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Karen Haag

Connections: The Most Misunderstood Proficient Reader Strategy

*For years, I assumed students connected information they learned
in other classes to information they learned in another.
I expected my students to use what they learned from me to help them not
only in their other classes but also in the real world.
But my experience working with adolescent readers showed me that
this isn't always the case. Many students ignored what they knew and dove
right into new material without considering their background knowledge.*

*They didn't know that the information in their head
is a powerful resource when reading difficult text.*

I Read It, But I Don't Get It: Comprehension Strategies for Adolescent Readers
By Cris Tovani, p. 63

Activate and Connect!

By learning to explain how connections help readers understand texts, comprehension improves. Children deepen their understanding by accessing their prior knowledge before reading a selection. Students practice thinking about what is misunderstood and applying what they know to repair meaning. They learn to apply connections to get meaning from a selection that was originally confusing. Students begin to dissect and discuss author's literary elements - like metaphors - to deepen their comprehension even further. A big part of learning to use connections is learning to compare.

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Breaking My Ankle Connection

I learned from breaking my ankle. What I learned can be applied to teaching. When I first broke my ankle, I went to a physical therapist. I wanted to be well again. I wanted to know what to do - just what to do. Don't bother me with the theories. Just help me. She gave me exercises to strengthen my muscles and joints. I wrote down what she said. She made copies of directions.

I asked lots of questions. I thought I understood. I went home and tried the exercises. Once at home, I had more questions so I wrote them in a "health-journal". When I went back I asked the questions a second time.

As time went by, I became interested in the general ideas behind the "how-to's". Now that I had tried the exercises, I wanted to understand the "whys" of what I was doing so that I could fine-tune the effectiveness of my exercise routine. I also was desperate to streamline the amount of time I was spending on exercises.

Finally, I read the papers the therapist gave. I asked more questions. I discovered that I asked the same questions over and over - just to learn the mechanics of how to help myself. I combined exercises. I threw out exercises that made me worse. I found from this expert that I had been doing an exercise for 20 years that was not helping me. What a waste of time! I found others that were actually hurting me! What was considered effective 20 years ago changed.

I think by learning something so new - something that required me to learn the mechanics as well as the theory - I am a more reflective teacher. As a result of this experience, I looked through my teaching bag and asked:

1. What am I doing that already works? Keep it.
2. What does current research say about the strategies I use that I thought worked? Like the exercises that weren't helping me and the ones that were actually hurting? Get rid of them, even if I have been using them 20 years.
3. Where can I get expert advice when I need it?
4. Who will answer my questions over and over again?
5. How can I spend less time and yet be effective?
6. Where can I combine activities?
7. How can I allow myself to not rush my own learning process and give myself permission to take on new challenges one *step* at a time?



When learning about connections and other strategies, start small. My first year, I focused on learning one strategy every 4-6 weeks. I implemented other ideas at the same time, but I allowed myself time to concentrate as well as experiment.

As you try the ideas in this handout, go slow. Step back and reflect on what is working and what needs work. Make some notes for yourself for next year, even if they're very brief. Self assess, reflect, and record what you're learning. That is key to being metacognitive whether a teacher or student.

Steps For Minilesson 1: Schema

"One-Minute Schema Determiner T-Chart"

From Tanny McGregor's book, *Comprehension Connections*

Learning Target: I can explain what schema is.

1. Make a T-chart. Ask kids to call out something they know a lot about (like their school) for 30 seconds. Time them. Record their responses as fast as you can on the left side of the chart.
 2. Choose another topic they don't know anything about (like a Petoskey stone). Once again give students 30 seconds to call out anything they know about the topic. Write their responses on the right side.
 3. Reflect. What do students notice when looking at the chart? ...silence, fewer responses, less energy, questions, more guesses on the right
 4. Ask students to discuss as partners *why* the differences.
 5. Lead students to realize that when they are familiar with a topic they can make a much bigger list. That knowledge is called *schema*.
 6. Write SCHEMA down the left-hand column right over the responses.
 7. Record definition: *Schema is every thing you know about a topic.* When you approach a book or any new learning, assess how much schema you have. You can add schema to your brain by reading, experiencing, and talking.
- P.S. Show what a Petoskey is. Use pictures from the Internet.

School	Petoskey stone
SCHEMA	

Steps For Minilesson 2: Daily Exit Sheets

Learning Target: I can use exit sheets to explain what I learned.

CONNECT: Ask something like, "Have you ever thought about what you're thinking while you're reading, writing or solving a math problem?" Let students share their preliminary responses.

TEACHING POINT: Tell students that in today's lesson they will go in the attic of their minds to sweep out and then examine their thoughts. Eventually, they will learn to watch their minds at work and explain how their minds reason and reach conclusions. They will write what they learned about lessons. They will be metacognitive; they will analyze their thinking and record what they discover.

TEACHING: Read this line from *Tuck Everlasting*: "His long chin faded off into an apologetic beard." Stop and wonder about this thing called an "apologetic beard". What exactly does an apologetic beard look like? Model recording example on exit slip.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: Give the students time to read engaging books at their independent levels. Ask them to watch their minds at work while reading. Tell them that when they come back for closure, they will share or write (depending on grade level and readiness) what they observed.

REVISIT LEARNING TARGET AND SHARE: After reading time, students tell what they observed (noticed), inferred (guessed) or questioned (wondered).

