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Introduction

Consider this scenario: A teacher asks a small group of students gathered at a table for a reading lesson, “Boys and girls, what is the main idea of the text you just read?” Dead silence ensues. The teacher rephrases the question in an attempt to clarify, “What is this text mostly about?” The silence continues as students assume the positions of deep thinkers. Finally, the teacher repeats the question for the third time in a slower, more deliberate, and much louder voice, **“What is this text mostly about?”**

Likely, these students hear quite well, and hopefully, this frustrated teacher does not really believe that naming this comprehension strategy again in a louder voice will actually support students in their efforts to problem solve a reading challenge. Many teachers are at a loss about how to deal with students who, year after year, struggle with comprehension strategies, such as identifying the main idea, summarizing, and understanding the meaning of words in a text. These strategies are assessed yearly on state exams, and too many students continually demonstrate that they are not yet skilled in the use of these strategies. Teachers attempt to reteach these strategies, but often repeat the same instruction that they used before an assessment. This is ineffective because in order for students to become truly proficient with a strategy, you can’t just say “it” (*the identical instruction*) louder. These students fail to apply the strategies of proficient readers, and the teacher must isolate and address the point at which the confusion exists in order for these students to progress. A different approach for specific, assisted instruction for learning powerful comprehension strategies can provide the key to helping students become successful processors of text. Teachers search for an approach by considering the language that carefully articulates how to use a comprehension strategy. They then search for a concrete demonstration of the steps necessary to apply that strategy.

I wrote this book as a practitioner. This is a how-to book—a book about how to talk to students about what good readers do to understand

text, especially nonfiction text. After many years in the classroom and then many more as a literacy coach and consultant, I, too, recognize that all students do not get it the first time, or even the second or third time. We recognize that we need to differentiate instruction in order to successfully meet the needs of all the many levels of readers in our classrooms. Yet as teachers, we struggle to frame the language and processes that explicitly describe what readers do to effectively create meaning from text. We search to identify the necessary steps to support students in their attempts to build meaning from text so they can become independent readers who deeply understand and enjoy what they read. At the same time, we want to provide advanced readers with succinct, powerful skills to flexibly apply in any reading experience.

Therefore, as teachers considering where our students are as learners, we need to be able to deconstruct and clearly articulate the explicit actions and procedures of a reading strategy at the point of use. By doing so, we can ensure that all readers develop deliberate processes to comprehend text. We want to provide carefully crafted, appropriate lessons with focused practice that challenge every student at the cusp of his or her learning potential. This book gives teachers a springboard for powerful decision making as they contemplate sound learning theory and multiple examples of targeted lessons designed to teach students how to use reading comprehension strategies in authentic reading contexts.

Overview of Chapters

You Can't Just Say It Louder! Differentiated Strategies for Comprehending Nonfiction consists of 10 chapters and a conclusion. The first three chapters are foundational; they provide the contexts within which strategy instruction has developed. Chapters 4–10 describe the metacognitive language—words that describe the thinking behind a comprehension process—necessary to actually teach comprehension-strategy use. The text explains how teachers can develop the incremental procedural language to describe a strategy's use while modeling the critical attributes of that comprehension strategy during reading—this is referred to as “talk the walk.” The clearly

defined procedures outlined in each model lesson engage students in active “meaning making” during reading as they move from learning and practicing the processes of a reading comprehension strategy in an instructional context to using the strategy automatically and fluently while reading independently.

Chapter 1: Constructing a Personal Theory About Learning explores some of the findings of education and psychology experts that inform reading comprehension strategy instruction. Three aspects of research and practice are reviewed: the critical nature of the social context and language in learning, the gradual release of responsibility model, and the impact of applied brain-based research.

Chapter 2: Moving from Strategies to Skills: You Can’t Just Say It Louder! describes the essence of comprehension instruction—moving students from strategy to skill. This chapter considers the impact of effective, ongoing assessment that drives the focus for strategy teaching and how students evolve from intentional problem-solvers during reading to automatic, fluent processors of text through a gradual release of responsibility.

Chapter 3: Differentiation Rules addresses the concept of differentiating instruction based on students’ reading strengths and learning needs by selecting a “just right” text while choosing from a variety of instructional processes that best address the students’ readiness levels, learning preferences, and interests.

Chapter 4: Preparing Students to Read with Meaning—Activating Student Thinking Through Text Introductions presents multiple before-reading strategies to set students up to read with maximum meaning.

Chapter 5: Understanding Word Meaning in Texts focuses on the use of context and word structure to enable students to deal with the ever-increasing demands of vocabulary in nonfiction texts that they will encounter as they advance through school.

Chapter 6: Using Text Features to Determine Importance, Develop Main Ideas, and Create Text Summaries describes the characteristics of texts that are designed to support readers before, during, and after reading. These features take many forms in nonfiction text—headings, subheadings, graphics, and various design elements—and students need to be familiar with all of these as they move toward independence in reading.

Chapter 7: Visualizing the Text examines several visualization strategies that guide students in forming mental images—strategies that draw upon various learning modalities.

Chapter 8: Asking Questions and Making Inferences centers on the generative aspects of reading. Engaged readers become involved with text as they question the author and distinguish between ideas that are stated explicitly and those that must be inferred by connecting personal knowledge with the author’s details.

Chapter 9: Recognizing Nonfiction Text Structures and Author’s Purpose focuses on the various ways in which authors structure their texts and how readers can recognize these structures. The chapter includes a number of graphic organizers—visual representations of the text that support students in making meaning.

Chapter 10: Monitoring Comprehension: The Ongoing Orchestration of Meaning draws together concepts about metacognitive awareness that are presented in previous chapters.

STAR (Strategic Thinker and Reader) Model Lessons

STAR Model Lessons, built on the gradual release of responsibility model described in Chapter 1, are used in Chapters 5–10 to demonstrate the selected reading strategies. The lessons feature examples of teacher-student conversations that demonstrate how to use a focused “thinking plan” for processing text while employing such strategies as understanding word meaning, determining importance and main ideas, asking questions, making inferences, and visualizing. The STAR Model Lessons and accompanying STAR Points charts in