

A New Path to Building Reading Comprehension:  
An In-depth Study of Reading Comprehension and Exploration of Practical, Meaningful Book  
Reports to Assess Reading Comprehension  
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“I believe that if we want to give our students the best possible chance in life, if we want to open doors of opportunity while they're young and teach them the skills they'll need to succeed later on, then one of our greatest responsibilities as citizens, as educators, and as parents is to ensure that every American child can read and read well.”

Barack Obama, September 15, 2005

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## ABSTRACT

Book reports can many times be viewed in classrooms as a means to obtain a writing sample, a time-filler or just another “thing to do.” I believe that book reports that are uniquely and purposefully crafted can be powerful tools to encourage students to grow in their use of metacognitive strategies to comprehend text. This comprehensive essay will delve into research to bring to focus what reading comprehension is, why it is important, and the strategies that should be used to foster growth in a student’s reading comprehension. With this base of knowledge and understanding, I will formulate my case that non-traditional book reports can be used in upper elementary classrooms (grades 3-8) as innovative, powerful tools that motivate students as readers, push students towards higher-order thinking and build students’ strategies to better comprehend text.

Duke and Pearson (2002) break down the reading process into three phases: before, during and after. Each stage plays a different role in the development of ability to successfully use reading comprehension strategies. We must first teach students how to comprehend by implementing reading comprehension strategies into curriculum before reading a text (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Secondly, we guide and facilitate use of reading comprehension strategies while reading to encourage self-regulation and ownership (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Thirdly, we provide assessments for students to demonstrate their knowledge and ability to self-regulate their reading comprehension, and to transfer their understanding to present it in a new form, such as a book report (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

This paper will be broken into two major parts: (1) reading comprehension instruction and effective strategies and (2) non-traditional book reports that focus on assessing use of effective reading comprehension strategies and understanding of text. The first part of the paper

will address the learner, learning context and curriculum as it relates to effective reading comprehension instruction, effective reading comprehension strategies and implementation. It will cover the before and during part of the reading process (Duke & Pearson, 2002). In the second part of this paper, I will address assessment, the after part of the reading process (Duke & Pearson, 2002). I will make a case for how innovative, non-traditional book reports can act as meaningful assessments for teachers to make informed instructional decisions for teaching reading comprehension and challenge students to improve their use of metacognitive strategies for reading comprehension.

*Key Words:* reading comprehension, reading comprehension instruction, reading comprehension strategies, reading comprehension assessments, book reports

## **Part One: Reading Comprehension**

### *Introduction*

I don't remember being taught how to properly use reading comprehension strategies. As an adult, I often struggle to comprehend text. Typically, I have to meticulously take notes, underline words and agonize over material in order to attempt to come to a literal understanding of text. The process of engaging with text at a critical level is difficult for me because so much concentration goes into just grasping a literal understanding of text.

Why don't I know how to properly use comprehension strategies? I may have been taught once and I just don't remember. Regardless of whether or not I was taught a reading comprehension strategy once in grade school, the fact is that no useful process stuck. I had to fend for myself while studying for the SAT and eventually figure out that I had to take notes in order to remember information and comprehend text. Indeed, I entered college with limited effective reading comprehension processes and strategies, a challenge considering the complex reading assignments and need for application to real life situations.

Reading comprehension matters. The way reading comprehension is taught and how students are held accountable for taking ownership of reading comprehension also matters. We want reading comprehension strategies to become embedded in students' personal skill-sets from a young age so that they stay with students well past when they get their diploma or pass a standardized test.

### *Defining Reading Comprehension and the Importance of Reading as a Learner*

Reading comprehension is defined as "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning" (Sweet, 2003). Reading comprehension is the meaning we put behind the words we read (Pinnell & Fountas, 2009). Without good reading comprehension skills and

strategies, students are left devoid of knowledge of the purpose of reading and why it is fun to read. Reading comprehension is a powerful component of building a student's fluency (Paris & Hoffman, 2004). Encouraging students to build great reading comprehension skills and strategies not only leads them to succeed in testing, but also further motivates students to become readers and actually enjoy reading (Paris & Hoffman, 2004).

### *Why Reading Comprehension is Important*

The toolbox of reading is comprised of five aspects of reading: phonemic awareness, phonology, comprehension, fluency and vocabulary (NICHD, 2000). Reading comprehension is a major component of the toolbox of skills that encompasses reading. As teachers, we must learn ways to effectively teach students how to build their reading comprehension skills.

Reading comprehension is one of the top three most frequently assessed components of reading for students (Paris & Hoffman, 2004). Along with reading comprehension, phonics and fluency were focused on most heavily in standardized tests (Snow, 2002). As standardized tests increase in importance, there is a large tendency for teachers to focus on teaching the informational model of reading (Wilhelm, 2003). The informational model of reading focuses on the literal understanding of text, leading instruction to weigh heavily on phonics and fluency (Wilhelm, 2003). This focus on fluency and accuracy leads readers to be easily lulled into the assumption that good readers are readers who get all of the words right (Kletzien, 2009).

The informational model, although beneficial and important, is void of teaching rich, meaningful reading comprehension skills and strategies (Wilhelm, 2003). This gives students a very limited perspective of the purpose and richness of reading (Wilhelm, 2003). This tendency of the informational model's instructional focus creates a great need for teachers to understand how to actively, purposefully and skillfully teach and equip students with the reading

comprehension skills, strategies and knowledge in order to share with students the full spectrum of what reading is and how engaging and fun it can be. As teachers we need to stress reading comprehension and the implementation of reading comprehension strategies in students' daily reading so they understand there is more to reading than just reading the words correctly (Kletzien, 2009). By understanding and teaching reading comprehension, teachers can encourage students to grow an appreciation, understanding and concept of what it means to be an active, engaged and great reader (Wilhelm, 2003).

#### *How Do Learners Develop Reading Comprehension?*

How do learners develop the skills needed to comprehend text? Application, application and more application (Mills, 2009)! Mills (2009) discusses the essential role that application plays in students who are developing a concept, understanding and familiarity with reading comprehension strategies. Duke & Pearson (2002) further support the needed stress on application by describing the active role that readers must have in the reading process.

#### *Passive Readers*

The opposite of an active reader is a passive reader (Pinnell & Fountas, 2009). Let's define what a passive reader is so that we know what to steer students away from as we teach, facilitate and assess the growth of our students as readers. A passive reader is one who simply reads in order to say each word correctly, to get finished with a given text, or to check off an assignment as completed. A passive reader is a reader who does reading to just get it over with to appease a parent or teacher. A passive reader is what I was when I was in elementary school. I didn't read to engage with books. I didn't read to understand the author's perspective. I didn't read to take myself to an imaginary world or to discover something new about myself. I read to



complete the assignment, for the accompanying grade and to know enough to pass the comprehension test.

### *Active Readers*

When a reader is engaged and active, their understanding of the depth and breath of reading increases and their appreciation for reading grows (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Pinnell & Fountas, 2009). This taken into account, how does a reader “engage with text” to be considered an active reader? First, they must learn how. Mills (2009) discusses the role of strategies in the development of a student’s reading comprehension. Mills (2009) lays out six major strategies for reading comprehension that should be explicitly taught and applied in the classroom to develop learners reading comprehension and encourage students to “engage” with a text. The six strategies are: activate prior knowledge, make inferences, use knowledge of text structures, visualize, generate and answer questions, and retell and summarize (Mills, 2009).

Not all learners will take ownership of the comprehension strategies presented in class and implement them into their reading to produce a cookie-cutter meaning of the text. The transactional theory of learning describes the different meaning that each reader will have due to each reader’s unique experiences (Gills, 2008). Taking into consideration the constructivist theory of learning, we must additionally remember that learners are actively constructing their own knowledge and understanding by making connections (Gills, 2008). Applegate, Quinn & Applegate (2006) have a very beneficial article that describes 8 common profiles of readers and provides research-proven effective instructional strategies to assist them as they grow in their literacy. It is well worth reading and a beneficial tool for teachers to use when addressing different learners/readers in the classroom.

