READ TALK WRITE: SHOWING STUDENTS HOW TO THINK ABOUT AND ANALYZE TEXTS

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Writing to Read
Evidence for How Writing Can Improve Reading
A Report from Carnegie Corporation of New York
Steve Graham and Michael Hebert
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The Recommendations

Have Students Write About Their Reading

- Write to Build Prior knowledge
- Write Personal Reactions, Analyzing and Interpreting the Text)
- Write Summaries of a Text
- Write Notes About a Text
- Answer Questions About a Text in Writing or Create and Answer Written Questions For a Text


“"For instance, when elementary –grade students are directed to write about material thy are reading, (versus students who mainly read and reread or study this material) their comprehension of the text jumps 24 percentile points, whereas writing about content material presented in class results in a 9 percentile-point jump on measures of learning” page 381 In The Reading Teacher, January/February 2016.

Six kinds of Talk to integrate Into Your Lessons & Improve Comprehension

- Turn-and-Talk:1 to 3 minutes
- Whole-Class Discussion: 10 to 20 minutes
- Partner Talk: 5 to 15 minutes
- Small-Group Discussion: 10 to 20 minutes
- In-the-Head Conversations: while reading
- Teacher-Student Talk, Conferring to Scaffold: 5-Minutes
Inferring With Fiction and Biography

1. Study the following to infer:
2. Dialogue
3. Setting
4. Decisions
5. Interactions with Other characters, persons
6. Problems
7. Conflicts
8. Chapter titles

Inferring With Informational Texts

1. Use text details to find unstated or implied meanings.
2. Use information in text features.
3. Use Chapter titles.

Three Steps to Identifying Themes

1. Identify the general topic of the selection—or one of the general topics. Do this with one word or a short phrase.
   For “Hoops Tryouts” a general topic is hard work can lead to success.
2. Ask a question using the title and the general topic: Here’s the question for “Hoops Tryouts:” What does hard work can lead to success have to do with ‘Hoops Tryouts?’
3. Use the answer to state a theme. Do not mention the title, characters, or specific details from the story. A theme can apply to more than one text.
   **Theme statement:** Hard work and practice can help you reach an important goal.
Guidelines for Think Aloud

1. State the lesson’s focus.
2. Explain what you’ll do.
3. Explain what students will do.
4. Think-aloud.
5. Involve students.
6. Wrap-up with summary of what happened and what’s important to recall.

Benefits of Thinking Aloud:

9. Shows students your analytical process.
10. Students can think aloud and share their process once they observe how this strategy works.
11. Thinking aloud builds students’ mental model of how to apply a strategy. They need a mental model to accomplish application of strategies.
12. It’s an effective way to teaching reading and show students what goes on in a good reader’s mind.

Initiating Literary Discussions With Interpretive Questions

Research shows that students who are taught to generate their own questions after reading can develop a deeper understanding of the text than students who receive no training and practice (Rothstein & Santana, 2011; Zimmerman and Keene, 2007). Deep comprehension develops because students must have a thorough knowledge of the reading material to create questions. Moreover, using their questions motivates students to discuss texts and also leads to greater independence.

Explain to students that there are two kinds of questions: open-ended, interpretive questions that have more than one answer and closed questions that have one correct answer. For example, an interpretive questions for The Giver by Lois Lowery is Why does the Giver encourage and help Jonas to escape the community? A closed question is Who does Jonas Take with him when he leaves
the community? An interpretive question has more than one answer that can be supported with text evidence. Tell students that as soon as they can find two valid answers to a question, they can think about composing another question. You'll also want to teach students to ask guiding questions so they can explore ideas in multiple texts.

