

**Sponsoring Committee: Dr. Charlotte R. Zales, Moravian College
Dr. Connie Unger, Moravian College
Mrs. Sheri McNett, Lehigh Valley Academy**

**MAKING READING AUTHENTIC
Eileen Gilhooley Cro**

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study documents the observed and reported experiences of a third grade remedial reading group and their teacher when using authentic literacy activities to increase student comprehension and motivation to read. In this study, the teacher explored the process of implementing metacognitive reading comprehension strategies, using diary entries as a way to walk in the shoes of the stories' characters, allowing book choice, and creating authentic culminating literacy activities in order to engage students in reading. During the study, the teacher stayed attuned to the needs of the students, adjusting and implementing reading comprehension strategies as needed by the students. The students wrote personal and reflective diary entries taking on the persona of the character in the story and used their writing as the basis for authentic literature discussions as well as authentic culminating literacy activities. The teacher discovered that giving students book choice, making them aware that they are in control of their own comprehension, and providing them authentic literacy activities positively influenced their reading experience.

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RESEARCHER STANCE

We need to show students that reading is life. We need to show students that reading can take them on adventures: adventures of the physical world and adventures of the heart. Although I always knew that reading was a way to experience the world on many levels, it truly was not until I had children of my own, and I saw through their eyes, that I understood how exciting and how meaningful reading can be to a person. Both of my children are avid readers. I do not take credit for this. I was not a teacher back then. No one told me that I needed to read to my children from the very earliest ages in order to develop their passion for reading and language. I read to my children out of boredom. We were home a lot. We went to the library a lot. The library became a weekly outing for us. We waited in line together to sign up for story time. We came home each week with a bag full of books, and we could not wait to sit down and read. At four years old, my daughter asked to be Diana, the best friend of Anne of Green Gables, for Halloween. At four years old, my son ran around the dining room table reciting lines from *The Hobbit*. My husband and I read both these books aloud to our children. Initiated by my children, we spent many hours together becoming the characters, acting out book and movie dramas. We always read together. We always talked about what we were reading. My daughter's early experiences of putting on the persona of the characters she read about in books ignited her passion for literature, and she is now an English major in college.

Students in the primary grades are capable of a lot more than we sometimes give them credit. This is true in the area of reading. Just because students may still be working hard at decoding does not mean that they cannot be astute comprehenders of the stories they read. It is our responsibility as teachers to raise our students' consciousness, from the earliest years, to the fact that characters in stories are a lot like they are in order to turn our students onto reading.

Thinking about how my own children developed an enjoyment of stories and books and the desire to become the characters in stories and books, led me to the desire to create in my students the innate quest for stories, books, and all the adventures, feelings, connections, and higher level thinking that is a natural outgrowth of reading exposure. Many of my students do not have the kind of access that will lead them to a deep enjoyment of lifelong reading for the joy of engaging with story characters. This is what I wanted to help them understand and develop through my study.

For the past two years I have had fourth and fifth grade students writing their thoughts and feelings about their reading in personal response journals. While doing this, I have sometimes asked the students to write in diary form from the point of view of a character. I observed that the students seemed to be more motivated not only to read, but also to write reflectively as the character. They seemed to like taking on the persona of the character, and it seemed to lead to deeper comprehension and livelier discussion.

These experiences with fourth and fifth grade students, combined with my experiences with my own children's love of the physical adventures traveled in good books, and the rollercoaster adventures of the heart, drives me to create these experiences for third grade students who struggle with reading comprehension and have not yet lived in books. I want the students I teach to experience the thrill of walking in the shoes of a story's character. I want students to roam around in and relive a story character's experiences as they use their reflective journal writing as the basis for authentic literacy response activities. I want my students to not only live and understand these experiences, I want them to develop a passion for reading, and to grow and change along with the characters they read. For these reasons I studied this question: What are the observed and reported experiences when third grade students engage in authentic literacy activities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Giving students choice about the books they read has been shown to increase reading motivation. Allowing students to respond to books in a response journal based on personal thoughts, feelings, and connections increases reading motivation as well (Mizokawa & Krening, 2000). Students who read like real readers and who respond authentically like real readers naturally increase their stamina, motivation, and comprehension. The more opportunities they have to read, the more students build fluency and background knowledge, the more students have the opportunity to develop better quality comprehension (Pardo, 2004). Building fluency and comprehension needs to happen simultaneously. Even first graders have the ability to respond to story characters' thoughts and feelings aesthetically in order to deepen their understanding of a story (Roser, Martinez, Fuhrken, & McDonald, 2007). Students enjoy the authentic aesthetic conversation that develops about their reading when they respond in personal response letter writing with their peers or their teacher. When students respond emotionally in this way, they are engaging in a transformative transaction that leads to deeper meaning (Cox & Many, 1992). This reading and writing connection helps build students' higher level thinking skills as they synthesize and evaluate what they have read (Kelly, 1990).

In addition to reading and writing reflectively in journals to deepen comprehension, Gillespie (2005) found that students think deeply about their reading when they respond through various genres. Using personal journal reflections as the basis for creating a culminating reading activity gives the reader another chance to revisit not only the text, but also their own thoughts and feelings in order to reevaluate and come away with an even deeper understanding of the characters, the story, and themselves.

Barriers to Reading Comprehension

Decoding

Tompkins (2003) defines decoding as “using word-identification strategies to pronounce and attach meaning to an unfamiliar word” (p. 505). Tompkins defines four word-identification strategies to decode words: phonics – using letter sounds and spelling patterns; analogy – using known letter patterns to figure out unknown words; syllabic analysis – using a combination of phonics and analogy to analyze syllables in words; and morphemic analysis – identifying root words first to figure out unknown words. According to Tompkins, reading requires that students decode rapidly using an array of word identification strategies as well as context clues as they construct meaning simultaneously. When readers struggle to decode text, it is difficult for them to construct meaning. Mesmer and Griffith (2005) state that explicit, systematic phonics instruction has resurfaced due to federally funded initiatives such as No Child Left Behind.

Historically, explicit, systematic phonics instruction meant a deductive, direct, and sequential teaching of phonics predominately out of the context of authentic reading and writing activities. Mesmer and Griffith surveyed 1000 teachers in order to see how current teachers defined explicit, systematic phonics instruction. When reviewed, the 362 surveys returned with a usable answer to the question showed that today, teachers view explicit, systematic phonics instruction as a combination of direct teaching and hands-on activities for high inductive student engagement. Calkins (2001) explains that students “need opportunities to actively construct knowledge of phonics”, but that phonics work also needs to be imbedded in interactive reading and writing (p. 203).

Fluency and Prosody

Decoding accurately and automatically leads to fluency, and when students add meaningful expression, or prosody, Rasinski (2006) calls this the “gateway to comprehension” (p. 704). However, according to Rasinski, many readers struggle with fluency and prosody. They spend so much time decoding that they fail to construct meaning. Effective fluency instruction, according to Rasinski, combines teacher modeling and student practice of reading to increase speed with simultaneous attention to prosody. Prosody is an important component to reading for meaning and therefore should not be overlooked. Students who read with expression, which includes accurate intonation and phrasing, increase their comprehension. Rasinski explains that studies have

shown that when students reread text with expression for authentic purposes, such as a script for performance, or readers theater, not only are they motivated to engage in the activity, their fluency, prosody, and comprehension increase.

Metacognition

Even when students are reading fluently and with prosody, if they are not being metacognitive, or thinking while they are reading, Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, and Joshi (2007) note, they will not comprehend. Boulware-Gooden et al. report that phonics, decoding, and fluency instruction are not enough. Students need explicit metacognitive comprehension strategy instruction to awaken their self control over their own construction of meaning. The more metacognitive comprehension strategies students have at their disposal, the greater their comprehension. Boulware-Gooden et al. found that teachers often neglect to teach these strategies while students are actively reading. In her study, third grade students practiced several metacognitive strategies while reading: thinking out loud while they read, identifying the main idea and the supporting details, using a visual representation of the text's structure, and writing a summary. Harvey and Goudvis (2000) offer other metacognitive strategies to explicitly teach students so they can self-monitor their comprehension such as making text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections, questioning what they are reading, visualizing and reading with their senses to make the text come

alive, inferencing, determining what is important, and synthesizing ideas to gain reflective and critical understandings.

Reading and Writing in Isolation

Synthesizing ideas to gain reflective and critical understandings also happen when students write about their reading (Cox & Many, 1992). Fletcher and Portalupi (1998) add that reading inspires writing and writing inspires reading. Bromley, Winters, and Schlimmer (1994) warn that when reading and writing are disconnected from each other and the content areas, student achievement suffers. In a study, Bromley, Winters, and Schlimmer (1994) found that when resistant and struggling eight and nine year old readers and writers collaborated with college students to read and write about fairy tales, not only did the elementary students' comprehension of story elements increase, their motivation and self perception as readers and writers did as well.

Limited Self Perceptions as Readers

According to McTavish (2007), "children learn about reading and writing before they come to school from the beliefs, function, and values of the people with whom they are involved" (p. 483). McTavish explains that families intentionally nurture children's literacy, for example, by reading and discussing good books with them. Parents also unintentionally nurture their children's literacy, for example, by holding sustained conversations with them, having

children help read and write grocery lists, and having children help read recipes. By engaging their children in intentional or unintentional literacy activities, their children see the value in reading and writing and develop positive self perceptions of themselves as readers and writers, an advantage for literacy success in school. Esquith (2007) says that many distractions in and out of the home get in the way of children's developing a love for reading, and when children do not read, their self perceptions of themselves as readers diminishes along with their motivation. These distractions may include "television, video games, poor teaching, poverty, the breakup of the family, and the general lack of adult guidance" (p. 31). Esquith states that teachers' reading objectives should highlight the joy, passion, and excitement of reading, instead of the stale objectives on scripted basal lessons.

Best Practices in Elementary School Reading Comprehension

Comprehensive Literacy

McLaughlin (2003) defines comprehensive literacy as an "instructional framework that fosters comprehension" (p. 3). According to Mazzoni and Gambrell (2003), the goal of reading instruction in a comprehensive literacy approach is to help students become fully literate people. The goal of fully literate people is to understand what they read and communicate with others about their understanding. To achieve this, fully literate people bring their knowledge, gained through both life experience and prior reading, to their current reading. This allows them to connect with what they already know and use these

experiences to understand and communicate new ideas. Fully literate people engage and respond to their reading with a wide range of intellectual and sensory capabilities. Not only do they enjoy reading, but they also desire to monitor and evaluate their degree of understanding while they read. Best practices in a comprehensive literacy program integrate reading and writing for authentic purposes using real literature, whole and small group direct and guided instruction, and independent opportunities to become fully literate (Mazzoni & Gambrell, 2003).

There are many features to a comprehensive literacy program. According to Fountas and Pinnell (1996), beginning in kindergarten students benefit from daily integrated literacy instruction that teaches them how to decode and memorize sight words and how to construct meaning. A comprehensive literacy program imbeds phonics and comprehension instruction and builds a connection to writing throughout the day during read alouds, shared reading, guided reading, reading workshop, independent reading, shared writing, interactive writing, writing workshop, and independent writing.

Tompkins (2003) explains that the goal of teachers is to help students become fully literate by providing a comprehensive literacy approach from the earliest years. In a comprehensive literacy program teachers meet the needs of individual students through skill and strategy instruction taught both directly and in context using on-level texts as well as meaningful real world literature. This

skill and strategy instruction ranges from phonics and decoding, to sight word recognition and vocabulary, to reading comprehension and writing instruction designed to enhance students' personal and academic growth across the content areas so they develop into fully literate lifelong learners.

Self-Monitoring Comprehension

Along with their growing ability to actively decode, read fluently and expressively, and construct meaning, which are expectations of a comprehensive literacy program, students, starting in kindergarten, need to determine on their own whether they understand what they read. While some students do recognize when they do not understand, some students inaccurately monitor their comprehension (Pardo, 2004). To help students accurately evaluate their comprehension, Pardo recommends that while reading, teachers model and students practice, with teacher support, a host of comprehension strategies so that students understand the value, flexibility, and usefulness of these strategies, and students more accurately, automatically, and authentically monitor their own comprehension. Boyles (2004) suggests that teachers explain metacognition, or thinking about one's own thinking, to students. Boyles models and supports students' flexible and accurate use of the following strategies so they can correctly monitor and construct meaning while they read -- connecting to the text, using sensory images during reading, questioning, determining importance, inferring, monitoring or noticing when you stop understanding, and predicting.

Fisher and Frey (2008) caution not to teach these strategies in isolation, reminding teachers that the “goal of strategy instruction should be consolidation, so that the reader can activate the right strategy at the right time” (p. 16).

Reader Response and Transactional Theory

Students’ success at self-monitoring their comprehension not only comes with using the strategies highlighted above but also when students respond aesthetically to their reading. According to Rosenblatt (1994), readers respond aesthetically when they “pay attention to the associations, feelings, attitudes, and ideas that words and their referents arouse within” (p. 25). Rosenblatt explains that connecting to the text from past life experiences triggers an aesthetic, personal, and emotional response, allowing readers to live in the text, experiencing what the characters are experiencing, so that readers create meaning and new insights about life. As readers construct new understandings, they continuously reevaluate what they have read. These new insights cause readers to create clearer and more complex interpretations. Rosenblatt calls this “transaction with the text” (p. 68). During the transactional process, a constant interplay exists between the reader and the text. “The reader envisions the characters, participates in their uttered thoughts and emotions, and weaves the sequence of events into a plot” (p. 68). “The reader’s main purpose is to participate as fully as possible in the potentialities of the text” (p. 69).

Rosenblatt (1994) suggests that students learn to take an aesthetic or efferent stance when reading, depending whether their purpose is enjoying a literary experience, which would evoke an aesthetic stance, or finding information, often in a non-fiction text, which would evoke an efferent stance. When taking an efferent stance while reading the “reader disengages his attention as much as possible from the personal and qualitative elements in his response” (p. 27). The reader is primarily concerned with the “end result that he seeks – the information, the guides to action, that will be left with him when the reading is over” (p. 27).

While Rosenblatt (1994) describes the aesthetic and efferent stance, Cai (2008) suggests that transactional theory “does not provide a critical stance” (p. 213). However, Rosenblatt contends, “critical interpretation and evaluation is efferent reading” (p. 214). Rosenblatt explains that readers should “learn to examine personal factors that enter into their transaction with literary works and critically scrutinize their responses to literary works for social, cultural influences” (p. 215). As Wilhelm (2008) explains, when students read from a critical stance they can “judge and evaluate the truth and usefulness and limits of what is read, heard, and experienced” (p. 198).

Cox and Many (1992) conducted a study on reader response and transactional theory of reading. In order to determine the stances that children take when responding to literature and film, 38 fifth grade students participated in

a year long study. An additional study with fourth, sixth, and eighth grade students followed. Students self selected books, wrote, and talked about what they were reading with the researchers. Cox and Many observed three characteristics in the aesthetic responses. First, the students pictured the stories in their minds and actually lived in the characters' world experiencing the joys and conflicts experienced by the characters, and trying to decide what they would do in similar situations. Second, some students hypothesized about the stories they were reading, and they thought about how they would change story elements. They created literacy response activities based on their ideas. The third characteristic was that students responded emotionally to the books and were able to relate private personal feelings to those of the characters. Cox and Many found that when teachers encourage an aesthetic and transactional process, reading becomes more student-centered as students read, as well as interpret, based on a full range of personal experiences. The aesthetic stance makes the reading experience flow from the students and not from the teacher. It is the students' response that is vital, not the teachers'.

Student Choice

When Cox and Many (1992) analyzed the results of the study mentioned above, not only did they find that students responded aesthetically to texts, they also found that students' motivation about the books they were reading increased when they were allowed choice. In the study, the students chose the books they

wanted to read. Students also chose how they wanted to respond to their reading. The authors stress that not every book read needs a response activity. The “opportunity to make choice is what is important” (p. 32). Hobgood (1998) also found that students’ sense of ownership motivated them to read when allowed to read the books they wanted. Daniels (2002) states that “one of the gravest shortcomings of reading programs is that assignments, choices, texts to read, are usually controlled by the teacher” (p. 18). Daniels continues, “For reading to become a lifelong habit and deeply owned skill, it has to be voluntary, anchored in feelings of pleasure and power” (p. 19). Fountas and Pinnell (2001) say that when students choose their own books for independent reading enjoyment improves. However, guidance by the teacher is appropriate so students gain experience selecting books within their reading ability and area of interest. For guided reading, Fountas and Pinnell explain that either the teacher can select appropriate on-level books for students, or students may choose their own on-level books with teacher guidance. Harvey and Goudvis (2000) recommend that students choose their own books during reading workshop, suggesting a classroom filled with many books at many different levels so all students have access to books they want to read.

The Reading and Writing Connection

According to Cox and Many (1992), reflecting and responding in writing in a personal response journal about what is read aesthetically immerses students

in their reading. When students respond personally, emotionally, and intellectually to their reading, they are involved in a transactional process because the reader creates new understandings through active personal and intellectual interpretation.

Barone (1990) studied a heterogeneously mixed group of first through third graders who responded in personal response journals. Over time, she found that several types of responses emerged: personal subjective response, response that raised questions to clarify understanding of the story, and retellings. Barone initiated the use of dialogue journals in her classroom to deepen the students' literary responses. Barone described dialogue journals as a place where students write letters to the teacher about any aspect of their reading. The teacher then responds in writing to the student. The student and teacher have the opportunity to share their joys and concerns about their interpretations of the text. Barone also gave her students the option of responding in a double entry draft where the students divide their page in half. The students write intriguing quotes on the left side and respond to each quote on the right side of the page. The teacher may comment back to the student. Barone found that dialogue journals and double entry drafts yielded rich and meaningful student responses. Starting out by writing retellings and story summaries, students moved into capturing their concerns for character actions, questioning and relating their concerns for characters, developing an ability to side with a particular character, making predictions, and

making literary interpretations that clearly demonstrated deepening comprehension. Barone found that written dialogues between students and the text as well as between students and the teacher deepened the reading comprehension of students in primary grades.

In a personal response journal, students express their thoughts and feelings about the text. According to Kelly (1990), the teacher may comment informally as opposed to a letter-writing correspondence as in a dialogue journal. Kelly examined the nature of 28 third graders' responses to the literature she read aloud and how students responded using three prompts to facilitate reader response, asking students what they noticed in the story, how the story made them feel, and what the story reminded them of in their own lives. At first Kelly's students responded orally and quite briefly to the prompts. As students gained experience responding orally, their responses became deeper with students often agreeing with each other's comments. Kelly found that the students transitioned easily from oral to written responses. Written responses about students' feelings regarding the book were longer than the oral responses. Also, written responses increased in length with practice with some students going beyond retellings and including emotional reactions, indicating the students' personal connections. Kelly's results indicate that regardless of reading ability, when guided by prompts, students are able to go beyond literal recall and move to higher-level thinking both intellectually and emotionally.

Keeping a diary from the point of view of a character is another way students can interact through writing with the books they read in order to deepen their comprehension. Mercurio (1999) found students' motivation, ownership, and understanding of characters' internal traits heightened this process that involved the students assuming the persona of a passenger of the *Titanic* while reflecting in a diary, a character journal, as Mercurio calls it. Students studied the time period, the clothing, and other aspects of their character, including societal class, in order to immerse themselves within the character's milieu.

Multi-Genre Responses

In addition to reading and writing reflectively in journals to increase comprehension, Gillespie (2005) found that students think reflectively about their reading when they respond through different genres. Through various imaginative genre-based writing activities, such as editorials and monologues, Gillespie's seventh grade students wrote about the moral dilemma posed by a character in their novels. Other genres include comic strips, song lyrics, and book jackets, to name a few. Gillespie explains that because the students had choice with which genre to respond, students were motivated. In addition, genre responses necessitated that students reread to clarify understanding. Gillespie reported that students made text-to-self-to-world connections using a multi-genre response activity.

Hobgood (1998) reworked a tried and true found poem exercise by having students find poems from within their personal journal reflections of the novels they were reading. Traditionally, found poems, created from a compelling book passage that a student condenses and breaks down into lines and stanzas, allows them an authentic genre for sharing a passage's powerful points. Hobgood marvels at the level of astonishment students have at their capacity to write such compelling poems. Hobgood goes on to say that this exercise in creating found poems benefits the students' feelings of owning the reading that they do and understanding that the meaning they make is for their own lives. Hobgood goes one step further to make found poems even more meaningful to the students. Hobgood's students created found poems from their personal response journals. Students re-read their journal entries looking for powerful gems, deleting, condensing, and realigning their journal text to create strong, self-reflective poems. According to Hobgood, this process requires that students put themselves in the story, reflect on the internal and external character traits, and the conflict. Writing found poems through personal response journals allows students to make emotional connections to the text and to be able to do something with their journals.

Another powerful genre to consider in students' response to literature is the connection of reading and writing and art. According to Smout (1990), art is a motivator for children's responses to literature, especially when combined with

reading and writing tasks because of its ability to engage the senses further. The ability to feel, see, and touch gives students other avenues to explore, manipulate, and deepen understandings. Smout explains that the open-ended and concrete nature of artistic expression involves students in problem-solving, organizing, and internalizing concepts that lead to students' ability to bring meaning to print. The reading, writing, and art connection provides concrete ways to allow students to deepen comprehension. Smout's students developed character portraits using reading, writing, and art to express the external and internal character traits of story characters to increase comprehension. According to Wilhelm (2008), "artwork is as sweet a piece of metacognition as you can imagine" (p. 184).

Authentic Literacy Activities

Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall, and Tower (2006) define authentic literacy activities as those activities where students read to gain knowledge and then communicate this knowledge through writing for real purposes in order to provide real audiences with information or to teach them.

According to the researchers, students engaged in authentic literacy activities showed increases in motivation as well as the ability to read and write in various genres. During a two-year research study of genre learning with 26 second- and third- grade teachers and their low and middle socioeconomic students, Duke et al. (2006) studied the impact of students reading authentic literature and engaging in authentic writing activities with informational and

procedural texts in science. The researchers' goal was also to help the teachers increase their understanding of authentic literacy. In order to increase their understanding of authentic literacy, the teachers attended summer workshops and received weekly mentoring during the study. The researchers developed a 3-point rating sheet to measure the authenticity of the teachers' science activities in two categories: authenticity of purpose and authenticity of text. In order for an activity to score three points in the authenticity of purpose category, the activity needed to serve a real purpose in the community, and not just in a classroom. In order for an activity to score three points in the authenticity of text category, the text created must be instructional and useable by a real audience, outside the classroom. Keeping in mind the 3-point scale, in order to bring authentic literacy activities to their students, teachers in the study engaged the students in hands-on science investigations where the students naturally generated questions to drive the discussion. Teachers used teachable moments to drive authentic investigations, and students read informational texts, allowing them to raise their own questions for further research and reading. Teachers also set up discrepant events to allow students to raise their own questions for further study. Students then wrote authentic procedural brochures, in response to their science inquiry, for school and community use, providing real audiences for their work.

Assaf (2006) found that teachers face a dilemma within the testing climate to stay true to using motivating authentic literacy practices for students, such as

authentic peer discussions, and responding to books in a variety of personally meaningful ways. Mizokawa and Krening (2000) say this makes it difficult for teachers who value a more aesthetic approach and who understand the transformative value of the text on the reader. Getting and keeping students motivated to read happens when students themselves realize that their personal life experiences help reading come to life. Moreover, through immersion in authentic literacy practices, students realize that they control interpretation and expression of meaning, a very thoughtful and motivating experience.