Duke and Pearson (2002) detail that readers who have developed good reading comprehension skills and abilities have clear goals when they are reading text, evaluate the text constantly, make predictions, selectively read, and construct, revise and question the meanings they make as they read. Block and Israel (2004) take these characteristics of a learner who has skillfully developed his or her skills in reading comprehension by stating the importance of using the characteristics before, during and after the reading of a text. Below is a chart that has been created based on the findings of Block and Israel (2002) as they explored what good readers do before, during and after reading.

Before	During	After
Think about the book's purpose (what is reading the text supposed to do for the reader)	Understand word meanings, define any unknown words and understand what the words mean in context	"Notice novelty in text"
Activate prior and background knowledge relating to the text	Ask questions about the text	Make real-world connections to the text
Connect to the author's big idea	Revise prior knowledge and make predictions	Think about how the reader can use the information in daily life
Look for important information in and out of text to help further understand the text	Notice the author's writing style	

(Block & Israel, 2004)

In summary, research shows that there are strategies that students should use to develop their reading comprehension abilities. Strategies such as questioning, making real-world connections and making predictions must be actively a part of the reading process before, during and after the reading of a text to deepen meaning, connections and understanding (Mills, 2009). These strategies must explicitly be taught and ingrained so that readers move into self-regulation of personal reading comprehension. First, students must develop metacognitive abilities and recognize what they are doing to build reading comprehension in order to eventually make it

virtually instinctual to employ reading comprehension strategies to create deeper meaning of text and self-regulate their own learning and understanding.

### *A Positive Learning Environment for Reading Comprehension*

In order for students to be able to develop reading comprehension at the metacognitive level, the environment of the classroom must be a positive, learning environment that supports the development of a reader. The following are aspects of a classroom that support the growth of a reader, including a growth in reading comprehension skills. This is by no means a comprehensive inventory of all necessary components of a literacy-rich environment, but it details some of the essential beginnings of developing a literacy-rich, positive learning environment for reading comprehension.

### *Text to Talk Opportunities*

Talking about text is a very important part of instruction and literacy development (Gersten et al, 2001; Mills, 2009; Pinnell, 2006; Pinnell & Fountas, 2009). By having students engage in small group, whole group and one-on-one discussions, students are able to think more critically about text, gain others' perspectives, be encouraged to constantly think about text and learn to enjoy reading (Mills, 2009; Pinnell, 2006). As Pinnell & Fountas (2009) detail, students need the opportunity to “engage in conversation that helps them expand their use of language, engage in conversations about their experiences with texts, tell stories from their experiences and listen and respond to language.”

### *Wide Variety of Texts*

Students need to be introduced to and given the opportunity to explore a wide variety of text including real-world text, such as newspapers, magazines or articles on the Internet (Gersten et al, 2001). Students need to feel comfortable reading a variety of texts and understand the

different purposes of different types of text (Gersten et al, 2001). By having a wide variety of texts available for students to use during free time and during structured instructional times, students are able to become comfortable using a wide variety of texts and understand the different purposes that different types of texts have (Gersten et al, 2001; Pinnell, 2006).

#### *Cross-Curricular Literacy*

Incorporating literacy, both reading and writing, throughout the day, gives students more opportunities to practice their literacy skills, see the need for literacy and grow an interest in reading and writing through different subject areas (Pinnell, 2006). Having short mini-lessons reinforcing strategies and skills for reading throughout the day also encourages students to start to use what they are learning in their reading block in everything they do, not just during reading time.

#### *Rich in Vocabulary*

A supportive classroom also needs to be rich with vocabulary. Teaching vocabulary through mini-lessons, small group instruction, think alouds and discussions encourages students to think about the meaning of a word in their reading, which is the first step to building a student's comprehension of text (Pinnell & Fountas, 2009). Pinnell and Fountas (2009) on page 170 and 171 in their book, *When Readers Struggle – Teaching that Works*, have a detailed description of pro-active strategies and instructional contexts to implement in the classroom to encourage vocabulary development.

#### *Reading-Writing Connections*

The classroom needs to have lots of opportunities to allow the child to make reading to writing connections to further grow his or her fluency and comprehension abilities (Duke & Pearson, 2002). This may be in the form of each student having a journal that he/she writes in

whenever he/she has free time or having a center every week that has students “write around the room.” It’s all about making reading and writing accessible, available and desirable to the student to support his/her learning and personal reading fluency and comprehension (Pinnell, 2006; Pinnell & Fountas, 2009).

### *Reading Comprehension Strategies*

A consistent finding across studies is that some comprehension strategies are more effective than others (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). McMahon (2008) emphasizes the importance of focusing on strategies and instruction that encourage higher-order thinking and critical comprehension. Given these respected opinions, what then should I teach? Do I teach about summarizing? Do I teach how to answer comprehension questions correctly on a standardized test? What are the research-proven effective strategies that should be focused on in reading comprehension?

We will explore seven specific strategies of reading comprehension that should be focused on in instruction and dictate curriculum choices by the teacher (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Lanning, 2009; Mills, 2009). Each of these strategies, in different ways, incorporates the transactional theory (Rosenblatt, 2004). The transactional theory integrates the theories of cognitivism and constructivism to explain the building process of creating meaning by connecting with the text on different levels (Rosenblatt, 2004). Each strategy chosen forces students to go beyond the literal understanding of a text to engage with text, deepening comprehension and creating a 3-D perspective of text that is multi-faceted, complex and personal. We will focus on visualizing, predicting, inferring, making connections, questioning, paraphrasing and summarizing.

### *Visualizing*

Visualizing allows students to create meaning and understanding through pictorial or visual representations of text. Gambrell and Bates (1986) found that visualizing is an important and highly effective strategy for improving student understanding of both expository and narrative text. The point is to help students display relationships and connections between ideas from text and to visually comprehend what the text is about or what events are going on in the text (Liang & Galda, 2009).

An example of a visualizing activity in the classroom is reading a book to students and then having students go back to their desk and draw a picture of what they thought the book was about. It is as easy as that. Another example is having students create a comic strip of the major events in a book that they read. This would assess student's ability to sequence events and their comprehension of how events happened in the story. Students respond to the text by creating a visual of the text. If reading an expository text, a teacher may ask students to draw a graph or chart to detail the content of the text (Liang & Galda, 2009).

### *Inferring*

Inferring focuses more on "the direct exchange of meaning between the reader and the text" (Lanning, 2009). The strategy of inferring allows readers to fill in the blanks of the text, coming to educated guesses based on the context the book provides and the background knowledge the reader brings into the reading of the text. Inferring highlights the relationship between the reader and the text as the reader creates a more comprehensive picture of meaning of the book on the foundation of a literal understanding of the text. Unlike prediction, inferences do not need to be accepted or denied. Inferring allows the reader to use their imagination and judgment to come to a deeper understanding of a character, situation or other in a text (Lanning,

2009). As Lanning (2009) explains, “inferring is [also] a basic survival strategy for it helps unlock and personalize that which the author has not made explicit.”

### *Predicting*

“Prediction is one of the most commonly taught comprehension strategies (Liang & Galda, 2009). Students can compare predictions before reading to what actually happened in a text. Students have to think outside of the text before reading it, taking in what the book looks like, what is on the cover, what the topic of the book is, etc. to create ideas and expectations of what the book is about. This encourages students to think outside of the text, to make connections and build relationship between the text, their knowledge, experiences and visual cues of the cover of the book. Prediction is a form of inferring, of making educated guesses based on background knowledge, past experiences and contextual clues (Lanning, 2009).

Prediction is commonly taught because it is easy to teach (Liang & Galda, 2009). You predict and see what happens, and if you are right, great and if not, adapt and move on. The conflict of a student having different interpretations or creating different meaning of a text does not influence or affect predictions, and thus more superficial “yes” or “no” responses and discussion occur in the classroom.

I implore teachers to think of revolutionary ways to teach prediction, ways that take it beyond the superficial “Yes, this happened” or “No, that did not happen” answers to dive even deeper into why certain predictions were made, why the author may have had a certain event happen and how this affect the individual student’s perspective, understanding and ability to relate to the story. Predictions are a great avenue to rich meaningful discussion about text. Prediction further encourages students to think deeper about text and to come to greater personal

understanding and interpretation of the text, naturally fostering the development of reading comprehension in a student.