EXIT SHEET REFLECTION: Students write. This first exit slip may take a little time but with practice the students get faster. They eventually expect to reflect, so they start thinking about what they'll write during the lesson. Ask students to write the last 5-10 minutes of lesson time. You might play music (without words) at this time. As soon as the students hear the music, they know it's time to put everything away and start writing. *Write with one student every day. By asking questions, help one child/day improve in elaborating her thoughts.*

NOTE: At first, I collect the reflections every day and respond, even if I write just a word or two. I rarely go more than a day without reading the exit sheets because I decide what to teach as a result of reading them. For example, one time a child wrote [sic] *The Author described him as a man that was nice and kind. But I think he is a bad character because the last sentence was, "My mom told me never to talk to strangers."* And I wrote: *Do you think foreshadowing is happening here?* The next day, I explained foreshadowing in my minilesson and gave credit to the child who recorded that brilliant noticing. I simply named what he noticed.

Steps for Minilesson 3: Make My Brain Happy by Overviewing

Learning Target: I can overview a selection to improve comprehension.

CONNECT: Begin by asking something like, "Do you want to make your brain happy when you read?" Explain how the brain is a problem solver and sorter. It loves to put new ideas, questions and solutions into filing cabinets.

To make the point, play a little game for this minilesson. Give each child a handout of a short poem - white side up. When you say go, they turn the paper over for 7 seconds, scan the poem, and look for the topic, author, and genre.

After the 7 seconds and without looking at the poem, see what information the class/group gathered. (Students determine topic by looking at the title, pictures, captions, and subtitles. They determine genre by looking at the structure of the piece or the author or title. The author is under the title.)

TEACHING: Stress how comprehension will improve if the brain can understand the genre. **NOTES:** If it's a genre I know well, I already know the story structure and I can determine my reading pace. Some genres like poetry and nonfiction require a slow pace and/or several re-readings. If the topic is familiar, I will be reading pretty quickly and adding to my stored body of knowledge. But, if it is something I know very little about, my reading rate and my purpose for reading changes. If I know the author, I can expect a certain story structure. Without knowing the author, I don't know what to expect and will have to determine my pace and purpose as I read. Finally, from overviewing, I should set a purpose for reading, "What am I reading to find out?" Having a purpose helps me focus my reading and separate out what is important from what is unimportant – the very gist of comprehension.

TEACHING POINT: As a class, gather this information in 7 seconds. As a reader, a huge boost in comprehension results from determining topic, author, genre, and purpose before reading. The brain can store the facts in the correct filing cabinet along with any

other background knowledge the reader has. In addition, by taking a few minutes to file the information correctly, the brain can retrieve it again the next day.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: Ask the students to begin reading their books by overviewing, whether it is a whole book or a chapter.

REVISIT LEARNING TARGET: Students reflect on the results of using the new strategy.

EXIT SHEET: (1) What is overviewing? (2) How will you use it in the future?

Steps for Minilesson 4: Overviewing to set a purpose.

Learning Target: I can set a purpose for reading after overviewing.

CONNECT: Ask students if they want to improve their comprehension immediately with an easy-to-use strategy.

TEACHING POINT: Readers improve comprehension by figuring out what they know and what they want to know *before* they begin to read.

TEACH: Show students how to do an intermediate picture walk: look at the cover and the information there, read the summary (usually on the back), note the author (like yesterday), scan the pictures, captions, bold and italic words for nonfiction, scan the chapter titles.

Post chart paper and ask students to tell what they noticed after a few minutes of overviewing. Record their responses. From what they notice, figure out what they know and what they want to know when they read. After they notice and wonder they set a purpose. Each child shares a question she wants to read to answer.

Example...

Notice	Wonder (What I'm reading to find out)
I noticed the woman is selling something that looks like tacos in the picture.	Is this a Spanish restaurant? Will the story have something to do with Mexico?
The woman is on every page.	Who is the woman? Will she be the main character?

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: Try the strategy while reading a group-book and report back at closure time.

SHARE: Revisit Learning Target. Reflect on the results of using the new strategy.

LINK: Explain the reason for "think-about-what-you-know" *before* reading. When the brain has background knowledge about a topic, it will hook the new information with the old information for a better understanding of the new reading. If the student does not take time to access that "schema," the process slows down. The brain may eventually discover the relationship. However, taking a few minutes to remember what you know makes this process work more smoothly and boosts comprehension.

EXIT-SHEET REFLECTION: (1) What more did you learn about setting a purpose for reading? (2) How will you set purposes for reading in the future?

Steps for Minilesson 5:

Recognize the power of connecting!

Learning Target: I use language that helps me connect and improve comprehension.

TEACHING: Choose a picture book to model to read and think aloud. Talk aloud, stopping to share connections with my students. Focus on explaining memories, feelings, relationships to characters and settings, thoughts, and questions. Model *what I'm thinking* and *how the thinking helps me* understand the book better. Model what is confusing and how to use personal experiences to get unconfused. **NOTES:** I read the book ahead of time and prepare what I'm going to say. I write what I will say on a sticky note. I use phrases like...

The general finding is that when readers are given cognitive strategy instruction, they make significant gains on measures of reading comprehension over students trained with conventional instruction procedures. They read better.
National Reading Panel

You Know When You Are Connecting...