Barriers to Best Practices in Reading Comprehension

Standardized Test Preparation

Teaching to the test takes time away from authentic learning activities, according to Assaf (2006). When studying teacher's feelings about the pressures of high-stakes testing, Assaf notes that teachers worry about the integrity of what they know and do as best practice. Well-meaning administrators, trying not to leave any child behind and worrying about test scores, mandate that teachers replace meaningful and integrated literacy practices with skill and drill methods. For example, according to Assaf, benchmark tests, given several times a year to assess students' gains on standardized test-type questions, can take as much as 12 days or more away from meaningful instruction. Assaf warns that test instruction jeopardizes teachers' yearnings to present authentic and comprehensive literacy instruction to nourish real readers.

In addition to compromising best teaching practices, teaching to the test threatens the scope of the curriculum. Assaf (2006) points out that teaching only the prescribed test curriculum will help students achieve well on the test. However, as noted above, this type of teaching puts at risk not only teachers' integrity to teach well, but also leaves behind valuable curriculum content that is not tested.

Summary

As indicated by much research, allowing students to reflect on their reading through various types of journal writing allows students a chance to immerse themselves aesthetically in a transaction of intellectual and emotional correspondence among their own thoughts and feelings, the thoughts and feelings of a story's characters, the story elements, and their teacher (Cox & Many, 1992). This helps students develop the independent capacity to make meaning from their reading. By giving the students opportunities to use their understandings borne out of their journal reflections as the content to create authentic multi-genre responses, students intertwine reading, writing, and art as they reflect further to gain deeper meaning. Teachers need to be mindful to create a meaningful and integrated comprehensive literacy program, judiciously incorporating test-taking strategies, so they motivate and nurture readers for life.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Ever since I read Fountas and Pinnell's book, *Guiding Readers and Writers Grades 3-6: Teaching Comprehension, Genre, and Content Literacy*, I liked the idea of students reflecting about their reading in a reading response journal. I have had students respond in the past and was very excited from time to time with the precious gems of personal thoughts and feelings that the students would set to paper that reflected the meaning the students created from the story. If only I would have taken advantage of the opportunities for the students to lift those thoughts off the page and incorporate them into authentic literacy response activities. That is why I am eager to observe when elementary students engage in authentic literacy activities.

Setting

Students from several nearby districts attend our regional charter public school in an urban area that serves a multi-cultural student population in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Parents choose to send their students to our school. There are 810 students, 20% of whom receive free or reduced price lunch. Students wear a uniform. The school campus contains three buildings: a combination primary and middle school building which houses kindergarten and first grade and a middle school wing. The primary wing and the middle school wing are not accessible to each other by the students. An elementary building

contains grades two through five. The high school building is located across the street from the elementary building. The school administrators consist of the Chief Operating Officer, The Chief Academic Officer, and two principals: one serves the primary and elementary school and the other serves the middle school. The Chief Academic Officer also serves as the high school principal. For each grade, there are three to four classes, twenty-five students per class, through middle school. The high school student population is still growing. Ultimately, the population will reach 900 students. At the primary and elementary level, each class has one full-time teacher, and each grade has one full-time teaching assistant. For the primary and elementary students there are also three Reading Specialists and one Math Specialist. Because the school follows the International Baccalaureate curriculum, in addition to reading, math, music, art, and gym, students, beginning in kindergarten, have Spanish every day. Students also study social studies and science through inquiry design in their Units of Inquiry.

As one of three Reading Specialists sharing a modest sized room, I mostly meet with small groups of students during guided reading in a quiet corner of a classroom where the students and I can focus with minimal distraction. For this study I worked with third grade students in a quiet spot in a third grade classroom.

Participants

The participants in my study are six third grade students, four boys and two girls, who scored below grade level in reading comprehension on beginning

of the year Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). The students are white, Hispanic, and African American. They are each eight years old.

Procedures

At the beginning of the school year, all students in first through fifth grade receive a Developmental Reading Assessment to assess their reading level. I selected six third-grade students who scored below grade level in reading comprehension to participate in my study. This initial assessment was the baseline score for the students in my study. Furthermore, I recorded daily notes of my student observations in a field log. I interviewed each student, one-on-one, using a pre-reading survey (Appendix A) to learn his or her reading habits and interests so that I could choose a selection of high interest books from which to make our reading selections. Moreover, I inquired if they engaged in any comprehension self monitoring.

Before we began our first guided reading session, I took the results from the pre-reading survey and selected several high interest books from which the group would choose one to read: *Nate the Great and the Missing Key*, *The Chalk Box Kid*, and *Cam Jansen and the Mystery of the UFO*. In order for each student to select one book for the group to read, the group participated in a book pass. During the book pass the students read the back cover of the book. Then they took a picture walk. Finally they read the first page of the book. The students then quickly filled out a Book Pass Survey (Appendix B) for each book. The students

previewed each book selection in this manner. When students passed all the books, they marked a star on the book pass survey for their preferred book. I tabulated the results and announced the winning book. This winning book was the first book that the group read. During the next guided reading session, I had a copy of our new book selection, *Nate the Great and the Missing Key*, for each student.

Before we began reading our first book selection, I read aloud a picture book, *The Pain and the Great One* by Judy Blume. I explained to the students that while we read our first book selection, the students would write their thoughts and feelings about what was happening in the book in their reading journal. I modeled a personal reading response after the read aloud, and we discussed point of view. The students began reading the first book selection, *Nate the Great and the Missing Key*, using a guided reading approach. This means that the students silently read from one to several pages at a time, and then we stopped and discussed the book. Every few days, depending on the action in the book, the students wrote a personal response in their journal. Because the students had trouble with their reading comprehension right from the start of reading this first book, it was necessary for me to model several reading comprehension strategies in the context of our book: understanding point of view, wondering and asking questions, making predictions, making connections, using context clues, reading with the five senses, visualizing, and becoming the character. Instead of personal

response journals, it became necessary to model a diary entry from the point of view of the character. In order to increase their reading comprehension, I wanted the students to walk in the shoes of the character; one way to do this was to have them pretend to be a character in the story, and write diary entries about what was happening to them from the point of view of the character.

As we read this first book selection, I explained the components of a character trait graphic organizer (Appendix C) as well as modeled its completion based on what we were learning about the main character, Nate the Great. On the left side of the graphic organizer, the students were asked to think about the character actions: what the character did, said, thought, and felt. Then on the right side the students were asked to tell what they learned about the character based on the character's actions. In other words, provide a character trait to describe the actions of the character. As we continued to read our book selection, we completed the character grid together as a group as we discussed characters' external and internal character traits. This way the students received the practice they needed in order to complete this type of graphic organizer with minimal teacher assistance when we moved into our second book selection.

After we finished reading the book, completed the diary entries, and completed the character trait graphic organizer, the students used all this information and the reading comprehension strategies they practiced while reading to complete their first authentic literacy activity. The students created a

bulletin board for the hallway explaining the reading comprehension strategies they used. All the information came from their diaries. The bulletin board informed all students of strategies they can use while reading to help them better understand and enjoy their reading.

For our second book selection, again the students participated in a book pass and completed the book pass survey (Appendix B). The students chose between *Ready Freddy and The King of Show and Tell*, *Freckle Juice*, and *Horrible Harry and the Ant Invasion*. Again, the students wrote diary entries while reading the book from the point of view of the main character. The students kept track of the characters' character traits by completing the character trait graphic organizer (Appendix C). As a culminating authentic response activity, the students created character graffiti using the content from their book, their diary entries, and their character trait graphic organizer. Character graffiti began with making two outlines of a student's body traced on large paper to represent two characters from the book. The students turned the outlines into characters from the book using crayons to add detail. Using the information in the diaries and on their character trait graphic organizers, the students wrote examples of character's actions and what they came to understand about the character's personality traits based on these actions. The character graffiti outlines were hung in the hall. The students' explanatory sentences hung next to their graffiti. Students and teachers alike were able to use the character graffiti as authentic learning tools to help

them understand the application of using character actions as clues for drawing conclusions about a character's personality traits, as well as understanding the use of details from the book as a way to support a character trait selection. I further assessed students' understanding of character traits. The students listened to a read aloud, *Arthur's New Puppy*, by Marc Brown. Students answered an open-ended question in their journals: Choose a word to describe Arthur. Support your response using two details from the story. At the end of the study, I interviewed each student, one-on-one using a post reading survey (Appendix D) to compare his or her reading habits and interests to the pre-reading survey, as well as determine how well the students grew in their ability to communicate about reading comprehension strategies. Midway through the study, I conducted student interviews to gather their thoughts about reading and reading group. Furthermore, I gathered data in field log notes, student diary entries, student responses to open-ended questions, and their authentic literature response activities.

Data Sources

I analyzed various sources of data to triangulate, monitor, and document student progress. I kept a field log where I made notes on my student observations. I conducted student pre- and post reading surveys. I interviewed students and gave students book pass surveys to investigate student book interest. I used information in the students' diary entries. The parts of the graphic organizers that students completed independently provided more data. In addition,

the students' culminating activities provided another authentic way to collect data, as well as students' responses to the open-ended question.

TRUSTWORTHINESS STATEMENT

My research study adhered to the criteria set forth by Hendricks (2006) to ensure research validity and ethics. I gave my students voice by questioning them about what was occurring, by allowing their discoveries to impact and transform the study's direction, by staying flexible and open minded to my students' needs, and by being ready to do what was required to help them achieve success. Moreover, I triangulated my data sources. In order to guide the study's course, I gathered multiple data sources in a systematic way at different points during the study: pre and post reading assessments, interviews, pre and post reading surveys, participant observations recorded and analyzed in a field log, reading journal entries, and book response outcomes. Analyzing data along this continuum helped me decide at any point if strategies were working or not working for the students. I needed to know this so that I could change course and do more research to help the students. My research study group members helped me clarify occurrences, helped me keep in mind the objectives of my study, helped me see things I might not otherwise have seen, and provided me with fresh perspective of my analysis.

I adhered to the "ethical guidelines for teacher action researchers" (p. 176) as indicated by Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005). I received clearance from the Human Subjects Internal Review Board from Moravian College to conduct this study (Appendix E). I ensured students' confidentiality by using pseudonyms,

removing their names from any documents, not using any information against them, and keeping all the data in a locked filing cabinet. I ensured students' safety and rights by allowing them to personally recuse themselves, or have a parent recuse them from the study with no penalty. I sought the written permission of the school principal (Appendix F), keeping the principal informed during all phases of the study. Furthermore, I obtained both student and parental permission (Appendix G) to participate in the study. I was self-reflective at all times to ensure no bias was evident, especially in light of my bias to want my students to show growth. Being self-reflective at all times helped me honestly analyze and report data, and helped me communicate honestly with my research study group members who were willing to enlighten me should any bias interfere with my interpretation of data or any study procedures at any time.

In addition to my bias of wanting all my students to show growth, another bias is that I have a hard time understanding how some parents do not read to their children or provide them with books. Books are free at the library. Books are very inexpensive at garage sales and second hand bookstores. There are social agencies that provide free books to children. Furthermore, parents need to model reading behaviors for the children. It does no good to for parents to tell their children to go and read and then they, the parents, turn on the television. But I know that I have to temper this bias with the understanding that life is complicated for many people. Many parents are parenting alone after working all

day long, perhaps even all night long, or both. On top that come the responsibilities for all the chores, all while parenting. I understand that not taking children to the library is not intentional; it just may be impossible. In light of this bias comes my sincere acknowledgment and belief that my students are all highly capable. I am determined never to give up on my students by providing all of them with high expectations, book choice, group discussion and voice, time for personal reflection, authentic reading activities, and an open mind and heart to help them all be successful. I will communicate honestly and completely with my research study group members so they may enlighten me should any signs of bias be evident during my research study.

Lastly, although this study lasted approximately twelve weeks, with results limited in scope, hopefully the results indicate and underscore the research into selected best practices in literacy instruction.

MY STORY

Getting Started

At the beginning of the school year struggling readers, those reading below grade level, are indentified in each class based on students' results on the Developmental Reading Assessment, (DRA). A group of six third-grade students, identified as struggling readers became participants in my study: Ray, Ava, Nick, Maya, Josh, and Caleb.

I knew all these students except Nick, new to our school this year. But honestly, I rather planned my study with Ray, Ava, Maya, and Josh in mind. Having these students last year in reading group, I knew them as wonderfully sweet boys and girls, but as readers they struggled with comprehension, decoding, and reading motivation. As second grade ended last year, these students made a lot of progress with decoding and comprehension, and while they seemed motivated to read during our reading time, saying good-bye at the end of the school year made me sad because I doubted how much they would read over the summer.

When they returned to school in September, clearly the results of their DRA showed they each backtracked in their reading because of reading summer slide. This occurs when students do not read over the summer. When they come back to school in September, students suffer a loss of some of the reading gains mastered the previous school year. They must make up this setback before they

begin to make new gains in the current grade. This clearly happened to the students in my group.

Your Reading Life

Now that I had my group, I conducted a pre-reading survey (see Figure 1). I wanted to know about their reading life. Maya likes to read in her room when bored. She reads for 20 to 30 minutes usually about three times a week; although, sometimes Maya reads when she has nothing else to do, like when alone or with only her big sister and mother in the house or on Fridays, Saturday, and Sundays. Maya qualified all this by saying that her teacher requires them to read 20 minutes a night for homework, but she said that she really does it because she finds reading fun. Maya likes to read *Junie B. Jones*, *Flat Stanley*, and *Cam Jansen* books. Maya explained that the reason she reads, not only does she like reading, but she wants to be the greatest reading teacher or librarian when she grows up, her reading goal. If Maya were stranded on a desert island she would take the following books: *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (her favorite book), *June B. Jones Goes to Jail*, and *Cam Jansen: Mystery of the Birthday Party*.

Josh, on the other hand, with no reading goal to articulate, says he reads because his Mom makes him. Josh says that he reads in a quiet place in his home for ten minutes a night, usually three times a week. “I don’t have to read on Saturday or Sunday.” “Why?” I asked. “Because it’s not a school night, and I don’t like to read. It takes away from outside time. I have to do my homework

before I go outside, and I never go outside. I go to Creative Kids where I play and do homework. After dinner I play games on the computer.” “What have you been reading?” I asked. “*Spider Man* and space books,” he responded. “If you were stranded on a desert island, what books would you want to bring with you?” “I don’t really have one that I would want,” replied Josh softly. “But you do have books you enjoy, don’t you? What are your favorite kinds of books?” “I like outer space books and cobra snakes, or where the setting is space.”

Nick, a new student at our school is small in stature, but big on smiles. “Tell me about your reading life, Nick?” I asked. “Where, when, how long, and how often do you read?” “I like to read in the library at school or when my Mom is cooking. I read for twenty minutes but not everyday because Mom and Dad are not together anymore.” Nick also likes to read *Junie B. Jones*. If stranded on a desert island Nick would chose *Goose Bumps* books, *Amber Brown* books, and of course, *Junie B. Jones* books. “I love her books,” he said smiling. “I just got three of them from the library; two are in my book bag and one is in my desk,” he said excitedly. “If you could set a reading goal, Nick , what would it be?” I asked, completely charmed. “To read a lot,” he responded eager to make me happy.

Ava, a tall beautiful girl, and an only child lives with her mother and grandmother. Ava likes to read every day at school in the classroom during silent sustained reading time. She says she reads during this time, which is about 15 minutes. “Do you read at home, Ava?” I asked. “Only for homework,” she

whispered. Ava likes to read *Captain Underpants* and *Amelia Bedelia* books, and she would like to have these as well as sticker books should she be stranded on a desert island. She says that she likes to read for fun, and she does not have a reading goal. Ava explains that her favorite kinds of books are *Captain Underpants* because it has chapters.

“Caleb, where do you like to read?” “In the library, at home in my room, and on an airplane because it’s boring if you don’t have something to read. I read when I get home from school after I do my homework. I read for about one hour.” “Really,” I say astounded. “You read for one hour every day?” “Yes, I read every day when I get home, plus in school and on the weekends.” “What have you been reading?” “*Tex-Rex* book. I don’t remember the name of it, but it has 74 pages, and so far I have read 23. I also read *Spider Man 3* and *Captain Underpants* books.” “Why do you like to read, Caleb?” “To get smart, and for facts about stuff, and ’cause I want to, too. My reading goal is to read 100 books for the book contest my teacher is having in our classroom. If I could bring books on a desert island I would bring my *T-Rex* book, *Captain Underpants: Night of the Living Boogers Part 2*, and a book about how to live in the desert. My favorite kind of book is how to make a house out of wood cause I want to know how to build a house,” he said almost all in one breath.

“Ray, where do you like to read?” “On top of monkey bars so I could read upside down or with one hand.” “Really?” “No, I don’t really do it. I don’t even

Student	What do you do to help you understand what you read? What do you do when you are reading and the story does not make sense?
Maya	I get interested in the book and say this is a fun book. If I don't know a word I skip it and go back and sound it out. I'll go back and take a picture walk.
Josh	I think about what they are saying. I keep going but then I go back.
Nick	I sound out the words. I say, "Mommy, I don't understand what it means."
Ava	<i>I think what it is and I ask questions. I look back.</i>
Caleb	I focus. I ask an adult. I stop reading the book.
Ray	I try not to think about food. I'm thinking what will happen. What will be the problem? Why the problem comes. I ask whoever is around. I think of it another way and think again.

Figure 1. On the pre-reading survey the students answered the questions: What do you do to help you read? What do you do when you are reading and the story does not make sense?

bring a book to the park.” “Where, really?” “In my room ’cause I can watch TV and read during the commercials.” “What have you been reading?” “*Magic Tree House: Hour of the Olympics*. I read because I am hoping to win a prize in my teacher’s contest.” “Do you read for any other reasons?” “Sometimes it’s like TV in your mind with pictures, and I want to read to learn how to play soccer.” “If I could bring three books on a desert island I would bring a puzzle book, a read aloud book, *Treasure Planet*, and *Beauty and the Beast*. My favorite kinds of books are chapter books about what people do and fantasy books that have magic and sword fights.”

In the pre-reading survey I wanted to find out what reading comprehension strategies the students used. I asked two questions on the survey to probe their thoughts: 1) What do you do to help you understand what you read? and 2) What do you do when you are reading and the story does not make sense?

While intrigued with some of their responses to these two questions, especially Ray’s, responses such as “I ask my Mommy,” and “I stop reading the book” lead me to believe that the students do not really understand how to understand what they are reading. Some students said they “sounded it out.” They have an idea of what to do when they cannot read a word, but not any clear idea of what to do when the story does not make sense, as if they are not aware that the story should make sense, or that sometimes while they read there comes a

time when what they are reading does not make any sense to them, and this should cause them to stop and think and solve this dilemma.

Please Pass the Book

Because these students read independently within a range of a beginning to mid second grade level, I scanned the bookshelves in the reading room to find a motivating selection of easy chapter books for our first book pass. A bright day, the sun warmed me as I scanned the bookshelves for a motivating combination of books. I reached for a new clean looking set of *Nate the Great and the Missing Key* books. Maybe the students would be drawn to its bright orange cover. *The Cam Jansen and the Mystery of the UFO* set caught my eye. Did not Maya tell me she liked *Cam Jansen and the Mystery of the Birthday Party*? Maybe Maya would like this book. We do not really have a great collection of books at a reading level that would appeal to third graders. If you recall, in the pre-reading survey, both Ava and Ray said they like to read “chapter” books. Somehow young students feel that reading chapter books makes them real readers. They ignore the difficulty and the fact they do not understand the events in the story. With this in mind, I did not want to bring books labeled “easy readers” to the students. Certainly, I only wanted to present them with a selection of books they could read and comprehend successfully, but the books had to look like real chapter books. The only other book I felt fit the bill, *The Chalk Box Kid*, I knew

intuitively the students would eliminate because its old and worn condition. But I had no choice. I saw nothing else appropriate on the shelves.

“Here is Mrs. Cro,” Mrs. Long said happily to the class. “How is everyone today?” I asked, feeling the good naturedness of Mrs. Long’s students. “Hi Mrs. Cro,” Cara called out. “It is so nice to be here,” I said softly. “When I call your name please come and sit by the corner by the bookshelf.” I called the students’ names, and they came. “Criss cross applesauce,” I teased a bit. “You are too old for me to tell you that, but let’s sit that way when we come to group because we do not have a lot of room.” Since I know all these students, and we chatted a bit already when I met individually with them to fill out the pre-reading survey, we got right to business. “Today you are going to choose the first book we are going to read together.” The students stayed attentive as I laid three book choices on the floor. “We are going to do a book pass. Let me explain how this works.” “Didn’t we do this last year?” asked Maya, never missing a beat. “Oh yeah, I remember,” added Caleb. “We did this with the *Dolores Starbuckle* book,” replied Ray. “That was a funny book,” Ray said laughing. “First look at the cover, then read the back cover, and finally take a picture walk. Then fill out a book pass sheet for each book. I will give you a book to start with, and once you preview this first book, then do the others, one at a time. When you are done looking at all three books, put a star on the sheet of the book you want to read. Keep it to yourself. Don’t let your neighbor see which book you pick. I want

everyone to do their own thinking and make their own choice. Any questions?” “Can I put a big star on the paper?” asked Caleb enthusiastically. “Yes! That would be great,” I smiled.

“This one looks creepy,” exclaimed Caleb referring to the old *Chalk Box Kid* book. “It’s all gray inside.” “I like *Nate the Great*,” Nick said. “Keep it to yourself,” I reminded them nicely. Not only did the students enjoy looking over the books, they also liked the freedom I gave them to choose which order they could look at the books, and that they could do it at their own pace. Not in any hurry, it actually took two 20-minute small group periods to complete the book pass, including filling out the book pass sheets. The students handled the books carefully and curiously. It seemed that the students deliberated mostly between *Nate the Great* and the *Cam Jansen* book, these being in the newest, brightest condition, but also these books, from well-known series, seemed familiar to them. The *Cam Jansen*, with its intriguing and colorful illustration of a UFO on the cover, and *Nate the Great’s* cover, a bright orange, contrasted strikingly to the grayish blue and ragged cornered *The Chalk Box Kid* book.

Comprehension Detectives

I wanted to keep the suspense high, so I did not unveil the most popular book choice for a couple of days. We had some read aloud work to do first anyway. I wanted to review some basic comprehension strategies first. “Think about a time when a brother, sister, friend, or cousin annoyed you,” I pondered

aloud. “My big brother always bothers me when I play on the computer. He tells me I’m too slow,” Ray spoke up instantly. “How old is your big brother,” I asked curiously. I thought Ray was an only child. “Michael is 10.” “My sister is so annoying,” added Caleb. “She is always hogging the TV.” “My big brother and I fight about the toys. He is so annoying, and then we get in trouble,” shared Nick. “My little sister gets on my nerves,” declared Maya. “She follows me around.” “My brother always hogs the TV,” added Josh. “What about you Ava,” I asked. “I don’t have brothers or sisters,” she responded softly. “Did a friend or cousin ever annoy you?” I asked. Ava shook her head no. I told them that having the feeling of being annoyed would help them understand how the brother and sister in our story feel. I read the story, *The Pain and the Great One*, by Judy Blume. The first half of the story, told from the point of view of the big sister, describes her younger brother, a pain in the neck. The second half of the story, told from the point of view of the little brother, describes how he does not understand why his older sister thinks she is so great. Not only did I want to discuss point of view and review how to identify the speaker in the story in order to help understand the story, I also wanted to review making a personal connection to help reading comprehension.

