CHAPTER 2

Think Aloud With Focus

Five Comprehension Strategies That Go the Distance

© Rick Harrington Photography

Let me start this chapter with a golden oldie that taps into a teaching truth—"Time in a Bottle" by singer-songwriter Jim Croce. Though I was not yet born when it became a megahit, it somehow is in my emotional DNA. The line "But there never seems to be enough time to do the things you want to do once you find them" especially gets me. It is so darn true, and gets truer with each passing year. Time *is* the most valuable commodity. On a day-to-day work basis, teachers feel this especially acutely, with the needs of dozens of learners tugging at the instructional minutes each school day.

Add to that the long list of instructional priorities bombarding teachers and that "urgency" and "efficiency" and "accountability" are values du jour, and it's no wonder my pre-service and in-service teachers often say to me, "How do I find the time for this?"

The answer is: We make time by boldly, honestly jettisoning classroom practices and activities that don't have strong support from either published research or our own data. We prioritize the relevant, useful methods and strategies that yield positive outcomes for student learning. In my role as a teacher educator, I often say, "These are the ones that give the most instructional bang for our buck." By this, I mean strategies that are easy to plan and implement, that generate meaningful conversations and interactions around the classroom, and that leave a lasting impact on student learning. Think alouds fit all of these criteria.

How Think Alouds Benefit Our Readers

When teachers think aloud, students benefit. According to Lapp, Fisher, and Grant (2008),

> [a]n interactive think aloud provides a means for modeling, scaffolding, and practicing. It offers struggling readers the opportunity to see and hear how proficient readers approach a text, and it allows advanced students to engage in conversations that draw on their prior knowledge. (p. 378)

Effective teacher think alouds positively impact student achievement. The research spans three decades and is compelling (e.g., Anderson & Roit, 1993; Bereiter & Bird, 1985; Loxterman, Beck, & McKeown, 1994; Ortlieb & Norris, 2012; Schunk & Rice, 1985; Silvén & Vauras, 1992; Ward & Traweek, 1993). Think alouds are effective for children of all ages, from preschool (Dorl, 2007) to secondary levels (Coiro, 2011; Lapp et al., 2008). Think aloud instruction benefits students across text formats and genres: in online text (Coiro, 2008; Kymes, 2005), in narrative text (Dymock, 2007), and in informational text (Coiro, 2011; Lapp et al., 2008; Ortlieb & Norris, 2012). Equally promising are the effects of think alouds on struggling readers (Anderson & Roit, 1993; Migyanka, Policastro, & Lui, 2005; Smith, 2006) and on English language learners (Ghaith & Obeid, 2004; McKeown & Gentilucci, 2007). More specifically, there are three patterns among the research into how readers benefit from teacher-generated think alouds.

Think alouds prepare students to apply reading comprehension strategies to independent reading. Perhaps the most obvious reason that teachers think aloud is to model their reading moves and steps so that readers will adopt similar strategies in their independent reading. Just as I model good table manners at a restaurant, in hopes that my daughter will see my choices and emulate my behavior, teachers can do the same with their reading behaviors in their classrooms. Block (2004) surveyed 630 second through sixth graders, asking them what their teachers could do to help them better comprehend. Students most frequently responded that they wanted teachers to better explain their reading processes. More specifically, they wanted teachers to explain "just about everything that they did in their minds to comprehend." Similarly, English language learners and struggling readers requested think alouds from their teachers (Garcia, 2002). While conducting think alouds in a science text with kindergartners, Ortlieb and Norris (2012) found that students who received think aloud instruction outperformed their peers in the control group on reading comprehension scores. When teachers model how they address unfamiliar vocabulary, challenging concepts, and complicated text

features, they build their students' ability to succeed in these challenges (Lapp et al., 2008).

