so I was but also, by then, I understood so much more it was like now I could think about what I didn't understand. Whatever it is, it's probably like being pretty polite because he's bowing and all.

Debriefing the Strategy

The students in this class were learning the value of rereading. Mr. Bell didn't wait until a student said he was confused about a particular part of a text, then offer him the vague advice of "reread it." Instead, he wanted students to discover how rereading allows them to see things in the text they simply can't see on the first read. Mr. Bell did a couple of things to make sure this would succeed. First, he asked them to reread a short chapter. No one wants to reread twenty-five pages; but eight pages is probably manageable. Second, he gave students specific things to do with each rereading.

Putting the Strategy to Work

Rereading is probably the number one strategy independent readers use when something stumps them in a text. It's probably the last strategy dependent readers use. That's because independent readers believe it's their job, as a reader, to figure out the text. If they didn't get it the first time through, then they simply need to try again. Dependent readers neither believe they can figure it out nor that they are expected to figure it out. Rereading can move from a quick suggestion to a powerful way to read strategically with a little instruction from us.

1. *First, prove to students that rereading is valuable.* Do this by giving students a short text and asking them to reread it three times. Keep it short enough that they can do this in class. Ask them to rate their understanding of this text on a scale of 1–10 after each reading (1 is low and 10 is high). Discuss their rating when they are finished. Most students will see that their scores improved either between the first and second readings or second and third or after each rereading. Discuss

You try it! Read the poem found in Figure 7.3 three times. After each reading, rate your understanding of the poem on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being low and 10 meaning you could write the Cliff Notes for the poem. Don't consult a dictionary, thesaurus, online resource, or even ask a buddy. The point is to show you that even without consulting outside resources, your comprehension will probably improve. After each rating, jot down one or two questions you have. When you've completed this, think about how you altered your reading each time you went through the text.

Rereading is probably the number one strategy independent readers use when something stumps them in a text. It's probably the last strategy dependent readers use.

Huswifery
by Edward Taylor

Make me, O Lord, thy Spinning Wheel complete.
Thy Holy Word my Distaff make for me.
Make mine Affections thy Swift Flyers neat
And make my Soul thy holy Spool to be.
My Conversation make to be thy Reel
And reel the yarn thereon spun of thy Wheel.

Make me thy Loom then, knit therein this Twine:
And make thy Holy Spirit, Lord, wind quills:
Then weave the Web thyself. The Yarn is fine.
Thine Ordinances make my Fulling Mills.
Then dye the same in Heavenly Colors Choice,
All pinked with Varnished Flowers of Paradise.

Then clothe therewith mine Understanding, Will,
Affections, Judgment, Conscience, Memory,
My Words, and Actions, that their shine may fill
My ways with glory and thee glorify.
Then mine apparel shall display before ye
That I am Clothed in Holy robes for glory.

Ratings:

1st Reading 2nd Reading 3rd Reading

FIGURE 7.3 *Rereading for understanding*

I've used the following poems for this: "The Secret" by Denise Levertov; "The Sacred" by Stephen Dunn; "The Journey" by Mary Olive (better for high school); the first few verses of "The Raven" by Edgar Allen Poe; "Daily" by Naomi Shihab Nye; "Legal Alien" by Pat Mora; "Ain't I a Woman?" by Sojourner Truth; as well as political cartoons, comic strips from the newspaper, and ads from magazines.

with students why this happened. Figure 7.4 shows you one sixth-grader's reasons for why his scores went up after rereading.

2. *Next, model your thinking as you reread a text.* Read a short passage aloud and think through what was happening in the text. Then reread it and think through it again. Let students hear how your thinking changes as you reread a text.
3. *Then give students specific tasks as they reread.* Dependent readers aren't aware of the power of rereading, so they don't know what the rereading should accomplish. To help them with that, you might do what Mr. Bell did and have students brainstorm instances when it is helpful to reread. Figure 7.5 shows you one student's list.
4. *Finally, after students have reread, review what happened.* This move from rereading to reviewing highlights the value of rereading.

Brad
Language Arts, 4

Sep. 4, 2001

Reasons for Score Increasing

- Slowed down 2nd time

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- Already had an idea of what it was about

- Knew what the problem was and could focus on that

- Knew which parts I had gotten and could get past those quickly

- Had an overall idea, so I could see it better in my mind

- I already knew which words I didn't know so I could be thinking about those when I read to find context clues

FIGURE 7.4 Brad's explanation for how rereading helps

Questions and Answers

1. When you do the part where students rate their understanding three times, do scores ever go down instead of up?

Yes. If you are working with students who really don't care about success in school, then that might happen. I've told some students to reread something only to have them just move their eyes over the same text. If students don't put a greater effort into understanding the second time they read, then nothing will happen. Also, if you choose a really difficult text, students might not put forth the effort needed for the

Alexis
J.A.-3rd
2-7-00

When to Re-read

1. When I can't even remember the last word I read.
2. If I'm not understanding what's going on.
3. If there is a lot of talking and I get mixed up on whose saying what.
4. If there is a hard word and I need to back up some to reread to see if I can figure it out.
5. When I need to figure out what digraphs mean I go back to see were they fit.
6. If the part seems ~~really~~ really important, like a major idea or a clue to something that is happening.
7. When I come to questions later that need answers from the text.
8. If the paragraph is just confusing.
9. When I really like a part, like in Watson's Ho to Birmingham - 1963, when the kid kisses the mirror and his tongue gets stuck to it.
10. If I'm reading along thinking something is going to happen but it doesn't.