Right away, the students understood the two parts of the book and could identify the speaker in each part. They could easily retell the story once finished. Not only did we discuss point of view, but I also had the students tell me how

they identified the speaker in each section to review using details from the story to support their answers, hoping to anticipate the learning because these students will have to be able to give details from the story to support their answers when they take their PSSA Reading Assessment later in the winter.

The next step, modeling a personal connection to the story in a journal entry, followed. “When I read this story I am reminded of the time when my little brother was always allowed drinks in the car, but I, the big sister, was not.” I wrote for them:

Dear Mrs. Cro,

When I read *The Pain and the Great One* it reminded me of when my younger brother, Steven, was little. My Mom always let him have drinks in the car. But I was not allowed to have drinks in the car. This reminds me of when the little brother in the story gets dessert even when he doesn’t finish his dinner, and the sister does not.

I stopped writing at this point to explain that first I wrote about my personal connection and next I needed to refer to and write about the part in the story where I connected. Then I asked the students to make a connection to the story. All six hands went up. I modeled Ava’s response in a journal entry.

Dear Mrs. Cro,

This story, *The Pain and the Great One*, reminds me of Hannah Montana when Hannah and Jackson have to share the same bathroom. When they

are brushing their teeth, Hannah spits on Jackson. When their dad is watching they are nice, but when he's not, they fight. This reminds me of the story because Hannah thinks she's better than Jackson, just like the big sister thinks she's better than the little brother.

“Can we bring our snack?” asked Josh. “Not today,” I said quickly, motioning the others to our little circle. Our group meets from 10:50 until 11:10. The room crackles with snack wrappers, busy workers, and chatter. I feel badly about telling Josh and the group that they cannot bring their snack to group. “I’ll let you have snack sometimes during group, but not when we have a lot of directions to follow and writing to do, and today is one of those days. You can’t eat and write, especially since we’re just getting to understand what I expect from your journal writing.”

We reviewed the personal connection journal entry I modeled for them. I wanted to make it clear to them that the reason for the journal entry for *The Pain and the Great One*, making a connection to their own life, would help them get into the story by understanding how characters in the story feel. Ray raised his hand and asked, “What if you don’t understand how all the characters are feeling because I only understand how the sister feels?” “That’s okay, Ray, because, of course, when you are reading you might not always understand how all the characters are feeling. You may just understand how one character is feeling. That is okay because by understanding that one character, it will help you

understand what is happening in the story and why characters act the way they do.” I taped the personal connection diary entry to the wall. “Your job now is to write your own personal connection journal entry.” I reviewed the journal entry I wrote with special emphasis on how after I gave a specific detail from my own life of my connection to the story, I then gave a specific detail from the story to support my connection and how it actually related to something that happened in the story.

I handed out their journals one by one and talked to each one about a personal connection and made sure they each knew a detail from the story to support and tie back to their personal connection. I had to explain my directions three times, referring back to the journal entry I modeled, before I felt everyone understood, and I saw what they were writing aligned with my directions.

“Josh, what is your connection to the story?” I asked noticing he struggled to write anything down. “When the sister could swim and the brother could not,” he replied “That’s a great example from the story,” I answered encouragingly. “Write that down.” Still not writing. “Now tell me what does it remind you of in your own life?” “What did you say?” he asked. “How does the sister being able to swim and the brother not being able to swim remind you of something in your own life?” “I don’t know.” “What are you thinking about?” Blank stare. Nick, having trouble as well, needed the directions repeated several times, but in the end

Nick independently wrote the detail from the story to support the personal connection he made (see Figure 2).

With Josh still thinking and fidgeting with his pencil, I checked in on Maya, Ray, and Caleb. Maya's detail showed a misinterpretation of the story. We talked about the story again. Ray and Caleb's journal entry showed me that they made a personal connection to the story and related it to a specific detail to the story. "How are you doing Josh? What is your connection to the sister being able to swim and the brother not being able to swim," I asked again. "Is this good? It reminds me of when my brother can do back flips on the diving board and I can't (see Figure 3). Is that good?" "Yes, that is a great connection," I told him excitedly. "Write that down." Josh needs so much prodding. Always so unsure of himself, his lack of confidence cripples him. I have seen this before in him many times. He comes up with good smart answers sometimes, but so unsure of himself he frequently asks before committing to his answer, "Is this good?"

Dear Mrs. Cro I reminded
 me of when my younger brother
 when my brother gets candy
 when he did not eat dinner
 and when I don't get to
 eat candy does does reminded
 me of the ~~mind~~ and the
 great one when the brother
 gets candy and I don't
 get anything.

Figure 2. Nick's personal connection journal entry to the book, *The Pain and the Great One*, by Judy Blume.

Dear Mrs. Crow
 this story reminds me about
 when my brother nose how
 to do flip of the diving board
 it reminds me that my
 brother can swim I can't
 It reminds me of when in
 the story pain and the
 great one the girl can
 swim and the brother can't

Figure 3. Josh's personal connection journal entry to the book, *The Pain and the Great One* by Judy Blume.

I wanted to run through the reading comprehension strategies before we started our choice book, *Nate the Great and the Missing Key*. The students still did not know this book won the most votes. The next reading comprehension strategy to review, reading with all of your senses and visualizing, would be modeled with a read aloud of two Jack Prelutsky poems: *There Was a Tiny Baker*, and *In a Winter Meadow*. As I read the poems, the students closed their eyes. I wanted them to focus on what they were feeling, seeing, hearing, and tasting. Students worked enthusiastically when they got to draw how they experienced the poems through their five senses (see Figures 4 & 5). “Can I write what my picture shows?” asked Caleb. “That would be great.” “Can I do that too, Mrs. Cro?” asked Nick smiling. “Yes, that would be great.” Because of his difficulty writing, Caleb impressed me when he asked to write what his picture showed. He goes to occupational therapy for his penmanship and fine motor skills. Soon, all the students busily wrote what their pictures showed. I explained that while we read our first book, I want them to use their senses to make a movie in their mind about what happens in the story. “What book are we going to read?” they all asked at once. “You will find out tomorrow.” “I can’t wait,” I heard them say, clutching pencils, and standing to go back to their seats. “Have a great day,” I called out.

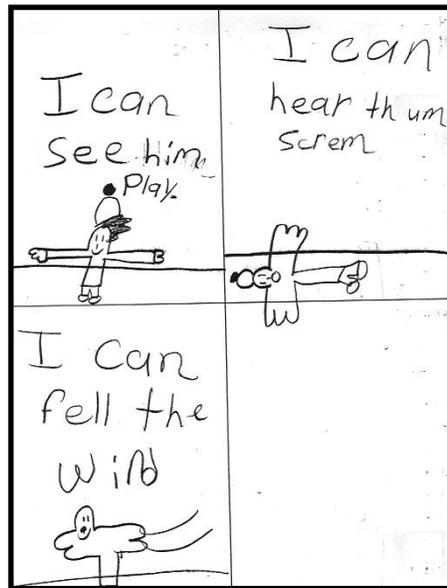


Figure 4. Maya used her senses as she listened to the poem, *There Was a Tiny Baker*, by Jack Prelutsky.

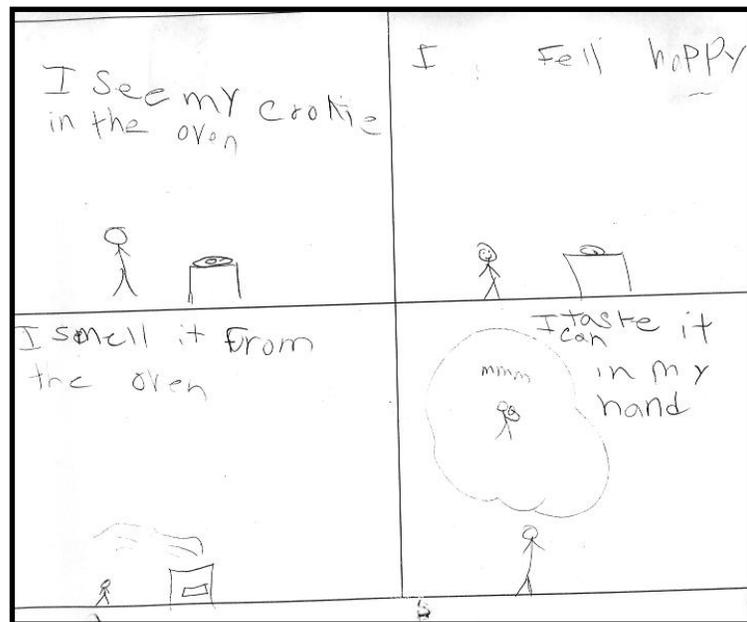


Figure 5. Ava used her senses as she listened to the poem, *In a Winter Meadow*, by Jack Prelutsky.

“Do you have the book? Do you have the book? I know it is *Nate the Great*. It had the fun pages in the back,” smiled Maya enthusiastically. “I voted for *Cam Jansen*,” Ava said softly. I slowly pulled the pile of orange books from my green bag. “Yes, *Nate the Great and the Missing Key* got the most votes,” I responded. “What is the genre of this book?” I asked. “It’s fiction,” Caleb called out. “What kind of fiction?” “A mystery,” he quickly said. “What does a mystery book have in it that makes it a mystery?” I asked. “Something missing,” Ray responded. “Clues,” added Caleb. “What do you mean by clues,” I asked. “Clues are little pieces of information to lead you closer to solving the mystery,” Maya said succinctly. “What else does a mystery book have?” I wondered. “Something suspicious,” someone called out. “You need to follow a trail,” someone else added. “What does the trail lead to,” I asked. “New information about something,” Ray responded. “Special artifacts and surprises,” Ray continued. “What’s that glass thing called?” I asked, pointing to the picture on the cover of the book. “A magnifying glass,” Josh spoke up for the first time. “What do you call the person who solves the mystery and uses a magnifying glass,” I asked. “A detective,” Caleb shouted. I turned to Nick who had been rather quiet this whole time. “Do you know what the word detective means?” “No.” “Ray, can you please explain to Nick what a detective means?” “A detective is a person whose job it is to solve mysteries.” “Thank you, Ray.” “Do you understand, Nick.” “We learned about mysteries and detectives last year when most of us read, *The Case of the*

Hungry Stranger. You weren't here with us then, so some of us know a little more about mysteries because we talked about some of this in second grade." I saw that made Nick feel better. I could tell he might be feeling a little overwhelmed by all the information the other students knew, and I just wanted to make him feel better. A native Spanish speaker, I just wanted to clarify that Nick understood the vocabulary.

"Can any of you make connections to mysteries?" I asked. "Indiana Jones," Caleb called out. "Oh, yeah, Indiana Jones opening the door," added Nick. "It reminds me of the board game Clue, and when my first grade teacher would hide stuff, and we had to look for clues," announced Maya clearly. I passed out the books. Immediately the students turned to the funny pages at the end of the book. "Can we read this part?" "Take a look at it now because we only have a couple more minutes. We can start reading the book tomorrow," I responded happy and hopeful about the reading that would start tomorrow.

"Okay, Mrs. Cro's group," I heard Mrs. Long say as I walked into the room. The students quickly grabbed their pencils and headed to our little corner. I quickly passed out the books and told them to quietly read pages 7 to 11, five pages with only a half a page of text on each page. "Nick, move closer to me, please. Please whisper read so I can hear you. I've not heard you read before, and I would like very much to hear you read." Nick read fluently so I knew this was a good book for him. "Who's telling the story?" I asked. "Who is the speaker in the

story?” I rephrased. “The narrator is telling the story,” answered Ray. Quickly, before I could respond, Ava spoke up, “No, Nate is telling the story.” “How do you know?” I asked. “Because right away it says, “I, Nate the Great, and I is Nate.” “That’s exactly right, Ava.”

I reread the pages aloud as the students followed along. I modeled reading with expression as we talked about our reading comprehension strategies of visualizing, and using our five senses to make a movie in our mind while we read. I asked Josh, “Who was telling the story?” “I don’t know,” he said. We talked again how the I in the story is Nate because just like Ava said on the very first page, the author writes, “I, Nate the Great, am a detective.” I am a little disappointed that Josh and Ray had trouble with this because in second grade we spent a lot of time going over point of view, and I knew that Mrs. Long constantly talked about point of view whenever the students read. The students reread the pages out loud to their neighbor so that everyone could practice reading with expression. We talked about how good readers do this not only when they read aloud, but also when they read in their minds. “We want to hear the characters voices in our minds,” I reminded them.

When the students came to group again, I had them reread the first five pages of the book. In addition to comprehension, these students needed to build up their fluency and prosody. I wanted to review another reading comprehension strategy. “Boys and girls, good readers wonder and ask questions about what they

are reading to help them understand the story better,” I explained. “What are you wondering about the story, or what questions do you have so far about the story?” I made a list as the students started talking. “Is someone going to steal the key?” Maya said right away. “Will Nate like Annie’s dog,” she added quickly. “Why is Nate afraid of Fang?” Ray wondered. Caleb asked, “Is Rosamond going to steal the key?” “I wonder if Annie is going to find the key,” said Nick. Ava added, “What if the cat took it? Josh responded, “Did the cat knock the key off the table?” Maya added, “Maybe Annie forgot the key inside the house.”

“Good readers also make predictions about the story,” I explained. “What do you think might happen in the story?” Again, Maya spoke up immediately, “Annie will find the key and Nate will go to the party and not be afraid of Fang anymore.” “The key might break when Nate finds it,” said Ray. Nick said, “I think Fang ate the key.” Ava added, “Rosamond finds the key, and then they have the party.” Students wrote three “I wonder” statements, one question, and one prediction in their journals (see Figure 6).

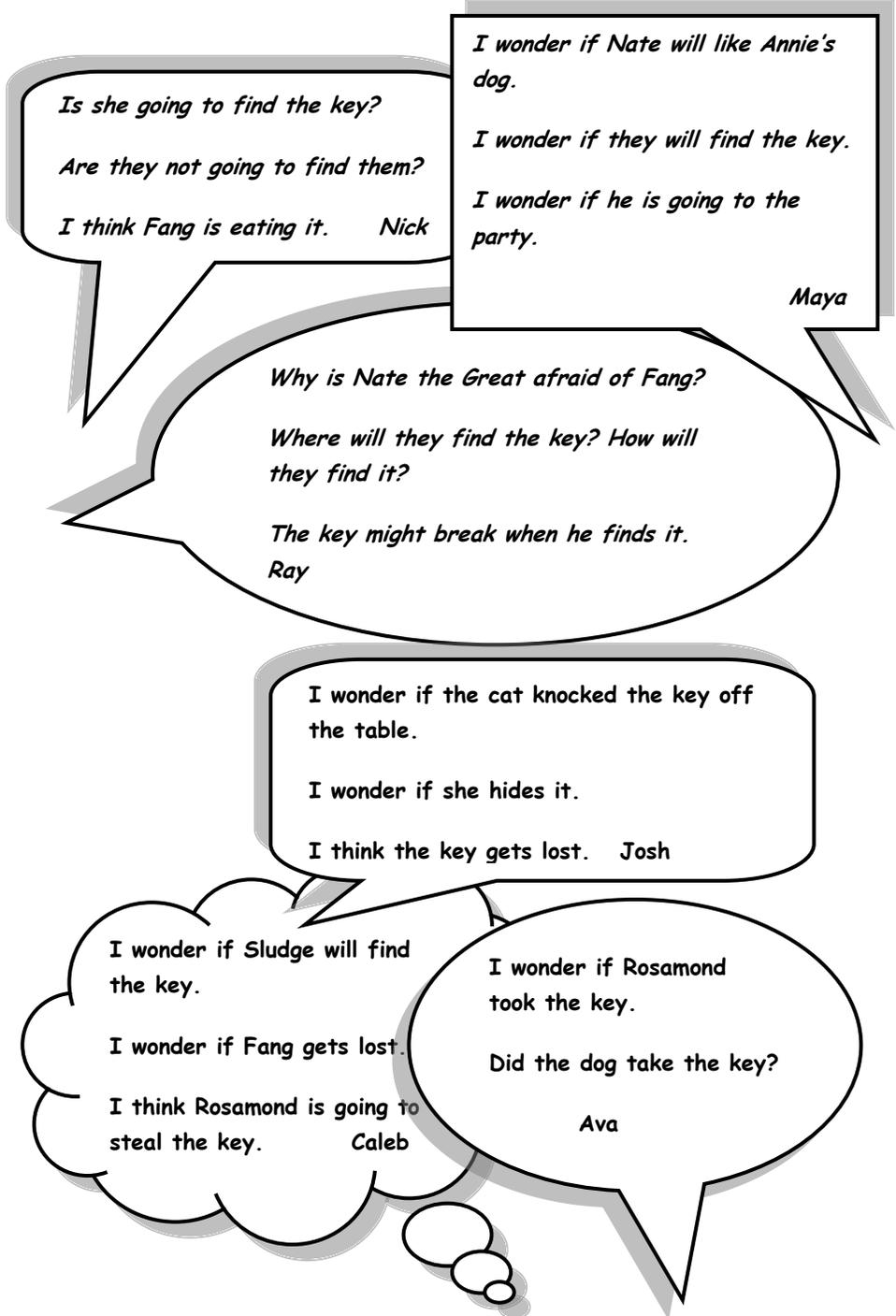


Figure 6. Students wonder, question, and predict what will happen next.

We moved on with reading the next few pages. Some of the students, confused why Nate does not like Rosamond's dog, Fang, thought that Nate does not like dogs in general. Especially proud of Ava, she reminded us that Nate does have his own dog, Sludge, so he must like dogs, just not Fang. We reviewed the reasons why, citing evidence from the story. We also reviewed point of view, and everyone, clear that Nate tells the story, understood that the "I" in the story refers to Nate. Then we discussed what we knew about the characters so far: Nate, Rosamond, and Annie. We also discussed how Annie feels about Fang, her dog citing evidence from the story.

The next few pages of the book proved to be fun but challenging. Caleb, excited because cursive writing appears in a note Nate writes to his mom, cried out, "I can't read this note, Mrs. Cro," "I need help too," followed Nick. "Give it a go," I replied. "When everyone is on page 18, we'll read it together." I helped the students read the note aloud. "What does that word "case" mean?" I asked. "Think about how the author is using that word in the story. What does it mean for a detective to be "on a case?" I repeated. "It means that he has a mystery to solve. The case is the mystery that needs to be solved," Ray stated definitively. "Excellent."

As we read further, Ava asked, "What's a drainpipe?" "Yeah, what's a drainpipe?" Nick repeated. We discussed the word. A picture of a drainpipe on the page left me curious that these two students could not make a connection

between the word and the picture. But once they knew the definition for drainpipe they made all kinds of connections. “I have one on my house,” Maya explained, “and when it rains all the water gushes out the bottom.” Today we also met a new character in the story, Oliver. I asked the students to write three things they knew about Oliver so far. Since they did not show his picture yet in the story, I asked the students to draw a picture of what Oliver looks like in their mind. Just as a review, I also asked the students to write three things they knew about Nate, Annie, and Rosamond, using details from the story (see Figure 7). They all asked if they could draw pictures of these characters. “I don’t know anything about Annie. What page is about Annie? She wrote a shiny note didn’t she? I don’t know anything about Annie,” Josh exclaimed distressingly. “There is no one page about Annie, Josh. If you don’t remember what you know about Annie, then you go back and reread,” I said gently. “She lost the key?” Josh responded uncertain. The others, successfully responding and drawing in their journals, made me wonder why Josh could not. It disappointed me that Josh agonized about this because we really had talked about Annie, Nate, and Rosamond quite a bit since starting the book. Oliver, the only character not discussed, yet Josh listed what he knew about Oliver. He listed what he knew about Nate. Why Annie caused this trouble for him confused me. Not rereading, Josh shut down. He kept saying he did not know anything about Annie. When he asked me if Annie wrote the shiny note,

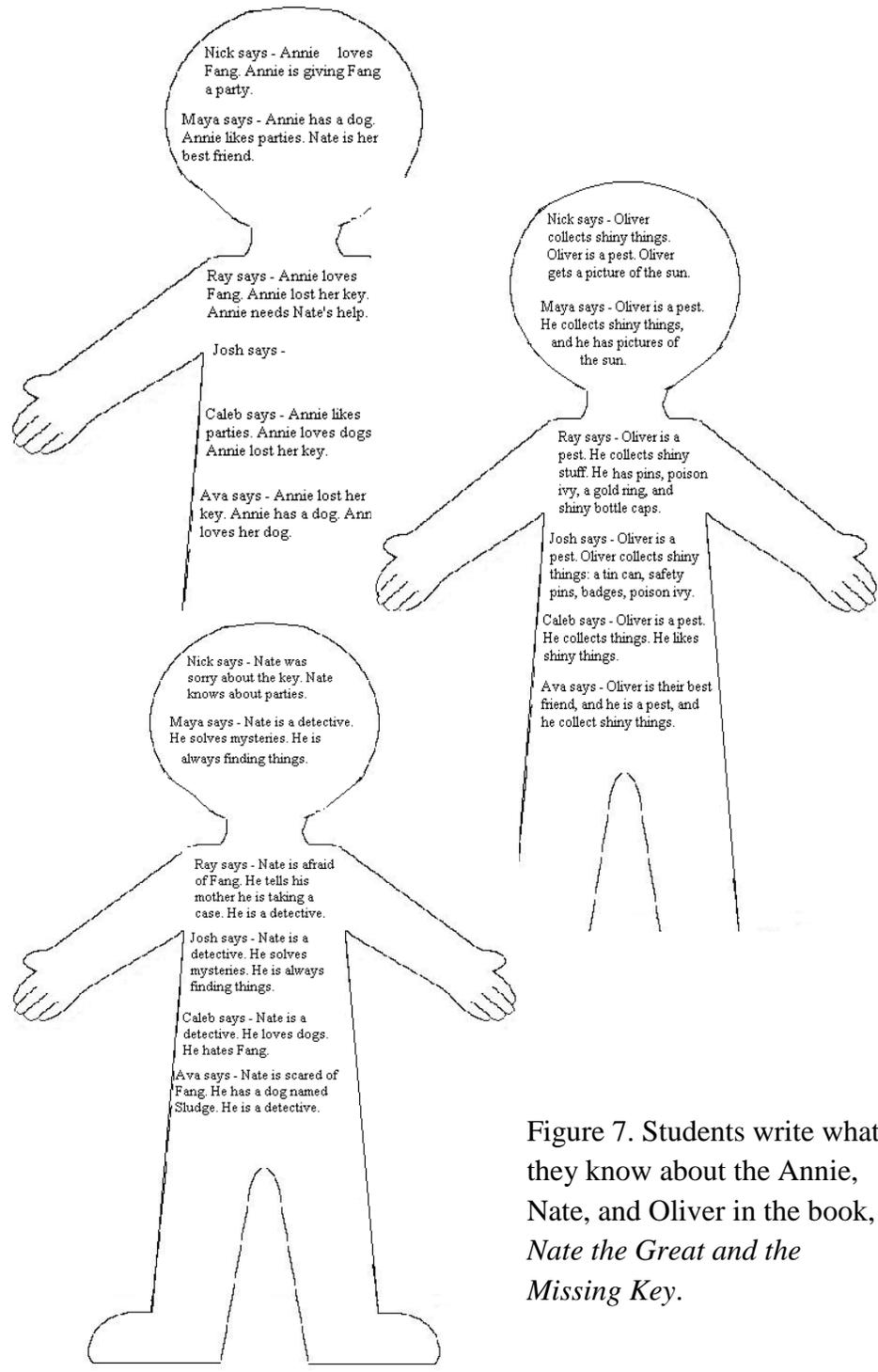


Figure 7. Students write what they know about the Annie, Nate, and Oliver in the book, *Nate the Great and the Missing Key*.

