Praise for *Diving Deep Into Fiction*

Diving Deep Into Fiction is not only a teacher-friendly blueprint for developing deeper readers of literature, it is also a valuable resource for helping students become discerning readers beyond the walls of the school. I love how Smith and Wilhelm's easy-to-use lessons transfer to help students critically read songs, street signs, comics, poetry, billboards—in short, the world. This is a great resource.

Kelly Gallagher, author of *Deeper Reading* and *Readicide*

Adapting their four "rules of notice" to the world of characters, symbols, and motifs, Smith and Wilhelm have done it again. In this practical guide, they lead educators through a combination of literary texts and teaching strategies, as well as how to scaffold students' learning into transferable skills. As in all their work, Smith and Wilhelm's *Diving Deep Into Fiction* will help teachers prepare their readers and writers to become more curious, critical, and creative as they respond to fiction, poetry, comics, websites, paintings, and more.

Troy Hicks, Interim Associate Dean, College of Education and Human Services, Central Michigan University

In *Diving Deep Into Fiction*, Michael Smith and Jeffrey Wilhelm draw back the curtain on perceptive reading. Using diverse texts and artfully moving from the most accessible to the more complex, they show how students can use "rules of notice," a powerful set of inquiry tools, to go beyond surface comprehension. As you read through their precise lessons, you feel yourself guided by two master teachers.

Thomas Newkirk, University of New Hampshire

In the face of growing concerns about the "end of the literate age," Smith and Wilhelm remind us that we know not only how to foster literacy but how to grow joyful readers. And then they offer practical helpful examples of what that kind of teaching looks like. Instead of wringing our hands about what students can't or won't do as readers, let's all read this book. Let's remember what a pleasure it is to read fiction. And let's teach young people why to do it, how to do it, and how to love doing it.

Tanya Baker, EdD, Executive Director, National Writing Project

My students and I appreciate this book's accessibility, practicality, and depth. The chapters are brief and conversational, but every principle and example is based on sound theory, research, and teaching experience. In *Diving Deep Into Fiction*, two highly successful literature teachers explain and demonstrate what they do, how they do it, and why.

Brian White, Grand Valley State University

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Diving Deep Into Fiction: Transferable Tools for Reading ANY Fiction by Michael W. Smith and Jeffrey D. Wilhelm is an essential guide for educators and readers who want to unlock the deeper power of literature. Smith and Wilhelm expertly reveal the "rules of notice" that accomplished readers use—often unconsciously—to make sense of texts, offering practical lesson sequences and strategies that foster genuine engagement, critical thinking, and transferable reading skills. This book is a must-read because it bridges research and classroom practice, empowering teachers to help students become insightful, independent readers who find meaning and joy in fiction.

Piper Lee-Nichols, co-author of *Habits for Resilient Learners: Empowering Students to Thrive Through Challenge and Change*

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DIVING DEEP *into* FICTION

Grades 6–12

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From Michael

To Jay Imbrenda, Hugh Kesson, Jessica Hadid, and Mary Beth Reinhold, collaborators extraordinaire.

From Jeff

To Peggy Jo, "best of wives and best of women," the most courageous, inspiring, and resilient person I know; and to all of the many teachers, National Writing Project fellows, and students with whom I have taught, learned, and engaged in thinking partnership over the last 43 years.

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Michael W. Smith | Jeffrey D. Wilhelm

DIVING DEEP *into* FICTION

Transferable Tools for Reading ANY Fiction

Grades 6–12

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CONTENTS

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Chapter 1

An Introduction to Our Approach

Inquiring Into the Reading Process and How Texts Work

We're readers. Our love of reading, especially fictional narratives of all different sorts, is what brought us to teaching. It's what animates much of our scholarship.

Our experience as readers has convinced us that literature has the capacity to provide learners with a unique and powerful way of knowing. Our experience as teachers has convinced us that far too many students don't experience that power. The purpose of this book is to share five sequences of lessons designed to reverse that situation by sharing some of the "secret things that all accomplished readers know, yet never talk about" (Meek, cited in Thomson, 1987, p. 109).

