

# A STUDY GUIDE

Stephanie Harvey • Anne Goudvis

# Strategies *That* Work

*Teaching  
Comprehension  
to Enhance  
Understanding*



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# *Strategies That Work*

## *Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding*

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Nothing enhances understanding more than sharing our thinking about teaching and learning, both with our kids and with each other. This study guide will encourage teachers, librarians, staff developers, and administrators to talk about reading comprehension and student learning and to experiment with new ideas about instruction. In the study groups, teachers will be asked to notice their own process as readers and writers and to share that process with others. The study group also provides a forum for bringing kids' ideas and responses to the table for discussion. Students' thinking informs and extends our teaching more than anything else. If we want our strategy instruction to go beyond a series of mini-lessons, it makes sense to work together to come up with new and original approaches. The study group offers a great opportunity to go beyond the thoughts and ideas we've presented in *Strategies That Work* and generate new thinking.

Reading comprehension is about much more than answering literal questions at the end of a passage, story, or chapter. Reading comprehension is an ongoing process of evolving thinking. When readers read, they carry on an inner conversation with the text. They respond with delight, wonder, even outrage. They question the text, argue with the author, nod their heads in agreement. They make connections, ask questions, and draw inferences to better understand and learn from what they read.

The noted children's author Madeleine L'Engle says, "Readers usually grossly underestimate their own importance. If a reader cannot create a book along with the writer, the book will never come to life. . . . The author and the reader 'know' each other. They meet in the bridge of words." We want our students to recognize how important their thinking is when they read. It's our job as teachers to convince students that their thoughts, ideas, and interpretations matter. When readers engage in the text and listen to their inner conversation, they enhance their understanding, build knowledge, and develop insight.

*Strategies That Work* describes the inner conversation readers have as they read and the strategies they use to understand their reading. The book is divided into three parts: Part 1, *The Foundation of Meaning*, explains how research-based comprehension strategies support and enhance student learning; Part 2, *Strategy Lessons and More*, focuses on strategy lessons, response options, and

assessment practices; Part 3, Resources That Support Strategy Instruction, provides an annotated selection of picture books and other resources for comprehension instruction with short text, including bibliographies of magazines and other periodicals for students and professional resources for selecting children's books.

The following questions may be helpful for beginning a conversation about *Strategies That Work*:

*How do you currently teach comprehension strategies in your classrooms?*

- Are students challenged and excited by their reading? Do they recognize how important the reader is to the text?
- Do students understand and think critically about what they read? Why? Why not?
- Do students engage with and discuss important issues and ideas in literature? In social studies, science, and other curricular areas?
- Do you model how to think out loud for students as a means of instruction? Do you give students time to practice using strategies in their own reading? How much time?
- How are students reading to learn from informational text, including textbooks and other materials? Can students sustain their interest in this information over time?

*How do you support students to keep track of their thinking when they read? How do you keep track of their thinking? How do you assess their understanding?*

- In what ways do students recognize and discuss their thinking about reading? Do students hold inner conversations about their reading as well as share their thoughts with others?
- What evidence do you have that students are understanding and learning from their reading?
- Are there some terms you use to describe how readers think when they read? Should your school use a standardized terminology for comprehension instruction?
- How do your students use written as well as other kinds of responses to show their evolving thinking?

*What resources do you have/need to support comprehension instruction?*

- Do you have the necessary resources for comprehension instruction? Plenty of books, Post-its, clipboards, and so on? What are some ways to get these into your classrooms without breaking the bank?
- Do you teach with a wide variety of genre?

- Do you introduce and use a variety of short text forms, including short stories, poetry, essays, feature articles, and so on?

*How do you create a learning community that promotes thinking in your classrooms/schools?*

- Do students feel free to share their ideas, opinions, and tastes in reading? Take stock of the times when you and your students share your thinking about books (i.e., read-alouds, discussions, informal sharing times, and so on) and remember to build in time daily to talk about reading.
- What kinds of implications do time, scheduling and room arrangements have for your instruction? What changes to scheduling, room arrangement, or procedures might be needed to ensure an environment that promotes thinking?
- Do you have an ongoing reader’s workshop in your classroom? Effective strategy instruction requires that students have long blocks or time for reading and responding.