**Initiating Literary Discussions With Guiding Questions**

In the opening of this article, I describe a unit on war that has students reading different texts. Such a unit is ideal for developing guiding questions that move beyond a specific book to exploring a topic, issues, and common themes. For the unit on war, students developed two guiding questions: *Is there such a thing as a just war? Why do conflicts escalate into wars?*

Help students develop guiding questions for a unit of study by telling them the issue, theme, or concept they'll be exploring. Then ask students to use a theme such as stereotyping or obstacles to compose a question that can’t be answered in one or two sentences. Guiding questions such as *How do obstacles affect the course of a person’s life?* or *Why does stereotyping limit a person’s right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness?* compel students to read texts closely, think critically, and agree or disagree as they exchange ideas in order to build understandings and a knowledge base.

**Student Resource: Guidelines for Discussion**

- Come prepared to the discussion. Complete the reading assignment, and bring the text, your smart notebook, and a pencil.
- Collaborate with peers to compose open-ended questions about the text (if not using a teacher-assigned guiding question).
- Choose a moderator, whose job is to keep the discussion moving forward.
- Participate in the discussion, being respectful of others, listening carefully, asking questions to help a speaker clarify an idea, and citing text evidence to support your points and inferences.
Here are some suggestions for gradually moving students to independent literary conversations:

- **Start with the Turn-and-Talk strategy** (see the lesson on pages TK-TK) so students have brief talking encounters and can experience sharing, questioning, and listening. Use the prompts in the lessons or your own.
- **Move to a whole-class discussion** and motivate talk with a guiding question or an open-ended question; encourage a student to volunteer and start the discussion. Tell students that they don’t have to raise their hands, but they can participate by adding thoughts or asking questions once the student speaking has finished.
- **Debrief after the first whole-class discussion** and ask students to reflect on what worked and what could be improved.
- **Invite students to design guidelines for productive discussions.** Revisit the guidelines after two to three months so students can make adjustments based on experience. Here are the guidelines fifth-grade students developed early in the school year:

  *Come prepared; do the reading; bring your notebook.*

Continue using Turn-and-Talk to give students the experience of sharing ideas with and listening carefully to a partner. If students have difficulty maintaining a conversation, you can provide the following ideas for adding to the discussion:

**Ways to Contribute to a Discussion**

- **Restate the speaker’s idea.** If a student would like to clarify an idea, he or she can restate it in his or her own words and ask the speaker if that was the intended meaning. *I heard you say <>. Does that sound about right?*
- **Ask a question.** If a student would like the speaker to elaborate on or clarify his or her thinking, or is curious about a speaker’s take on a related issue, the student can ask a question. *Can you say more about <>? / I’m not sure what you mean when you said <>. Can you help me understand? / What do you think about <>?*
• **Connect to the speaker’s idea.** Students can build on a speaker’s idea by first connecting to it. *I like the point you made about..., and I have this to add. I had a similar idea....My idea differs from yours....*

• **Offer a different view.** Students can acknowledge the speaker’s contribution and then share their own perspective in a respectful way. *I hear what you’re saying about <>. I had a different thought when I read that part. / I have a different perspective on that scene.*

• **Disagree respectfully.** Sometimes students will disagree with each other, and that’s fine as long as they can frame the talk respectfully. Teach them language they can use to respectfully disagree. *I didn’t see it that way. Instead, I think . . . ; I don’t agree; I think it means... because ....*

• **Refer to the text.** Since we want students to ground their thinking in the text, we should encourage them refer to the text during discussion, either to provide evidence for an idea or as a point of discussion. *When it says ..., I infer... because .... Let’s take a look at this description; it says a lot about the protagonist.*

**Repairing Derailed Discussion**

If students’ behaviors derail a discussion, address the problem as soon as it arises. These issues might never occur in your class. However, if one of them does, here are suggestions for helping students move to positive, collaborative behavior that respects everyone’s ideas and promotes their ability to share them.

**If no one talks:** First, ask students why they aren’t responding; they might tell you they can’t recall details or didn’t read the selection. If the text is at their instructional or independent reading level, suggest they read it again to deepen their recall. If the text is too difficult, you can provide an audio version or read it aloud to students. If preparation and readability are not the issues, you can also try a different prompt.