What are those secret things? Based on our research and experience, we have identified two foundational understandings:

1. Reading Literature Is a Rule-Governed Activity.
2. Not Everything Is Equally Important.

Building on those foundational understandings, we have identified two more key ideas:

3. Four Rules of Notice Are Powerful Tools to Guide Reading.
4. Five Key Elements Are Especially Important to Notice.

To begin, let's examine each of these ideas in more detail.

Reading Literature Is a Rule-Governed Activity

When she was growing up, Michael's granddaughter Gabrielle was a huge fan of knock-knock jokes, among them this chestnut:

Gabby: Knock-knock.

Michael: Who's there?

Gabby: Boo.

Michael: Boo who?

Gabby: Don't cry, Pop-Pop.

As she got older, she diversified. You probably know the one that repeats "banana" as the answer to the question "Who's there?" several times before concluding this way:

Michael: Who's there?

Gabby: Orange.

Michael: Orange who?

Gabby: Orange you glad I didn't say banana?

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Or this one:

> Gabby: Knock-knock.
>
> Michael: Who's there?
>
> Gabby: Interrupting cow.
>
> Michael: Interrupting cow—
>
> Gabby: Moooooo.

Engaging in knock-knock jokes is a conventional activity. When Gabby says, "Knock-knock," Michael knows how he is expected to respond. If he were to say, "Come in," the joke would be ruined. But it's important to note that rather than limiting communication, those conventions are what allow it, foster creativity, and promote pleasure. Knowing the conventions doesn't constrain Michael's response to the joke. Rather, that understanding allows it. In response to her joke, he could laugh, or groan, or tell a knock-knock joke of his own. But none of those responses can occur if Michael doesn't appropriately participate in the joke in the first place.

We think literature works in much the same way.

Louise Rosenblatt (1982) championed the reader's role in the experience of reading, a position she noted was "practically subversive" (p. 268) back when she first advanced it in 1938. However, she also worried that although "the importance of the reader's role is becoming more and more widely acknowledged" (p. 268), the notion of the reader's response is becoming too diffuse. As a consequence, her later writing endeavored to clarify the relationship between the reader and the text.

In her initial formulation way back in 1938, she wrote of the "to-and-fro spiral" between the reader and the "signs on the page" (p. 26). Forty years later, she spun out that spiral as follows:

> First, the text is a stimulus activating elements of the reader's past experience . . . both with literature and with life. Second, the text serves as a blueprint, a guide for the selecting, rejecting, and ordering of what is being called forth; the text regulates what shall be held in the forefront of the reader's attention. (1978, p. 11)

The text is both a stimulus and a blueprint. As a blueprint, the text

> sets up tentative notions of a subject, of some framework into which to fit the ideas as the words unfurl. If the subsequent words do not fit into the framework, it may have to be revised, thus opening up new and further possibilities for the text that follows. This implies a constant series of selections from the multiple possibilities offered by the text and their synthesis into an organized meaning. (1982, p. 268)

We cite Rosenblatt at length because we want to establish that even the words of the most famous and influential champion of readers acknowledged that texts constrain what readers do. But, as we have suggested, readers are rewarded for accepting those constraints because doing so yields "multiple" new possibilities.

Let's consider how this plays out by looking at a text. Michael recently came upon a cache of (mostly embarrassing) poems he wrote many years ago when he and some of his high school colleagues put on an annual poetry reading for his school's arts festival. One was an attempt at an ironic monologue in the style of Robert Browning, a poem in which the speaker unknowingly lays bare negative qualities. Here it is:

A Lonely, Quiet Street

Through a glass-block window, light
shimmers, an underwater scene.
You, too, are refracted. I presume
your laundry takes you. The basement
must be damp. When it's hot like this,
I go through clothes quickly. In the
dark, though, your parkway grass cools
my chest, my face.