FIGURE 7.5 Alexis' notes for when to reread

rereading to be helpful. As mentioned earlier, the text should be one that you know they will understand better with repeated rereading. Also, very good readers sometimes notice something they missed the first time (or second time) that then confuses them and so they rate their understanding with a lower score. In fact, they know more because now they know what they don't know!

2. *How important is it to make the list of reasons to reread?*

I think this list is critical. It's not just the list of *when* to reread, but what to do *while* rereading. For instance, if students discover they weren't paying attention through an entire section, then they probably need to reread very carefully. However, if they need to reread to find one fact, then they probably can skim many parts of the text.

A last comment about rereading. When my daughter, Meredith, was in eighth grade, her English teachers assigned her class to read *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Meredith read it and when she finished, she told me how much she enjoyed it. "It's a really, really good book, Mom." When Meredith went to high school the next year, her ninth-grade English teacher assigned the same book. Meredith, who enjoys reading, reread the entire book. This time, when she finished, she told me once again how much she liked the book. Then, between Meredith's ninth- and tenth-grade years, we moved, and she changed high schools. And that year, in tenth grade, her English teacher required that they all read *To Kill a Mockingbird*. When Meredith finished the book for the third time, she sat beside me in my study, crying. "Mom, this is the most important book I've ever read," she said and then went on to describe what made this book so powerful to her. Finally, done talking about the book, she wiped tears off her face and then said, "But you know, Mom, I like this version of this book so much better than the one I read in eighth grade." I had to work hard not to laugh. She had decided that in eighth grade she must have read an abridged version; I wanted to hug her and tell her that when she was in eighth grade, she was abridged, just not quite all here yet. And suddenly I thought of all her buddies from eighth grade who had not followed her on to the same two high schools and, having only read *To Kill A Mockingbird* one time, still see it as "a really good book."

I wonder how often we, as English teachers—the people who should most see the value in rereading important texts—convince students that there is *no* value in rereading novels. We say things like, "No, you can't use a book you've already read for your book report," instead of, "If you reread it, you can use it." We argue with one another in the teachers' workroom, telling each other, "No you can't teach that book in eighth grade because we

read it in seventh grade." Yet we intuitively understand the incredible value of rereading because we know that every time we reread *Romeo and Juliet* or *The Giver* or *Holes* or *Esperanza Rising* or *Tears of a Tiger* or *Local News*, we understand more about the text. Yet we become frustrated when students don't see the same things in a text that we do when they read it the first time through. I have to ask what would be the harm in revisiting some texts over all three years in middle school or four years in high school? More important, what would be the advantages? I think the advantages far outweigh any disadvantages.

I'm not suggesting that all students should do is reread; however, why not spend that first three weeks of school, when we should be getting to know our students as readers and writers, rereading a novel they read the previous year? Or why not, during December, give students the opportunity to look back through their literature textbooks and find a short story or poem they want to reread? "But they already know how it ends," you think. Please remember, these are the same kids who went to see the movie *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* five times—in a row. These are the kids who rented *Jaws* to watch it repeatedly one weekend. Knowing the ending isn't the issue for them. The primary reason kids don't want to reread is because they sometimes don't want to be forced to do the same activities they had to do the first time around. They don't want more vocabulary lists, more lists of questions to answer, more tests to take, more dioramas to make. The second reason students don't want to reread a text is because they didn't enjoy it the first time. That's particularly true when we're forcing students to read classics that were not written for thirteen- or fourteen-year-old students to begin with. If students balk at everything you have them read, then it's probably time that you review what you are requiring them to read. Students prefer rereading—just watch a four-year-old choose bedtime stories. And they understand more of the text each time they reread.

I'm going to propose that each time a reader rereads, she revises her understanding of the text. The first read of a story, a chapter, a poem, a novel, a web page, a letter—any sort of text—yields the first draft of understanding. Readers revise that draft through every rereading. That process of read, revise, read, revise lets me suggest that the reading process is actually more like the writing process than the *writing* process. We've all seen student writing enough to know that at some point the revision of the writing begins to have a reverse effect; the revision, instead of making the writing better, makes it worse. "Stop!" we cry out. "Use the previous revision." But with reading, every revision results in some additional layer or dimension of understanding,

The first read of any sort of text yields the first draft of understanding. Readers revise that draft through every rereading.

whether that is an additional question or new connection or sudden clarification or thought on how to fix up what is still confusing. Viewing reading as revision is a powerful way to understand reading—but one that requires that we encourage rereading of texts rather than discourage it.

Think-Aloud

It happens all the time. You ask students to tell you something about what they've read, and they meet your request with blank stares. They seem to know nothing about the text, but they maintain they've read it. Many of these students have done what they consider reading: their eyes have traveled over the words from left to right and from top to bottom; they've even turned pages at the appropriate time. What they haven't done is pay any attention to what those words mean; they haven't been thinking about what they are reading, noting what they don't understand, deciding what they should do to make the text make sense. That's when a strategy called Think-Aloud can help.

The Think-Aloud strategy (Davey, 1983; Olshavsky, 1976–77) helps readers think about how they make meaning. As students read, they pause occasionally to think aloud about connections they are making, images they are creating, problems with understanding that they are encountering, and ways they see of fixing those problems. This oral thinking not only helps the teacher understand why or how a student is having difficulty with a text but also allows the student to analyze how he is thinking about his reading. This type of metacognitive practice builds independence in reading.