### *Making Connections*

By making connections with the text, readers are able to engage with the text in a more meaningful way. The strategy of making connections focuses on the social aspect of reading. Students interact with each other, the text and their past experiences by making connections. This strategy broadens the spectrum of interactions beyond just between the reader and the text to derive meaning. This strategy demonstrates the transactional theory, which explains the social relationship between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 2004). With this strategy, the indirect exchange of meaning between the reader and the text occurs. Readers create meaning through external connections from the text.

The strategy of making connections teaches students how to incorporate past experiences, background knowledge and other external sources from the text to create personal meaning and understanding. It also is a catalyst for students to learn how enjoyable, interesting and understandable text is by having students create a bond with the text (Lanning, 2009). There are three major kinds of connections that are a part of the making connections strategy to reading. The three connections are text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Kenne & Zimmerman, 1997). These are different avenues that students can use to help better understand and create meaning of the text (Lanning, 2009). It forces students to think outside of the literal meaning of the words on a page and to think about the story as it relates to him/herself, the world and other text that the student may have read.

When first introducing the strategy of making connections, choose books that students can easily relate with and make multi-faceted connections with the specific book (Lanning,



2009). Also, when teaching the strategy of making connections, the teacher needs to stress the reality that every individual, because of their unique set of experiences and knowledge, will create a unique meaning of text (Lanning, 2009).

### *Questioning*

In an age of testing, bubbling in answers and multiple-choice questions become routine and expected. Students can get lulled into using the example of standardized test questions into their personal questioning of text, focusing on the literal understanding of text. There are two types of questions: questions that test and questions that construct (Pinnell & Fountas, 2009). “Yes” and “No” answer questions are questions that test (Pinnell & Fountas, 2009). Questions that construct are questions that build on ideas, facts, events or other aspects of the text to create a deeper understanding of the text (Pinnell & Fountas, 2009). We want to teach students how to ask questions that construct to encourage deeper comprehension. The “5 W’s and a H” are good models to introduce to students to encourage them to ask questions of text that go beyond the literal understanding of text. The “5 W’s and a H” are “Who, What, Where, When, Why and How.” These question starters prompt students to dig deeper in text.

### *Paraphrasing*

Paraphrasing has been shown to be a strategy that good readers use, yet it is taught and stressed less in classrooms than other popular strategies such as visualization (Gajria et al, 2007). Paraphrasing is a step before summarizing. It doesn’t require students to evaluate the difference between unimportant and important events. When paraphrasing, students use their own words to describe the story (Kletzein, 2009).

As Kletzein (2009) says, “paraphrasing encourages the reader to make connections with prior knowledge to access what is already known about the topic and to use words that are part of

the reader's knowledge." It encourages the reader to stop and think about what they are reading and put what they are reading into their own words. Typically paraphrasing is introduced during think-alouds where the teacher models how to paraphrase during read aloud, possibly by asking the question, "What did I just read?" or "What just happened?" This reading comprehension strategy makes the student delve into thinking through what the text says, what the text means and forces the student to put into words what is being read, instead of just reading text or thinking about what is going on in his or her head.

In theory, if the student is a self-regulated, good reader and is unable to paraphrase what was just read, he or she would know he or she needs to go back and reread a section of the text to make sure a meaning and understanding of the text is reached. Paraphrasing is a great way to indirectly teach students the true purpose of reading, which is to understand to create personal meaning (Kletzein, 2009).

### *Summarizing*

Summarizing "requires the reader to identify, paraphrase, and integrate important text information" (Lanning, 2009). Summarizing is necessary in order to come to a literal understanding of text and to deduce the intended meaning of the text (Lanning, 2009). Summarizing forces the reader to get to the meat of the text. The reader has to siphon out the supporting details and redundant information from the main point or big ideas of the story to explain what the author is really saying in the text. This requires the student to be able to identify supporting details, the main idea, characters, setting and plot, and from that be able to deduce and condense the important ideas into a short written or verbal explanation of the text.

Summarizing is a skill that only builds in importance in the older grades when students are reading more dense texts. As texts get longer and more complex, readers have a great need

to continuously self-regulate their reading by summarizing small parts of the larger text in order to piece together an understanding of the text as a whole (Lanning, 2009). In short, summarizing is the process of determining the important big ideas of a text and taking into consideration the genre, type of text and background knowledge to create a new, concise, shorter description of the original text (Dole et al, 1991).

*Practical Implications for the Teacher, Classroom and Curriculum*

Where does the teacher fit into the development of reading comprehension in a student? The teacher is the beginning of the developmental journey to self-regulated reading comprehension for a student. However, the teacher also needs to facilitate and carefully handle the rest of the journey. A teacher not only needs to teach strategies but also model and foster environments that use reading comprehension, slowly giving ownership to the student and insuring transfer of knowledge. McMahon (2008) discusses that the major problem of much reading comprehension instruction is transfer. Reading comprehension instruction may occur in classrooms; however, if it is not transferred, it is worthless.

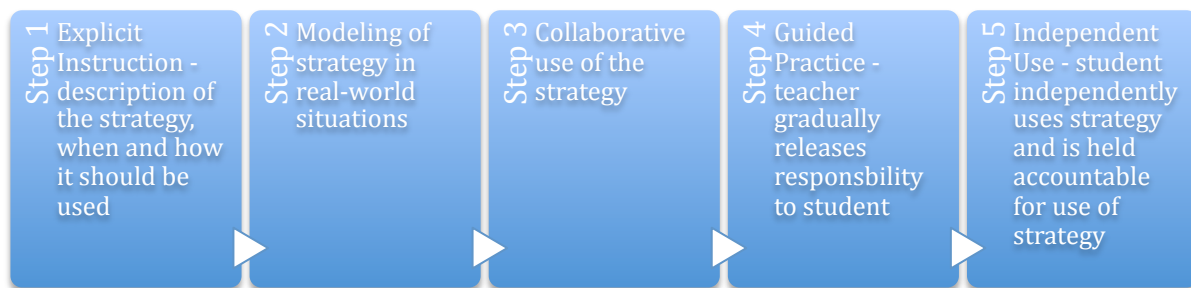
*Practical Implications for the Teacher*

By just teaching one strategy to students, students' comprehension can improve (Duke & Pearson, 2002). That's all it takes! Think about how powerful it will be when two or more strategies for reading comprehension are taught – and retained by the student. As stated before, however, a strategy cannot just be taught; it must be taught and encouraged throughout the journey of developing reading comprehension as discussed earlier in this paper. Each of the seven strategies we just dissected needs to be taught in a way that encourages transfer, metacognition and eventual self-regulation. Duke and Pearson (2002) map out a series of steps that should be incorporated into curriculum to help build students' metacognition of reading

comprehension strategies and move them into self-regulating their reading comprehension.

Steps similar to Duke & Pearson's (2002) are prevalent throughout the research on effective instructional strategies for reading comprehension. For example, Lanning (2009) calls her model, "The Gradual Release Lesson Procedure," which more or less follows the exact pattern of Duke and Pearson (2002).

Steps to Reading Comprehension Instruction:



(based on Duke & Pearson, 2002)

Duke and Pearson's (2002) model of the progression of reading comprehension instruction points out the need for the teacher to gradually give ownership to the individual. It also highlights the need to use strategies continuously throughout the entire progression of steps that will not only be taught, but will also be implemented into the individual's daily reading habits and will develop accountability in the student to regularly use the strategies.

Another component of teaching reading comprehension strategies is the need for the teacher to focus efforts of instruction on encouraging higher-order thinking and critical comprehension (McMahon, 2008). This may come in the form of asking students lots of questions about the text, then discussing the text in small groups and finally formulating new questions to ask about the text. It may mean that students use what they comprehended in a text to produce something new. I implore teachers to go beyond the controllable, to ask the questions

that do not have one answer or an expected response, and to ask the questions that make students think critically and independently to create their own meaning of the text, even if it results in a meaning that you may not fully understand. Teachers should encourage and facilitate discussions and debates of text to further push students into higher-order thinking about texts.