Think alouds promote readers' self-efficacy and metacognition. Psychologist Albert Bandura defined self-efficacy as one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task. Bandura (1977) proposed that people with stronger efficacy beliefs are more likely to attempt novel tasks and experiences. A 2012 research article by Kadir Yoğurtçu posited that readers with high self-efficacy are more likely to develop reading strategies that are "effective, interactive, strategic, and quick" (p. 382). As our students witness us talking through the troublesome spots in a text, they increase in their ability to do the same. The more adept they are at applying comprehension strategies to text, the more confident in their reading skills our students become.

Think alouds help readers think about their own thinking. Readers who comprehend are metacognitive, or aware of their own processes. Flavell (1976) defined metacognition as "one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and products" (p. 232). In metacognitive reading experiences, readers are aware of any comprehension failures and which strategies they apply to comprehend a text. Inherently, successful readers are more metacognitive than less successful readers (Paris, Lipson, & Wixson, 1994). Furthermore, metacognition plays an important role in reading motivation. Logically, readers who struggle to comprehend lack an awareness of fix-it strategies to help repair their comprehension; poor comprehension can decrease students' motivation to read (Israel & Massey, 2005).

Think alouds build student engagement by turning passive readers into active readers. A 1996 article by Shelby J. Barrentine explains that "many teachers are dissatisfied with straight-through storybook readings that relegate listeners to a passive role" (p. 36). Another key point about think alouds: our students like them! Ivey and Broaddus (2001) reported that middle schoolers were more likely to stay engaged and motivated while listening to their teachers think aloud. In a survey of 1,765 middle schoolers and follow-up interviews, students reported that they enjoyed and were motivated by listening to the teacher reading and thinking aloud, and that such interaction provided "scaffolds to understanding."

Arming Yourself With the Five Essential Think Aloud Strategies

Instructional time is precious, so I offer a list of the five most essential comprehension strategies to model during think alouds. As I define each strategy, I explain how it contributes to reading comprehension. These strategies—as listed below—are rooted in the rigorous standards

set forth by the collaboration between the International Literacy Association (founded as the International Reading Association) and the National Council of Teachers of English, as well as the anchor standards of the Common Core. I focus on a small number of strategies because, as suggested by Wilhelm (2001), it is "better to focus and really address a few goals rather than diffusing energy by trying to address too many" (p. 44). Additionally, multiple-strategy instruction is more effective than teaching strategies in total isolation; readers use more than one strategy as they encounter text (Duke & Pearson, 2002). For this reason, the think alouds in this book use multiple strategies concurrently. Should you want additional support in focusing on a single strategy, those transcripts are available in Appendix I.

Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

In my work with teachers, a question that I frequently encounter is "Which reading comprehension strategies should I incorporate into my think alouds?" Knowing the importance of depth over breadth, I focus on five strategies. In developing my list of strategies, I looked to the legends in the field of reading research. In his 2001 book *Improving Comprehension With Think-Aloud Strategies*, Jeffrey Wilhelm focused on the following reading comprehension strategies:

1. Set purposes for reading
2. Make predictions
3. Connect personally
4. Visualize
5. Monitor comprehension
6. Use fix-up strategies to address confusion and repair comprehension

In her 2009 book *Interactive Think-Aloud Lessons*, Lori Oczkus maps out the "Super Six" comprehension strategies incorporated by good readers: (1) connect, (2) predict, (3) question, (4) monitor/clarify, (5) summarize/synthesize, and (6) evaluate. I've modified Oczkus's list slightly to meet the demands of close reading and today's high-rigor expectations. For example, I've eliminated connections because too often I've seen this strategy veer readers off course. In addition, Oczkus lumps together predictions and inferences in her Super Six. In my experience, predictions come readily to most children, whereas making inferences is a struggle. While the two are certainly not the same strategy, they draw on the same skill set—as discussed below.

My top five strategies are as follows:

Five Essential Think Aloud Strategies

1. Asking questions
2. Making inferences
3. Synthesizing
4. Understanding the author's purpose
5. Monitoring and clarifying

I see these five strategies as the "path towards understanding and accessing complex texts" (Frey & Fisher, 2013, p. 17).