When collecting connections, my students often notice that they recorded similar phrases. I find it helpful to make charts of the language my students and I discover. The language of connections may look like this:

This story reminds me of...

I understand...

My experience is...

I believe the same way...

This time is the same as...

I agree with...

This place is similar to...

NOTES: To get the hang of think aloud, I recommend reading 3 or 4 picture books taking time to notice your thinking. I took a course online with Ellin Keene and she recommended that we read 12 books. At first I thought, 12 books? But I realized I didn't know much more than my students about this technique. With practice, I could model sophisticated connections for my students, connections that actually improved comprehension, not just the "Oh-I-have-a-grandmother-too" connection.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Ask students to notice their connections as they read and mark them with a sticky note. Give just 2 sticky notes to each child. Ask them to decide which 2 connections are the best for sharing and mark them with these notes. As they see a "better" connection, they move the sticky.

OR

Give students a short text to read. Ask the students to work with a partner and partner-read the text. Mark the text ahead of time with a dot – in pencil. When they come to the dot, they should stop and think aloud. See if either partner (or both) has a connection at the dot!

REVISIT LEARNING TARGET & SHARE: At closure time, share how stopping and thinking about connections improved comprehension. **NOTES:** At first, connections may be shallow. I study connections for one month so that I have time to investigate how connections can help us understand text. The next lessons will help students deepen their understanding of how to use schema to improve their reading ability.

TEACHING POINT: Revisit Learning Target. Ask students if they noticed any specific language used to make a connection. For example, "I remember when..." may help them be cognizant of a memory connection. Or they might think, "I feel the same way as ..." In this first lesson, they probably did not notice such specifics but I want to lay the groundwork for

the language they might use when recording connections in their daybooks or talking to one another about connections. As the days progress, make charts of the words students notice and add some of your own.

Reteaching ideas from Tanny McGregor, *Comprehension Connections: Bridges to Strategic Reading*

Launching Sequence: Schema

Materials: Lint roller with tear off sheets, 1/2-by-2" slips of paper

1. What makes you unique? Turn to a Partner and Talk (TAP)
2. Teacher summarizes responses and then challenges students to think more deeply. "What is it that really makes you *you*?" TAP again.
3. Demonstrate with lint brush. Spread small slips of paper on table. Each slip should have the teacher's personal experience, feeling, or thought written on it. Roll the lint brush over them to show how it picks up the slips. Tear off the sheet and hold it up to show how your schema becomes your knowledge stuck to your brain.
4. Teacher explains that thoughts, feelings and experiences make each person unique. Some may have similar eye color but no one has experienced life in the same way.
5. Tell students: More schema is better. Students need to read, talk, and experience to build schema.

Norman Rockwell: Enduring Connections

1. Students pair up to write on sticky notes when viewing artwork (from Internet, calendars, etc.)
2. Post thinking stems to scaffold them...
 - > That reminds me...
 - > I'm remembering...
 - > That compares to...
 - > I have schema for...
 - > I can relate to...
3. Reflect: How did thinking about connections promote deeper understanding of Rockwell's work?

Wordless Picture Books (Mercer Mayer)

Consider reading *A Boy, A Dog, and A Frog* series. Pairs discuss connections to pictures. Compare their stories. How did schema slip into their personal "reading" of the wordless picture books?

NOTES: Sometimes by asking children to write too much during reading time we break down comprehension. One way to avoid that problem is to give students a choice when recording their thinking. Tell them you will give them 20 minutes for reading and writing for example. Tell them you know that some like to read and write as the thought occurs to them. Some like to read without interruption and write at the end. So to accommodate both learning styles, you will tell them when 15 minutes have passed. That way the students who just like to read, can use their last 5 minutes to write.

Be very careful with students with reading and writing disabilities. Coding and writing can actually **BREAK DOWN** comprehension. You may want them to record what they want to talk about using codes or very brief notes. Talk to each child to find out what works.

Steps for ANCHOR lesson 6: Code Nonfiction Connections

Learning Target: I can use coding to slow me down to think deeply about ideas.

TEACHING POINT: Post a magazine article on a chart stand. Tell students that across the country boys and girls are learning to code text and that you want them to try it. I show students the chapter in *Nonfiction Matters* by Stephanie Harvey so they can see a model.

TEACH: Think aloud and model how to code an article in a magazine. Read each sentence and code each sentence, talking aloud about how you use these codes suggested in *Nonfiction Matters* by Stephanie Harvey:

I = important ideas

W = wonder about this

***** = interesting fact

L = learned something new

C = connection, "reminds me"

NOTE: Be very careful with students with reading and writing disabilities. Coding and writing can actually BREAK DOWN comprehension. You may want them to record what they want to talk about using codes or very brief notes. Talk to each child to find out what works.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: Select a different article for your students to read and code. Harvey suggests that students code every sentence when they're learning. I found that helpful. In that way, students could not say, "I don't have any connections." They can use more than one code for each sentence.

REVISIT LEARNING TARGET & SHARE: Gather back together.

Ask students to compare codes with a partner near them. Same? Different? Possible reasons?

Share what we coded and experiences with the whole group.

Discuss whether coding helped.

Share what was difficult and talk through solutions. (Pay particular attention to students who say this technique didn't work for them. You may want to work with them next time to see what the problem actually is. Be on the lookout for shutting down comprehension with coding, however.)

