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# 1 Theory into Practice

his book is about teaching reading-thinking strategies to elementary school children in the context of authentic literature experiences that include rich interpretive dialogues and provide the support children need to become engaged, thoughtful, and independent readers and writers. The rest of this chapter explains and expands on these central concepts.

# Reading Comprehension Instruction: A Historical Perspective

The reading comprehension instruction practiced in most American schools today evolved out of instructional methods and programs grounded in behavioral and task-analytic theories of learning that flourished during the early and middle parts of the twentieth century. Reading was viewed as a skill that could be divided into a set of subskills involved in both decoding and comprehension. Reading instruction was based on the assumption that reading could be improved by teaching students each of these subskills (Guthrie, 1973; Rosenshine, 1980; N. B. Smith, 1965). Once a reader mastered the skills, he or she was considered a proficient reader who could comprehend any text. In this view of reading, readers were assumed to be passive recipients of the information or meaning that resided in the text. In the 1970s and 1980s, basic and applied research in reading resulted in new understandings of the reading process and a different view of what is important to teach.

A classic study by Dolores Durkin (1978/1979), "What Classroom Observations Reveal about Reading Comprehension Instruction," called attention to the need for change in comprehension instruction. Durkin found that most of the questions that teachers asked students during reading instruction required only literal responses, and she observed that very little comprehension instruction was actually taking place in elementary school classrooms. In the late 1980s the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Applebee, Langer, & Mullis, 1987) recommended that reading instruction should emphasize thinking skills and strategies that would enable readers to engage in higher-level interpretive responses to texts. Since Durkin's study, reading researchers have studied the strategies expert readers use as they read and how to improve readers' understanding of text through comprehension strategy

instruction. Allan Collins and Edward Smith (1982) were among the first to provide a framework for using these strategies as an integral part of comprehension instruction. They categorized reading strategies into two general classifications: comprehension monitoring and hypothesis generation, evaluation, and revision. That is, they suggested that readers construct meaning in response to an unfolding text by integrating textual information with their prior knowledge to generate predictions, inferences, and questions about the piece. Readers build a "working hypothesis" about the meaning of the text as it unfolds, and as they encounter new information or activate relevant knowledge they confirm, revise, or reject initial predictions, assumptions, or interpretations. Readers monitor comprehension as the text unfolds by evaluating their working hypothesis to identify gaps or problem areas that need rethinking and revision. The instructional plan presented by Collins and Smith featured teacher modeling and student engagement. That is, the teacher models both comprehension monitoring and hypothesis generation while reading a text aloud. Then the teacher invites student participation in these strategic activities. The goal is for students to internalize these strategies so they can use them as thoughtful, independent readers.

Strategy instruction was also a central part of the studies in "reciprocal teaching" conducted by Annemarie Sullivan Palincsar and Ann L. Brown (1984; 1988), who focused on teaching four comprehension-monitoring and comprehension-fostering strategies. What was unique about this plan was the use of dialogue to help students internalize the strategies. The teacher supports the students as they work in small groups interacting with a text and engaging in a dialogue about the text. Their dialogue is guided by the use of the four basic strategies: asking questions, identifying sections in the text that require clarification, summarizing the text, and making predictions about it. The reciprocity of the dialogue emerges as the students take turns assuming responsibility for leading the group. This work reflected the shift from identifying and teaching discrete skills to focusing on students' efforts to make sense of ideas or to build their own understanding of text and their own active involvement as readers as they construct meaning in a social context.

The research of the 1970s and 1980s served as a point of departure for further studies of strategy instruction, and other researchers have expanded on this earlier work. For example, Michael Pressley and his colleagues (1992) used the term *transactional strategies instruction* to describe an approach in which students are taught to coordinate a repertoire of strategic processes and "teachers and students jointly construct

understandings of the text as they interact with it" (p. 516). This collaborative construction of meaning results in a "small interpretive community" (p. 516). The long-term goal is for students to internalize the strategies used in the group setting and to use these strategies as independent readers. "The thought processes that were once interpersonal become intrapersonal" (p. 516). That is, students internalize these processes: development and practice of a repertoire of reading strategies; regular discussion of metacognitive information, such as when, where, and why to use particular strategies; building a nonstrategic world knowledge base; and motivation to use the strategies and world knowledge being learned (p. 517). The term *transactional* as applied to this approach is based on the reader-response theory of Louise Rosenblatt (1978). Her transactional theory of reading will be discussed later.

The new view of reading that evolved out of the research of the 1970s and 1980s emphasized the cognitive and interactive nature of the reading process and the constructive nature of comprehension (Rumelhart, 1980; Spiro, 1980). This research highlighted the active role of readers as they engage in cognitive and affective transactions with text and generate meaning by bringing their prior knowledge and experience to the text (Adams, 1977; Golden, 1986; Goodman, 1967, 1985; Rosenblatt, 1982; Rumelhart, 1976; F. Smith, 1978, 1988). Frank Smith introduced the term *nonvisual information* to refer to this prior knowledge used to construct meaning (1978, p. 5). According to Smith, "The meaning that readers comprehend from text is always relative to what they already know and to what they want to know" (1988, p. 154). He refers to organized knowledge or cognitive structures as "the theory of the world in our heads," which enables readers to make predictions as they interact with a text (1988, p. 7). "Prediction means asking questions, and comprehension means being able to get some of the questions answered. . . . There is a *flow* to comprehension, with new questions constantly being generated from the answers that are sought" (1988, p. 19). In the interpretive dialogues featured in this book, the children were encouraged to develop their own questions to guide the reading-thinking process as they encountered literary texts. The authentic literature experiences that formed the core of the literary/literacy program described in this book were cumulative, and, as such, provided opportunities for the children to expand and revise the theory of the world in their heads and to build new cognitive structures (or prior knowledge) to bring to and enrich each new experience with literature.