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When Michael wrote this poem, he was counting on readers to identify its genre, a subject we'll explore in detail in Chapter 3. When readers recognize that the text is an ironic monologue, they must accept the convention that Michael is not the poem's speaker and that their primary purpose as readers is to gain insight into the psychology of the speaker. Accepting those conventions is much like saying "Who's there?' in response to a knock-knock joke. Although it doesn't allow readers to say Michael's a creep for looking through basement windows (because Michael is not the speaker), it does allow multiple other possibilities, such as saying, "This is scary," or "I wonder what drives people to behave that way," or "It's stupid. Nobody would do that," or "Why would anyone give a voice to a stalker?"—and on and on.

Not Everything Is Equally Important

Imagine this scene: You're at a hot new restaurant in town with your partner. The place is crowded. Words are everywhere: your partner's conversation, the waiter's description of the specials, the little argument that's erupted at the table next to you. If you try to pay attention to all those words, you'll drive yourself crazy, and you will likely miss out on something truly important, such as how your partner's tone shifts when they start talking about their new boss.

Stories, and especially novels, are a lot like that restaurant—lots of words. All of them may, in fact, be interesting, but not all of them are equally important. Rosenblatt (1982) wrote of the importance of selective attention, and she noted that "We respond . . . to what we are calling forth in the transaction with the text" (p. 269), in other words, not to everything—only to what we select. Rabinowitz (1987) concurred, writing, "We know from experience that there are always more details in a text—particularly a novel—than we can ever hope to keep track of, much less account for" (pp. 43–44).

As Reynolds (1992) noted, following a comprehensive review of research on selective attention, successful readers have conscious control of strategies that allow them to identify the most salient aspects of texts, especially by understanding both text structure and task expectations. They then pay increased attention to those salient aspects, which makes it far more likely that they will learn and remember them. In contrast, less successful readers often lack these strategies and skills.

For our students to develop the conscious control that successful readers need, we must help them develop an explicit awareness of what may be implicit understandings. In speaking about managing the excess of information in texts, Rabinowitz (1987) explained, "We have learned to tame this multiplicity with a number of implicit rules, shared by readers and writers alike, that give priority to certain kinds of details, and that thus help us sort out figures from ground by making a hierarchy of importance" (p. 44). Building on this awareness, we have identified four such rules to share with students, which we call the *rules of notice*.

Four Rules of Notice Are Powerful Tools to Guide Reading

In this book, we focus on the same four rules of notice that we do in our companion book, *Diving Deep Into Nonfiction: Transferable Tools for Reading Any Nonfiction Text* (Wilhelm & Smith, 2016):

- Direct statements
- Calls to attention
- Ruptures
- Reader's response

These rules are intended to help readers learn to focus on the key details that can help them engage with texts successfully and pleasurably. We'll be drawing on these four rules throughout the book, and we will be teaching them explicitly in the lesson that comprises Chapter 2, so we'll simply define them quickly here.

Direct Statements

The first rule of notice involves *direct statements*—which one of our groups of students called "statements and demands" (Wilhelm et al., 2023, p. 107).

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Readers need to make many inferences as they read, but sometimes authors make direct statements that don't require making inferences. When authors make these direct statements, readers need to pay attention. The most obvious example might be the moral of fables. But even more complex literature sometimes has something of an equivalent. Consider the first line of Anna Karenina: "All happy families resemble one another, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."

As another example, one of Michael's favorite poems, "Dionysus and the Kangaroo," written by his friend Steve Schroer, points out parallels between twice-born Dionysus and a fetal kangaroo's journey to and out of its mother's pouch. It ends like this: "The world is terrible but wonderful,/Wonderful in the facts, the very facts," a succinct and memorable direct statement of the poem's theme.