Step Inside a Classroom

I sat in the middle school reading lab with DeDe for about fifteen minutes, listening to her read aloud *Belle Prater's Boy*, a novel by Ruth White (1997, New York: Yearling). DeDe's teacher had asked me to work with her because it appeared to the teacher that DeDe could answer literal-level questions about a text but not much more. DeDe was a fluent reader who had few, if any, problems with word recognition. That fluency, however, had not translated into better comprehension.

I asked her to read aloud a portion of *Belle Prater's Boy* (which she did well) and then tell me what that section was about. She offered a quick retelling that indicated she wasn't sure about the sequence of events, about what was motivating the characters, or about what the effect of some

actions would be. It appeared that DeDe's teacher was correct: this student needed help with comprehension, not word recognition. The next day, I met her in the lab again and told her that today I'd be reading a part of the novel aloud and that I had two goals while reading it: First, I told her I wanted to share this excellent story with her and begin discussing who this story was really about—Belle Prater's boy (Woodrow), his cousin (Gypsy), or Belle Prater (Woodrow's mother, who suddenly vanishes). This first goal was intended to pose a question that the teacher had said she wanted the students to explore while reading this book. Second, I explained that I wanted DeDe to learn a strategy that would help her understand a text better as she read. I told her that her job, when I finished reading, would be to tell me what I did while I was reading to help this text make sense. She nodded warily and I began.

Here I'm using features about the cover to note what is confusing me.

Here I make a connection.

At this point, I make a prediction.

Here, I'm using facts from the text to make a prediction about some things that might happen in the story.

Now I'm using some information from the text to clarify a confusion I had about the cover art.

Using what I know about pronouns, I clarify my confusion by predicting that the word *her* is connected to Belle.

First, I spent time commenting on the cover: "Well, as I look at the title and the illustration, I get a little confused. The title says 'Belle Prater's Boy' but there's a boy and a girl on the cover, so he's probably the boy, but is she Belle Prater? I really don't think so because she looks about his age, or at least not old enough to be his mother. It sort of looks like there are mountains in the background, but they are all covered with lush green trees. That doesn't remind me of the Rocky Mountains, but is more like the Smokey Mountains or the Appalachian Mountains. And there's a house down here in the corner, so the story must have something to do with home—leaving home or going home or maybe running away from home or maybe something good or bad happens in the home."

I continued my think-aloud by starting on page 1 of Chapter 1. When I paused to think aloud, I laid the book down on the table; when I read, I held it up. I was trying to give some sort of visual cue that I was thinking about the text, not reading it. After reading the first sentence, I paused:

"Oh, here, with the first sentence, I see that it's 1953. That's almost fifty years ago. That tells me right away that I bet some of the things that happen in this story are going to seem very old-fashioned and out of date. And look, it says, 'my Aunt Belle,' so maybe the girl on the front is Aunt Belle's niece, and that would make the boy and the girl cousins." I read the second sentence, then paused again to make another statement:

"Well, this was confusing, right here, where it says, 'her husband, my Uncle Everett, told the sheriff.' The first sentence sounded like the girl was talking, but now her husband is talking. And who is 'her'? 'Her' must be Aunt Belle. So, Aunt Belle and Uncle Everett go together. Does that mean Everett is the dad of the boy who is on the front cover? And look at what the sentence said about going outside to the toilet. I don't think that most people had outside toilets even in 1953 unless they lived way out in the

country. Maybe that's right, though, because look at how Uncle Everett said 'figgered' instead of 'figured.' The author must have done that to give us a hint about either how educated he is or where he lives."

I read the first three pages, stopping quite often to think aloud, or to do what Wilhelm (2001) calls "reporting out." As I reported out, I consciously tried to predict what might happen next, clarify what was going on, note what parts of the text were confusing me, visualize the scene, or connect what I was reading to what I know. If I needed to reread something, I said, "I better reread this part," or if I thought that the best way to figure something out was to read further, I said, "Maybe when I read on, this part will make more sense." Figure 7.6 shows you a bit more of this think-aloud.

I point out that the author is using an event (going outside to the toilet) and a particular word (*figgered*) to give me a hint about the setting and a character.

Text	Comments
<i>"Uncle Everett, a coal miner, and Aunt Belle, along with their boy, Woodrow, lived way far in the head of a long isolated holler called Crooked Ridge, near the town of Coal Station, Virginia, where the Appalachians are steep and rugged."</i>	So, I guess Woodrow is the boy on the front? Maybe. There is so much information just on this first page. I'm not sure what a holler is. I think about holler meaning shout, but that's not it. It's someplace to live because it says Woodrow lived at the head of it. I guess that means the beginning of it. And there's the Appalachians. I thought those mountains on the front looked like the mountains you'd see there.
<i>"According to Uncle Everett, Aunt Belle was barefooted and wearing only a thin nightgown. Her two pairs of shoes and all her clothes were still in their rightful places. There was no evidence of foul play and no indication that she went traipsing off to somewhere else."</i>	Boy, this is sounding like a great mystery. Maybe even a murder mystery. I predict that the story is about figuring out what happened to Belle. The author is giving a lot of hints about how these people live and how much money they have. She only has two pairs of shoes. That's not very many. <i>Traipsing</i> is a word you don't hear very often. Sort of like <i>figgered</i> . I bet the author used it to show me that these are real country people. I wonder where she went and if Uncle Everett had anything to do with it. Or maybe, you hear about kids who are committing terrible crimes, maybe her son, Woodrow, did something to her.
<i>"Mama reminded me how privileged I was, how fortunate, and I didn't doubt her word one bit, except when a certain nightmare came to haunt me . . . It had something to do with a dead animal, and I would wake up sobbing or screaming."</i>	I wonder if Gypsy is dreaming about what happened to her Aunt Belle? Is she connected to her aunt's disappearance in some way? I'll have to wait to see if that's right, but whatever it turns out to be, I predict that this dream is important in some way. The author has mentioned it too early in the story for it not to be important.