Crucial link → **EXIT SLIP:** Ask students to (1) explain what coding is and (2) how they can use coding in their reading lives. Linda Hoyt in *Snapshots: The Video* suggests this reflection question: "What did we learn and how can we apply the strategy to our lives?" This step provides critical formative assessment that helps teachers assess what children learned and what they need to teach next. *Remember, students would not be coding every sentence after the first few tries.*

NOTES: The sharing time is so important. Often, when we share, I discover I need to do some reteaching. In this lesson, the students wrote on a *Time For Kids* article. When asked, how can you apply coding to other situations in your reading life, they had nothing to say. I helped them see that eventually they would code in their heads when they read the science and social studies textbooks. They could code on sticky notes and post them in their texts and write on the magazines we buy for them or books they own. My young readers do not make these discoveries without reflection time at the end of the lesson.

In my experience, the teacher or the students need to clearly state the how to and the application of coding at the end of this lesson.

- Will you code everything you read? (No.)
- What will you code? (Books I own, magazines and newspapers.)
- Why? (To slow down my reading. To mark ideas to discuss. To mark places that are confusing to me. To remember what I read.)
- Can you write on all texts? (No.)
- What do you do if you can't? (Record notes on sticky notes and post in the book.)
- How is coding helpful? (Coding helps us slow down and think about each sentence. It also helps the reader interpret the personal meaning of the text.)
- For what tasks? (Usually for new topics or difficult topics – more often nonfiction.)

I lead students to realize that coding can be used effectively sometimes. However, it's the student's responsibility to choose a writing strategy to match a reading task. Independent readers need to know what strategies to use with what texts and what reading situations. Through reflective questions we help students see that readers do not use every strategy every time.

Minilesson 7: Bring what you don't understand to discussion groups!

Learning Target: I can bring what I don't understand to discuss with my reading group.

IMPORTANT!!!! The hardest part of reading is identifying when I don't understand something. If children read texts they CAN read (90% of the words), then trying out the proficient reader strategies is something they CAN do. The first step is to make sure the students are reading a selection on their *instructional level*.

Next, it helps if I model something I don't understand and ADMIT it in front of my students. For some reason, students come to me thinking that they should understand every thing. Changing their habits... getting them to admit what they don't know... is the hardest part of teaching connections. I do that by building a caring community, modeling that I have questions, and I will always have questions. I will be reading harder texts. Assign students to pay attention and to record what they don't understand. Talk with other students. Ask questions. Do something.

This story is good to use with children to prove my point. A child was reading a story about Snow Blue --- Snow White who turns blue from being left out in the cold too long. It's told from Grumpy's point of view. When we came to discussion group, one student asked why Snow got in trouble all the time. In this story Snow *didn't* get in trouble all the time and she certainly doesn't in Disney's *Snow White*. Upon further investigation, we asked the child to read the part that was confusing him. He read a part from very early in the story where it says, "It's not that I minded Snow so much. I even got used to having her around after a while. But maybe you don't know about Snow and us and all the trouble we had."

The child didn't understand that there are many meanings of the word trouble: to cause to worry, difficulty, extra work or bother, inconvenience, disturbance. He was reading trouble to mean "disturbance" or "being in trouble" when in this context it meant "difficulty". The author used that sentence to foreshadow the trouble Snow encounters later in the story when she gets locked out in the cold. So, the first step is to recognize when you don't understand. Huge!

Another example is this one: We read a story about baseball player Josh Gibson. In the story it says that he hit the ball so hard in Pittsburgh one day that it went up in the air and disappeared over the fence. The next day, while playing in Philadelphia, a ball came flying into the park. The ref joked, " That ball must be the one you hit yesterday in Pittsburgh, Josh!"

I asked my second graders, "Do you have any questions?" They didn't. So I asked them if a ball could be hit into the sky in one city one day and come down THE NEXT DAY in another city and they thought it could. Ten minutes of talk later, one child said, "Well, in cartoons it can!" Exactly. In cartoons – that are made up. Struggling readers have a hard time with jokes. What finally helped was when we used our connections. We thought about 2 cities in our state. By bringing the story closer to home, they understood the impossible.

Steps for Minilesson 7: What's confusing?

1. Explain that students must question their reading and recognize when they don't understand.
2. Share the examples written above or some of your own.
3. Ask students to identify the places that are confusing while they are reading today.
4. Bring the questions back to the whole group at closure time. Answer as best you can or let students answer if you think they can without guessing. This is not the time for guessing. To make this lesson flow, just answer the questions and move on.
5. Revisit Learning Target. The point is to teach students to begin to recognize when they come across text they don't understand, ask a question, and move forward. Praise them for admitting when they didn't understand their reading.

Minilesson 8: How can you use connections to solve reading puzzles?

Connection Stretch

Learning Target: I can use connections to get unstuck.

When reading, readers should have questions. To help answer those questions - turn to your brain's connections. Here is a minilesson that introduces children to how connections are supposed to work. Use the examples to help students name kinds of connections: remember how words work, how we say things, personal experience, TV shows, conversations, etc. What other connections can students discover?

POSSIBLE examples...

For words.... you might use your knowledge of the pattern of rhyme:

PROBLEM	CONNECTION	SOLUTION
To figure out balk	I think of talk . Change the /t/ to /b/ to get...	Balk

or you might use root words...

