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THINKING ABOUT READING

A METHOD FOR SUCCESSFUL COMPREHENSION

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative action-research study was to examine the effects of explicit instruction of metacognitive reading comprehension strategies for a group of third graders. The study was designed based on Vygotsky's theory of gradual release of responsibility. It included explicit instruction through teacher thinking aloud, modeling, scaffolding and guided practice, and ultimately individual application of selected reading strategies. The strategies explored were predicting, visualizing, summarizing, self-monitoring, following inner-voice, making connections, using prior knowledge, and employing appropriate fix-up strategies. Methods of data collection included teacher observation, surveys, student conferencing, and student work.

Through the experiences of whole-group, small group, and individual discussion, students demonstrated an awareness of their own comprehension, an ability to help themselves develop understanding, and an opportunity to think more critically about what they were reading. Additionally, students demonstrated an increased improvement in responding to their reading through written responses and reflections. Students were increasingly able to express their understanding by citing evidence from the text in their written responses.

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Researcher Stance

Reading has always been easy for me, and I love to do it. However, I do not remember anything about how I learned to read. Contrary to my lack of memory on learning to read, I remember seemingly every minute of learning math. Math was so difficult for me, and I struggled every year. Even while I sat in AP English language arts classes, I struggled though the lowest math classes until I had just enough math credits for graduation, so I could finally stop. I know what it feels like to struggle in school.

Early in my teaching career, I taught a group of 5th grade students who were struggling readers. Our district had recently purchased a new reading series, and we were expected to use it to teach reading. However, I quickly ran into a huge problem; my students could not read the book. I remember feeling so frustrated because I just did not know what to do. My students were not learning, and reading class was becoming a source of anxiety for me. I did my best, but I was a fairly new teacher, and I did not have a vast array of reading instructional strategies beyond the set curriculum. I felt as though I had failed them, and I did not teach them much that year. As the years passed, I became more comfortable with the curriculum, and I felt that my instruction improved with experience. However, I still was not spending much time teaching my students how to read. My reading instruction focused on teaching my fifth graders to use reading as a

vehicle to learn, and to be able to apply the many reading skills I was required to teach them.

A few years ago, my assignment changed to third grade. Fortunately for me, I had an above-average group of readers, including many gifted students, that first year teaching third grade, so teaching reading was not too big of a change for me. I was able to follow the curriculum and augment with literature circles and book projects, much like I did as a fifth grade teacher. My students progressed, and they did well, but I suspect that was more because of them and not as much because of me.

The second year of teaching third grade was very different. I had been told that third grade is a time where some students are ready to use reading to learn, but many others are still learning to read. Thankfully, I had begun taking classes to become a Reading Specialist, so I had many resources and a lot of support to help me shift my teaching to address those students who were still developing readers, as well as challenge those who were ready to use their reading to learn. As I met my students and experienced the wide range of reading development in my classroom that year, I realized that I would have to teach differently, and I was going to have to leave my curriculum comfort zone to be successful.

On one end of the spectrum, there were some students in my class who were already thinking critically and relating their reading to other areas of their

learning. There were also a few students who were still learning their letter sounds and trying to decode words successfully.

As I began the school year with that new class, I discovered that many of my students were indeed able to decode with fluency, but they were lacking successful comprehension. It seemed to me that there was something missing in the continuum of reading instruction for these readers with regard to understanding what they were reading. They just were not making that transfer from reading words to making meaning of those words. When I asked higher-order thinking questions, my students gave me a lot of blank stares. Only a few of my students were actively participating in those discussions. Even those students were not displaying critical thinking and were not connecting their answers back to the text as much as I was hoping they would. We tried written responses as well. Again, I was disappointed with the results. I did not understand why they were having difficulty comprehending and discussing text.

I realized I needed to re-evaluate how I was teaching reading. My students were not necessarily thinking about what they were reading as they decoded words. For me, thinking about reading and being aware of my thoughts as I read seemed so logical and natural, but it was not something to which my students had much exposure. I needed to show them how to be aware of their thought processes before, during, and after reading. My students needed to learn strategies before they could apply skills to their reading.

I want my students to be proficient readers. It is so important to me that they are able to understand what they read, be able to use reading to navigate their academic as well as personal lives, and hopefully develop a life long love of reading. I feel passionate about reading and I want to ensure that my students have strong reading skills. If this was going to happen, my journey as a reading teacher was going to have to take a different course. I was not sure how I was going to take this reading journey with my third graders, but I did know that I was about to leave my comfort zone.

I knew from experience that reading instruction in the intermediate grades has a focus on skills, as students are expected to use reading to learn. While skills are important, the comprehension strategies, such as predicting, visualizing, questioning, summarizing, and self-monitoring, need to be in place before skills can be applied. This is important to build a solid literacy foundation for students to understand and analyze text. Many of the reading skills, such as cause/effect, or identifying main idea and details are not as meaningful if the students are not able to comprehend the text they are analyzing.

I did not want my students to miss out on learning how to apply reading strategies to understand any text they were presented with. Knowing that I had two types of readers to teach, those who were proficient and those still developing as readers, I wanted to be prepared to meet all of their needs. For those students who were still developing, I did not want them to feel inadequate or anxious about

reading, nor did I want to deny the able readers meaningful reading instruction. Therefore, I planned to teach reading strategies using a model of gradual release of responsibility. In this way, the strategies that I would teach would benefit all of my readers. Those students with a strong grasp of the strategy would be given the opportunity to practice the strategies independently, with peers of similar ability, and with appropriate level texts. It would also allow me to teach more explicitly, and provide more modeling and scaffolding for those students who were in need of it. I felt if I did not take the time to teach these developing readers explicitly at this point and guide them to the point where they could apply their learning, they might not get another opportunity to learn these important reading strategies with such purposeful instruction.

Pressley (2000) states that there is a real need for educators to change the way comprehension instruction occurs in schools. I realized that effective comprehension instruction is essential to teach students the processes to become active readers. I know that good readers process text in many ways while they read. They visualize, predict, question, compare, summarize, re-read, and, perhaps most importantly, they self-monitor and are aware of when they do not understand something. They know how to think about their thinking, and how to help themselves when meaning breaks down.

In order to get my third graders to understand what they were reading, I needed to teach them strategies to become aware of how to think about their

reading while they were doing it. Most readers are capable of reading the words on the page. Their difficulty is that they do not know how to comprehend what they have read. To help address this problem, I decided to directly, explicitly teach the strategies and processes that proficient readers use to understand what they read. I know that when students get older, teachers do not always know how to address comprehension struggles, and students fall further and further behind. It is demotivating and deflating for them when they sit in class and do not understand what is going on. This can lead to a lifetime of negative reading experiences.

I did not want my students to fall prey to a lifetime of literacy struggles. It became crucial for me to help them be aware of their thinking while they are reading, and recognize when they do not understand. They need different comprehension strategies and guidance to use those strategies simultaneously. They also need the tools to help themselves when meaning breaks down. Instructing my students in this way would help them become active readers with strong comprehension. Therefore, my research question is: *What are the observed and reported experiences when students are explicitly taught metacognitive reading comprehension strategies?*

Literature Review

Introduction

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2010), there is a growing concern for the number of Americans who are not educated or skilled enough to adequately supply our nation's workforce or provide for national security. Part of the reason this is occurring is due to the number of students who drop out of high school or do not graduate on time. While there are initiatives in place to address these problems, steps need to be put in place well before children enter high school. In many drop out cases, students are unable to read proficiently by fourth grade. In fact, research shows if students are not at least semi-proficient readers by the end of third grade, their chances of drop out increase significantly.

Hernandez (2012) reports that data collected from a longitudinal study of 4,000 students showed that students who are not yet reading proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than are proficient readers. More concerning is that those readers who were not able to grasp even the most basic reading skills by third grade were six times more likely to leave school without a diploma.

According to the American Public Health Association (2010), health and education are very much intertwined. Students need strong literacy skills to be successful in school and in life after school. Without a strong foundation in literacy, young people struggle socially, in employment situations, and as

productive contributors to society. The costs associated with emotional, social, and public health and academic failure are well documented. There is a strong correlation between students who do not finish high school and poor health. High school graduates have better health and lower medical costs. The American Public Health Association (2010) states there is evidence suggesting that improving graduation rates and reducing health problems for young people may be more cost effective than investing in medical interventions. With graduation rates are tied to literacy, and health and well-being tied to graduation, there is a national literacy crisis going on, which can no longer be ignored (Biancarosa & Snow 2006)

Students at the middle and high school levels generally do not struggle with decoding or reading the words. Instead, their reading struggles happen with comprehension, or making meaning of what they read, and it is important to address this issue early. Biancarosa and Snow (2006) explain the need for teachers to explicitly teach comprehension strategies and provide scaffolding and guidance toward independent practice as a way to improve comprehension.

Metacognition, metacognitive reading strategies, and self-monitoring help improve comprehension. As students move toward proficiency in reading comprehension, teachers can shift from strategic teaching to instruction that fosters higher-order thinking, collaborative learning, and discussion to further support comprehension.

Reading Comprehension

There are five main aspects to literacy, building upon each other, with the overall goal and outcome being comprehension. These include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. These reading skills can be thought of as building a pyramid. One needs a foundation of letters and letter sounds, word recognition, and finally text-processing and comprehension at the top of the pyramid (Pressley, 2000).

Researchers and educators alike agree that comprehension is the most important aspect of reading (Boardman, et al., 2008). Reading comprehension involves understanding, remembering what has been read, and making meaning of text. Successful readers are actively employing strategies before, during, and after their reading. They use a variety of processes simultaneously to achieve comprehension and construct meaning. Comprehension can be compromised if any part of the literacy component pyramid is lacking (Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, & Joshi, 2007).

During the 1970s and 1980s, there were conflicting ideas on whether reading comprehension was more of a process in which students used visual stimuli such as letters, words, and sentences to make meaning of text, or if readers used the process of combining background knowledge along with text to make meaning. Today, however, researchers have come to a general agreement that successful comprehension is a combined, interactive process in which readers use

letters, words, and background knowledge simultaneously to make meaning of text (Almasi, 2003). Background knowledge is not the only factor readers use to make meaning of text, but activating prior knowledge is one of several active, cognitive processes readers employ to construct meaning from what they are reading. Duke and Pearson (2002) explain that researchers have learned a great deal about reading comprehension in the past 30 years because so much work has been done on observing and analyzing what good readers actually do. Reading is an active process in which many things happen at the same time. This active reading process includes predicting, visualizing, working with graphic organizers, questioning, thinking aloud, summarizing, self-monitoring for understanding, and making adjustments to reading using appropriate fix-up strategies. Proficient readers also understand they need to vary their reading style according to the genre of the text.

These are just a few of the many actions good readers use as they read. Comprehension is a flexible process (Gunning, 2010). While readers do not use all of these strategies all of the time, good readers employ appropriate strategies for the given reading situation.

The Difference Between Comprehension Skills and Strategies

Affflerbach, Pearson, and Paris (2008) explain that comprehension strategies and skills are often used synonymously. These terms are generally used to describe what teachers are teaching, and what children are learning. There is

some confusion in the educational community between the two terms. A thorough understanding of the differences is important, though, in the instruction of reading comprehension. There is a time and a place for both strategic and skill based reading. Teachers need to understand the difference because instructional decisions can be made based on strategic versus skillful reading.

> Reading strategies are deliberate, goal-oriented attempts to control and modify the reader's efforts to decode text, understand words, and construct meaning of text. Reading skills are automatic actions that result in decoding and comprehension with speed, efficiency, and fluency, and usually occur without awareness of the components or control involved. (Affflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, p. 368)

It is important to note that skills and strategies often times have the same goals for reading success. Reading strategically allows readers to understand and be flexible in their approach to text. Readers monitor their own understanding and apply appropriate strategies to gain and maintain understanding. They are aware of and have control over their reading actions. Reading skills are used automatically and out of habit. Skills are the steps or procedures a teacher might use to teach a specific concept pertaining to a text (Shannahan, 2005). The reader does not have as much decision or control over these skills.

According to Beers (2003), the strategy can lead a reader to a skill. She uses the example of learning to ride a bike. The skill is riding the bike without

falling. To achieve this skill, one will need a lot of practice, learn to balance, and maneuver the bike correctly. Transfer that to reading: The skill is identifying the main idea. To get there, a reader must employ different strategies such as thinking out loud, self-monitoring, visualizing, and making connections to understand the text before he or she can identify the main idea.

Using a purposeful balance of both strategies and skills in instructional practice is beneficial for readers. When students have a strong understanding of text, and automatic control over reading strategies, skills have a definite purpose. They allow a reader to look more deeply into a text, analyze a particular structure, or think critically about the text. However, if comprehension is weak, instruction of reading strategies is more beneficial than teaching skills, as skills will not be meaningful without understanding. Students who learn about reading strategies can use that knowledge to be fluent, efficient, and skilled readers. When strategies are in place and used automatically, skills become meaningful (Affflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008).

Reading is not a natural process for people. It needs to be taught, developed, and practiced, and it comes easier to some than others. Teachers must provide clear, explicit instruction about reading strategies and skills. Strategies must be modeled, taught and practiced until a reader can use them with automaticity (Lyon, 1998).

The Need for Explicit Instruction

While humans have been communicating with oral language for thousands of years, we have only been using the written word to communicate for several hundred years. Therefore, it makes sense that understanding the written word is not as natural a process as understanding the spoken word. These skills must be taught through formal means (Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, and Joshi, 2007).

Historically, teachers have not taught reading comprehension explicitly. Durkin (1978-1979) found a lack of comprehension instruction in her research more than 30 years ago. She observed that teachers spent their time supervising assigned activities, ensuring that students stayed on task, and assessing rather than teaching students the necessary strategies and skills they would need to comprehend successfully. Block and Pressley (2002) explain that for many years, teachers believed that students would learn to comprehend by reading more and more. They did not realize that reading is not a natural process. Children need to be taught decoding, word recognition skills, and reading comprehension strategies directly and systematically (Lyon, 1998). Durkin (1978 -1979) noted that teachers spent the time directly instructing phonics and word recognition skills, but did not continue the practice of direct instruction for comprehension. As she observed a fourth grade class, she found that teachers spent less than 1% of their time on comprehension instruction.

For many years, teachers believed that if students could read a word, they could understand the meaning. Therefore, teachers invested their time in planning activities and assessing, but not teaching how to make sense of what students were reading. Pressley (2006) explains that many teachers did not understand the components necessary to actively teach comprehension. Therefore, they did not address those areas in instruction.

Instructional practices with regard to comprehension have continued to change since the 1980s. The report from the National Reading Panel (2000) offered additional strategies and research on reading instruction, making today's teachers more aware of what is involved in comprehension. Ness (2010) observed in her 2009 research that teachers were spending more time actually teaching reading and using a variety of strategies to do so. Many of these strategies are offered in the National Reading Panel report (2000).

Research has shown that the most effective instruction happens when comprehension strategies are directly taught, modeled, and practiced at length (Pressley, 2000). Biancarosa and Snow (2006) concur. They list 15 elements of effective adolescent literacy programs. Number one on their list is the need for comprehension strategies and skills to be explicitly and actively taught. Furthermore, studies show students who were explicitly taught comprehension strategies out-scored their peers, who did not receive this type of instruction, on standardized reading measures and standardized tests. Atkins (2013) completed a

study entitled The Effects of Explicit Teaching of Comprehension Strategies on Reading Comprehension in Elementary Schools. This study took place in two New York City schools, both ranging from K-5th grade with an average number of students per building of 500. The treatment school used a program designed to address comprehension difficulties for students from K-5th grade. The program was called Urban Education Exchange (UEE) in which teachers used explicit instruction, modeling, and guided practice as a supplement to their regular language arts curriculum. The control school taught language arts through a variety of traditional curriculum programs. Atkins reports, in his two-year study, that student performance between explicit and traditional instruction was not significant after the first year. However, after the second year, when the teachers were more comfortable with the explicit instruction, the explicitly taught students scored much higher on comprehension assessments than did their peers.

Explicit instruction happens when teachers focus the students' attention explicitly on a particular strategy or concept in order to help them understand how to think about text, and how to make meaning from it. Explicit teaching is very much teacher-directed and focused. This method of instruction is effective when teachers invest the time in learning how to teach strategically and spending classroom time doing it. According to Beers (2003), investing the time teaching strategies early on will help students become better readers. She admits that

teaching strategies takes away time from teaching content, but without strategies students will not progress as readers.

Palinscar and Brown (1984), the pioneers of an instructional approach known as reciprocal teaching (RT), incorporate explicit instruction in the way of teacher introduction and modeling. RT utilizes four strategies, predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing, to help improve comprehension. Teachers demonstrate each strategy, offer a clear explanation of the thinking process, and explain when, how, and why those strategies should be used. They engage the students as they actively transfer the responsibility to them through dialogue and guided practice until the students are using the skill independently. This gradual release of responsibility is the key to effective explicit instruction. This is the component of explicit teaching that shifts the responsibility from the teacher to the student as automaticity is achieved for each strategy. RT has been shown to improve students' reading levels quickly (Stricklin, 2011), and is widely used today. RT is just one example of how explicit instruction and the gradual release of responsibility helps students to become stronger, more confident, strategic readers.

Implementing explicit instruction of reading strategies and following a gradual release of responsibility model supports Vygotsky's theories of socially mediated learning. Vygotsky believes that students need intensive instruction and support when learning and practicing skills that are within their Zone of Proximal

Development (ZPD). These skills are things a child is not developmentally ready to do independently, but with appropriate adult modeling and scaffolding, will develop knowledge to the point he or she can perform the skill independently (Vygotsky, 1978).

Connor, Morrison, and Petrella (2004), support the benefits of explicit teaching for students who are average to below average readers. One aspect of their study was on third graders' reading comprehension. Their study was designed to investigate the effect of different types and amounts of language arts instruction, in particular, the observable growth between students who received a balance of teacher-directed instruction and student-directed activities compared to those students who received traditional language arts instruction. There were 73 children from 43 different classrooms across the district who participated in the study. Participants ranged from one to five per classroom. The researchers report a positive effect for teacher-managed explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies. They found that students who began third grade with lower reading comprehension scores made significant gains in classrooms where the teacher spent more time spent with explicit instruction. However, students who began third grade reading above grade level made less progress in explicitly taught situations. This supports Beers' idea that without reading strategies, readers will not progress (2003). Students need to be taught to their needs, this study exemplifies that explicit instruction is effective for students who need help

learning how to use the different reading strategies in order to understand what they are reading. Those students who have a solid grasp of strategic reading do not need this type of instruction.

Comprehension instruction spurs on a great debate in the educational community. The "Reading Wars" is a common topic of discussion among researchers and educators. The reading instruction pendulum has swung back and forth between whole language and phonics for decades (Nichols, 2009).

Abraham (2000) explains the two views of reading instruction as a top-down or bottom-up way of learning to read. Whole language is constructivist in nature, and takes a top-down approach. Whole language advocates believe that reading will develop by reading more, and immersing children in print rich environments. It takes on a meaning emphasis, which focuses on the reader's interaction with the text, what they bring to the process, and how they connect it to their own knowledge. Piaget's theory that learning is a social process, and comes from interactions with peers and environment, support a whole language approach. (Morrow, Gambrell & Pressley, 2003). Whole language has been criticized for being ineffective. According to LeDoux (2007), whole language was introduced at a time when high stakes testing was also coming to the forefront of education. Teachers did not fully understand how to implement whole language, test scores were low, and it was judged too quickly before teachers were able to fully understand it, and implement it correctly.

Phonics advocates believe the whole language approach is not effective because students do not spend enough time learning the fundamentals needed in order to comprehend. Phonics advocates view reading instruction from a bottom-up approach, in which teachers systematically and explicitly teach phonics, decoding skills, and then move toward comprehension. Jean Chall, a leader in the field of reading education and Harvard professor, played a key role early on in the importance that phonics and decoding play in the reading process. Although criticized, Chall held strong to her convictions that all stages of reading need to be taught directly and systematically. Chall believes that teacher-directed approaches result in higher student achievement, with notably higher benefits for children with learning difficulties (Chall, 2000).

One undisputable point, however, is "that 'reading is the gateway to learning in all content areas and essential for achieving high standards', as stated in the National Education Association's (NEA) official reading policy." (NEA, 2002-2013). Effective teachers need to understand that relying too heavily on either one of these processes is likely to result in a deficit of some sort in students' reading progress (Shapiro & Riley, 1989).

Connor, Morrison, Fishman, Schatschneider, and Underwood (2007) agree that there is not a "one size fits all" solution to reading instruction. Although most children will benefit from a balance of explicit instruction and whole language activities, teachers must be careful not to assume this balanced approach is the

solution for everyone. Teachers must learn about their students' needs and provide effective instruction that fits what each child needs.

Metacognition

Metacognition is thinking about, and being aware of, one's own thinking. John Flavell introduced the idea of using metacognition in conjunction with reading comprehension in the mid-1970s. His theory suggested that one can be taught to be aware of his or her thinking and monitor it to understand, and self-correct mistakes when he or she is reading (Flavell, 1979). This idea spurred much research in connecting metacognition and reading comprehension. Despite all the research, professional literature, and teacher education, very little metacognitive instruction was actually taking place in classrooms in the 1980s and 90s (Collins Block & Parris, 2008).

With the publication of the NRP report (2000), researchers validated and agreed that metacognition is an important aspect of reading instruction. Biancarosa and Snow (2006) support metacognitive reading strategies as an effective means to helping students realize how they understand what they are reading.

It is important for students to use metacognition effectively in order for them to use it to successfully improve reading (Baker, 2008). In order for students to do this, they must be taught what it means to be aware of their thinking, shown the different strategies they can use, and be taught how to use

them. Baker states that metacognition can be taught. She analyzed several different studies in which the focus was on the instruction of metacognitive strategies in areas such as word recognition, identification of text discrepancies, and making inferences. Some of these studies included control groups, tracking students who did and did not receive instruction for metacognitive understanding. Baker found that students did, in fact, learn more about their own reading and gained awareness and ability to monitor their own comprehension through metacognition instruction. Further analysis showed that some of these students demonstrated improvement in comprehension. Baker also notes that the general consensus is "the best way to promote metacognition is for teachers to discuss, model and practice it explicitly" (Baker, p. 67).

Competent readers use one or more strategies at the same time to understand what they read. If students are aware of what they need to do to understand, using even one strategy will help improve their comprehension. Teaching students a variety of strategies from which they can draw upon will greatly improve their reading comprehension as they master each one and understand when and how to use it (Almasi, 2003).

Metacognitive Reading Strategies

Metacognitive strategies help readers become more aware of what and how they are thinking as they are reading. Readers learn about several strategies that they can use to help their understanding given the particular reading situation.

However, since students are not innately aware of these strategies, teachers must explicitly teach these thought processes to students through modeling, thinking aloud, scaffolded practice and finally, independence of the targeted strategy. Students gain understanding of metacognitive awareness and application through a gradual transfer of responsibility from the teacher to the student. Then, the cycle begins again with another strategy (Baker, 2008).

Incorporating metacognition into reading comprehension instruction further supports a reader's ability to construct meaning and understand text. Traditional reading instruction offers limited tools from which students can choose to develop their comprehension. McTavish (2008) has found teaching metacognition to be effective for helping students develop as readers and be able to make meaning of text. McTavish further explains that when students do not know why they are not comprehending, and do not know what to do, meaning will continue to break down. It is important that students understand what the strategies are, how to use them appropriately, why and when to use them. Often times, students who experience frequent breakdown in meaning tend to give up. This results in less successful literacy and adversely affects them academically resulting in less successful futures for these students.

The National Reading Panel report (2000) offered various strategies for effective comprehension instruction. Some of their recommendations include predicting, visualizing, making connections, self-monitoring, questioning, the use

of graphic organizers, summarizing, employing appropriate fix-up strategies, and using a variety of strategies simultaneously.

Predicting text. Students need to become actively engaged in text before they even begin the reading process. Anticipating where the text will go is a before-reading strategy known as predicting (Beers, 2003). Engaging in this thought process helps students to establish a purpose for reading and sets their mind up for the type of reading they may be doing with respect to genre and topic. Predicting helps create and hold student interest, and provides readers with a plan for reading.

Strategic instruction in prediction must focus on teaching students how to make meaningful predictions and purposes for reading. Teachers must begin by explaining the purpose of predicting, modeling their own thought process for making a prediction, thinking out loud as they demonstrate how to make connections with prior knowledge and setting a purpose for reading based on the text at hand (Almasi, 2003). Duke and Pearson (2002) explain that tapping into prior knowledge enables students to construct an understanding of new ideas as they read text. It is important for teachers to explain that predictions do not always have to be correct, but they should be meaningful with regard to the text. It is important to make predictions, and equally important to go back to those predictions and clarify them with what actually happened in the text. This provides a closure to this process, which enhances student comprehension.

Students can use graphic organizers to keep track of their predictions, their thinking and reasoning, and the outcomes of text (Almasi, 2003).

Visualizing text. Another strategy used to help readers better comprehend is the use of visual imagery. Rubman and Waters (2000) state the reason less skilled readers have limited success creating meaning from the text is because they primarily focus on how to decode the words on a page, and do not extract meaning from them. However, when students were given an opportunity to manipulate and re-construct text in the form of a storyboard, they were more successful in understanding what they read. The use of visual imagery to re-construct a story encourages readers to connect the ideas from text and piece them together as a story, rather than trying to make sense of one sentence at a time. Students learn to visualize with concrete visualization such as storyboards and sketches. Eventually this will become an internal process and provide students with a memory aid to use as they navigate the cognitive process of reading comprehension (Rubman and Waters, 2000). Teachers can help students learn to do this by modeling the process of visualizing and sharing their own thinking. They should also elicit imagery from students' sharing their ideas. There are many ways to encourage students to visualize text through direct instruction, demonstration, guided practice and independently (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006).