FIGURE 7.6 Think-aloud for Belle Prater's Boy

When I paused at one point, DeDe interrupted me and asked, "Why are you doing all that?"

"I'm just saying aloud all what my mind is thinking while I read this."

"You're kidding, right? You're thinking all that while you're reading?"

"Sure. That's what good readers do. They have like a conversation in their mind while reading—asking questions, answering those questions, making predictions, making connections, visualizing the scene."

"Not me. I just read it. You know?"

"Well, why don't you try it, just once, with this next part. Just read it aloud and why don't you stop after this sentence and then either ask a question about something you don't understand or comment on something that now makes sense." She nodded slowly and then began.

"*Woodrow had lived way up in the head of that holler with his mother and father without any plumbing or even a refrigerator, and he and I had always gone to different schools.*" There's that holler again. You know, you noticed when you were reading. Here it is again. I'm still not sure what it is. Like a hole maybe? But why would you live at the beginning of a hole? I don't know. And there's more of those hints, you know, like you were saying, like hints from the author about them being poor because it says they didn't have any plumbing or a refrigerator. That's really poor.

"*I couldn't wait to visit Woodrow that spring night when he moved in next door. I wanted to know if he had any secret knowledge or theories about what had happened to his mother.*" So Gypsy thinks it's a mystery, too. Um, I predict that he, um Woodrow, that he knows where his mother is.

She paused for a moment and said to me, "This is hard work. You know, this is like you really have to think about every word."

"Yeah," I said. "But what do you notice as you are doing all that thinking?"

"Well, it's really different, like, you know, like it's like the story has all this stuff in it, that if you really pay attention it's all there or at least there are hints there. But this is really hard work. You do this all the time?"

Dede stops to question something she doesn't understand.

Notice how quickly she picks up the term *predict*.

Debriefing the Strategy

Good readers have a constant dialogue with the text as they read, although they usually do it silently. Think-alouds provide struggling readers with a structure on which to build this dialogue; they learn to think about their reading and to monitor what they do and do not understand.

As students use this strategy, they

- ◆ predict ("I bet that . . ." or "I wonder if . . ." or "I think that . . .")
- ◆ picture the text ("From this part here, I can see . . ." or "I imagine that . . .")
- ◆ make comparisons ("This reminds me of . . ." or "This part is like . . ." or "This is similar to . . .")
- ◆ monitor their comprehension ("I don't get this . . ." or "This confuses me because . . ." or "This is a difficult part because . . .")
- ◆ decide how to fix up (repair) comprehension problems ("Maybe I better reread . . ." or "Maybe I need to keep on reading to see if . . ." or "I better look this word up because . . ." or "Maybe I better consider that . . .")
- ◆ comment on what they've read ("I like this because . . ." or "This part is sad because . . ." or "If you think about it . . .")
- ◆ connect what they've read to what they already know ("This reminds me of . . ." or "I know that this part in the text is right [or wrong] because . . .")
- ◆ question what is happening in the text ("I wonder why the author . . ." or "What's happening here . . ." or "Is the character going to . . .")

Any of these comments indicates that the student is actively engaged with the reading. That's the goal. As students use this strategy more and more, that internal dialogue with the text becomes more natural, proving to students the connection between reading and thinking. As DeDe later explained, "All this thinking is really the whole point of reading. I mean if you aren't thinking it, you aren't reading it."

Putting the Strategy to Work

1. *First, model thinking aloud.* This is truly a strategy that isn't just taught but is shown—again and again. In fact, I've found that every time we switch genre or form, I've got to model a think-aloud. In other words, I can't presume that just because I've modeled how I think through a poem, students know how to think through a persuasive essay. And after I've modeled how to think through a persuasive essay, that doesn't mean they understand how to think through an argumentative essay or the section of their history book that compares the Civil War to the Revolutionary War.
2. *Before you begin to think aloud, tell students that as you read a passage aloud, you will be stopping to think through what you are reading.* Tell them

to listen for when you predict, visualize (or use the word *picture*), question, clarify, connect, comment, monitor your understanding, or identify ways to fix up your misunderstandings. Remind them that skilled readers constantly have this sort of dialogue with the text as they read.

3. *As you read the text, stop frequently to talk about how you are analyzing what happened in the text.* Some people advocate doing a "cold reading" for your think-aloud, one where you've never seen the text before so that students observe as real a think-aloud as possible. This is good to do occasionally; however, I find it more important to have studied the text I'm going to use for the think-aloud so I can plan where I will stop and what I will say.
4. *As you stop to report out, give students a verbal or visual cue that you're switching from reading the text to thinking aloud.* I like to shift how I'm holding the book. Other teachers say they like to turn their bodies a slightly different direction. Others say they start each think-aloud comment with, "Thinking now," or "My turn." Do whatever works well for you.
5. *Sometimes, as you report out, jot your comments down on a transparency as you make them.* Then when you've finished your think-aloud, let students go back and decide if you were predicting, commenting, noting your confusions, deciding how to fix up what confused you, questioning, clarifying, or visualizing as you read. This level of metacognitive analysis helps students understand what you, the more skilled reader, are doing and why you are doing it.
6. *After you've modeled thinking aloud a few times, have students try it on a portion of text with a partner.* Give students a short amount of text to think aloud. As they read to one another, circulate through the room to see how they are doing. Expect to hear some of them say, "I don't know what to say." That's better than nothing. They'll get better. If students have a very difficult time, you can scaffold this practice for them by cueing exactly where in the text you want them to stop and exactly what word, phrase, or sentence you want them to report out on. You can even tell them that after they read that particular section, they are to describe the scene they see (visualizing) or discuss how this relates to something they know (connecting) or what the text tells them about the character or setting (clarifying). Your job at this point is to support them. Be ready to step in with prompts if they need them. The partners will learn how to be effective from your examples. They can also

capture comments that the readers make on sticky notes. Then, both the reader and partner can study the notes to see what types of comments the reader made.

