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Sincerely,
Karen Haag

I hope I can help you in some small way.
Please feel free to email with questions 😊

Strategy Circle Lesson

When it comes to strategy circles, the magic number 3 works for me: (1) I model first (think aloud), (2) then, we work together (think along), (3) then, the students finish the reading on their own. For this example I'm sharing, the students are reading a newspaper article about an elephant who got so stuck in the mud, the fire department had to lift her out with a crane and a forklift.

NOTE: The framework of the lesson is the template I made from Sarah Dowhower's article, *written in italics*. Blue words refer to observations. Green words refer to inferences.

IT TAKES MORE THAN A CRANE

How do you get an elephant up?

LOS ANGELES – An 8,000-pound elephant laid down in a pond at the Los Angeles Zoo and couldn't get up, and it took the fire department to get her back on her feet.

Handlers found Tara, who is in her 40s, in the shallow pond at the zoo Saturday morning and she appeared unable to get to her feet.

"Tara's not one who lies down on a regular basis," mammal curator Jennie McNary said. "I think she was in a position where it was difficult for her to get up."

Firefighters and zoo animal handlers used a tow truck, crane and a forklift to move Tara. It took them nearly three hours to get two thick straps around the massive animal to lift her.

Tara was not hurt, zoo officials said.

It was a new experience for firefighters. "When I go to work in the morning, I'm going to start taking a handful of peanuts with me," said Carl Butler, a fire battalion chief.

-- ASSOCIATED PRESS in *The Charlotte Observer*

ENGAGE: *Assess/elicit prior knowledge.*

(For more on overviewing, review the Connect 3 of **LikeToRead**.) The students use their overviewing skills to determine that they are reading a newspaper article (*title, subtitle, city in all caps at the beginning of the article, and the words, "Associated Press" at the end*). The article is about an elephant. (*The title is, "How do you get an elephant up?"*) We share what we know about elephants. (For me? Not much.)

EXPLAIN THE LEARNING TARGET:

Focus attention on strategy.

Our strategy is to distinguish between **observation** and **inference**. I make a public, double entry T-chart: **observation - inference**.

I invite upper-grade students to make one in their daybooks as well, depending on the writing skills of the students. (*See page 3.*)

Using different colors for the different strategies is a strong visual reminder for some students, which helps them learn the difference.

EXPLORE: The First Section

Active Reading: Establish a purpose for reading. Work the reading in cycles.

1. I read the first section aloud and

model. On the **observation** side, I tell the students that I observed *the elephant is 8,000 pounds, lives in the L.A. zoo, a fire department had to rescue her because she was stuck in a pond*. I record the facts - the details that no one can argue.

2. On the **inference** side of my DEJ, I write some brief notes to show my initial inferring: *elephant won't get up - lazy? Heavy? Sick?*

3. What is the purpose for reading this article? To determine why the elephant is stuck.

Second Section

In the second section, I recorded that the *elephant was in her 40s, the pond was shallow, and this happened on a Saturday morning*. On the right side, my notes read, *old elephant? (is 40 old?) Hadn't*

eaten? Too late to rescue her? I try to think out loud why I'm making the **inferences** I'm making. I'm reading to find out why the elephant got stuck. I see my brain trying to puzzle that out. *Then I get worried she may not be well.* That's probably a piece of background knowledge that slipped in there; when people/animals have accidents, sometimes it doesn't turn out so well.

Third Section We work the next section together. We find out just one more fact: *the curator, J. McNary explains that the elephant doesn't usually lie down.* I record the students' inferences on the right side and ask students to record their inferences as well: *curator - scientist? Cures animals?*

By recording their responses, I see if I need to re-teach or if they're on track. I continue to teach the difference between an **inference** and **assumption** when I see examples of each in their responses. (For more on the difference between inferences and assumption, read Infer on **LikeToRead**. An inference is based on evidence. An assumption is not based on Arthur Hyde's work in *Comprehending Math*.)

Almost always someone jumps to a conclusion not substantiated by the evidence in the text to which I can refer when teaching. I handle the child gently, thanking her for the input. I AM thankful - really - because I get to explain the difference and surely someone else is thinking the same way.