Successful readers need to notice details about characters and make inferences about the characters based on those details. But at times, noticing direct statements from an undramatized narrator is what's called for. Here's an example from Ray Bradbury's "All Summer in a Day," a story that chronicles how children born on an always rainy Venus mistreat Margot because they are jealous that she is the only child in their class who remembers the sun because she was born on earth:

> But she remembered and stood quietly apart from all of them and watched the patterning windows. And once, a month ago, she had refused to shower in the school shower rooms, had clutched her hands to her ears and over her head, screaming the water mustn't touch her head. So after that, dimly, dimly, she sensed it, she was different and they knew her difference and kept away. There was talk that her father and mother were taking her back to Earth next year; it seemed vital to her that they do so, though it would mean the loss of thousands of dollars to her family. And so, the children hated her for all these reasons of big and little consequence. They hated her pale snow face, her waiting silence, her thinness, and her possible future.

The story turns on her difference and her classmates' hatred because of that difference. And, through the author's use of direct statements, readers are explicitly told about both.

Calls to Attention

A second rule of notice involves a *call to attention*—what our students called "attention grabbers." Rabinowitz (1987) titled his chapter on rules of notice "Trumpets Please," and you can help students think of a call to attention as a clarion call. One obvious call to attention is echoing a title (e.g., *To Kill a Mockingbird*). Repetition is another example. For example, Chapter 2 of *The Great Gatsby* begins with a three-paragraph description of the Valley of Ashes that includes this passage:

> But above the gray land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg. The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic—their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face, but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a non-existent nose. Evidently some wag of an oculist set them there to fatten his practice in the borough of Queens, and then sank down himself into eternal blindness, or forgot them and moved away.

In this case, readers should wonder, *Why does the author spend the time to offer such a precise description?* Initially, it doesn't appear to advance the plot or teach readers about the characters. However, a hundred pages or so later, experienced readers get the payoff for remembering this observation when it enriches their understanding of Fitzgerald's critique of the empty materialism of the society he depicts. The point here is not to develop a comprehensive catalog of all the possible calls to attention but rather to help students understand that authors make moves to highlight what they want readers to attend to.

Ruptures

The third rule of notice involves *ruptures*, which our students called "twists." As experienced readers,

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we know that we are called to attend to the unexpected. For example, toward the beginning of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Taylor, 1977), Cassie, the dramatized narrator, describes the Jefferson Davis County School, the school the White children in her area attended. As if the name weren't enough, she tells readers that two flags flew from a flagpole in the center of the school's front lawn. In the story, the Mississippi flag, which until 2021 had the Confederate battle flag as its canton, flew above the U.S. flag. Cassie notes this rupture, pointing out the "transposed" (p. 10) positioning of the two flags, and experienced readers attend to the detail as significant because of that rupture.

As another example, the first chapter of Part 2 of *To Kill a Mockingbird* chronicles the Finch children's visit to the church attended by Calpurnia, their Black housekeeper. The setting shifts from the White world of Maycomb for the first time, a rupture. Experienced readers consider why that shift matters, noticing that Scout admits, "That Calpurnia led a modest double life never occurred to me" and thinking about why that realization is important.

There are myriad other possible ruptures. Here, too, our point is not to develop a comprehensive list. Rather, we want to emphasize that it's important for students to notice when something unexpected occurs and then to think about what the unexpected accomplishes.

Reader's Response

Thus far, the rules of notice we've described have focused on what and why authors do what they do in the texts they create. In our fourth and final rule of notice, we take a different tack and focus on the reader's response, which our students called "the vibe." The fourth rule, simply stated, is this: If something in a text provokes a strong emotional response in you, you need to notice it.

This rule is informed by a recognition that Rosenblatt (1966) had more than half a century ago: "*Imaginative* literature happens when we focus our attention on what we are sensing, thinking, feeling, structuring, in the act of response" (p. 1000).

With that in mind, we worry that instead of privileging the experience of reading, the study of literature has become overly technical. Rosenblatt warned that when conventional instruction neglects what is "lived through" (p. 999) by the reader, students "will read only with half a mind and spirit, knowing that this is sufficient to fill in the requirements of a routine book report: summarize the plot, identify the principal characters, describe the setting, etc." (p. 1003).