## ***Chapter Descriptions and Study Group Actions and Considerations***

### **Chapter 1 Strategic Thinking**

### **Chapter 2 Strategic Reading**

Chapter 1 explains how readers make meaning when they read and why it’s important to teach comprehension. The chapter summarizes strategies that proficient readers use and suggests that if we want readers to use them independently, teachers need to show students how we think when we read. We describe the “gradual release of responsibility” approach, which advocates instruction through modeling, guided practice, independent practice, and application. Chapter 2 goes into greater detail about what it means to read strategically.

#### *Actions and Considerations*

- Start a collection of intriguing articles, short stories, excerpts, poems, or other short pieces. Copy and share these pieces and decide on one to read together, with each participant keeping track of their inner conversation with the text. Margin notes and coding the text help you record your thinking to later share those strategies you used to make sense of the piece. Consider:

What strategies proved useful for understanding this text?

What did you do as a proficient reader to understand new information, ideas, or insights?

Notice your questions, ideas, opinions or interpretations and share these. What does paying attention to your own thinking during reading teach you about supporting students as they learn to use comprehension strategies?

Save one of these pieces to share with your students as a model of your ongoing writing/thinking in response to reading.

- Try a similar activity with your students. Choose an interesting or provocative piece of short text. Provide each student with a copy, read it together, and ask students to record their inner conversation on the text or on Post-its. Then ask students to share their thoughts with a partner. The greatest way to enhance understanding is to talk about the text after reading it.
- Observe a colleague as he or she launches comprehension strategy instruction. Record the language used to model and explain the strategy. Based on the students' responses to the lesson, discuss the effectiveness of the language and overall lesson.
- Four levels of metacognitive awareness and the ways in which readers monitor their thinking about their reading are described in *Strategies That Work*:

*Tacit readers.* Tacit readers lack awareness of how they think when they read.

*Aware readers.* Aware readers may realize when meaning has broken down, but lack strategies to fix the problem or repair confusion.

*Strategic readers.* Strategic readers use a variety of strategies to enhance understanding and monitor and repair meaning when it is disrupted.

*Reflective readers.* Reflective readers can apply strategies flexibly depending on their goals for reading. They reflect on their thinking and revise their use of strategies. You can observe this reflective stance when students comment with surprise, amazement, or wonder as they read.

Think about two or three students you work with and try to categorize their level of metacognitive knowledge and awareness. Observe and keep track of how each student monitors his or her thinking during reading. Consider the ways you support students to move through this continuum to become more strategic and reflective readers.

- Collect student work—Post-its, response journal entries, texts with margin notes—and discuss it. What evidence is there that students are keeping track of meaning as they read? Can you observe their evolving thinking? Brainstorm some additional ways that students might keep track of their thinking.
- Explore each of the strategies defined on pages 21–25 in *Strategies That Work* in greater depth. Study group participants might work together to add to these definitions. Consider a common language for reading comprehension instruction across ages and grade levels.

## Chapter 3 Strategy Instruction and Practice

Chapter 3 focuses on teaching reading strategies, what we call explicit comprehension instruction. We provide guidelines for modeling our own thinking, supporting students as they practice a given strategy, and responding to reading in a variety of ways. The section on best practice instruction (page 31) summarizes ways in which we deliver comprehension instruction. A framework for comprehension instruction, the gradual release of responsibility approach (page 13), is explored further.

### *Actions and Considerations*

- Consider your own best practices. Which of these do you use on a regular basis with your students?
  - reading aloud
  - thinking aloud and coding the text
  - lifting text
  - reasoning through the text
  - providing anchor experiences
  - rereading for deeper meaning
  - sharing your own literacy by modeling with adult text

What other instructional practices do you find particularly effective in getting at kids' thinking?

- Kids differ. Some kids are able to grasp how to use a strategy quickly, others need more time for practice. How do you differentiate strategy instruction to accommodate a wide variety of learners? Describe how you meet individual needs through whole group instruction, flexible small groups, and confering with individuals.
- Consider how the gradual release of responsibility approach may help you differentiate instruction. How might you provide additional support to small groups who need further explanation and practice? How would you provide opportunities for students who have a clear understanding of a strategy to work independently?
- As a group, read the same piece of text and experiment with a variety of response options (Appendix F contains a list of some of these). Talk about your inner conversation and discuss the different strategies that come into play with these different options. How does sharing your thinking about your responses enhance your understanding of the text?