7. *Provide ample opportunities for students to practice thinking aloud.* This is a strategy that requires constant practice—after all, it's what proficient readers do constantly.
8. *Give students a chance to reflect on how the think-aloud has changed their reading habits.* Figure 7.7 shows you a think-aloud assessment I use with dependent readers.

Questions and Answers

1. *What do I do if students make comments for every sentence?*
Sometimes that's necessary. But if you think students are stopping too often, then check your modeling to make sure you are showing students how to chunk their reading; it's important for them to see how to stop after every few sentences or even a paragraph to make comments.
2. *Is it helpful to tell students what kind of comments to make?*
Generally, the answer is no. However, dependent readers sometimes need that extra scaffold of knowing exactly where in the text to stop, exactly which part of the text to respond to, and exactly what type of comment they are to make. This type of cued think-aloud focuses students' thinking. Your job is to monitor their ability to work with cues so you know when to remove them.
3. *What if students' comments are questions they have about the text? Should I answer their questions?*
Not as the think-aloud is in progress. Often, confusion about what is going on in the text—whether that means wondering what a specific word means, which character is speaking, or what is happening next—is cleared up as the student continues reading. That's when you'll hear comments like, "Oh, I get it," or "I bet that part meant . . .," or "It must have been this character who said. . . ." Remind partners to keep track of questions and to see if the reader can clarify his own questions as he moves through the text.
4. *Isn't think-aloud similar to the Say Something strategy?*
It's the role of the partner that is the biggest difference between these two strategies. In the Say Something strategy, two or three readers work

Name _____ Date _____

Think-Aloud Self-Assessment

PART I. Read each statement below. Put a 1 by the items you do often, a 2 by the items you do sometimes, and a 3 by the ones you do rarely.

When I pause to think aloud . . .

- _____ I make my mind try to visualize the scene. (visualizing)
- _____ I try to figure out which parts have confused me. (monitoring comprehension)
- _____ I compare what has happened now with what happened previously. (comparing)
- _____ I ask questions about what's going on in the text. (questioning)
- _____ I make myself connect what I know to what's happening in the story. (connecting)
- _____ I make comments about what I like or don't like. (commenting)
- _____ I anticipate what a character might do next. (predicting)
- _____ I make comments about what the author is doing to give me hints about the characters or plot or setting. (commenting)
- _____ I wonder what the author wants me to figure out at this point. (questioning)
- _____ I try to figure out if I need to reread a section. (identify fix-up solutions)
- _____ I predict what will happen next. (predicting)
- _____ I try to imagine what is happening in the text. (visualizing)
- _____ I think about characters or events to see how they are alike or different. (comparing)
- _____ I ask myself how this is like something else I've read or maybe a song I've heard. (connecting)
- _____ I try to figure out if I should read on. (identify fix-up solutions)
- _____ I stop and ask myself if I understand what I've read so far. (monitoring comprehension)

PART II. Look at the numbers you put in the blanks in Part I and then answer the questions in Part II.

1. What do you do most often when you think aloud?
2. Why do you think you do that the most?
3. What do you do the least?

PART III. Complete the following statements to help you plan what you'll do in your next think-aloud.

1. Think-alouds help me because . . .
2. I need to keep practicing (predicting, connecting, comparing, visualizing, monitoring comprehension, identifying fix-up solutions, commenting, questioning) because . . .
3. In my next group of think-alouds I'll . . .

FIGURE 7.7 *Think-aloud checklist for dependent readers*

together, with one saying something one at one point in the text and the others responding. When they reach the next stopping point in the text, they switch roles. In the think-aloud strategy, one person is doing the reading and the thinking aloud. The partner's role is to capture the statements on paper or sticky notes and, when the think-aloud is complete, discuss with the reader what he or she did during the process.

5. *Do students always have to do a think-aloud orally?*

Not at all. You can have students think through a text by responding to it on sticky notes. I've watched Robert Probst do this with teachers during staff development workshops. He gives teachers a poem on a large sheet of paper and has them read it, encouraging them to make notes all over the paper about their understanding of the poem. I've been so impressed with this that I recently taught my graduate students this same process. Figure 7.8 shows you one of the think-silently posters that one of my graduate student's eleventh-grade class made after reading a poem by e. e. cummings.

Strategy Snapshots

Say Something, Rereading, and Think-Aloud were described in detail to provide you with rich descriptions of how the strategies look in the classroom. In the next section, you'll find eight additional strategies that, though described in less detail, are no less important in helping dependent readers understand how to construct meaning during reading.

Double-Entry Journals

Many of us have had students respond to what they've read in some form of a journal; others of us have had students take notes while they read a text. Double-entry journals combine both techniques, giving students a powerful way to take notes and respond at the same time. Have students fold notebook paper in half lengthwise. They label the top of the left-hand column "Notes from the Text" or "What's in the Book" and the top of the right-hand column "Notes from My Mind." or "My Response." As students read the text, they record on the left-hand side a passage or a word from the text with the page number. On the right-hand side, they make their comment about that passage. This might be a question or a connection or a visual symbol to help them remember something. Figure 7.9 is a portion of DeDe's double-entry journal that she kept while reading *Belle Prater's Boy*.