When we investigated the nature and variety of pleasure kids take from their out-of-school reading, many of the deeply committed adolescent readers we interviewed also confirmed this concern. Consider this exchange one of our participants had with Jeff:

> **Helen:** When you pick up a book in school, you know that there's supposed to be something you're getting out of this, and that's all you really think about: What does the teacher want me to understand from reading this? And then, when you read it by yourself, you don't really know what you need to know about it, and it's a little more spontaneous when it happens.
>
> **Jeff:** So, how is that for you, qualitatively, when you are reading something and you learn something that kind of grabbed you versus going for what the teacher wants?
>
> **Helen:** Kind of exciting, actually. And fun, like yes, there really is this amazing meaning in this book, and no wonder it's so good. And when you learn something from a book a teacher gives you, it's like, there, now I've found what she was looking for, and now what's the point of finishing this book? And teachers, like, nobody records stuff in the journal when you read the book for school. I don't think you think about the book anymore. You're just writing down what you think, and you're thinking about certain things that you think the teacher wants you to think about. When you read a book on your own, you think whatever you want to think. More personal that way, I guess.

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The feelings Helen experiences in her out-of-school reading are what make those books memorable and important. Yet that experience stands in stark contrast to her merely intellectual and easily forgettable engagement with her school reading. Unfortunately, as Levine and her colleagues (2021) established, students' emotional responses to literature are suppressed in schools. The researchers demonstrated that privileging *affective evaluation*—that is, foregrounding the student reader's attitudes, feelings, and subjective experience of the book—not only taps the funds of feelings students bring with them to class but also helps them move beyond summary to much more richly textured interpretations. Noticing feelings, then, is not at odds with developing rich textual understandings. Rather, such noticing is at the heart of the process.

Five Key Elements Are Especially Important to Notice

Earlier in this chapter, we cited Rosenblatt's (1978) contention that "the text is a stimulus activating elements of the reader's past experience" and that this "experience includes experience both with literature and with life" (p. 11). Rabinowitz brought that idea a step further when he wrote that "all literary texts take on their meanings in part intertextually—that is, because of the grid against which they are read, the prior texts they copy, contradict, dally with" (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998, p. 90). As students work to incorporate the rules of notice into their approach to reading, they also benefit from focusing on the five key elements that serve as the structure for the chapters in this book:

- Genres
- Key Details About Characters
- Key Details About Point of View
- Symbols and Motifs
- Thematic Conversations

Before we proceed, let's quickly examine each of these key elements here.

The Genre

Ever since the pandemic, we've both been watching crime dramas from the UK. Identifying a show as a *crime drama*—that is, noticing the genre—tells viewers a lot. If you've watched enough of them, you know, for example, that there are likely to be red herrings, so if there's a too-obvious suspect, then you should probably look elsewhere. Identifying a show as a *crime drama from the UK* tells you even more. For instance, shootouts are highly unlikely, and you should probably be on the alert for issues of class hierarchies. You could also make an even finer distinction by noticing that in some UK crime dramas, the main mystery lasts the entire season, whereas others are of the one-crime-per-episode variety. In similar ways, your students will have a more fulfilling reading experience if they notice the kind of text with which they are engaged so they can do the kind of work the text calls on them to do.

Key Details About Characters

In addition to recognizing the text's genre, successful readers also need to notice local-level details. Details about characters are especially important, as we explain in more detail in Chapter 4. We're drawn to Wayne Booth's (1988) argument that "stories are typically centered on characters' grappling in some way or another with moral choices. In living through those efforts, we readers stretch our own capacities for thinking about how life should be lived" (p. 187).