Visual displays help students to understand, organize, and remember what they are reading. Activities such as sketch and share are ways in which children

are thinking about their reading by drawing and discussing their interpretation of it. Graphic organizers are another way for students to visually organize their thoughts to aid in comprehension.

Graphic organizers. Graphic organizers are visual representations of text. These tools are used for narrative and informational text before, during, and after reading. Organizers are helpful before reading to make predictions, or introduce a new concept. When using graphic organizers during reading, students are encouraged to be aware of their reading as they progress through a text. They slow down and think about whether or not they understand what they just read. This encourages self-monitoring, as students will find they have difficulty completing an organizer if they do not understand what they have just read. Graphic organizers can be used after reading to summarize, find important events in text, or reflect upon reading with a personal response. Examples of organizers are semantic maps, story maps to highlight the important elements in a story, main idea and detail organizers, venn diagrams, and character maps to analyze character traits. It has been reported that the use of organizers has improved comprehension among students with reading difficulties (Marchand-Martella, Martella, Modderman, Petersen, & Pan, 2013).

Jitendra, Hoppes, and Xin (2000) have shown that systematically teaching students to self-monitor using organizational tools, such as prompt cards or

graphic organizers, had a positive effect on students with reading difficulties. The skills were maintained over time and transferred to other reading materials.

Questioning. Questioning has many uses in reading comprehension. It can help the teacher assess where the reader is in terms of understanding a text, or even within the reading process. Teachers should take Bloom's Taxonomy (Krathwhol, Bloom, & Masia, 1999) into consideration when generating questions to ensure they support students' individual levels of understanding and support higher order thinking (Marchand-Martella, Martella, Modderman, Petersen, & Pan, 2013).

Question generation and self-questioning are a part of self-monitoring. The process of questioning before, during, and after reading allows students to be aware and recognize when they find something interesting, question why something happened, make personal connections or relate to an event, and form opinions as they read. It also allows them to realize when they are having difficulty understanding. When students generate their own questions, they are more motivated in their reading.

Students can use thin and thick questions to help develop deeper thinking questioning about text. Thin questions are more factual or concrete types of questions. There is a right answer, and it can be found directly in the text, usually in one place. Thick, or open-ended, questions require a reader to synthesize different aspects of the text, and make inferences and connections to respond.

These types of questions give the teacher a view into how the reader is thinking. They are also more interesting for students, and can lead to meaningful discussion (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006). Teaching students how to identify and generate different types of questions, as well as demonstrating how to use questioning keep track of their thinking while they read has been shown to improve comprehension among students (Jacobucci, Richert, Ronan, & Tanis, 2002).

Think-aloud. The think-aloud process can serve as a two-pronged approach in a classroom. It involves teacher modeling for instruction and student participation to enhance comprehension. During a think-aloud, the teacher verbalizes his or her thoughts while reading or listening to stories. Teachers can utilize think-aloud opportunities to demonstrate comprehension strategies and give a brief explanation why, or why not, to use a particular strategy at that given time (Duke & Pearson, 2002). These are effective during read aloud or in small group instruction, and can be used to enhance instruction for a multitude of strategies including vocabulary development, predicting, and making inferences.

Teachers can also guide students to stop and think periodically throughout a text by asking them to connect to or question the text. Teachers must understand, however, that think-aloud will disrupt the reading process, so it must be used intentionally as an instructional procedure to either give students a glimpse into how a successful reader thinks while he or she is reading, or to gain

an understanding about what the student is thinking as he or she reads (Block & Pressley, 2002).

Verbalization, or thinking aloud has different purposes for different genres (Gillam, Fargo, & Robertson, 2009). Verbalizing predictions and generating inferences are more appropriate for narrative text. Teachers can also gain knowledge about a student's cognitive process by listening to and analyzing responses to informational text. Laing and Kamhi (2002) researched inferential responses between average and lower achieving readers. Their findings concluded that while average readers produced more explanatory (higher-level thinking) inferences, the level of comprehension increased significantly in both groups of students while engaging in the think-aloud process.

Other benefits of thinking aloud have shown that students have been more successful in responding to and summarizing text when they are taught to think aloud during reading. Verbalizing their thoughts slows them down before they answer or generate responses to questions because they have read more thoughtfully and strategically (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

Thinking aloud to oneself and with peers is mutually beneficial to readers. The idea that the sum of the whole is greater than its parts supports the benefits of classroom discussion, higher order thinking, and increased reading comprehension. While each reader may have his or her own contributions, it has been shown that when students interact with others in meaningful conversation

about text, they create a deeper understanding of the text. Hulan (2010) says that students feel a sense of ownership and demonstrate a higher level of understanding through discussion of text.

Murphy, Wilkinson, Soter, Hennessey, and Alexander (2009) offer several instructional approaches toward student discussions about text. Collaborative reasoning has the potential to elicit higher-order thinking skills as the teacher poses a questions specifically designed to evoke several points of view. This type of discussion activity encourages students to draw upon their prior knowledge and support their opinions and ideas with evidence from a piece of text.

Summarizing. Another way students can keep track of their understanding is to summarize. This is often difficult for students, as they often lack the organizational tactics to successfully summarize the essential information in what they have read. Students can learn to do this with examples, practice, and feedback from the teacher. Summarizing should be taught in smaller chunks before moving to longer passages. Graphic organizers are extremely effective tools to aid in summarizing text. Teachers can help students by showing them examples and non-examples of summaries (Boardman, et al., 2008).

Self-monitoring. It is important for students to become aware of what they are thinking, how they understand what they are reading, and when meaning breaks down. Fiske (2011) found self-monitoring to be effective in improving comprehension among her students. She explained that although her students had

been introduced to a variety of reading strategies, very few of them understood how or when to use them. She taught them through explicit instruction and modeling. She reported her experiences with her 11th grade remedial readers who fell into the category of reluctant readers. They were merely pretending to read, not engaged, and were losing track of their reading without realizing it. Fiske implemented comprehension monitoring logs and helped her students find engaging texts. These steps took her students from "simply 'reading' to 'reading with understanding'" (p. 146).

Comprehension monitoring involves many aspects of metacognition. Students incorporate predicting and evaluating predictions, thinking aloud, visualizing, graphic organizers, and summarizing along the way in order to regulate their understanding and know what to do if an obstacle occurs (Block & Pressley, 2002). Students should read in small chunks and think aloud to keep track of their understanding, and work on ways to fix it up if they did not understand.

Jacobucci, Richert, Ronan and Tanis (2002) report findings that students were more actively engaged in their reading, more proficient at organizing information and took more responsibility in monitoring their understanding when they were taught with a systematic approach of instruction, modeling, coaching, and practicing to help improve comprehension.

Fix-up strategies. Often times, students do not know what to do when they do not understand what they are reading. Fix up strategies are steps proficient readers take to repair a breakdown in meaning as they read. Some strategies include slowing down, rereading or reading on for clarification, or discussing a confusing word or idea with a peer or teacher. They need to be able to understand why meaning has broken down in that situation, and then choose and apply the appropriate strategy to help support their comprehension.

Almasi (2003) explains that reluctant readers do not know how to fix their reading, and often do not even realize that their comprehension has broken down, so the direct teaching and modeling of fix-up strategies is an important component in the reading process. Using fix up strategies takes time, and struggling readers are not eager to invest the time, as they often just want to "finish." She advises teachers to create a safe, risk-free environment in which readers do not feel the pressure of a time limit in their reading. They should be given the time to use whatever strategy necessary to enhance their comprehension.

When students use fix up strategies, studies have shown comprehension has improved (Block & Pressley, 2002). According to Guthrie, et al. (2009), these strategies are effective for all learners, but especially for lower achieving readers. Teacher modeling, repetitive, guided practice, visual cues and posters give students the tools they need to comprehend.

Summary

Reading comprehension needs to be addressed when students are young. Teaching students to read strategically will give them the tools they need to comprehend a variety of genres, read critically, and progress academically in all areas. Studies show that third grade is a crucial year to identify struggling readers and intervene with explicit comprehension instruction, including metacognitive strategies, and develop higher-level thinking skills to give these children access to life-long literacy. Proficient literacy will ultimately have a positive effect on their future health, education, employment, and contributions to society.

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

I conducted an action research study in which I taught various metacognitive reading comprehension strategies using a gradual release of responsibility model. My instruction model consisted of explicit, whole-group instruction and modeling through think-aloud and examples, followed by opportunities for students to participate in guided practice with partners and small groups. I continued to provide scaffolding as necessary. Finally, students were released to apply learned strategies independently to their own reading.

Setting

This study took place in a third grade, regular education, classroom in a K-5 elementary school. The school is part of a district consisting of seven elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. It is located in a suburban community in eastern Pennsylvania. This particular building is a neighborhood school in a small town. It is very much a part of the community; the majority of students live close enough to walk to school. There are approximately 400 students attending this school. The socio-economic backgrounds of the students vary. Approximately 39% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch. The ethnic make up of the school is about 80% white. There are Asian, African-American, and Latino students in the school as well. There is a small transient population in this school.

Participants

The participants in my study were the 26 students in my third grade classroom, ages eight and nine years old. There were 16 boys and 10 girls. Their reading abilities ranged from about a fifth grade reading level to a mid-year first grade reading level. There were two gifted children in my room. They received pull-out enrichment instruction twice a week for 45 minutes each session. There were two ESL students in my classroom. They received a combination of pull-out and push-in instruction five days a week for 45 minutes. There was also a deaf/hard-of-hearing student in my classroom. This student received a combination of pull-out and push-in instruction for two 45-minute sessions per week.

Procedures

Prior to beginning my research, I submitted an application detailing my study to the Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB), which was approved (see Appendix A). The district superintendent and my building principal received an informed consent letters, and granted their permission for me to conduct my study (see Appendices B, C). The parents and guardians of my participants received an informed consent letter about the study, and granted their permission for their child to participate (see Appendix D). I also explained the study in detail to my students. I wanted them to understand what we would be doing in our reading time, and why we were doing it.

Throughout the study, students learned and practiced several metacognigitve reading comprehension strategies and skills. These strategies included predicting, visualizing, self-monitoring, following their inner-voice, questioning, connecting to text, summarizing, and reflecting to text in writing. In addition, students learned how to employ appropriate fix-up strategies when they encountered a breakdown in reading comprehension. Students read various genres and text levels, and worked in several different learning settings as they participated in the study.

Students worked with learning tools, such as graphic organizers, reading notebooks, reading response cards, and Post-It notes as part of the study.

The following is a plan of how I conducted my study.

Week 1

- I handed out parent consent forms
- I collected the signed forms

Week 2

- The students completed the pre-study reading interest survey (see Appendix E).
- I taught a "Why We Read" lesson
- I taught a Good-Fit book lesson
- The students assembled their Good-Fit book bags and chose Good-Fit books from the classroom library.

- The students practiced reading independently with purpose, building stamina (reading time) each day.
- I conducted reading interviews to gain an understanding of students' attitudes toward reading (see Appendix F).
- I taught a whole-group lesson on how to "read the pictures," using *Flotsam*, by David Wiesner.
- The students worked in pairs to "read the pictures" with various picture books, then compared their picture story to the words.

Week 3

- The students took a pre-study reading comprehension test (see Appendix G).
- I taught whole-group lesson, using *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers,* by Mordicai Gerstein, on predicting and using text evidence to support predictions with a graphic organizer (see Appendix H).
- I taught a whole-group lesson on identifying character traits and using them to make predictions. We read *Ruby the Copycat*, from the Harcourt Storytown reading series (see Appendix I).
- I taught a whole-group lesson on character analysis using *Frog and Toad* stories, by Arnold Lobel. The students worked in pairs to practice character analysis and prediction literacy activities (see Appendix J).

Week 4

- The Students read independently to analyze a character of their choice from their own reading (see Appendix J).
- I conducted reading conferences to assess student book choice, fluency, and basic comprehension.
- I taught whole-group lesson on visualizing text.
- I began to administer DRA2 reading assessment to identify students' independent reading levels. This continued for several weeks.

Week 5

- I held a class discussion on reasons readers get confused, and fix-up strategies. We created anchor charts based on these discussions.
- I introduced Thinking Stems and following "inner-voice" while reading, and posted an anchor chart with thinking stems for student reference.
- I taught whole-group lesson on using thinking stems and inner-voice while reading. I modeled with *Henry's Freedom Box,* by Ellen Levine. Students used Post-It notes to keep track of their thinking.

Weeks 6-8

- We began working in guided reading groups to practice strategies at students' instructional levels, providing direct instruction, scaffolding, and independent practice as needed. Guided reading was on-going from this point on.

- I taught a lesson on visualizing and identifying the words in the text that helped students create images in their minds. I read *When I was Young in the Mountains* by Cynthia Rylant (see Appendix K).
- I continued to conduct reading conferences.
- I taught a whole-group lesson on identifying story elements and plot. We read *Loved Best* from Harcourt Storytown to complete a story map and use it to write a summary of the story (see Appendix L).
- The students worked on story mapping in guided reading and independent reading.

Weeks 9-12

- I taught a lesson on following your inner-voice with non-fiction, using text features and prior knowledge to make predictions, connections, and generate questions. We read *Expedition Zero*, from Reading A to Z, for this lesson (see Appendix M).
- The students identified main idea and details in various non-fiction selections in guided reading. I provided scaffolding as necessary.
- The students practiced summarizing non-fiction text in guided reading using a graphic organizer (see Appendix N).
- We set up reader's notebooks and conducted a whole-group lesson on how to respond to a prompt.

- I conferenced with students on written reflections about reading, and handed out Make-A-Connection prompts for narrative and informational text, and reading response question cards (see Appendices O, P, Q).
- The students independently practiced written responses, supporting with text evidence.
- I conducted student interviews about their feelings toward writing about reading.

Week 13-14

- The students took a post study reading comprehension test (see Appendix R).
- I administered post study DRA2 assessments for students who began the year reading below grade level.
- I administered the post study surveys (see Appendix E).
- The students created a class collage as a review of different metacognitive reading strategies.
- The students wrote a post study reflection about using reading strategies.

Data Sources

I collected data from several sources throughout my study to observe reading growth and application of learned reading strategies in my students.

Observational data. I kept a continuous field log to observe my students' reading activity and progress. My field log included participant and non-participant observations in whole group, small group, and independent reading activities. I also kept a record of dialog and conversations with students. I logged my reflections on what I observed in my students, as well as my own instruction with each entry.

Reading conferences and student interviews. I conducted reading conferences with my students about their reading choices, comprehension, and strategy use several times over the course of the study. I also conducted interviews with my students at the beginning, middle, and end of my study, to gain insight into their reading attitude as well as their thoughts on writing about reading.

Surveys. I administered pre-study and post study reading surveys to gain an understanding of my students' feelings toward reading, their personal perceptions of themselves as readers, and their reading preferences.

Student Work. I collected student work, such as graphic organizers, reader's notebooks, and other literacy activities, as an on-going process throughout my study. I collected samples from whole group, partner, and

individual reading activities. These helped drive my instruction as I analyzed student progress.

Assessment. I administered a pre-study and post study reading comprehension test. I also administered the DRA2, and various reading comprehension tests and quizzes throughout my study. Formative and summative assessments were an on-going part of my study.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to instruct my students in metacognitive reading comprehension strategies. I used a gradual release-of-responsibility model as the framework of my instruction. Students were explicitly taught reading strategies in various learning settings, including whole-group, partner work, small group, and independent work. I provided scaffolding and guided practice as needed until the students were able to apply the strategy independently. In addition, students became more aware of their own thinking and understanding during reading, as well as how to use appropriate fix-up strategies to help with understanding when they encountered confusion as they read.

Trustworthiness Statement

I followed ethical research guidelines throughout my study to ensure that it was valid and credible. Before the study began, I submitted my research proposal to Moravian College's Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB), and obtained approval to conduct my research. (Appendix A). I also sought permission from my district's superintendent, my building principal, and the parents of all participants. (Appendices B, C, D). All participants were informed that there would be no consequence if they decided not to participate, or to withdraw from the study. My letter of consent clearly informed parents that regardless of formal participation in the study, all students would receive the same instruction and participate in the same activities, so no student would be denied the experience of what I believed to be best teaching practices. Lastly, I ensured the parents that their children would remain anonymous throughout the study, their identities would be protected by pseudonyms, and data will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

It was important to me that my students be well aware of the study in which they were participating. I explained in detail why I was conducting the study, what I would be doing, how I would be talking to them about their feelings on reading, observing them while they work, and collecting samples

of their work. I also told them how my hope was that teaching and learning this way would help them become better readers, and they would also find more enjoyment in reading. I wanted them to feel comfortable and be excited to participate in the study. All but one family agreed to participate in the study.

Prior to beginning my study, I conducted an extensive review of literature based on my research topic prior to beginning the study. I was able to infuse what I learned from relevant research on my topic into the design and implementation of my study. Reporting qualitative data involves the process of responsibly representing the relationship between facts, truth, reporting, and opinion (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997, p. 36).

To ensure trustworthiness, or credibility, throughout my study, I triangulated my data. I maintained a comprehensive field log in which I recorded observations of what I saw and heard in my classroom. Data included various types of entries, including participant and non-participant observations, student interviews, and work samples. My data were kept separate from my personal opinions, and was recorded accurately and promptly following instruction. I used member checks throughout this process to ensure that my observations were accurate. This aided me in keeping my observations credible, and reduced my own interpretations as I

documented my students' comments (Hendricks, 2009). I gathered and analyzed data from my observations, student surveys, interviews, student work samples, and assessments. I was careful to be aware of my own biases regarding the study, and not allow them to affect my judgment or expectations on the outcome of my study. Some of my biases included my expectation that certain parts of my study would be easier to teach and more engaging for the students than others. I also held a bias regarding my concern that the higher-level readers would be bored with my instruction, and therefore would not benefit from my study. To help offset any bias in my reporting, my observations included negative case analysis, as I reported both positive results, as well as experiences that did not work as I had hoped (Hendricks, 2009).

Hendricks (2009) advises researchers to take certain steps to ensure validity and credibility throughout research. Dialogic validity is a means of ensuring validity through discussion with colleagues, and using that feedback to plan and adapt as needed (Hendricks, 2009). Outcome validity is the process of using feedback and results for planning, reflection, and deepening understanding (Hendricks, 2009). Both dialogic and outcome validity were present in my study, because I regularly participated in peer debriefing opportunities with my fellow Moravian College colleagues through support

groups. We shared observations, data, and interpretations, and discussed potential biases. Through these discussions, I obtained different points of view from my colleagues as we discussed the progress of the study. I also continually reflected on my findings throughout my study. Reflecting on my own practice, combined with my peer discussion groups, enabled me to modify and adapt my research to best meet the needs of my students.

My field log was maintained and served as an audit trail throughout my study. It was available for my peer researchers to access and review my study at any time.

All findings remained secure throughout the duration of the study. All data was kept in a secure location in my classroom, and, outside of my peer support groups, only I had access to it.

My Story

The First Days

I love the beginning of school. I spend hours setting up my room, reflecting on what worked last year, and what I want to change for this year. I love the smell of the clean building just waiting for the students to walk through the doors. I was especially excited to teach reading this year. The time had finally come for me to conduct my study, and I knew that I was going to be making some big changes in my reading instruction as I carried it out. I could not wait to get started.

The beginning of school is a time consuming process, and I quickly realized that I was not going to start my study the first days, or even weeks, of school. My new students and I had to invest these first couple of weeks getting to know each other and establishing expectations and routines to build a solid foundation for the school year ahead.

When I explained my study to the students, they were very excited to be part of it. To avoid influencing the students' responses to the pre-study survey, I gave the survey to my students before I began any reading instruction related to my study (see Appendix E). Jenny asked, "Is this for your College?" When I replied that it was indeed for my study, the students were eager to take the survey. I read the survey out loud and explained each part before they began to complete it.

Table 1

Pre-Study Reading Survey Results

Survey Question	Response	Results
Reading is something I like to do.	Yes	17
	No	7
	Sometimes	0
I think I am a good reader	Yes	19
	No	5
I enjoy listening to my teacher read books in class.	Yes	21
	No	3
I enjoy having time to read by myself at school.	Yes	22
	No	2
I understand what I read.	Most of	18
	Some of	5
	Little of	1
When we talk about stories in class, I participate.	Always	4
	Sometimes	15
	Hardly Ever	5
I like to talk about books with my teacher and friends.	Always	4
	Sometimes	13
	Hardly Ever	7
I like to write about what I am reading.	Always	4
	Sometimes	10
	Hardly Ever	10
I prefer to read…	by myself.	20
	with a partner.	4
	in a group.	0

The results of the pre-study student reading survey helped me to better understand my students as readers, and their perceptions of themselves as readers. Many of them stated they enjoyed reading, and understood most of what they

read. Their levels of participation in discussions did not surprise me, and I was pleased to see they were willing to participate at least some of the time.

However, when asked what they did if they were confused while reading, many students seemed to equate being confused to decoding difficulty, not to comprehension.

Table 2

Pre-Study Survey: What Do You Do When You Are Confused When Reading?

What I do when I am confused	Results
I ask for help	**10**
I sound out the word	**8**
I re-read the page	**1**
I skip it (the word)	**8**
I guess (at the word)	**1**

Note. Some students offered multiple strategies.

Finally, the students' personal perceptions of themselves as readers were generally favorable. They gave several reasons why they felt they were or were not good readers.

Table 3

Pre-Study Survey: Personal Perception as a Reader

Explanations for I Am a Good Reader	Results
I read a lot	**7**
I read chapter books	**5**
I know (can say) the words	**4**
I understand what I read	**5**
Explanations for I Am Not a Good Reader	**Results**
I do not read a lot	**2**
I do not know the words	**2**
Everyone finishes before me	**1**

Getting Ready to Read

With the survey completed, I taught the first lesson for my study. It was a mini-lesson on why we read, and how to choose the right kind of book. My students seemed to understand the connection between practicing something and getting better at it. Further discussion led the class to understand that reading often would help them become better readers (see Figure 1).

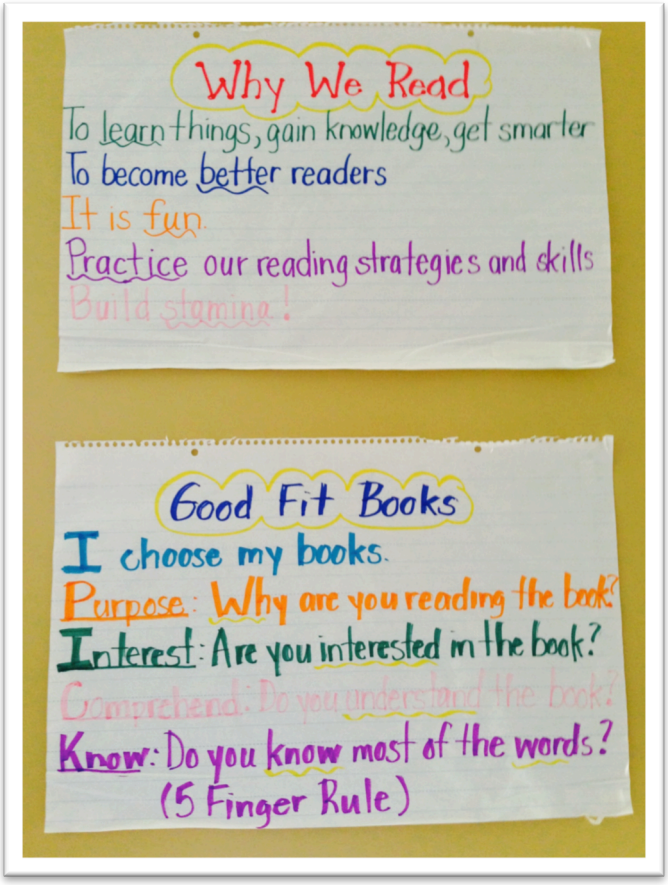


Figure 1. Why We Read and Good-Fit Books Anchor Charts

Good-Fit Books

Choosing the right kinds of books is an important part of reading. I taught my students about Good-Fit books, commonly referred to as "Just Right" books. These are student-chosen texts that are an appropriate level of readability for that individual child. The term Good-Fit comes from Daily 5 Reading Framework, a management strategy that revolves around whole group mini-lessons, literacy-based centers, and small group reading instruction.

I taught a lesson comparing the purpose and fit of different shoes to the purpose and fit of different books, so my students understood how to choose a book that was a Good-Fit for them. I gave some humorous examples: I would not wear snow boots to the beach, nor would I wear my husband's golf shoes to work. Both those examples elicited some giggles, and the students understood, that like the shoes, some books just do not fit in size or purpose. We learned and recited the "I-PICK" poem to reinforce the importance of choosing Good-Fit books (see Figure 2).

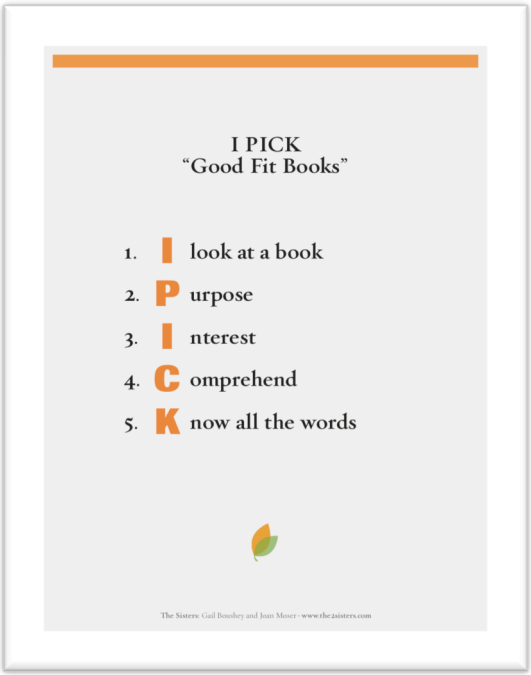


Figure 2. I PICK "Good-Fit Books" Poem

I modeled how I would examine three different books. One was a toddler book, which was much too easy and did not hold my interest. We agreed this was not a Good-Fit book. The next was a medical book about the musculoskeletal system. I modeled the five-finger rule, as I read a page. The five-finger rule is a guide to help students determine if a book is too difficult. If there are five or more difficult words on a page, then the book is too challenging. I dramatically stumbled over some of the words, and pointed out that although I could read most of the words, I struggled with at least five of them. Also, I commented about how I did not understand what I had just read, and I had no interest in the topic at all. This was not a Good-Fit book for me, either. I was able to read the third book, *Lunch Money*, by Andrew Clements, fluently. I understood it, and I was interested in it. We agreed that this was a Good-Fit book for me.