Josh misinterpreted the story, but he correctly stated that Annie lost her key. But time had run out, and Josh could not write or tell me anything about Annie.

It took all our energy and time just to read, retell, clear up misinterpretations about vocabulary and the characters that doing any journal writing lapsed. The next day we came to a part of the story that seemed like the perfect segue into moving forward with diary writing and becoming the character. I thought that for Josh becoming the character, Nate the Great, and walking in his shoes as he solves the mystery, might really help his comprehension, at least I hoped.

Missing Something

The students wanted to share what they wrote in their journals about the characters from the day before. Still stuck in the previous day's dilemma, Josh kept saying he did not know anything about Annie. "I know that Rosamond is having a great day because of locked doors," stated Ray confidently. "I'm not sure what you mean, Ray," I respond. "It says on page 17," replied Ray. "Everyone turn to page 17, and let's read." "Read for us, Ray." "Yes, ma'am."

"You must go to Rosamond's house and ask her where she put your key," I said. "I went to her house," Annie said. "But it was locked, too. I rang the bell, but no one was home." "This is a big day for Rosamond and locked doors," I said.

I tried to explain Nate's sarcasm when Ray said that, but the students did not know what I meant. Ray, not the only one confused, made me realize that the sarcastic remark triggered comprehension break down. I needed to give them a mini-lesson on sarcasm. It also seemed a good time to talk about character traits as Nate's sarcastic streak becomes clear to them.

"How will I explain sarcasm to them?" I asked myself opening my car door as warm October breezes washed over me. Glad to have some quiet thinking time in my car driving home, an idea finally arrived. A simple but effective T-chart would do the trick.

The next day I hung a large poster of a T-chart on the wall in the corner where we gathered. On the T-chart I wrote the definition of sarcasm: Sarcasm is saying one thing but really meaning the opposite. "Sometimes people say sarcastic things as a way to be funny, or even sometimes as a way to be fresh," I explained. "For example, if it is pouring rain outside, and I say, oh, what great weather we're having. Do I really mean that we are having great weather?" "Nooo," giggled Maya. "Or let's say you are on your way to catch the school bus and you trip, drop your backpack, and tear a hole in your pants, and you say oh, what a great way to start the day?" "Do you really mean that you are having a great start to the day?" "No," said Caleb. "You mean you are having a bad day." I wrote the examples and explanations on the T-chart as I asked if the students understood sarcasm. "Sometimes Nate says things that are sarcastic. He says one

thing, but he really means the opposite. Turn to page 16 in the book. Let's reread pages 16 and 17 and think about what is happening in the story." "Rosamond lost her key and Nate and Annie are going to go to her house to help her look for it," recapped Ava. "What does Nate mean when he says this is a big day for Rosamond and locked doors?" I asked as I wrote Nate's words on our T-chart. "Does Nate really mean that Rosamond is having a big or great day for locked doors?" I asked. "Rosamond is having a bad day because of locked doors," Ray called out. "As we move on and read pages 24 to 25, let's be on the lookout to where Nate is being sarcastic to Oliver," I said as the students read on. "On page 24 when Oliver asks if he can follow Nate, Nate says all right. But why is Nate being sarcastic when he says all right?" I asked. "Because Nate doesn't really want Oliver to follow him," said Caleb. "How do you really know that Nate doesn't want Oliver to follow him? What details are on that page to help you come to the understanding that Nate does not want Oliver to follow him?" I ask. The students pondered as they put their heads down looking at the page. "Because Nate tells him that when he goes east he tells Oliver to go west, and when he says he'll go south, he tells Oliver to go north," Caleb said. "Let's continue reading," I exclaimed. "I love reading," Ava called out. "I like reading a little," Josh admitted shyly. "Reading is fun," Nick smiled broadly. These outbursts melted my heart, especially Josh's. So often, so timid, how wonderful to hear Josh say he likes reading a little. "If Rosamond was at the bank there would be cat hair," Ray

offered to the group. “Explain what you mean Ray,” I state not fully making the connection myself. “Rosamond has six cats, remember?” Ray smiled easily. “So she would leave cat hair wherever she goes,” he continued. Ray’s insight also melted my heart. Sometimes Ray’s responses are a little off, but other times he reveals such great insight and offers us such gems. Speaking of gems, Josh, the only student in the group who could explain what it meant to deposit money in the bank, experienced a successful moment, just what Josh needed to build his confidence. The group really started to open up unprompted. “Rosamond doesn’t do that much, and she writes strange poems,” Ava shared. “She looks strange,” Caleb continued. “She’s weird and writes weird notes,” Maya added. “So how would you describe Rosamond?” I asked. “Weird,” Josh called out. “Strange,” others said. “What details from the story make you come to that understanding about Rosamond?” I asked. “She’s dressed strange,” said Maya. “Look at her face and her hair,” she added. “She wrote her note weird. It rhymes. It is like something you have to figure out,” Ava said. Turning to page 16 we reread Rosamond’s note all wondering what exactly Rosamond means.

Dear Diary

“Ewww,” shrieked Maya as she continued reading the next day. “Gross,” Caleb responded. I know they have just read that Nate must look in Annie’s garbage can. When I began the study I thought that we would be doing more personal response journal writing while we read. But the students needed to build

up their reading comprehension stamina much more than I anticipated. But this part of the story seemed to be the perfect part to have the students begin writing diary entries from the point of view of the character. This way the students could become the character while they read with the hope that this would help their reading comprehension. “Think about what you would be thinking and feeling if you were really Nate, and now you realize that you are going to have to crawl through Annie’s garbage can looking for her key,” I explained. “What are you thinking about?” “Gross, smelly garbage,” Ray laughed. “Remember how we wrote a journal entry making a personal connection to the story when we read *The Pain and the Great One*,” I reminded them. “Now I want you to pretend that you are Nate the Great. I want you to pretend that you, as Nate the Great, have to crawl through Annie’s stinky, yucky garbage to find her key. What are you thinking and feeling about? I want you to write a diary entry as Nate the Great and explain what is going through your mind,” I continued. “What’s a diary?” Nick asked. “A diary is like a journal. It’s a place where you write down what you are thinking and feeling about things that are happening to you,” I explained. “How do you spell diary?” Ray asked. “d i a r y,” I answered. “I spelled dairy,” Nick laughed. “Does everyone understand what I am asking you to do? I want you to pretend you are Nate. I want you actually to become Nate. What is it going to be like to have to look through Annie’s garbage? Use your five senses. Okay?” As the students quietly wrote, Caleb asked, “Is this enough?” “Tell me more, Caleb.

Think about what you are feeling with your five senses.” He wrote more. “How many sentences are enough?” Josh wanted to know. “A good half page at least,” I answered. Ava said, “I’m done.” “Do your closing,” I responded looking over at her writing. “Does everyone understand what I mean when I say closing,” I asked. They nodded yes. “How do you spell sincerely,” Nick wanted to know. “I’m done. What do I do now?” asked Ava. “Read the next three pages. We will share our diary entries tomorrow.” When I read Ray’s entry at first it did not make sense to me, and I feared he misinterpreted the story. He wrote about how Nate’s dog was going to go through the garbage and not Nate. That does not happen in the story. But when I reread what Ray wrote I saw that it did actually make sense, a lot of sense. When Ray put himself in Nate’s shoes, Ray said that as Nate he would want to tell his dog to go into the garbage can to look for the key so that he, Nate, would not have to be the one to do it (see Figure 8).

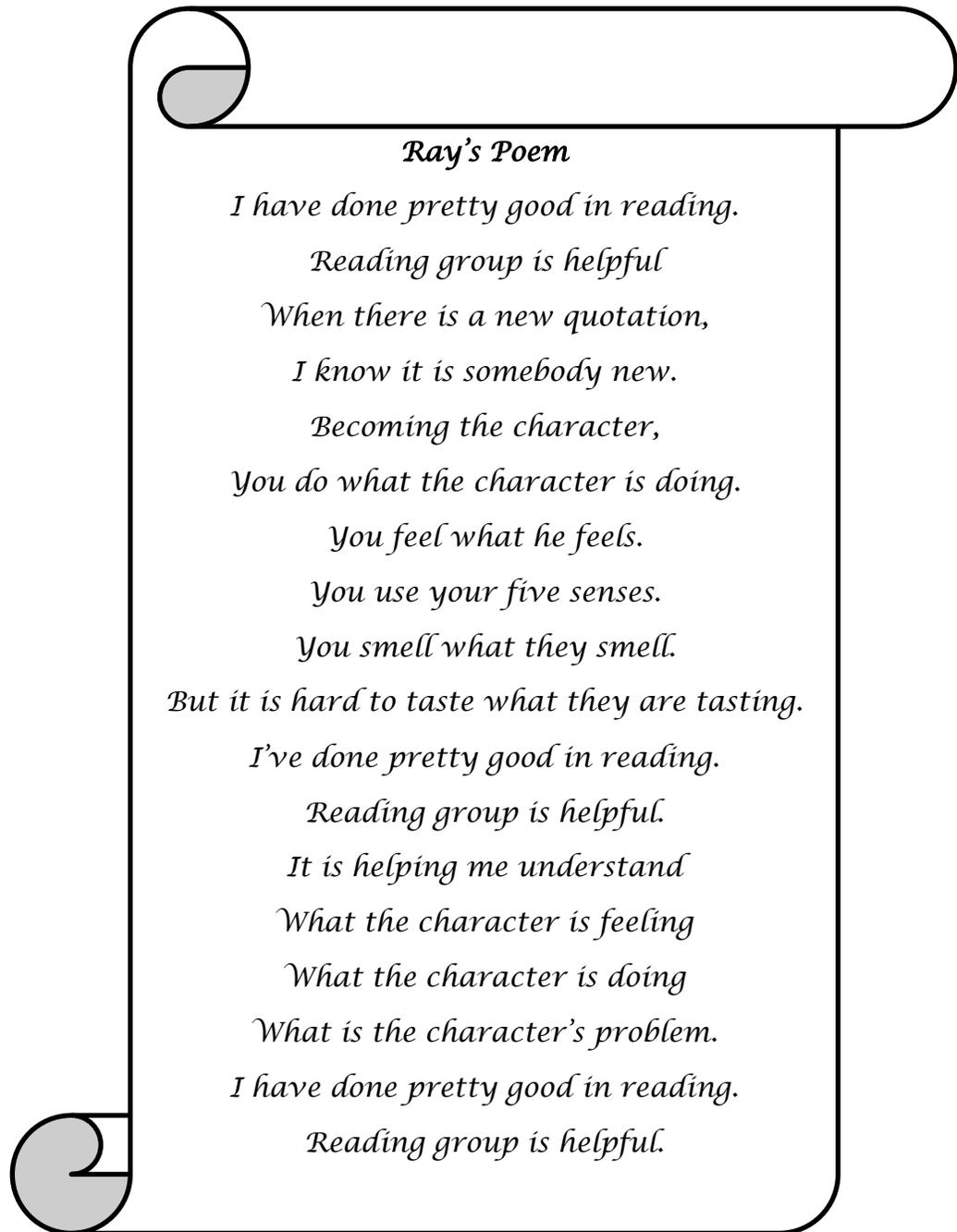


Figure 8. A poem I wrote about Ray using words he spoke during an interview reflecting what he thinks about reading and reading group.

The students eagerly asked to share their diary responses, except Josh, reluctantly refraining from taking chances (see Figure 9). After Ray read his diary entry, we made predictions whether Nate would climb into the garbage or have his dog do it. I proudly commended Ray for being the first to share this thought of whether Nate would climb in the garbage or have his dog do it. “My mom lost her car keys once,” Maya told us making a connection. “What happened?” I asked. “She looked all over the house for them, and we had to help her. My little sister Kayla had them.” “What does Nate realize?” I asked. “That the key may be in a pile of shiny things, and it may be hard to find,” answered Caleb. “They understand,” I said to myself. “We know where the key is. It’s on Fang’s collar,” they all shouted at once excited about letting me know they had figured out the mystery and understood the story.

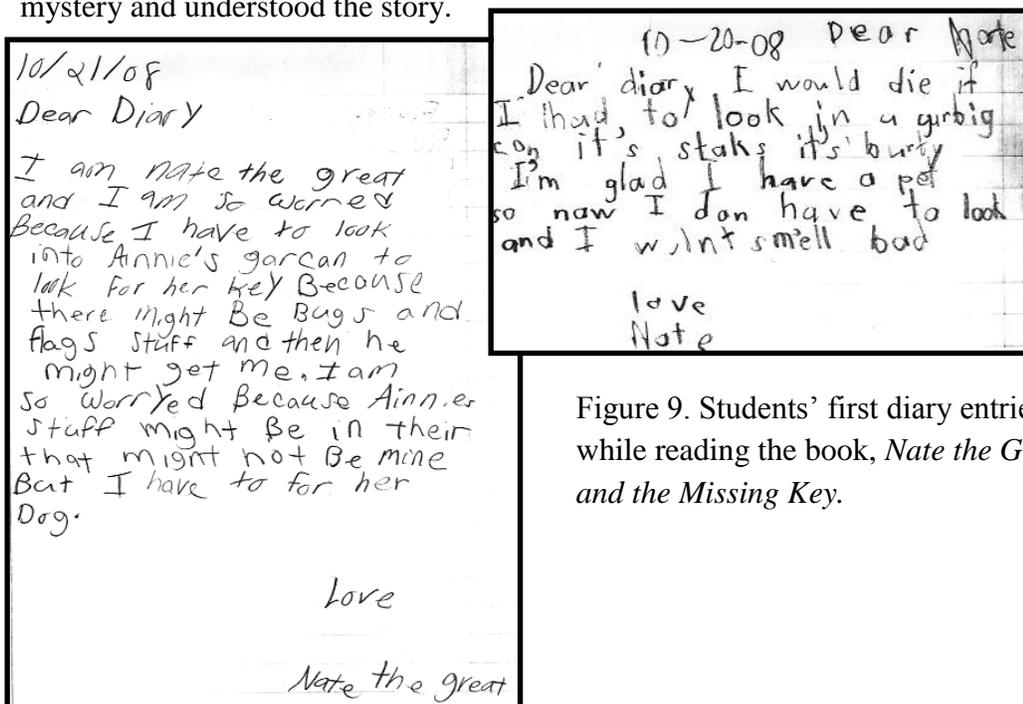


Figure 9. Students' first diary entries while reading the book, *Nate the Great and the Missing Key*.

“I know where the key is,” Maya sang as she sat down for group the next day. Caleb, Nick, and Ava had their books open ready to read. This enthusiasm about finishing the book excited me. Ray, playing with his pencil eraser, needed prompting to transition. “Josh’s at the library. I’ll go get him,” Maya announced. “Okay. Hurry back,” I said. I did not mind letting Maya go get Josh. She works very slowly, but I know she will not have trouble comprehending the rest of the story. Suspecting Josh went to the library to get out of the classroom for a few minutes, I also hoped he needed a good book to read. “The rest of us, let’s finish reading the book. Read from page 39 until the end of the book. While you are reading, pretend that you are Nate the Great. Do what he does, think what he thinks, say what he says,” I reminded them. A few minutes later Ava declared, “I’m done. Can I look at the activity pages?” “I will give you plenty of time to do that soon,” I said. Right now I want you to find two places in the book where Nate is sarcastic, and write them in your journal.” I wanted to see if the students really understood Nate’s sarcasm. “I know,” Caleb called out. He whispered in my ear, “When he wants the party to be short.” “Write it down in your journal and tell me what Nate means by that.” “I know one too,” Nick declared. Maya, Caleb, and Ava found one example of Nate’s sarcasm. Deciding that asking them to search the whole book was too much, I gave them the page number of where to find another example. All the students found it (see Figure 10).

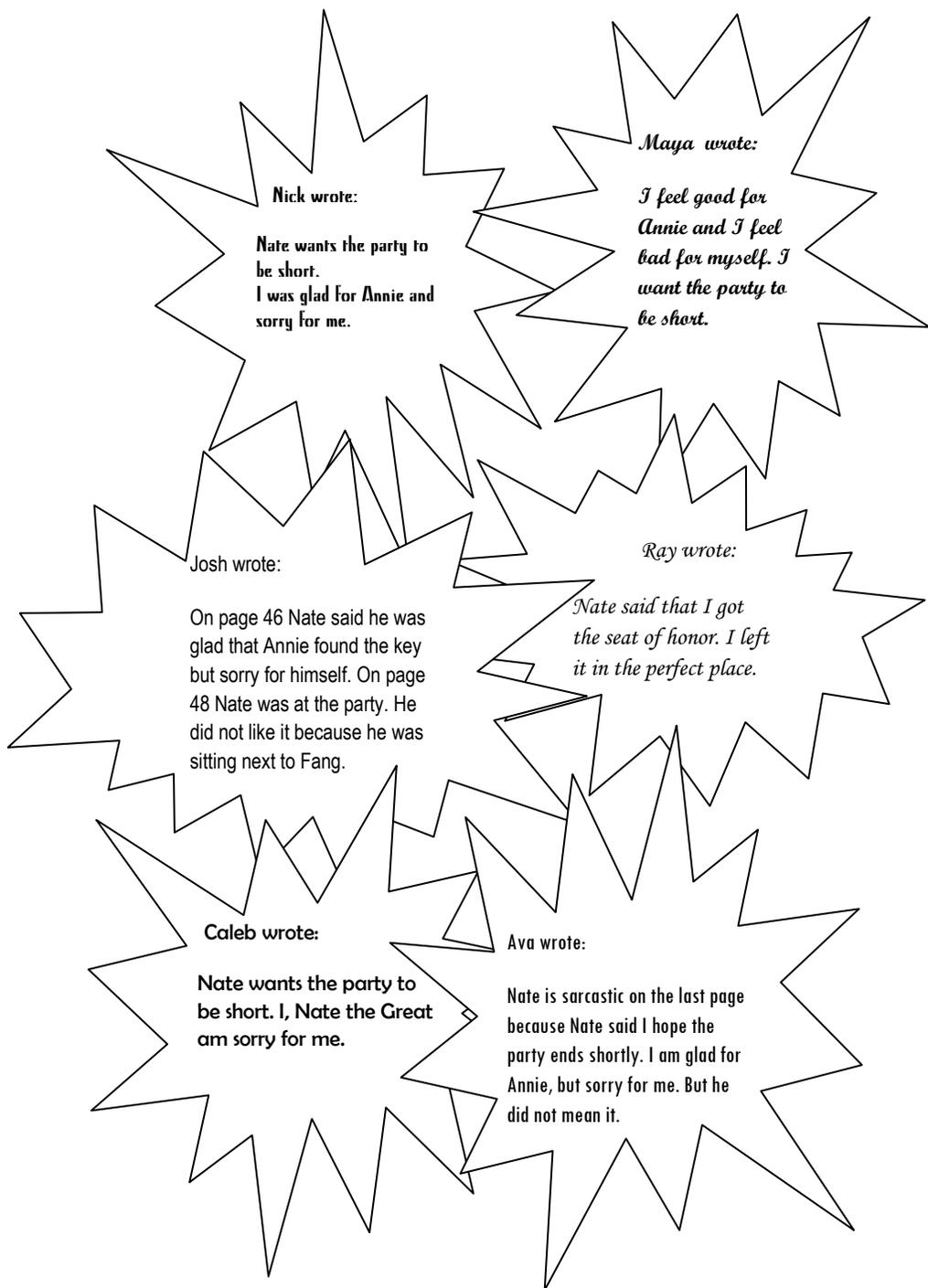


Figure 10. Students write about Nate the Great's sarcasm in their journals.

Ray just needed a little more time, a pattern I have noticed with him. Ray eventually understands, but he needs more time. Giving him the page number enabled him to find the example of Nate's sarcasm. At the end of our meeting, Josh smiled at me and said, "I like *Ready Freddy* books because Freddy has a sister who is a pain just like the book you read to us." Thinking what a huge milestone for Josh to smile about books made me happy he shared that he likes *Ready Freddy* books because I happened to be considering a *Ready Freddy* book for our next book pass. Also, his making the connection between the *Ready Freddy* books and *The Pain and the Great One* delighted me. Josh shows me great thinking from time to time, but with such poor self confidence he seems paralyzed so many times. But other times he offers up such gems. Josh, an amazing artist, inspires me to press on so our group can get to the art-based character graffiti assignment that will come at the end of our next book. But first we need to complete the authentic activity for *Nate the Great and the Missing Key*.

What a Character

Mrs. Long gave me permission to take the students for an extended period of time today, from 10:50-11:30. I needed time to get them started on our authentic activity now that we finished *Nate the Great*. But before we got started on the authentic activity, I wanted to walk the students through the character trait graphic organizer I devised to help them think about and communicate what they have come to understand about the characters in the book. The graphic organizer,

a T-chart like the one we used to organize and explain sarcasm, where on one side the students write down things that Nate the Great does, says, thinks, or feels, and for each of the actions, on the other side of the T-chart, the students write a word or phrase that describes what they have learned about Nate because of the corresponding action, the supporting details from the story. Knowing that Mrs. Long talks about character traits, I ask, “What do you know about character traits?” Ava raised her hand, “Character traits mean about the person if they are mean, kind, smart.” “Me and my Mom watch a Spanish show and a girl has a dog and they are having stuff missing and then a detective comes and checks it out,” Maya shared spontaneously. “Sounds like a great connection to *Nate the Great*,” I commented. It appeared that Maya listened to my question and Ava’s response, but then when Maya raised her hand she connected the TV show to the book, but I wished she also followed up on Ava’s comment. We filled out the character trait graphic organizer together as I modeled first how to do it. Happily, Nick took the initiative to look back in the book without my even having to say anything. This told me he thinks, and sometimes he knows what he needs to do to solve his own problem and answer the question. Redirecting Caleb’s attention, I thought this would be motivating for them because they would get to show each other and me just how much they knew about Nate the Great. Caleb often thinks he knows how to do something or knows the answer, and just writes something down without looking back in the book or really thinking, and then he does not have the correct

response. I needed to reexplain to him how to use the graphic organizer. Ray also needed more instruction. He wrote in the wrong columns, and just seemed very confused. But once I explained to him how to use the graphic organizer Ray wrote all on his own that Nate was brave, and he used details from the story to explain why, exactly the point behind the graphic organizer. To me, it seems that Ray, able to come up with solid reflective thinking, interprets his own unique way, and his inability to understand the format of the graphic organizer, hampered him. But listening carefully to what he tells me will help me interpret his understandings in a positive way. Ray, a very sensitive student, reminds me that I need to listen and not discount his thoughts and personal interpretations when conceivably they can be interpreted accurately. But then, too, I need to be on the lookout for misinterpretation, so we can discuss where meaning breaks down for him and review our metacognitive reading comprehension strategies, so internalizing them, he learns to use them independently.

The students completed the character trait graphic organizer, and we added this strategy to our list of metacognitive reading strategies that we have reviewed while reading *Nate the Great and the Missing Key* (see Figure 11).

10-24-08 Missing Key

Directions:

Think about the kind of person Nate the Great is, and describe some of his character traits.

Character traits are words we use to describe the way a person acts or behaves.