The remainder of this chapter is a detailed explanation of the five strategies that I rely on while thinking aloud. For each of the strategies, you'll find the following elements:

- A brief explanation of the strategy, as well as a bit of its research base
- A *student-friendly definition* of the strategy, written exactly as you'd give it to your students
- A strategy symbol, or quick image that visually represents the strategy
- Sentence starters, a framework to jump-start your think aloud

A Note About the Strategy Symbols

Next to each strategy, you'll find a visual image. I call these "strategy symbols"; each one represents a comprehension strategy. In the second step of my three-step process, I quickly sketch these strategy symbols on my sticky notes to denote which reading comprehension strategy I will incorporate. This way, I've made my work in the third step a bit easier as I have a reminder of what strategy to use. The symbols are meant to be quick sketches; by no means am I an artist!

For asking questions, the strategy symbol is obvious: a question mark.

For making inferences, I draw three vertical lines because making inferences is often described as "reading between the lines."

For synthesizing, I draw a circle with inner spirals, because this is a skill of continually intertwining strands of a text into a whole.

For understanding the author's purpose, I draw the letter *A*.

For monitoring and clarifying, I sketch two arrows, because so much of monitoring and clarifying is the process of rereading. The arrows represent how readers go back and forth in text to address their confusion.

A Note About the Sentence Starters

I've modified Oczkus's (2009) "strategy starters" into my *sentence starters* (also available in Appendix D). Sentence starters remove the difficulty of generating the correct academic language associated with each strategy. They are a crutch to rely on to get your creative juices flowing. As you become more adept at thinking aloud, you may come up with your own sentence starters. I encourage you to use my sentence starters at the beginning of the script that you say out loud to students as you think aloud.

The Five Essential Think Aloud Strategies

Asking Questions

Good readers are inquisitive. They ask questions both of the text and beyond the text. Rarely, if ever, does a reader pose a question for which there is one correct answer. Instead, authentic questions are those that can be explored—rather than definitively answered. The reader pursues them by simply reading on, perhaps by rereading, perhaps by discussing them with others, or even by having them come to mind hours, weeks, or years later! Our students must become amazing at being inquisitive and curious—not amazing at answering. In many schools and in our testing culture, this requires a significant shift in mindset.

The power of student-generated questions is indisputable. Key studies point out that proficient readers ask questions and that asking questions is a favorable strategy to enhance reading comprehension (Chin, Brown, & Bruce, 2002; Davey & McBride, 1986; King & Rosenshine, 1993; Ness, 2015; Nolte & Singer, 1985; Rosenshine, Meister, & Chapman, 1996; Taboada & Guthrie, 2006; Taylor, Alber, & Walker, 2002; Therrien & Hughes, 2008; Wong & Jones, 1982). As explained by Harvey and Goudvis (2000), asking questions pushes readers forward in their understanding of text. In their meta-analysis of question generation, Therrien and Hughes (2008) reported thirteen studies highlighted significant gains in reading comprehension scores with the use of question generation. Taboada and Guthrie (2006) noted that question generation contributes to the active reading comprehension process by helping students to initiate cognitive processes, concluding that "[w]hen asking questions, students are involved in multiple processes requiring deeper interactions with text" (p. 4). As they pose questions, students become focused readers with stronger understanding of the written text (Chin et al., 2002).

In addition to the reading comprehension benefits, question generation benefits children in other cognitive and motivational capacities. In posing questions, children think critically, activate higher-level thinking skills,

and focus on essential information to synthesize their understandings. They learn not to accept information at its face value, but instead to extend their learning in a self-directed manner. A research team from the University of California, Davis (Singh, 2014), monitored brain activity to measure how engaged learners were in reading questions and their answers. When learners' curiosity was piqued by questions and their answers, the parts of the brain associated with pleasure, reward, and creation of memory underwent an increase in activity.