**If one student consistently interrupts:** Have a private discussion with the student, explaining what you noticed and giving the student strategies that help him or her restrain the need to interrupt. You can try asking the student to squelch the urge to interrupt by counting to 100 and listening carefully. Another effective strategy is to give the student
an index card before talk starts. On the card write: “Remember to be a good listener and share ideas when the person speaking has finished.”

**If one student talks over another student:** Confer with the student and ask him or her to step into the other person’s shoes and discuss how he or she might perceive the situation. Suggest that when ideas pop into the student’s head, he or she jot them on paper to remember and share when the other student has finished.

**Polite Ways to Disagree With a Classmate**

Here are prompts the help you disagree with statements and ideas classmates present.

- I understand your idea, but I have a different interpretation.
- That’s an interesting point that I did not think of, but here’s my idea.
- I find that idea interesting, but I’m not sure you can support it with text evidence.
- Even though our positions seem different, I believe they have common points. Let me explain.
- You proved your idea with text evidence. Let me share my idea, which differs from yours.
- It’s okay to have more than one interpretation. Here’s what I think.
- Your idea intrigues me and I’m thinking my idea grows out of it. Let me explain.

**When Students Listen Actively, Literary Conversations Blossom**

In order to become active listeners during discussions, students benefit from having multiple opportunities each week to talk with a partner, small group, and the whole class. All participants should listen actively during discussions, but this doesn’t come naturally to most students. Take some time to define active listening, discuss why it’s important, and model it for students. Tell them that when someone else is talking, listeners should

- Keep focused on what the speaker is saying.
- Set aside any distracting thoughts that arise.
- Not think about what to say in response.
Listeners may jot notes to help them remember what the speaker said, but the focus should be on understanding the ideas the speaker is conveying first, rather than formulating their own ideas.

**Student Resource: Prompts That Keep a Discussion Moving Forward**

- So we’re supposed to [restate prompt].
- Does anyone have a different idea?
- Can you find evidence in the text that supports that?
- Is there more than one way to think about that?
- Can you explain that term?
- What points in the text support that claim?
- I’m unsure of your point. Can you clarify it?
- What made you say that? Can you give text evidence?
- Tell me more about that idea.
- Here’s how I see that idea.
- Let’s check the directions (or rubric)
- I agree with ___ but disagree with _____________.
- Let’s check that idea against the question we’re discussing.
Listing Discussion Highlights

Name __________________________ Date ______________________

Directions: Use the prompts to create lists of key points in your group’s discussion. Answer those prompts that apply to your discussion.

List 3 to 4 important ideas your group discussed.

Write two questions you discussed and under each one, list the points the group discussed.

Write two inferences your group made and give the evidence that supports each one.

Note one to two questions the group discussed that enabled you to figure out themes and big ideas. Now, write one theme.

What did you learn about your book’s genre from this discussion?
Examples of Protagonist and Antagonists

Title________________________________Author__________

Video or film clip____________________________________

Directions: Using a short text you’ve recently completed or a section of your instructional reading book, answer these questions in the space provided below:

1. Define protagonist and give an example of the protagonist from your text.
   Explain how you know this person is the protagonist.

2. Explain the role of an antagonist. Choose a character in your text who is an antagonist, and show how that character works against the protagonist.
“Hoops Tryouts” by Anina Robb

“Brian! Breakfast!” Brian’s mom was knocking at his locked bedroom door. “Why is this door locked, young man?”

“I’ll be out in a second, Mom.” Brian leapt down from the top bar of his bunk-bed from where he’d been hanging, stretching, his toes dangling, his white pajama pants flapping like a flag of surrender.

And, in fact, today, that was all that Brian wanted to do—give up. He’d been stretching from his bunk for the last month and he was still the shortest boy in 7th grade. He was shorter than most of the girls. Heck he was shorter than the 6th graders. Basketball tryouts were today, and if he didn’t make the team, he’d disgrace his family.