## Chapter 4 Teaching with Short Text

## Chapter 5 Book Selection

Chapter 4 describes reasons for using more short text with our students. Chapter 5 suggests criteria for choosing picture books and other short text forms.

### *Actions and Considerations*

- Choose several compelling pieces of short text (one page max) that you think would interest your kids. You can select a poem, a story, a feature article, and so on. Introduce each piece and sell the kids on the text to fire them up to start reading. Students can choose the piece that most interests them, read it, grab a partner who's read the same text, and start talking. We ask each of them to share their inner conversations. You can wander around the room and listen in on their discussion, taking notes of what they say. Once in a while, ask them to share their thoughts with the whole class. Bring your notes to the study group and talk about their comprehension process.
- Start a collection of picture books for teaching different comprehension strategies (see Appendix A for suggestions). As you read the picture books, jot down your responses on Post-its or in a response journal, focusing especially on how a given strategy or strategies helped to enhance your understanding of the book. With a partner, brainstorm how you might use one of the instructional approaches described in Chapter 3 (thinking aloud and coding the text, lifting the text, reasoning through the text, and so on) with one of the books. Some schools keep lists of selected books for strategy instruction in the library so teachers can quickly access them. (One school attaches short lesson suggestions to each book in a "strategy text set" located on a shelf just for teachers and the librarian to use in mini-lessons.) The study group might design some lessons for specific books they've chosen.
- To begin a text set, think about a topic you or your students are passionate or curious about. Or think about how you might breathe new life into a time-worn (but well-loved) topic by searching for poems, essays, or new picture books related to it. Begin with text you know and love, just as we did in Appendix B. Remember to include student contributions—picture books, short stories, articles, poems, newspaper excerpts, essays, and so on. Don't forget to think about audience, purpose, and quality of writing as you make your selections.

## ***Part 2: Strategy Lessons and More***

Chapters 6 through 10 are the nuts and bolts of *Strategies That Work*. These chapters include lessons organized by strategy. The lessons move from less to more sophisticated—the initial lessons are introductory, those that follow build on the foundation of the earlier lessons.

### **Chapter 6 Making Connections: A Bridge from the New to the Known**

Readers naturally bring their prior knowledge and experience to reading, but they comprehend better when they think about the connections they make between

the text, their lives, and the world at large. Readers also make other kinds of connections: to literary elements and features, to different genre, to different authors, and so on.

#### *Actions and Considerations*

- Experiment with different ways of asking kids to keep track of their own connections—a class chart, Post-its, a response journal, and so on. Keeping track of your thinking allows you as well as your students to look back and re-examine your thought process over time. You might ask:
  - Are students' connections becoming more meaningful over time? That is, are the connections furthering their understanding of the text, issue or topic? Do students make a variety of content connections (text to self, text to text, text to world)? Do students connect to literary elements and features as well as to the content? Do students' responses illustrate new and original ways of thinking about their reading?
- Gather samples of students' reading responses. Examine the samples in your study group, assessing if and how students' connections are leading to a greater understanding of what they read. Consider ways to nudge children further during conferences, just as Steph did in her conference with Allison on page 79.
- Teachers often ask about connections kids make that just don't seem to enhance textual understanding, those tangential connections that come fast and frequently. It is your responsibility to check with kids about how their connections help them better understand the text. A form that is helpful is the two-column form headed *My Connection/How It Helps Me Understand*. Bring a piece of text to your study group and try this form with your own reading. This form is also helpful for questioning and inferring.

## **Chapter 7 Questioning: The Strategy That Propels Readers Forward**

Questioning is the strategy that keeps readers engaged. When readers ask questions they clarify understanding and forge ahead to make meaning.