Fortunately, asking questions is a skill that comes naturally to young children. Any parent or teacher will attest to the sheer magnitude of questions generated by young children. On an average day, mothers typically are asked an average of 288 questions a day by their children aged two to ten (Frazier, Gelman, & Wellman, 2009). Chouinard, Harris, and Maratsos (2007) revealed that children ask between 400 and 1,200 questions each week!

The ability to ask questions is a high priority in today's classrooms. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS Initiative, 2010) emphasize question generation throughout the developmental spectrum of elementary grades. As readers rise in grade level, the questions that they are expected to ask become increasingly complex. Second graders are expected to ask journalistic-type questions (who, what, where, when, why, and how) about explicit information in a text. By the end of fourth grade, students are expected to ask both closed-ended and open-ended questions, requiring both inference skills and critical thinking.

Building Students' Skills in Asking Questions

To model question generation, teachers must demonstrate how they wonder before reading, during reading, and after reading. Teachers should model rich questions, both within and beyond the text. Not only should thinking aloud include the basic questions (who, what, where, when, why, and how), but it should also include higher-order and evaluative questions that push readers to engage beyond the surface level of a text (Oczkus, 2009). In my experience with young children, questions beget questions (Ness, 2015). The more they see their teachers and classmates wonder about possibilities within and beyond the text, the more likely students are to ask similar questions of their own.

A student adds to a collection of student-generated questions about *A Bad Case of Stripes*.

Classroom Spotlight on

ASKING QUESTIONS

I recently had the pleasure of doing two different read alouds in a kindergarten classroom. For our first read aloud, I chose Tomie dePaola's Caldecott award winner *Strega Nona* (1975), which tells the story of an Italian witch doctor known for her successful remedies. By carving out instructional time to encourage question generation and by giving students simple questioning vocabulary (*who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, *how*), students eagerly share out a long list of questions:

- Will Big Anthony use the magic pasta pot?
- Why does Big Anthony never listen?
- What will Strega Nona do when she sees all of the pasta?
- Is there really magic?
- Where is Calabria? Italy?
- Could Big Anthony really eat all of that pasta?
- What is pasta made from?

In asking these questions, students become more engaged and purposeful in approaching the story. The same is true for a subsequent read aloud, with the picture book *Roller Coaster* by Marlee Frazee (2003). *Roller Coaster* begins with illustrations of a long line of people at a fairground. Ahead of them is a roller coaster named Rocket. As the line creeps slowly, passengers await anxiously. At last, twelve passengers—some calm and collected, others excited—climb into the cars. With vivid images and the typography mimicking the motion of the roller coaster, the illustrations depict the riders as they experience a variety of twists, turns, and loop-the-loops. Here, I encourage students to generate deeper questions—which cannot necessarily be answered within the pages of this book. They generate the following list:

- How does a roller coaster stay on the track? Does it ever fall off?
- What makes a roller coaster so noisy?
- Do you wear seatbelts on a roller coaster?
- Why do people put their hands in the air on a roller coaster? Aren't you supposed to hold on?
- I wonder why those riders are kissing in the back of the roller coaster.
- I wonder why that man is walking away from the roller coaster. Did he decide not to ride?
- How do you get to be a roller coaster ride operator?
- Why can't she open her eyes on the roller coaster?
- Why are most people dizzy after a roller coaster?
- I wonder if anyone threw up after riding.
- What do wobbly knees feel like? I wonder how a doctor might fix wobbly knees.

Defining Asking Questions for K–5 Readers

Purposeful readers are naturally curious. They ask questions about what happens in the text. Sometimes the answers to their questions are found in the text, and sometimes they are not.

The following sentence starters are useful to help generate the academic language associated with question generation:

- I wonder . . .
- I would like to ask the author . . .
- Who . . . ?
- What . . . ?
- When . . . ?
- Where . . . ?
- Why . . . ?
- How . . . ?
- This makes me wonder about . . .
- How is this different?
- How does this part here add to . . . ?