These authentic literature experiences set the stage for readers to engage in cumulative meaning-making processes. According to Judith

Langer, reading as a meaning-making process involves *envisionment* building:

I use the term envisionment to refer to the understanding a reader has about a text—what the reader understands at a particular point in time, the questions she has, as well as hunches about how the piece will unfold. Envisionments develop as the reading develops. Some information is no longer important, some is added, and some is changed. What readers come away with at the end of the reading, I call the final envisionment. This includes what they understand, what they don't, and the questions they still have. The final envisionment is also subject to change with time, as the result of conversations with others, the reading of other works, or pondering and reflection. (Langer, 1990, p. 812)

Envisionments are text-worlds in the mind, and they differ from individual to individual. They are a function of one's personal and cultural experiences, one's relationships to the current experience, what one knows, how one feels, and what one is after. (Langer, 1995, p. 9)

In the context of the interpretive dialogues described in this book, children were invited to articulate their initial understandings or envisionments of a text and to revise or extend these envisionments as they gained new information from the unfolding text. The children were encouraged to use their prior knowledge in conjunction with text knowledge to explore possible meanings, perspectives, and interpretations and to reflect on their own understandings in light of their life experiences and their "conversations with others, the reading of other works, or pondering and reflection."

Rosenblatt also focuses on the nature of readers' responses to unfolding texts, and her transactional theory of reading provides a framework for exploring a reader's responses to literature. According to Rosenblatt, reading is a "transaction, a two-way process, involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances" (1982, p. 268). The nature of this transaction is determined by the reader's stance or "mental set," which is related to a reader's expectations and the way he or she approaches the text. Rosenblatt uses the term aesthetic to refer to a stance that allows a reader to focus on the "lived through" experience of reading. She argues that the most effective way to read fiction and poetry is from an aesthetic stance. The aesthetic reader enters into the story world and "lives through" it as a personal and emotional experience. Rosenblatt uses the term efferent to refer to the stance of the reader who focuses on accumulating information to use in the real world. Thus, nonfiction texts are most effectively approached

from an efferent stance by readers who are interested in facts and knowledge to be "carried away at the end of the reading" (p. 269). According to Rosenblatt (1991), readers can switch stances while reading, and stance can move along the efferent/aesthetic continuum within a single reading event (p. 446). Most reading is predominantly, rather that solely, one or the other. Rosenblatt observes that teachers need to be clear about the different purposes of efferent and aesthetic reading, and that different purposes lead to different modes of reading. Thus the teacher needs to decide whether the emphasis is on verifiable information or practical application or whether the purpose is literary (p. 447). Rosenblatt calls for literature instruction that emphasizes aesthetic reading: "Precisely because every aesthetic reading of a text is a unique creation, woven out of the inner life and thought of the reader, the literary work of art can be a rich source of insight and truth" (p. 277).

During the read-aloud sessions described in subsequent chapters, the children entered into the story world and shared their spontaneous personal responses to this experience. They were also invited to step back from this aesthetic experience and to explore the story objectively as a literary text, and to engage in reflection, analysis, and interpretation. The term *critical/analytic* has been used to refer to a third stance, which is defined as a "focus on a major dilemma or problem facing a character, a consideration of reasons for different courses of action, and appeals to the text for evidence and for interpretive context" (Chinn, Anderson, & Waggoner, 2001, pp. 381–82). By stepping back from the text, the children shifted from the aesthetic stance to the critical/analytic. Over time, they learned to adopt the stance appropriate to their purposes in their transactions with texts.

Langer (1994) also distinguishes between a literary orientation and reading to gain information:

A literary orientation . . . can be characterized as *exploring a horizon of possibilities*. It explores emotions, relationships, motives, and reactions, calling on all we know about what it means to be human. . . . A literary orientation is one of exploring horizons—where uncertainty is a normal part of response, and new-found understandings provoke still other possibilities. When the purpose of reading is primarily to gain information (as when students read science and social studies texts), the reader's orientation can be characterized as "maintaining a point of reference." (pp. 204–5)

James Baumann and Gay Ivey (1997) conducted a yearlong study featuring strategy instruction integrated within a rich literature-based environment. They conceptualized their study in terms of two of what

Hudelson and Lindfors (1993) call *delicate balances*: "a curriculum balance between literature envisionment (Langer, 1995) and skill/strategy instruction, and an instructional balance between teacher-initiated instruction and instruction responsive to students' needs and interests" (Baumann & Ivey, 1997, p. 244). They used Langer's concept of literary envisionment as the framework for promoting literary appreciation and response. An analysis of the results of this study revealed that "students developed into readers . . . [,] became engaged with literacy . . . [,] grew in word identification ability and reading fluency . . . [,] became better at comprehending what they read . . . [, and] grew in written composition proficiency" (p. 269).

In the preface to their book, *Improving Comprehension Instruction*: Rethinking Research, Theory, and Classroom Practice (2002), Cathy Collins Block, Linda B. Gambrell, and Michael Pressley state: "Reading comprehension is an urgent national priority whose time has come! No other body of knowledge is the foundation for all content knowledge" (p. xvii). They express their concern about the absence of effective comprehension instruction in many of today's schools: "Even as recently as 1998, many students left primary and secondary schools having experienced very little training in cognition and metacognition and very little teaching of how to process text independently. Most so-called comprehension lessons consisted merely of a teacher's direct questions about material that students were supposed to have comprehended. Educators did not explain, model, or demonstrate how to understand" (p. xv). A survey of studies of comprehension instruction conducted between 1984 and 1997 revealed that "teaching comprehension strategies based on reading research benefits and increases students' comprehension. Across these studies, strategy instruction increased students' willingness to read difficult material, discover meaning in text, and react to and elaborate on text meaning" (p. 12).

Dixie Lee Spiegel's survey (1998) of the research on the benefits of reader-response approaches to literature revealed that students who participate in peer discussions and respond in journals grow in many ways: these researchers found that students increase their repertoire of responses to literature and "move to higher levels of thinking in their responses" (p. 45). They make personal connections between literature, their own lives, and the world (p. 44). "Students develop an appreciation for multiple interpretations of literature, with tolerance for and even an expectation of ambiguity; and a need for rethinking one's initial responses" (p. 44). Researchers found that these students also grow as readers, in general: "They gain confidence in themselves as readers; they

develop an ability to monitor their own reading and learning; and they gain strategies that will enable them to read, respond to, and understand a variety of texts" (p. 46). Several of the studies in Spiegel's survey have shown that these students do better on standardized achievement tests than do students in more teacher- and text-dominated programs (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991; Swift, 1993; and Raphael & McMahon, 1994).

# Comprehension Instruction: Teaching a Repertoire of Cognitive Strategies

Subsequent chapters will describe examples of literary experiences that provide a context for teaching cognitive strategies used by proficient readers and examples of ways teachers model and explain these strategies to students so they can eventually internalize and use them to enhance their comprehension as independent readers. Janice Dole and her colleagues (1991) offer distinguishing features of *strategies*:

Strategies emphasize intentional and deliberate plans under the control of the reader. Strategies emphasize reasoning; readers use reasoning and critical thinking skills as they construct and reconstruct evolving meaning from the text.

