

Thank you for downloading this PDF I created **FREE** for you.

I do hope I've helped you in some small way.
Please feel free to email with questions☺

In return, I ask that you...

- (1) Give me credit for my work.
- (2) Use with your students only.
- (3) Not post my work to other sites.
- (4) Refer others to my websites www.LikeToRead.com,
www.LikeToWrite.com, and www.Facebook.com/LikeToWrite

I also ask that if you see any editing or content errors
that you would let me know
by emailing me at
[khaag@liketowrite.com!](mailto:khaag@liketowrite.com)



A Strategy Circle: The Story of Asking Our Questions for the First Time

This story and so many others like it demonstrate why I am so grateful to Ellin Keene and Susan Zimmermann who started me on this journey of teaching students to use proficient reader strategies. It's just easier to engage students when reading is puzzle-like instead of test-like. The students in this story were used to being peppered with comprehension questions every time they read a n y t h i n g. I share this short transcript of the opening of their lesson the first time they brought their own questions to a reading group. In this case, struggling readers prepared for the discussion by reading a chapter and writing their questions on sticky notes. (Names have been changed.)

One of the reasons we want students to develop metacognitive awareness is so they will have a repertoire of strategies they can use when they need to clarify something they are reading and that they will actually use those strategies to clear up confusions. Many disengaged readers are not aware that they (not the teacher) must do something when they do not understand a text. They will either keep reading and ignore their confusions or appeal to the teacher to help them. The goal when teaching clarification is to get students to contemplate and then correct confusions while they are reading (Beers, 2003).

Tommy began our discussion by asking, "Why did Tecumseh cry?"

I waited to see what his classmates would do. The group sat in silence, however, heads down, flipping through their book, *The Defenders*.

"Watch me assume the role of a participant in a book group, kids," I said. "Tommy has not given us enough information to help us answer his question so I am going to model what you can do when this happens again – and it will happen again. I will ask him something like, 'What page are you on?' This way we know to what he is referring and we can help him better."

We turned to page 55 as per his response, but we still sat in silence. This response is typical of students in first-time groups. They truly do not know how to communicate with one another.

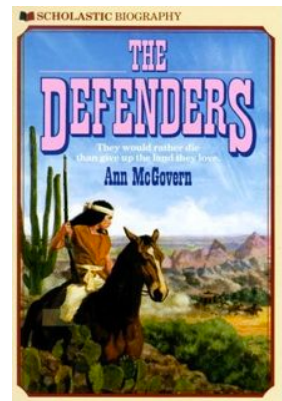
"Watch what I do now, kids," I said. "Tommy. Just knowing what page to turn to is not going to help us. We need you to read all the words around your question. Do you remember from our minilesson that we need to read the context clues in order to get un-confused?" Turning to his bookmates, I said, "If I were you, I would ask Tommy something like, would you tell us where Tecumseh cries and read the sentences around it for us?"

"It's at the bottom of the page." Tommy told us. "It says, *Tecumseh hated the white man, but he had compassion and he cried - - - (turn the page) - - - to his Indian brothers and said, 'You are not acting as men.'*"

More silence.

I realized that the page turn got in Tommy's way and so he immediately fell back on his definition of "cry." I'm experienced at this, though. I'm the one that teaches how to talk to one another, so I pushed my students harder.

"What would force Tecumseh, the king of warriors, to cry? Sometimes you'll find that you have to back up and read the whole paragraph before you can answer someone's question."



We backed up and read the whole paragraph. The students pieced together that the Indians burned a white man at the stake. Now, everyone wanted to know what burning at the stake meant. I was surprised by their question, but answered it anyway. They were interested now. However, they were not on Tommy's question any more. I needed to show them how to come back to the unanswered question.

I modeled again, "You just asked what burning at the stake means and, while interesting, that doesn't answer Tommy's question. Here's another way to help. *You* can read the confusing part aloud to see if by reading aloud somebody sees the answer." Then, I asked Tommy to listen to me read the sentence and I read it without the page turn, "...and he cried to his Indian brothers."

"Oh," said Tommy. "That was a stupid question. He didn't cry."

"Plenty of readers confuse words because they have more than one meaning," I assured him. I also explained that the page turn got in his way. I pointed out that his group members had been confused, too. His question didn't waste our time, either. As a result, we found out how white men were burned at the stake and what that meant. "Plus, you discovered a different meaning for cry by yourself. That's what readers do."

I used one of the many discussion moves I learned from reading *Improving Comprehension With Questioning the Author* to make sure we honored Tommy's dignity. (See Question Moves below.) I modeled that reading was confusing, sharing our problems with others might be uncomfortable for them and for us, sustaining our attention on solving the problem worked, getting off task and talking about other things in the book were okay, and as a result of our conversation, we found other interesting facts we had missed the first time around.

Of course, I named what we learned for these readers. I called my observations to their attention so that they would notice and repeat these behaviors, hopefully.

And then our circle took off - off into the world of talking about books on their terms. Not where the teacher asks the questions, but where the students do the thinking, asking about things they truly do not understand. The level of engagement shot up: they pulled out maps, actually consulted their social studies book because they wanted to know, and they asked about things that most teachers would not dream their readers tripped over until given an opportunity to ask. Would I have even considered "cry" as a vocabulary word in 5th grade? These "struggling readers" searched for answers for 30 more minutes because the questions were theirs.

We have to consider that maybe our kids aren't answering our questions because they are bored to tears and our questions aren't relevant. On that day, I asked myself questions I offer for your consideration:

Isn't it better to find time to sit with students to see where their thinking has gone off track? Can we train ourselves to wait and watch what readers do, even when it is nothing? Can we model what to do when we're not sure ourselves? Can we break away from teaching the way our teachers taught us?

Maybe it's actually better to turn the work over to the students. Maybe you'll like paying attention to what they're asking, what they want to know, and what you can teach next. Maybe you'll love learning from their questions instead of asking yours. Maybe you'll find joy in watching students ignoring you and exploring the book.

Best of all, like me, hopefully you'll see love of reading soar along with test scores from having this kind of fun. It's just easier to engage students when reading is puzzle-like instead of test-like.

10 Discussion Moves from Beck and McKeown and little Haag thrown in 😊

These are the teacher moves that will help your students deepen their understanding of the text and curriculum and learn to talk to one another.

1. **Mark.** Name what's happening in the group. Name the strategies students use and the ones they need to work on, the social skills they exhibit and the social skills they need to work on.
2. **Annotate.** Fill in background information when it's obvious kids don't have it but need it in order to function. Control the dictionary. Look up words while students move on.
3. **Recap.** Summarize what has happened so far. Then, move the group to the next question. This move is used when the conversation wanes or when people start repeating themselves.
4. **Revoice.** Relate seemingly unrelated comments to the conversation by explaining how the comment connects or by asking the student to explain how it relates.
5. **Connect.** Point out concepts that emerge in conversation and relate them to your reading, writing or inquiry curriculum. Point out ideas you see that your students may not. These are teaching points.
6. **Model.** Ask questions you truly don't understand and need to discuss.
7. **Reference the Text.** Ask students to provide evidence to support their comments.
8. **Reference Other Students.** Encourage students to talk to one another, answer each other's questions, and say that their questions either did or did not get answered. Refer students to other students in the group who can provide background information or text information.
9. **Record and/or Assess.** Record questions that need further discussion or research. Assess student progress (Star Chart, anecdotal notes, Book Club Log, checklists). For more on Formative Assessment options, see page on **LikeToRead** of that same name.
10. **Facilitate.** Teach students to use discussion social skills. For more on argue safely language, read "Argue Safely Rules" on the Structured Talk page.