Finally, it was time for the students to choose books for themselves. Each student had a large zip bag and was asked to choose two-to-four books from our classroom library. They rotated into the library in small groups to avoid congestion, while the other students worked independently at their seats and waited for their turn. This process took quite a long time, but it was engaging and held their interest. The students benefited from purposeful instruction of how to select a Good-Fit book. It seemed like a long morning for this one concept, but it was well worth it. My students came away from that experience with appropriate

books, they were open to suggestions, and some even wanted to bring a few books from home to add to their bags.

Building Reading Stamina

The students were ready to spend time reading their books. We reviewed the importance and purpose of reading, and how they would get better at reading with practice. I wanted my students to understand that independent reading time was going to require effort and stamina (see Figure 3). I explained that independent reading time was a time to focus on reading their chosen books with the purpose of understanding and concentrating on their reading. I asked them to read this way for just three minutes. It did not seem like a long time, but when they were finished, we talked about how different focused reading was, from reading without any specific direction or purpose. Some of the students said they noticed they concentrated more because they had a reason to read.

To build our reading stamina, we added a few minutes to each session. Soon, the students were begging me for independent reading time each day, and they were using that time appropriately. I was genuinely pleased with my students' eagerness to read with the purpose of becoming better at reading.

*Figure **3***. Stamina poster

During independent reading time, I interviewed a few of my students to learn their opinions about reading. I chose six students: two above-level readers, two on-level readers, and two developing readers to talk to.

Table 4

Student Interview Responses

Student	How do you feel about reading?	What do you like about reading?	What do you not like about reading?
Hannah	**It's fun.**	**I like to read books that are interesting.**	**If the book is hard**
John	**I love reading.**	**You can learn new things.**	**When the book is not interesting**
Mark	**I like it when the book is interesting.**	**It's fun and I like to read new books.**	**When the book is boring**
Max	**It's ok.**	**I do it when I am bored.**	**When I don't want to read, and someone makes me**
Alex	**I don't really like it**	**When I like the book.**	**When I can't read the words**
David	**Not good.**	**When I can read the words.**	**It's boring.**

It was apparent that high-interest texts were key to my students' independent reading engagement. I also noted that decoding would be a concern for a few of my students, and something I would need to address in small groups to help them progress as readers.

Tommy: I am new here. I do not know anyone, and I am not very interested in schoolwork. My teacher asked us to fill out some papers about reading. I did not know what to say, I guess I am a good reader, and I know I am supposed to say I like reading, so that is what I wrote. I would rather look out the window or play with the things in my desk.

Mrs. Brion: Tommy is a new student in our school this year. When I met him, he seemed confident and comfortable in his new school. He was polite and attentive the first few days. However, as we started moving past some of the introductory activities, Tommy seemed to be uninterested in what we were doing. He struck me as capable of doing the work, but he was not putting forth effort. I began to watch him more closely.

Figure 4. Tommy's Journey – Part 1: A Reluctant Reader

The Framework of my Study: Gradual Release of Responsibility

I planned to teach my students several reading strategies as part of my study. The method with which I would approach my instruction for each strategy was to use a gradual release of responsibility model. I began with explicit teaching for each strategy in a whole-group setting by explaining the purpose of it, and how it would benefit the students as readers. I regularly used think-aloud to model my own thinking about reading, and invited students to participate in the lessons.

When the students were ready to practice each new strategy, they worked in pairs or small groups as I guided them in their work. Often times, this guided practice included the use of graphic organizers and leveled texts. At the start of the study, the students were paired randomly. However, as I became more aware of their individual abilities, I paired them more intentionally. Sometimes, students read with a partner or group of readers with similar ability, and sometimes I paired a higher and lower level reader together for peer modeling.

The final part of each strategy was independent application. This happened at different times for different students. I was able to conduct formative assessments as students applied learned strategies to their independent reading through written responses, graphic organizers, and comprehension activities.

I learned that this model of explicitly instructing and gradually giving students the opportunity to practice and apply learned strategies is effective. One

of the most profound realizations I experienced in teaching this way was seeing the difference it made when I took the time to explicitly tell my students exactly what they were learning, why it was important, and how would help them become better readers. This extra step in my explanation gave them a sense of purpose and something to connect to as they worked.

John is bright, articulate, has loads of background knowledge, and is truly gifted. During the first few weeks of school, John was never disrespectful or disruptive. He was a joy to listen to, as he shared countless tales of his family's traveling adventures, or bits of knowledge about a topic. He could make a personal connection to almost anything we were discussing in class. He could answer any question I asked. However, he rarely volunteered, unless his response provided him an opportunity to share his own experiences or connections. Getting him to lift his head out of his book was becoming a concern. John was "sneak reading" throughout the day, seemingly much more interested in the book he was reading than what we were doing in class. Of course, I loved that he had such a love of reading, but he was disconnected with what we were doing, and I had to find a way to fix that.

Figure 5. Connecting John – Part 1: An Unplugged Student

Picture This!

I taught a lesson about using the pictures in a book to help with comprehension. We read the book, *Flotsam,* by David Wiesner, to model how to use the pictures to enhance or create meaning in text. I began the lesson by modeling with my own observations and questions about what was happening in

the pictures. It did not take long for the students to engage in a discussion about the pictures, and soon they were creating the story of *Flotsam,* a book without words, by looking closely at the pictures, making predictions, asking questions, and using prior knowledge to make connections. They shared their own ideas of what was happening in the story, and why it was happening. I used their examples to teach them how important their prior knowledge is to helping with reading comprehension. They were so excited to share their ideas, to tell what they knew, and to hear their ideas validated by their peers. Their enthusiasm was contagious! They learned several things that day: the power of prior knowledge, making connections, predicting, and using pictures to tell a story.

I chose several pictures books from the library to use for the guided practice part of the lesson. Students paired up and "read" their stories without reading the words. I challenged them to work together to tell their own version of the story by only reading the pictures.

The students were working very nicely on this activity. They were on task and engaged. I heard David comment, "I can see that," when Carter suggested what might be happening in their book. The students then read the words and compared the author's version with their own. They shared some of their observations on how close or different their stories were. Many of the students commented that they enjoyed the activity, and using the pictures as a way to read

the book. There are many clues in the pictures, and my purpose in this lesson was to show my students the value in using those clues when they are available.

Making Predictions and Character Analysis

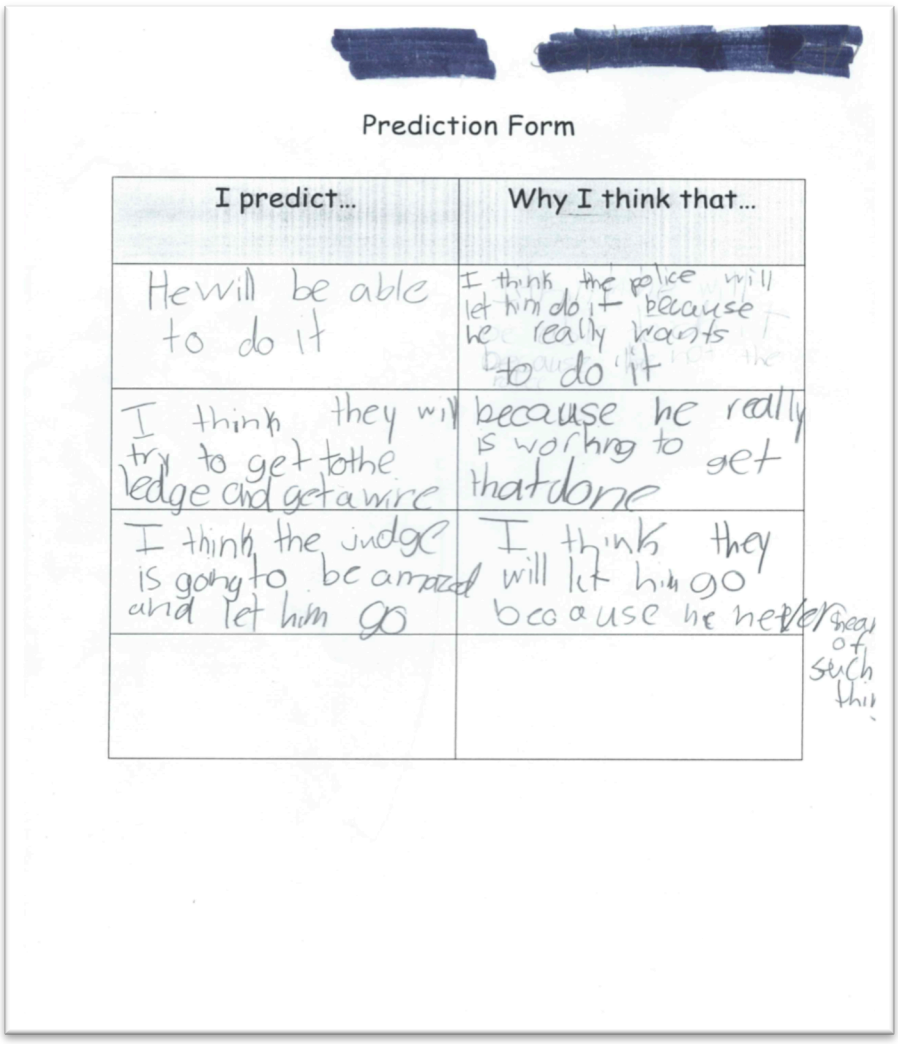
Making predictions before and during reading helps students think about what has happened and what might happen next in a book. I taught the students that their predictions needed to be based on evidence. The evidence could come from the pictures, an event in the book, or a character trait. Another important aspect of predicting is to ensure that the reader reflects on those predictions and compares them to the outcome in the text.

To explicitly teach this to the whole class, I read *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers,* by Mordicai Gerstein. I opened the lesson, asking students when to predict in a story. When I got no response, I told them that we predict before, during, and after we read.

Courtney suggested that we could look at the cover of the book to guess what it would be about. I used her idea to show the students how to record their predictions on a Prediction Form (see Figure 6). This form gave the students a way to document their predictions and explain their reasons and what text evidence they used to form their predictions.

> **Max**: A circus because it has a guy walking with the pole like in a circus.
>
> **Michael**: It is about a lady on a tight rope.

I stopped reading the book at three designated places to give the students an opportunity to predict what might happen next. The students used a prediction chart to record their predictions at each place. They were not permitted to give an answer without a reason why they thought that it would happen. We discussed their predictions and compared them to the outcomes of events as we read the story. Students offered differing predictions, and each student was able to justify his or her prediction with evidence from the text. Tommy's justification seemed to show a lack of interest or effort. His answer was *"because it's cool,"* and was not willing to elaborate any further on his answer. When I looked at his paper, it was not complete.



Prediction Form

I predict...	Why I think that...
He will be able to do it	I think the police will let him do it because he really wants to do it
I think they will try to get to the ledge and get a wire	because he really is working to get that done
I think the judge is going to be amazed and let him go	I think they will let him go because he never [illegible] of such thi

Figure 6. Hannah's Prediction Form

In our after-reading discussion, we compared our initial predictions to the outcome of the book. Students recognized that using the cover helped them make a logical and partially correct prediction. While the book was not about a circus, it was about a tight rope. I emphasized that making correct predictions was not the goal of the strategy. The purpose of predicting as we read is to help us stay focused and keep us thinking about our reading as we progress through the book.

Using Character Traits and Text Evidence to Predict

Mrs. Brion: *What are character traits?*

Owen: *Traits describe something, so a character trait must describe a character in a book.*

Figure 7. Conversation on character traits

Students can use character traits to make predictions in a story. To begin this next phase of predicting, we made a list of character traits. The students started with some simple traits, such as kind and nice. It only took one person to share a higher-level word, and soon their character trait list went from plain to supreme! My third graders were describing characters with words, such as pleasant, generous, loyal, confident, and fearful (see Figure 8).

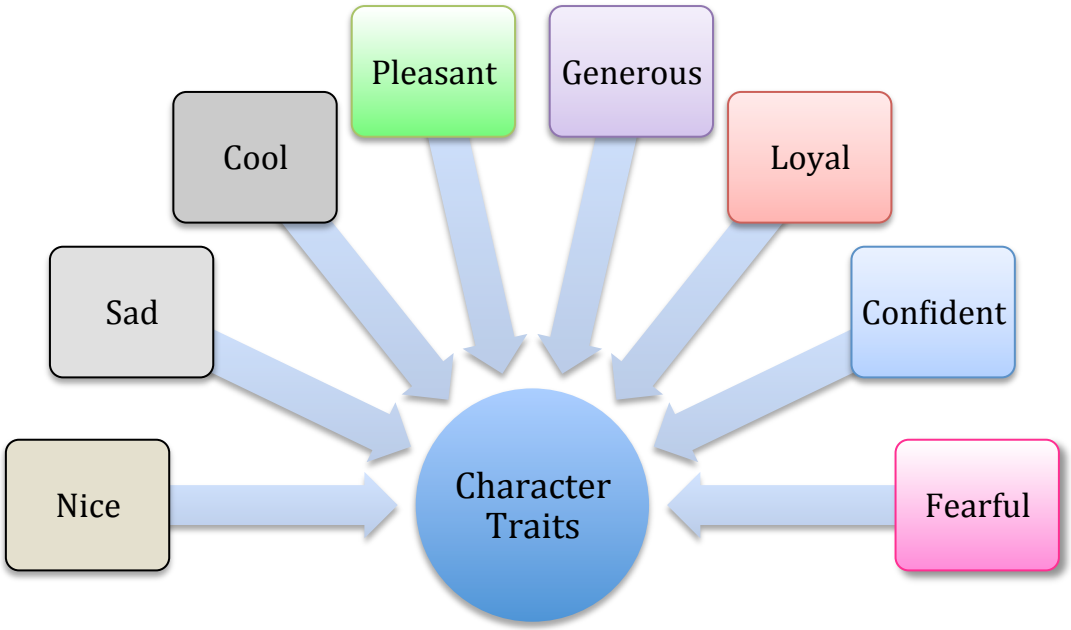


Figure 8. List of Character Traits

Although this list was creative, I wanted to be sure the students could explain why characters were described in certain ways, and they were not just giving me a bunch of fancy words (see Figure 9).

***Mrs. Brion**: How do you choose a word to use to describe a character?*

John: Read the book.

***Mrs. Brion**: Yes. Can you tell us what to look for in the book?*

John: You can think about how the character is by what the character says, the things he does, and how he feels.

***Mrs. Brion**: John just did a great job explaining to us how to use evidence from a book to support why characters can be described in certain ways.*

Figure 9. John's response to identifying character traits.

I taught the students how to support their character traits with evidence from the story. I modeled this with a story in our reading book, called "Ruby the Copycat." As I read it aloud, I stopped occasionally to think aloud about what was happening in the story, and modeled how to use clues from the text to help describe the character and make a prediction about what would happen next based on what the characters were doing, thinking, and saying. I used one of the characters from the story to complete a graphic organizer, which was projected on the SMART Board (see Figure 10).

As the students transitioned from whole group to guided practice on this strategy, they worked in pairs to re-read the story and complete a graphic

organizer using a different character from the story, and support their description with text evidence. Students were paired randomly for this activity.

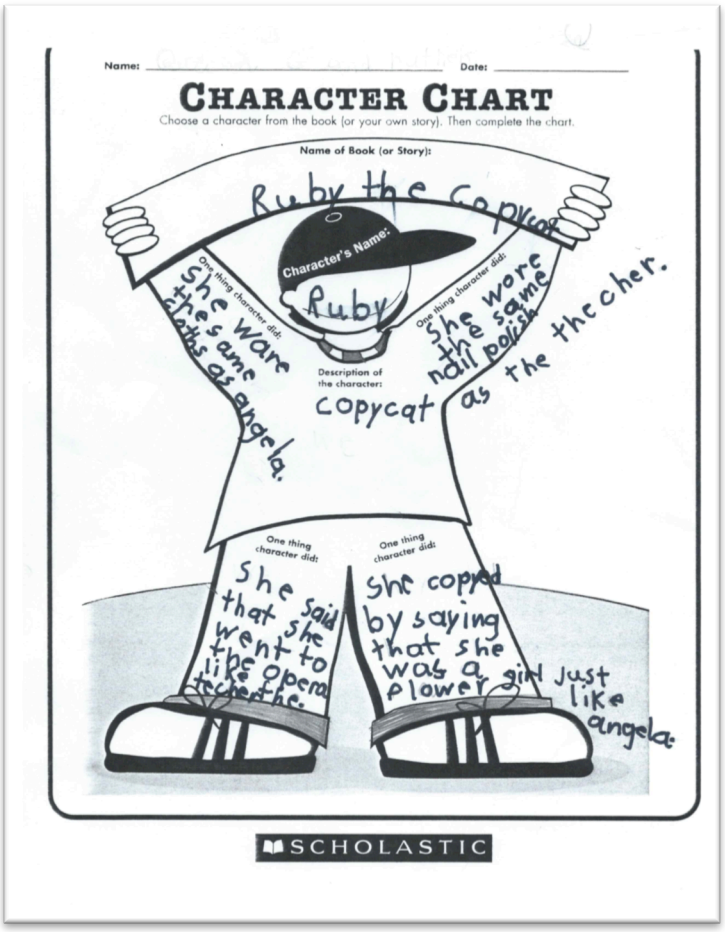


Figure 10. Courtney's Character Chart

As I walked among the groups, I noticed that several pairs of students were working next to each other, but independently. They were not discussing the story or the assignment. Rather than try to re-direct each group, I stopped the class to re-explain that they were to be working together and discussing their ideas on

this activity. Based on this observation, I made a mental note to do some modeling for cooperative work.

To continue working on using character traits to help predict, I read, "A Lost Button," a short story from *Frog and Toad Treasury,* by Arnold Lobel. While we were reading the story, we filled out a Character Consideration chart to document the character, Frog. I used think-aloud to model how to identify Frog's character traits. For the guided practice portion of this lesson, the students turned and talked to each other and analyzed the character, Toad. We used the character's traits to predict and compare how he reacted to the problem and the outcome of the story.

I rearranged this organizer slightly, to an order which I felt was less confusing. The students did a fantastic job with this activity. Some of the students had difficulty supporting their predictions and traits with evidence from the text, however, I think this is because the book was read aloud and they did not have it to refer to (see Figure 11).

The students worked in pairs, reading a leveled reader, *Trust Rey,* from our reading series, to continue guided practice using story events to analyze character traits and make predictions. They read the book and completed the graphic organizer. As I spent time with each group, I noticed that the students were still splitting up the work, and were working independently, rather than holding a discussion on each section. Madison and Ben were working together,

but Madison was doing all of the work. While she was sharing her ideas with Ben, he was not reciprocating or contributing. I explained that they both needed to be sharing ideas, not just one person. Owen and David were doing something similar. However, Owen was simply writing his thoughts, not discussing them. David was not contributing at all. At the conclusion of the activity, even though I realized that I needed to intervene on the process of cooperative work, the student responses to the lesson showed me that understood how to use evidence and character traits to predict in a story.

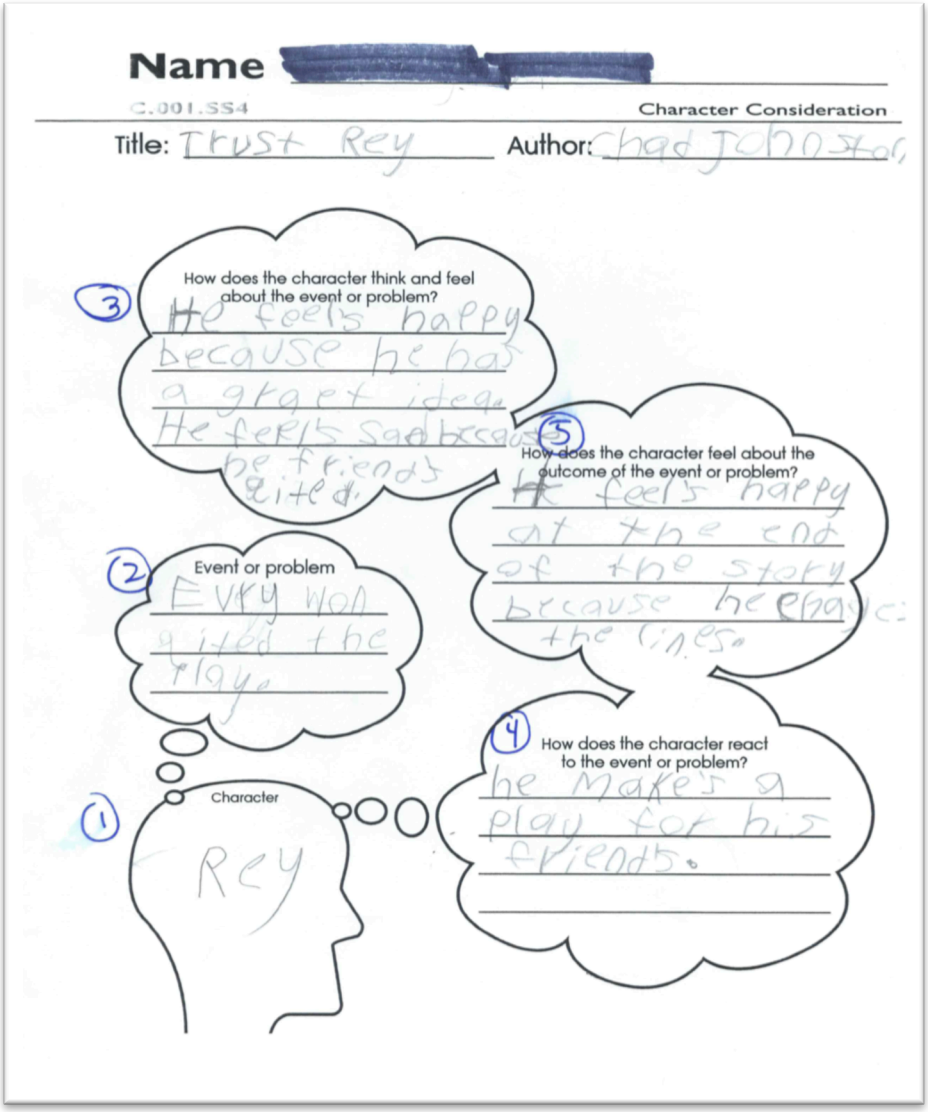


Figure 11. Owen's Character Consideration Chart

Learning How To Work Together

Partner work continued to be a struggle for my students. While I was asking my students to work in partner groups as a way of implementing guided practice and eliciting discussion among peers, they did not seem to understand how to work collaboratively. Many students were working in parallel, both on the

same activity, but independently. The level of discussion and opportunity to practice newly learned strategies was not going the way I had hoped. In an attempt to redirect my students in this type of work, I conducted a mini-lesson in which I explicitly modeled how to work together and discuss opinions and responses to a given activity. I read another short story, "A Swim," from the *Frog and Toad Treasury,* and posed a question about how the characters reacted to the problem. Robert was my volunteer partner, and we acted out how to work together (see Figure 12).

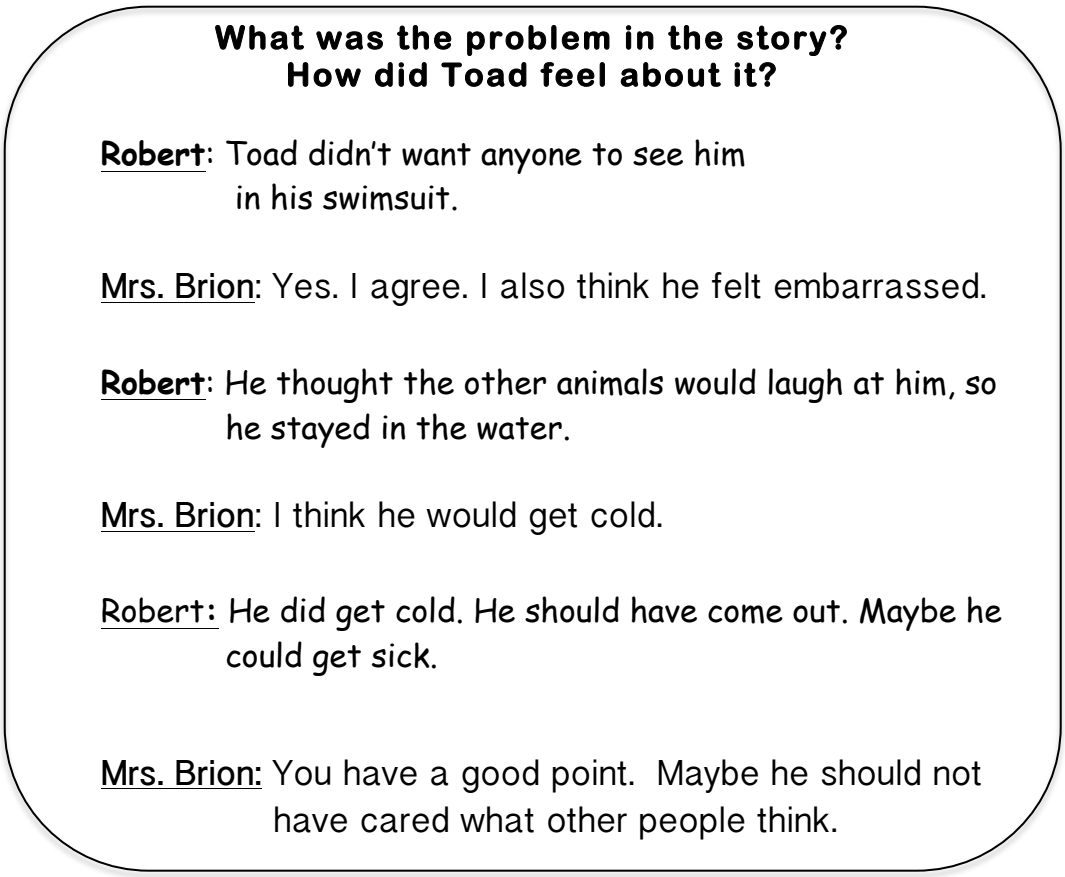


Figure 12. Modeling how to discuss a text

As we were talking, I made a point to stop and explain to the class that as Robert and I took turns offering our own ideas and opinions to the question, we were also listening to each other and were able to help each other better understand what we read. We also proved that we understood what we were reading because we could talk about it. This was a great example of using more than one reading strategy at one time. I charged the class to try their best to listen and respond to each other during our next partner activity.