Like Booth, we saw that kind of stretching in our study of the nature and variety of pleasure that avid adolescent readers take from their out-of-school reading (Wilhelm & Smith, 2014). Here are two different examples that emphasize the importance of using the rules of notice to focus on character:

> Sometimes when, like, big stuff happens in my life, I'll think about what my favorite character would have done, the ones I admire most. Also, sort of subconscious, I don't stop and think about what someone would do; it's just something that happens. Like, I bet so-and-so would be really brave about this, or one of my favorite characters would have

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> totally sped after this guy. And then sometimes I follow their example and sometimes I don't. . . . They all have different approaches, different ways they approach things, and then I try to apply that to my life, to see which way works for me. Characters are just ways of thinking, really.
>
> You can look to books, I think, and characters for their influences. Also I think a psychology kind of thing. You can look at "Oh, so I made a mistake like that so that could be why they reacted that way" and realized also how the characters reacted in real life, you know? Maybe I shouldn't have done that. And you can reference your own experiences off of books. And you can kind of "Yeah, so I shouldn't do that again because the character also found that very offensive." Kind of like a cautionary buddy.

For readers to employ a character as a way of thinking or as a cautionary buddy, they need to understand them. And understanding characters requires getting an initial, general impression of them and then continually refining that understanding by checking it against accumulating details.

What does this look like in practice? Michael recently read the second book (Benn, 2007) of a mystery series featuring Billy Boyle, a fictional 22-year-old Irish American former Boston cop who investigates murders during World War II. Initially, Michael formed the impression that Billy is an innocent thrown into a terrible conflict who succeeds due to his wit and determination. Then (spoiler alert!) Billy murders the villain in cold blood—not so innocent, it seems—and the trigger for Michael to use the rules of notice to recalibrate his original impression.

Classic research in social psychology on impression formation also sheds light on this process. An oft-cited article by Solomon Asch (1946) begins this way:

> We look at a person and immediately a certain impression of his character forms itself in us. A glance, a few spoken words are sufficient to tell us a story about a highly complex matter. We know that such impressions form with remarkable rapidity and with great ease. Subsequent observation may enrich or upset our first view, but we can no more prevent its rapid growth than we can avoid perceiving a given visual object or hearing a melody. (p. 258)

Key Details About Point of View

Continual assessments and reassessments are especially important for readers when a character is acting as the narrator, which is the focus of Chapter 5. Scholes and Kellogg (1966) explained that point of view controls "the reader's impression of everything else" (quoted in Lanser, 1981, p. 12). And Booth (1961/1983) explained that what's especially crucial is the extent to which the narrator is reliable, for "if [the narrator] is discovered to be untrustworthy, then the total effect of the work [the narrator] relays to us is transformed" (p. 158).

Let's look at another example. We realize that there's controversy around teaching *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. But there isn't controversy that Huck is one of literature's most famous dramatized narrators. Here's the paragraph in which we meet him:

> You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*; but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary. And Polly—Tom's Aunt Polly, she is—and Mary and the widow Douglas is all told about in that book, which is mostly a true book, with some stretchers, as I said before.

Right from the start we can tell that he's a kid and that he is not well educated. That means he may report on things he doesn't understand. To be sure,

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his lack of education, which suggests he's not part of mainstream society, may provide him a unique perspective of society that will be valuable for us to attend to as readers, but when, say, Huck gives accolades to the quality of Emmeline Grangerford's poetry, which we see as morbid, we trust our judgment and not Huck's.

Contrast that first paragraph with the first paragraph of Percival Everett's brilliant *James*, a retelling of that familiar story from the perspective of Jim, Huck's enslaved companion:

> Those little bastards were hiding out there in the tall grass. The moon was not quite full, but bright, and it was behind them, so I could see them as plain as day, though it was deep night. Lightning bugs flashed against the black canvas. I waited at Miss Watson's kitchen door, rocked a loose step board with my foot, she was going to tell me to fix it tomorrow. I was waiting there for her to give me a pan of cornbread she had made with my Sadie's recipe. Waiting is a big part of a slave life, waiting and waiting to wait some more. Waiting for demands. Waiting for food. Waiting for the end of days. Waiting for the just deserved Christian reward at the end of it all.