Making Inferences

When I was an elementary school student, my teacher often reminded the class that "good readers read between the lines to use clues in the text." Here, she laid the foundation for making inferences, the process of making educated guesses about a text based on what a reader already knows. Making inferences asks students to fill in information that was not directly presented to them. An inference is something that is probably true—probably something the author intends for us to think, feel, or know. The author and illustrator don't directly tell us everything in a story, but sometimes they give us clues to help us think about things that are probably true. In her pivotal text, Kylene Beers (2003) defines an inference as "the ability to connect what is in the text with what is in the mind to create an educated guess" (p. 62). An inference is the intersection of meaning; it is the product of clues from the text and background knowledge, or schema. To make an

Classroom Spotlight on

MAKING INFERENCES

Let's examine an opportunity within the picture book *Thank You, Mr. Falker* (1998) by Patricia Polacco. This poignant narrative tells the story of Trisha, a struggling reader. Midway through the book is this essential event, which profoundly impacts Trisha's childhood:

> Trisha's grandma used to say that the stars were holes in the sky. They were the light of heaven coming from the other side. And she used to say that someday she would be on the other side, where the light comes from. One evening they lay on the grass together and counted the lights from heaven. "You know," her grandma said, "all of us will go there someday. Hang on to the grass, or you'll lift right off the ground, and there you'll be!" They laughed, and both hung on to the grass. But it was not long after that night that her grandma must have let go of the grass, because she went to where the lights were, on the other side. And not long after that, Trisha's grandpa let go of the grass, too.

A proficient reader would reach the inference that Trisha's grandparents have died. I observed a second-grade teacher tell her students to turn and talk about how Trisha might have felt about the death of her grandparents. After an awkward pause, students turned to their neighbors with puzzled looks. Finally, one brave boy raised his hand and said, "How are we supposed to know that Trisha's grandparents died? It doesn't say so in the book." He—and his classmates—entirely missed the inference about this pivotal event in the book and were unable to extract the significance of this event. What if the teacher had modeled her thinking to show her students how to reach this important inference? A think aloud might have looked like this.

What the Text Says	What the Teacher Says
Trisha's grandma used to say that the stars were holes in the sky. They were the light of heaven coming from the other side. And she used to say that someday she would be on the other side, where the light comes from. One evening they lay on the grass together and counted the lights from heaven. "You know," her grandma said, "all of us will go there someday. Hang on to the grass, or you'll lift right off the ground, and there you'll be!" They laughed, and both hung on to the grass.	*This evidence makes me think that Trisha's grandmother is talking about dying. On the other side of the stars is heaven—and someday she's going to go to heaven, meaning she will die. If you hang onto the grass, you will not be on the other side—where heaven is.*
But it was not long after that night that her grandma must have let go of the grass, because she went to where the lights were, on the other side. And not long after that, Trisha's grandpa let go of the grass, too.	*The author doesn't come right out and tell me, but I can figure out that Trisha's grandparents have both died. They let go of the grass and went to the other side—which I know is heaven.*

inference, students act like detectives to use facts, clues, observations, logic, and reasoning to come to an assumption or conclusion.

Inferences and predictions are not the same, though they are related. Whereas an inference asks, "What conclusions can you draw about what is happening now?," a prediction asks, "What will happen next?" Marzano (2010) encourages teachers to have students identify the information that they used to make an inference. This may include information directly from the text or the background information that a student brings to the context. An inference results from clues from the text and a reader's background knowledge.

Building Students' Skills in Making Inferences

Though we do it all the time, making inferences is a difficult skill. Students may struggle to make inferences because of the subtlety of a text or because of their limited background knowledge. To further complicate matters, inferences are not clearly confirmed or denied through reading. Yet without the ability to make inferences, students miss out on the subtleties of characters' feelings, underlying events and actions, and the nuances planted throughout a text.