To figure out memorabilia	I think about memory ...	and think it might be stuff that holds my memories.
----------------------------------	---------------------------------	--

or you might use what you know about how English works

To figure out the word /recalcitrant/	I might spot and dot it and think that re + cal (sounds like pal) + cit (maybe like sit?) + trant...	to say re-cal-ci-trant
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For questions, you might use personal experience...

To figure out the moral of the story of <i>The Giving Tree</i>	I might think of the conversation I had with my parents about how it is better to give than to receive...	and then use the text to see that the tree keeps giving to the boy and figure out that their words fit in this case.
---	--	--

or you might use a television show you saw...

To figure out why a brown car has driven up in front of a house and parked in the story I am reading	I might think about a detective show that I saw where I could even see a picture in my mind of a car with a detective parking to watch outside...	and think that maybe this is a detective in the car who is watching and waiting to solve the crime. And, that maybe this story is a mystery .
---	--	--

EXPLORE

1. Give students 2 sticky notes each.
2. Ask each to read their group-book book paying attention to ideas that don't make sense as they read. Ask them to try and use what they know to figure out the confusing parts.
3. Ask students to sticky note up to 2 places in their books to share with discussion groups.
4. Come together and share.
5. Revisit Learning Target. Reflect on the discoveries.
6. Ask students to record what they learned in readers' notebooks.

Steps for Minilesson 9: Commitment Contracts

Learning Target: I can solve problems with classmates with kindness and concern.

In a class meeting or over several meetings, ask students to role-play what to do if the following problems occur during reading groups:

- A student talks so softly the others in the group cannot hear his/her comments.
- A student is absent.
- A student comes to circle unprepared.
- Someone in the circle insults another student.
- Students cannot agree.
- A student does not talk or contribute to the conversation.
- A student talks too much and doesn't take turns.

In addition, discuss, "What will the language I use sound like? What will my body language look like? How will I use my voice to help me?"

When class reaches consensus, record the solutions on chart paper. Post it so that problems and solutions can be seen easily.

Each teacher and class has different solutions and procedures for handling problems. Depending on the class, you may choose to role-play each of these situations *before* going into groups. Some children truly do not know what to do if the problems mentioned occur. Helping them role-play what to say and how to act before the problem rears its head makes groups run more smoothly. Talking about solutions ahead of time enables students to know what to do and be as independent as possible.

When moving into discussion circles, the commitment contract needs to change to reflect the new work the students will be doing. Ask the question, "What do we need to do to make discussion circles work? What commitments should we make to one another for the next round of reader's workshop?" Record the ideas the class has and rewrite the commitments to reflect the suggestions.

Commitment Contract for Jazmin in Reading Workshop

Date	?	Example	?
Have daybook and reading ready.		Have daybook and reading ready.	✓
Listen with my whole body.		Listen with my whole body.	✓
Encourage others to talk.		Encourage others to talk.	✓
Talk so everyone can hear.		Talk so everyone can hear.	NO
Talk one at a time.		Talk one at a time.	✓
Marked what I want to talk about.		Marked what I want to talk about.	✓
In reading time, I learned...		In reading time, I learned... <i>coding makes me slow down as a reader and think about every sentence.</i>	

Steps for Minilesson 10: Mark What You Want to Talk About

Learning Target: I can prepare for discussion.

1. Select a portion of a text to display.
2. Read the text aloud and think aloud your connections.
3. Show students how to rip the sticky notes into strips and mark several connections to share with buddies. NOTES: In that way we save sticky notes. Also, we will not have time to share all connections so choosing the most important becomes a necessity. Determining what is most important is a good reader skill. In addition, elementary children start competing as to who has the most sticky notes! Students can also use tickets, bookmarks or response journals to record their thinking.
4. At the end of the reading, go back through sticky notes and determine which thoughts to share with your reading group. Select 1-2 really good connections that helped you understand the reading better.
5. Write a few notes to myself on the sticky note so if even a few days pass, you will remember what you wanted to share.
6. Ask the students to read and follow your example, recognizing when they've made a connection, marking them with sticky notes or ripped sticky notes, determining which "ah-ha's" they want to share, and then writing a reminder note to themselves.
7. Ask students to share their connections with partners or reading groups.
8. Ask students to leave their sticky notes in their books as a record of their thinking. Use the sticky notes later for benchmark assessment.
9. Revisit Learning Target
10. Of course, students write an exit sheet reflecting on (1) what they learned and (2) how they will use the new learning.

ANCHOR Lesson 11: Talk About Connections

NOTES: I begin by thinking aloud my about a picture book. I remind students that they, like me, will use what they know about the world to figure out what they don't know about their reading. I model how using what I know helps me repair confusing parts.

For example, when reading the newspaper, I ran across a sentence that read, "*Six-year-old Charles Boyd wanted to visit his father at work Monday morning in Kings Mountain, N.C., so he hopped into his mother's car and started driving.*" I reread the sentence thinking I read it incorrectly. I'm thinking, "Six years old or sixteen years old? The father or the boy hopped into the car?"