Strategies are inherently flexible and adaptable. Readers modify strategies to fit different kinds of texts and different purposes.

Strategies imply metacognitive awareness; good readers can reflect on what they are doing while they are reading. They are aware of whether they understand or do not understand, and this awareness usually leads to regulation and repair. (p. 242)

Researchers in reading comprehension have identified a number of different *reading-thinking strategies*, outlined in Figure 1.1, used by proficient readers to comprehend text:

1. Engaging in cover-to-cover study of new texts: The *cover-to-cover* study of literary texts involves a careful examination of the front and back covers, dust jacket, endpapers, front matter such as the dedication and title pages, author's notes, and other text and pictures that precede or follow the story text. According to Margaret Higonnet (1990), French critics use the term *peritext* to refer to these peripheral features as well as the illustrations that surround or enclose the verbal narrative in picture books or in illustrated chapter books. A study of the peritext enables readers to discover clues to make inferences or predictions about the story during the prereading phase, or it may help them to activate relevant prior knowledge or trigger questions about some-

#### Reading-Thinking Strategies

- 1. Engaging in cover-to-cover study of new texts
- 2. Activating and using prior knowledge
- 3. Drawing inferences
- 4. Making predictions
- 5. Determining importance
- 6. Summarizing, analyzing, and synthesizing
- 7. Evoking mental imagery
- 8. Generating questions
- 9. Using text structure and story grammar
- 10. Monitoring comprehension
- 11. Making connections between the text and other texts, oneself, and the world
- 12. Engaging in metacognition
- 13. Thinking aloud

#### Figure 1.1

thing that is not part of their prior knowledge or that seems puzzling to them. Readers can use the peritext to identify the genre or to learn something about the story or the author that will influence their transaction with the text. Readers can use the peritext to study the artist's craft: What choices did the artist make? How do the illustrations enrich the story as a whole? During and after interaction with the text, readers return to segments of the peritext to evaluate their initial responses and to confirm or revise their earlier predictions, or to answer questions posed earlier, or to build understanding and enrich the meaning making process by integrating new information in the unfolding text with clues in the peritext.

2. Activating and using prior knowledge: Readers who bring relevant prior knowledge to a text are able to generate more meaning than readers who do not possess this prior knowledge (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). Reading comprehension programs in the elementary school can provide opportunities for students to build rich prior knowledge through extensive reading of high-quality literary and nonfiction texts and to learn how to activate relevant prior knowledge to bring to their transactions with new texts. The more a person reads, the more knowledge of language, literature, the natural world, and the human experience that person has to bring to the text. Readers elicit prior knowledge before, during, and after the reading event.

- 3. Drawing inferences: Readers use their prior knowledge and experience and textual information to draw conclusions and develop interpretations and opinions as they interact with a text. Lea M. McGee (1996) used the term gap-filling activities to describe children's inferential thinking as they move beyond the literal level of understanding toward interpretations of the story as a whole (p. 196). Narrative writers usually include implicit information that requires readers/listeners to make inferences and to fill in the gaps in the story, that is, to focus on what is not in the story. Inferential thinking is required to identify literal/figurative distinctions, motivations of characters, and logical relationships among events in the story. "When we read, we stretch the limits of the literal text by folding our experience and belief into the literal meanings in the text, creating a new interpretation, an inference" (Keene and Zimmermann, 1997, p. 147). According to Jean Anne Clyde, readers can "step inside the story world" by generating the subtext, the thoughts and emotions behind the action in the story (2003). Clyde observed that readers who created subtext were able to "think deeply about characters' emotions and motives . . . . [and] to appreciate multiple viewpoints" (p. 156-57).
- 4. Making predictions: Readers think about what will happen next as a story unfolds; they develop an anticipatory attitude toward text and learn to predict their way through the text. "Prediction means asking questions, and comprehension means being able to get some of the questions answered" (F. Smith, 1988, p. 19). Readers use textual knowledge in combination with prior knowledge and experience to make predictions. As the text unfolds and they encounter new information, readers confirm, revise, or reject initial predictions.
- **5. Determining importance:** Readers identify main ideas and significant themes as they read. They use these ideas and themes to determine the difference between important and unimportant ideas. Determining importance of ideas or information in a text is a critical factor in summarizing, analyzing, and synthesizing that text.
- **6. Summarizing, analyzing, and synthesizing:** Summarizing (or review) involves allocating attention to the major content and checking for understanding (Palincsar & Brown, 1984, p. 120). Readers integrate important ideas and information in the text and ignore unimportant or irrelevant information in order to review the content or retell a narrative. Readers engage in analysis by examining basic elements of a text, its structure, or its story grammar. Readers analyze the author's craft by examining his or her language, literary techniques, and style and posing questions about the choices the author made in composing

the text. According to JoAnn Portalupi (1999), "We build our knowledge of craft each time we engage in discussion of literature" (p. 5). Synthesis goes beyond what happened in the story to what it's about, the key themes. Readers move from analysis to synthesis by integrating text knowledge and their own prior knowledge to create new insights or understandings or larger meanings that reach beyond the single text. Synthesis of multiple texts enables readers to expand insights and understandings.

- 7. Evoking mental imagery: Allan Paivio (Paivio, 1971, 1986) uses the term *dual-coding system* to refer to the coding of knowledge in both verbal and nonverbal representations. Readers use all five senses and their emotions to construct their own mental images as they read. These images evolve out of readers' prior knowledge and personal experience, and they clarify and enrich readers' comprehension as they interact with a text. "For readers, the mental images derived from what they've read connect them personally to the texts, over time coalescing into a self-awareness, complexity, and depth which is at the core of being human" (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997, p.141). According to Rosenblatt, the aesthetic reader is able to "savor the images, the sounds, the smells, the actions, the associations, and the feelings that the words point to" (1991, p. 447). Research on mental imagery reveals that comprehension improves when students are taught to use mental imagery (Anderson, 1971).
- **8. Generating questions:** When students pose and answer their own questions before, during, and after reading, they become more actively and deeply involved in the reading process, and they can identify gaps in comprehension and points in the text that need clarification or hypotheses that need to be rethought (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). Questions may lead to predictions or inferences or to a focus on the important elements in the text. Other readers' questions during dialogue may challenge students' interpretations and stimulate new questions and inquiry, enhancing understanding of the text.