Defining Making Inferences for K–5 Readers

Purposeful readers make inferences. An inference is something that is probably true. The author doesn't tell us exactly, but good readers take clues from the text and combine them with what they already know. An inference is made when a reader says, "This is probably true."

The following sentence starters are useful to help generate the academic language associated with inferences:

- From the text clues, I can conclude that . . .
- Based on what the text says and what I know, I think . . .
- This information makes me think . . .
- This evidence suggests . . .
- That is probably why . . .
- Although the author does not come right out and say it, I can figure out that . . .
- It could be that . . .

- Maybe/perhaps . . .
- This could mean . . .
- Based on what I know about these characters, I bet he/she is going to . . .
- With what just happened, I imagine this character is feeling . . .

Synthesizing

As readers wade through a text, their thinking changes as they read more and gain more information. A synthesis allows readers to reevaluate their schema to form new schema. Without synthesis, a reader's view of a text or topic may remain stagnant. Block and Duffy (2008) noted that synthesizing is critical to understanding the big ideas of informational text. Oczkus (2009) recommends that in a synthesis the reader ask, "How have I been changed by reading this book? What will I remember? What new ideas do I have about the topic, concept, the author, or genre? What is my new big idea to add to my background?" (p. 22). Synthesizing moves students away from simply recalling text-based facts toward how the author uses these facts to convey a central idea (Cummins & Stallmeyer-Gerard, 2011).

There is a logical fit between synthesizing as a reading comprehension strategy and expository text. Synthesizing requires readers to differentiate the main idea of a text from its supporting details, to put new material into their own words, and to combine new information with their prior knowledge. I'm specifically focusing on synthesizing as an extension of summarizing; whereas summarizing holds readers to restating the text's important points, synthesizing requires readers to input their ideas about the text to reach an evolving understanding of it.

Building Students' Skills in Synthesis

Defining Synthesis for K–5 Readers

Purposeful readers constantly change their minds as they read. They use the unfolding information or events in the book to adapt thoughts, opinions, and conclusions. In fiction, readers often synthesize to refine their understanding of characters and theme; in nonfiction, readers synthesize in order to get the most important points about parts of a text. As they continue to read and synthesize, they add up the bigger ideas in their mind. Ultimately, readers synthesize to draw a conclusion about what the author's perspective of a topic is, and what their own perspective is, based on the text.

The following sentence starters are useful to help generate the academic language associated with synthesizing:

- Before I read, I thought . . . , but now I think . . .
- My schema before I read was . . . , and now I understand . . .
- This part gives me an idea . . .
- When I put all these parts together, it seems the author is focusing on this big idea . . .
- My synthesis is . . .
- Mostly, . . .
- I learned . . .
- Now I understand . . .
- Now I think . . .
- The author keeps using these similar terms, so I think this whole section is really about this aspect of . . .
- Some of the most important ideas are . . .
- The text is mainly about . . .
- The text, pictures, and boxes all seem to point at informing me that . . .
- The author's most important ideas were . . .
- The details I need to include are . . .
- Some important concepts are . . .
- The most important evidence was . . .
- The basic gist is . . .
- The key information is . . .
- In a nutshell, this says that . . .
- If I asked the author to just tell me in one sentence what the big idea is, he/she would say . . .

Understanding the Author's Purpose

I love books that include an Author's Note before or after the text. Here I get the backstory—the rationale for the author's writing and the conscious explanation of how and why the author created the text. Most texts,

© Rick Harrington Photography

Here, students think aloud on sticky notes in response to Shel Silverstein's poem "Sick."

however, lack an Author's Note, leaving the reader to deduce why the author created the book. Proficient readers attempt to define the author's intention and to guess why the author was motivated to write this particular text. As readers understand the author's purpose, they can explore the effectiveness of the author's writing and message.