From my experience, I thought of my brother Tom who put the car in neutral and backed the car out of the driveway at 2 years old. I think of my neighbor Grayson, who at 7 years old drove the car onto the porch. So I think it could be a 6 year-old boy. I read on to confirm or disconfirm. If I had not had my experiences, though, I'm not sure I would believe a 6 year-old could drive a car. My connections helped envision the possibility: the boy is six years old and drives his dad's car.

Steps for Using the Fishbowl Technique to Envision How Discussion Groups Work

Learning Target: I can use the First Discussions Guidelines to discuss in groups.

1. Bring a reading group of 3-4 student volunteers together to demonstrate how to talk about connections.
2. Ask the small group to be ready to share the confusing parts they marked with sticky notes the day before OR the connections they felt helped them understand the book better.
3. Set them up in the middle of the class in a circle in what I call a "fishbowl."

Materials

1. Picture book for teacher to use as a model (optional)
2. How-to-talk safely poster – last page of packet
3. Text for each child, 4-5 children reading the same book
4. Students' group-book book with 2 unclear places marked with a sticky note from lesson 8 and 9.
5. Problem-Solution T Chart
6. First Discussion Steps posted in the room (page 13)

4. Gather the rest of the students in a circle around them as best you can.
5. Review the how-to-talk-safely rules I established for group discussions as found on the last page of this packet.
6. Introduce the **First Discussion Steps** to students. Tell them that when they are first discussing books, it is helpful to follow the protocol listed on the chart. Eventually, students will run circles in their own way but while everyone is learning, the class will follow these steps. Follow all 6 steps. Then...
7. Revisit Learning Target & Reflect. Ask the small group to reflect on how using connections helped them figure out the confusing parts of the reading. Readers don't ALWAYS have connections that help so finding an example where using connections worked is worth reporting.

Ask all students to pinpoint the problems and possible solutions for discussing books with one another. Record them on a challenge-solution T-chart posted in the room.

First Discussion Steps

1. **Group appoints a leader.**
2. **Leader welcomes everyone by name to the circle.** Explain that it is important to recognize people and call them by name. In book circles the students should follow the same social etiquette.
3. **Leader states the objective for getting together.** When first learning how to talk with one another, it is important to post the objective so the leaders can remember what it is. In this case, the leader should say something like: *We are together today to practice using connections to help us understand our reading.*
4. **Leader opens the discussion** by asking for volunteers or calling on participants. Remind the students to use their sticky notes to remember what it was they needed help understanding.
5. **The group writes a summary to report what happened in their group today.** It is the leader's responsibility to share the summary at closure time. I often ask the group to record summaries in reader response notebooks as a record of progress as well. Encourage the group NOT to retell every question that was asked or name every student who spoke. Tell the group participants that you want them to look for patterns. *Our questions all seemed to be about (character's name).* Or, *We had many questions about words today. We helped each other figure out - and -.*
6. **The leader compliments each member of the group for her specific contribution.** You may have to help the leader model the complimenting step. i.e.; *Becca, thank you for reminding us to look at the book for evidence; Mason, you did a really good job of not getting frustrated when you got interrupted today; Jamal, thanks for helping me with the summary; Norma, thank you for sharing your ideas about your experience in Mexico. Your story helped me understand the reading better.*

NOTES: Learning to talk about connections may take *several days of modeling* and you may need to *repeat this lesson* many times using different groups for the fishbowl. You may need to facilitate the conversation so that the students learn how to share, how to include everyone, and how to compliment their fellow readers. You will probably have to (1) ask students in the fishbowl to talk louder, (2) demonstrate how to phrase comments in the form of questions so others know what to talk about, (3) show students how to find the reference the reader is questioning, (4) encourage others to share their responses and thinking, (5) notice when students have a connection that might help their peers, (6) encourage others to refer to the text to convince their friends that an answer is based on the reading, and (7) model how to turn to a student and ask if the discussion is sufficient or if they need more clarification.

Discussion Time for Everyone (Possibly the next day)

Learning Target: I can discuss with my group without relying on the teacher.

1. When all groups are ready to discuss their books, assign each a space in the room. All groups can meet at the same time. Ask them to draw their chairs into a circle. Ask them to follow the **First Discussion Steps** posted in the room.
2. Give each book group time to share their questions they recorded on sticky notes and try to make sense of the text using connections.
After watching the modeling, students should have a good idea about what to do. However, walk around, monitor and facilitate. Keep a clipboard and write down what to discuss in closure.
3. Revisit Learning Target. Bring the students together to highlight what worked and what needs work. For example, when students worked together to find the reference they needed, share with the class how they found the page together. If a group couldn't get everyone to participate, ask students to suggest a couple solutions group members could try.
 - Discuss, "How can you use connections to help you comprehend?"
4. EXIT SLIP: Ask students to record in their reader's notebooks what they learned and how they can apply the learning.

In the days to come, continue the investigation of connections. It's not important that students name the connections. It's more important that they clarify misunderstandings by thinking about themselves, their reading and viewing and their world (their experiences and knowledge) to figure out what they don't know. The texts should be instructional reading levels - a little bit difficult so that the group members NEED one another's help.

Connections Gone Off Track

Learning Target: I can recognize when connections have taken discussion off track.

At some point when teaching connections, I point out that connections can steer us in the wrong direction. It is important to use evidence from the text and what we know about the world along with logical thinking to make good connections.