This time I read *Thank You, Mr. Falker*, by Patricia Polacco. The students were paired and asked to choose a character from the story identify a character and support it with evidence. I did not give the students a graphic organizer to do with this story. I wanted them to focus on listening and responding to each other without the distraction of writing. As I moved around the room to observe, I noticed that the conversations were much richer, and students cited more text-based evidence. In addition, students were equally contributing to the conversations (see Figure 13). Taking away the writing also seemed to help with equal participation and collaborative discussion.

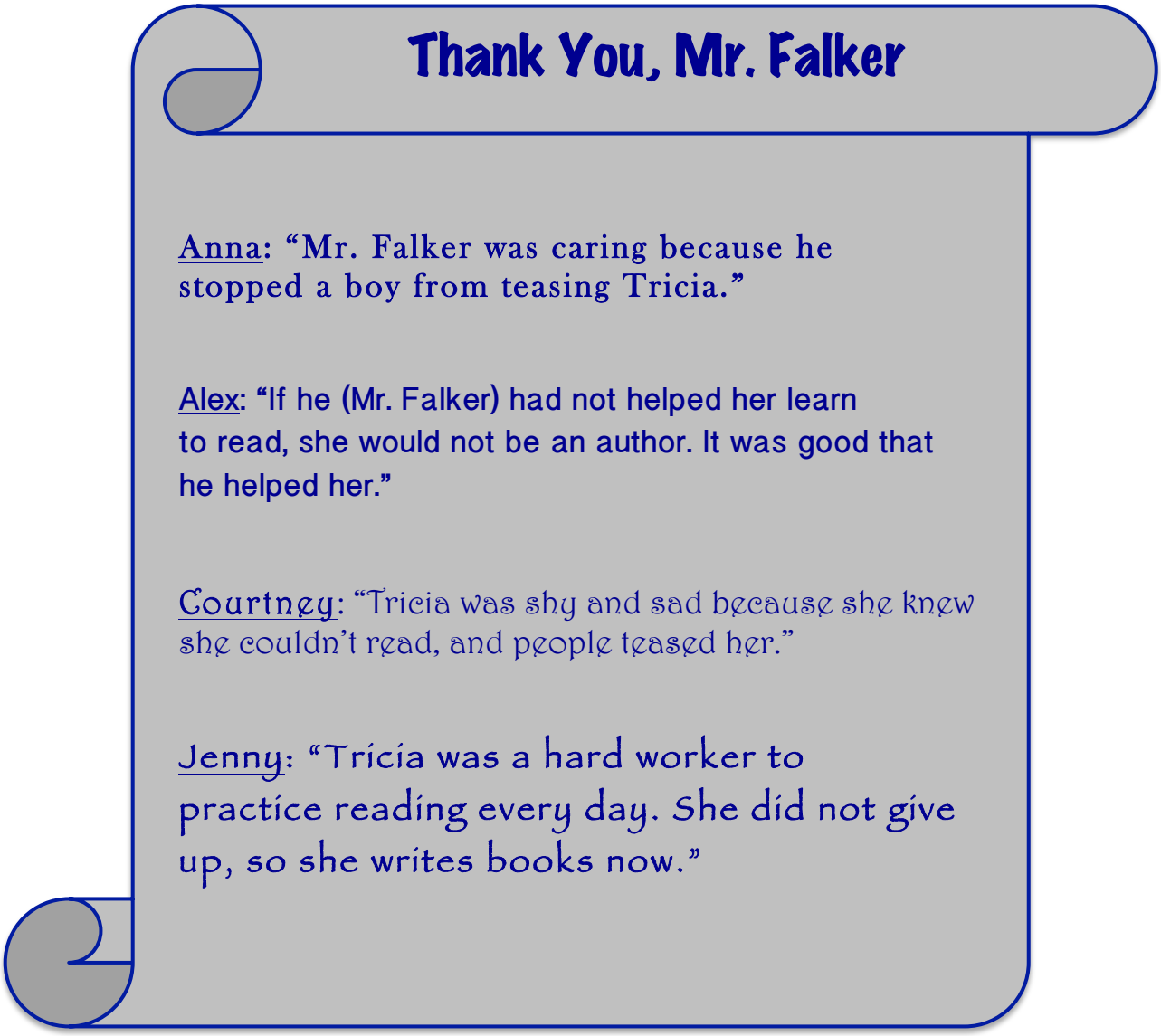


Figure 13. Thank You, Mr. Falker character analysis

After working on collaborative conversation about text, the next step was to work together with the added layer of completing a written task as well. Students with similar reading levels were paired and worked together to complete a Character Analysis with Evidence graphic organizer. The students were familiar with the graphic organizer, and knew how to fill it out (see Figure 14).

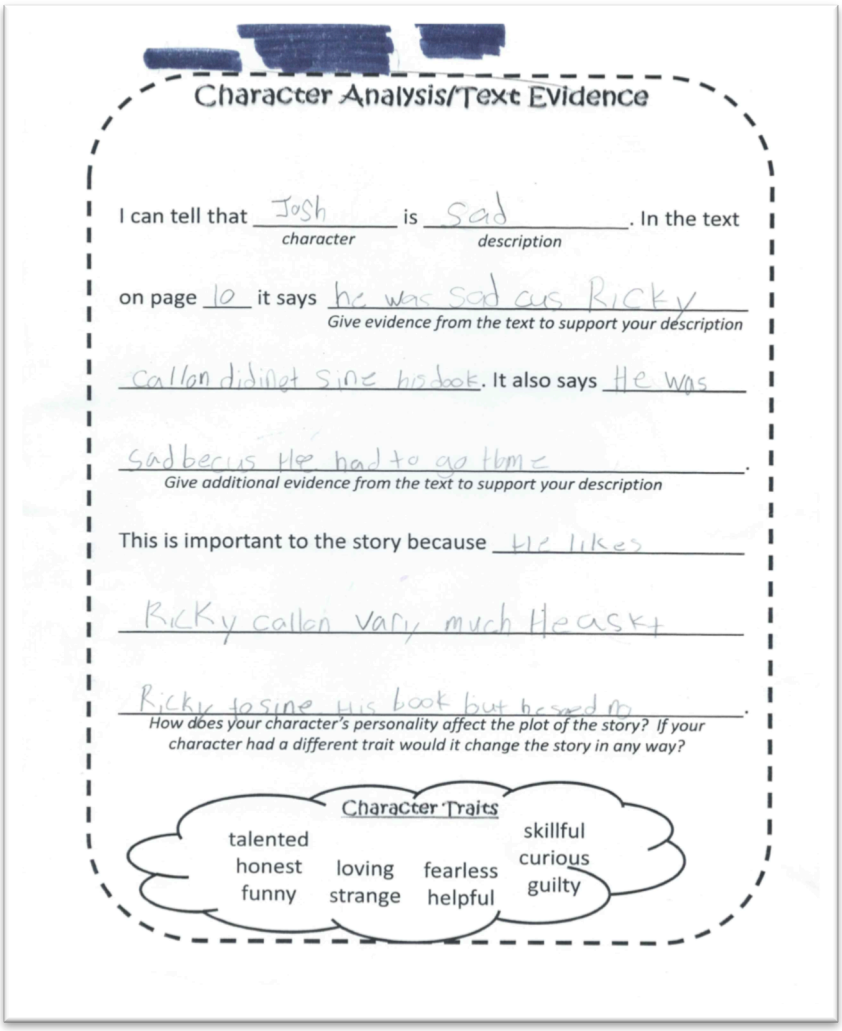


Figure 14. Jenny's Character Analysis Organizer

Tommy: So now I have to work with a partner, again, to fill out another paper on what I read about. Sometimes partners are ok, when we can talk. Today, my partner is not much help. I can tell she does not want to work with me. So, we read 'blah, blah, blah,' and I flipped the pages. I really do not care about this. Uh-oh, here comes Mrs. Brion. She heard me saying 'blah, blah, blah'.

Mrs. Brion: Did I just hear that right? Is he really saying, 'blah, blah, blah'? As I approached Tommy and his partner, Lisa, she gave me a look of disdain, and complained that Tommy was not working. Right away, the argument began, "I am working, she's not. I don't get it." Perhaps this was not the best match for partner work, neither one of them is very motivated. They had nothing on their paper, which made sense, because they clearly had not read the book. They were not happy with me when I asked them to start again. What a waste of time! Lazy!

Figure 15. Tommy's Journey - Part Two: "Blah, Blah, Blah!"

The students were ready to apply what they learned with independent practice. I was excited for them to apply the character analysis to their own reading choices with their Good-Fit books (see Figure 16).

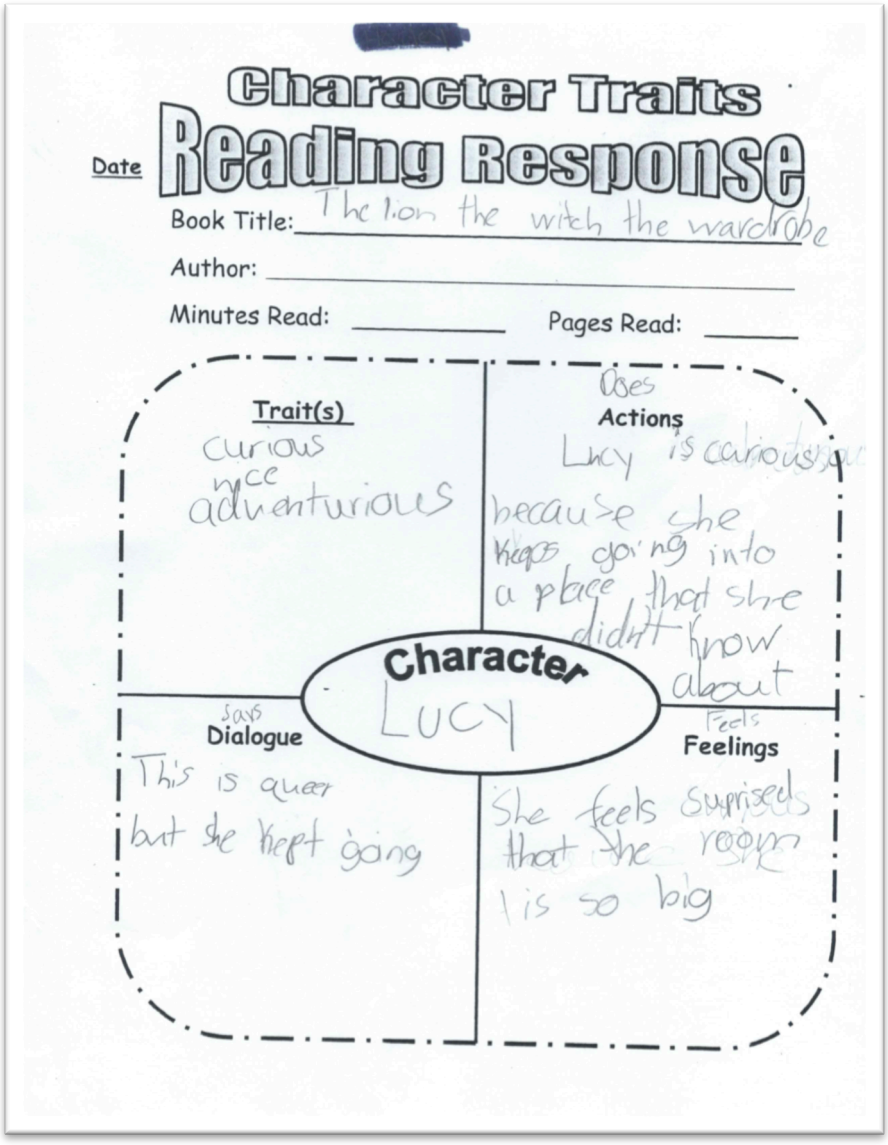


Figure 16. Hannah's Character Traits Reading Response

Table 5

Observations of Student Independent Work

Student	Observational Notes
Lisa	Lisa had absolutely no idea what to do. She is frustrating to me because she does not listen to directions or pay attention. She seems like if she would put even a little bit of effort into her work, she would be so much more successful.
Hannah	Hannah was working hard, and needed just a bit of scaffolding to complete the graphic organizer. Her book might have been a bit challenging for independent work, but she did not give up.
Noah	Noah commented that the book I helped him choose was "a perfect Good-Fit book for me" and was able to complete the activity independently and correctly.
David	David insisted he could not do it. He was taking so long to write anything about his book, I wondered if he had even read it. As I looked more closely at David's choice and tried to help him with his work, I realized that although David is verbal and articulate, his comprehension and perseverance were not as strong as he led me to believe.

These observations were insightful, and I used them to help me form Guided Reading groups. I had a few students, like David and Lisa, who appeared to have more ability, but less work ethic. Still others, such as Alex and Anna, were more meek and shy about their reading, but they put forth so much effort that they were more successful than I would have anticipated.

I also used observations from independent reading conferences as formative assessment, and as a way to help form Guided Reading groups. I asked the students about how and why they chose their books, and I listened to them read aloud for a fluency check.

Table 6

Reading Conference Notes

Tommy	
Title	*I Survived the Japanese Tsunami of 2011*
Good-Fit Book	A little challenging
Fluency	Choppy
Comprehension/Higher-level thinking	Basic recall. Higher level thinking not evident. However, he seemed to enjoy the book.
Notes	This would be a good instructional level book for Tommy. He is reading too fast. If he would slow down, he would grasp more of it.
Ben	
Title	*Henry and Mudge and the Tall Tree House*
Good-Fit Book	Yes, perhaps too easy
Fluency	Very good
Comprehension/Higher-level thinking	Yes – great retell of events.
Notes	We discussed finding something more challenging. He had a more appropriate book in his desk, but he wanted to read Henry and Mudge today.
Hannah	
Title	*The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*
Good-Fit Book	Yes, but she working hard and taking her time to comprehend.
Fluency	Excellent
Comprehension/Higher-level thinking	Good retell, stumbled over some parts
Notes	She is really working with this. She's putting a lot of effort into her work. It is slow, but she is getting it.

John continued to concern me. The book he chose for the independent reading character analysis was very simple, and his responses reflected little effort. I re-directed him, and asked him to improve his work, but the second attempt was not much different than the first. My suspicion was that he rushed through the work so that he could read his own book. John fell into the category of an "underground reader." These readers are commonly known as gifted readers who see the reading they do in school as completely disconnected from the reading they prefer to do on their own (Miller, 2009). Furthermore, he was missing instruction. I knew I was going to have to find a way to get him to realize that what we were doing was important. The quality of work he was producing was not acceptable, and did not reflect proficiency.

Figure 17. Connecting John - Part Two: Still Unplugged

Let's Make A Movie

When students took the time to visualize what they were reading, they had another channel through which they were able to comprehend what they were reading. The students shared their thoughts on visualization:

Hannah: Picturing it in your head.

Mark: When you're in it, you feel that you're in it.

I explained that visualizing is a way to use the author's words to make a picture or a movie in your mind, to help you understand what you are reading. I modeled how to use visualization when I read the poem, *Spaghetti Challenge*, by Leslie Perkins. I asked the students to close their eyes, listen to the words, and try to make a picture in their minds as I read. After hearing the poem, some students shared their images.

Scott: I saw a kid sitting at a table waiting for dinner and a mom cooking.

John: I imagined spaghetti falling off a fork.

I modeled Scott's idea of the child sitting at a dinner table with a quick sketch on the white board, and Scott and I identified the words in the poem that helped form the image in his mind.

To practice visualizing, the students read the poem again, sketched what they imagined to be happening, and underlined the words in each verse that helped them visualize (see Appendix S).

In retrospect, perhaps introducing this strategy with poetry was not the best decision. Although the poem lent itself well to this activity, several students seemed to struggle with understanding it. As I looked over the different work samples, I noticed that some of the students really did not understand the poem, so the images they drew were not accurate to the events in the poem. When we worked on this as a whole group with my guidance, the class seemed to respond

well. They liked the idea of sketching the images in their minds. However, when they practiced in pairs, it was not quite as successful as I had hoped. Several of the students clearly did not understand that the child in the poem never got to eat the spaghetti (it kept falling off of his fork), so their sketches were not accurate. Tommy's sketch was a stick figure and a few scribbles. He did not identify any words in the poem, so I was unable to tell if he understood. Matthew and John both showed evidence of comprehension, and captured the child's frustration with the spaghetti falling off the fork and not getting to eat it.

It was clear that the students needed more instruction with this text. I read it again, and stopped verse by verse to discuss meaning and sketch what I imagined in my mind. The students understood the poem the second time around with my direct instruction and modeling. I realized that if the students were not visualizing accurately, it was not an effective strategy. I needed to teach them other strategies to use in conjunction with it.

Fixing Up Your Thinking

I wanted my students to see a connection with the different strategies I was teaching them, and their own comprehension. Before I started teaching this, I wanted to see how much my students already knew about comprehension and how to help themselves (see Figures 18-19).

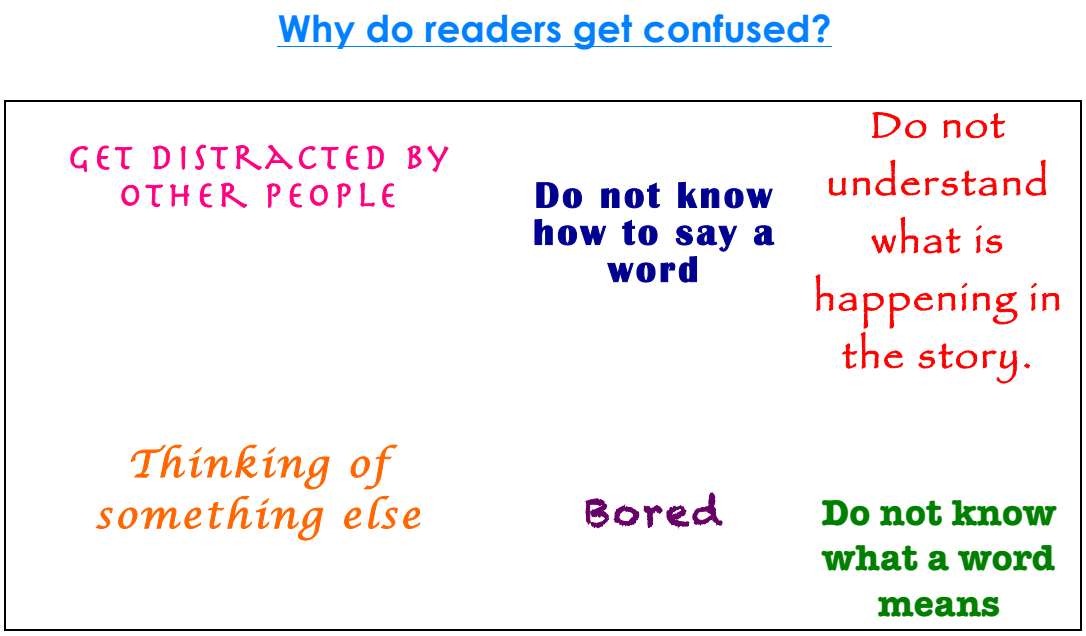


Figure 18. Why readers get confused

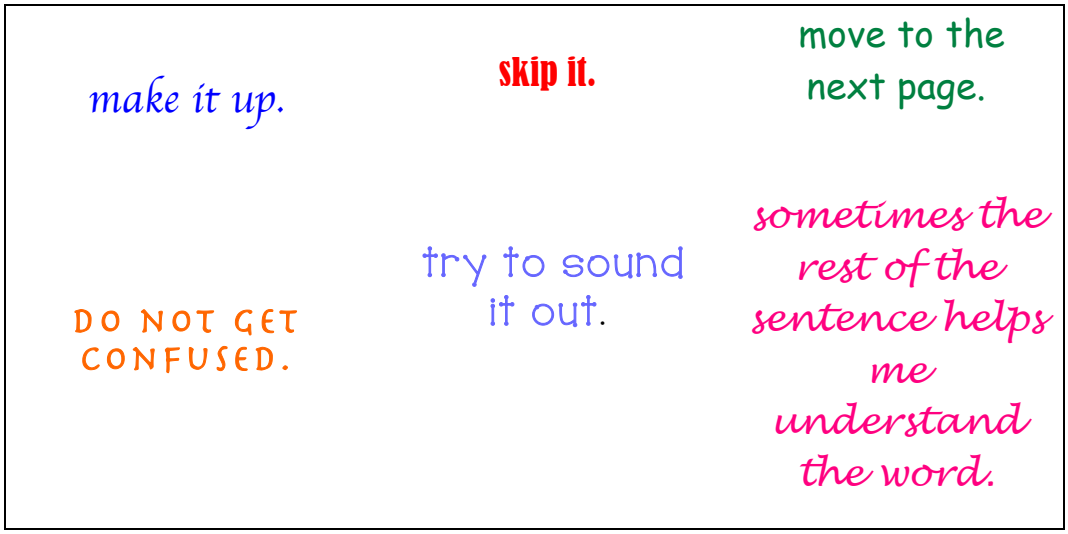


Figure 19. What do you do when you do not understand?

Most of the students' ideas centered around decoding and word clues, and I was not surprised by this, but I wanted the students to realize that comprehension is more than reading words. I explained that the strategies we had been working on; visualizing, predicting, making connections, and using prior knowledge were also ways to help with understanding.

I introduced my students to several new strategies that would help them with comprehension: self-monitoring, chunking the text to check for understanding (which is a form of self monitoring), and following your inner-voice. All of these involved thinking about your thinking as while reading, and being aware of your own understanding (see Figure 20).

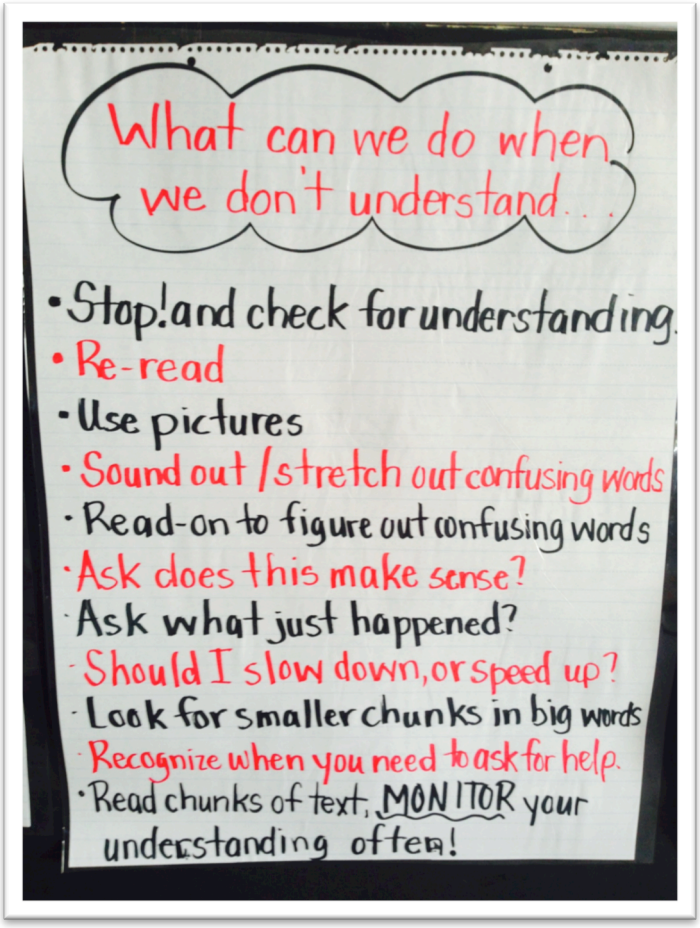


Figure 20. Fix-up Strategy Anchor Chart

I explained that successful readers use these kinds of strategies to help them understand, and often, they use a few strategies at the same time. In order to know which of these to use, readers also need to always be thinking as they read, be aware of when they do not understand something, this is called monitoring your comprehension, and following their inner-voice, which involves making connections, asking questions, and realizing your understanding as you read. I explained that the big word for all of this thinking about your thinking is

metacognition. I got some quizzical looks, but the students seemed interested in what I had to say.

I modeled following my own inner-voice and used think-aloud to show the students how I thought about my reading as I read *Henry's Freedom Box*, by Ellen Levine. I created an anchor chart of thinking stems to follow a reader's inner-voice during reading.