This narrator is far different. Look at the language. We don't have to worry about his intellectual understandings. The "little bastards" are Huck and Tom, who were "always playing some kind of pretending game where I was either villain or prey, but certainly their toy" (Everett, 2024, p. 9). James's nuanced explanation of his circumstances is something we profit from rather than suspect.

Our initial judgments of a narrator's reliability can be challenged or confirmed by the details we notice. Details will reveal whether the narrator is too self-interested, sufficiently knowledgeable, moral, and emotionally balanced to be reliable. If the details of a text raise concerns about any of those hot-button issues, then readers have work to do.

Symbols and Motifs

Literary language differs from everyday language in a fundamental way. As Miall and Kuiken (1994) explained, in everyday conversation, our primary purpose is to communicate effectively. They draw on a long history of literary theory to highlight an interesting contrast: unlike everyday conversation, literature has stylistic features that are designed to "deautomatize perception," prompt defamiliarization, and foster affective responses. In other words, literary language—such as the use of symbols, motifs, and other tropes—is designed to make the familiar unfamiliar. Making things strange, it seems, allows us to see things with new eyes—and that new seeing contributes to literature's power.

To experience that power, our students have to notice the tropes. The list of tropes is long, so in Chapter 6 we narrow our focus to an important one: symbols and the highly related notions of archetypes, motifs, and allegories. In our experience, successful readers apply two ways of recognizing symbols.

The first way is for readers to notice when an author deploys a conventional symbol, one whose meaning depends on knowledge from outside the text. We think of such symbols as *extrinsic* symbols. For example, we tend to associate the color red with passion and purple with royalty. If a character has the initials J. C., we're aware that an author may be making a Christological reference. With that in mind, as Steinley (1982) pointed out, our "cognitive lexicon" of symbols is not enough. A character may choose to wear red, for example, because it's one of the colors of their university or for any of myriad other reasons.

The second—and more essential—way is for readers to notice when authors are making moves to develop a symbol within the world of a text—what we think of as an *intrinsic* symbol. For example, mockingbirds don't have any cultural significance, but when you read these lines in a book titled *To Kill a Mockingbird*, you know something is up: "Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird."

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Not all symbols announce themselves through titles, of course, so it's important to recognize other ways that readers do that noticing and then interpreting. As we explore in Chapter 6, experienced readers notice what one of Michael's former students termed "weird authorial behavior," such as paying seemingly undue attention to an insignificant object. Patterns of repetition also require noticing, as do patterns of opposition. As always, once such patterns are noticed, readers must do some interpretive work.

The Conceptual Conversation

Readers and viewers also need to notice the conceptual conversation of which a text is a part. We've long been fond of the parlor metaphor of Kenneth Burke (1941) to explain:

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. (pp. 110–111)

The other participants in the "unending conversation" taking place in the parlor are writers, their texts, and other readers of those texts. As a practical example, when Michael read *All American Boys*, a novel by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely, which takes up a conversation about police brutality and how people respond to it, he read it against a large intertextual grid that contains other novels, news stories, and the like. Doing so raised a host of questions for him:

> Does it matter that Rashad, the Black victim of the police brutality, was beaten and not shot?
>
> To what extent and in what ways does the perspective of the White kid Quinn, who witnessed the beating and who narrates alternating chapters with Rashad, add to my understanding?
>
> To what extent and in what ways do their responses affect my understanding of Starr, the narrator of *The Hate U Give*, a novel that takes up a similar issue?

And on and on. We focus on noticing conceptual conversations in Chapter 7, when we discuss theme, since noticing the central conversational topics of particular texts is essential to making thematic generalizations.

A Few Words About Teaching to Transfer

Now that we've introduced you to the four rules of notice and the five key elements we'll explore throughout the book, we'd like to say a few words about one of the seldom specified but most important goals in education: teaching for transfer. As educators, we want our students to gain knowledge and skills that they will use both in and outside of school immediately and in the future. Transfer of learning occurs when students move their developed knowledge and skills from one problem-solving situation (e.g., a reading or composing task) to another—different—kind of task and use it appropriately there. Specifically, when we help students develop knowledge about reading literature that they can apply across texts of all kinds, our teaching matters more because what we have taught our students today is something they can also use tomorrow both in and out of school.