Sometimes we stop to think about our connections and spend lots of time trying to figure out things that are not that important. While it's hard to put a price tag on our personal connections, students should be aware that I do not expect them to be talking just to be talking. I want them to bring truly confusing parts to the discussion groups. Also, if the books are too easy, discussion will be limited. It's my job to make sure I have meaty book choices.

I might be sharing connections that take us off track. For example, while reading *Tuesday With Morrie*, I read this sentence, "My old professor's life took place once a week in his house, by a window in the study where he could watch a small hibiscus plant shed its pink leaves."

I might think, "I don't know what an hibiscus is. I know it sheds its pink leaves. It's a plant that sits in the window." Further, I might speculate, "I know the professor is sick and friends bring plants to sick friends. When my mom had surgery, a friend brought a plant to cheer her up." It's really not important to figure out what kind of plant is on the window or how it got there. It doesn't help me understand the story any better. I am using connections, my mother's surgery, but I really don't know if my inference is correct or not.

Our time would be much better spent trying to figure out this part, "My old professor's life took place once a week in his house." The professor's life takes places only once a week. While confusing, that seems central to comprehending the story. While we may not be able to understand right away, a discussion of those words is important. The only way to make this point is to continue to model.

Steps for Minilesson 12: Star Charts to Map the Conversation

Learning Target: I can talk in a group and contribute effectively.

1. Set up spaces for students to discuss the books they are reading. Depending on the class, (1) meet with one group at a time, (2) let all groups meet and spend about 5 minutes with each star charting, or (3) invite enough adults to sit with each group initially.
2. Remind the students about the modeling done in the fishbowl discussion. State the objective for today: Each group will run their own book circle like the fishbowl. They need to follow the steps as outlined on the First Discussion Groups poster. The purpose for discussion is *to use connections to help clear up confusing parts*.
3. The students go to their place, choose a leader and begin. Each adult watches one group and maps the conversation. 5-10 minutes of mapping produces sufficient data.



OR

4. Move from group to group and star chart for 5 minutes (if you don't have any adults to help.)
5. Each group finishes discussing and continues reading silently where each left off.
6. The next day, put Star Charts on the overhead and discuss how the groups interacted. Do not include any names and do not tell the class which group is which.
7. Revisit Learning Target & Reflect: Can students talk with one another effectively?
8. From this discussion, the children write personal goals in their reader's notebooks. Also, add new phrases to our "How to Talk Safely Chart" and suggestions to our "Solutions Chart."

SAMPLE GOAL: "The next time we meet in reading groups, I will try not to talk so much. I will ask some of the shy kids what they're thinking."

SAMPLE PROBLEM-SOLUTION CHART

PROBLEM	SOLUTIONS
1. Reader didn't come prepared.	1. Reader can't participate. Needs to use her time reading and catching up.
2. Reader didn't talk loud enough for us to hear.	2. We raised our hands to show that we couldn't hear and she spoke louder.

Continue reading and discussing, reading and discussing, modeling and reflecting until reading groups are finished reading group-books. I suggest discussing $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, and $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way through the books and at the end.

To learn more about Star Charts and mapping conversations as formative assessment, read the pages and see the examples on www.liketoread.com.

Minilesson 13: Noticing Deeper Connections

Learning Target: I can notice literary elements and deeper connections and discuss them.

As students get the hang of using connections, I introduce them to the idea of noticing connections their peers might not be noticing. If a reader observes something in the story, it's probably because that reader has some connection that helped her make that observation.

For example, in *Esperanza Rising*, the mother develops a slight cough. As soon as I read that, I wondered if the mother was going to get sicker in the story and maybe even die. I brought that to the attention of my group. "Is the author foreshadowing that the mother will get sicker in this story or may even die?" I inferred that because of the many, many stories I read where bad things happen after the author mentions them. I know authors do not make characters do things for no reason. The cough was purposeful. I may have known that because of life experience; a slight cold turned into a threatening disease.

It's at this point that I teach students author's techniques to look for when I'm working in the upper grades. I ask them to record their thinking in a double-entry journal fashion. Through this process they begin searching for clues that can help them get at the deeper levels of text.

Prepare for talk-about-book time by looking for CLUES to share with your bookmates!

<p style="text-align: center;">NOTICE CLUES my brain think are VERY important!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">WONDER I think it is important because...</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">CLUES</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Quote it. EX: "I wanted to stay and look for Deza and her mother but it was too hard listening to all those people crying and arguing." P. 87</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Retell it. EX: Buddy wanted to stay but he was upset that people were crying. P.87</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Summarize it. Buddy – upset and couldn't stay. P.87</p> <p>© Karen Haag</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">I Think I know about...</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Characterization – what people are like</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Genre – the kind of book this is</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Foreshadowing – the author is telling me what is going to happen next</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Climax – the most exciting part of the book</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Author's style – how the author writes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Author's point of view – what the author thinks</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Author's purpose – whether the author is trying to explain to me, persuade me, inform me or entertain me</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Main Idea – what the book is mostly about</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Theme – what lesson I feel the author is teaching</p>

For more lessons introducing Literary Elements, download the FREE handout on www.liketoread.com Connections page, "Be the First On Your Block to Notice."

Vocabulary Strand: Words in Context

Learning Target: I can use connections to monitor meaning.