### *Practical Implications for the Curriculum*

Curriculum many times does not follow Duke and Pearson's (2002) model for reading comprehension instruction. Curriculum may dictate that a teacher introduce one reading comprehension strategy one day and a new one the next without any long-term accountability or development of a single strategy. Taking this factor into account, teachers need to be aware of the need of a child to develop and refine at least a single skill or use of a consistent strategy over a long period of time. Just as language develops over a long period of time and vocabulary gradually builds, reading comprehension grows as strategies are used, matured and developed in the individual (Schmitt, 2008). This may require the teacher to adapt, add to or enrich curriculum.

For example, the *Treasures* curriculum (2008) falls short of carrying out the process of getting students to eventually self-regulate their use of reading comprehension skills as Duke and Pearson (2002) describe. In the curriculum, teachers model strategies such as summarization, but rarely are the strategies explicitly explained and rarely is metacognition encouraged. In this example, a teacher, who is well-versed in what research says about reading comprehension strategies and the development of reading comprehension skills in a child, would adapt the curriculum to first explicitly teach the strategy - stating its purpose, how it is used and in what context the strategy is used, then model and eventually give over ownership and responsibility of using the strategy while reading to the student, encouraging metacognition and self-regulation.

*Observations and Practical Implications for a Classroom*

I recently observed a 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading block in Williamson County. The teacher was very purposeful in her incorporation of building reading comprehension in her classroom. Through visual displays and consistent incorporation of discussing or using reading comprehension strategies through her teaching, she displayed and voiced the importance she held to building reading comprehension. She had a bulletin board that had the following comprehension strategies displayed: Asking Questions, Visualizing, Connections, Synthesizing and Inferring.

She used these strategies as a framework in the guided reading group I observed, encouraging students to use the strategies to create a deeper understanding for the material, as well as asking students questions about what type of comprehension strategy they should use in a given situation to further encourage students to use reading comprehension strategies while reading. She also had students participate in a variety of activities that incorporated the use of reading comprehension skills so that students became familiar with using reading comprehension strategies in different ways and continued to practice using reading comprehension strategies.

Kletzein (2009) says that modeling and empowerment are the best strategies for teaching students to use reading comprehension strategies in their own reading. In this classroom, the teacher had obviously taught students what the individual strategies were in the beginning and then continuously modeled and empowered students to continue using the strategies. From the posters on the wall reminding students of the strategies they could use to her constant verbal reminders in guided reading groups of using specific strategies, the environment of the classroom encouraged students to create deeper meaning and understanding of the text, encouraging the students' intentional strategies and their becoming more of a natural, ongoing process.

*Closing Thoughts and Summary of Reading Comprehension*

Reading comprehension is a process. As Duke & Pearson (2002) and Block & Israel (2004) discuss, good readers use reading comprehension strategies before, during and after the reading of a text. As teachers, we need to model this approach to good reading habits in students to adapt reading comprehension instruction to be before, during and after text (Block & Israel, 2004). Teachers need to choose a set of strategies that he/she wants to have students use. For example, the seven strategies identified by the National Reading Council are: summarization, question generalization, question answering, cooperative learning, story structure and graphic and semantic organizers (NICHD, 2000). After choosing the set of strategies, a teacher then integrates effective reading comprehension instruction of the strategies before, during and after the reading of a text to model and encourage students to move into self-regulation of their reading comprehension (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Pinnell & Fountas, 2006).

How do you adjust reading comprehension strategies to meet a diverse range of learners? That is a question that is at the forefront of much research and debate in the education circle. From my research and classroom experience, you need to find where students' holes are in reading comprehension and focus on those strategies both in instruction and assessment to help students grow their individual comprehension. If you have a small class or a great system in place where you can meet with each child regularly, perhaps you may adapt one-on-one instruction and assessment to focus on the needs of the child and the areas that he or she may struggle with regarding comprehension skills. In Appendix B and Appendix C, there are resources and information on specifically meeting the needs of students with learning disabilities and students who are bilingual.

*The “After” Part of Reading Comprehension Instruction*

In the second part of this paper, we will explore in-depth a practical, useful, well-constructed way to monitor and assess reading comprehension after the reading of the text. Monitoring and assessing reading comprehension after the reading of the text is many times an area that is overlooked or simply comes in the form of standardized tests. I will make my case that there are ways to construct creative, interesting, comprehensive and meaningful book reports that act as a great assessment for teachers and tool for students to self-assess their personal understanding of a given text.



**Part Two:**  
**Bridging the Before and During to the After –**  
**Accountability, Self-Regulation and Assessment**

Keene and Zimmermann (2007) remind us that students need to do more than decode words on a page. Lain (2003) says, “what students need to do is connect with the text to bring their own beliefs, experiences, and expectations to bear on the printed word. As they do this, they activate their schemata, those file folders of information in their brains.” How do we foster activities and assessments that encourage students to develop their own beliefs, expectations and understanding from text? From a typical teacher’s perspective, first thought after finishing reading a text as a class or individually is assessment. Book reports are a popular means to assess students’ understanding of the text after reading book as a class.

Book reports can be viewed in a classroom as a way to obtain a writing sample, a time-filler or just another “thing to do.” When formed in an educated, research-proven strategic manner, book reports can be used as a powerful, innovative tool to foster learning experiences for students to grow and strengthen their reading comprehension skills. Using our prior knowledge of reading comprehension strategies and implications in the classroom from part one of this paper, we will explore how to create a framework for book reports that has students create new, beneficial and unique assessments to further support reading comprehension development.

*Why Book Reports?*

Book reports are a form of post-reading activity. Post-reading activities are essential in developing a deeper understanding of the book. Post-reading activities are also an important opportunity for a student to take ownership of what he/she read and make real-world personal connections to the text (Block & Israel, 2004; Clark & Graves, 2004). From a constructivist approach of teaching reading, book reports are an effective means of scaffolding knowledge and

building upon prior knowledge (Clark & Graves, 2004). When preparing a book report, students take the knowledge and understanding acquired from reading a book, and create a new product by using strategies, such as summarizing, retelling, paraphrasing, inferring or asking questions. This not only provides an assessment for the teacher but also further builds the student's comprehension of the text (Morrow, 1992).

### *Tired Book Reports*

“Book reports: Bane or a blessing?” This was the title of Helen Francis' article written in 1926. Book reports have been around for a long time. During the research process of composing this paper, I found numerous articles from the early 1900's about book reports and their purpose in the classroom. Typically, book reports come in the form of a paper or oral presentation on a specific book that a student has either read individually or the class has read together (Bynum, 1931). A teacher simply gives a prompt such as “Explain the story to me” or “Discuss the different characters and how they develop throughout the book,” and students build their paper or speech from the given prompt. The teacher then evaluates the paper or presentation and gives the book report a grade. This definition of book reports weighs heavily on assessing a student's ability to use the reading comprehension strategies of summarizing and retelling. As a result, it focuses on literal comprehension of text (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

Traditionally, book reports have been used first and foremost as a way to get a grade for what students have been accomplishing during the reading block of the day at school. Especially in the current drive for quantitative data on our students' understanding, producing some sort of “grade” on a student's reading and understanding of a book is imperative.

Secondly, book reports are a seemingly easy, straightforward way to test and assess reading comprehension skills. Especially since traditional book reports weigh heavily on the

literal meaning of the text, it is easier for a teacher to grade because an individual's perspective and interpretation of the text at an interpretive or critical level of comprehension is absent (McMahon, 2008). Book reports, in the traditional sense, encourage the regurgitation of knowledge and surface-level facts instead of critically thinking about the text. Glassner (1996) also points out that traditional book reports discourage engagement and risk taking.

#### *The Case for Non-traditional Book Reports as a Tool for Reading Comprehension*

There are three factors that influence comprehension: the reader, the text and the activity, the purpose, or the situation (Gills, 2008). The third factor is up for debate depending on whom you are talking with and their perspective on the development of a learner and reader. The reader and the text are constants to a certain extent. The reader is always a student and the text is whatever text is chosen either by the student or as dictated by the teacher. The third factor, the activity, purpose or situation, however, varies and is dependent on the teacher, his/her perspective on what reading comprehension is, the depth to which the teacher expects a text to be understood, her teaching philosophy, and the environment he/she creates in the classroom.