CONSTRUCTING MEANING

Dede	
Book	Response
→ "When it came to washing my hair, I'd rather clean than vomit." (31)	→ Oh my gosh, she loves to like to so much a tom boy
→ "Y'all didn't have a piano with that lil' ol' shack, didja?" (33)	→ She can be pretty rude, calling his house a shack
→ Is that a bottle of your homemade blackberry wine I see there on the sideboard? (34)	→ What's a sideboard? And is this wine like real wine they made out of blackberries?
→ Everything on p. 36	→ This was weird. Did this really happen or was he just making it up? I'm confused.

FIGURE 7.9 DeDe's double-entry journal

Logographic Cues

A logograph is a visual symbol. Many traffic and pedestrian signs are logographs. When drivers see the yellow triangle that has a squiggly line going down the center, they know to slow down because the road ahead has curves. When pedestrians see a sign that has a circle with a diagonal drawn through it, they know to not walk in that direction. Logographic cues are designed to offer readers a high-utility message in a minimum amount of space. Readers can design their own logographs to insert into texts as they read to become "signposts" that show them the direction the text is taking. They can draw these logographs on sticky notes and adhere the notes to the

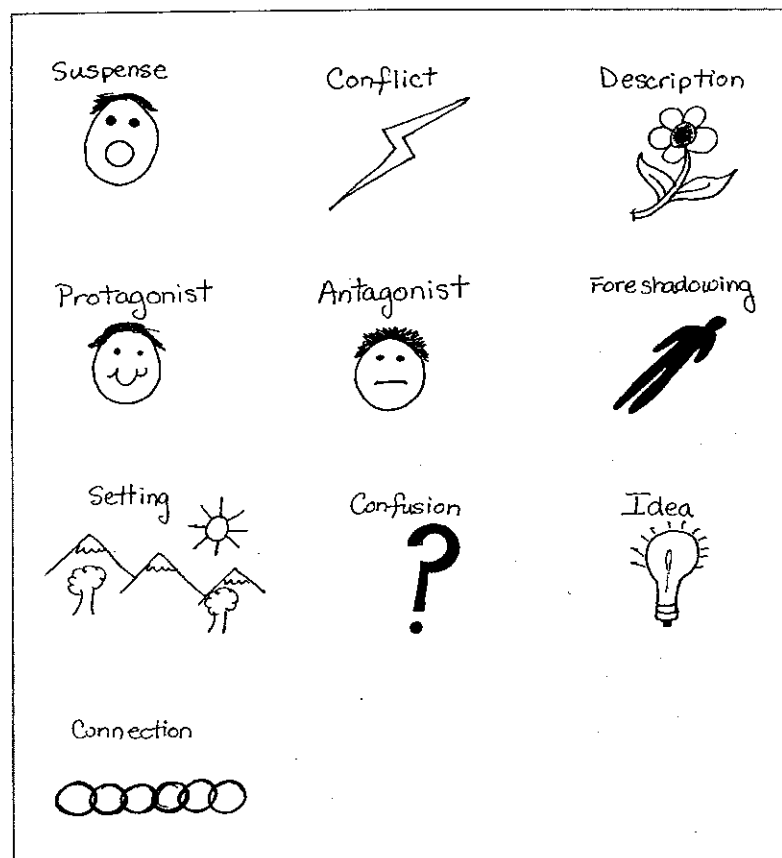


FIGURE 7.10 Mary Helen's logographic cues

texts or they can make a double-entry journal and instead of writing in the response column, they can draw their logographs. Students should design their own logographs so that the picture has meaning for them. You might start, however, by brainstorming some symbols that could be used to show characters, conflict, or setting as well as symbols to show questions, clarifications, or inferences. Figure 7.10 shows you Mary Helen's logographic cues she developed while reading *Mr. Tucker* by Gary Paulsen.

Bookmarks

Everyone knows what a bookmark is—even dependent readers. Playing on the word *mark* in *bookmark*, teachers at Lanier Middle School and I created different types of bookmarks for students to use while reading. Some teachers ran these bookmarks off on bright card stock; others copied them

Expand Your Vocab. Bookmark	
Name	Margavita
Title of novel	Buried onions
Author	
Word or phrase	Biven tree
Pg. #	21
Comments	any group of trees bearing saw-toothed leaves; the pale or white bark of the tree is easily peeled.
Word or phrase	Staggered
Pg. #	71
Comments	To move unsteadily or with a swaying motion; to stagger.
Word or phrase	Ornary
Pg. #	111
Comments	not fully awake or alert; in a daze or in a state of confusion.
Word or phrase	Daytime
Pg. #	54
Comments	a large knife or dagger that can be attached to the neck of a horse or used for stabbing or slitting in hand-to-hand combat.
Word or phrase	La Hele
Pg. #	161
Comments	hanging or torn in shreds.
Word or phrase	Whisky
Pg. #	13
Comments	a whisky distilled mainly from corn.