In a critical literacy program, students are encouraged to adopt a questioning stance in response to socially conscious literature that exposes them to issues of equity, justice, and power. Students' questions set the stage for inquiry that takes them *beyond* the texts to gain new understandings and insights about social issues and prepares them to take action against injustices and inequities they encounter in their own worlds.

**9. Using text structure and story grammar:** Knowledge of text structure is an important factor in reading comprehension. "Successful readers are aware of differences between narrative structures and ex-

pository structures, and they use this knowledge to guide and monitor their comprehension" (Reutzel, Camperell, & Smith, 2002, p. 325). In the 1970s, researchers identified an internal structure for simple stories, referred to as story grammar (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; N. L. Stein, 1978). This inner structure is made up of a network of categories and the logical relationships among them, and provides a systematic way to analyze stories (Leondar, 1977; N. L. Stein, 1978). By listening to and reading a variety of narratives, children develop a story schema, an implicit knowledge of story grammar or story structure that can be used to comprehend and recall narratives. Stories are organized into sequences of events in which the main characters pursue goals and overcome obstacles (Graesser, Golding, & Long, 1991; Mandler & Johnson, 1977). Readers use their story schemata to become aware of the logical and purposive behaviors that characterize well-formed stories (Leondar, 1977; N. L. Stein, 1978). Comprehending stories requires readers to infer characters' motives and to identify themes. In her discussion of story grammar research, April Nauman (1990) states that "a basic understanding of story structure enables readers to predict what kinds of things will happen next and to infer certain information not stated explicitly skills that improve comprehension. An understanding of story structure also enables young writers to recognize what kinds of experiences make good stories and to select what details to use. We can use the work of story grammarians to help children become more sophisticated readers and writers" (p. 58). Story grammar research provides evidence that children use their knowledge of story structure to understand and recall stories, to make predictions about stories, and to generate their own stories. Researchers have also demonstrated that explicit teaching of story structure improves comprehension of stories (Fitzgerald & Spiegel, 1983) and helps students compose better-organized stories (Fitzgerald & Teasley, 1986).

Cognitive theorists have demonstrated that the quality of reading comprehension is determined in large part by the quality of prior knowledge or nonvisual information the reader/listener brings to the text. This knowledge is organized; the term *schema* is used to refer to one's organized knowledge or mental model of the world, just as the narrower term *story schema* above refers to a mental model of the way stories work. In terms of schema theory, readers comprehend a text when they are able to retrieve relevant schemata from their memory stores and make appropriate connections to new information in the text. One of the most effective ways to improve comprehension is to activate relevant knowledge stored in these memory banks before reading.

Proficient readers identify the genre of the text they are reading, and use their knowledge of genre to generate meaning. In the seventh edition of *A Critical Handbook of Children's Literature* (2003), Rebecca Lukens defines *genre* as "a kind or type of literature that has a common set of characteristics" (p. 13). An awareness of genre enables a reader to draw from a set of expectations associated with a particular genre in his or her transaction with a particular literary text.

Knowledge of story grammar and genre for narrative texts and knowledge of organization or overall structure for expository texts has been found to be especially valuable for helping readers differentiate important from unimportant information as well as for helping them recall information (Meyer & Rice, 1984).

- 10. Monitoring comprehension: Proficient readers know when they understand the text they are reading, and they know when it does not make sense. In order to repair comprehension problems, they identify the source of the problem (such as an unfamiliar word or concept or text structure, or segments of the text that are confusing or unclear), and then they decide how to solve the problem (by consulting a dictionary, rereading the passage, searching for missing details, or drawing from prior knowledge). Finally, the reader refines or revises his or her understanding or interpretation of the text.
- 11. Making connections between the text and other texts, one-self, and the world: Proficient readers think about their own world knowledge, their literary histories, and their personal experiences as they read, and they make connections between the text they are reading and the thoughts it triggers. These connections generally take three forms:

Text-to-text connections; text-to-self connections; and text-to-world connections. (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997)

Readers' transactions with a new literary text often trigger thoughts of personal experiences, memories, and associations as well as relevant world knowledge. Readers also find connections between a new text and previous texts. Students are encouraged to identify and use *intertextual links* to generate meaning. The term *intertextuality* was first coined by Julia Kristeva (1984) to describe the process a reader uses to comprehend one text by means of a prior text. In his research on the way readers understand texts, Richard Beach (1990) found that "the more stories they [the students in this study] read, the richer their intertextual links, which, in turn, related to the quality of their inter-

pretation of the story" (p. 70). The results of this study are consistent with other studies of intertextual linking which, taken together, suggest the value of "continually relating current texts to past texts so that students build a sense of their own histories as readers" (Wolf, 1988). In an "intertextually rich environment" (Hartman, 1995, p. 528), children develop the habit of reading intertextually and engaging in comparative analysis as a natural dimension of literary study.

Text-to-world connections include the world knowledge readers bring *to* a text to generate meaning as well as the understandings and insights about the world that readers gain *from* their transactions with a text. When a text prompts reflection about complex social issues, readers look beyond the text to probe more deeply into an issue and consider ways to translate concerns and insights into action in their own world.

- 12. Engaging in metacognition: "Research has confirmed what teachers of reading may have observed in themselves and in their students, namely, that thoughtful, active, proficient readers are metacognitive: they think about their own thinking during reading" (Keene, 2002, p. 84). When teachers articulate and demonstrate reading-thinking strategies and focus instruction on the mental processes that underlie reading, their students develop an awareness of their own thought processes as they read. By engaging in metacognition, readers can take control of their transactions with texts; they can plan what strategies to use, monitor the effectiveness of these strategies, and revise their plans to solve comprehension problems. Proficient readers know what they are doing when they read.
- 13. Thinking aloud: Think-alouds refer to talking about thinking processes used during reading or listening to a text. James Baumann and his colleagues define think-alouds as "overt, verbal expression of the normally covert mental processes readers engage in when constructing meaning from text" (Baumann, Jones, & Seifert-Kessell, 1993, p. 185), and they list think-aloud strategies as "asking questions, drawing on prior knowledge, assessing comprehension by asking, 'Does this make sense?'; predicting and verifying, inferring unstated ideas, retelling, and rereading and reading on to clarify meaning" (p. 187). Linda Kucan and Isabel Beck (1997) reviewed the research on thinking aloud in reading comprehension and found that think-alouds were also being used to promote social interaction. "Current efforts to engage students in constructing meaning from text in collaborative discussions seem to indicate a new direction for thinking aloud research, one in which social interaction assumes increased importance" (p. 271).