Krieger (1991/1992) found evidence that students dislike writing book reports. Subsequently, Krieger (1991/1992) found that students' dislike influences the ability for the book report to be an effective tool and actually be carried out for its intended purpose. Taking this premise into account, we need to find new and innovative ways to revamp book reports to motivate and get students interested in reading and sharing their understanding. Increasing engagement through an appropriately structured report format can help start eroding this somewhat natural dislike many students have towards the traditional book report. The four specific benefits for using my proposed non-traditional, new framework for book reports are engagement with text, engagement with others, assessment, and motivation.

*Benefit #1: Engagement with Text*

Book reports based on the new framework provide interactive, comprehensive, engaging activities and projects that assess the whole child and their individual comprehension skills, not just their ability to take what they read and speak or write about it. As Lain (2003) discusses, students need to engage with and interact with text, producing a new product based on their reading and understanding of the book. There is a need to use assessments that are multimodal and stray from the traditional, safe assessments that have been used for years in order to give students more real-world experiences, broaden the tools they feel comfortable using, and force students to display their knowledge and understanding in multiple different contexts (Mills, 2009).

Additionally, using book reports that take the form of something such as a podcast, forces students to engage with the text at a different level and in a different way than a reader would be required if just writing a book report. The engagement with text required with the new framework for book reports requires the reader to use more strategies for reading comprehension than just summarizing and retelling. Students must actively engage with the text, asking questions, making inferences and analyzing characters.

*Benefit #2: Engagement with Others*

Traditional book reports have been highly criticized for how they limit the amount of interpersonal interaction a reader experiences (Adam & Mowers, 2007). Creating book reports that require a significant amount of peer interaction encourages deeper comprehension and understanding of a text (Reinking & Watkins, 2000). Peer interaction may include, but is not exclusive to, students working collaboratively, sharing ideas about a book, and developing innovative ideas for projects based on the book. Using the framework, readers are able to

actively engage in both the text and with others by doing more than just detailing facts from the book. Baker and Wigfield (1999) found that such active engagement with text and others increases students' reading comprehension abilities.

Book reports that follow the new framework also appeal to a larger audience than traditional book reports. Traditional book reports typically involve an interface only between the reader and teacher. With the new framework for book reports, students share with each other, the teacher, and possibly parents or administration. The audience is really up to the teacher and the student, which allows for many unique audiences to add richness, depth, and engagement to a book report. For example, if students make a podcast for their book report, their podcast could be posted online and anyone could listen to the podcast. Another example is if students wrote a play for their book report, they could perform the play for other classes in the school or for parents. A larger and more diverse audience expands the extrinsic motivators that students may have for completing a book report (Baker & Wigfield, 1999).

### *Benefit #3: Assessment Tool*

In order to know the needs of our students, we have to assess students' understanding and abilities. Book reports, if intentionally created and positioned, allow a teacher to assess students' strengths and weaknesses to help teachers adapt future instruction. Post-reading assessments also help identify students' needs and create future goals for the next book he/she reads (Fiene & McMahon, 2007). The framework for new book reports additionally encourages teachers to assess more than one comprehension strategy which enables a single assessment to provide the teacher a knowledge of a student's understanding and the ability to use a wider range of comprehension strategies than traditional book reports. Therefore, the assessment becomes more meaningful and beneficial for the teacher and the student.

*Benefit #4: Motivation*

In Reinking and Watkins's study (2000), students started creating multimedia book reviews instead of the traditional book reports which the class had completed in the past. Reinking and Watkins' (2000) showed that lower readers were completing more multimedia book reviews, gaining self-confidence, and improving reading scores. As Reinking and Watkins' (2000) observed, "Many students seemed to acquire a different, more active, persona when involved with project activities, often becoming less inhibited, more verbal, and more cooperative."

By allowing students to choose from a variety of book reports that diverge from the traditional written book report or speech, there is a higher likelihood that a student will be able to choose an activity that they want to do and that they know they can successfully accomplish. Motivation increases because students have a choice in what they get to do and how they get to display their knowledge (Baker & Wigfield, 1999). The new framework for book reports also gives students the opportunity to make their own book report to share their understanding of a book with the class. This builds the self-esteem of the child, encourages reading and engaging with text in and out of school, and gives students the opportunity to take ownership of reading and use multiple reading comprehension strategies (Baker & Wigfield, 1999).

*New Framework for Book Reports*

My goal is to frame book reports in a way that encourages students to use and exhibit not only literal comprehension, but also interpretive and critical comprehension of text. In addition, my proposed framework for book reports will force students to use multiple comprehension strategies including, but not limited to, one of the most frequently used and assessed comprehension strategy of summarizing (Retellings, 2009). This new framework for book

reports also forces the teacher to rethink and restructure reading comprehension instruction before and during reading.

*The Framework – “Dig Deep” into Books!*

**Design the Room, Rubrics and Reports** – Before the year starts, choose which strategies you want to focus on during the year. Creatively incorporate the strategies in the room whether through posters, bookmarks or other creative means. Also, obtain examples of book reports and create rubrics for assessment that you want to use throughout the year so that you do not have to quickly create things or run out of time during the school year.

**Introduce and Model Strategies** – In a unit, introduce two or three strategies that you will focus on during the unit and that students will be held accountable for using in their book reports. If some students are at different levels in their reading and need to focus on other strategies, have conferences with students one-on-one to work on those specific strategies.

**Guided Practice and Eventual Independent Practice of Strategy** – Give students opportunities in whole group, small group and one-on-one meetings to use strategies to encourage independent use of strategies in independent reading.

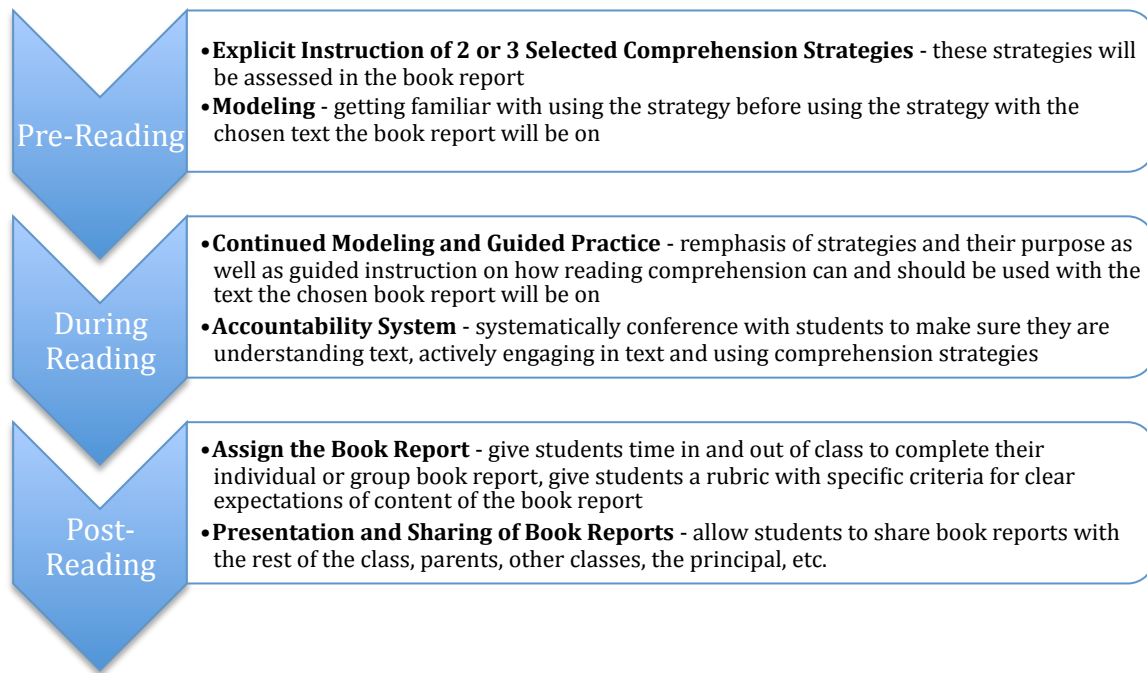
**Dive into text** – Read the book as a class or individually, encouraging students throughout the reading of the book to use strategies to actively engage with the book.

**Examples, Rubrics and Expectations** – Share with students examples, rubrics for grading purposes, clearly state expectations and clearly communicate which reading comprehension strategies each student is going to use independently or which strategies the class will use specifically when creating the book report.