<p>What does Nate the Great do, say, think, or feel?</p> <p>Nate feels that that they found the key.</p> <p>Nate felt bad because he needs to go to a dog party.</p> <p>he says things he does not mean. For example, when he said this is a big boy for Rosamund and lock doors.</p> <p>Nate the Great does not want to look back because Oliver is following him.</p>	<p>Write a word or phrase that describes what you have learned about him because of what he does, says, thinks or feels.</p> <p>Nate is a caring friend.</p> <p>he is afraid of big dogs.</p> <p>He is sarcastic.</p> <p>He is kinda mean.</p>
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Directions:

Think about the kind of person Nate the Great is, and describe some of his character traits.

Character traits are words we use to describe the way a person acts or behaves.

<p>What does Nate the Great do, say, think, or feel? Nate feels happy that Annie found the key.</p>	<p>Write a word or phrase that describes what you have learned about him because of what he does, says, thinks or feels. Nate is a caring person.</p>
<p>he feels bad he has to go to a dog party.</p>	<p>he does not like dog parties.</p>
<p>Nate is only afraid of only I think Fang.</p>	<p>Nate is brave.</p>

Figure 11. The first character trait graphic organizer the students filled out as I modeled and scaffolded the task.

“Let’s review our work in our journals that we did while we read our book,” I quickly tell the students as I pass out their journals. “Open to the first page. Let’s review what we have done in our journals and in our minds to help us understand what we read. We used some reading comprehension strategies. What was the first one we used? Read the first page of your journal.” “I made a connection to explain how what happened in the story is the same as what happened in my own life,” Maya explained perfectly. “Next one,” I demanded nicely. “I use my five senses to help me make a movie in my mind,” Nick noted gleefully. “I wondered about the story,” Ray stated. “I made a prediction,” Nick smiled. “I ask questions while I read,” Caleb reminded us. “I picture what I read,” Josh spoke up. “I think about what I know about the character,” Caleb exclaimed. The students all added in a hodgepodge of chatter back and forth, “I become the character in the story so I can understand how he feels. I understand what the character thinks, does, feels, and says so I can learn about the character.” Josh and Caleb, not as engaged as the others in the final part of our conversation disappointed me, but it thrilled me to see that the students could communicate with each other and me what they worked so hard at while they read *Nate the Great*. Confident feelings flooded me about their success at completing our authentic activity: a bulletin board explaining these reading comprehension strategies, lifted right from their journals.

In My Own Words

“I’ve written the reading comprehension strategies we reviewed yesterday on the wipe board. Let’s read them over: making a connection; using my five senses to make a movie in my mind, wondering about the story, asking questions while I read, making predictions, becoming the character, and thinking about what I know about the character.” “Are we going to do the bulletin board?” asked Maya. “Yes, that is what we are going to start right now,” I said placing a pile of folded slips of paper in the middle of our round table. Today our group is meeting in the reading room. I needed them to have space and to be sitting at a table to do this work. I also needed use of the wipe board. The sun shone brightly through my wall of windows, and the students smiled naturally. “On each piece of paper I have written one comprehension strategy. I want everyone to pick one piece of paper, unfold it, and read what it says. Do that now,” I instructed. “I got the five senses strategy, Mrs. Cro,” Caleb informed us. “Okay, now I want you to find one example of that strategy in your journal. Turn to the page in your journal where we practiced that strategy.” I explained that I wanted them to copy that strategy example in their best handwriting for our bulletin board. “These comprehension strategies will be read by every student in the building, so they can also use them to understand what they read. We are going to use the bulletin board right outside the cafeteria that way when students are lined up for lunch, they will read what you have written.” “When are you going to take our picture?” asked Maya, ever

the ham. “You know I will,” I replied. “I just have to remember to bring in my camera,” I added smiling. The students worked busily rewriting their comprehension strategy example onto good paper. “Let me make lines for you on that graphic organizer, Caleb,” I offered. “Can I have lines, too, Mrs. Cro?” asked Nick. “Can I draw a picture?” asked Maya. “Me too?” Nick inquired. Nick often asks to do what others have suggested. I noticed Josh erasing the picture he started. “I don’t want to draw a picture,” he whispered. I saw this as another example of how Josh, paralyzed from taking chances unless he is sure that the result will be perfect cripples him. Furthermore, it seems to me that sometimes he only wants to complete the least amount of work possible, and the least amount of thinking possible.

With their good copies complete, I wanted to make sure that the students could explain their reading comprehension strategy in their own words. If the students could explain their reading strategy in their own words, that was evidence enough for me that they understood the strategy, and hopefully use it while reading our next book and independently. Maya, Ray, Ava, and Caleb each explained their strategy, and I wrote what they said on the wipe board. I gave them each a large yellow construction speech bubble. “Copy your explanation of your strategy very neatly onto the speech bubble,” I explained. “I wrote your words on the wipe board to make it easy. Copy it down on the speech bubble (see Figure 12). When I take your picture your speech bubble will come out of

I understand what I read when I become the character. I write what he or she feels and knows.

Ray

I understand what I read when I wonder and I predict. I think about what is going to happen next.

Maya

I understand what I read when I use my five senses to hear, feel, taste, see, and smell and make a movie in my mind.

Caleb

I learn about the characters when I think about what they do, say, think, or feel.

Nick

I understand what I read when I know information about the characters.

Josh

I understand what I read when I compare the book I'm reading to a movie or a book that is just like the book I read. For an example I compare The Rain and the Great One to Hannah Montana because the sister is better at sports and Hannah is better at sports too. The brother can't do sports, and Jackson can't do some sports.

Ava

Figure 12. Each student explained a reading comprehension strategy in his or her own words on speech bubbles for the bulletin board.

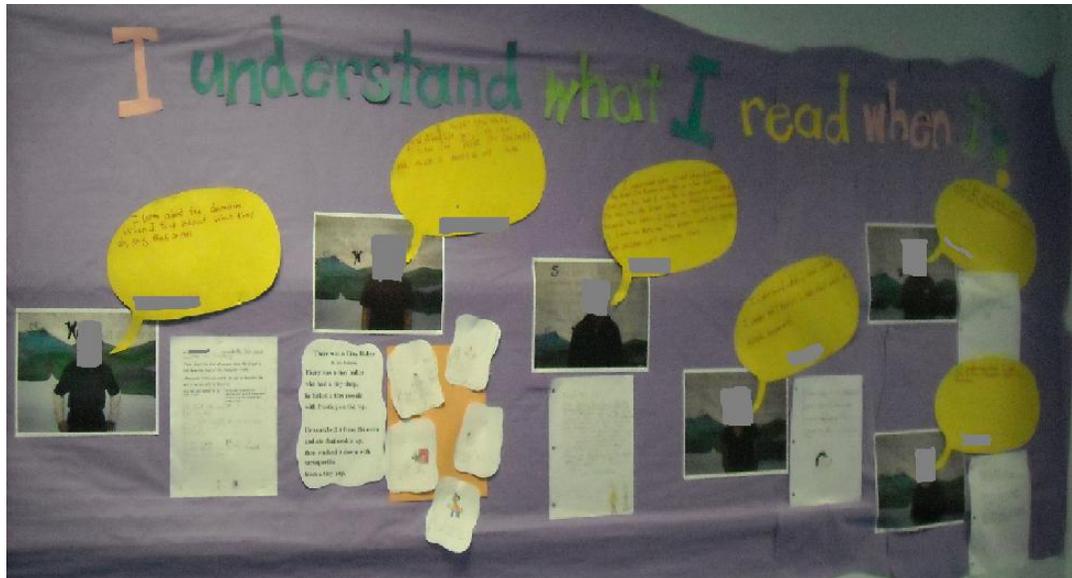


Figure 13. The students created this bulletin board after reading *Nate the Great and the Missing Key*. The students explained, in their own words, different reading comprehension strategies using information from their journals.

your mouth like you are speaking,” I held up the speech bubble next to Ray’s head to show them (see Figure 13). “That looks funny, Mrs. Cro,” Nick giggled. I am glad Nick giggled now because in a few minutes he would be in tears (see Figure 14).

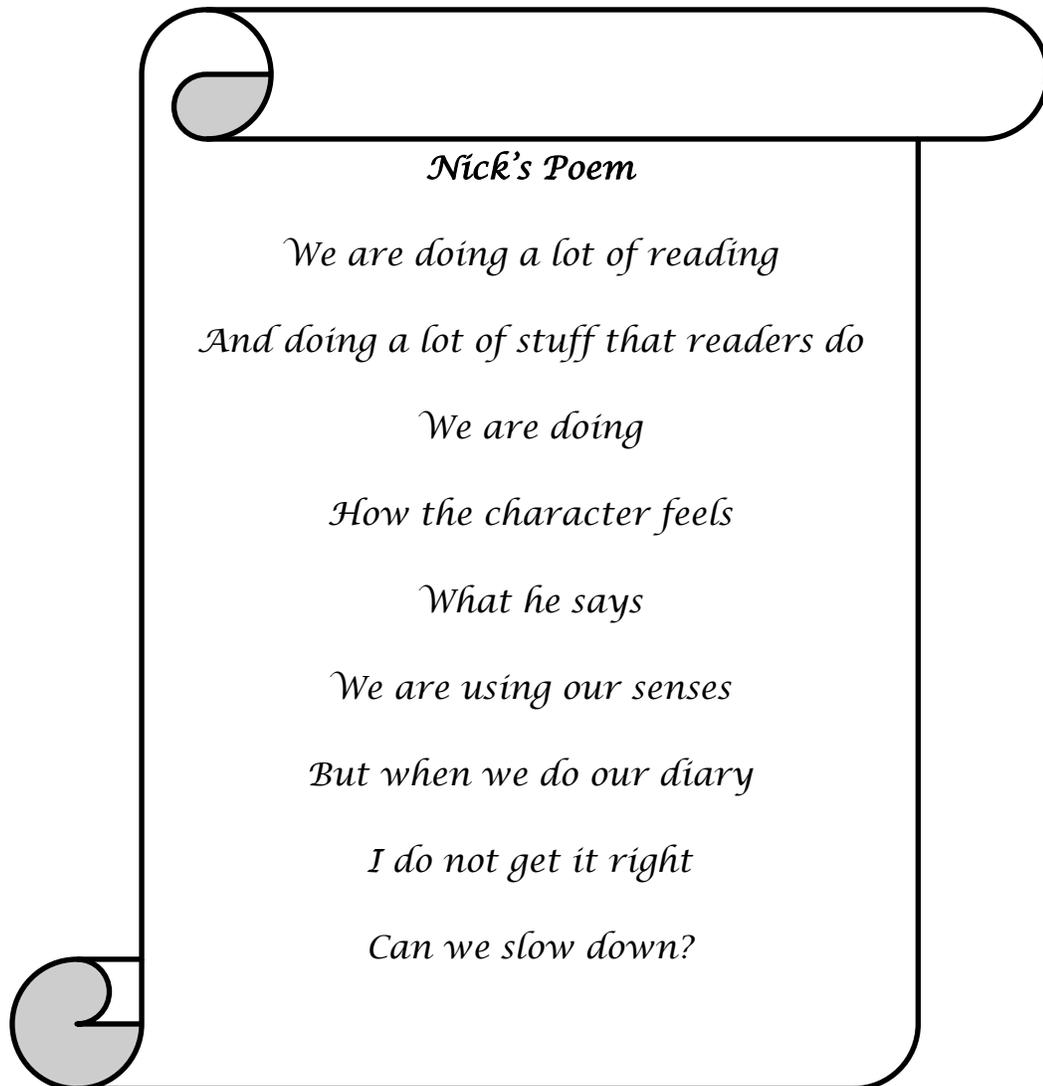


Figure 14. A poem I wrote about Nick using words he spoke during an interview reflecting what he thinks about reading and reading group.

Nick had the most difficult reading strategy to explain in his own words. He had the character trait strategy. He had to put into his own words the idea that if a reader knows and understands what a character does, says, feels, and thinks, then the reader can name a character trait for the character. I struggled with which way to present this strategy. I decided to focus on what we know concretely about the character: those things that the character says, does, feels, and thinks. Using these actions as clues, I hoped the students could come to an understanding about what kind of a person the character was on the inside, at the heart. This proved difficult for Nick to explain, but it was also one of the main strategies we talked about and would talk about for the rest of the study because it is my belief that it is at the heart of most, if not all, the reading they will do for the rest of their lives: to come to understand the characters in stories and how we can learn from them. Nick had successfully completed the character trait graphic organizer several days ago, so I knew he had an understanding of the strategy, but as he tried to formulate it in his own words, tears began to fall. I had to work backwards with Nick. With this strategy, I essentially wanted the students to complete this sentence: I come to understand the character when.... But for Nick, I reworded it backwards: When I know what the character does, says, thinks, and feels I learn what kind of person he or she is. With my prompting, Nick said, "I learn about the characters when I think about what they do, say, think, or feel." Disappointed that

Nick could not come up with this independently, he showed me he tried to do his best. Josh, on the other hand, did not even try. The strategy Josh needed to put into his own words was, “What I know about the character.” It was that simple. That was really all he had to write. Josh had turned to the pages in his journal where he had written down what he knew about Oliver, Nate, and Annie, when we had practiced it together. All he had to do was explain it in his own words. “I don’t know,” he repeated. At least Nick tried to communicate with me about his strategy. All Josh said several times was “I don’t know.” Josh’s strategy was simple and very literal: that understanding what you know about the character helps you understand what you read. For example: Nate is a detective. Nate does not like Fang the dog. Annie is Nate’s friend. This was easier than Nick’s strategy that required drawing conclusions about what you learn about the character based on what the character does, feels, thinks, and says. In the end, I had to tell Josh what to write (see Figure 15).

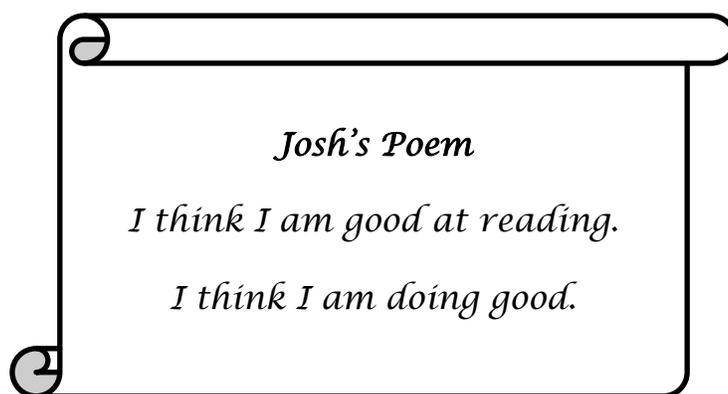


Figure 15. A poem I wrote about Josh using words he spoke during an interview reflecting what he thinks about reading group.

A Second Helping

“Mrs. Cro, I don’t like my eyes in the photo,” Nick announced. “My glasses are crooked.” “I like my photo,” said Maya. The students, commenting on the bulletin board of their work, settled into group a few days later. I was disappointed that these were the only comments about their work on the bulletin board. No one else had anything to say about it. Ready for our second book pass, I announced the three choices: *Ready Freddy and the Kind of Show and Tell*, *Freckle Juice*, and *Horrible Harry and the Ant Invasion*. “I know which one I want to read,” Josh exclaimed. “Keep it to yourself. Don’t tell the others. Do the book pass anyway,” I responded adding, “Spread apart. I want everyone to make up his or her own mind.” Josh whispered to Ray, “I like *Ready Freddy*. That’s the one I want to read.” Josh became interested in the *Ready Freddy* book series after his classroom teacher had a conference with his mother telling her she needed to get him to read at home. Josh and his mother went to the bookstore and picked out a *Ready Freddy* book, and now Josh, motivated to read, shows excitement about this book choice. “Look, this one has Mad Libs in the back,” blurted Maya referring to the *Ready Freddy* book. “I did two books. I already know which one I want to read. Do I have to do the other one?” asked Josh, as usual the last one to finish. Running out of time, I sent the other students back to their desks. Knowing his excitement about reading *Ready Freddy*, I told Josh he did not have to preview the last book.

“Mrs. Cro, what’s your favorite color?” Maya asked. “Pink,” I said. Ava joined in, “Tomorrow is twin day, and I’m dressing up with Maya. “Mrs. Cro, can I be twins with you?” Maya inquired. Having only 20 minutes a day with these students, I love our small talk, and wishing I had more time with them, I showed the students the next book based on their book pass votes. Happily, everyone excitedly took a *Ready Freddy and the King of Show and Tell* book and began looking through it. “I like this book,” declared Ava. Josh gave an enthusiastic “Yes!” “I want to do the Mad Lib,” Nick shared. “Everyone picked this because of the Mad Lib,” Maya added. “Look at the code page. Can I look at this?” Josh wanted to know. “Mrs. Cro, you should try this page,” Josh told me. “I wonder what I’m getting for my birthday?” Ava shared. “My dad is donating \$150.00 to the library,” Caleb declared.

Happy to see the students excited about the book choice, and especially delighted to see Josh so motivated. I hoped that the students would enjoy this book and get hooked to read more in the Ready Freddy series. Furthermore, although off topic, I really did not mind Ava’s comment about her birthday because to me it showed that she was happy and relaxed – an ultimate goal of reading: to be happy and relaxed sitting with a group of peers and a good book. And then there is Caleb. Sometimes I am pretty sure he makes things up, but even if his story about his Dad donating money to the library is not true, to me it says

that Caleb, excited about reading, thinks it would be a good thing to donate money to the library (see Figure 16).

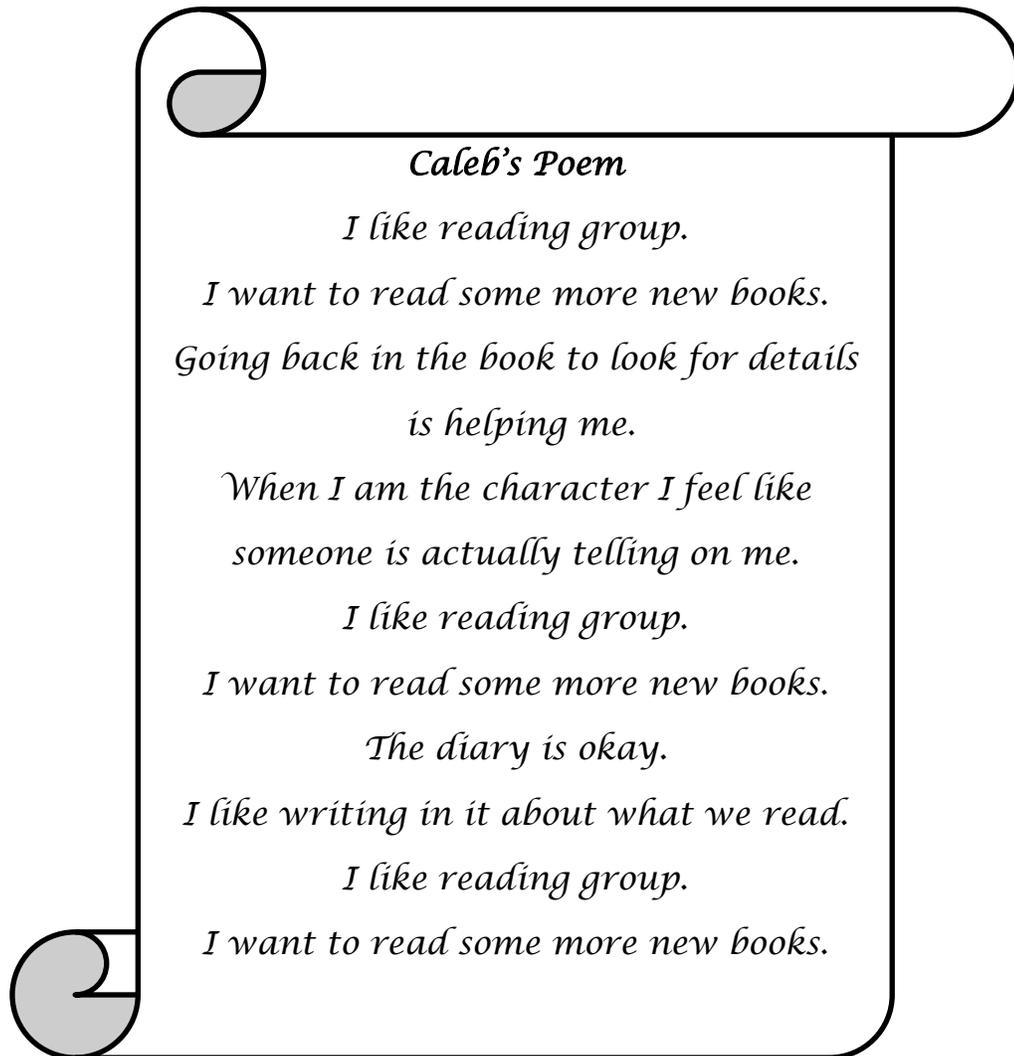


Figure 16. A poem I wrote about Caleb using words he spoke during an interview reflecting what he thinks about reading and reading group.

We began our new book, *Ready Freddy and the King of Show and Tell* building background and making connections to a time when students brought something in for show and tell. We read the chapter titles and made predictions about what might happen in the story. At one point Ray predicted, “Maybe Max will hurt Freddy because Max is a bully.” “Who’s Max,” Ava inquired. “Max is a bully. I’ve read *Ready Freddy* books before,” answered Ray. I felt glad that Ray clued us in on what he already knew about Max, and that Ray, like Josh, enjoyed *Ready Freddy* books. We also previewed some vocabulary. I wrote some words on a large sheet of paper. “What’s a quill?” “A pointy needle on a porcupine,” answered Caleb. “What’s a fossil?” “Old dinosaur bones,” Nick said. “What does endangered mean?” “An animal that needs help,” shared Ava. “What does protected mean?” I continue. “Like a bodyguard who keeps you safe,” Ray answered. “Yes, but let’s think about animals being protected,” I suggested. “Helps keep animals safe,” responded Ray. Pointing to the word paleontologist, I did not even need to ask when Maya exclaimed, “A person who studies animals.” “Dinosaurs in particular,” I added smiling. “Look Mrs. Cro, I am reading another *Ready Freddy* book, *Ready Freddy Stop That Hamster*,” Nick said as he held it up to show me. “How does Freddy feel?” I asked after the students read the first few pages silently to themselves. “Jealous and scared that he won’t have anything good to bring in for show and tell,” Ray answered automatically supporting his response with a detail from the story. The students did a much better job

comprehending the beginning of this book than they did when we began our first book, *Nate the Great and the Missing Key*.

Metacognition Mania

As we met the next few days, the students read and discussed the book giving accurate impressions. With their comprehension seemingly solid and their understanding of Freddy's voice telling the story, the students wrote their first diary entry from the point of view of Freddy, the main character. All their diary entries reflected an understanding of what they read (see Figures 17 & 18).