Think-alouds can provide teachers with a vehicle for demonstrating the reading-thinking strategies used by proficient readers as they respond to unfolding texts. *Mosaic of Thought: Teaching Comprehension in a Reader's Workshop*, by Ellin Keene and Susan Zimmermann (1997), is about "lively talk in [literature-rich] classrooms and what happens when children develop an awareness of their thought processes as they read" (p. 11). In this book the authors describe classroom instruction that is based on the conviction that "reading comprehension could be taught by showing children what proficient readers thought about as they read, and teaching children to use those same strategies themselves" (p. 24). The authors comment: "As we worked with the strategies, it became clear that metacognition—thinking about one's own thinking—was an umbrella under which the other strategies fell. Each strategy was a variation of metacognition" (pp. 24–25).

In "Using the Think-Aloud for Reading Instruction," Leslie Oster (2001) describes her use of think-aloud strategies for instruction as well as assessment. Her students' think-aloud comments, shared in group discussion or in writing, revealed their strengths and weaknesses as readers. These comments helped Oster plan instruction to meet specific learning needs and helped her students develop metacognitive awareness by focusing on patterns in their own think-aloud comments.

### The Literary Context

For many years researchers have demonstrated that children who are immersed in rich, authentic literary experiences become highly engaged in literature and develop literary awareness and appreciation (Clark, 1976; Durkin, 1961; Routman, 1988, 1991; Short, 1995; Walmsley, 1992). Baumann and Ivey (1997) studied the impact of a combined program in which teacher-led strategy instruction was embedded in a literaturebased framework. Their data demonstrated that the students in their study "became more proficient in reading and writing abilities . . . and . . . they grew in knowledge, interest, and attitudes toward reading, writing and literature" (p. 272). Like the findings in a study by Block (1993), the results of the Baumann and Ivey study reveal that "elementary students can acquire reading and thinking strategies within a literature-based environment" (p. 270). The authors conclude that: "The immersion in literature and the embedded strategy instruction created a kind of symbiotic, synergistic relationship in which each program characteristic contributed to and fed off the other" (p. 272). Claude Goldenberg (1992/1993) uses the term instructional conversation to describe "discussion-based lessons geared toward creating richly textured opportunities for students' conceptual and linguistic development" (p. 317). Goldenberg's model is designed to "weave instruction and conversation into a seamless whole: The conversation is instructional, and the instruction is conversational" (p. 319).

According to Langer (1998), literature is thought-provoking and "literature classrooms are particularly good environments not only for the learning of literary works . . . but also for the development of literate thinking, intelligent reasoning, and human sensitivity" (pp. 16–17). Literature has the power to touch the minds and hearts of aesthetic readers and to transform readers who enter into the lives of literary characters. Readers who respond with empathy and compassion make emotional connections, and they imagine beyond the boundaries of their own experience and gain new insights and perspectives about what it means to be human and about the universality of human experience and the uniqueness of individual human beings. According to Langer (1995): "All literature . . . provides us with a way to imagine human potential. In its best sense, literature is intellectually provocative as well as humanizing, allowing us to use various angles of vision to examine thoughts, beliefs, and actions" (p. 5).

### **Literature and Critical Literacy**

Critical literacy "transcends conventional notions of reading and writing to incorporate critical thinking, questioning, and transformation of self or one's world" (McDaniel, 2004, p. 472). This idea of transforming oneself and one's world through language is rooted in Paulo Freire's philosophy of transformative education (2000). Langer has called attention to the "intellectually provocative [and] humanizing" nature of literature and its transformative power, and using selected children's literature in the classroom is one way to support critical literacy and transformative education. Critical conversations begin when teachers encourage children to adopt a questioning stance in response to literary texts and to consider ways to translate insights about issues of equity and power into social action to change their worlds. Christine Leland and Jerome Harste draw from Luke and Freebody's (1997) theoretical model of critical literacy to develop criteria for selecting books that invite readers to engage in critical analysis, i.e., searching for the particular views that are represented in the text as well as those that are silenced and "[being] conscious of the assumptions that are embedded in the text" (Leland and Harste, 2000, p. 3). For example, they se-

lected books that "don't make difference invisible, but rather explore what differences make a difference . . . . [;] help us question why certain groups are positioned as 'others' . . . . [; and] show how people can begin to take action on important social issues" (p. 4). The authors note: "Engaging children in conversations about the pernicious effects of 'otherness' can help them begin to see and understand the world in new ways" (p. 5). Children respond with compassion and empathy as well as righteous anger as they encounter injustice and inequity in socially conscious literature. When these emotional responses are interwoven with a growing understanding of social issues, students are prepared to practice social justice and to take action against injustices they encounter in their own worlds.

### **Reading Aloud**

The first chapter of For Reading Out Loud: Planning and Practice (Fisher & Medvic, 2003) is entitled: "Why Read Aloud?" The authors begin this chapter with an answer: "We read aloud to children because it is the best way we know to help them learn to love reading. Reading aloud to children forms the foundation of literacy learning" (p. 1). In their classic text, Children's Literature in the Elementary School (8th ed., 2004), Charlotte Huck and Barbara Kiefer also emphasize the powerful connection between reading aloud and learning to read. Children who hear books read aloud on a regular basis discover the patterns of narrative and expository texts and learn to understand the meanings of the texts. As they become immersed in rich literary experiences in these read-aloud sessions, children learn about themselves, about others, and about the world, and they learn to think critically and creatively. The literature children hear is reflected in their writing. "Whether consciously or unconsciously, children pick up words, phrases, textual structure, even intonation patterns from books they know" (p. 11). In addition, children build on the ideas found in narratives and expository texts as they engage in writing, drawing, drama, and art activities. In the social context of the read-aloud sessions, children learn to collaborate in responding to, exploring, and studying the shared texts. Susan Hepler and Janet Hickman (1982) use the term *community of readers* to describe children working together to become readers of literature and to explore and build meanings together.