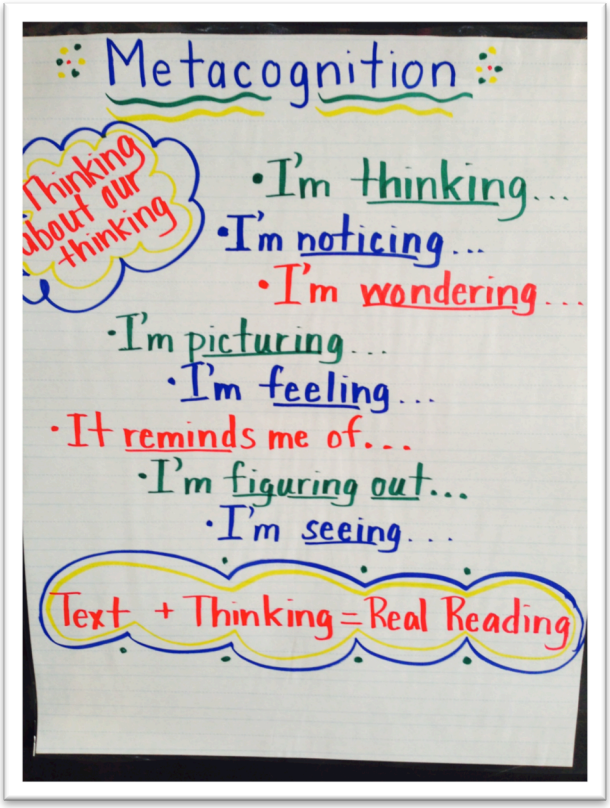


Figure 21. Inner-voice/Metacognitive Thinking Stems Anchor Chart

Before I began reading, I invited the students to use Post-It notes to write down any thoughts they had as they listened to the story. While I read and shared my own thinking, I noticed lots of pencil movement on the Post-It notes. Soon, the hands started waving and my third graders were excited to share their own questions, comments, and connections to the story. When I finished reading, there was such a feeling of ownership and pride in the room as the students read their Post-It notes and shared their inner-voices (see Figure 22).

Figure 22. Students' inner-voice responses for *Henry's Freedom Box*

I was thrilled with how well this lesson went. Everyone was engaged, even Tommy. The students loved using the Post-It notes to track their thinking, and they used them appropriately. I felt like my students were seeing a purpose for learning the different reading strategies, and they felt accomplished as they applied their learning with this activity.

In My Mind's Eye

I conducted another lesson on visualization. The first time we did a formal lesson with this strategy, I was not pleased with the outcome. I approached it differently this time, and I used a book rather than a poem. I read *When I was Young in the Mountains* by Cynthia Rylant, but I did not show the pictures as I read the book. Students closed their eyes to imagine what was happening as they listened to the story. I chose three places to stop, beginning, middle, and ending of the story, and the students used a visualizing graphic organizer to sketch what they were imagining in their minds, and identify the words that helped them visualize (see Appendix K). The students shared their sketches, and while they varied, they were all appropriate and accurately showed they understood the book. As they shared their sketches for different events from the story, I showed the actual pictures from the text. They loved comparing their images to the illustrations in the book. The written aspect of this activity was beneficial, as it helped the students to identify the words from the book that led them create an image in their minds. It was interesting to see the different aspects of the book

that individual children chose to imagine. Noah commented that he used the adjectives to help him imagine in his head. Comprehension was stronger with this lesson, and it was much more successful than the first one.

Mid-Study Reflection

At this point in my study, I was feeling a bit unsettled. I tried to plan my study in conjunction with the curriculum, and while some parts matched, others did not. I was feeling scattered and unorganized. The newness of the Common Core had many of my colleagues scrambling for direction, and I felt a bit isolated, as I was essentially navigating my study and was not following the sequence of the district curriculum. I began to question myself. I had shuffled the order of my methodology a bit, but it I changed it as I followed the needs of my students as we progressed in the study. I knew my study was valuable and that my students were learning, but there was the cloud of curriculum looming over me. My study defined my passion and I was following the way my true teacher inner-voice had wanted to approach reading instruction for so long. This had been cloaked in constraints of the curriculum for so many years. I had become complacent in my planning and the depth of effective reading instruction.

Still, I felt as though I my instruction was incomplete, and my

students were missing something because I was not following the curriculum closely. Dewey helped ease my concern as I read his work, I was reminded that educators must

> *"*be able to judge what attitudes are actually conducive to continued growth and what are detrimental. He must, in addition, have that sympathetic understanding of individuals as individuals which gives him an idea of what is actually going on in the minds of those who are learning." (Dewey, 1938, p. 39).

Although I was teaching outside of the scope and sequence established by the district, I was not ignoring the curriculum, I was just approaching it differently. As I reflected on the learning that was taking place in my classroom, I realized that my students were not missing out on anything. In fact, they were responding to reading in a more positive, energetic way than I have seen in many years. No, we were not sticking with every skill, worksheet, or weekly test, but my students were becoming better readers, and their attitude toward reading was improving. I was not as far along in the study as I had hoped, but were making meaningful gains and my students were making progress.

Figure 23. Mid-Study Reflection

Putting It All Together in Guided Reading

I had explicitly taught the students to keep track of their thinking using Post-It notes and thinking stems as they read. This practice serves a few purposes: students are continually thinking as they read, and jotting notes about their thoughts helps keep them focused on the text. It also helps with self-monitoring. Students are more apt to realize when they are confused or unfocused when they are monitoring their inner-voices.

In guided reading, I was able to work more closely with students to help them practice these skills with text that was appropriate for their learning.

One of the groups read *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, a selection from Reading A to Z. This group is reading on grade level for the beginning of third grade. We put many of our reading strategies into practice while working in this small group, as I guided them to monitor their own understanding by chunking up the book, think about what they had read. The students enjoyed using Post-It notes to write their thoughts, and were excited to share them with the group.

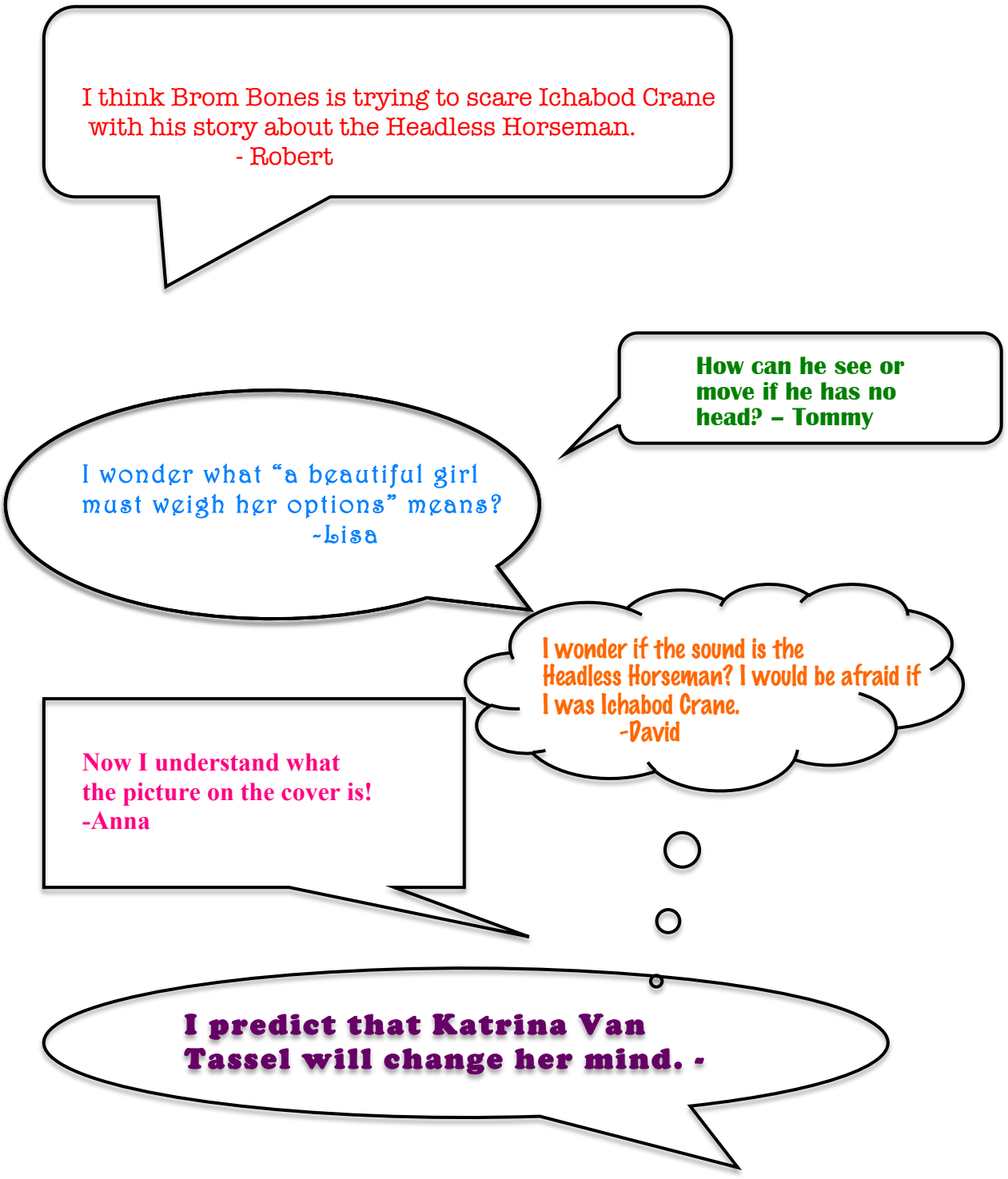


Figure 24. Students follow their inner-voices

Students worked on applying these strategies in their independent reading as well. To keep track of their thinking, they completed metacognition reading strategies and fix-up strategies charts (see Figure 25 and 26).

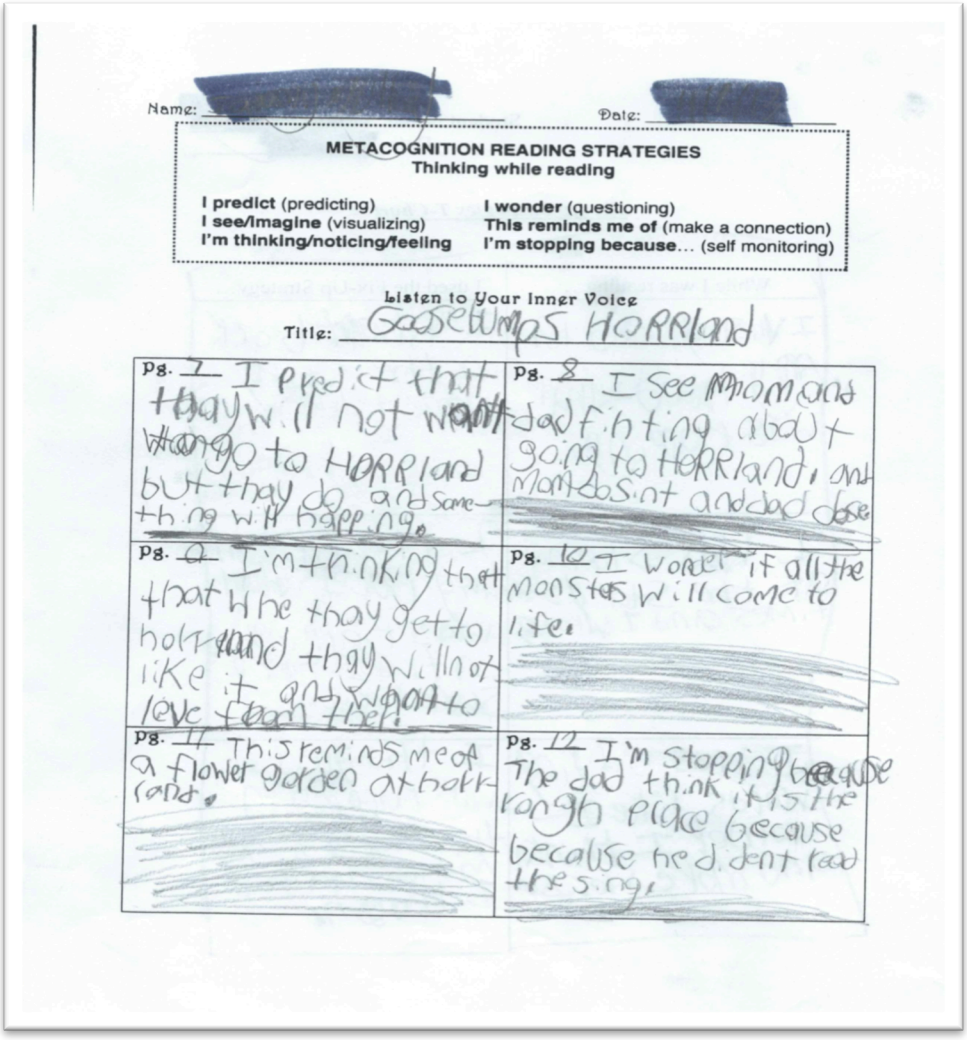
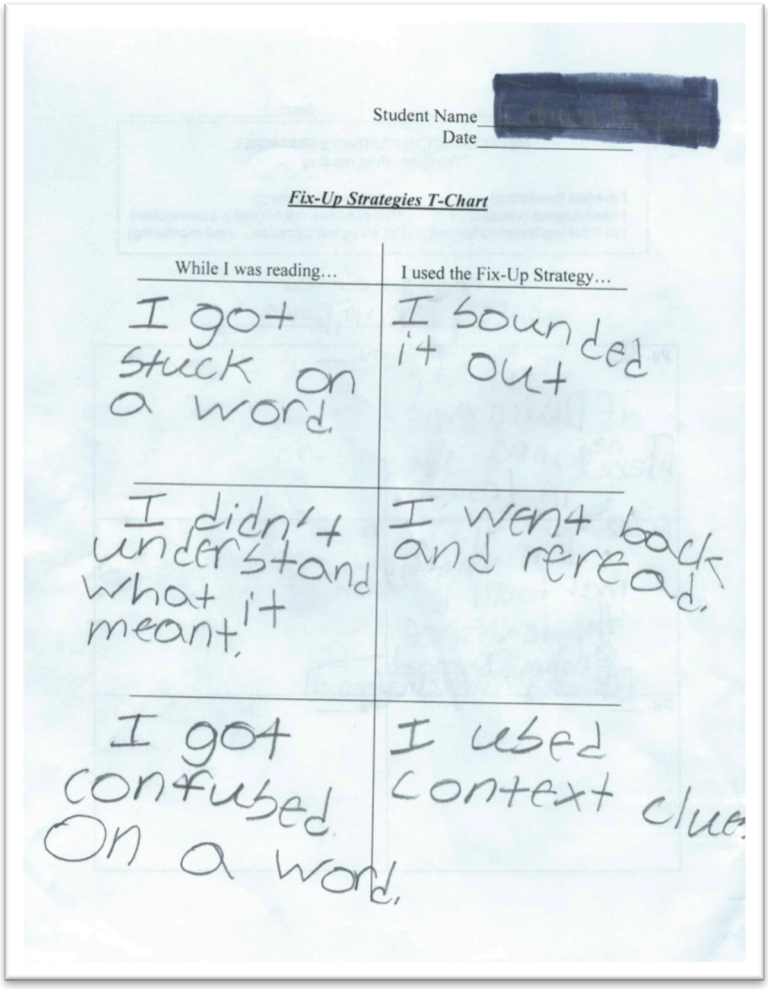


Figure 25. Scott's Inner-voice Thinking Stems Chart



Student Name [redacted]
Date _____

Fix-Up Strategies T-Chart

While I was reading…	I used the Fix-Up Strategy…
I got stuck on a word.	I sounded it out
I didn't understand what it meant.	I went back and reread.
I got confused On a word.	I used context clue.

Figure 26. Madison's Fix-up Strategy Chart

In addition to guided reading observations, I conducted reading conferences to talk with the students about how they were self-monitoring and using fix-up strategies.

Table 7

Reading Conference with David

Mrs. Brion	What are you reading?
David	*Goosebumps – Coo Coo Clock of Doom*
Mrs. Brion	Why did you choose it?
David:	*I liked the cover, and I like Goosebumps*.
Mrs. Brion	Tell me about what is happening so far.
David	*Michael stepped in gum, his sister tricked him into looking down, then (long pause)*
Mrs. Brion	Can you tell me more?
David	*I don't understand why it happened*.
Mrs. Brion	So, what can you do when you do not understand?
David	*Go back and re-read.*
Mrs. Brion	Ok. You do that and I will come back to you in a few minutes and you can tell me why that happened.

Note: Upon re-visit, David was able to talk about what he read with a bit more understanding.

Table 8

Reading Conference with Noah

Mrs. Brion	*What book are you reading?*
Noah	Mrs. Yonkers is Bonkers. I started it today.
Mrs. Brion	*Anything surprising happen so far?*
Noah	No, not really
Mrs. Brion	*Anything funny?*
Noah	The new teacher was wearing cheese on her head, and she is a computer.
Mrs. Brion	*Really? The teacher is a computer?*
Noah	Yes
Mrs. Brion	*Let's look back in the book to be sure.* (We looked back in the book and found the part where Noah thought the teacher was a computer. We re-read together.) *So, was she really a computer?*
Noah	No. She teaches about computers.
Mrs. Brion	*So, what fix-up strategies did you just use?*
Noah	I looked at the pictures, and I re-read.
Mrs. Brion	*Thinking back, did it make sense when you thought she was a computer?*
Noah	No, not really.
Mrs. Brion	*Did the strategies help you understand it better?*
Noah	Yes
Mrs. Brion	*I'm glad we were able to do this. I want you to work on reading this way on your own. I won't always be here to help you catch those things while you're reading. You did a good job today.*

The most challenging part of using metacognitive strategies was helping the students recognize when they were confused or did not understand the meaning of the text. I continued to model recognizing when things did not make sense and how to use fix-up strategies to help me understand as I read books to the class. We continued to focus on this in guided reading.

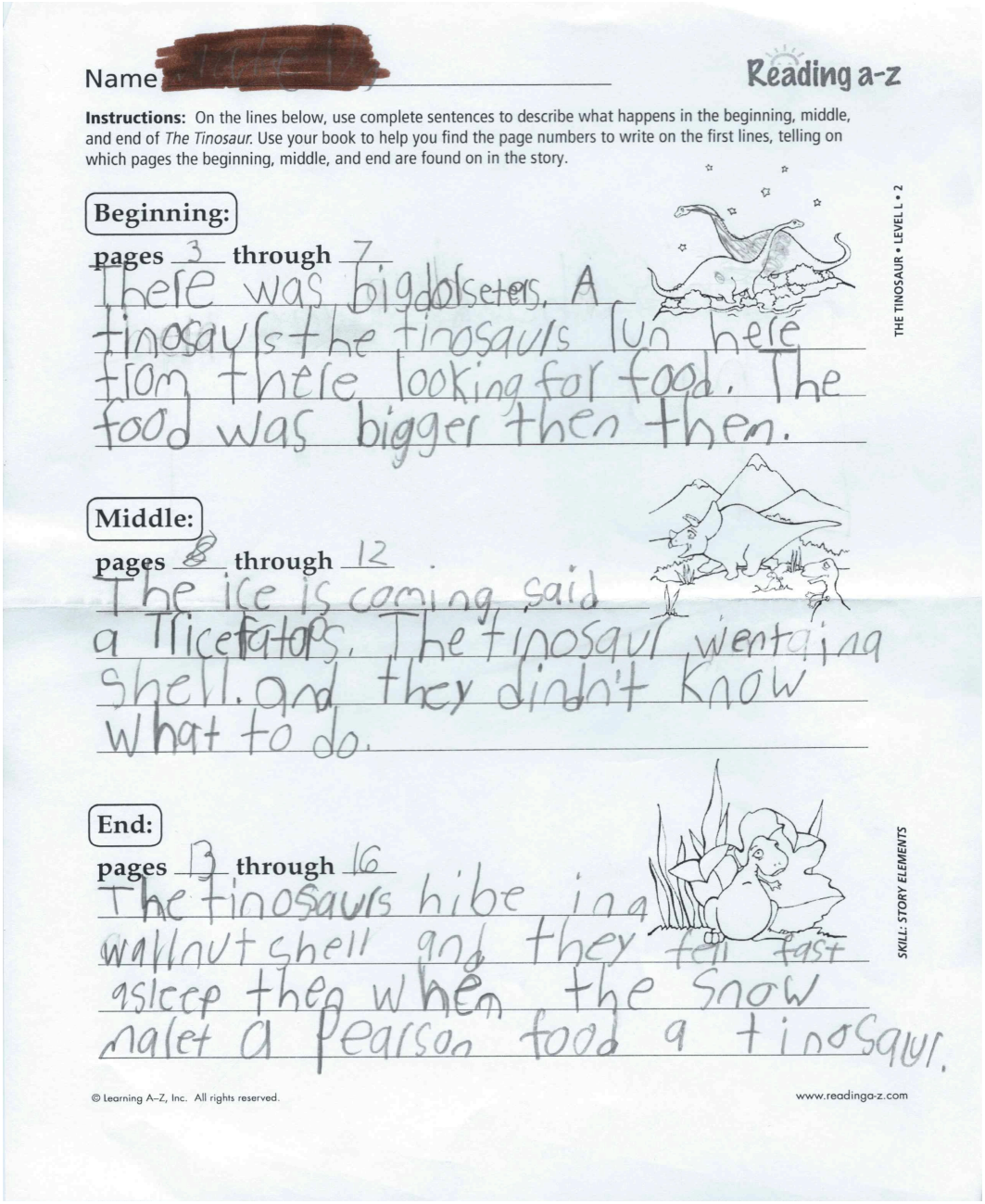
Story Elements and Summarizing

Just as identifying character traits can help a reader predict and infer what a character might do next, identifying story elements while reading also helps with understanding. Identifying story elements was not a new concept for the students. However, when I taught them how and why to use the story elements to summarize their reading, they were able to see summarizing as a comprehension strategy. I taught this concept to the whole group with a story from our reading series, *Loved Best*.

After we identified the different parts of the story, I modeled how to use the story elements to summarize the story using a Story Map graphic organizer (see Appendix L). I wanted the students to understand that if they could summarize what they read, then they had a true understanding of it. If they could not summarize it, then they needed to use some fix-up strategies and re-visit the text. In order to do this, they needed to monitor their own comprehension.

We continued to work on summarizing in guided reading, as well as independently with Good-Fit books. Many of the students grasped this concept

quickly and solidly, and those higher-level readers summarized with the What's The Main Idea? Graphic Organizer (see Appendix N). There were a few who struggled with this, and we continued to work on it in guided reading. We used the book, *The Tinosaur*, a selection from Reading A to Z, and discussed how the story elements can be identified in order as we read the story. We broke the story into chunks by beginning, middle, and end, and identified the story elements in each part. We then summarized the story together. Taking the story apart and putting it back together in this manner helped the students identify the story elements, and small group discussion helped them understand how to use the story elements to help with comprehension (see Figure 27).



Name [redacted]

Reading a-z

Instructions: On the lines below, use complete sentences to describe what happens in the beginning, middle, and end of *The Tinosaur.* Use your book to help you find the page numbers to write on the first lines, telling on which pages the beginning, middle, and end are found on in the story.

Beginning:

pages 3 **through** 7

There was big dolseters. A tinosaurs the tinosaurs run here from there looking for food. The food was bigger then then.

Middle:

pages 8 **through** 12

The ice is coming, said a Triceratops. The tinosaur wenting shell. and they didn't know what to do.

End:

pages 13 **through** 16

The tinosaurs hibe ing walnut shell and they fell fast asleep then when the snow malet a pearson food a tinosaur.

THE TINOSAUR • LEVEL L • 2

SKILL: STORY ELEMENTS

www.readinga-z.com

Figure 27. Melissa's Beginning-Middle-End Organizer

As we worked more frequently in guided reading groups, it was becoming more and more obvious that the pacing and content of my reading instruction was changing. Some groups were ready for independent application quickly, while others continued to need scaffolding and guided practice.

John was becoming more engaged in reading activities with the onset of guided reading. He was with his like-level peers, and the book selections were interesting to him. I talked with him about his reading preferences, and he told me that he preferred to read to himself rather than with a partner or in a whole group. It made sense that he was more engaged in guided reading, where he was doing the reading. I wanted to give him something more to do with his reading. I felt he needed to be meaningfully challenged with his own "project," as he was often times finished with his work before the others, and I wanted his time to be used productively. I also wanted to be able to track his progress and his thinking as he read.

The solution was to introduce him to another reader (a fourth grader) who was equally intelligent and in need of some productive use of his spare time. After gaining permission from both sets of parents, I set up an on-line reading club for the two boys to participate in though my class website. They chose to read Hatchet, by Gary Paulsen. John devoured the book and eagerly logged

onto his computer account to discuss the book with his partner. I was able to accomplish two things: engage John, and help him connect the work we were doing in class to his own reading. In monitoring his on-line discussions with his partner, I could see how John was thinking about his reading through connections, character analysis, predictions, and summarizing.

As my understanding of how to meet John's needs improved, his classroom engagement increased ten-fold. He became more attentive, shared his critical thinking with the class, and made connections like no other child I had ever had the privilege to teach. He truly became an asset to our class. John and I often had book discussions about his separate reading selections, and we traded books back and forth. He recommended as many books to me as I did for him. Yes, he continued to bury his head in his desk to sneak read, and he still had a tendency to rush through some of his work, but John was learning and growing in his own way, and I felt a sense of accomplishment in helping him get to that point.

Figure 28. Connecting John – Part Three: We Have Contact!

Non-Fiction

Reading non-fiction text requires a different approach than reading fiction. Some students love non-fiction, while others prefer fiction. I wanted my students

to understand that regardless of the genre, the reading strategies they were learning could apply to anything they read.