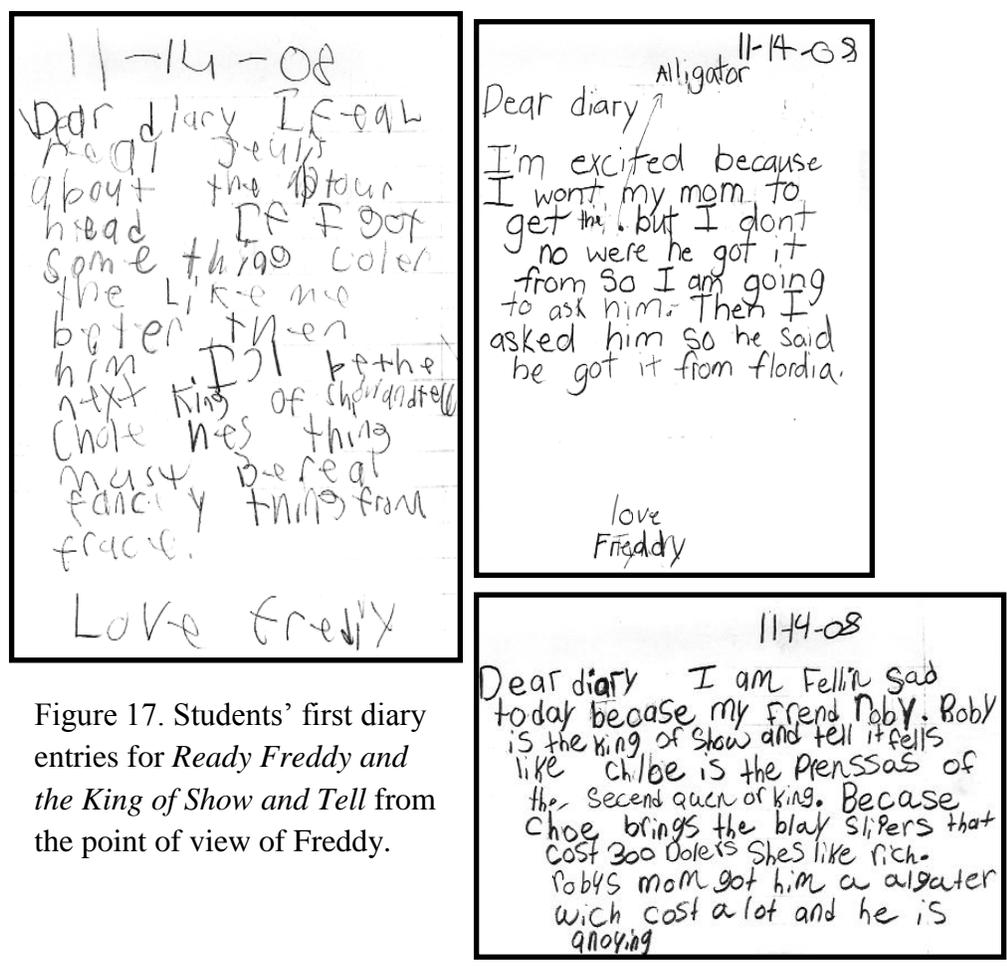


Figure 17. Students' first diary entries for *Ready Freddy* and *the King of Show and Tell* from the point of view of Freddy.

11/14/08
 Dear Diary,
 Hello I'm Freddy and I
 am jealous because my friend
 Robbie brought in a real alligator
 head and everyone rask their
 head. But I don't think it is
 cool. When it was Chole's show
 she let Blaine speaker and
 everyone raise their hand and
 I think everyone is saying that
 when I show it will be
 boring
 Love
 Freddy

11-14-08
 Dear diary I desire more
 attention because I bring in
 shark tuf fasulls and
 bones. Sharks are more danger
 then a gator
 love
 Freddy

11-14-08
 Dear Diary
 I wish I had a
 cool show and I
 I am scared of the
 Alligator He is ca
 me, I do not wish
 I dont ge shot
 in the arm shoes
 are much better
 than chipes

Figure 18. Students' first diary entries for *Ready Freddy* and *the King of Show and Tell* from the point of view of Freddy.

Unfortunately Caleb misinterpreted the story. During our discussion he told us that Chloe brought an alligator purse from France to Show and Tell. Caleb likes to breeze through his work. What seems worse, not realizing his comprehension break down, he just accepts his misinterpretation and then writes about it without even a thought to go back into the text. I needed to teach the students to support with details from the text thoughts they have about events in the story as a built-in way to self-monitor comprehension.

The next day we reviewed our reading comprehension strategies. “Tell me what you do to help you understand what you read?” I asked. “Skip it and read to the period,” answered Ava. “That is a decoding strategy. That is what we do when we come to a word that we can’t read,” I explained to Ava exasperated. Even after all the work we did on the comprehension strategies, and talking and writing about them in their own words while we read our first book and while we prepared our bulletin board, Ava still gave me a decoding strategy. Feeling frustrated I asked, “What strategies have we been talking about? What are the things you do in your mind to help you understand what is going on in the story?” I explained. “I can taste something,” Ava said softly. “What do we call that?” “Using our senses,” Nick responded smiling. “Good,” I complimented. “What are some more comprehension strategies? What other things do you do in your mind to help you understand what you read?” I asked again. “Becoming the character,” offered Ray. “Comparing the story to *Nate the Great*, or *Hannah Montana*, or *The*

Pain and the Great One,” suggested Ava. “What do we call that?” I asked. “Making a connection,” Nick quickly said. “Becoming the character,” added Maya “What the character thinks and feels,” Nick tacked on. Josh, not offering anything to our discussion, busily stuck his pencil in his shoe as he elbowed Caleb to look at him. I felt frustrated at Ava and now at Josh.

“What do you know about Chloe?” I continued to question the students. “She’s drama-ish. Talks fancy. Popular,” Maya answered. “Give me details from the story to support that?” I asked. “She wears fancy clothes, and when she says her Grandma didn’t go to jail she moves her arm across her forehead like this and says oooh and aaah,” Maya responded with her endearing dramatic flair. “She brings ballet slippers from France to Show and Tell,” Caleb added. I was glad that Caleb added this correct detail. It comforts me that he correctly made meaning from what I asked him to reread yesterday. “What comprehension strategy am I asking you to use when I ask you to write a diary entry from the point of view of a character?” I asked. “To become the character and to think and feel and say and do what the character does,” announced Maya. “Great,” I applauded verbally. The students read a little more and wrote in their diaries.

“To smell like the character,” Maya announced, making me laugh as she settled into group the next day (see Figure 19). “To compare and contrast the character,” someone else chimed in. “Using my five senses,” on student added.

“Where is Josh?” “He’s in the bathroom.” “Can I read my diary entry?” Maya asked (see Figure 20).

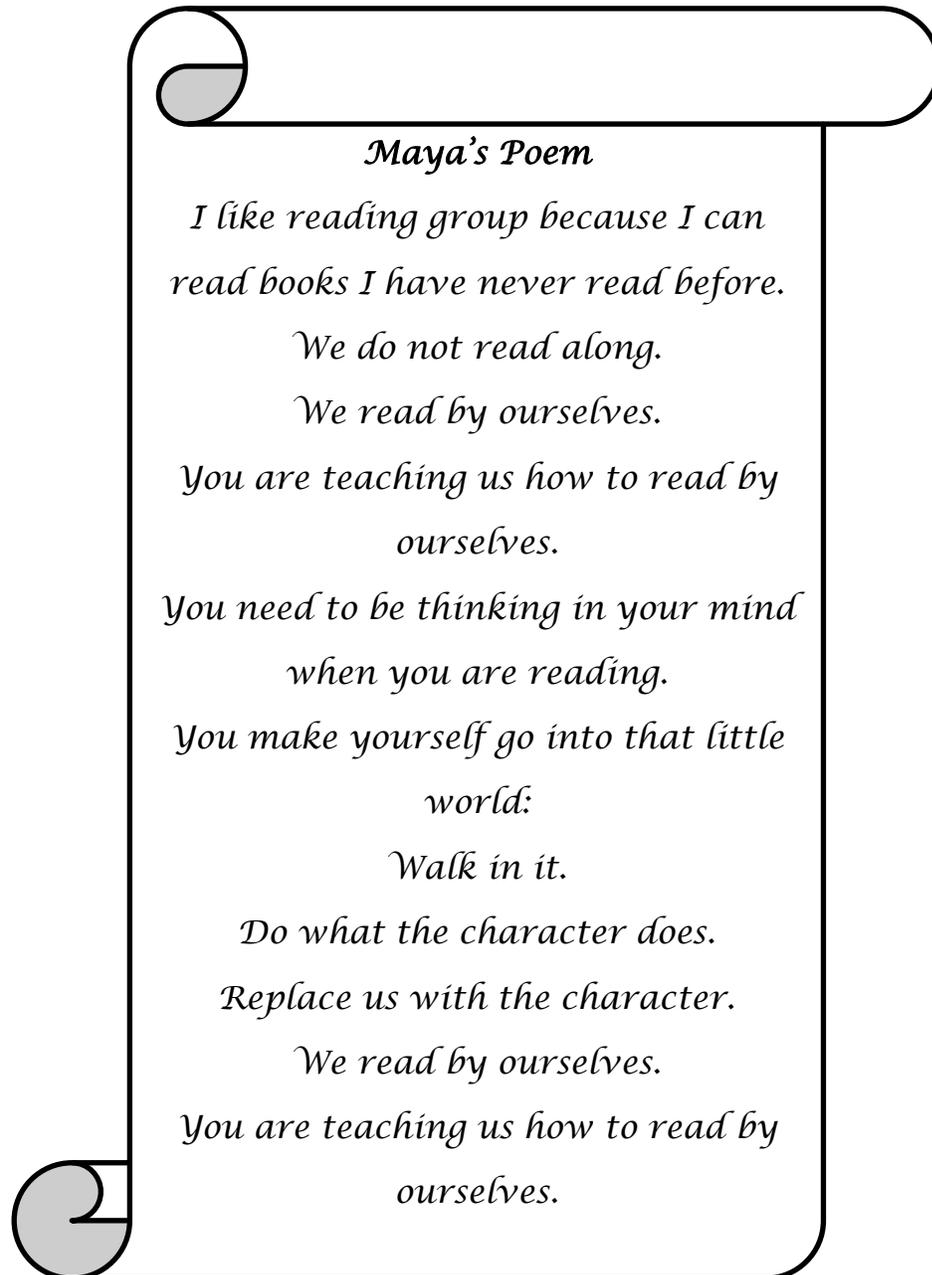


Figure 19. A poem I wrote about Maya using words she spoke during an interview reflecting what she thinks about reading and reading group.

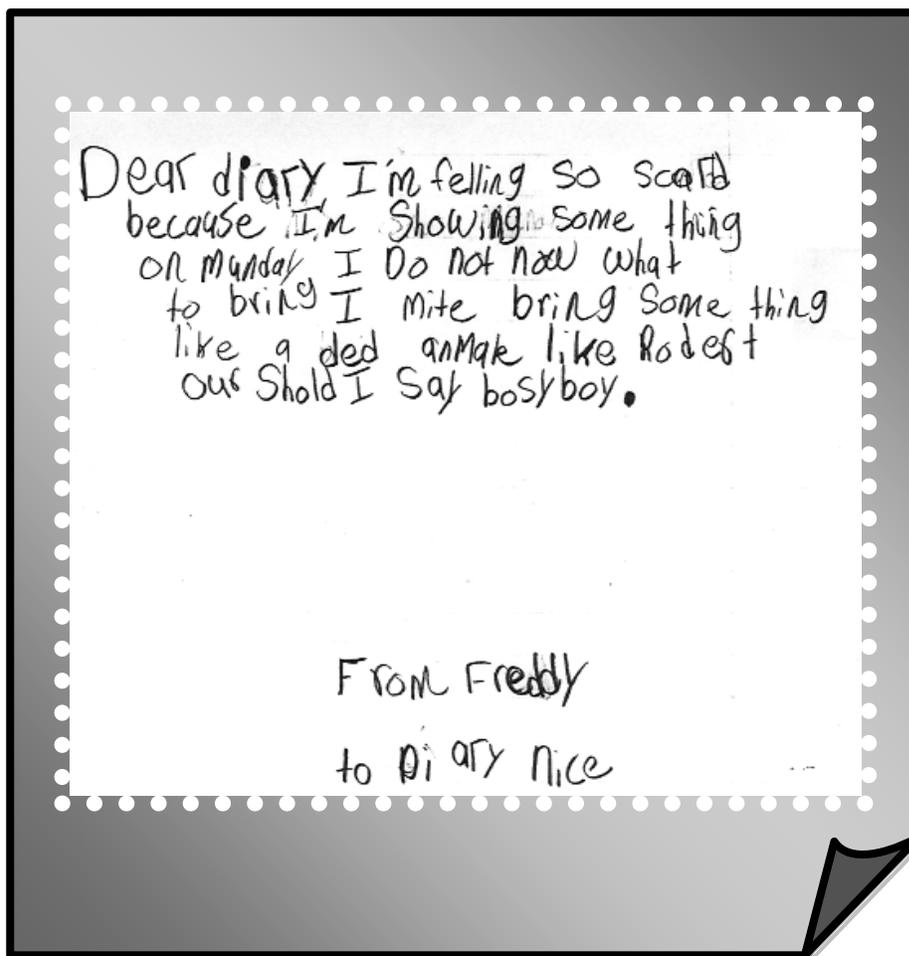
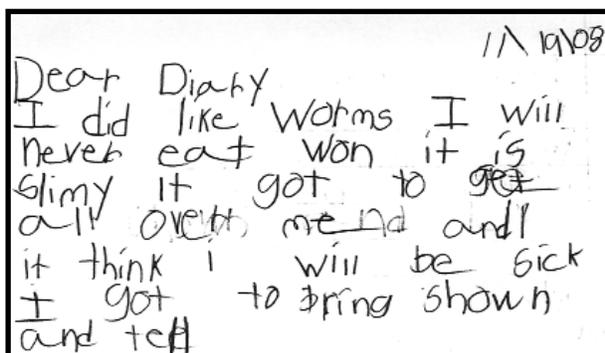


Figure 20. Maya's diary entry.

A Mile in My Shoes

“What chicks is Maya talking about?” asked Ava. “The birds in the trees,”

Caleb told her. Nick read his diary entry (see Figure 21).

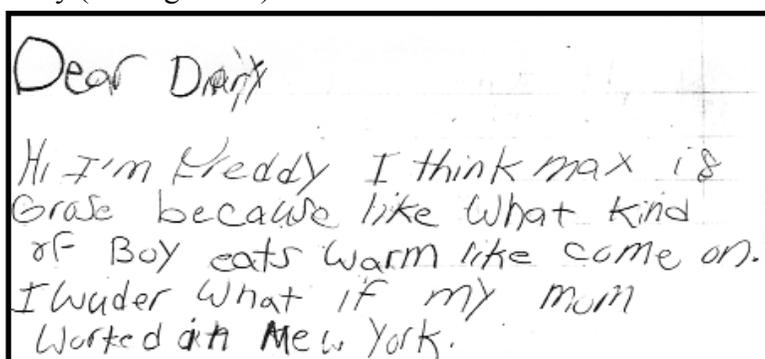


11/11/08
Dear Diary
I did like worms I will
never eat won it is
slimy it got to get
all over me and
it think I will be sick
I got to bring show n
and tell

Figure 21. Nick’s diary entry.

“What worms?” Ava asked. “On the bus. Max eats worms,” Nick answered her.

Ava seemed so unsure of the details, although Maya does refer to the birds as chicks when they are actually called birds in the story. But Ava should have been able to make this connection. But Ava is even unclear about the worms. I check Ava’s diary entry (see Figure 22).



Dear Diary
Hi I'm Freddy I think max is
Grase because like what kind
of Boy eats worm like come on.
I wuder what if my mom
Worked in New York.

Figure 22. Ava’s diary entry.

Ava's diary entry confirms that she understood about the worms when she read because she talks about the worms in her entry. So maybe she just forgot about them during our discussion.

As the students continued their reading, I asked them to write a diary entry from the point of view of Freddy explaining their feelings about Max Sellars. I wanted the students to use details from the story in their diary entries. As I read their entries, I noticed they did tell me about their feelings, but did not use details from the story to support their feelings. From the point of view of Freddy, all the students felt that Max was mean or a bully. "Go back to page 30 and give me a detail from the story to explain why you feel Max is mean or a bully and write it in your diary," I instructed them. "I found two details," announced Caleb. "Great. Write them both," I responded. Ava, pointing to the sentence about squeezing the baby bird to death, "Is this correct?" "Yes," I told her. "Write it down."

All the students found two or three supporting details to add to their diary entries. Hoping to get to this point earlier in my study, I had to build up the students' metacognitive reading strategies first, and that took a bit of time to do. Hoping we could sail through the rest of the book writing diary entries using supporting details, filling out the character trait graphic organizers, again using details to support our thinking, and finally creating our character graffiti bulletin board, another comprehension barrier brought us to a standstill.

Dialogue Dilemmas

“I know how Robbie is like Nate the Great,” Josh shared as we continued reading the next day. “How?” I asked. “He looks for clues and is sarcastic,” Josh responded. Josh made such an excellent connection. Sometimes he gives me gems.

“The nest was empty,” Nick informed us. “They thought the cat ate the bird,” Josh added. So far so good, but not for long. The students quietly read the first six pages of Chapter 4. These pages consisted of two whole pages of text and four half pages of text with illustrations. I asked them to write in their diaries where Robbie was being sarcastic on these pages. Ava and Nick do not know.

As we discuss the events in the chapter, it becomes clear that Nick and Ava did not understand the speaker of the dialogue. As I thought about how to help them, I examined how the author wrote the text. When two characters carry on a conversation, the author does not always identify the speaker with “Robby said” or “Freddy said.” But a pattern to the dialogue emerges: first one character speaks and then the other character responds. After thinking about it for a little while, I decided that using a different color highlighter to highlight the dialogue of each character, Robbie and Freddie, would show the students the dialogue pattern and help clear up their misunderstandings. I made copies of Chapter four and brought pink and yellow highlighters to our next meeting.

Handing out one pink and one yellow highlighter to each student the next day along with a copy of Chapter 4, I explained that it seemed to me that the way the author wrote the dialogue might be confusing, and that highlighting the dialogue Robby speaks in pink, and the dialogue Freddy speaks in yellow, would help us identify each speaker. The students could tell me that the story was told from Freddy's point of view, and the "I" in the story referred to Freddy, but even so, the dialogue still confused them. Highlighting the first page of the chapter went smoothly. When we got to the next page, though, and I asked, "Is anyone speaking the words, we both lay down?" "No," they all said. "Why not," I asked. "Because there are no quotation marks," they replied almost in unison. "I see a pattern," exclaimed Nick. "Explain the pattern," "Robbie talks then Freddy talks." The pattern Nick discovered became clear because highlighting revealed a pink, yellow, pink, yellow dialogue pattern. We talked about how even though the author doesn't always write, "said Robbie" or "said Freddy," we understand who is talking by paying attention to the back and forth nature of the conversation. I quickly had the students turn to their neighbor and in reader's theater style with one partner being Freddy and the other Robbie practice speaking the dialogue pattern.

We practiced the dialogue highlighting some more the next day. Ava, still confused, that even when the author identified the speaker, Ava still did not know who was speaking the dialogue. "Freddy is that you?" my Mom called. "Who is

speaking that?" I asked. "Robbie," answered Ava. "No, the Mom," the others chimed in. We continued reading. I asked Ava again to identify the speaker. Ava replied, "Freddy, no, Robby, no Freddy." I went back and explained again about noticing the pattern with the pink and yellow markers. I explained, "First Freddy speaks, then Robbie responds." "Well I got the box and a fluffy towel to make it a soft, comfy, bed." "Who said that," I asked Ava. "Freddy," she replied. "How do you know?" I asked. "Because Robbie just said something and Freddy is answering. Plus Freddy is the "I" in the story," Ava answered (see Figure 23). "Very good."

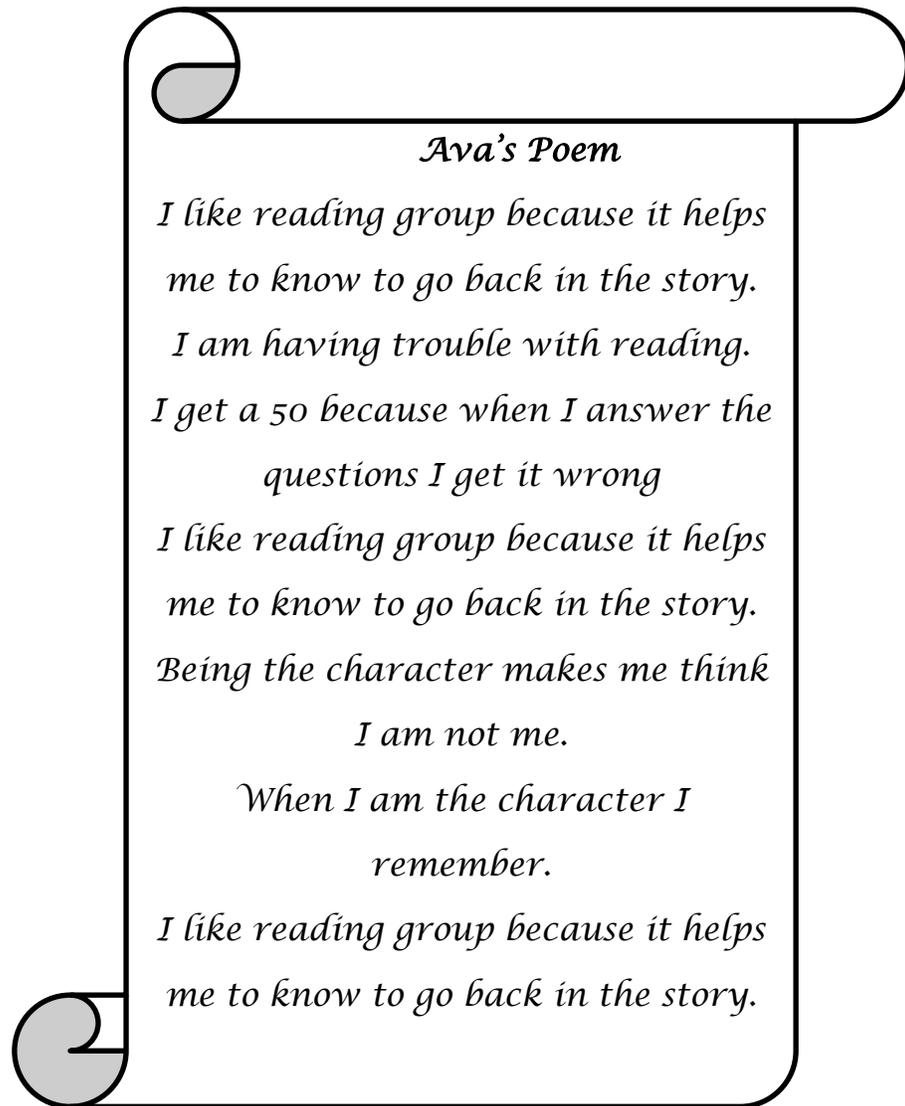


Figure 23. A poem I wrote about Ava using words she spoke during an interview reflecting what she thinks about reading and reading group.

Get the Picture

As our group kept meeting and students kept reading, writing diary entries and discussing the story, all the students consistently showed that they understood the events in the story. “I am going to order a *Freddy* book from the book order,” Ava said. Finally done reading the book, the students successfully filled out character trait graphic organizers for Freddy and Max Sellars. We did the graphic organizer for Freddy together, but the students needed to fill out the one for Max Sellars on their own (see Figure 24). In addition, I read *Arthur’s New Puppy*, and the students filled out a character trait graphic organizer for the Arthur as an assessment (see Figure 25).

Directions:	
Think about the kind of person Max Sellars is, and describe some of his character traits.	
Character traits are words we use to describe the way a person acts or behaves.	
What does Max do, say, think, or feel? (these are details from the story)	Write a word or phrase that describes what you have learned about Max because of what he does, says, thinks or feels.
Max said he would squish the bird.	Max sellars is mean
Max said he ate worms.	Max is is grouse
Max is picking on people He tell Joe those shoes are dome	Max is a bully

Figure 24. Josh’s character trait graphic organizer for Max Sellars.