“Finally,” his Mom sighed as Brian slid into his chair at the kitchen table. She piled a heaping serving of scrambled eggs on his plate. “Eat-up, you have a big day!” His big brother, Jonas, had already finished breakfast.

“A kiss good-bye for your Mama?” Mom joked, and Jonas turned to bend down to kiss her. Then he smacked Brian on the head. Brian thought this could mean one of two things: I love you or you are an idiot. Jonas was a sophomore in high school and almost six feet tall. He’d been a starter on the basketball team since junior high. Everyone knew he’d get a basketball college scholarship. Brian shoved the eggs in his mouth.

“Alex is here, don’t forget your lunch money!” Mom called as Brian slid his plate into the sink and grabbed the coins from the bowl. Alex knocked on the screen door like a trusty alarm 8:05. The two friends had been walking to school together since the 2nd grade. But Alex only cared about basketball because his friend liked it—he was more interested in computers.

“Ready for tryouts?”

“I guess, ready as I’ll ever be.” Brian shrugged.

“What you gonna do about Lesh?” Matt Lesh thought he was the best basketball player in 7th grade because he was 5’10”. He’d been picking on Braxton for being short
for so long that Brian couldn’t remember a time that he hadn’t. In fact, it was Lesh who had inspired Brian to try to stretch himself out. Of course, Brian didn’t tell anyone he was trying it.

BRRRRING The first bell was ringing which meant 5 minutes to get to class. Brian fumbled at his locker. When he finally opened it, Matt Lesh darted around the corner and slammed his locker door shut, “Oops, my bad!” and he was gone. Brian didn’t have time to react or say anything. He had to get his locker open again so he could get to first block on time.

At lunch things just got worse. In the lunch line Matt was full of put-downs: “How about some shrimp, today? No, maybe a small fry? Would you like some peanuts with that?” Brian was getting hot; he could feel his face flushing red like the roses in his grandmother’s garden.

“Just ignore him, Brian,” Alex elbowed his friend along in line. He’s not worth it.

After school, the gym was bustling with boys trying out for the basketball team. The coaches lined everyone up in order from tallest to shortest, and wouldn’t you know? Brian was dead last.

“End of the line, Hunh, Brian?” Coach Peters chuckled. For a moment, Brian thought of splitting, just hightailing it out of there and not looking back. Geeze, even the coaches were making fun of him. But, he’d been practicing for weeks to get on this team, and he knew that being tall was not the end all be all for junior high basketball. Besides, he was bound to grow sometime soon, and then everyone would need someone else to sneer at.

“Alright,” Coach Peters, boomed, “This tryout is made up of 4 different stations: a dribbling through cones drill, jump shooting, passing, and an agility drill. Let’s pair up and get started! Front of the line—you are with the back of the line and so on!”

Brian froze. It couldn’t be. This was his worst nightmare ever. He was paired with Matt Lesh. Matt jogged over, “You better make me look
good, short-stuff.”

And in that moment, Brian decided the thing to do was to make himself look good—to take all the work that he had put in the last few weeks and show it off—not for Matt or his brother or his mom but for himself. He deserved a spot on this team because he was good and he worked hard and he was a team player. Brian took off to the first station, leaving Matt in his shadow. “Hey, wait up!” And that is how each station went—Brian dribbled by Matt, he out-passed him, he threw more jump shots, and his feet were lighter on the basketball court during the agility drills.

Sweaty and hot, the boys slumped by the bleachers when the coaches blew the whistles.

“Alright, good work out there, today. Good hustle. A team roster will be posted tomorrow morning by the gym.”

As everyone started shuffling out of the double doors, Brian spotted Alex waiting for him across the street. Just as he turned to slip on his jacket, there was Matt Lesh behind him. He braced himself for the coming insult. Instead Max raised his hand for a high-five. Brian reluctantly raised his, too. “Nice,” Matt nodded his head, and jogged away.