I taught the students to slow down and chunk the text into smaller sections when they read non-fiction, as they need to absorb more facts and unfamiliar vocabulary as they read. I explained how to use text features, such as the cover, table of contents, and photos to predict and use prior knowledge to make connections before reading. To model this, I projected *Expedition Zero,* a selection from Reading A to Z, onto the Smart Board.

As we read, I introduced a Talk-to-the-Text activity (see Appendix M), which gave students the opportunity to think about things they found interesting, and things they wondered about as they read. I began by reading the text and modeled by thinking-aloud as I added things to my Talk-to-the-Text paper. I used the thinking stems and fix-up strategies we had been working with. Students kept track of their own thinking on their papers as we read the book. The discussion included examples of visualizing, questioning, and making connections to other texts we had read. The students seemed to enjoy reading non-fiction text in this manner. We went on to identify essential and non-essential information, main idea and details, and continued summarizing to help comprehend our reading of non-fiction text.

Tommy: I liked this book. The pictures were cool, and it was interesting to see the different places. I had things to say about this book, and it made me think of lots of questions. I am going to get some non-fiction at the library today. "You really got me with this one, Mrs. Brion. I was really into it. I wish we could keep going."

Mrs. Brion: For what seemed like the first time this year, Tommy was very engaged in this lesson. He had many quality comments and questions throughout this lesson. He was very excited to go to the library class and get non-fiction books. At the conclusion of the lesson, Tommy came up to me with a huge smile on his face, and said "You really got me on that one, Mrs. Brion. I was really into it." Other students also commented on how much they enjoyed the lesson, but Tommy's was the most rewarding that day.

Figure 29. Tommy's Journey Part Three: We Have Arrived

We continued to work on summarizing non-fiction in small, guided reading groups. Students worked with leveled text and identified main idea and details. The students practiced their reading strategies by reading smaller chunks of text and completing a What's the Main Idea? Graphic Organizer (see Appendix N) to organize their work. The graphic organizer was a great tool for summarizing, and it was also instrumental in helping students to understand essential versus non-essential information in non-fiction text.

Once again, some of the groups grasped this quickly. Others needed additional modeling and guided practice. We used smaller chunks of text, and worked in pairs to practice identifying the essential information, main idea and details, and summarizing. Eventually, some of these students were able to work on this skill more independently. Allison realized the gradual release of responsibility one day, and we had a conversation about it during her guided reading group.

Table 9

Dialog with Allison about Gradual Release of Responsibility

Allison	Mrs. Brion, why don't you show us anymore? You used to help us with this?
Mrs. Brion	*Well, Allison, didn't you just do this one by yourself, and do a really great job summarizing it?*
Allison	Yes, I guess so.
Mrs. Brion	*So, that means you don't need me to help you with every step anymore. That is the whole idea of learning. I teach it and help you until you can do it by yourself, and now you can.*
Allison	Yeah. I didn't think about it that way.

Reading Reflections

While summarizing is one way to reflect on reading, forming opinions and thinking deeply about reading is also an integral part of comprehension. To help my students do this, I introduced reading response journals and reading prompt cards (see Appendices O, P, Q).

As a class, we set up notebooks and responded to a read aloud, *Dear Mrs. LaRue,* by Mark Teague. I used think-aloud and chart paper to model my response to the story, and invited the students to share their ideas about how they would respond. I emphasized that responding in writing to text was a way to express your thoughts and opinions, but the students must provide examples and evidence from the text to support their responses.

Tommy continued to respond favorably to reading time. When I introduced reading responses and taught the class how to set up a reading notebook and modeled a written response to a book I read aloud, Tommy participated in the activity and offered suggestions on what to include in our class's guided response.

The students had an opportunity to try a response based on their independent reading. After they read for a while, I gave them ten minutes to respond in writing. Several students, including Tommy, asked me for more time to write. I was pleasantly surprised.

Mrs. Brion: Hmmm, Tommy. It seems to me that you are beginning to enjoy reading.

Tommy: *Yup! Last year I hated it. It's better this year. Look how much I wrote! I have eight sentences!*

Figure 30. Dialog with Tommy

Responding in writing was an activity many of my students seemed to enjoy. Several students voluntarily wrote during center time, while others were indifferent. Still others expressed a true dislike for writing about reading. I found

it interesting that the students' reading ability was not necessarily a factor in their interest in written responses. While many of the on-level and struggling readers were more enthusiastic writers, several of the higher-level readers preferred not to write, they just wanted to read. I asked about this during reading conferences.

Table 10

Writing About Reading Interview Responses

Hannah (above-level)	I love writing about my reading. It helps me understand it better. The questions are interesting. I like the one about the character's birthday present.
Courtney (above-level)	I love to re-tell the story when I write. Then I know I understood it.
John (above-level)	I just want to read. I think about the book while I'm reading it. I like to do it that way.
Allison (on-level)	I like to write, but I like the Post-It notes better. They help me while I read. But sometimes I like to write about the questions on the cards, too.
David (on-level)	I do not like to write. I never know what to say.
Robert (on-level)	Writing is fun. I like to do it most times, but sometimes I want to write my own stories and make my own books.
Jenny (struggling)	I do not like to write when I read. It is hard.
Andy (struggling)	Sometimes I like to write about my book. Sometimes I don't feel like it.
Tommy (struggling)	I think it helps me. I like to write about my books.

I learned that validating the students' opinions was motivating to them. They enjoyed reading the feedback I gave them in their reading notebooks. The students were getting better about supporting their ideas with evidence from the text. Writing also became another strategy that some of my students used to help themselves with understanding.

Our Toolbox is Full

After I gave the post study reading survey (see Appendix E), I asked my class to compose a list of the reading and fix-up strategies they found helpful while they were reading. I told them their responses would be anonymous, and my feelings would not be hurt. I just wanted them to be truthful. This activity provided me with a way to do a member check to validate our daily discussions, their surveys, and see if they truly were using these strategies. I was pleased to see that the thinking stems and fix-up strategies I taught them had become part of our daily classroom practice (see Figure 31).

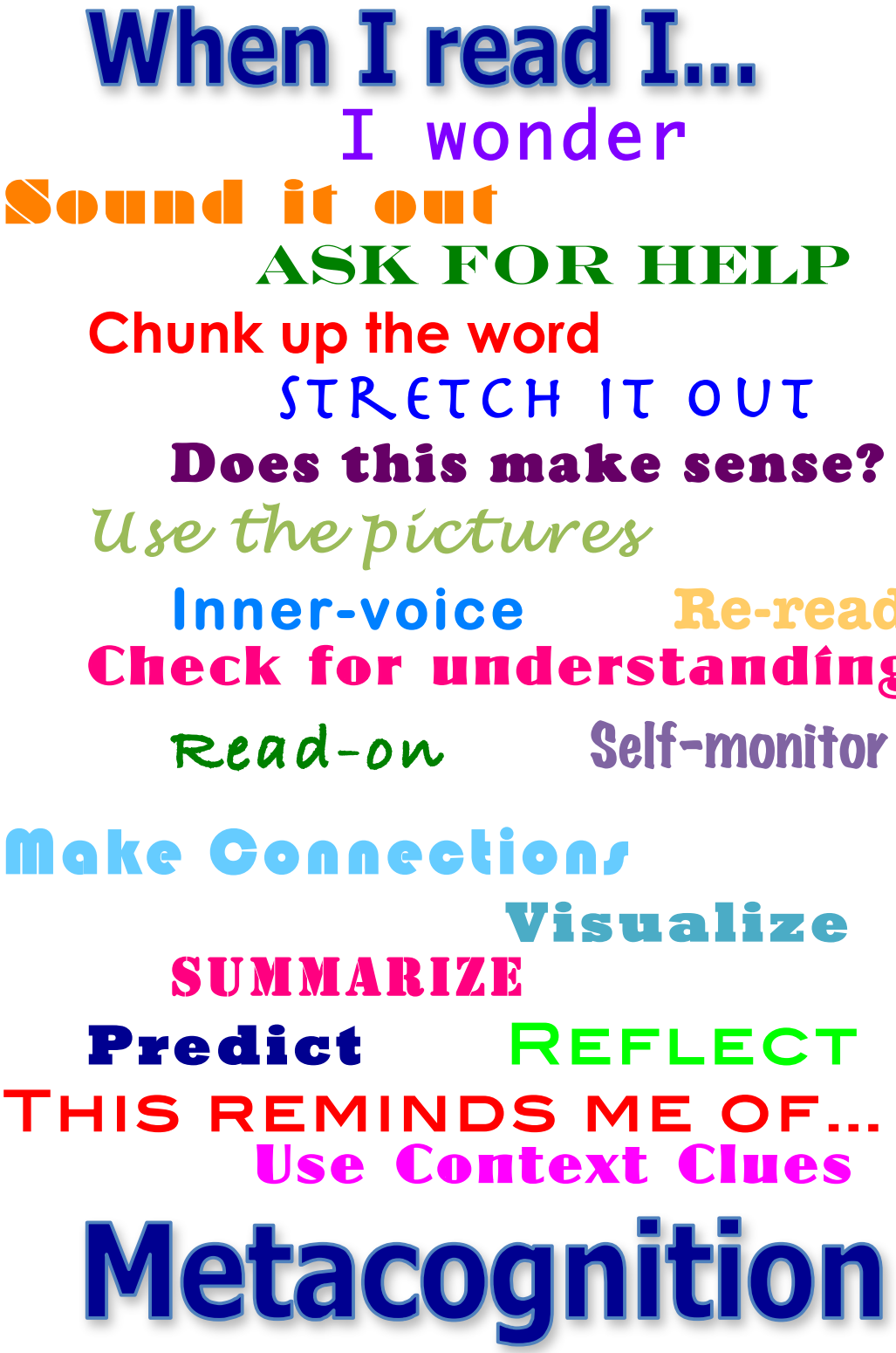


Figure 31. Metagognitive Strategies That We Use

One thing I learned from the post study survey results was that my students had become more aware of their reading. Some of them did not make as much progress as I had hoped, but their personal awareness of their comprehension and decoding abilities was more insightful.

Table 11

Alex's Post study Interview on Reading

Question	Pre-Study Comment	Post study Comment
Are you a good reader?	No. I am not a good reader because I do not read that much.	No. I am not a good reader because I do not understand it that much, and I can't read fast like some people can.
What do you do when you get stuck or confused?	I skip it	I can re-read or read on to look for evidence to help me read.

Table 12

Max's Post study Interview on reading

Question	Pre-Study Comment	Post study Comment
Are you a good reader?	Yes. I read a lot at night.	No. When I read I don't really understand the book.
What do you do when you get stuck or confused?	I either sound it out or put it (the book) back.	When I get stuck, I read it over again to see if I understand it.

Table 13

David's Post study Interview on reading

Question	Pre-Study Comment	Post study Comment
Are you a good reader?	Yes. Because I read books that are hard.	No. Because I always get stuck. I think it is because I don't take my time when I read.
What do you do when you get stuck or confused?	I ask for help.	I re-read so I understand the book more.

As the study was drawing to a close, I knew that although my data collection and field log notes were ending, my teaching of metacognitive reading strategies would not. My approach to reading instruction was forever changed. Through explicit instruction, modeling, scaffolding, guided practice, and independent application, my students were able to think as they read, they understood how to be aware of their understanding, and they had a toolbox of strategies to use to help them along the way.

The very last chapter of our journey together was a fun one for the children. They made a collage of all the ways reading made them feel, or how they felt about reading. It was a great end to an interesting journey for all of us (see Figure 32).

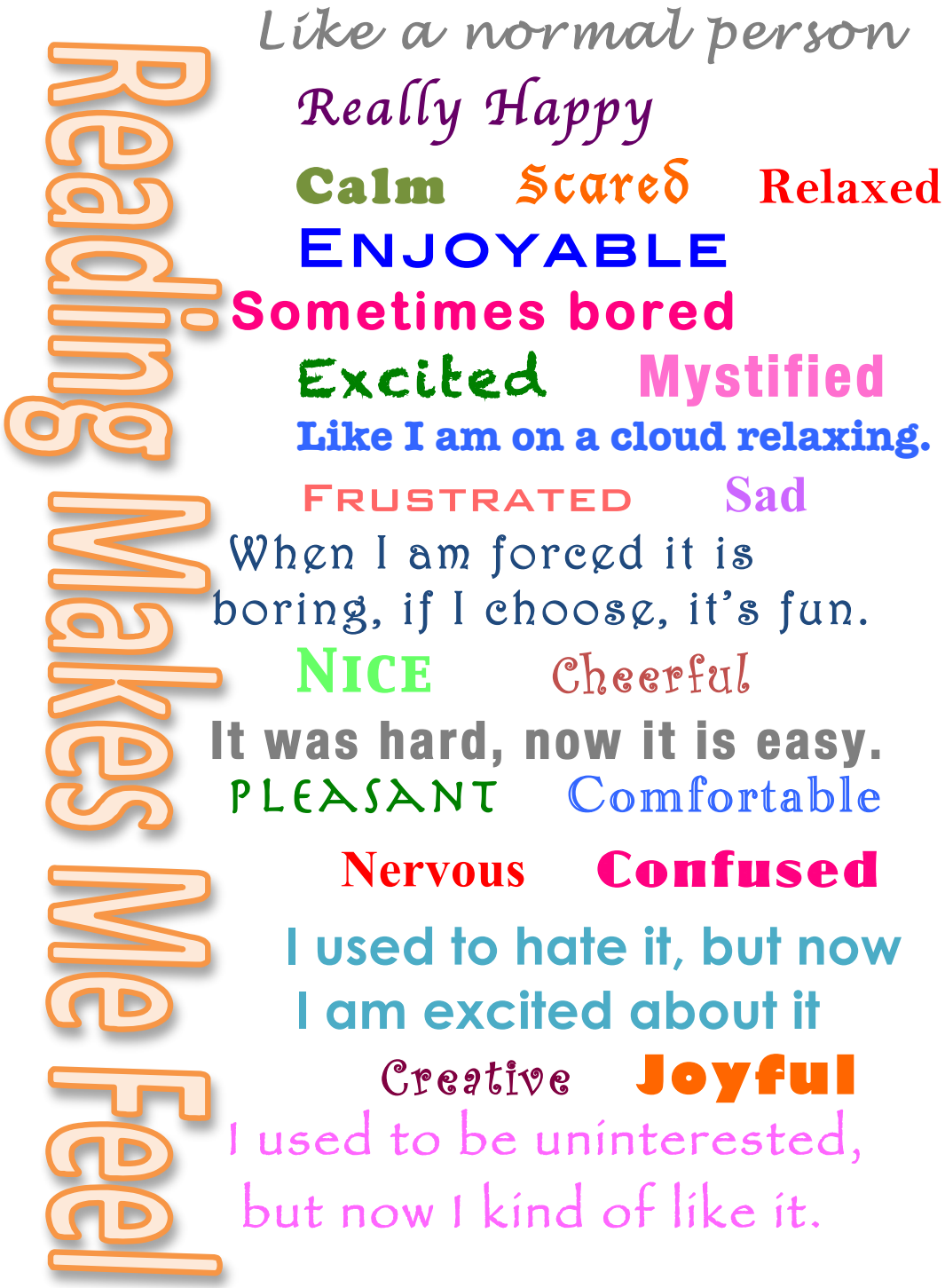


Figure 32. Reading Makes Me Feel

Data Analysis

As I carried out the study, I collected many pieces of data in several forms. It was important to collect data from a variety of sources to ensure triangulation (Hendricks, 2009), and that my study findings were valid. My data sources included pre-study and post study reading surveys, participant and non-participant observations in my field log, student work samples, reading conferences and interviews, reader's notebook entries, and pre-study and post study assessments.

Student Reading Survey Analysis

I began and ended my study with a student reading survey (see Appendix E). The purpose of the survey was to gain insight as to my students' feelings on reading, discussing books, and writing about what they have read. I also learned about their perceptions of themselves as readers. The survey included questions about how the students handle confusion in their reading. I was able to learn that many of my students enjoyed reading, and they were willing to participate in class discussions about reading. I learned that most of my students thought that being confused while they were reading meant not being able to decode words; they did not view confusion as a comprehension issue. This led me to know that I was going to have to spend a lot of time teaching self-monitoring and comprehension fix-up strategies, which were a big part of my study.

The results of the post study survey allowed me to compare the changes in my students' attitudes toward reading, their perceptions of themselves as readers, and their use of self-monitoring and fix-up strategies. While some of my students seemed to think less of themselves as readers, I concluded, through observations, conferences, and interviews, that my students had become more aware of their reading and of when they encountered struggles. The comparison also showed me that the students had more strategies to use when struggling. In reality, my students improved in their reading ability, their awareness of their reading, and their use of metacognitive reading strategies (see Tables 14-16).

Table 14

Pre- and Post Study Reading Survey Comparisons

Survey Question	Response	Pre-Study Results	Post Study Results
Reading is something I like to do.	Yes	17	23
	No	7	2
I think I am a good reader	Yes	19	18
	No	5	7
I enjoy listening to my teacher read books.	Yes	21	22
	No	3	3
I enjoy having time to read by myself at school.	Yes	22	23
	No	2	2
I understand what I read.	Most of	18	16
	Some of	5	9
	Little of	1	0
When we talk about stories in class, I participate.	Always	4	5
	Sometimes	15	14
	Hardly Ever	5	6
I like to talk about books with my teacher and friends.	Always	4	3
	Sometimes	13	13
	Hardly Ever	7	9
I like to write about what I am reading.	Always	4	4
	Sometimes	10	14
	Hardly Ever	10	7
I prefer to read…	by myself.	20	19
	with a partner.	4	5
	in a group.	0	1

Table 15

Pre- and Post Survey Comparison of Self-Perceptions as Readers

Explanations for I Am a Good Reader	Pre-Results	Post-Results
I read a lot	7	3
I read chapter books	5	0
I know (can say) the words	4	5
I understand what I read	5	3
I check for understanding	0	2
I know what to do when I get stuck	0	3
I read fluently	0	1
I make predictions	0	1
I take my time	0	1
Explanations for I Am Not a Good Reader	**Pre-Results**	**Post-Results**
I do not read a lot	2	0
I do not know the words	2	4
Everyone finishes before me	1	3
I am slow	0	3
I get stuck	0	1

Table 16

Pre- and Post Survey Comparison of Fix-up strategies

What I do when I am confused	Pre-Study Results	Post Study results
I ask for help	**10**	**8**
I sound out the word	**8**	**8**
I re-read the page	**1**	**13**
I skip it (the word)	**8**	**3**
I guess (at the word)	**1**	**0**
I read on	**0**	**8**
I use the pictures	**0**	**2**
I predict	**0**	**2**
I stop and think if it makes sense	**0**	**1**

Observational Data Analysis

My daily observations were enormously helpful to me throughout my study. First, they provided a log of formative assessments and served as a guide for me to plan my daily weekly lessons as my students and I progressed through the study. I made changes to my plans as my students' needs arose. I was also able to use my data as a tool to reflect on my students' progress, as well as on my

instruction. For example, in reflecting on my students' progress, I realized that we had a gap in our class, with respect to summarizing. Some students were struggling, and I spent more time on that concept with those children. Others demonstrated that they were able to apply summarizing independently, and I was able to increase the level of their text and add a level of critical thinking to their instruction.

My non-participant observations allowed me to see how my students were interacting with each other, and gain some insight into how engaged they were in our reading activities. As a result of my non-participant observations, I realized that my students needed some extra modeling and guided practice in collaborative work. I was able to incorporate a few extra lessons on that topic so that my students would have more meaningful experiences as they worked together.

Student Work Analysis

In collecting and analyzing student work samples, I was able to see if my students understood and were able to apply the strategies I taught them. Students completed many different types of graphic organizers during lessons as guided practice in whole-group settings, in pairs, in small group settings, and during independent application. One example of student work analysis was a visualization activity in which the students were asked to sketch their own images as they listened to a poem. Upon analysis, I learned that the students did indeed sketch what they imagined, but I discovered that many of them did not

comprehend accurately. Upon discovery of this, I was able to shift my instructional plans to address comprehension and self-monitoring.

Student Interview and Reading Conference Analysis

I began conducting student interviews at the beginning of my study. After I conducted the first few interviews, I noticed that the students did not give candid answers, in fact, they seemed to be telling me what they thought I wanted to hear. As a result, I did not continue interviewing every student in my class, but I made a conscious decision to only interview a few students of varying reading abilities. Later in my study, I interviewed another select group of students to learn about their feelings toward written responses. These interviews were helpful to me as I planned to address the different needs of the readers in my class.

I also conducted reading conferences with all of my students on a regular basis. These conferences were especially helpful, as I was able to ascertain each student's attitudes toward reading as we talked informally. Conferencing enabled me to keep track of whether my students were choosing Good-Fit books, to note their level of engagement while they were reading, and to see if they were applying self-monitoring and comprehension strategies independently.

Reader's Notebook Analysis

Toward the end of the study, the students started composing written responses about their reading. I analyzed their responses to see the depth of their thinking and their analysis of the books they were reading. The students and I had

a written dialog in their reader's notebooks. I found that my responses to their writing helped them to find more meaning in the writing activities. I also found that collecting and responding to several responses a week held the students accountable for putting effort and time into their written work.

Pre- and Post study Comprehension Test Analysis

Students were given a pre-study comprehension test. This test was comprised of two short stories to read, and several multiple-choice questions, and one short answer response (see Appendix G). The scores provided me with a baseline measure of the students' reading comprehension. The post study comprehension test was a similar level of difficulty and length (see Appendix R). The comparison allowed me to see how students improved in their reading comprehension over the course of the study (see Table 17).

Table 17

Pre- and Post Study Comprehension Test Score Comparison

Test Scores Percentage	Pre-Study Results: Number of Students (out of 24 students)	Post study Results: Number of Students (out of 25 students)
100%	3	6
92%	3	8
83%	6	4
75%	5	3
67%	5	2
58%	1	1
42%	1	1

DRA2 Analysis

I administered the Developmental Reading Assessment 2 (DRA2) to my students both at the beginning and the end of my study. The purpose of this assessment is to identify each individual student's instructional reading level. While the DRA2 administration is a district requirement for all students in the beginning of the year, the post study administration of this assessment was given only to those students who were identified as below-grade level in September. A proficient DRA2 score for beginning of third grade is a 28 or above. All of the

students who were re-assessed at the end of my study had made gains to a DRA2 level 28 or 30.

Codes, Bins, and Theme Statements

As my study progressed, I began coding my field log and other pieces of data that I was collecting. Although this was time consuming and required me to review my data multiple times, coding helped me to see similarities and emerging trends in my data. I then was able to use those codes to develop bins and theme statements, which helped to further define my study (see Figure 33 and Table 18).

Figure 33. Codes and Bins

Table 18

Theme Statements

Theme Statements
Metacognitive Reading Strategies *In order to achieve reading proficiency, students must be aware of their own thinking and how it relates to what they are reading. They must also be aware of when and why meaning breaks down, and what to do when that happens.*
Explicit Instruction *Before students can be expected to apply reading strategies or skills of any kind, they must be shown how to use and apply those skills to their individual reading situations through direct teaching and modeling.*
Learning Setting *Students learn and apply reading strategies in a variety of different settings including whole group direct instruction, guided practice in small groups, and the gradual release of responsibility as students work cooperatively and independently.*
Learning Attitude *As students develop in their reading ability, their attitudes toward different reading activities changes with increased engagement, participation in discussions, and effort.*
Learning Tools *In order for reading instruction to be successful, certain tools are necessary in helping the teacher and student progress though this process to teach to whole group as well as individual needs.*

Findings

The purpose of this study was to see how third grade students responded to the explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies, and how they were able to make the shift from teacher centered to student centered application. I designed this study because I had found that some of my students were coming to third grade without a solid grasp of how to comprehend text, and there did not seem to be a curriculum component to help them gain these skills. Proficient readers often use strategies simultaneously to make meaning of text. However, I found that not all of my students were able to do that. I did not want my third graders to be left behind in the world of literacy when they needed some more time and a few more tools to develop their literacy skills.

Metacognitive Reading Strategies: In order to achieve reading proficiency, students must be aware of their own thinking and how it relates to what they are reading. They must also be aware of when and why meaning breaks down, and what to do when that happens.

For this study, I chose a series of metacognitive reading comprehension strategies that would help students to understand what they read. The metacognitive reading strategies I chose to teach were predicting, visualizing, following one's inner-voice, questioning, making connections with prior knowledge, summarizing, and reflecting. In addition, I taught my students how to self-monitor and help themselves when they lost meaning in their reading.

Being able to think about one's thinking, and be aware of when they are confused does not come naturally to everyone. I found that students enjoyed learning how to follow their own inner-voices as they read, and to keep track of their thinking on Post-It notes or charts. They demonstrated that continually thinking about their reading, and interacting with the text, helped keep them focused and engaged in what they were reading.

In the pre-study survey, I found that many of my students did not have an awareness of their own understanding of meaning in text. Their responses led me to understand that they viewed a good reader as one who can read all of the words. In breaking down comprehension strategies for my students, and giving them the opportunity to see that decoding is only one aspect of reading, I found that their awareness of their understanding text had increased. As a result, some of my students began to feel that they were not as good of a reader as they initially thought. This led me to spend more time in small groups, working with those students on following their inner-voice, checking for understanding with smaller chunks of text, and helping them use appropriate fix-up strategies.

Explicit Instruction: **Before students can be expected to apply reading strategies or skills of any kind, they must be shown how to use and apply those skills to their individual reading situations through direct teaching and modeling.**

Vygotsky (1981) believed that learning should be a systematic process taught through social interactions. He proposed that knowledge is socially constructed and learning occurs thought a child's interactions with the more knowledgeable others who provide support within their Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky also believed in a gradual release of responsibility, in which the learning was specifically taught, and the teacher assisted as needed until the student was able to apply the skill independently. My study was based on this theory as I incorporated explicit instruction, scaffolding and guided practice, and the opportunity for independent application of several reading comprehension strategies.