#### *Actions and Considerations*

- Once your students have had practice asking questions with lots of different kinds of texts, try brainstorming questions with your students about a puzzling piece of text, as Anne did with Langston Hughes' poem "Dreams" on page 30. After you have charted the kids' questions, encourage their independence by asking each student to respond in writing to a question of their own choosing. As a class, come back together to share these responses, discussing how each person's thinking contributes to an understanding of the text. Share these responses with the study group.
- Keep track of the questions you ask for a day or two and bring a list of these to your study group. Track the kinds of questions you found yourself asking,

sorting these into sincere vs. assessment categories. Discuss situations and circumstances that encourage each of these kinds of questions.

- As students begin a new topic study in social studies or science, keep a large chart with their questions. Periodically review this chart to sort through answers to the questions and to assess if the kinds of questions children ask are changing. Next to the questions, you might keep a list of “Ways our schema is changing as we learn more about \_\_\_\_\_.”

## Chapter 8 Visualizing and Inferring: Strategies That Enhance Understanding

Inferring is at the intersection of taking what is known by garnering clues from the text and thinking ahead to make a judgment to discern a theme or speculate about what is to come. Visualizing strengthens our inferential thinking. When we visualize, we are in fact inferring, but with mental images rather than words and thoughts.

### *Actions and Considerations*

- The bravest among you can invite a small group of students from your class to share their thinking with the study group. Model your thinking on either visualizing and inferring and then involve the students in guided practice on that strategy. Study group participants can script the various conversations between the teacher and kids and the kids with each other. After the demonstration is complete, study group members can question the kids about their thinking and learning. Allow time to debrief this lesson after the kids depart. Discuss how this observation can help you plan your own instruction. Don't hesitate to try this technique with any of the strategies discussed in the book.
- When readers ask a question, an inference is never far behind. Human beings are driven to answer questions and most often do so with an inference. Our favorite scaffold to link questioning and inferring is the two-column I Wonder/I Think form. Try this in the study group with a piece of text that lends itself to a wide range of interpretations, such as a contemporary poem, and then talk about how your questions and inferences help you understand it.
- Visualizing expands the possibilities for response beyond talking and writing. The artist in every kid needs opportunities to respond through drawing as well. Choose a piece of text that spurs strong images and try to sketch a response that you visualize. If you are feeling particularly adventurous, you could dramatize a response or sing a song!

## Chapter 9 Determining Importance in Text: The Nonfiction Connection

Thoughtful readers grasp essential ideas and important information when reading. Readers must differentiate between less important information and key ideas that are central to the meaning of the text.

### *Actions and Considerations*

- Using nonfiction texts and excerpts, begin your own class chart of features that help your students navigate dense text. Bring these charts to your study group and examine ways to develop a common language across grade levels for teaching these conventions and features. Consider ways that different features help students determine important information.
- We are big fans of the Facts/Question/Response (F/Q/R) response form. Using the suggestions listed in Appendix F, page 282, try several of the two- and three-column note forms with students. Share student work samples and examine how these forms scaffold student learning. For instance, do some forms lead to further questioning and research topics?
- As your students become more adept at strategy learning, encourage them to use the strategy for determining importance to sort out other strategies. For instance, as kids learn about connections and questions, they may make lots of tangential ones. Encourage them to look at which connections and/or questions are the most important and help them better understand what they read. A connection that the reader makes may be important to him but less important to his deeper understanding of the text. A good response form for this might be titled Connections with columns below: Important to Me, Important to Understanding the Text, and Both. In this way you honor all of the reader's connections but help him decide which ones are truly important to understanding. A similar form for questioning has also proved useful. You want to teach your students to evaluate the importance of their questions and connections in relation to understanding the text. Try this in your own reading with your study group with these and other strategies.

## **Chapter 10** Synthesizing Information: The Evolution of Thought

Synthesizing involves combining new information with existing knowledge to form an original idea or interpretation. Synthesizing lies on a continuum. Rudimentary synthesizing involves merely stopping and thinking about what we are reading. Taking stock of meaning and reading for the gist is a step further down that line. Sometimes readers have a true synthesis, an “Aha” of sorts where they achieve new insight and change their thinking. This is the ultimate form of synthesis.