**Encourage Creativity** – Allow students to collaborate while creating their book reports, sharing ideas and expressing different ideas and opinions about the books.

**Present Book Reports** - Give students an opportunity to share their book reports with each other.

Below is a graphic organizer laying out the framework for the unit that will culminate with the creation and presentation of a new framework-based book report.



### *Pre-Book Report Instruction and Preparation*

Block and Israel (2004) stress the importance of guiding reading comprehension instruction and implementation before, during and after the reading of a text. Before the school year starts a teacher should select the specific strategies that he/she will want to teach and have students use to support and encourage reading comprehension. After selecting the specific strategies, a teacher should display the chosen strategies in creative ways throughout the room whether through posters, bookmarks, displays or other ways of visually reminding students of the strategies. This will make students aware of the strategy even before they may understand the meaning and purpose of the strategy and serve as a reminder when students need to know how to use the strategy.



A teacher needs to prepare students before and during the reading of a text with the necessary tools, strategies and abilities to successfully complete a new framework based book report. As we discussed with Duke and Pearson's model (2002), this process first begins with explicit instruction of strategies, followed by modeling of strategies before the text is introduced. I would suggest that teachers teach one strategy that encourages literal comprehension and one strategy that encourages critical or inferential comprehension. In this way struggling readers who may need practice with the foundations of reading comprehension can focus more on the literal comprehension strategy; students who are more advanced and ready to move on to critical and inferential comprehension can focus on the second strategy. Students should be individually guided in which strategy to focus on during one-on-one conferences with the teacher.

During the reading of the text, either as a whole-class or independently, the teacher should continue to reinforce strategies by encouraging the use of strategies through conferencing, small group discussions and continued modeling of strategies by the teacher and students. These activities and instructional times give students opportunities to collaborate, participate in guided practice, and take on gradual ownership and responsibility for using the reading comprehension strategies being taught in the specific unit (Duke & Pearson, 2004). During the reading of a text, it also may be beneficial to give students a sneak peak at some example book reports to give them an idea of what will be expected of them as their post-reading assessment.

#### *Preparation for the Teacher before Assigning the Book Report*

First, the teacher needs to select which book report format(s) he/she is going to allow students to choose from. Secondly, the teacher needs to create a rubric(s) for the book reports that give clear expectations and necessary content for students to receive an exceptional grade. Thirdly, the teacher should obtain or create examples of each type of acceptable book report for

students and enable students to review them during the brainstorming phase of the book report process.

In Appendix D there are two samples of rubrics that offer suggestions on how to assess book reports. These rubrics especially emphasize the two or three comprehension strategies on which to hold students accountable to utilize in diving deep into text. The rubrics should be introduced to students before they start the process of creating their book report as well as used by the teacher to grade.

The student and teacher need to communicate which two strategies (or three) the student is specifically targeting in his/her book report in order for the rubrics to be beneficial in helping grade the assessment. This can be done through one-on-one conferencing, students filling out a rubric identifying strategies before beginning their book reports or by the teacher dictating to the whole class what strategies to use.

#### *Assigning the Book Report – Providing the Framework and Parameters*

After the book is read, the book report can be assigned. Remember, the goals of these book reports are four-fold:

- 1) Provide an opportunity for the student to further engage with the text to encourage deeper comprehension and understanding (Lain, 2003).
- 2) Encourage students to collaboratively work on projects and/or discuss literature, and provide motivation beyond just getting a grade from the teacher (Baker & Wigfield, 1999).
- 3) Be an authentic, quality assessment of a student's comprehension skills and abilities for the teacher to adapt and modify future instruction to further refine areas and attend to possible weaknesses in comprehension skills (Fiene & McMahon, 2007).
- 4) Equip the student with the knowledge and understanding necessary to self-regulate and self-assess his/her reading comprehension skills based on his/her ability to successfully and wholly complete his/her chosen book report (Duke & Pearson, 2004).

We want the students to use strategies such as visualizing, responding, paraphrasing, questioning, summarizing and inferring throughout the process of designing, creating and presenting the book report.

*Examples of Framework-based Book Reports*

By now, you may have a picture in your mind of what you think these non-traditional book reports look like. They should be creative, innovative, interactive projects that encourage students not only to display literal comprehension but also to dig deeper with the text into critical, interpretive and inferential comprehension skills.

The following are some of the book report ideas that follow the new book report framework:

- **Write and Perform a Jingle** – Students will write and perform a jingle to market the book and describe why readers would want to read the book. Students will be given a length and content requirement that pushes students from just summarizing text and encourages students to identify unique details that they noticed in the book that would not be evident by simply reading the back cover of the book.
- **Costume Designer**– Students will create costumes for the play version of the book. The costumes must be colored sketches or computer designed with a description of each character, as well as a description of the meaning and symbolism of specific items of clothing or accessories that a character may have.
- **Podcast** – Students will create a podcast where they summarize and reflect on their thoughts, real-world connections and questions they had after reading the book. Adam and Mowers (2007) state “With podcasting, we move beyond the two-dimensional paper book report to a dynamic product sure to excite students and adults alike.”
- **Sell, Sell, Sell** – Similar to “Write and perform a jingle” students will market the book and describe why people would want to read the book. Students can make and tape a commercial or create a product such as a toy that relates to the book or advertises the book. The toy would be supplemented with a “User’s Guide” describing the meaning of different aspects of the toy and its connection to the book.

- ***Everything I Need to Know I Learned from a Children's Book (by Anita Silvey) Compilation*** – Based on the book by Anita Silvey, students will create an entry similar in format to Silvey's book. (See Appendix G for example). Students will (1) make a real world connection to how the book affected them or a lesson they learned from the book, (2) write a short summary of the book and (3) draw or get graphics from the internet that portray the book. The whole class could read different books and complete an entry and a class book of all the entries could be made.
- **Super Soundtrack** – Students will create a CD mix of different songs (all songs must be edited and appropriate, students will get a 0% if they turn in songs with inappropriate content) that have some meaning to the book. Students will write a CD insert that describes how each song describes and connects to the book.
- **The Sequel** – For the writers in the class, students will write a mini-sequel to the book. Students would detail what events that would take place, how the characters would develop and how they would interact if there were a sequel to the book.
- **Poetic License** – Students will write a poem about the book, including demonstration of both literal and inferential or critical comprehension of the book.
- **Let's Play a Game!** – Students will create a board game based on the book. For example, if students read the book, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, a student could create a game based off the concept of Monopoly and the different places around the board could all be places or events that happen throughout the book such as the lamp post, the Queen's table, the closet or the beaver's house. There would be "Chance" cards that all relate to the book as well.
- **Pack a Suitcase** – Students will pretend they are packing a suitcase for one of the main characters in the book. Students can get a cardboard box to put the actual items in or draw a picture of a suitcase with each of the items detailed. Students will make a "Packing List" that has every item in the suitcase, a description of each item and any symbolic meaning the items may have to the characters in the book.
- **Read All About It!** - Students will create a newspaper from the town/city/place of the book. The newspaper will contain typical elements of a newspaper, such as front-page articles, news articles, pop culture section, comics, and classifieds. All articles/sections will relate to the book: the setting, plot, and characters.

Englebright and Englebright (2006) compiled a list of the top 40 book reports that follow the framework and are a great resource if additional ideas for creative book reports are needed. Appendix E has note cards of each of the book reports listed above that can be used as a resource for teachers and/or students in the classroom.

### *Conclusions and Summary*

Paris and Hoffman (2004) say, “Researchers cannot lose sight of the fact that good assessment rests on good theory, not just a theory of reading but of effective teaching and development.” In order for these book reports to be effective and beneficial tools for assessing reading comprehension, integration of research-proven theory, effective teaching practices and ample preparation must take place. The book reports must also be developed over time, maturing and evolving to meet the needs of the students, reflecting what the teacher discovers realistically works in the classroom and what does not. I have provided a flexible, research-based framework that the teacher needs to adapt to his/her needs, teaching style and the composition of his/her classroom.