Select a passage from literature that the children will read in class and put the passage on the overhead. Select one student at a time to *either act out or illustrate on the whiteboard* pre-selected words indicated here in bold print. Encourage students to use what they know to figure out the words they don't know. Ask questions to help students discover meanings. Ask them where they have seen words or parts of words before and how they arrived at a definition. *For example:* Here's a passage from page 17 of *Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt. I ask these questions to get the discussion rolling. What color is a **jaunty** yellow suit? (How do you know?) What does it mean to **pause** at the gate? (Explain how you figured that out.) What would you look like if you were **intent** on catching fireflies? Can you draw an **apologetic** beard? (Explain how you drew your conclusions.)

*At sunset of that same day, a stranger came strolling up the road from the village and **paused** at the Fosters' gate. Winnie was once again in the yard, this time **intent** on catching fireflies, and at first she didn't notice him. But after a few moments of watching her, he called out, "Good evening!"*

*He was remarkably tall and narrow, this stranger standing there. His long chin faded off into a thin, **apologetic** beard, but his suit was a **jaunty** yellow that seemed to glow a little in the fading light. A black hat dangled from one hand, and as Winnie came toward him, he passed the other through his dry, gray hair, settling it smoothly. "Well now," he said in a light voice. "Out for fireflies, are you?" (Overhead copy...liketoread.com)*

Metaphors are Connections!

Learning Target: I can recognize and understand metaphors in reading and writing.

When trying to understand a concept that is difficult, we use metaphors to help us. The other day my husband was amused that we don't use money any more. *"Everybody just promises every one else that they will pay,"* he said. *"Hardly any money changes hands any more. And the bank keeps track of the promises."* The metaphor made his thinking clear to me.

Sometimes metaphors don't work, however. I like to use an example that shows my students that if you don't choose a connection the reader understands, you might as well not use a metaphor at all.

In the first Harry Potter book, for example, the author says Harry aims his broom like a *javelin*. I've never found a child in my classes that knows what a javelin is so the meaning is lost. However, in England that simile most likely works!

Likewise, my students write about running up the stairs as fast as a cheetah. That doesn't work either. It's very hard to get a visual. I already know what running up the stairs as fast as I can looks like so it's probably not even a good place to use a simile.

The time to use a simile is when I am trying to describe something that I think others will not understand. In that case, I compare what I am writing about to something I think my reader will know. I have to understand my audience like, "When students are learning to use similes for the first time, they act like kindergartners stamping periods everywhere." I find this month a good month to explain that similes are connections that readers understand.

The Test CONNECTION:

Test language to work into assessment this unit.

Learning Target: I interpret test language.

CONNECTIONS

Connecting text to experience

compare, contrast
experience

change

describe
qualities

alike, different

Which qualities would be best to have if you were to ...

Which experience is closest to ...

Which experience is most similar to (the character's experience) in ...?

How do you think (the character) will change in the future?

From now on, (the character) will probably ...

Reread (the selection). What would (character 1) tell (character 2)?

Based on what you have read so far, what kind of person do you think (the character) is?

You could describe (the character) as ...

To other texts

book title, chapter titles

paragraph
poem

selections, passage, story

Read both selections. How do (character 1) and (character 2) compare?

In what way are (character 1) and (character 2) alike? Different?

References

Table of Contents

index

atlas, almanac, encyclopedia
dictionary, Internet, online
keywords, guide words

topic, heading, subheading
reference source

Where would you look if you wanted to (*find the most facts about rain forests*)?

Which reference source would be the best to use if you wanted to find out...

Use the Table of Contents to find the chapter you would read if ...

On what page would you start reading if ...

Which pages tell where...?

Which keyword or words would be best for an Internet search?

In what kind of book would these topics appear?

Analogies

similar, different

relationship

(Character 1's) relationship to (Character 2) is most like...

Which of the following relationships is most similar to the relationship choices?

How To Talk Safely poster

Learning Target: I can talk in a group respectfully.

Not all children know how to engage in conversation about books and strategies. We need to teach them some strategies for discussing with one another. Their body language and words will influence the success of the discussion groups. Explain to children that educators and scientists have studied communication. They have some ideas to share with us about how to disagree with one another without hurting each other's feelings. We need to change our language to help us communicate our ideas without shutting down communication from others in our group. For example, instead of saying, "I agree with you but..." try saying "I agree with you and I would like to add..." What a difference it is to hear and. It's much more affirming. Here are some ideas to get started. What other discoveries can we add to these lists?

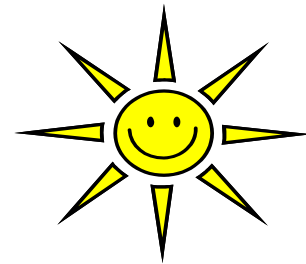
Ideas to think about when discussing with your group:

1. Be aware of people's feelings
2. Look at people when they're speaking
3. Act interested.
4. Compliment people on their comments.
5. Take time to acknowledge comments before you go on to your own.
6. Ask follow up questions to help people clarify their thoughts and share their evidence.



Phrases That Help: Ask for help, to clarify, to understand, to agree or disagree

- ✓ I agree and...
- ✓ That's true and...
- ✓ Good point! I also learned...
- ✓ That's interesting. Did you also think about...
- ✓ I'm curious what you thought about...
- ✓ I was wondering...
- ✓ What did you think when...
- ✓ What about...
- ✓ Tell me more about...



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