For understanding the author's purpose, I will introduce the three most common approaches, made memorable with the acronym PIE (persuade, inform, entertain). An author's purpose is

1. To persuade, or to convince the reader of an opinion
2. To inform, or to give information and teach
3. To entertain, or to capture and delight the reader with a story

In some cases, the author provides more than one purpose in the text; the PIE dichotomy begins to blur. For example, Jim Arnosky's *A Manatee Morning* (2000) informs young readers where manatees live, what they eat, and other facts. Also in the book is a deliberate persuasive element—encouraging children to be active in protecting these and other endangered animals. In fact, some of our most engaging high-quality children's books cannot be pigeonholed into a single category for understanding the author's purpose.

Building Students' Skills in Understanding the Author's Purpose

Reflective readers are able to analyze information more thoughtfully when they know an author's purpose.

Defining Author's Purpose for K–5 Readers

Purposeful readers try to figure out the reason that the author wrote a text. They want to know the purpose of the text. If a text gives a clear opinion or tries to convince the reader of something, the author's purpose is to persuade. If a text gives facts or tells a reader how to do something, the author's purpose is to inform. If the text is enjoyable, tells a story, or uses a story to teach a lesson, the author's purpose is to entertain.

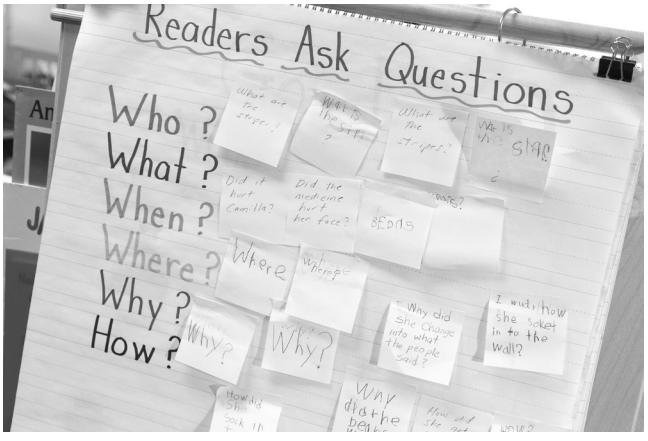
The following sentence starters are useful to help generate the academic language associated with understanding the author's purpose:

- The author wants me to learn about . . . [specific to nonfiction]
- The author's purpose in writing this story was . . .
- I wonder why the author . . .
- I think the author's purpose is . . . because . . .
- The main character learns . . . in the end, so I wonder if the author wants me to reflect on . . .
- This story is set in history during [a famous event], so I think the author's purpose is to . . .
- I predict that the author's purpose is to inform/entertain/persuade because . . .
- After reading the selection, I believe the author's purpose is . . . because . . .
- The author's purpose is . . . based on . . .
- I am curious why the author . . .
- A golden line for me is . . .
- I like how the author uses . . . to show . . .
- This word/phrase stands out for me because . . .

Monitoring and Clarifying

Good readers are active; they monitor their own understanding and are cognizant of when they encounter troublesome spots in a text. Good readers engage in silent dialogues with the text. As they monitor their understanding, they are strategic in clarifying comprehension breakdowns. To be successful in this strategy, students first must be able to recognize the signals of when their comprehension is faltering. Cris Tovani (2000) outlines these signals of comprehension "red flags," or breakdowns:

- When the voice inside the reader's head is passive, or is not interacting with the text
- When the camera—which helps a reader to visualize what is happening in a text—inside a reader's head shuts off
- When the reader's mind is wandering, and not focusing on the text
- When the reader can't recall what he or she has read



© Rick Harrington Photography

Students as young as kindergarten age can begin to jot down the questions that naturally arise in their heads as they hear and read stories and nonfiction.