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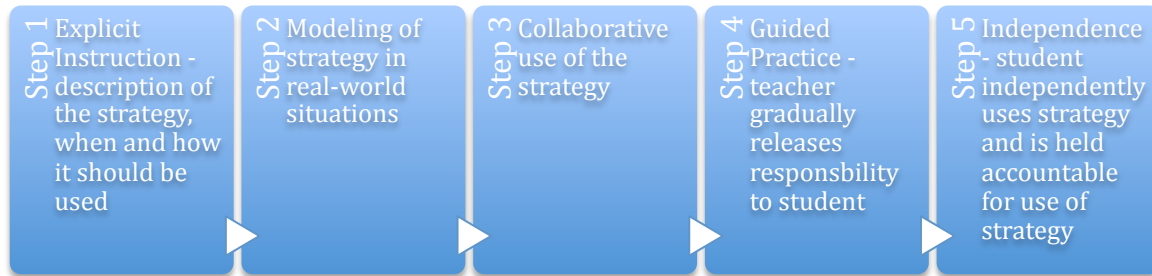
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Appendix A – Steps to Reading Comprehension Instruction

Steps to Reading Comprehension Instruction:



(Duke & Pearson, 2002)

## Appendix B – Teaching Reading Comprehension Strategies to Students with Learning Disabilities

Suggestions for Areas to Focus Instruction on:

- **Literal Understanding** – Buly & Valencia (2002) found that there was students with learning disabilities generally lack of a strong base of word identification knowledge and understanding which led to poor comprehension skills. By focusing more on literal understanding and vocabulary skills, students with learning disabilities will be able to create a better foundation of reading comprehension skills. Many times in an inclusion classroom, these elementary skills are overlooked by the teacher or seen as skills that were taught and acquired in younger grades. Teachers may need to consider working with students with learning disabilities in small groups to give more individualized instruction on necessary fundamental skills to increase their comprehension abilities.
- **Knowing How to Use Strategies** - Typically for students with learning disabilities, there exists a lack of understanding of how to efficiently use the skills and tools that an individual already possesses (Gersten et al, 2001). Gersten et al (2001) found that students with learning disabilities generally simply don't know when and how to use comprehension strategies and thus get lost and confused when being assessed on reading comprehension. Reviewing the basics of what reading comprehension strategies are and how they are used in real-world situations to encourage metacognitive ability will benefit all students, regardless whether or not they have a learning disability.
- **Knowledge of common text structures** – Different text structures can be very confusing and need to be differentiated. By defining the differences and similarities between different text structures, it helps understand how to interpret and comprehend material and what strategies to use when (Gersten et al, 2001).
- **Active Reading** – As discussed in the first part of the paper, it is important for all students to learn how to be active readers. The importance of active reading and task persistence – selection, application and monitoring of strategies is important to teach and stress during instruction to students with learning disabilities (Gersten et al, 2001). By making tools for self-evaluation such as bookmarks or posters, students will be reminded visually and tactilely to continue to use the strategies even after teachers are directly working with a student or reminded a student to use certain strategies.

Further Reading:

Buly, M. R., & Valencia, S. W. (2002). Below the bar: profiles of students who fail state reading assessments. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 24*(3).

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## Appendix C – Teaching Reading Comprehension Strategies to Bilingual Students

## Suggestions for Areas to Focus Instruction on:

- Word recognition
- Vocabulary
- Word reading is many times the key missing link to understanding and differentiating instruction (August et al, 2006).

## Tips to Guide Instruction:

- **Build Basic Understanding:** To foster growing word recognition and basic comprehension, focus more on literal comprehension in the beginning phases of instruction. In the later stages of reading comprehension instruction, adapt assessments such as book reports to weigh heavier on literal understanding, retelling and summarizing than asking questions and making connections. This builds a firm foundation of basic understanding and reading comprehension skills before moving on to more complex aspects of comprehension.
- **Build Background Knowledge:** Typically background knowledge is also a missing link that needs to be focused on during instruction. It may help to use the Diagnostic Assessment of Reading Comprehension (research-proven to be effective for students as young as kindergarten) to better understand the needs of ELL or ESL students (August et al, 2006).

## Further Reading:

August, D., Francis, D. J., Hsu, H. A., & Snow, C. E. (2006). Assessing reading comprehension in bilinguals. *The Elementary School Journal*, 107(2).

## Appendix D: The Framework

## “Dig Deep” into Books! – Framework of the Unit that Culminates with Non-Traditional Book Reports

**Design the Room, Rubrics and Reports** – Before the year starts, choose which strategies you want to focus on during the year. Creatively incorporate the strategies in the room whether through posters, bookmarks or other creative means. Also, obtain examples of book reports and create rubrics for assessment that you want to use throughout the year so that you do not have to quickly create things or run out of time during the school year.

**Introduce and Model Strategies** – In a unit, introduce two or three strategies that you will focus on during the unit and that students will be held accountable for using in their book reports. If some students are at different levels in their reading and need to focus on other strategies, have conferences with students one-on-one to work on those specific strategies.

**Guided Practice and Eventual Independent Practice of Strategy** – Give students opportunities in whole group, small group and one-on-one meetings to use strategies to encourage independent use of strategies in independent reading.

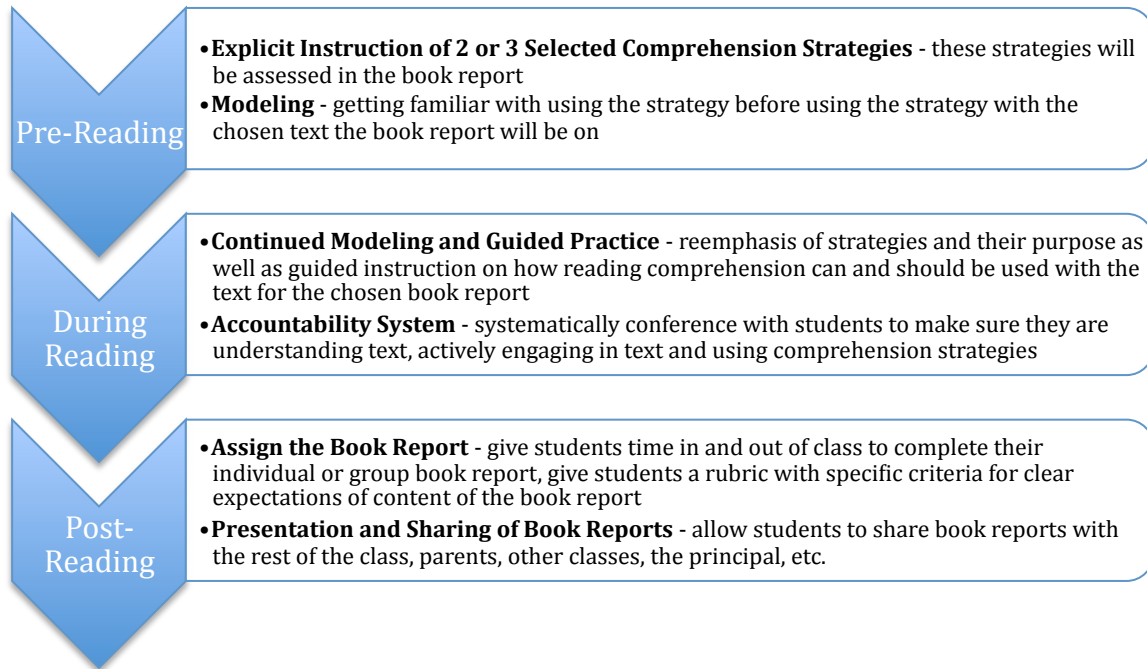
**Dive into text** – Read the book as a class or individually, encouraging students throughout the reading of the book to use strategies to actively engage with the book.

**Examples, Rubrics and Expectations** – Share with students examples, rubrics for grading purposes, clearly state expectations and clearly communicate which reading comprehension strategies each student is going to use independently or which strategies the class will use specifically when creating the book report.

**Encourage Creativity** – Allow students to collaborate while creating their book reports, sharing ideas and expressing different ideas and opinions about the books.