As I approached each strategy, I used engaging authentic literature to model and think aloud so the students could see and hear how I was processing what I was thinking as I read. I found that the students were engaged in these lessons, and eager to participate. They began applying the strategies with their own ideas and opinions on the books we read during whole group instruction. Students were then given guided practice and scaffolding in partners and small, guided reading groups. I used leveled texts on the students' instructional levels for this component of instruction. Finally, students were given the opportunity to apply each strategy in their independent reading as they built their own bank of reading strategy resources.

I found that the explicit instruction component of my study was meaningful in a few ways. As I explained why and how each strategy was used, and how it would benefit the students' reading, they felt a sense of purpose for learning and practicing these strategies. As they grew more proficient as readers, they felt a sense of ownership as they discovered which strategies worked best for them.

Learning Setting: **Students learn and apply reading strategies in a variety of different settings, including whole-group direct instruction, guided practice in small groups, and the gradual release of responsibility as students work cooperatively and independently.**

Introducing a concept whole group was an effective method of delivering a new concept for all of the students. However, students do not all acquire new skills at the same pace. Allowing for different settings to take place within the classroom enabled me to best help meet the needs of every student. Those students with a faster rate of acquisition were able to work independently on more challenging texts and enrichment extensions. I found that it was very important to be aware of those readers who were above-level, as well as those who were below-level readers. It was my responsibility, as their teacher, to be sure that all of my students were connected and engaged in what we were doing in class, and that they each saw a purpose for learning. With this in mind, I put guided reading

and small, flexible groups into place as we progressed through the study and learned how to use each new strategy.

> The greater maturity of experience which should belong to the adult as educator puts him in a position to evaluate each experience of the young in a way in which the one having the less mature experience cannot do. It is then the business of the educator to see in what direction an experience is heading. There is no point to his being more mature if, instead of using this greater insight to help organize the conditions of the experience of the immature, he throws away his insight. (Dewey, 1938, p. 38)

The gradual release of responsibility model proved to be very effective in teaching reading as we moved into guided reading groups. It was with their like-ability peers that those students who struggled felt most comfortable. They were not afraid to ask questions, take risks in practicing strategies, and were receptive to the additional direct instruction I gave them. The level of comfort my students felt in these small groups allowed me to provide the scaffolding necessary to meet my their individual needs. I found that my students in general, were much more comfortable and willing to participate, attempt new things, and share their work than in a whole group setting. This was especially true for the students who were below-level readers.

Learning Attitude: **As students develop in their reading ability, their attitudes toward different reading activities changes with increased engagement, participation in discussions, and effort.**

When students are engaged in what they are doing, their motivation increases and they have a more positive attitude toward the work they are doing. I found this to be true as my students worked on various reading activities and strategies throughout the study. Students were excited to share their ideas in class discussions, volunteered to answer questions, and were excited to spend time reading. I found that as the study progressed, more and more students became interested in what we were learning. There were a few students, in the beginning, who were disconnected or uninterested in reading. As I worked with them, in some cases to enrich them appropriately, their attitude toward our classroom learning improved. In other cases, it took more time and just the right book or activity to hook that child.

Trust and rapport played a big part in our learning environment and in the attitudes of my students. I learned to trust my students, as their learning and attitudes gave me insight to their needs. They taught me to be flexible, and observing them helped me adjust my teaching to best meet their needs. Sometimes they were ready for things before I had planned on teaching them, and other times, they demonstrated that they needed more time before I could introduce something new. “Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-

student contradiction by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students" (Freire, 1970, p. 72).

We needed to build rapport and trust, and they needed to feel confident that I would be there for them if they needed me, as they ventured into something unfamiliar and difficult. Relationships like that take time. One example of this was the introduction of written reading responses. When students were ready to take that step forward and begin responding in their Reader's notebooks, they were excited to do it, and they trusted me to get them there.

> From the outset, her efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. His efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partners of the students in their relations with them. (Freire, 1970, p. 75)

Learning Tools: **In order for reading instruction to be successful, certain tools are necessary in helping the teacher and student progress though this process to teach to whole group as well as individual needs.**

In teaching reading to a wide range of readers, a diverse set of tools was necessary to accomplish meaningful instruction. I found that students responded very positively to engaging read alouds and were enthusiastic about participating in whole group discussions. Other students were not as verbal in whole-group discussions, but proved to be very insightful about their reading during small

group work. Having leveled texts was a key component to the success of my study. I was able to work with students on their instructional levels so they felt successful and motivated to continue making progress. Students also had a solid understanding of how to independently choose appropriate level books for themselves from our classroom and school library. Having these interesting, engaging books motivated them to spend time reading independently, and put into practice the strategies we had learned.

Anchor charts were essential to the study. We created them together as we learned a new strategy. The students referred to the charts frequently, and felt ownership toward them. The anchor charts in our classroom were a work in progress, as we realized something could be added to them, we added it. They were not always pretty, but I found that giving the responsibility of creating and maintaining the anchor charts made the charts authentic and meaningful

Graphic organizers were learning tools that we used daily. These forms, charts, and diagrams provided a means for me to model reading strategies for my students as a whole group. They were then able to use the organizers to practice and apply learned strategies. Presenting the students with a variety of different organizers gave them the opportunity to choose a format that they were comfortable using and understood.

As students began keeping track of their inner-voices while reading, I found that some students chose to use Post-It notes, and some chose to document

their inner-voices on a chart. I modeled both ways, and gave the students choice.

The element of choice in the learning tools was an important aspect of my study. Not only did the students feel more engaged when they chose their own tools, the various tools offered options to meet the different learning styles among my students.

Next Steps

As a result of this action research study, my approach to reading instruction has been forever changed. So many positive things happened in my classroom while I conducted this study. We embarked on this journey together and, I learned as much, if not more, from my students as they learned from me. As I reflected on my experiences over the course of this study, I realized that explicit instruction for strategy based reading is effective. Gibson (2009), states that strategy based reading instruction is an effective approach to improving reading comprehension. She further supports that explicit instruction and modeling of strategies supports many types of readers. I am excited to continue my work with metacognition and reading comprehension with all of my future students.

One of the many things that I found beneficial to my students was not only the explicit instruction, but also the explicit explanation of purpose. Explaining to my students what we were learning, why we were learning it, and how it would help them connected my students to the literacy activities we did each day. I felt it

was important to share this information, and it established a level of respect for learning, and rapport in the classroom that we all appreciated.

Small group instruction and discretion also proved to be extremely beneficial. The students who were lower-level readers in my class were very well aware of their abilities compared to their peers. They were much more receptive to the smaller group, more individualized instruction I provided for them. None of their peers knew what we were working on during our time together. They were not embarrassed when they were working in small group. None of their peers knew these few students were working on a strategy that the others had long since mastered. They were receptive to the small group setting, and not timid about asking questions and sharing their thoughts while in guided reading. Similarly, this was the case for all of my guided reading groups, regardless of where they were in their acquisition of reading strategies; guided reading time was a favorite for everyone.

Individual reading conferences also stood out as a new practice that I will adopt for the future. While it has always been something I knew I "should do," I never found the time to fit it in. While time management continues to be a struggle, I found such benefit in informally talking with my students about their reading, I will continue to find a way to include it in my practice. The students enjoyed telling me about what they were reading, and I was able to use those conferences as a way to monitor what my students were reading, check their

choices for Good-Fit books, and offer suggestions for new genres and authors to add variety to their reading choices. In addition, the conferences gave me an opportunity to take some formative assessments and gauge how my students were applying strategies. I also enjoyed the one-to-one time with each child, and I know they enjoyed the attention.

As I move forward with my class this year, and those in the future, I will continue to use metacognitive reading strategies to teach reading in areas beyond language arts. These strategies will be effective in math, science, social studies, and test taking genres. I truly believe in the study I conducted, and I believe I am a better teacher for it. I am confident that these strategies will stretch to all areas of learning for my students in the future.

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Appendix

Appendix A: HSIRB Approval

Account, HSIRB
To Me, Zales, Charlotte R

May 30, 2013

Dear Karen,

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has accepted your proposal, "Thinking About Reading: A Method for Successful Comprehension." A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Co-Chair, Dr. Adams O'Connell, for the duration of the time of your study and for up to one year from the approval date indicated by the date of this email.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into topics other 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 email notification, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation, awaiting HSIRB approval of the changes.

We do still need to collect your electronic signature, so please respond to this email with your name and project title in the subject line. Dr. Rappe Zales can provide her electronic signature by replying to this email with her name in the subject line. Your replies will serve as your signatures.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Virginia Adams O'Connell
Co-Chair, HSIRB
Moravian College
hsirb@moravian.edu
voconne1@moravian.edu
(610) 625-7756

Appendix B: Superintendent Consent Letter

CONSENT FORM

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 using metacognitive strategies and critical thinking to improve reading comprehension. The title of my research is *Thinking About Reading: A Method for Successful Comprehension*. My students will benefit from participating in this study by learning to monitor and strengthen their reading comprehension.

As part of the study, students will be asked to take surveys, conduct reading interviews and conferences with me, work in cooperative groups to discuss literature, and keep a reflecting reading notebook. The study will take place from August 26, 2013 to December 20, 2013.

The data will be collected and 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 (made up names) – no one's identity will be used. I will store the data in a locked drawer in my classroom. At the conclusion of the research, the data will be destroyed.

A student may choose at any time not to participate in the study. However, students must participate in all regular class activities such as guided reading, teacher conferencing, responsive journaling, cooperative learning, and whole group instruction. In no way will participation, non-participation, or withdrawal during the study have any influence on any aspect of the class.

We welcome questions about this research at any time. My students' participation in this study is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or consequence. Any questions you may have about the research can be directed to me, Karen Brion, [redacted] or my advisor, Dr. Joseph Shosh, Education Department, Moravian College, [redacted] Any questions about the rights of research participants may be directed to Dr. Virginia O'Connell, Chair HSIRB, Moravian College, Bethlehem, PA 18018, [redacted]

Sincerely,

Karen E Brion

I agree [redacted] Karen Brion to conduct this project in her classroom.

[redacted] 8/7/13

Superintendent Signature Date

Appendix C: Principal Consent Letter

CONSENT FORM

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 using metacognitive strategies and critical thinking to improve reading comprehension. The title of my research is *Thinking About Reading: A Method for Successful Comprehension.* My students will benefit from participating in this study by learning to monitor and strengthen their reading comprehension.

As part of the study, students will be asked to take surveys, conduct reading interviews and conferences with me, work in cooperative groups to discuss literature, and keep a reflecting reading notebook. The study will take place from August 26, 2013 to December 20, 2013.

The data will be collected and 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 (made up names) – no one's identity will be used. I will store the data in a locked drawer in my classroom. At the conclusion of the research, the data will be destroyed.

A student may choose at any time not to participate in the study. However, students must participate in all regular class activities such as guided reading, teacher conferencing, responsive journaling, cooperative learning, and whole group instruction. In no way will participation, non-participation, or withdrawal during the study have any influence on any aspect of the class.

We welcome questions about this research at any time. My students' participation in this study is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or consequence. Any questions you may have about the research can be directed to me, Karen Brion, [redacted] or my advisor, Dr. Joseph Shosh, Education Department, Moravian College, [redacted] Any questions about the rights of research participants may be directed to Dr. Virginia O'Connell, Chair HSIRB, Moravian College, Bethlehem, PA 18018, [redacted]

Sincerely,

Karen E Brion

I agree to allow Karen Brion to conduct this project in her classroom.

[redacted] 5/31/13

Principal Signature Date

Appendix D: Parent Consent Letter

CONSENT FORM

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 using metacognitive strategies and critical thinking to improve reading comprehension. The title of my research is *Thinking About Reading: A Method for Successful Comprehension*. My students will benefit from participating in this study by learning to monitor and strengthen their reading comprehension.

As part of the study, students will be asked to take surveys, conduct reading interviews and conferences with me, work in cooperative groups to discuss literature, and keep a reflecting reading notebook. The study will take place from August 26, 2013 to December 20, 2013.

The data will be collected and 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 (made up names) – no one's identity will be used. I will store the data in a locked drawer in my classroom. At the conclusion of the research, the data will be destroyed.

A student may choose at any time not to participate in the study. However, students must participate in all regular class activities such as guided reading, teacher conferencing, responsive journaling, cooperative learning, and whole group instruction. In no way will participation, non-participation, or withdrawal during the study have any influence on any aspect of the class.

We welcome questions about this research at any time. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or consequence. Any questions you may have about the research can be directed to me, Karen Brion, or my advisor, Dr. Joseph Shosh, Education Department, Moravian College, jshosh@moravian.edu. Any questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed to Dr. Virginia O'Connell, Chair HSIRB, Moravian College, Bethlehem, PA 18018

Sincerely,

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

Appendix E: Student Pre- and Post Study Reading Survey

Student Reading Survey

1. Reading is something I like to do. Yes No

2. I think I am a good reader. Yes No

Why do you think you are a good reader or not a good reader? Explain below.

_____

_____

_____

3. I enjoy listening to my teacher read books to the class. Yes No

4. I enjoy having time to read by myself at school Yes No

5. I understand most of some of a little of what I read.

6. When we talk about stories in class, I participate in the discussion:

always sometimes hardly ever

7. I like to talk about books I am reading with my teacher and friends.

   always sometimes hardly ever

8. I like to write about what I am reading. always sometimes never

9. I prefer to read by myself with a partner in a group

10. Explain what you do when you get stuck or confused when you are reading._____

    _____

    _____

    _____

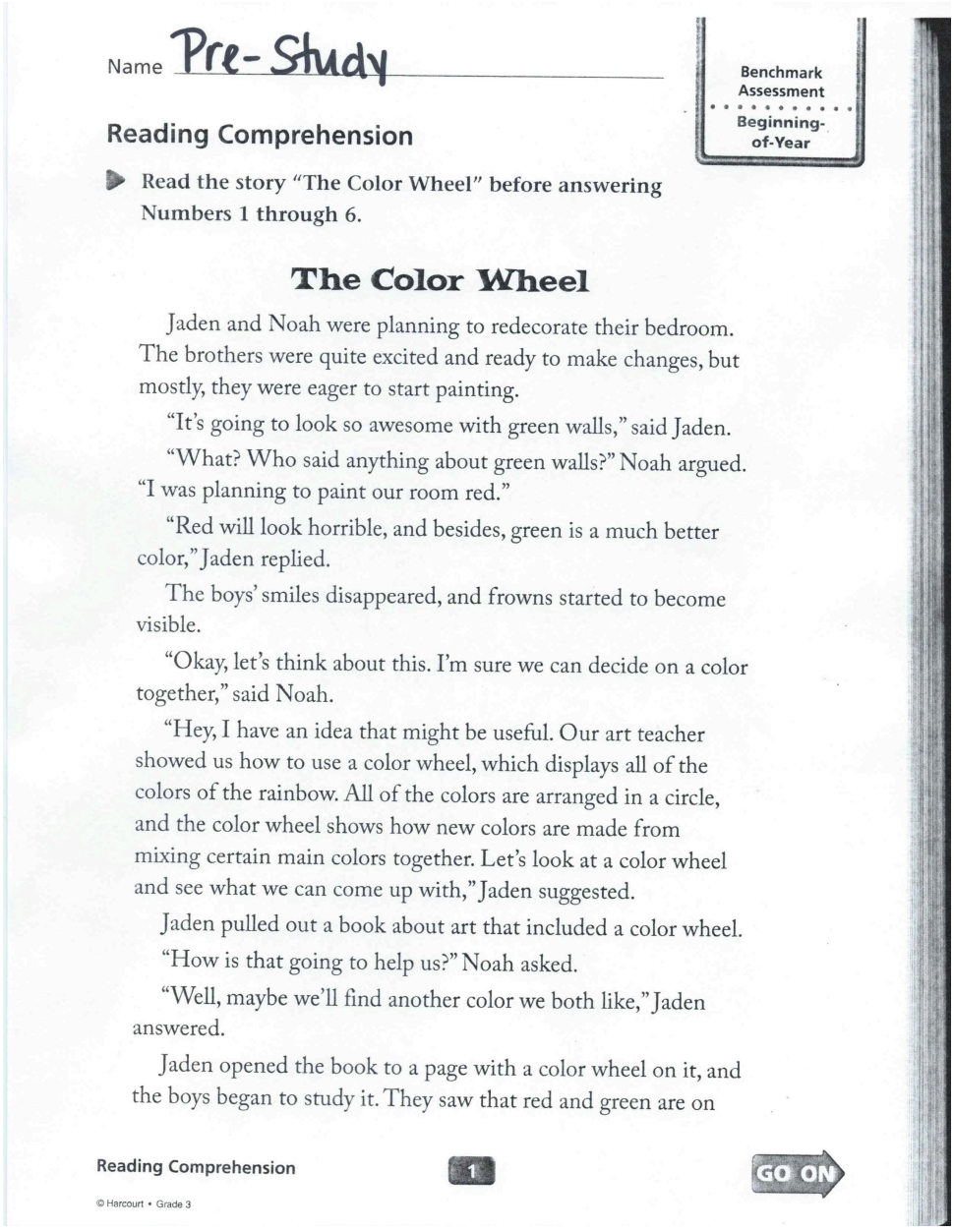
Appendix F: Student Interview Questions

1. **How do you feel about reading?**

2. **What do you like about reading?**

3. **What do you not like about reading?**

Appendix G: Student Pre-Study Comprehension Test



Name Pre-Study

Benchmark Assessment
Beginning-of-Year

Reading Comprehension

Read the story "The Color Wheel" before answering Numbers 1 through 6.

The Color Wheel

Jaden and Noah were planning to redecorate their bedroom. The brothers were quite excited and ready to make changes, but mostly, they were eager to start painting.

"It's going to look so awesome with green walls," said Jaden.

"What? Who said anything about green walls?" Noah argued. "I was planning to paint our room red."

"Red will look horrible, and besides, green is a much better color," Jaden replied.

The boys' smiles disappeared, and frowns started to become visible.

"Okay, let's think about this. I'm sure we can decide on a color together," said Noah.

"Hey, I have an idea that might be useful. Our art teacher showed us how to use a color wheel, which displays all of the colors of the rainbow. All of the colors are arranged in a circle, and the color wheel shows how new colors are made from mixing certain main colors together. Let's look at a color wheel and see what we can come up with," Jaden suggested.

Jaden pulled out a book about art that included a color wheel.

"How is that going to help us?" Noah asked.

"Well, maybe we'll find another color we both like," Jaden answered.

Jaden opened the book to a page with a color wheel on it, and the boys began to study it. They saw that red and green are on

Name _____

Benchmark Assessment
Beginning-of-Year

opposite sides of the color wheel, which means they are very different from one another. Sometimes colors that are not alike work well together, but they can also be so different that they don't work well together.

"Hey, these colors look good together," said Jaden. He pointed to a golden color and a green color. The colors were side by side on the color wheel, but they were not similar.

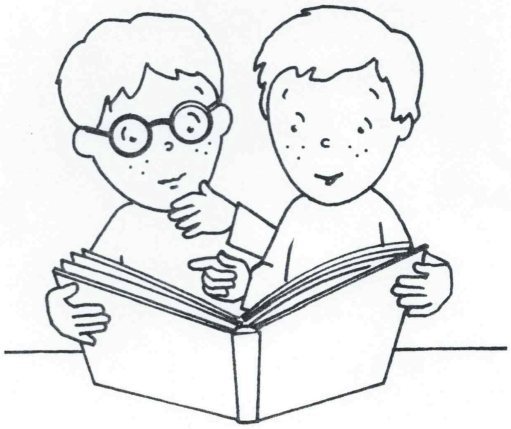
Noah agreed. "But I really do like red," he added.

"Well, I like blue as much as I like green. What would happen if we mixed blue and red?" Jaden asked.

The boys looked at the color wheel. The color in between red and blue on the wheel was purple. They looked at each other and started to grin.

"I think we might have solved our problem," said Jaden.

"I think you're right," said Noah.



Name _____

Benchmark Assessment
Beginning-of-Year

Now answer Numbers 1 through 6. Base your answers on the story "The Color Wheel."

1. What is the story MOSTLY about?
   - Ⓐ two brothers who cannot get along
   - Ⓑ two brothers who decide to paint a bedroom two colors
   - Ⓒ two brothers who discuss a problem and work it out
   - Ⓓ two brothers who cannot make a decision

2. Read the sentence from the story.

   "The brothers were quite excited and ready to make changes, but mostly, they were eager to start painting."

   What does the word *eager* mean in the sentence?
   - Ⓕ thoughtless
   - Ⓖ annoyed
   - Ⓗ ready
   - Ⓘ unwilling

3. Why does Jaden suggest he and Noah look at a color wheel?
   - Ⓐ to show Noah what he learned in school
   - Ⓑ to make Noah forget about the problem
   - Ⓒ to find a color they both like
   - Ⓓ to prove green is better than red

Name _____

Benchmark Assessment
Beginning-of-Year

4. Where does Jaden find the color wheel?
   - (F) in his bag
   - (G) on a shelf
   - (H) in a book
   - (I) at school

5. What will MOST LIKELY happen next?
   - (A) Noah and Jaden will keep looking at the color wheel.
   - (B) Noah and Jaden will paint their bedroom blue and red.
   - (C) Noah and Jaden will decide on a color another day.
   - (D) Noah and Jaden will paint their bedroom purple.

Name _____

Benchmark Assessment
Beginning-of-Year

READ THINK EXPLAIN

6. How does the color wheel help Jaden and Noah solve their problem? Base your answer on details from the story.

Name Pre-Study

Benchmark Assessment
Beginning-of-Year

Read the story "Friends Go Shopping" before answering Numbers 20 through 24.

Friends Go Shopping

Sonja, Urie, and Gabrielle were shopping at the mall one evening. They always enjoyed each other's company when strolling through the stores and daydreaming about wearing the newest fashions. There was one catch today, though—they only had five dollars each to spend.

The girls were eager to take a peek at the jewelry store, the music store, and the many other interesting shops in the mall. They couldn't help dashing across the mall and through the stores. Urie told her friends that she was starting to get hungry. They headed over to the food court, where a variety of snacks were available. Soon most of their money was gone.

After lunch, the girls continued shopping. As Sonja passed a clothing store, she stopped suddenly, and Urie and Gabrielle turned to look at Sonja. "What is it, Sonja?" asked Gabrielle.

"That sweater in the store window," answered Sonja, "I just have to get it!"

"I bet that style would look amazing on you," said Urie, "and it looks like the store carries one in your favorite color!"

"I know. I love that shade of purple," said Sonja. "I've been hunting for one just like it for months!" Sonja rushed into the store and tried the sweater on, hoping it would fit. The sweater fit perfectly. But the price was more than Sonja could afford.

Sonja remembered shopping with her mother a few months ago. Sonja's mother had wanted to buy a dress that she had tried on. But the store only had one dress in her size, and it had a large smear of dirt on the collar. When Sonja's mother brought

Name _____

the soiled dress to the salesclerk's attention, he had given her a discount. Sonja's mother bought the dress at a reduced price, and she had removed the stain at home.

In vain Sonja examined the sweater for flaws, but she didn't find any stains or tears. "What if I 'accidentally' got lipstick on this?" Sonja wondered. "Would I get a discount, too? But that would be dishonest," she said to herself, as she reluctantly put the sweater back on the clothing rack and joined her friends.

"I need to talk to you two," she said. "I really need your opinion. I want that sweater, but I don't have enough money to buy it." Sonja quickly told her friends about her mother's dress. "I'm tempted to get it dirty and ask for a discount. What do you think?"

"Sonja, that's not like you," Gabrielle said, frowning. "Why don't you just wait until you have the money?"

"But how would I ever get enough money to buy that sweater?" asked Sonja.

"You can do extra chores at home," answered Urie. "If you save all of your money, you'll have enough in no time."

Sonja looked at the sweater and then turned back to her friends. "You're right. I can earn the money if I work hard. I'm lucky to have friends who always remind me of the right thing to do!"

Name _____

Benchmark Assessment
Beginning-of-Year

Now answer Numbers 20 through 24. Base your answers on the story "Friends Go Shopping."

20. Where does the story MOSTLY take place?

Ⓐ in a food court
Ⓑ in a music store
Ⓒ in a clothing store
Ⓓ in a bookstore

21. What is Sonja's MAIN problem?

Ⓕ Her friends want to leave her to go to the food court.
Ⓖ She doesn't know which color would look best on her.
Ⓗ She doesn't have enough money to buy something.
Ⓘ Her friends don't like the sweater she likes.

22. What is the MAIN lesson Sonja learns in the story?

Ⓐ Making enough money to buy clothes can be difficult.
Ⓑ Having friends who look out for you is important.
Ⓒ Shopping with friends is a lot of fun.
Ⓓ Buying new clothes is expensive.

23. What would MOST LIKELY have happened if Sonja made a different decision?

Ⓕ She would feel guilty about her choice.
Ⓖ Her friends would be proud of her.
Ⓗ Her friends would make the same choice.
Ⓘ She would have gotten her friends in trouble.

Name _____

Benchmark Assessment
Beginning-of-Year

24. How are Gabrielle, Sonja, and Urie ALIKE?

Ⓐ They save their money to buy new clothes.

Ⓑ They like the same color.

Ⓒ They enjoy going shopping.