Shelby Barrentine (1996) uses the term *interactive* to describe the kind of read-aloud style that encourages students to engage in discussion and response *during* the reading of the story. Grover Whitehurst

and his colleagues (1994) use the term *dialogic* to refer to the interaction that occurs as the text unfolds in a read-aloud session. Lawrence Sipe studied storybook read-alouds and the role of the teacher in promoting critical thinking and thoughtful literary interpretation (2003), conducting an in-depth study of a single teacher as she interacted with her students during the reading of stories over a nine-month period. Sipe observed that this teacher was interjecting her own comments as she read aloud the author's words. "She is not only expanding on the text and interpreting it; she is connecting emotionally to the text and personalizing it" (p. 165). In addition, the teacher served as an "emotional bridge between the children and the story . . . she let her storybook reading be determined, in part, by her audience . . . . [S]he encouraged different kinds of responses to the story, including the children's own stories[,] . . . . socio-dramatic play, dramatic re-enactments, and journal writing as extensions of the readalouds" (pp. 165–66). Sipe uses the term storytelling style to describe the teacher's role as reader and storyteller and the "synergy developed between the teller's words and the interjected comments of the audience" (p. 164).

The authors of Reading Aloud and Beyond: Fostering the Intellectual Life with Older Readers (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003) envision "the read aloud as the foundation of the reading curriculum, the launching point for the study of the language arts and the content area disciplines" (p. xi). They emphasize the central role of literature in the curriculum: "Literature is the driving force behind the curriculum we construct with our students . . . . Literature is used as a lens to understand the world" (p. 3). The authors also highlight the use of the picture book with older students: "We believe that the length and format of the picture book make it a perfect resource, one that often goes untapped in the intermediate and middle grades" (pp. xii–xiii). They use the metaphor "teacher as docent" to describe the role of the teacher during a read-aloud experience (p. 4). Like the museum docent, the teacher can serve as a guide in the world of literature. The teacher invites personal responses and helps his or her students build new understandings, construct new interpretations, gain new insights, and view the literary text from multiple perspectives as they enter into it together and explore its meanings.

# Interpretive Dialogues

This book is about literary discussion that evolves before, during, and after a story is read aloud and that promotes literary understanding and provides a context for strategy instruction. As a teacher of young chil-

dren for over thirty years, I have had the good fortune to participate in lively discussions about literature with my students over those years (Moss, 1982, 1984, 1990, 1998, 2000, 2002; Moss & Fenster, 2002).

Subsequent chapters in this book include excerpts from actual literary discussions that evolved in the context of cumulative readaloud/think-aloud sessions in which children listened to and discussed shared texts. Students were invited to talk about their unique, personal, and emotional responses to the aesthetic experience (Rosenblatt, 1978) and to share their understandings, interpretations, and questions as they listened to the texts. They considered the contributions of others and constructed new meanings together in the social context of the classroom. These literary discussions were an integral part of the read-aloud sessions. Discussion began with comments, questions, and predictions triggered by the book's title and the front and back covers and other components of its peritext; the cumulative discussion continued during the unfolding of the story and after its conclusion. Thus the children entered the story world together, building understanding, cover to cover, in an ongoing, shared reading experience. They were actively involved in the collaborative construction of meaning and interpretation as each text unfolded. At the conclusion of the shared reading of particular texts, the children were invited to step back from the text to adopt a critical/analytic stance. Deborah Wells (1995) uses the term grand conversations to describe literature discussion groups in which children engage in genuine dialogue to explore important ideas and issues. In her book Knee to Knee, Eye to Eye: Circling in on Comprehension (2003), Ardith Cole writes: "Literature conversations provide a platform for deep, rich comprehension of text. By developing these classroom structures for talk, teachers can help students collaborate, substantiate their ideas, and negotiate" (p. xiv). According to Cole, literature conversations not only foster deeper comprehension of text, they also have a "positive influence on social interaction, relationships, and community spirit" (p. xv).

Most readers know that independent reading can be meaningful and enjoyable. They also know that sharing reading experiences with others can enrich and extend their solitary transactions with texts. When students have opportunities to talk about books and to share their personal responses, interpretations, and opinions with others in the social context of the classroom, these shared thoughts often trigger further ideas from other participants. As they listen to one another, students discover diverse personal responses to a single shared text as well as multiple perspectives and interpretations. In the process, they learn from

others and about others as unique individuals. These literary discussions—whether in response to stories read aloud in a group setting or to stories read independently and then shared—are an integral part of the reading experience in the classroom. Our responsibility as teachers is to introduce students to a rich world of language, ideas, and human experience in the form of poetry, fable, myth, legend, folk and fairy tale, modern fantasy, contemporary and historical realism, biography and autobiography, and informational books. As teachers, we can set the stage for enjoyable literary experiences that enhance the quality of students' responses to and appreciation of literature; that challenge them to stretch their minds and imaginations and open their hearts; and that provide the linguistic and literary knowledge and cognitive strategies needed to generate deeper meanings. Literary selections that invite students to engage with the text and to search for understanding offer the kinds of reading experiences that readers want to share with others (Moss, 2002). Rich interpretive dialogues evolve as students enter into the world of literature, think deeply about the ideas embedded in texts, and engage in a collaborative construction of meaning in the social context of the classroom.

The cumulative read-aloud/think-aloud group sessions also developed students' ability to respond to each new text in light of previous texts. These group sessions formed the core of literature units, and, from one session to the next, students gradually accumulated literary knowledge as well as reading-thinking strategies that enriched their transactions with new texts. As students explored intertextual links, they cycled back to previous texts with new ways to understand subtle meanings and literary patterns and themes in these earlier texts. Each of the literature units described in this book was an integral part of a larger literary/literacy curriculum that included a series of literature units for a given school year in the elementary school. As students became immersed in each successive unit, they carried with them strategies, understandings, and insights gained in previous units. The opportunity to revisit diverse genres and recurring patterns and themes enabled students to probe more deeply into the literary texts they discussed in the group sessions or selected for independent reading.

# Scaffolding

Teachers can offer support, or *scaffolding*, to help students learn to use higher-order thinking strategies. The concept of scaffolding is derived from the developmental theories of Lev Vygotsky (1978), a Soviet psy-

chologist who proposed that an adult's assistance enabled a child to function in the "zone of proximal development," an area between what the child can accomplish independently and what the same child can accomplish with assistance. Scaffolded instruction helps children bridge the gap between what they know and what they need to know to become independent learners. To help students learn the reading-thinking strategies used by proficient readers to generate meaning, teachers may model a particular strategy. For example, in order to teach a strategy for using the title and covers of a new text to activate relevant prior knowledge, to fill in gaps in prior knowledge, and to make predictions about the story, the teacher may ask prereading questions such as these:

- What do you think the title means? How do you know that?
- Do you have any questions about anything in the title?
- What do you notice about the illustrations on the front and back covers?
- What clues do you find in the title or in the illustrations that will help you predict what the story is about?
- Why do you think the artist chose that picture for the back cover? Why do you think that?