**Present Book Reports** - Give students an opportunity to share their book reports with each other.

## Outline of the Unit:



Appendix E: Framework and Guidelines for Book Reports

- 1) Provide an opportunity for the student to further engage with the text to encourage deeper comprehension and understanding (Lain, 2003).
- 2) Encourage students to collaboratively work on projects and/or discuss literature, and provide motivation beyond just getting a grade from the teacher (Baker & Wigfield, 1999).
- 3) Be an authentic, quality assessment of a student's comprehension skills and abilities for the teacher to adapt and modify future instruction to further refine areas and attend to possible weaknesses in comprehension skills (Fiene & McMahon, 2007).
- 4) Equip the student with the knowledge and understanding necessary to self-regulate and self-assess his/her reading comprehension skills based on his/her ability to successfully and wholly complete his/her chosen book report (Duke & Pearson, 2004).



## Appendix F: Book Report Idea Note Cards

Use these note cards as a resource for you or for your students as they are starting the brainstorming phase of selecting what type of book report to complete (if the teacher gives students options on which book report to complete). The note cards could be cut out and placed in a card file or hole-punched and placed on a book ring.

### **Make a Podcast**

**Description:** Students will create a podcast where they summarize and reflect on their thoughts, real-world connections and questions they had after reading the book. Adam & Mowers (2007) state “With podcasting, we move beyond the two-dimensional paper book report to a dynamic product sure to excite students and adults alike.”

**Specific Strategies to Use: Summarizing, Making Connections, Questioning**

## Write a Jingle!

**Description:** Students will write and perform a jingle to market the book. The jingle needs to describe why readers would want to read the book as well as small insights into the important details and setting of the story. Students will be given a length and content requirement that pushes students beyond just summarizing text and encourages students to identify unique details that they noticed in the book that would not be evident by simply reading the back cover of the book.

**Specific Strategies to Use: Summarizing, Making Connections**

## Costume Designer

**Description:** Students will create costumes for what they imagine the costumes would look like if there was a play version of the book. The costumes must be colored sketches or computer designed with a description of each character as well as a description of the meaning and symbolism of specific items of clothing or accessories that a character may have.

**Specific Strategies to Use: Visualizing, Paraphrasing, Inferring**

## Poetic License

**Description:** Students will write a poem (or a series of poems) about the book, including demonstration of both literal and inferential or critical comprehension of the book.

**Specific Strategies to Use: Summarizing, Inferring, Making Connections, Visualizing**

## Let's Play a Game!

**Description:** Students will create a board game based on the book. For example, if students read the book, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, a student could create a game based on the concept of Monopoly and the different places around the board could all be places or events that happen throughout the book such as the lamp post, the Queen's table, the closet or the beaver's house. There would be "Chance" cards that all relate to the book as well.

**Specific Strategies to Use: Summarizing, Making Connections, Visualizing, Questioning**

## Pack a Suitcase

**Description:** Students will pretend they are packing a suitcase for one of the main characters in the book. Students can get a cardboard box to put the actual items in or draw a picture of a suitcase with each of the items detailed. Students will make a “Packing List” that has every item in the suitcase and a description of what it is and what symbolizes to the character based on what they read in the book. A great book to have students do this book report for is Bud, Not Buddy.

**Specific Strategies to Use: Summarizing, Inferring, Visualizing**

## Read All About It!

**Description:** Students will create a newspaper from the town/city/place of the book. The newspaper will contain typical elements of a newspaper such as front-page articles, news articles, pop culture section, comics, and classifieds. All articles/sections will relate to the book: the setting, plot, and characters.

**Specific Strategies to Use: Summarizing, Making Connections, Inferring, Visualizing**

### ***Everything I Needed to Know I Learned from a Children's Book*** **Compilation (based on the book by Anita Silvey)**

**Description:** Students will (1) make a real world connection to how the book affected them or a lesson they learned from the book, (2) write a short summary of the book and (3) draw or get graphics from the internet that portray the book. The format of the 3 aspects of the report will be similar to the entires in Anita Silvey's book (consult her book for more details and a better understanding). .

**Specific Strategies to Use: making connections, summarizing, visualizing**

### **Sell, Sell, Sell**

**Description:** Similar to "Write and perform a jingle" students will market the book and describe why people would want to read the book. Students can make and tape a commercial or create a product such as a children's toy that represents the book. The toy would be supplemented with a "User's Guide" describe the meaning of different aspects of the toy and its connection to the book.

**Specific Strategies to Use: Visualizing, Summarizing, Inferring, Making Connections**

Appendix G: Rubrics for Book Reports

Rubric #1 - This is a rubric for teachers to use when grading students, after the book reports have been completed and turned in.

Name of Student:

Book:

Type of Report:

	Evidence	Points out of 5
<b>Strategy #1:</b>		
<b>Strategy #2:</b>		
<b>Synthesis and Presentation of Comprehension</b>		
<b>Following of Original Directions</b>		
<b>Creativity/Originality/Making it Personal</b>		
Total out of 25		

Additional Notes:

Rubric #2 – This rubric is a great rubric for students to fill in as a self-assessment and for the teacher to complete to give students a grade on their work.



\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_ (out of 20)

Comprehension Strategy #1:  
Evidence –

Comprehension Strategy #2:  
Evidence –

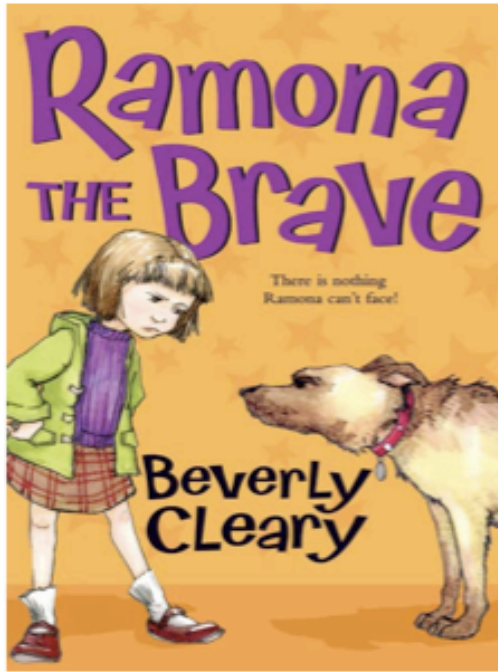
Notes/Comments:

Appendix H: Example of Book Report – *Everything I Needed to Know I Learned from a Children’s Book Excerpt*

**Ramona  
the Brave**  
by Beverly Cleary

Lessons Learned  
by Elizabeth Derck

**You Can't Spend  
Life Comparing  
Yourself to  
Others..**



...you can only pursue to become the best version of yourself. As Ramona finds out through her teacher, Mrs. Griggs, sometimes people are not open to originality and uniqueness in an individual. Sometimes, people expect uniformity and perfection from everyone. However, that is a far cry from being a realistic expectation of others. We all fail, we all have flaws and we are all unique individuals. If we spent our life comparing ourselves to others, we would always see things in ourselves that didn't match up to those around us and probably end up living very bland, unoriginal and unsatisfied lives.

Ramona begins to notice that the way she perceives herself many times seems contradictory to the way others see her. It reminds me of the importance of self-awareness as an individual. Who am I, what do I love and what makes me unique? All of these questions and more are essential in gaining a concept of self-knowledge and understanding. As a child, having a unique identity and being known are typically two very important aspects to a child's life. Even as an adult, I find that I constantly am challenged with the questions, "Who am I?" and "What makes me unique?" Ramona's wavering confidence due to the external factors influencing her in her self-knowledge and self-assurance, reminds me of the importance of defining myself as an individual, letting others influence me in positive ways but also filtering out the influences that may not play a positive role in my self-image and self-concept.



**Fact File:**  
 Full Name: Ramona Geraldine  
 Quimby  
 Address: Klickitat Street,  
 Portland, Oregon  
 Best Friend: Daisy Kidd  
 Likes: playing in the park,  
 fairy tales, adventures  
 Dislikes: spelling, having to  
 play with Willa Jean,  
 perfect Susan



## Ramona the Brave

Ramona’s dad describes Ramona as “spunky.” Ramona, a rising first grader, is a curious, adventurous girl who always is getting herself into mischief and new interesting situations. During the summer between Ramona’s kindergarten and first grade years in school, she becomes bored, having conquered the Brick Yard and ready for a new challenge. Little does she know the challenge that awaits her in first grade, especially in her encounters with her first grade teacher, Mrs. Griggs...