Expand Your Vocab. Bookmark	
Name	Caitlin
Author	Kimberly Willis Holt
Title of novel	When Zachary Beaver Came to Town
Author	
Word or phrase	going yellow
Pg. #	170
Comments	at first I wasn't sure what this phrase meant! It means scared.
Word or phrase	septic tank
Pg. #	170
Comments	It is the tank that waste goes into (used for trailers).
Word or phrase	traipsing
Pg. #	179
Comments	trips to the trip on the
Word or phrase	up-and-up
Pg. #	179
Comments	The phrase on the up-and-up means honest.
Word or phrase	skinner
Pg. #	151
Comments	This is some a group of people. It wasn't in the dict.
Word or phrase	grimaces
Pg. #	180
Comments	an ugly or distorted expression of the face; a ugly or ugly smile or facial expression of pain.

FIGURE 7.11 Completed bookmarks

on regular white paper; still others distributed index cards or newsprint, showed students a template, and said, "Make your own." Though the bookmarks looked different from class to class, the result was the same—students were marking things of interest as they read texts. Here's a list of the bookmarks students used and Figure 7.11 shows you some completed ones. You can find templates for each of these in Appendix C.

- ◆ **Mark My Words:** A bookmark for recording interesting or unusual words you encounter while reading. Every five or ten days, spend ten minutes of class time reviewing what words students recorded. Put the words on chart paper you've put up somewhere in the room. Discuss what the words mean as you write them. As a class, choose two or three that everyone

wants to try using for the next week. Give bonus points every time someone uses one of the words correctly.

- ◆ *Marking Time:* Use these bookmarks to mark how the setting changes as the book or short story progresses. Excellent for a history class where students might need to track the movement of an army during a particular war.
- ◆ *Question Mark:* These bookmarks are for students to record their questions as they read. Make sure they put the page number by the question so they can revisit that part of the text to see what caused the question.
- ◆ *Mark Who?:* Students can record information about characters on these bookmarks.
- ◆ *Mark the Bold:* These are excellent bookmarks for students to use while they read their content area textbooks—or any book that has a lot of boldfaced terms. As students come across a boldfaced word, they record that word on the front of the bookmark. Then they turn it over to the back (which is titled “Talk the Bold”) and write what that term means in their own words. Once a week or so, have students review the terms they’ve collected on their bookmarks and then “talk the bold” by reviewing with one another what they said the words meant. (One student labeled this activity “a very bold move.”)

ABCs of Comparing and Contrasting

Janet Allen reminded teachers how to use ABC boxes to help students organize information during vocabulary study. While I had never thought to use these boxes for vocabulary study, I have encouraged students to use this simple graphic organizer to record information about characters as they read a text. For instance, as Anne read the short story “The Most Dangerous Game,” she wrote the two main characters’ names, Rainsford and Zaroff, at the top of the worksheet. Then as she read the selection, she recorded adjectives that described Rainsford in the correct ABC boxes in pencil. She jotted information about Zaroff in pen. When she finished the story, she discovered that her page was filled with words that gave her good information about both characters and she could easily see how they were alike and different. She was ready to write an essay on these two characters. Figure 7.12 shows you her ABCs of comparing and contrasting.

Rainsford		Zaroff		Anne ☆
A-B bossy angry	C-D confused controller	E-F fake friendly	G-H hunter genera) gets even grateful at first	
I-J	K-L Killer	M-N mean	O-P patient	
Q-R quick > Both! quick	S-T scared smart surprised strange selfish	U-V upset undecided	WXYZ worried weird	

FIGURE 7.12 Anne's compare/contrast chart

Post-it Notes

The principal asked me what he could buy his teachers to really help them help their students this year. For a moment I entertained all sorts of responses, but then settled on the practical: "Buy boxes and boxes of Post-it Notes. Get the little ones that come in bright colors and look like flags. Get the standard size we all see. Get some of the index-card-sized ones that have lines on them. And, don't forget some of the huge ones—the ones teachers can hang on walls." He did it and soon students were "writing" in their textbooks. Students used them to flag what they didn't understand or particularly liked. They used them to jot down notes about characters or in history class about events or in science class about experiments. As students finished chapters or stories, they took the sticky notes off the pages of their text and put them onto notebook paper that they then kept in their notebooks. Teachers used Post-it Notes as



Students can use Post-it Notes to mark specific passages in a novel

they moved from group to group listening in on discussions. They could write anecdotal notes on the pads, and then at the end of the day, put them into individual student folders. This was a fast way of creating a running record on many students. So, students use these notes as they construct meaning during reading and teachers use them to help them preserve their own thoughts about students' progress during discussions.

Character Bulletin Boards

I'll never forget the student who said, "When I read, I don't see it and I don't hear it." I cannot imagine at all what it means to not hear a text as you read silently. Add to that the inability to visualize the text, and suddenly we understand why kids would say that reading is boring! Illustrations, especially character illustrations, are very helpful as these reluctant readers try to form a picture in their minds of the people in the book. When books don't provide illustrations, I think it's important that we spend some time discussing what these characters might look like, dress like, walk like, and even talk like. Making character bulletin boards gives students quick references to characters as they read a novel. Students can draw pictures of the characters for these bulletin boards. They can add descriptions such as "funny guy" or "always sad" or "seems to get in trouble easily" by writing comments onto index cards and adding cards to the bulletin board. Students' comprehension is improved while they read if they have texts or classroom materials that help them visualize the plots and characters.