Directions:	
Think about the kind of person Arthur is, and describe some of his character traits.	
Character traits are words we use to describe the way a person acts or behaves.	
What does Arthur do, say, think, or feel? (these are details from the story)	Write a word or phrase that describes what you have learned about Arthur because of what he does, says, thinks or feels.
Arthur feels bad about putting the dog in the garage	sad
Arthur has to clean up the mess all of the time	hard worker
Nice because he trys to train the dog so the parents wont get rid of the dog	Nice.

Figure 25. Josh’s character trait graphic organizer for Arthur.

Finally, the day arrived when we would start our next bulletin board. “Lie down on the paper Nick,” I asked. “What for?” he asked. “I am going to trace you.” “Okay.” Giggles erupted. I traced Nick twice: once for a life-size drawing of Freddy, and once for a life-size drawing of Max. When I finished tracing Nick, I split the students into a Freddy group and a Max group. The students gathered around their character and with crayons and colored pencils filled in the physical details of their character. Finally, they just needed to lift out of their journal a character trait for either Freddy or Max with the corresponding supporting detail from the story all right from their character trait graphic organizer. We hung the life-sized portraits of Freddy and Max on the bulletin board, and around each character we hung their character traits and the details from the story that led the students to draw those conclusions about the characters. We labeled the character traits, and we labeled the supporting details as what the character does, says, thinks, or feels. We also used the word “clues” to label supporting details so anyone reading the bulletin board would know that details in the story provide clues so readers can draw conclusions about character traits (see Figure 26).



Figure 26. The students created this bulletin board after reading the book *Ready Freddy and the King of Show and Tell*. Using information from their diary entries and character trait graphic organizers, the students explained that character traits are conclusions we make about characters based on the clues they give us through what they do, say, think, and feel.

DATA ANALYSIS

I coded the field log and grouped similar data into bins, looking for and creating underlying themes to help me draw conclusions about the reading behaviors of my participants (see Figure 27). Furthermore, I analyzed student interviews, student diary entries, students' pre- and post reading surveys, and student book pass surveys to look for any information that lead me to draw conclusions about the participants. I reread all the information in my field log searching for what Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997) call ironies, inconsistencies, disparate visions and possible solutions" (p. 221-222). For example, while the students were reading it became clear that they did not understand character dialogue. I needed to find a solution to this comprehension barrier. Also, I needed to understand why some participants' comprehension was inconsistent. Ely et al. also advise "analyzing narrative data to look for themes and deeper meanings" (p. 220). I wrote analytical memos to analyze figurative language that appeared in my field log to help me understand what my students were thinking. I wrote analytical memos to compare pre- and post reading surveys to see if students grew in their ability to communicate about reading comprehension strategies as well as to see if they grew in their love of reading. I wrote found poems for each student based on his or her interview in order to analyze what the students were thinking and feeling about reading group and reading. I analyzed information in the students' point of view diaries to evaluate

students' reading comprehension. The parts of the graphic organizers that students completed independently provided more data to analyze. Moreover, I analyzed the students' culminating authentic activities, as well as the students' responses to the open-ended questions for information about students' reading achievement.

Research Question and Bins

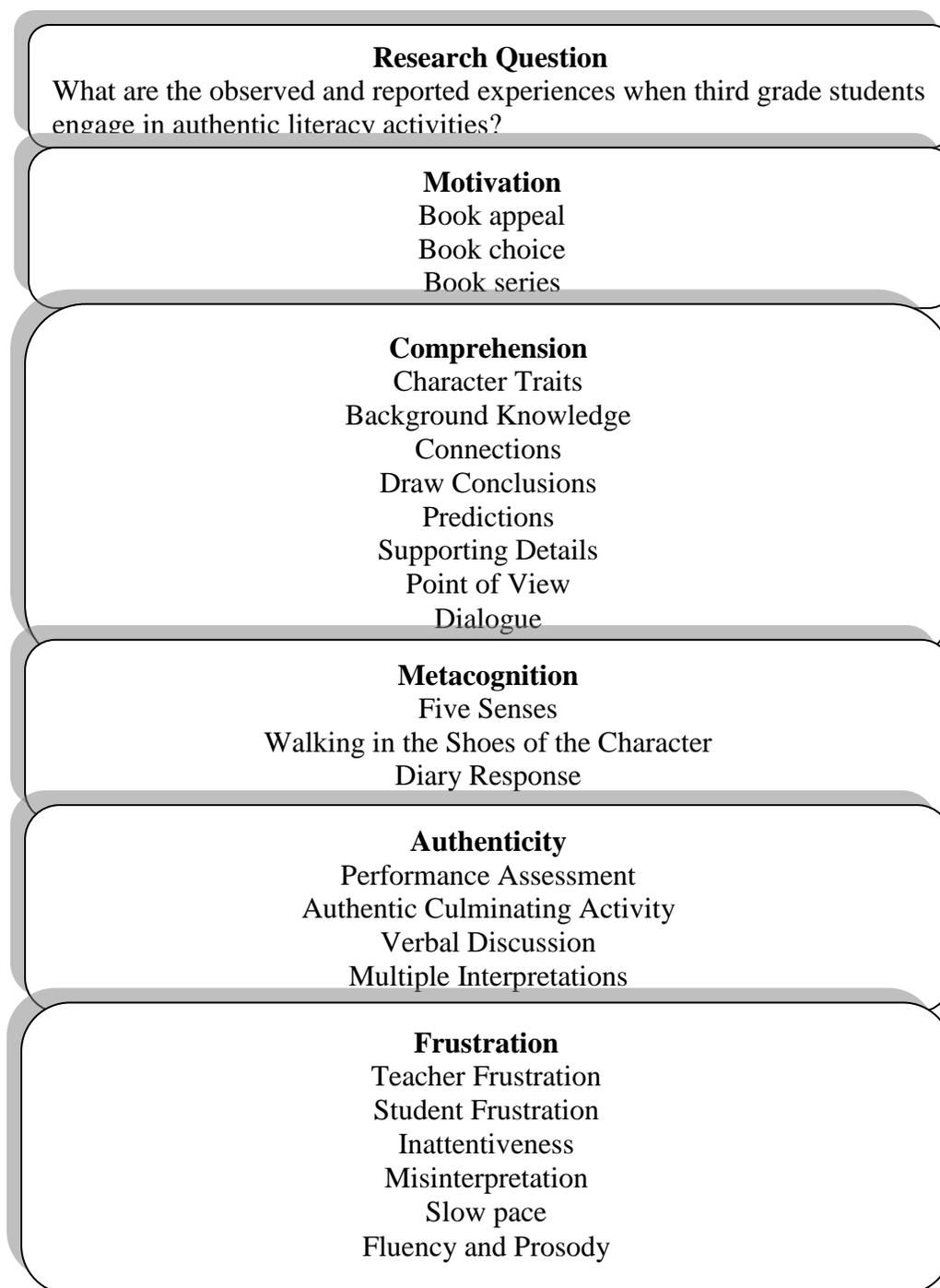


Figure 27. Research Questions and Bins

Theme Statements

1. **Motivation** - Students' reading motivation and reading for authentic purposes can be positively influenced when students choose personally appealing books in their realm of interest especially when the book is part of a familiar book series.
2. **Comprehension** - Students' comprehension can be positively influenced by building background knowledge before reading, understanding character traits, making connections, drawing conclusions, making predictions, understanding point of view, retelling supporting details, and understanding the dialogue.
3. **Metacognition** - Student's metacognition can be positively influenced when students read using their five senses, walk in the shoes of the character, and write diary entries from the point of view of the character.
4. **Authenticity**- Reading for meaning and enjoyment, the most authentic reading purpose, can be positively influenced when students discuss and share multiple interpretations, when students engage in performance assessments, and when students engage in authentic culminating response activities.
5. **Frustration** - Even when reading books of high personal interest, student inattentiveness, story misinterpretation, slow pace of work completion, and inadequate fluency and prosody lead to student and teacher frustration.

FINDINGS

The purpose of my study was to help motivate students to read and to help improve their reading comprehension. Furthermore, I hoped to get to the truth of students' reading experiences and to enhance these experiences so that reading could be a way for my students to not only experience academic success, but also personal growth.

According to Dewey (1997/1938), "collateral learning in the way of formation of enduring attitudes, of likes and dislikes, may be and often is much more important than the spelling lesson or lesson in geography or history that is learned. For these attitudes are fundamentally what count in the future. The most important attitude that can be formed is that of desire to go on learning" (p. 48).

My primary intent was to help students develop a positive attitude and a desire to want to read for the rest of their lives. My focus was on developing their comprehension, helping them connect to the characters in the books, helping them reflect on how what they were reading was all about life and how reading would help them to grow as a reader, a learner, and a person. "For these attitudes are fundamentally what count in the future" (Dewey 1997/1938, p. 48). The students worked on discovering how story characters change. Not only did I want them to realize that uncovering changes that occur with story characters was an exciting part about reading, I wanted my students to understand that after reading a book, often times they as people have been changed by living certain experiences

through the eyes of the character. Wilhelm (2008) states that “the seminal quality of literature is that it is transformational or life-changing in some way – whether this is a change in our views, our relationships with the world, or the way we regard books” (p. 51). I hoped that developing an excitement for transformational awareness would entice my students to go on reading, and as Dewey says, “to go on learning” (p. 48).

With this purpose in mind, as I analyzed the data, five themes unfolded, each with a central focus: motivation, comprehension, metacognition, authenticity, and frustration.

Motivation

Students’ reading motivation can be positively influenced when students choose personally appealing books in their realm of interest, especially when the books are part of familiar series.

Right from the start in their pre-reading survey, the students communicated enjoyment in reading books from series. Josh, in particular, named just two types of books he liked to read in the pre-reading survey: *Spider Man* and space books. In the post reading survey, Josh eagerly talked about his current reading: joke books and books from the *Ready Freddy* series (see Table 1). Nick also only talked about the *Junie B. Jones* series in the pre-reading survey. However, in the post-reading survey, Nick mentioned other familiar book series that he now enjoys: *Ready Freddy* and *Geronimo Stilton*.

When asked to name three books they would choose to have if stranded on a desert island, again, Josh, a reluctant reader at the beginning of the study, stated in the pre-reading survey that he does not really have a book he would want. However, on the post-reading survey Josh lists joke books and two series favorites: *Ready Freddy*, and *Horrible Harry*. Other students who originally named books from series they were reading continued to choose series books when answering the post reading survey (see Table 2).

When asked to complete the sentence, “My favorite kind of book is...,” Maya named only one specific book in the pre-reading survey, but in the post reading survey she named three different genres. Josh stated that now he thinks every kind of book is cool. Nick, on the other hand, named one familiar series book in the pre-reading survey, but in the post survey, he cannot name a favorite book. Again, other students continue to name series books (see Table 3).

Several of the students mentioned in the pre-reading survey that they only read at home because their teacher required it for homework. However, in the post reading survey, several of these same students now say that they read at home for pleasure and not just because it was required for homework. Nick increased his reading time from 10 minutes three times a week, weeknights only, to 20 minutes four times a week, and then added that now he does also read on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays because he wants to read the books from his book orders, a positive change for a student who previously stated, “I don’t like to read.”

What have you been reading?		
Name	Pre-Reading Survey	Post-Reading Survey
Maya	<i>Junie B. Jones, Flat Stanley, Cam Jansen</i>	<i>Mr. Pin and the Chocolate Files</i>
Josh	<i>Spider Man</i> , space books	<i>President Jokes</i> , I'm on chapter 2 of <i>Ready Freddy – Ready Set Snow</i> . It's about they are having a race to see who wins. I'm only on chapter 2, but I know Freddy wins 'cause I looked through the book. <i>Club Penguins</i> – it has more than 140 jokes but only 62 pages.
Nick	<i>Junie B. Jones</i> . I love her books. I just read three books from the library.	<i>Geronimo Stilton – The Christmas One</i> (I'm reading this now on Chapter 4, <i>Ready Freddy and the Pumpkin Elf</i> , <i>Ready Freddy – Stop That Hamster</i>
Ava	<i>Captain Underpants</i> – several I read, <i>Amelia Bedelia</i> , chapter books.	<i>Geronimo Stilton – The Curse of the Cheese Pyramid</i> , <i>Geronimo Stilton and the Secret Spy Agent</i> . <i>Geronimo Stilton- Fable Mouse Vacation</i> .
Caleb	Chapter books, <i>T-Rex</i> book – it has 74 pages, <i>Spider Man 3</i> , <i>Captain Underpants</i> .	<i>Ready Freddy – Tooth Trouble</i> , <i>Geronimo Stilton books</i> , <i>Deltoro Quest</i> , <i>Magic Tree House Books</i> , Titanic books and books about history, and Civil War books.
Ray	<i>Magic Tree House – Hour of the Olympics</i>	Bible books, 39 Clues (book and computer game), What else? These are the only books I actually read. Tell me more. I read <i>What Kids Ask Book 2</i> about things in the Bible that kids ask and what is good to do and not good to do.

Table 1. Comparison of pre- and post reading survey question: What have you been reading?

Name three books you would choose to have with you if you were stranded on a desert island.		
Name	Pre-Reading Survey	Post-Reading Survey
Maya	<i>Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, June B. Jones Goes to Jail, Cam Jansen – The Mystery of the Birthday Party</i>	<i>Junie B. Jones – Miss Cheater Pants, Mr. Popper’s Penguins, Mr. Pin and the Chocolate Files</i>
Josh	I don’t really have one that I would want.	<i>Ready Freddy books, Horrible Harry books, joke books</i>
Nick	<i>Junie B. Jones, Goosebumps, Amber Brown</i>	<i>Flat Stanley, Amber Brown, If You Give a Cat a Cupcake</i>
Ava	Sticker books, <i>Captain Underpants, Amelia Bedelia</i>	<i>Geronimo Stilton</i> – three of these books
Caleb	My <i>T-Rex</i> book. <i>Captain Underpants – Night of the Living Boogers Part 2</i> , A book about how to live in the desert.	<i>Geronimo Stilton – Curse of the Cheese Pyramid, Ready Freddy Tooth Trouble, Deltora Quest – Return to Deltora</i> (medieval with creatures and monsters)
Ray	Puzzle book, Read aloud book <i>-Treasure Planet, Beauty and the Beast.</i>	Fairy Tale books, Fiction, Biography, <i>I Spy, Three Little Pigs</i> , The book about Martin Luther King so I can see who killed him, so that’s a biography, so you can cross non-fiction and put biography because he’s my skin color.

Table 2. Comparison of pre- and post reading survey question: Name three books you would choose to have with you if you were stranded on a desert island.

Complete this sentence: My favorite kind of book is...		
Name	Pre-Reading Survey	Post-Reading Survey
Maya	<i>Charlie and the Chocolate Factory</i>	Fiction, poetry, non-fiction
Josh	Outer space books, or where the setting is space, non-fiction, cobra snakes	I don't know. I just pick books from the library. I think every book is kind of cool.
Nick	<i>Junie B. Jones</i> . I have two books in my book bag and one in my desk.	Could not give me an answer
Ava	<i>Captain Underpants</i> cause it has chapters	<i>Geronimo Stilton</i>
Caleb	How to Make a House Out of Wood 'cause I want to know how to build a house.	<i>Geronimo Stilton</i> , history, fiction
Ray	Chapter books, books about what people do, fantasy-magic and sword fights.	<i>John Henry</i> , which is a fairy tale

Table 3. Comparison of pre- and post reading survey question: Complete this sentence: My favorite kind of book is...

While Maya, Ava, Caleb, and Ray stated in both the pre-reading and post reading surveys that they read because they like to read, Josh and Nick's motivation to read seems to have increased. Josh only read because his mother made him. In the post reading survey, though, Josh states that he reads "because I read one book, and I got used to reading, so I started liking books because then I can read faster and get better at reading." Nick desired to read because his teacher was having a reading contest, but post survey he states that he reads because "I want to know what happens."

I found that giving students choice during reading groups motivated them. According to Dewey (1997/1938), "the teacher's suggestion is not a mold for a cast-iron, result but is a starting point to be developed into a plan through contributions from the experience of all engaged in the learning process" (p. 72). I wanted to establish a book community with the students where they became full participants in choosing what they wanted to read. During one particular book pass, when the students needed to put a star on the book pass page of their choice, Caleb exclaimed, "Can I put a big star on the paper?" By exclaiming this, Caleb showed his excitement for having choice over which book the group would read. With his words, Caleb showed that he felt empowered and motivated to read a book of his choosing. To put a big star on the paper literally means to draw a large multi-sided figure on a paper. A star is a symbol of hope, or of excellence, or a concrete body in space that lights up the night. When interpreted figuratively, as

in Caleb's case, the star represented the hope that the book he chose would be a great book to read. For me, his teacher, it meant that because Caleb felt empowered and motivated, his self-awareness as a reader who makes meaning became enlightened.

Comprehension

Students' comprehension can be positively affected by building background knowledge before reading, understanding character traits, making connections, drawing conclusions, making predictions, understanding point of view, retelling supporting details, and understanding the dialogue.

Helping the students make meaning is the heart of this study. Several barriers interfered with their comprehension. Some students were unclear from whose point of view *Nate the Great and the Missing Key* was being told. Because I anticipated this, before we started reading *Nate the Great* I read aloud, *The Pain and the Great One*, by Judy Blume, and modeled how to identify the speaker in the story. Moreover, further repeated questioning the students from time to time to explain how they knew who was telling the story, seemed to alleviate this barrier. The students also lacked background knowledge that stood in their way of understanding vocabulary, for example the word "drainpipe" that I mentioned earlier on. But once they understood "drainpipe," they made meaningful personal connections that showed they understood the events in the story. Previewing vocabulary, helping the students look for context clues, and creating a supportive

and safe environment for student questions and discussion was how I helped students acquire background knowledge to aid comprehension. According to Dewey, “an experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment” (p.44). This transaction is what Rosenblatt (1994) calls “the transactional model of the reading process” (p. 57) According to Rosenblatt, as readers construct new understandings, they continuously reevaluate what they have read. These new insights cause the readers to create clearer and more complex interpretations.

We also practiced making connections with the read-aloud of *The Pain and the Great One*. Josh had trouble making a connection, and required extra time and extra encouragement to write a journal entry making a connection at the start of the study. But during our second, book Josh informed us that “Robbie is like Nate the Great because they both look for clues.” Josh made a connection between the character Nate the Great from our first book and the characters of Robbie and Freddy in our second book. For me, looking for clues was a metaphor for what Josh did. Josh, a comprehension detective at that moment, went looking for clues to unlock meaning.

In addition to understanding point of view, building background, and making personal connections to the story, comprehension was evident when readers made predictions that make sense and aligned with what they already knew about the story’s characters and events. When reading our first book, *Nate*

the Great and the Missing Key, we practiced making predictions, which also included asking questions and wondering. While the students read our second book, *Ready Freddy and the King of Show and Tell*, several students naturally made predictions and wonder questions in their diary entries. For example, Ava wondered why Max wanted to go to Freddy's house. She also wondered what it would be like if her mother worked in New York, like one of the character's mothers. Nick predicted that Freddy would bring the baby bird in for show and tell, and Ava predicted that Freddy would be grounded. These predictions and wonderings showed me that the students really thought about the story and since their predictions and wonderings made sense, they showed me that they understood the events in the story.

Early on in our reading, we stopped to recap what we knew about the characters in *Nate the Great and the Missing Key*, a preliminary step for our later work. Literally telling what we knew about the characters early on set the groundwork for students' ability to draw conclusions about character traits a little further on in our reading. The first step to drawing conclusions about character traits arose from the ability to identify the fundamental things that the characters did, said, thought, and felt. Students demonstrated their knowledge by telling me in their journals what they knew about Nate, Annie, Rosamond, and Oliver. For the most part, all the students succeeded at doing this. Josh demonstrated trouble writing and telling what he knew about Annie, but he could tell me what he knew

about the other characters. As we did this, we stumbled upon another barrier to their comprehension, sarcasm. The students did not understand the way the author of *Nate the Great* used sarcasm, and it threw their comprehension into a tailspin. We quickly recovered using a simple T-chart analysis. In hindsight, that the students and I analyzed sarcasm as a character trait of Nate the Great's, turned out to be a precursor for their ability to understand sarcasm in the character of Robbie in our second book, *Ready Freddy and the King of Show and Tell*. Robbie spoke sarcastically to Freddy several times, and at those points I asked the students to identify them in writing in their journals. The students still had a hard time doing this. As long as I pointed out the sarcasm to them, then they understood what was happening. Left on their own, I am not convinced they understood it, and I believed it caused misinterpretations. Personally, I think lack of prosody and lack of maturity led to their not understanding sarcastic dialogue, and hopefully that will improve as the students grow and develop in both areas. As we proceeded into the *Nate the Great* book, I modeled and scaffolded a character trait graphic organizer where after identifying three things the character either did, said, thought, or felt, clues to his character, the students drew conclusions and came up with a word or phrase to describe the character, a character trait. As we kept reading, the students did this independently in their reading of *Nate the Great*. Then the students used the same graphic organizer to list clues, or supporting details, and drew conclusions about Freddy and Max in *Ready Freddy The King of*

Show and Tell. Students then took the information from the graphic organizer and wrote a short paragraph describing the character and explaining their reasoning using details from the story. The students also needed to do this independently after listening to my read aloud of *Arthur's Lost Puppy*, by Marc Brown. At one point during the reading of the second book, *Ready Freddy*, when I asked the students to tell me about the characters, their hands all shot up. Literally, this means that all the students raised their hands, but figuratively it means that they raised their hands with such enthusiasm and power, their hands like firecrackers, exploding into the air in a sparkling array of lights and color. I add this figurative interpretation to this phrase because it thrilled me to see that not only did the students eagerly share what they knew as proof of their comprehension, but they responded correctly, unlike the beginning of the year when it proved difficult for them. Understanding characters' actions as clues to drawing conclusions about character traits is important because it is an authentic application for life long reading. As readers who read for enjoyment, for knowledge, for fulfillment, one of the great pleasures is being able to understand what makes characters tick and to get to know and identify their traits as a way to learn more about them, each other, and most importantly, ourselves.

Understanding the speaker of the dialogue also caused comprehension to break down. As explained earlier, we color coded the dialogue and found that a pattern emerged, a pattern of the give and take of conversation. This strategy of

highlighting each speaker's dialogue a different color grew out of desperation on my part. Whereas I hoped to spend more time having the students write both personal connection journal entries and more diary entries, and I even had a third book planned for this study that we never got to, it seemed that at every turn roadblocks arose to their comprehension. For instance, Nick had difficulty keeping straight which characters spoke which dialogue. He started to get a little upset. Metaphorically, Nick was like the baby bird in *Ready Freddy*. Nick, small for his age, is very sweet and gentle. Truly a baby bird, he needs a nurturing teacher to break apart the components of the text and feed it back to him in small bites so he can digest it. According to Vygotsky (1978), "what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow" (p. 87).

Using highlighters to analyze the dialogue helped Nick and all the students. Having the students stop and analyze the dialogue with the highlighters brought to their attention that as readers they need to pay attention to who speaks the dialogue or else what they read will not make sense. When students saw the pink and yellow striped pattern start to emerge, they understood that dialogue is a back and forth construction, and that the author does not always explicitly identify the speaker.

With developmental maturity and with guidance a child will achieve. My students, all students, needed the consistent guidance from caring teachers from various realms of their life. My students needed guidance to help awaken in them

a love of reading and an understanding that there is purpose and joy in reading. When Josh told me that he does not know anything about Annie, or when Caleb tells me that Chloe brought an alligator purse to show and tell when really she brought ballet slippers, I wonder if these students are still in a maturation phase. All I can do is remain consistent, keep attuned to their needs, try to meet their needs, and try to keep the reading experience pleasurable so they will keep at it long enough to achieve success.