### *Actions and Considerations*

- Bring the texts kids are reading to the study group. Look at their Post-its together and notice their evolving thinking. Do they seem to be getting the gist? Does their thinking change as they read? Their Post-its provide you with a wealth of information. Let's take a look at them.
- How does summarizing differ from synthesizing? Summarizing is one aspect of synthesizing. Summarizing is recording events, information, and ideas in a

few sentences. Synthesizing is a more sophisticated process that involves original thinking. Ask students to summarize their thinking and jot down new thoughts or ideas that occur to them as they read. For instance, a two-column form headed Getting the Gist/My New Thinking can prove useful. You might try this response option with your reading in the study group as well.

- Synthesizing is the strategy that allows readers to change their thinking *if they are willing*. Because of their age, young readers are actually better at revising their thinking than adults. It is difficult for adults to read editorials they don't agree with. Sometimes we notice that an op-ed writer with whom we rarely agree says something that actually hits the mark. The tendency, however, is to skip right over it, rather than take it seriously and revise our thinking. Kids are far less set in their ways and more willing to allow reading to change thinking. Bring in some articles or editorials. Read a variety in the study group and see if you can break through your existing paradigm and use reading to change your thinking. Talk about this process with your colleagues and then share this experience with your students.

## Chapter 11 Strategy Instruction in Context: Three Classroom Portraits

The three classroom portraits in this chapter describe how teachers, using the gradual release of responsibility approach, design and implement comprehension instruction over time. Two (or more) heads are always better than one when planning instruction, so we suggest using the study group as a sounding board for upcoming topic and theme studies. Thinking a little differently about our instruction can breathe new life into time-worn curriculum topics.

### *Actions and Considerations*

- Collect and peruse resources (picture books, news articles, pieces of short text, artifacts) on a science or social studies topic you'll be studying in the near future. With the study group, brainstorm ways to launch the topic study. Does the piece of text lend itself to teaching a particular strategy? Is there a particular book or piece of text that provokes your thinking or captures your imagination? Is there a way to involve children and their imaginations in an observation, exploration, or experience?
- Work together with your study group to plan strategy instruction in a content area. Use the study group meeting time to map out the topic study. Consider those strategies and responses that best meet both your students' learning needs and the demands of the topic. Review how the teaching teams in Chapter 11 thought through instruction for each aspect of the gradual release approach: modeling, guided practice, independent practice, and application. Remember that the ultimate goal of strategy instruction and practice is for students to use strategies independently.

- The more kids know about a topic, the better their questions. Keep track of students' questions throughout the topic study on large charts posted in the classroom or library. Students should keep their own list of lingering questions in their journals. These lingering questions are often the ones students are most interested in when it comes time to decide on research topics.

## Chapter 12 Assessing Comprehension: How Do We Know?

All of the lessons, discussions, and responses in *Strategies That Work* have one purpose: to move kids toward independence as readers. We confer with our students to assess which strategies our students actively use to help make meaning and which strategies lag behind.

### *Actions and Considerations*

- With your students, brainstorm a list of strategies they might use to make sense of a piece of short text. These might include
  - stopping and thinking when the text doesn't make sense
  - rereading
  - asking questions to clarify confusion
  - making an inference when more information is needed
  - thinking about the two or three big ideas in a piece
  - paying special attention to charts, picture captions, or tables
 Ask students to tally which of these strategies they used and discuss when and why students used each strategy.
- Keep ongoing anecdotal notes of your reading conferences with your students. Bring the conference notes of at least three different students to the study group. Using the conference notes as evidence, discuss if and how these students are using strategies to better understand what they read. Discuss which evidence is most helpful in determining how effectively students are using the strategies.
- When teaching a particular strategy and asking students to use that strategy in their own reading, review your conference notes for that strategy. Note those children who are using the strategy independently in their own reading and those who seem to need more support and scaffolding to use the strategy effectively. How might you plan additional instruction for those who need it while also accommodating students who are ready to use the strategy independently with more challenging text? Share ideas for differentiated instruction with your study group, considering small flexible groups as well as individual instruction.
- When books are bursting with Post-its, kids can remove them and place them on a strategy chart to share their thinking. The chart might be titled

Our Questions about \_\_\_\_\_ (a topic, a book, an article, and so on). This chart can reflect ongoing learning about any strategy.

