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Reading with *Just Imagine!*

Children's earliest literacy experiences often involve fiction stories. As children learn to read on their own, narrative stories continue to make up a large part of their reading material. (This is changing; many nonfiction reading series have been introduced to allow more variety and choice in reading material for early readers.) The switch from learning to read to reading to learn remains a hurdle for many readers. Nonfiction makes up the bulk of what people need to read every day, yet many students, even proficient readers, often lack the skills necessary to understand and retain what they have read. Struggling readers face an even greater challenge.

Just Imagine! can help. This program was designed for the struggling upper-middle and high school reader. It bridges the gap between narrative fictional tales and nonfiction articles and texts. The paperback books are chock-full of articles that interest young adolescents. The stories read like narratives, with the familiar pattern of beginning-middle-end. But the content is often nonfiction or based on actual events. Students gain concrete knowledge, garner reading success, and practice critical-thinking skills.

The format is handy and fun—the books look almost like comic books, not reading primers. Dynamic illustrations add to the comic book feel and appeal to visual learners. The combination of low reading level and high interest topics encourages reading—and reading success. The short line length and slightly

enlarged type makes it easy for the eye to follow the lines of print. The brevity of the stories allows students to feel a sense of accomplishment when they finish reading a complete story in a short time.

The *Just Imagine!* books contain many nonfiction stories. Others are fictionalized historical accounts. Some stories are identified as urban legends or ghost stories. Whatever the genre of a particular story, readers are encouraged to think about what they are reading. The activities that accompany the books build and reinforce vocabulary, practice reading-comprehension skills, and challenge students to think critically. Do students find a particular explanation of a strange event believable? Why or why not? What connections do they see between two stories? How would they react if they were a character facing a fantastic event? Such questions engage readers in the stories and invest them in the reading process. They also teach students that all readers, even those with reading fluency problems, bring something to reading; their ideas count. Giving students the sense that they are entitled to be readers is a great gift, one that *Just Imagine!* can help offer.

Nonfiction Reading Strategies

These reading strategies are useful for any kind of reading material. For able, fluent readers, some of these skills may be second nature. For others, the skills need to be broken down and introduced or retaught. With practice, the skills will become a natural, integral part of the reading process.

• **Activate background knowledge**

Making an initial connection to a text can mean the difference between reading and not reading. If you know nothing about a topic and have no interest in it, why would you want to read about it? The key to this prereading step lies in helping students see that they have some background knowledge about many things. For example, even a difficult science article about DNA can seem accessible if students realize that they have watched television shows about crime scenes and DNA evidence. Tapping into students' investment in a reading motivates them to read.

One way to activate background knowledge is to scan tables of contents of books and magazines. A key phrase may hook a student. A chapter title might remind a student of an earlier class. Any back-cover or jacket blurbs can also draw students in and spark a connection. In books such as *Just Imagine!* an introduction gives a brief overview of the content. Students may find something there that strikes a chord. A class discussion in which other students share background knowledge can empower a less confident reader to recognize what she or he brings to the reading.

• **Visualize**

Picturing scenes of a story is like watching a movie—something teens love to do. Visualizing what you read is not just pleasurable, it is also useful. It gives your brain another way, in addition to decoding and analyzing printed text, to capture an idea.

Teaching students to visualize using fiction is not difficult. You may read aloud a passage that has plenty of sensory imagery, and ask a student to draw or describe the scene he or she sees in the mind's eye.

Visualizing nonfiction texts is more challenging, depending on the type of text. For nonfiction narratives, the process is like that for fiction. If there are illustrations, as in *Just Imagine!* these help keep an image in front of the reader, not just in his or her head.

For nonnarrative texts, visual aids can help. If such graphics exist in the text, students can be reminded to look at them first, before reading the passage, again while reading, and once more after reading. Students may want to make a graph, a pie chart, a Venn diagram, or chart of their choice to organize what they are reading. This is not just a mental process, of course, but also a physical one.

• **Ask questions**

Confident readers ask themselves questions, make predictions, and revise ideas as they read. Struggling readers can learn to do this by practicing. Guided reading questions can help at the start, training students to recognize the kinds of things they need to notice in the reading.

Nonfiction Reading Strategies, continued

Asking students to jot questions that arise at specified points in the reading is another step. Asking students to keep a journal of questions, predictions, and answers while reading can help them see how active reading works. Eventually, students will learn to ask the questions themselves, mentally, while reading.