After modeling prereading questions prior to reading aloud several new books, the teacher gradually withdraws this support and allows the children to assume responsibility for using the title and covers to activate prior knowledge, identify unfamiliar ideas, and make predictions about the story to initiate the meaning-making process. At this point, the teacher may simply hold up the book to show the front and back covers and to read the title as a cue for the children to respond on their own. Next, the teacher may introduce other parts of the peritext with specific questions until the children have internalized the cover-to-cover strategy and will be able to use it when they read independently.

Another type of scaffolding involves thinking aloud. As the teacher reads a story to the students, he or she thinks aloud as the story unfolds to demonstrate strategies he or she, as a proficient reader, uses to generate meaning. For example, the teacher shares his or her inner thoughts in reaching a segment of the text that is confusing and decides to backtrack in order to find a detail that might provide clarification. By externalizing these thinking strategies, by thinking aloud, the teacher allows the students to observe a critical part of the reading process that is usually hidden from them. The teacher gradually withdraws support

and invites the students to engage in "think-alouds" themselves as they construct and reconstruct evolving meanings from the unfolding text, in a collaborative interpretive dialogue.

The interpretive dialogue, or "instructional conversation," serves as a context for scaffolding. The teacher helps the students develop a repertoire of reading-thinking strategies through such scaffolding techniques as modeling, thinking aloud, explaining, prompting, rereading key segments of text, asking students to provide textual support for position or interpretative statements, coaching in how to use a strategy to read a new text, constructing visual representations, or sharing information from nonfiction resources to build the background knowledge necessary to comprehend a literary text. As the students gradually internalize the reading-thinking strategies, they assume responsibility for using them to generate meaning in a collaborative dialogue or during independent reading. As students become increasingly active as participants in the social construction of meaning, the teacher gradually becomes a partner or co-participant in the meaning-making process.

Teachers also provide scaffolding by *selecting* texts to read aloud in this social context or to recommend for independent reading. They select texts that foster reader engagement and lively discussion; stimulate critical dialogue about complex social issues of race, class, and gender; facilitate discovery of intertextual links and literature-life connections; and provide opportunities for children to gain insights about the human experience and to learn about literature and the craft of authors and artists. Scaffolding can also be supplied by a learning environment in which peers work collaboratively to solve problems or complete projects. Students provide scaffolding for classmates as they help one another understand a new concept or otherwise serve as resources for one another as they confront challenging tasks together.

In Lessons in Comprehension: Explicit Instruction in the Reading Workshop (2004), Frank Serafini features the reading workshop as context for scaffolded instruction. He offers a series of minilessons that teachers can use to help their students learn the strategies they need to understand literature and informational texts. In discussing the nature of "a quality comprehension lesson," Serafini writes: "It is sharing our reading lives, making our literate abilities visible, and maintaining the quality of the learning experience as students assume responsibility for their reading that is the basis for the reading comprehension lessons we provide in our classrooms" (p. 6).

### **Reading Engagement**

Engagement during reading is a state of deep involvement and sustained personal commitment to creating understanding while one reads (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). The reader is totally absorbed in the task and is intrinsically motivated to enter into the transaction with the text (Rosenblatt, 1978). Readers who are cognitively engaged use metacognitive and self-regulatory strategies. "That is, students are seen as being cognitively engaged when they are able to regulate their attention and effort, relate new information to existing knowledge, and monitor their comprehension" (Almasi, McKeown, & Beck, 1996, p. 107). John T. Guthrie and his colleagues (Guthrie, Alverson, & Poundstone, 1999) studied students' motivations for reading and noted: "Behind the book-circulation figures in any school is a story of reading engagement. Engaged students are possessed by the desire to find books, dwell in them, and share them with friends" (p. 8).

Janice Almasi and her colleagues (1996) conducted a yearlong study of the nature of engagement in the literature discussions in two fourth-grade classrooms. Their data analysis revealed that students and teachers became cognitively engaged as various tools were used to construct meaningful interpretations of the text: relating the content of the text to personal experiences, movies, or other books; using the text to support ideas or verify or reject earlier predictions; and piecing information together about aspects of the text such as character motives, character actions, or text events (p. 113). They also found that "engagement occurred when teachers provided an environment in which students felt free to ponder or question the text's meaning, content, character motives, text events, or author's craft" (p. 113). They discovered that students' questions played an important role in creating engagement and lively discussion and that students became highly engaged and stimulated when they responded to and challenged one another's interpretations in the course of discussion, or challenged the author's style, or questioned the meaning of the text. Stimulating texts also played an important role in promoting active engagement.

In a discussion of children's literary responses during read-aloud experiences, Sipe (2002) identified a type of expressive engagement in which children "talk back" to the story or characters (p. 477). According to Sipe, "talking back to the story and addressing characters directly begins to blur the distinction between the story world and the children's world. For a moment the two worlds become superimposed—one transparent over the other" (p. 477). Sipe adds that such responses are evi-

dence of children's deep engagement in the story world and that these responses are "deeply pleasurable for children" (p. 479, italics in original).

### **Independent Readers and Writers**

The ultimate goal of the comprehension strategy instruction featured in this book is to provide the support students need to become engaged, thoughtful, and independent readers and writers. A review of research focusing on strategy instruction since 1984 (following Palincsar and Brown, 1984) revealed that "across these studies, strategy instruction increased students' willingness to read difficult material, discover meaning in text, and react to and elaborate on text meaning" (Block, Gambrell, & Pressley, 2002, p. 12). In most of these studies, teachers modeled, demonstrated, or explained reading-thinking strategies used by proficient readers and provided opportunities for students to practice and internalize these strategies in a social context in which students collaborated to construct meaning in response to authentic literature. Once the students had internalized these strategies, they could use them to engage in independent reading transactions.