Metacognition

Students' metacognition can be positively influenced when students read using their five senses, walk in the shoes of the character, and write diary entries from the point of view of the character.

As stated above, the students had trouble following the dialogue while reading *Ready Freddy*. I did not anticipate misunderstanding of dialogue when I thought through and planned the lessons. But as the students became tangled up in the dialogue, I saw even greater value in one of the reading comprehension metacognition strategies I relied on the most to improve their comprehension: walking in the shoes of the character. After reading some of the work of Rosenblatt (1994), Wilhelm (2008), and Foutas and Pinnell (2001), I wanted to encourage students to walk in the shoes of the characters as a way to improve their reading comprehension. The two ways I tried to help the students enter into the characters' world were: reading using their five senses, and writing diary

entries from the point of view of the main character. The students responded with their five senses on graphic organizers after they listened to two Prelutsky poems I read aloud as our initial modeling activity. Over the course of our reading, I kept reminding them to use their five senses to see what the characters saw, and to smell what they smelled, for example. I kept explaining to them that this was what they needed to do in their heads while they read, making a movie in their mind and experiencing all that the characters were experiencing through their five senses. I hoped they would be able to tell me about these strategies in their own words at the end of the study. Four students were able to tell me the strategies in their own words. Two students could not.

In the pre-reading survey, when asked what they did as readers to help them understand the story, and what they did when the story did not make sense, mostly the students mentioned word decoding strategies. They had little self-awareness regarding their self-regulation of reading comprehension. In the post reading survey, a mix of answers to this question unfolded, some could communicate about the metacognitive reading strategies, others could not (see Table 4).

What do you do to help you understand what you read? What do you do when you are reading and the story does not make sense?		
Name	Pre-Reading Survey	Post-Reading Survey
Maya	I get interested in the book and say this is a fun book. If I don't know a word I skip it and go back and sound it out. I'll go back and take a picture walk.	I think like the character. I feel like the character. I act like the character. Like me and Kayla did a play about <i>Mr. Popper's Penguins</i> . I play his two kids and the mom and dad and the man who gave him the penguins and Kayla plays the penguins and the refrigerator and all the food.
Josh	I think about what they are saying. I keep going but then I go back.	Trying to remember because I can't remember anything after I read. Like for tests I have to tell the teacher to read it over so it makes sense. I can't remember when I read. I read one page or the whole book over. If I don't know a word I try to think what it means.
Nick	I sound out the words. I say, "Mommy, I don't understand what it means."	I'm not sure. I skip the next word. I sound it out. I think and if it's a hard word I just get it.
Ava	I think what it is and I ask questions. I look back.	Read the page again. Go back and read the sentence again if I don't know a word. Sound it out. Look at the title of the chapter. If I don't know a word I can look in another book to help me remember what the word is.
Caleb	I focus. I ask an adult. I stop reading the book	I use my five senses. I look back in the book.
Ray	I try not to think about food. I'm thinking what will happen. What will be the problem? Why the problem comes. I ask whoever is around. I think of it another way and think again.	I try not to be hungry cause I'm hungry a lot. If I'm at home I try to think I'm at school. I look at the title and the pictures. In my mind I usually try to say how this character is feeling, acting, thinking. What is the character doing? And I use my five senses.

Table 4. Comparison of pre- and post reading survey questions: What do you do to help you understand what you read? What do you do when you are reading and the story does not make sense?

Josh's response particularly opened my eyes. During our conversation while he filled out the post reading survey, he told me that he had trouble remembering anything he reads. Inconsistent with his comprehension throughout the course of reading the two books, Josh's later diary entries showed a good understanding of the events in the story, as well as his independently done character trait graphic organizers(see Figures 28 & 29). Even so, the fact that he could identify and talk to me about his having trouble remembering what he reads seemed to me to be a breakthrough for Josh, a developing awareness that what he reads he should be able to remember and what he reads should make sense to him. According to Friere (2003), "the students – no longer docile listeners – are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher" (p. 81). We kept hitting bumps in the road to comprehension. We needed to review all of our reading comprehension strategies. But my challenge was to get Josh and the other students to understand that they possess the ability to think about things and to come to conclusions and personal, meaningful interpretations about their reading and that by doing this they can come to understand themselves and the world around them better. So for Josh to communicate to me that he has developed an awareness of the cognitive nature of reading leads me to believe that he desires to be in control of his reading comprehension, but he understands that he is still struggling.

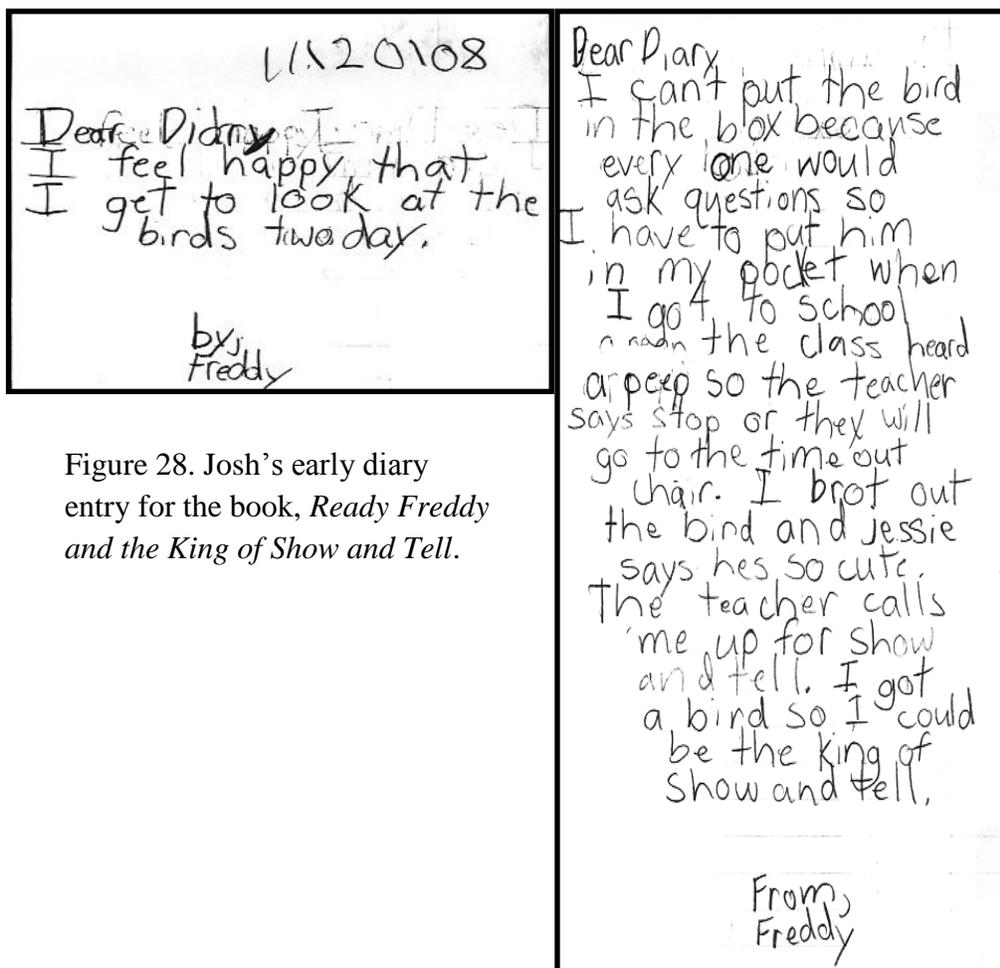


Figure 28. Josh's early diary entry for the book, *Ready Freddy and the King of Show and Tell*.

Figure 29. Josh's last diary entry for the book, *Ready Freddy and the King of Show and Tell*.

Other students showed improvement in their diary entries as we came to the close of the second book. These diary entries showed that the students successfully became the character (see Figures 30-33).

Dear Diary, I'm so mad because my friend is so per so per mean I do not like him he is so bossy. Because he said in a mad voice stop throwing cookies at me.

Figure 30. Maya's early diary entry for *Ready Freddy and the King of Show and Tell*.

Dear Diary I felt so sad that Mrs. Washy screamed at me and that I needed to tell her about the bird but she for gives me and I got to do my Show in tell I was finally King of Show and Tell it was like if I was on a throne. And I felt bad I got makes s in hole I stood up for my self and I feall said so i said the truth.

I'm sad because I got Max's intruder.

Figure 31. Maya's last diary entry for *Ready Freddy and the King of Show and Tell*.

Dear diary I think that
his wing hurts so bad I
need to get a vet because
I was panickin sens he brok
his wing.

love
freddy

Figure 32. Ray's early diary entry for *Ready Freddy and the King of Show and Tell*.

Dear diary I was happy I
thetruth or mis wishy
would find wingen and tell
mom and maby max will be
my friend. I hope ore you my
mother made winger feel
better busids max shouldnt
have been in trouble becuse
of wingers peeping.

love
freddy

Figure 33. Ray's last diary entry for *Ready Freddy and the King of Show and Tell*.

Authenticity

Reading for meaning and enjoyment, the most authentic purpose, can be positively influenced when students discuss and share multiple interpretations, when students engage in performance assessments, and when students engage in authentic culminating response activities.

Planning this study, I viewed the diary entries as a place for students' authentic reflections about the stories and the characters and as a place from where students could lift information for our authentic culminating activities. They also served as authentic performance assessments because by reading their diary entries, I could assess their understanding of the story. This provided especially valuable and authentic assessment toward the end of the second book, after we worked out our reading comprehension glitches, and scaffolded much of the book. Now, as the students read larger chunks independently and responded in their diaries before we discussed the events, I could truly evaluate what understandings they made independently from the text. The diaries, which also held the students' character trait graphic organizers, also became a place where the students needed to return in order to explain in their own words the metacognitive reading strategies they used while reading the first book, *Nate the Great and the Missing Key*, for our bulletin board. Returning to their work in the diaries and graphic organizers made this work authentic because the students actually used their diaries and graphic organizers for an authentic purpose – to

prepare a reading comprehension strategy bulletin board so all the students and teachers in the school could review these great strategies. They liked seeing their pictures on the bulletin board, and they liked doing the cutout speech bubbles where they each explained one strategy. They copied over onto good paper a corresponding example of their strategy lifted right from a diary entry or a graphic organizer. For the culminating response activity for the second book, *Ready Freddy and the King of Show and Tell*, the students again went back to their diary entries and lifted out information about character actions and corresponding character traits and prepared a bulletin board that informed the school population that characters' actions are clues, or supporting details, that help readers draw conclusions about character traits. The students prepared two life-sized portraits of two characters in the book, Freddy and Max, and they found this especially fun.

In addition to using their diary reflections for authentic purposes, the students also held valuable authentic discussions during the reading of each book. These discussions developed slowly as we struggled with comprehension, but as the students began understanding the events of the story and the problems and goals of the characters through their actions and character traits, authentic book discussions began to flow, occurring naturally as we sat around in our small group. Literally, to flow, means to move along. That is exactly what happened especially as we overcame the dialogue barrier.

According to Friere (2003), “It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours” (p. 96). The great flowing conversation we had one day while reading brings to mind this quote. I know this might sound silly, but the students and I had a very lively discussion about drainpipes. In the book, *Nate the Great and the Missing Key*, one of the places Nate looks for the key is in the drainpipe. As I mentioned before, one of the students did not know what a drainpipe was so another student explained that it was a pipe on the outside of your house and when the rain falls, the rain goes down through the drainpipe and out the bottom. Each student then had a connection to share about drainpipes at their houses. What I liked about this conversation was that it just flowed from one student to the other until we all got a glimpse of what each other’s houses and drainpipes were like. Furthermore, it was clear to me that the students visualized the drainpipe in the story through personal connections. I connect this occurrence to the Freire quote only because I could have so easily stopped the conversation after discussing the definition of drainpipe. Instead, the students entered into a dialogue with each other that enriched our sense of community because the students shared personal stories about their homes and their lives, even if it centered on drainpipes.

As we discussed the later chapters in the *Ready Freddy* book, the students got more and more into the story. The students eagerly shared their diary entries, and we used their diary entries as natural conversation starters about the story. Sometimes their diary entries showed multiple interpretations about the story, especially in terms of personal feelings evoked while reading. For example, Josh, taking on the persona of Freddy in his diary entry, said, “I thought my head would explode because I have stage fright and people might laugh at me.” Whereas Ray focused more on another aspect of the storyline in that chapter with his diary entry from the point of view of Freddy, “I am glad I lost all my guilt and Max likes me and my project. I think today went well.”

Frustration

Even when reading books of high personal interest, student inattentiveness, story misinterpretation, and inadequate fluency and prosody lead to student and teacher frustration.

While the students’ reading comprehension flowed more smoothly toward the end of the study, some frustrations remained. According to Kohl (2002) “When you see trouble, attune your work and topsy-turvy your practice in the service of your students. If you see your students failing, re-attune your work. Listen when you talk and understand that you are listened to as well as talking to your students” (p. 161). Kohl talks about topsy-turvy by which he means turning what you say around to imagine and construct how others see you and how they

are interpreting what you say. (p.150). It seems to me that in teaching this kind of perception is everything. If you want your students to be able to hear what you are saying, you need to try to figure out what it is they might be hearing. I think this also gets to the heart of at least some student inattentiveness. When students are having difficulty with the task required or are reading books that are too difficult, they often become inattentive.

For example, during our authentic culminating activity for the book we read, *Nate the Great and the Missing Key*, we reviewed and practiced using several metacognitive reading comprehension strategies. The students wrote responses in the journals based on each of the comprehension strategies we reviewed. For our final activity for the book we lifted these comprehension strategy examples from our journals and created a bulletin board for all the students in the school to read so they too could be reminded to use these metacognitive reading strategies. I wanted my students to be able to select a reading comprehension strategy and write it in their own words. Four of the students were able to do this successfully. Two students were not able to do this successfully. It was difficult and frustrating to try to get them to understand and reflect on what they had written in their journal so they could come to the level of understanding required so they could verbalize this understanding in their own words. With one student I was a little bit successful at getting him closer to an

understanding by working backwards and trying to get him to see the strategy in reverse. I had to re-attune my work, as Kohl (2002) says (p. 161).

Another frustration occurred when students could not consistently follow the story character's use of sarcasm and well as the speaker of the dialogue. I feel that this is essentially due to poor prosody while reading. Rasinski (2006) calls prosody the "gateway to comprehension." This became evident during this study. As much as I wanted the students to become the character and walk in the shoes of the character, and as much as we practiced this, and as much I reminded them to read with their senses, the students lacked my modeling and instruction of reading with expression, of giving the character a voice and reading with that voice in your head. Students risk story misinterpretation when they fail to read with prosody, as happened with my students.

Students also misinterpret the story when they do not pay attention to story details. This caused frustration for me because filling out the character trait graphic organizers required that the students think about character details. While I thought the students did a good job at this with teacher oversight, I thought they would do a better job when they had to independently fill out the character trait graphic organizer and fill in the character details for the character of Arthur when I read aloud the book *Arthur's New Puppy*. Clearly, the students need more practice with identifying main idea and supporting details.

WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

This research study allowed me the chance to study an issue in my teaching, engaging third grade students in authentic literacy activities. I learned that book choice motivates students. Through student surveys and interviews, the students told me their reading interests, often mentioning books in series. I need to remember to gather this type of valuable information from my students and to listen to what they tell me and to work with them in order to come as close as possible, within time and budget constraints, to meet their reading needs and desires in order to increase their reading engagement. Taking the time for students to complete book interest surveys and reading group surveys spotlight their point of view, which I value, and I could see how the students respected my concern for their reading experience. I feel this empowered them to take reading more seriously, for the most part, something I want to maintain and cultivate in the future. Furthermore, because the students felt empowered by reading a book of their choice, with the students reading comprehension well grounded, authentic group book discussions became more student centered, allowing the students to spontaneously share their thoughts and feeling about the characters and the events in the book. This motivated them to continue reading and motivated them to eagerly reflect and write their diary entries. This was a cycle. They read. They reflected in writing in their diary entries, and then they talked about the story. Talking about the story after they had time to reflect personally and respond in

their diaries gave everyone a voice in the discussion because they had their thoughts already written down, and they could refer to their diary during the discussion. This is definitely something I will continue doing because the students really ran the discussion--student centered, not teacher centered.

As I listen to the students discuss their reading and read what they write about their reading, I need to stay flexible and open minded and be ready to do what is required to help them achieve reading success. I noticed the students did not understand the dialogue or sarcasm. I tried to remedy this for them. Underlying the misinterpretation dialogue and sarcasm caused is lack of prosody. In the future, I need to focus instruction time in modeling and having the students practice reading with prosody to help increase their reading comprehension. Reader's theater is one strategy to help build prosody. I will need to research other strategies as well. Furthermore, I will need to work more with the students on identifying the main idea and supporting details while they are reading, but in authentic ways to help build their reading comprehension. I think that having students respond in a diary or journal while reading a book of their choice is a great way to get students to reflect about their reading using details to support their thinking and draw conclusions about characters and events. I will continue with this approach providing the feedback my students need to guide and motivate them to achieve and develop an unquenchable thirst for reading.

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APPENDIXES

- A. Pre-Reading Survey
- B. Book Pass Survey
- C. Character Trait Graphic Organizer
- D. Post Reading Survey
- E. HSRIB Approval Letter
- F. Principal Consent Letter
- G. Parent Consent Letter

APPENDIX A: PRE-READING SURVEY**Pre - Reading Survey**

- 1. Tell me about your reading life: where, when, how long, how often do you read?**

- 2. What have you been reading?**

- 3. What have been your reasons for reading?**

- 4. If you could set a goal for your reading what would that goal be?**

- 5. Name 3 books you would choose to have with you if you were stranded on a desert island.**

- 6. What do you do to help you understand what you read? (make predictions, make connections, ask questions while I read)**

- 7. What do you do when you're reading and the story does not make sense?**

- 8. Complete this sentence: My favorite kind of book is...**

APPENDIX B: BOOK PASS SURVEY

Book Pass Survey

Name of Book _____

I like the way the cover looked. yes no

What did you like about the cover?

I like what the book is about. yes no

I like the pictures in the book. yes no

What did you like about the pictures?

What else about the book makes you want to read it?

APPENDIX C: CHARACTER TRAIT GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

Name _____ Book: **Ready Freddy and the King of Show and Tell**

Directions:

Think about the kind of person Freddy is, and describe some of his character traits.

Character traits are words we use to describe the way a person acts or behaves.

What does Freddy do, say, think, or feel? (these are details from the story)	Write a word or phrase that describes what you have learned about Freddy because of what he does, says, thinks or feels.

APPENDIX D: POST READING SURVEY

Post Reading Survey

- 1. Tell me about your reading life: where, when, how long, how often do you read?**
- 2. What have you been reading?**
- 3. What have been your reasons for reading?**
- 4. If you could set a goal for your reading what would that goal be?**
- 5. Name 3 books you would choose to have with you if you were stranded on a desert island.**
- 6. What do you do to help you understand what you read? (make predictions, make connections, ask questions while I read)**
- 7. What do you do when you're reading and the story does not make sense?**
- 8. Complete this sentence: My favorite kind of book is...**

APPENDIX E: HSIRB CONSENT LETTER

MORAVIAN COLLEGE
A SMALL NATIONAL TREASURE

1200 Main Street
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania 18018-6650
TEL 610 861-1300
WEB www.moravian.edu

September 5, 2008

Eileen G. Cro
[REDACTED]

Dear Eileen G. Cro:

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has accepted your proposal: "Reading Response Journal Writing from Various Points of View and Through Various Genres." Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Chair.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into other topics than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation.

This letter has been sent to you through U.S. Mail and e-mail. Please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone (610-861-1415) or through e-mail (medwh02@moravian.edu) should you have any questions about the committee's requests.

Debra Wetcher-Hendricks
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board
Moravian College
610-861-1415

APPENDIX F: PRINCIPAL CONSENT LETTER

September 10, 2008

Dear [REDACTED],

I am completing a Master of Education degree at Moravian College. My courses have enabled me to learn about the most effective teaching methods. One of the requirements of the program is that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practices. This semester I am focusing my research on the effects of third grade student use of authentic literacy response activities. The title of my research is Responding to Literature Using Authentic Literature Response Activities. By participating in this study, my students will become more motivated and insightful readers. There are no anticipated risks.

As part of this study, students will be asked to respond to their reading in several types of reading response journals. Students will then use the insights expressed in their journals to create authentic book response activities. Students will be asked to complete reading interest surveys and participate in a one-on-one reading interest interview with me. The study will take place from September 15, 2008 until December 24, 2008.

The data will be collected, coded, and held in the strictest confidence. No one except me will have access to the data. My research results will be presented using pseudonyms-no one's identity will be used. I will store the data in a locked file cabinet. At the conclusion of the research, the data will be destroyed.

A student may choose at any time not to participate in this study. However, students must participate in all regular class activities such as guided reading and reading response activities. In no way will participation, non-participation, or withdrawal during this study have any influence on any aspect of the class.

We welcome questions about this research at any time. Student participation is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty or consequence. Any questions you have about the research or about the process for student withdrawal can be directed to me, Eileen G. Cro at school at [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] or Dr. Charlotte Zales, Education Department, Moravian [REDACTED]. Any questions about the rights of research participants may be directed to Dr. Debra Wetcher-Hendricks, Chair HSIRB, Moravian College, Bethlehem, PA 18018, [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

Eileen G. Cro

I attest that I am the principal of the teacher conducting this research study. I have read and I understand this consent form; and I have received a copy. Eileen G. Cro has my permission to conduct this study at [REDACTED].

[REDACTED SIGNATURE]

 Principal's Signature

9/10/08
Date

APPENDIX G: PARENT CONSENT LETTER

September 12, 2008

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am completing a Master of Education degree at Moravian College. My courses have enabled me to learn about the most effective teaching methods. One of the requirements of the program is that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practices. This semester I am focusing my research on the effects of third grade student use of authentic literature response activities. The title of my research is Responding to Literature Using Authentic Literature Response Activities. By participating in this study, my students will become more motivated and insightful readers. There are no anticipated risks.

As part of this study, students will be asked to respond to their reading in several types of reading response journals. Students will then use the insights expressed in their journals to create authentic literature response activities. Students will be asked to complete reading interest surveys and participate in a one-on-one reading interest interview with me. The study will take place from September 17, 2008 until December 24, 2008.

The data will be collected, coded, and held in the strictest confidence. No one except me will have access to the data. My research results will be presented using pseudonyms-no one's identity will be used. I will store the data in a locked file cabinet. At the conclusion of the research, the data will be destroyed.

A student may choose at any time not to participate in this study. However, students must participate in all regular class activities such as guided reading and reading response activities. In no way will participation, non-participation, or withdrawal during this study have any influence on any aspect of the class.

We welcome questions about this research at any time. Your child's participation is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty or consequence. Any questions you have about the research or about the process for withdrawing can be directed to me, Eileen G. Cro, Reading Specialist, [REDACTED] Principal, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Dr. Charlotte Zales, Education Department, Moravian [REDACTED] Any questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed to Dr. Debra Wetcher-Hendricks, Chair HSIRB, Moravian College, Bethlehem, PA 18018, [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Eileen G. Cro

Please sign and return this form as soon as possible. Thank you.

I agree to allow my son/daughter to take part in this project. I understand that my son/daughter can choose not to participate at any time.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Student's Signature

9/15/2008

Date
9/15/2008

Date