• Monitor comprehension

Some struggling readers may not recognize reading as a process. They may believe that proficient readers just sit down, open a book, read it through once in a smooth progression, and understand what they have read. Giving readers the freedom to stop and think, and to reread when necessary, develops the idea of reading as a process and increases the likelihood that they will understand and retain what they have read.

Teaching students to monitor comprehension means allowing them to think. At first, asking them to stop and regroup at a certain point in the reading can be helpful. If there is anything that does not make sense to them, they should feel free to reread a section.

• Review

Readers retain more information when they write about it. Writing notes, writing a summary, making an outline, or using another graphic organizer can help students analyze, synthesize, and think critically about the meaning of what they have read. Blank graphic organizers are included for use with any writing assignment.

• Think critically

Students sometimes believe that anything in print is true or good or worthwhile. Of course, this is not the case. Students can be encouraged to think about any text by asking questions about what lies behind the text, such as

Why did the author write about this topic?

Why did the author choose this word over another?

What opinion does the author have of this topic?

What is fact in the reading, and what is opinion?

What devices does the author use to make her or his point, and why?

Students can make their own connections to the text by asking themselves questions such as

What would I do in that situation?

What do I think of the choice/decision a character made? Why?

How am I similar to or different from a person in the text?

How did the setting—the time and place—of the text affect the people in it?

Has anything like what happened in the text ever happened to me?

Have I read or heard anything about the topic that does not agree with what this text says?

History's Mysteries

Many people have come and gone across the earth. Some have left little trace of their lives. We barely know they existed at all. Others have left books, and pictures, and cities. We know quite a lot about them.

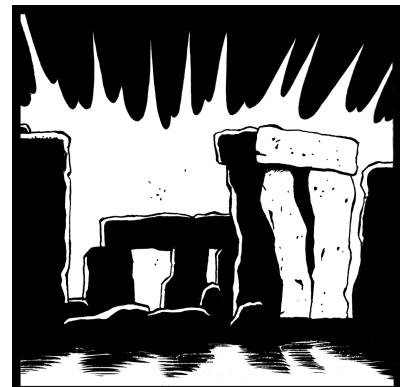
Then there are the people who fit in between, somewhere. They exist in the shadows of history. They built enormous cities. They ruled great empires. But then they disappeared, and no one knows why. We have also found weird sculptures and monuments made by unknown people. Sometimes they wrote books no one today can read. We know they existed, but we cannot get a picture of their lives.

Some cities have been utterly lost and forgotten. Then they turn up again! They give us a dramatic snapshot of a time that ended long ago. They give us hints about events we can never fully know.

The six stories in this book tell about vanished peoples and lost cities. As you read these stories, think about the life you are living. Could your town ever be lost to history? What if people were to dig up your house a thousand years from now? What if they had nothing from your time but the things you own? What picture would they get of the world you are living in today?

Below are vocabulary words from the story. Find the definition of each word. Write the letter of the correct definition on the line.

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| 1. ____ awesome | a. member of a religious group |
| 2. ____ monument | b. a u-shaped plate on a horse's hoof |
| 3. ____ concentric | c. causing wonder |
| 4. ____ outermost | d. to close in on all sides |
| 5. ____ enclose | e. having a common center |
| 6. ____ horseshoe | f. a statue or building to help people remember a person or thing |
| 7. ____ altar | g. farthest out |
| 8. ____ friar | h. a table or raised place used in religious ceremonies |
| 9. ____ rituals | i. open pits from which stone is dug or cut |
| 10. ____ quarries | j. acts done in ceremonies |



How many details do you remember about the mysterious Stonehenge? Answer the following questions to find out.

1. In which country is Stonehenge found?
2. How many doorways are in the center ring of Stonehenge? How tall are they?
3. According to medieval tales, what challenge did the devil offer to a nearby village? How did the friar answer?
4. Why is it unlikely that Merlin or King Arthur had anything to do with the building of Stonehenge?
5. Who were the Druids? Did they build Stonehenge?
6. What are two questions about Stonehenge that remain unanswered?

Just Imagine!

Imagine that you know the secret of Stonehenge. What do you do with the knowledge? Do you keep it secret? Do you tell everyone? Explain your choice.