- When the reader meets a character, event, or setting that has previously been introduced, but has no recollection of the person, event, or place

As readers begin to recognize the signals for when their comprehension breaks down, they understand the causes behind these breakdowns. Common reasons for comprehension breakdowns include fatigue, decrease in interest level, and lack of background knowledge. Knowing the cause of the comprehension breakdown allows a reader to more readily apply an appropriate fix-up strategy. Common fix-up strategies include the following:

- Reread
- Read on; move past the tricky passage
- Ask a question
- Use or seek out additional background knowledge
- Stop and refocus

Building Students' Skills in Monitoring and Clarifying

To model monitoring and clarifying, teachers must showcase both elements of metacognitive knowledge: the ability to evaluate their ongoing comprehension processes and the ability to take remedial action when needed (Baker, 1979; Baker & Brown, 1984).

Defining Monitoring and Clarifying for K–5 Readers

Purposeful readers know when they stop understanding what they are reading. Just as when a train is going too fast the conductor applies the brake, a reader slows down and takes steps to get back on track. A reader uses one or more "fix it" strategies for repairing his or her comprehension.

The following sentence starters are useful to help generate the academic language associated with monitoring and clarifying:

- I had to slow down when . . .
- It really surprised me, so I had to go back and reread because . . .

- I wonder what . . . means.
- Is this a different point in time?
- Is this a flashback?
- I wonder if this is a different narrator speaking, because . . .
- What is the author doing differently with the text here because I keep losing track . . . ?
- I need to know more about . . .
- This last part is about . . .
- I was confused by . . .
- I still don't understand . . .
- I had difficulty with . . .
- I used [name strategy] to help me understand this part.
- I can't really understand . . .
- I wonder what the author means by . . .
- I got lost here because . . .
- I need to reread the part where . . .

Final Thoughts

I started this chapter with the song lyrics of Jim Croce, so let me bring it full circle and end with more of his words. This time, let's turn to his 1974 "I'll Have to Say I Love You in a Song." So far in this book, I've worked to convince you of the need for and the power of think alouds. In this chapter, I've highlighted the academic benefits of think alouds and given you a concrete list of the five focal strategies. The next three chapters—which explicitly walk through the steps to planning think alouds—will steer you clear of any blunders, confusion, or mishaps in thinking aloud. Jim Croce sang, "Every time I tried to tell you, the words just came out wrong." With my direction and your careful planning, your think aloud words will surely not come out wrong.

Ready for a Trial Run?

Now, I want you to think about your own reading and about yourself as a reader. My aim here is to encourage you to become a metacognitive reader, as explained by Flavell's (1976) theory. Being metacognitive about your reading improves your ability to demonstrate think alouds with readers.

For instance, I know that my weakness as a reader is in making inferences and clarifying confusion. With that knowledge, I can devote extra attention to these strategies so that I further understand them, can engage with them, and, in turn, can model them. The more that we know ourselves as readers, the better prepared we are to teach our children to become readers. In order to effectively plan and implement think alouds, teachers must be metacognitive about themselves as readers; Duffy (2003) and Maria and Hathaway (1993) implored teachers to be aware of their own reading strategies so that they could conduct think alouds.

Think about the reading that you do on a daily basis: newspaper articles, recipes, social media posts, emails, blogs, pleasure reading. Spend some time thinking about these reflective questions:

- What is the purpose of each text?
- What do you as the reader bring to a text?
- What processes do you as a reader use in navigating the text? What reading strategies do you tend to favor?
- What reading strategies do you gloss over?

If these questions are novel to you, or you are unsure how to begin examining metacognitive reading processes, the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) may be a useful tool. The MARSI (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002) is a thirty-question reading strategies inventory. Readers evaluate their frequency of reading strategies such as "I preview the text to see what it's about before reading it" and "I try to guess what the material is about when I read." As you complete and score the MARSI, think through these questions:

- What did you learn about yourself as a reader?
- What are your strengths as a reader? What habits and strategies do you commonly use?
- What are your weaknesses as a reader? How does knowing your weaknesses as a reader help inform your instruction?

The MARSI can be accessed at dayofreading.org/DOR10HO/MARSI_2002.pdf.