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# Literacy Matters

Michelle Chappus – Teacher Consultant: Junior Program  
Junior Literacy Special Assignment Teachers – Program Department  
Liz LaPorte, Terri Barrette, and Kelly Winney

## Making Connections

All reading is a search for meaning: the essential purpose of reading is comprehension. The meaning that readers seek is both in the text and in the mind of the reader who brings experiences, knowledge, purposes, and a perspective to the author's words and meanings.

We know that knowledge about a reading topic helps to improve comprehension. Proficient readers use background knowledge to enhance their understanding. They think about things they already know and experiences that they've had to help them more deeply understand what they read. To encourage all readers to relate unfamiliar text to their prior world knowledge and/or personal experiences, we can provide opportunities for students to make three special types of connections in their minds:

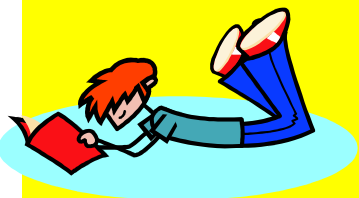
**Text-to-Self connections:** students use information from their own lives (e.g., experiences and feelings)

**Text-to-Text connections:** students use knowledge of other selections they have read (e.g., genre, author, setting, character, theme, social issues)

**Text-to-World connections:** students use their world knowledge (e.g., current events, social issues, shared experiences)

Fountas and Pinnell (p. 319) state that the ability to make connections far beyond the particular text they are reading:

- Deepens comprehension
- Changes the reader in some permanent way
- Adds to readers' understanding of life and the world
- Motivates readers to engage with other texts
- Expands the reader's language system – both oral and written
- Promotes enjoyment



## Explicit Instruction

Research indicates that readers who use strategies have better reading comprehension. Effective readers and writers use a range of strategies in a variety of combinations when interacting with text. They do not use strategies in isolation (Literacy for Learning, 2004).

...education is not a Nike commercial: you can't say, "Just do it." Instead, we must show students *how* to do it. That means we've got to be very **direct and explicit in strategy instruction**. -Kyleen Beers

Beers (2003) states that simple awareness and competency with comprehension strategies is not enough. If we really want to affect students' comprehension abilities, then we need to teach comprehension strategies explicitly and directly. We can **model** or **think aloud** how we use those strategies to understand texts.

We need to remember that comprehension strategies are a *tool for facilitating and extending comprehension*. While it is fine to introduce and practice strategies one at a time, we need to **balance explicit instruction with lots of time for practice and application**. We need to give students enough time for the independent reading that enables students to use and practice these strategies (Routman, 2003).



## Assessment Ideas

- ⇒ Think Alouds
- ⇒ Self-evaluation checklists of comprehension strategies
- ⇒ Anecdotal Observations
- ⇒ Reading Conferences

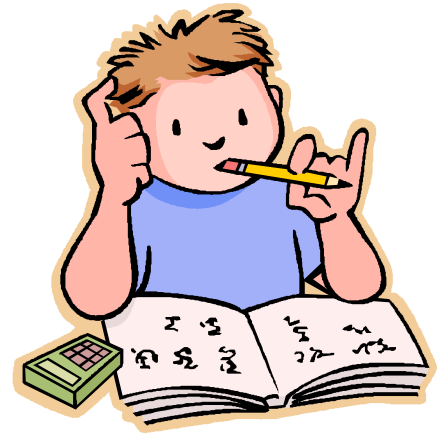
*Look for what students are doing well and what they need to work on.*

### Bibliography

- Beers, K. (2003). *When kids can't read: What teachers can do: A guide for teachers 6 to 12*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Expert Panel on Literacy in Grades 4 to 6 in Ontario. (2004). *Literacy for Learning: The report of the Expert Panel on Literacy in Grades 4 to 6 in Ontario*. Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Education.
- Fountas, I.C., & Pinnell, G.S. (2001). *Guiding readers and writers, Grades 3-6*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Routman, R. (2003). *Reading Essentials: The specifics you need to teach reading well*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

# Double-Entry Journals

**WHAT?** A double-entry journal gives students an opportunity to take notes from a text and express their thoughts about the material they encounter at the same time. Double-entry journals can be used with any text, in any subject, to monitor any comprehension strategies.



**HOW?** Drawing a vertical line down the center of a page can create a double-entry journal. On the left side, short, interesting quotes from the text are copied. On the right side, personal responses to the quotes are recorded. Readers' responses may include connections, predictions, opinions, guesses about meanings of words, or comments about where they were confused.

**WHY?** Double-entry journals are effective because they allow students to pick out the parts that **THEY** think are important, and respond with **THEIR OWN** ideas about the text, instead of doing exercises that the teacher makes up. Reading in this way can help students improve their comprehension, and remember the material better.

Following is an example of a double-entry journal created while reading *Science Everywhere* 4, p.106.

<b>Notes from Text</b>	<b>Student Thoughts</b>
kept in zoos	I've seen elephants at the Toronto Zoo and I've seen them in movies too.
feel vibrations, even though she wasn't hearing any sounds	I have felt the vibrations of drums when I went to the parade. I wonder if these are sound vibrations like the elephants make?
low-pitched sounds that travel too slowly for us to hear	Why can't we hear these sounds? How fast do sounds need to travel for us to hear them?

# Making Connections

Text-to-



Text-to-text



Text-to-  
world



Before, during and after reading..

I think about:

- What I know
- Other texts I have read about this topic
- My experiences
- What the author is saying
- What I know about the author
- What this text means to me