“What the heck was that?” Alex asked as they fell into step together. Brian shrugged his shoulders. Even if he didn’t make the team tomorrow, he was hoping things would be different from here on o
I had left Master Thomas's house, and went to live with Mr. Covey, on the 1st of January, 1833. I was now, for the first time in my life, a field hand. In my new employment, I found myself even more awkward than a country boy appeared to be in a large city...

The details of this affair are as follows: Mr. Covey sent me, very early in the morning of one of our coldest days in the month of January, to the woods, to get a load of wood. He gave me a team of unbroken oxen. He told me which was the in-hand ox, and which the off-hand one. He then tied the end of a large rope around the horns of the in-hand ox, and gave me the other end of it, and told me, if the oxen started to run, that I must hold on upon the rope. I had never driven oxen before, and of course I was very awkward. I, however, succeeded in getting to the edge of the woods with little difficulty; but I had got a very few rods into the woods, when the oxen took fright, and started full tilt, carrying the cart against trees, and over stumps, in the most frightful manner. I expected every moment that my brains would be dashed out against the trees. After running thus for a considerable distance, they finally upset the cart, dashing it with great force against a tree, and threw themselves into a dense thicket. How I escaped death, I do not know.

There I was, entirely alone, in a thick wood, in a place new to me. My cart was upset and shattered, my oxen were entangled among the young trees, and there was none to help me. After a long spell of effort, I succeeded in getting my cart righted, my oxen disentangled, and again yoked to the cart. I now proceeded with my team to the place where I had, the day before, been chopping wood, and loaded my cart pretty heavily, thinking in this way to tame my oxen. I then proceeded on my way home. I had now consumed one half of the day.

I got out of the woods safely, and now felt out of danger. I stopped my oxen to open the woods gate; and just as I did so, before I could get hold of my ox-rope, the oxen again started, rushed through the gate, catching it between the wheel and the body of the cart, tearing it to pieces, and coming within a few inches of crushing me against the gate-post. Thus twice, in one short day, I escaped death.
On my return, I told Mr. Covey what had happened, and how it happened. He ordered me to return to the woods again immediately. I did so, and he followed on after me. Just as I got into the woods, he came up and told me to stop my cart, and that he would teach me how to trifle away my time, and break gates. He then went to a large gum-tree, and with his axe cut three large switches, and, after trimming them up neatly with his pocketknife, he ordered me to take off my clothes. I made him no answer, but stood with my clothes on. He repeated his order. I still made him no answer, nor did I move to strip myself. Upon this he rushed at me with the fierceness of a tiger, tore off my clothes, and lashed me till he had worn out his switches, cutting me so savagely as to leave the marks visible for a long time after. This whipping was the first of a number just like it, and for similar offences.

I lived with Mr. Covey one year. During the first six months, of that year, scarce a week passed without his whipping me. I was seldom free from a sore back. My awkwardness was almost always his excuse for whipping me. We were worked fully up to the point of endurance. Long before day we were up, our horses fed, and by the first approach of day we were off to the field with our hoes and ploughing teams. Mr. Covey gave us enough to eat, but scarce time to eat it. We were often less than five minutes taking our meals. We were often in the field from the first approach of day till its last lingering ray had left us; and at saving-fodder time, midnight often caught us in the field binding blades.

If at any one time of my life more than another, I was made to drink the bitterest dregs of slavery, that time was during the first six months of my stay with Mr. Covey. We were worked in all weathers. It was never too hot or too cold; it could never rain, blow, hail, or snow, too hard for us to work in the field. Work, work, work, was scarcely more the order of the day than of the night. The longest days were too short for him, and the shortest nights too long for him. I was somewhat unmanageable when I first went there, but a few months of this discipline tamed me. Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!