- We know students truly understand how to use comprehension strategies in their reading when they can articulate why a strategy enhanced their understanding. Share the following double-entry form, Strategy I Used as I Read/How this Strategy Helped Me Understand the Text and model your own thinking about a piece of text before turning them loose with it.

## Appendixes

The appendixes make up nearly one third of the content in *Strategies That Work*. The appendixes are separated into seven sections, including a variety of text sets, a list of recommended magazines and newspapers, and a list of professional journals for selecting children's books. Appendix F, the response options section, includes a variety of strategy forms for oral and written responses and a group of anchor charts for classroom use. The appendixes conclude with an assessment interview that shows how we assess ongoing comprehension in authentic situations.

### *Actions and Considerations*

- **Appendix A:** Great Books and Author Sets to Launch Strategy Instruction and Practice

Book lists are meant to be deleted and added to. The suggested titles for teaching each strategy are just that, suggestions to launch the teaching of a particular strategy. With your study group, collect titles you've found that seem to spur a particular strategy. Certain authors make us infer, other make us question. Search these out. And *search* may be the operative word. Children's books seem to go out of print with frustrating rapidity. If you have difficulty tracking down a particular title your local library should be your first port of call. A web site that specializes in locating out of print books is [www.half.com](http://www.half.com).

- **Appendix B:** Great Books for Teaching Content in History, Social Studies, Science, Music, Art, and Literacy

Expand the text sets for teaching content into areas that you are particularly interested in teaching. This list covers many curricular topics common to American education, but not all. The choices are so vast and the number of books so enormous that your lists need to be constantly updated. Study groups are a great place to discover additional titles. Meet in the school or public library and search the stacks. Perhaps you might hold one session at your favorite children's bookstore.

- **Appendix C:** Adult Text Sets

If you really want to understand how these strategies play out in reading, you must read yourself. This list gives you a great start toward finding books to

discuss in your own book clubs. Choose a nonprofessional book and read it together. Notice how you use the strategies discussed in *Strategies That Work* and talk about that aspect of your reading as well as the content.

- **Appendix D: Magazines and Newspapers for Kids and Young Adults**

Check to see if your library has a good selection of kids magazines and newspapers and encourage the school to order any from the list or others you like. Search for and copy articles that are relevant to topics under study and add them to curricular text sets.

- **Appendix E: Profession Journals for Selection of Children's Books**

We all need to be reading professionally, but the sheer number of literacy journals is mind-boggling. No one can read everything that's out there. Have each person or grade level team in the study group select a journal that they will follow throughout the year. Bring articles of particular interest, especially those with bibliographies, such as outstanding science trade books, picture books for teaching global understanding, and so on. to the study group to ensure that everyone gets a chance to see them.

- \* **Appendix F: Response Options for Each Strategy**

The response forms here are useful not only in class but also for authentic homework assignments. Review these forms with your study group and consider which ones kids can best do independently. These make thoughtful homework assignments. Kids are asked to do at home in their reading what they are being asked to do at school.

The anchor charts in Appendix F are authentic summaries of lessons and conversations from classrooms. In every chart we include an explanation of our thinking about a particular strategy as well as examples of student thinking. The charts are anchors for subsequent instruction linking what we've already done to future strategy teaching and learning. After constructing one with your kids, share it with the study group. What better way to discover what's going on in a colleague's classrooms?

- **Appendix G: Assessment Interview with Fourth Graders**

The assessment interview provides an opportunity for students to show us how they think about and reason through a short piece of text or picture book. Gather two or three students together and select short text that will stimulate use of the strategy (or strategies) you would like to assess. Let the students know you're really interested in their thinking and that while they're doing the talking you'll be writing down what they're saying.

- Bring notes and scripting from assessment interviews you've conducted in the classroom. Discuss how this information about children's thinking guides your future instruction.

- Consider bringing in a small group of children and conducting an assessment interview with the study group observing. Participants might focus on

individual students to record thinking over time and then discuss evidence for how well students have internalized using particular strategies.

- Don't forget to bring daily response journals and children's work to the study group. Examining and discussing kids ongoing thinking is the best way to keep track of our teaching and their learning.

*Reference*

L'Engle, Madeleine. 1995. *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art*. New York: North Point Press

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