Section This article works by dividing into paragraphs	Observations What we KNOW from the article.	Inferences What we're thinking based on the evidence.
1	8000 pound elephant Los Angeles zoo Fire Dept rescued her. stuck in a pond.	Elephant couldn't get up - lazy? heavy? sick?
2	In her 40s In a shallow pond Sat AM	Old elephant? Hadn't eaten? Too late to rescue her?
3	J McNary is a mammal curator. Says elephant doesn't usually lay down	Curator = scientist? Counselor? Cures animals?
4	Tara is elephant's name. Took lots of people to get her up. Took 3 hours to get straps on.	She's very heavy.
5	New experience for firefighters Carl Butler - chief Says he'll take peanuts	Trying to be funny?

Ready to be Cut Loose?

By now, I've modeled and we know I can observe and infer together. Can the students work independently now? Depending on their level of understanding, I ask students to work on their own, paragraph by paragraph. Upper-grade students finish reading the article and recording in double-entry style in the reader's notebooks so I can assess their knowledge of the strategy. Primary students turn to a partner and talk after I read each paragraph and then share with the class and me.

The writer ends by quoting the fire chief who says from now on he will go to work with a handful of peanuts. Kids just don't get that - that he's making a joke. Students have to infer to get jokes. Struggling readers have difficulty with inferring. Explaining that the author used those words to make us laugh is part of this lesson, too.

EVALUATE: Final Discussion

Teacher includes 1-2 open-ended questions that get at the heart of the story (theme or author's purpose) and tie the discussion of the sections together.

In this lesson, we found out that it took a truck, a crane and a forklift to move the animal but the reporter never tells us why the elephant got stuck in the first place. Of course, the students think they know why the elephant got stuck, but I have to explain that they're inferring. *The article does not tell us why.* That's a big debriefing point. Frustrating as it may be, the students want to know and there is no answer. They have opinions about why but the author does not tell us why.

This short newspaper article turns out to be a great selection to begin a study of inferring. Great test preparation here. Can you see how these kinds of conversations prepare students for tests?

EXIT SLIP → Reflection

At the end of the reading session, I ask the children to reflect on their reading work with me or write in their reader-response daybooks: What did you learn about how to read better? How can you apply what you learned to other reading tasks you are doing?

ELABORATE

Post Reading – Independent Activities

To assess whether students understand the difference between observation and inference, you could ask them to complete the Think Work sheet I provided on page 5. Depending on their understanding, you could ask them to complete it as partners. *I made up these questions, so they are not field-tested!*

ANSWER KEY: (1-A, 2-C, 3-A, 4-D, 5-A, 6-D)

Evaluation of Teaching: Reflection of Self

- *How clear were your explanations of the strategy?*
- *How well did you reinforce the strategy throughout the lesson?*
- *How well do you think the students understood the strategy and were able to apply it to their comprehension?*
- *In what ways did you support the use of other strategies?*
- *How well did the students do independently?*
- *How well were you able to construct the theme or author's purpose of the reading?*



The Next Time We Meet

1. I begin the next day's reading session by reviewing the responses, asking students to explain their thinking, OR doing some more think aloud, modeling my reading process.
2. Review the questions of the Think Sheet to what questions they still have.

Use your reader's notebook to help you answer these test-type questions.

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- Since Jennie McNary said, "Tara's not one to lie down on a regular basis," the reader can assume that
 - McNary knows Tara.
 - Tara was sick.
 - It was night.
 - Tara is able to lie down without anyone noticing.
- The reason it took so long to get Tara back on her feet was
 - It was difficult to get the firefighters, zoo animal handlers, crane and forklift to work together.
 - The rescuers were inexperienced.
 - Tara is so huge.
 - The pond was so murky.
- The main purpose of including this story in the newspaper was to
 - amuse
 - inform
 - explain
 - describe
- The subtitle of the story is, "It takes more than a crane." The reporter meant
 - The elephant weighed 8000 pounds.
 - The story took place in Los Angeles.
 - It took 3 hours to get the rescue straps around Tara.
 - It took a tow truck, a crane and a forklift to get Tara on her feet.
- Why did the fire battalion chief say he was going to take peanuts to work from now on?
 - He was joking.
 - He gets hungry.
 - He expects to work with more elephants.
 - If he had peanuts, Tara would have gotten on her feet by herself.
- At the end of the story, what question remains unanswered?
 - How heavy is Tara?
 - Who is the mammal curator?
 - How old is the elephant?
 - Why did Tara lay down in the pond?