Syntax Surgery

Sometimes hearing us think through a text isn't enough for students, especially for our dependent readers. They need to see our thinking, see how we made connections in the text. That's when something called Syntax Surgery can be helpful. To do this, copy a paragraph from a text onto an overhead transparency. Then, as you do your think-aloud with this passage, connect the words that are related with circles and lines. Especially show how pronouns are related to nouns or other pronouns. Figure 7.13 is an example of a Syntax Surgery that I did while working with middle schoolers. The

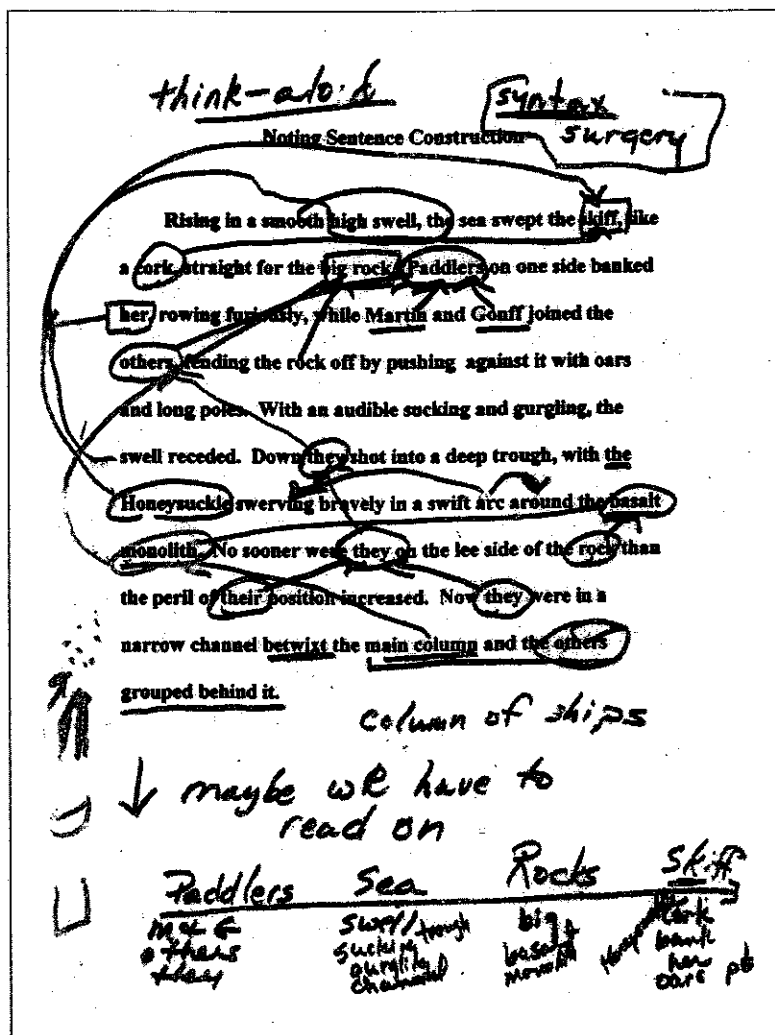


FIGURE 7.13 Syntax Surgery on a passage from *Redwall* by Brian Jacques

paragraph is from *Redwall* by Brian Jacques. Note at the bottom of the transparency, we then put words into groups—words about paddlers, the sea, rocks, and the skiff.

Signal Words

Signal words (or phrases) are words that signal what is about to happen next. Some signal words tell readers about the sequence (*later, next, before, first*); others tell them about a similarity (*likewise, in addition to, in the same way*); and some indicate a contrast (*however, on the other hand, although*). Dependent readers often overlook these clues. We must help them see how often they occur in a text and help them understand what information they provide about the text. Figure 7.14 offers a list of signal words to share with your students. You can put these up on chart paper in your classroom. As you think aloud a text, be sure you show students how you use those words to help figure out what is happening in the text.

Sequence Words	Restatement or Synonym Signal Words	Contrast or Antonym Signal Words
after	also	alternatively
afterward	as well as	although
ahead of	by the same token	apart from
all through	correspondingly	but
as	equally	by contrast
before	equally so	contrary to that
beforehand	especially	conversely
during	for example	despite
earlier than	in that	even though
first, second, third . . .	in the same way	however
finally	just as	in contrast
following	likewise	in spite of this
later	similarly	nevertheless
now	such as	nonetheless
prior to	these	notwithstanding
sooner than	too	on the other hand
subsequently		regardless
then		some . . . , but others
throughout		still
while		then again
		yet

FIGURE 7.14 *Signal words*

Reflections

DeDe had it right: "All this thinking is really the whole point of reading. I mean, if you aren't thinking it, you aren't reading it." Students often don't know how to do all this thinking. For too long we've told them to "think carefully" about what they've read without showing them how to do that thinking. And showing means bringing conversation—sometimes noisy conversation—into the classroom. It means demanding that students talk about the text before they complete it. Ben said, "I never used to worry about comprehending until I finished the story and came to that page of questions titled 'Comprehension Check.' I thought that's when I was supposed to think about it. Now I know that you have to think as you read it. If you wait until you're done, you've waited too late."

Jane agreed with him and then added, "You know, when you understand about things like predicting and connecting and figuring out fix-up solutions, then you know what the good readers have been doing all this time. Man, I thought they were just reading. No way. They were doing a ton of stuff. Now I can do it, too."

Dear George,

As your class finished reading *The Pigman*, I asked if John and Lorraine were responsible for Mr. Pignatti's death. Two students immediately started talking, each offering an opinion. I watched you stare at them. After class, you slowly gathered your books, appearing to want to ask me a question. "What's up, George?" I asked. "How'd they know all that? I mean, this book didn't say whether or not they did it. How'd they know all that stuff to say?" You looked so bewildered. "Well, George, they read it," I answered. "Did you read it?" I watched you frown, resigned. "Yeah, but I must've read wrong. I never get the same stuff they get." I wish I had known what I know now, George. You could have answered that question, that one and many more.