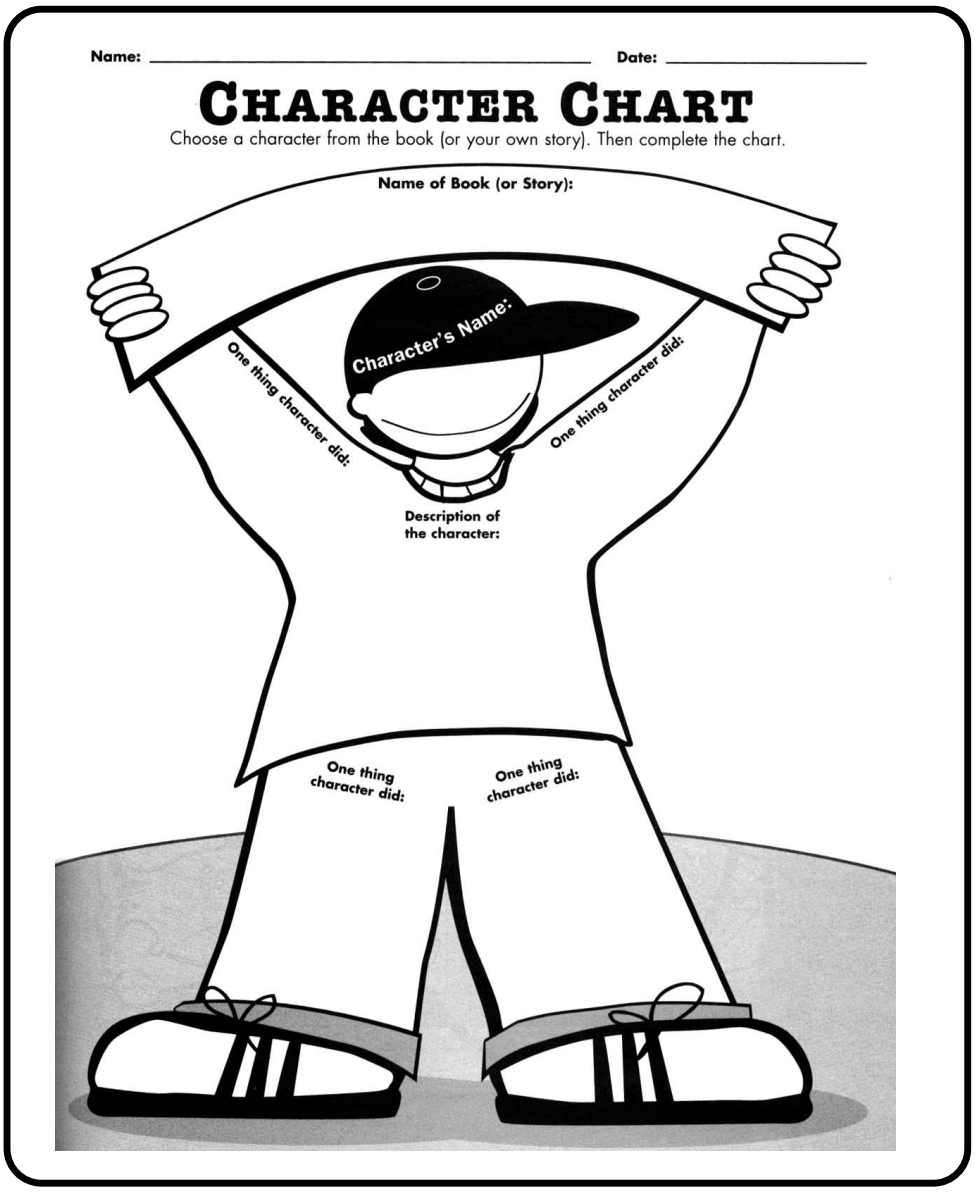
Ⓓ They do extra chores to earn money.

Appendix H: Prediction Form

Prediction Form

I predict…	Why I think that…

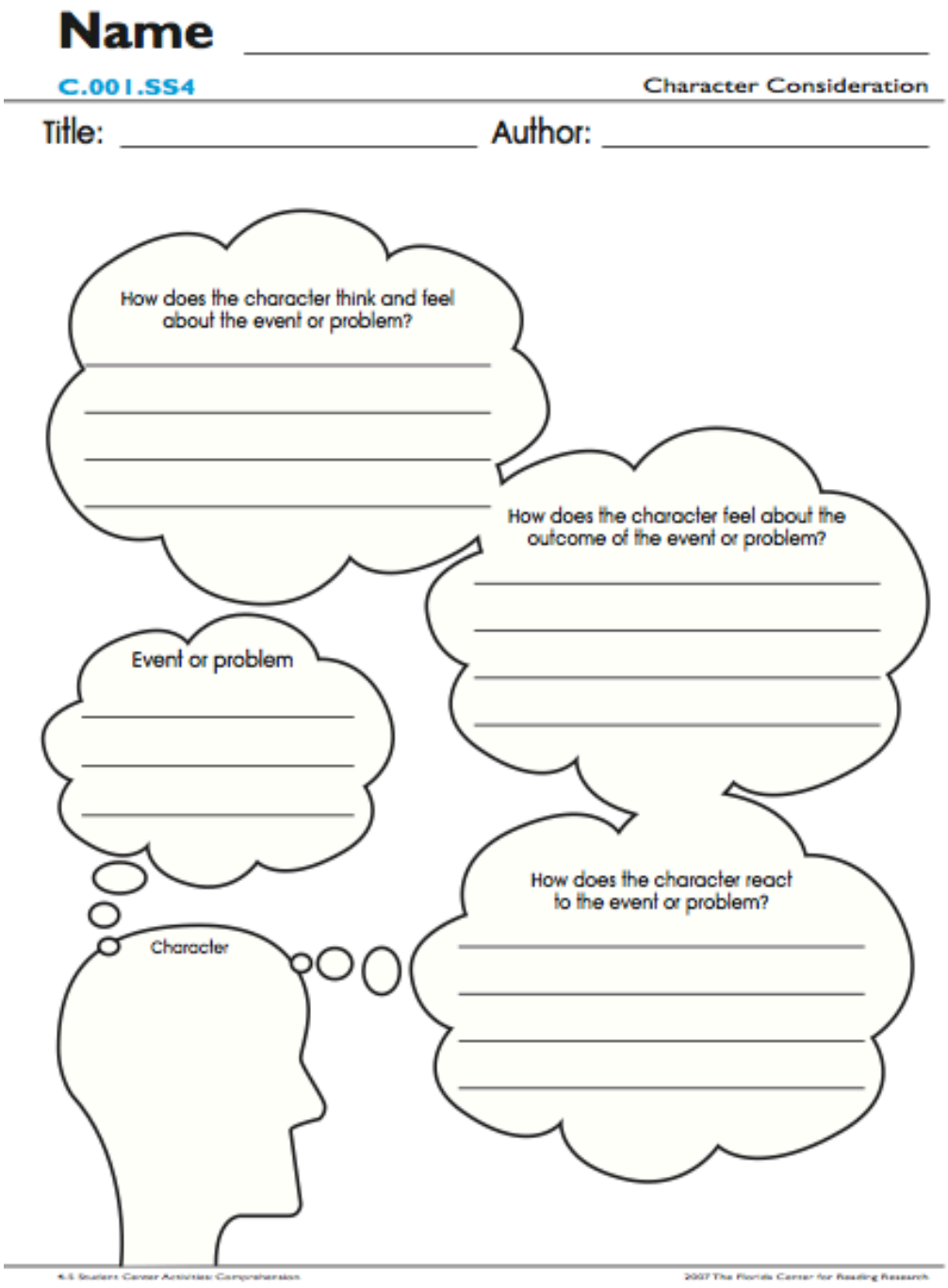
Appendix I: Character Traits Graphic Organizer



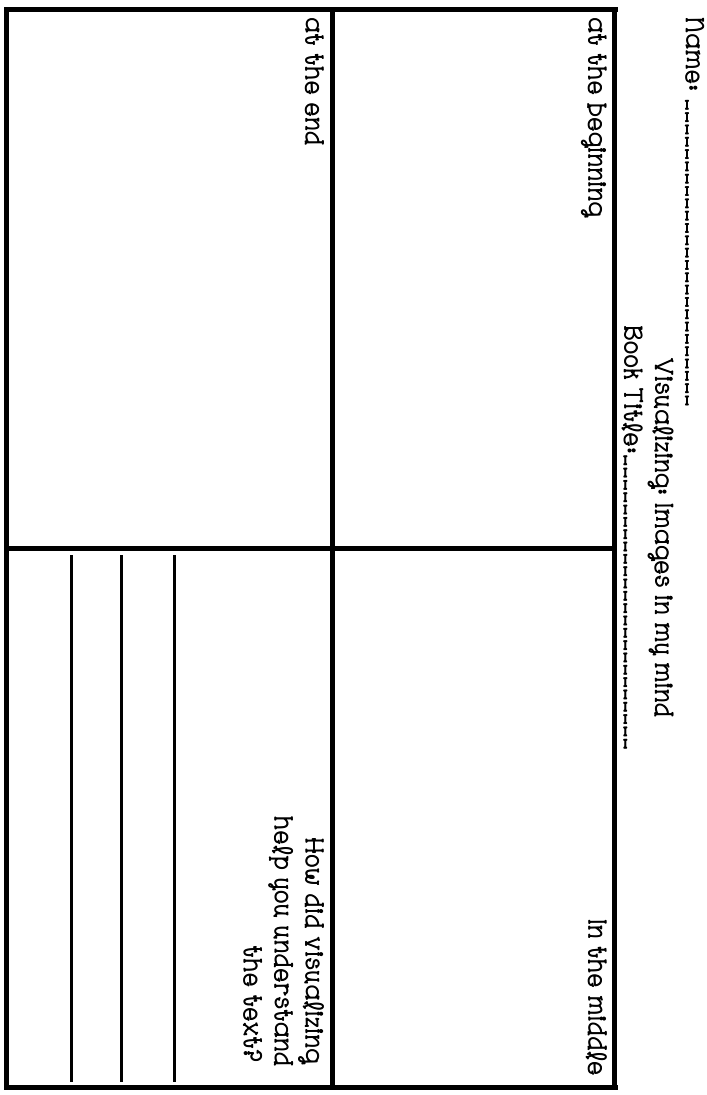
SCHOLASTIC

http://www.scholastic.com

Appendix J: Character Consideration Graphic Organizer



Appendix K: Images in my Mind Graphic Organizer



Appendix L: Story Map

Name: _____

Title: _____

Author: _____

Setting

Where: _____

When: _____

Characters

Main Characters: _____

_____

Other Characters: _____

_____

Main Problem

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Solution to the Main Problem

_____

_____

_____

_____

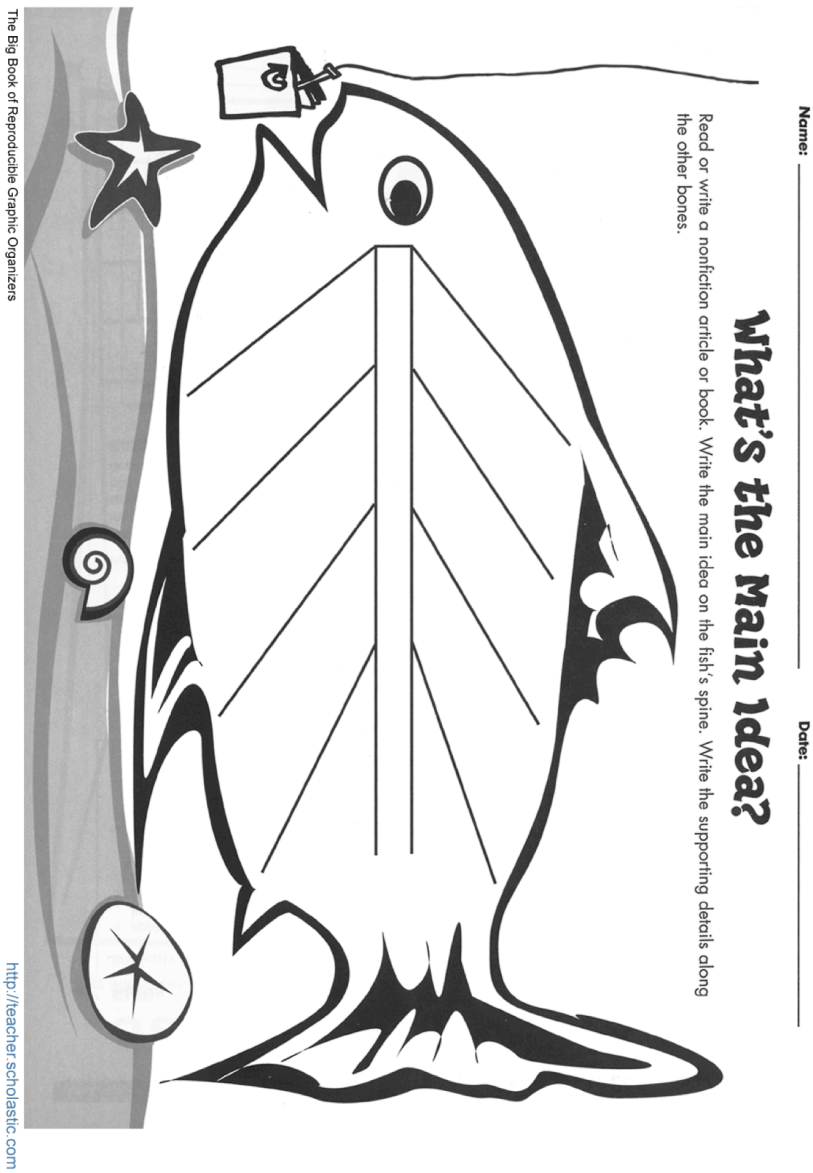
Super Teacher Worksheets - www.superteacherworksheets.com

Appendix M: Talking-to-the-Text

Talking-to-the-Text

WOW! Things I already know or things I find very interesting or exciting	HMMM? I wonder…. I don't understand….
Page:	Page:
Page:	Page:
Page:	Page:
Page:	Page:

Appendix N: What's the Main Idea? Graphic Organizer



SCHOLASTIC

Name: _____ Date: _____

What's the Main Idea?

Read or write a nonfiction article or book. Write the main idea on the fish's spine. Write the supporting details along the other bones.

Appendix O: Make-A-Connection Narrative Response Questions

Make A Connection (MAC)
Narrative Literature Responses

1. Think about the characters in this book. Which one is *most* like you? Why? Give as many reasons as you can.

2. Think about the characters in this book. Which one is *least* like you? Why? Give as many reasons as you can.

3. If you could be one of the characters in this book, which one would you choose? Why?

4. Pretend you are one of the characters in this story. Write a letter to another character in the story telling about one thing that happened to you in the story. Remember to write as though you are the character and stay focused on one event and its supporting details.

5. Pretend the main character is having a birthday. What gift would you give that character? It should be a gift that you know your character needs or wants. Give your reasons for picking that gift, and make sure the gift and reasons are based on information from the story.

6. Choose one of the problems in this story. Think about how it was solved, and how would you (if you were the author) solve it differently?

7. What would you change in this book if you could revise it? Think about changing an event, a solution to a problem, the ending, adding or taking away a character. Give reasons for your change.

8. What did you find confusing about this text? How did you help yourself understand it?

Appendix P: Make-A-Connection Informational Response Questions

Make A Connection (MAC)
Informational Text Responses

1. **Write about the main idea and supporting details in this text. Tell *how* you decided on this answer.**

2. **Think about why the author may have written this text. Explain the author's purpose for writing this text and support your answer with information from the article or book.**

3. **Think about the essential and non-essential facts in this text. Write 3 essential facts the author included in this text.**

4. **Think about how the author researched information to include in the text. Where do you think the author may have found his/her information?**

5. **Write a summary of this text.**

6. **Think about specific words or vocabulary related to the topic of this text. What are 5 words that are important to the text, and tell why the author used each of them.**

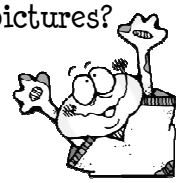
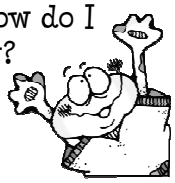
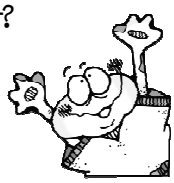
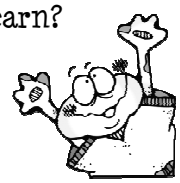
7. **Think about 3 questions you could ask the author of the text. Make each question a thick question.**

8. **What did you learn while reading this text? Tell in what ways the information was new or surprising to you.**

9. **What did you find confusing about this text? How did you help yourself understand it?**

10. **Write 3-5 facts and opinions based on the text you have just read.**

Appendix Q: Reading Response Questioning Cards

Before Reading Questions What story clues are in the titles and pictures? 	Before Reading Questions What will the main character need or want? 
Before Reading Questions Is this story real or make-believe? How do I know? 	Before Reading Questions Why do I want to read this story? 
Before Reading Questions If this text is real, what will I learn? 	Before Reading Questions How do I picture the setting? 

During Reading Questions

What will happen next in the story?

During Reading Questions

How do you feel about the main character?

During Reading Questions

Why does the charcter act or feel a certain way?

During Reading Questions

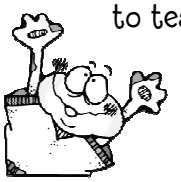
Does the story or text make sense?

During Reading Questions

How will the story most likely end?

During Reading Questions

How does this story or text remind me of my life?

After Reading Questions How did the story or text make me feel? 	After Reading Questions What do I like or dislike about the story? 
After Reading Questions What is the main part of the story or text? 	After Reading Questions How have my feelings about the character changed? 
After Reading Questions How are the character's feelings or actions different at the end of the story? 	After Reading Questions What is the author trying to teach me? 

Appendix R: Post Study Comprehension Test

Name Post Study

Benchmark Assessment
Beginning-of-Year

Read the story "A New Ball Game" before answering Numbers 25 through 30.

A New Ball Game

How are a peach basket and a basketball hoop alike? Read the story. You will find out.

A long time ago, there was a gym teacher named Mr. Naismith. He had a hard time keeping his class busy. His students were bored. They talked too loudly. They didn't like to stay inside in winter. Mr. Naismith tried to think of a way to keep his class busy.

Mr. Naismith had an idea. He asked someone at the school to find two boxes. No boxes could be found. Mr. Naismith got two peach baskets. He put the peach baskets high above the gym floor. One basket was at one end of the gym. The other basket was at the other end.

Mr. Naismith had a surprise for his students the next day. They saw the peach baskets. They thought that was funny. Mr. Naismith told them the rules of his new game. There would be two teams. Each team would try to throw a ball into a peach basket. The teams would not play against each other. They would just try to get a ball into their own basket.

There was one main rule. When a player had the ball, he had to pass it to another player. The player who got the ball would throw it into the basket. The students had a hard time passing the ball. Everyone wanted to keep the ball. They wanted to throw it in the basket.

The players could not push each other. They also could not hit. If they did, Mr. Naismith would blow his whistle and that team would get a foul. After three fouls, the other team would get a point.

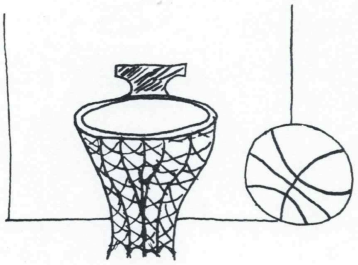
Name _____

Benchmark Assessment
Beginning-of-Year

When a player threw the ball into the basket, it stayed there! There were no holes in the bottoms of the peach baskets. Mr. Naismith had to climb a ladder to get the ball out of the basket. Then players could shoot the ball again. It was a slow game.

Mr. Naismith thought of some changes. He cut out the bottoms of the baskets. That way Mr. Naismith wouldn't have to climb a ladder to get a ball. The rules of the game changed too. The teams started to play against each other. Then players could bounce the ball. The game wasn't so slow any more.

The students loved peach basketball. They asked Mr. Naismith to play the game inside and outside. The students showed their friends how to play. Everyone loved the game. After a while, peach baskets were changed to hoops and nets. Does this sound familiar? Peach baskets became basketball hoops. The game of basketball was invented.



Name _____

Benchmark Assessment
Beginning-of-Year

Now answer Numbers 25 through 30. Base your answers on the story "A New Ball Game."

25. Which BEST tells why the author wrote this article?

Ⓕ to inform people of the rules of basketball
Ⓖ to encourage people to play a new kind of game
Ⓗ to show how Mr. Naismith became a popular teacher
Ⓘ to explain how the game of basketball was invented

26. Which event happened FIRST?

Ⓐ Mr. Naismith explained the one main rule of a new game.
Ⓑ Mr. Naismith had to think of a way to keep his students busy.
Ⓒ Mr. Naismith had a surprise for his students.
Ⓓ Mr. Naismith told his students about rules for a new game.

27. What was the main rule of peach basketball?

Ⓕ Players were out of the game if they had two fouls.
Ⓖ Players had to pass the ball.
Ⓗ Players had to shoot as soon as they got the ball.
Ⓘ Players were not to bounce the ball.

Name _____

Benchmark Assessment
Beginning-of-Year

28. How does Mr. Naismith solve the problem of having to get the ball out of the basket?

Ⓐ He lets the students get the ball.
Ⓑ He moves the game outside.
Ⓒ He cuts out the bottoms of the baskets.
Ⓓ He puts the baskets lower on the wall.

29. How do the students show they love the new game?

Ⓕ They show their friends how to play.
Ⓖ They laugh at the peach baskets on the walls.
Ⓗ They try to get the ball into the peach baskets.
Ⓘ They learn how to bounce the ball.

30. Which word BEST describes Mr. Naismith?

Ⓐ tired
Ⓑ calm
Ⓒ clever
Ⓓ funny

Name Post Study

Benchmark Assessment
Beginning-of-Year

Read the story "Lazy Day" before answering Numbers 31 through 35.

Lazy Day

by Eileen Spinelli
Illustrated by Stephanie Roth

One fine day Mama woke up long after the alarm clock went off. "Today is Lazy Day!" she declared.

So breakfast was berries and bananas, and nobody cooked.

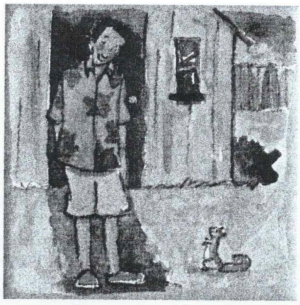
We all left our bowls in the sink and went outside where there was plenty to look at.

For the rest of the morning we took it easy and did nothing but look.

Daddy looked at the shed that needed painting. But nobody paints on Lazy Day. So he watched the squirrels instead. They were scurrying around the yard looking for something good to eat.

Name _____

Benchmark Assessment
Beginning-of-Year



Grandma looked at the weeds sprouting in her flower garden. But nobody pulls weeds on Lazy Day. So she watched the butterflies instead. They were dancing above the petunias.

Grandpa looked at his dusty red truck that needed washing. But nobody washes trucks on Lazy Day. So he watched Mrs. Albert's pet duck chase the mail carrier and got quite a giggle.

Mama watched our cat stalking a sunbeam.

I watched the sky. Two ship-shaped clouds floated by.

Lazy Day lunch was a picnic in the backyard with chunks of cheese and hunks of bread, and nobody cooked.

After lunch Mama felt like singing. So she did.

Daddy felt like smelling the roses. So he did.

Grandma felt like taking a nap.

Grandpa felt like taking off his shoes and socks.

I felt like splashing in an old garden tub. So I did.

Name _____

Benchmark Assessment
Beginning-of-Year

Dinner on Lazy Day was cold leftovers on paper plates, and nobody cooked.

After dinner there was plenty to entertain us. Fireflies and moonrise. Bats against the starlight. Owls hooting. Crickets chirping. Bullfrogs croaking. Neighbors waving and joking about us lazybones lolling in rocking chairs.

But that's how it is on Lazy Day. You don't have to do a thing. You just have to be.

Name _____

Benchmark Assessment
Beginning-of-Year

Now answer Numbers 31 through 35. Base your answers on the story "Lazy Day."

31. Read this sentence from the story.

> **"Grandma looked at the weeds sprouting in her flower garden."**

What word means about the same as *sprouting* in this sentence?

Ⓕ growing
Ⓖ wilting
Ⓗ dying
Ⓘ planting

32. According to the story, how are breakfast, lunch, and dinner ALIKE?

Ⓐ All three meals are served on paper plates.
Ⓑ All three meals are berries and bananas.
Ⓒ All three meals are not cooked.
Ⓓ All three meals are leftovers.

33. What happens LAST in the story?

Ⓕ Daddy watches squirrels.
Ⓖ Grandma looks at the weeds.
Ⓗ Grandpa takes off his socks.
Ⓘ Grandpa giggles at the duck.

Name _____

Benchmark Assessment
Beginning-of-Year

34. What will Daddy MOST LIKELY do tomorrow?

Ⓐ declare that it's a Lazy Day
Ⓑ pull some weeds
Ⓒ paint the shed
Ⓓ splash in a tub

35. What was the author's main purpose for writing "Lazy Day"?

Ⓕ to tell interesting facts about holidays
Ⓖ to tell a story about one family's special day
Ⓗ to show people why they should relax more
Ⓘ to give information about different chores

STOP

Appendix S: The Spaghetti Challenge Poem

Visualizing Name _____

Use the words author to help you visualize. Underline or highlight the words from the passage that helped you visualize. Sketch what you visualized on the other side.

These Words	Created This Image
The Spaghetti Challenge by Leslie D. Perkins My mom's spaghetti is the best; no other mom can beat it; and every time she cooks it I can hardly wait to eat it. I twist the strands around my fork with wonderful control, but as I raise them to my mouth they fall back in the bowl. I twirl the noodles once again with all the skill I'm able, but as I lift them up to eat they tumble to the table. I spin my fork; spaghetti winds around and round once more; but as it nears my waiting lips it slithers to the floor. My mom's spaghetti is the best; no other mom can beat it; but I would like it better if I got a chance to eat it.	