With that in mind, it's important not to subscribe to what Perkins and Salomon (1988) called the "Little Bo Peep" view of transfer: If we "leave them alone," our students will come to a new task and automatically apply relevant knowledge and skills. This rarely works because, as the authors explain, "a great deal of the knowledge students acquire is 'inert'" (p. 23). Although it may show up on a multiple-choice test, it doesn't get applied in "new problem-solving contexts" (p. 23). Instead, as they (Perkins & Salomon, 1992) argued, effective teaching and learning requires *high*

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road transfer: the mindful application of learning over which the learner has conscious control.

Haskell (2000) articulated the conditions that foster such transfer:

1. When students have command of the knowledge that is to be transferred
2. When students have a theoretical understanding of the principles to be transferred
3. When the classroom culture cultivates a spirit of engagement and transfer
4. When students get plenty of practice in applying meaning-making and problem-solving principles to new situations

The seven lessons we provide in each of our chapters are designed to fulfill those conditions so your students continue to use the skills they have learned as they move forward.

How This Book Works

In the chapters that follow, we'll share lessons to help your students apply the four rules of notice we've discussed. Chapter 2 is short and made up of a single lesson you can use to introduce your students to the rules of notice. Subsequent chapters apply these rules of notice so you can help students notice genres (Chapter 3); key details about character (Chapter 4); key details about point of view (Chapter 5); symbols and motifs (Chapter 6); and thematic conversations (Chapter 7).

Chapters 3 through 7 each include seven different kinds of lessons.

Lesson 1: Reading Visual Texts

In this lesson, students are introduced to the chapter's main strategies through their engagement with some kind of visual text. Visual texts provide what we think of as an easy in to the study of strategy and a clear demonstration of the payoff for using them. They also provide the opportunity for plenty of practice.

Lesson 2: Thinking Aloud

In this lesson, we share our strategies and observations with students as we verbalize the rules of notice we are applying as we engage with a text. By explicitly modeling the kind of expert procedures we want our students to apply, we help them see the tool's utility.

Lesson 3: Practice in Miniature

In Lesson 3, students get repeated practice in applying what they have seen modeled through what we call *practice in miniature*. In this lesson, students work with short texts that we have written or selected that are designed to provide a particular kind of focused, deliberate practice of the key strategy.

Lesson 4: Questioning

In Lesson 4, students learn an approach to asking questions about a text. In traditional instruction, teachers do the noticing of what's worth talking about and then ask students questions about what the teacher has noticed. In Lesson 4, we turn the tables so students ask the questions at the center of classroom discussion.

Lesson 5: Writing and Responding

In Lesson 5, students solidify their understanding of what readers do by consciously applying what they've learned about reading to their writing of narrative. Casting students as writers helps them understand that authors can't do their work without having expectations of what readers do. Drawing on those expectations will help students develop articulated strategic understandings—known as *conscious competence*—that they can then apply in their role as readers.

Lesson 6: Search and Find

In Lesson 6, we cultivate the spirit of transfer by calling on students to find texts outside of school that reward the application of what they've been learning.

Lesson 7: Putting It All Together

In Lesson 7, we ask students to pull together everything they've learned in the sequence of lessons as they consider a complete literary text.

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Although each lesson in this book is ready to teach as presented, we also hope that our lessons will be a useful model for you. That is, if you need to do some reteaching of the rules of notice, or if you are embarking on some other unit of instruction, we hope that thinking about the types of lessons we've employed here will be generative for you. However, you should always feel free to adapt and extend our lessons in ways that meet your students' particular needs and interests.

As teachers, researchers, readers, and writers, we often find ourselves asking, *What is it that expert readers and writers know, think, and do that schools and less expert readers miss?* Our purpose in this book is to explore those questions with you and to share meaningful lessons that will keep your students engaged as we work together to answer them.

Let's get started.

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