Reading and writing are complementary processes of meaning making and communication. Studies of the relationship between reading and writing demonstrate that readers construct meaning by using their prior knowledge in conjunction with authors' cues, and writers construct meaning by using their prior knowledge in conjunction with their assumptions about the prior knowledge their readers bring to the text. Reading and writing are social activities. "Readers think about authors, and writers think about readers" (Shanahan, 1990, p. 11). Readers can be influenced and informed by an author; writers can influence and inform readers. "Such notions of authorship and audience can only be developed fully when students have available to them the perspectives of both reading and writing . . . . The fusion of reading and writing in the classroom offers children the possibility of participating in both sides of the communication process and, consequently, provides them with a more elaborate grasp of the true meaning of literacy" (p. 4). Once students grasp the close relationship between reading and writing, they will be able to draw from their growing repertoire of reading-thinking strategies to generate meaning as writers.

In classrooms where reading and writing are taught and practiced together in the context of a literature-rich environment, children are given opportunities to record their experiences as aesthetic readers and their responses and interpretations in personal response journals, and

to draw from their literary transactions to write their own narratives and poetry and essays. As they extend their reading experiences into writing, children become actively involved as learners and thinkers. Literature has the potential for bringing out what is in the minds and hearts of readers and writers; writing enables them to give voice to thoughts, feelings, opinions, and memories triggered by their reading experiences and to reflect on interpretations, meanings, and questions generated in response to literary texts.

Sandra Stotsky (1983) reviewed the findings from correlational and experimental studies of reading-writing relationships and concluded that "reading experience seems to be a consistent correlate of, or influence on, writing ability. Thus, it is possible that reading experience may be as critical a factor in developing writing ability as writing instruction itself" (p. 637). In an article entitled, "Reading Like a Writer," Frank Smith explains: "To learn to write we must read like a writer . . . . To read like a writer we engage with the author in what the author is writing. We anticipate what the author will say" (1984, pp. 52–53). Smith notes that reading like a writer is the only way to acquire "the intricate complexity of a writer's knowledge" (p. 51). That is, the knowledge that writers require resides in texts, so reading like a writer helps students build a store of writer's knowledge. Children also need to write like readers. According to Smith (1982), the writer becomes a reader during the rewriting phase of the composing process. "Rewriting is the writer's own response to what has been written" (p. 127). Young writers need to become critical readers of their own writing from the viewpoint of their potential audiences. This view of the reading-writing relationship blurs the boundaries between these two aspects of literacy.

Further evidence of the validity of teaching reading and writing together can be found in story grammar research discussed earlier. Nancy Stein (1978), for example, used story grammar in her investigations of children's understanding of stories. By listening to and reading a variety of narratives, children develop a story schema, an implicit knowledge of story grammar or story structure. Stein demonstrated that children use their story schemata both to comprehend and to compose narratives.

Writing can be used as a prereading activity. In a review of writing-to-reading research, Bena Hefflin and Douglas Hartman (2002) describe a variety of practices in which writing is used prior to reading. For example, the *K-W-L model* (Ogle, 1986) was designed as a "framework to elicit students' prior knowledge and engage interest before, during, and after reading expository text" (Hefflin and Hartman, 2002,

p. 205). This model includes a three-step procedure in which the students engage in brainstorming about the topic to identify what they *know;* formulate questions to identify what they *want* to know; and record what they *learned* in response to these questions.

Another procedure, *semantic mapping*, has been used to "organize brainstormed ideas graphically, indicating relationships among ideas and key concepts by labeling lines, boxes, circles, and other geometric shapes with words that are strategically positioned to represent their semantic syntax" (Hefflin and Hartman, 2002, p. 205). In *Webbing with Literature: Creating Story Maps with Children's Books* (1996), Karen Bromley focuses on the use of semantic webbing or mapping as a way of sharing literature with children and fostering greater understanding and appreciation of literature.

The *language experience approach* has been used by teachers of young children since it was introduced by Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1958, 1963), Russell Stauffer (1970), and Roach Van Allen (1976). Children draw from their own personal experiences and interests to create stories that they dictate to the teacher. The children use these dictated stories as reading material that is predictable and readable because it uses their natural language and their own experiences. These dictated experience-stories may also be prompted by an object, event, or topic introduced by the teacher to serve as a stimulus for story development.

Dialogue journals are used as vehicles to establish ongoing written conversations between teachers and students (Staton, 1980). Children are invited to write about their experiences, feelings, thoughts, and questions. In responding to each entry the teacher focuses on the writer's message, not the mechanical aspects of the writing. Teachers encourage more written expression by answering children's questions; by introducing questions and comments that support and extend children's topics; by introducing new or related topics; by expressing appreciation, empathy, understanding, admiration, and other appropriate human responses; and by sharing their own personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences. By responding to the children, teachers show their acceptance of children's ideas and at the same time model accepted conventions of written language in a meaningful context. The dialogue journal provides a context in which reading and writing can be taught as complementary processes of meaning making. The dialogue journal also provides teachers with valuable information about their students as unique individuals and as learners, and can also be used as a vehicle for written literature conversations between the teacher and individual students and among students themselves. The children are invited to

write about their reading experiences and to share their responses, insights, and interpretations. The teacher or peer-partner responds to each new entry and shares his or her own understandings and interpretations. Oral discussions during the group read-aloud sessions set the stage for written conversations about literature. The literary dialogue journal enables students to respond to authentic literary experiences and to engage in authentic writing intended for a real audience. For children who are reluctant to contribute to the oral literary discussions, these private written conversations often pave the way for more active participation in the public arena. The teacher's supportive responses serve to encourage these students to take the leap and to share their ideas and opinions in the social context of a whole class dialogue. This writing-to-reading exchange can even occur through e-mail among students in the same school or among students who live in other parts of the United States or outside.

The writing workshop (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1986, 1994; Graves, 1983, 2003; Ray, 1999, 2002; Ray & Cleaveland, 2004; Ray & Laminack, 2001) is a predictable time set aside in the school day for students to become actively involved in writing their own texts so they can see themselves as authors. The teacher provides minilessons to focus on procedures or rules for working together in the workshop; literary components such as setting, characters, problem or plot, and theme; and transcription skills such as punctuation and spelling. Children are encouraged to read and reread what they write during the composing process so they can monitor their meaning making. They are invited to talk about their writing with a partner or in a small group during the composing process. When children are allowed to think aloud during writing, they help one another clarify meanings by asking questions, making suggestions, or providing relevant information (Cazden, 1981). While the children are working on their pieces, the teacher holds conferences with individual children. The children regularly share their work-in-progress with classmates as part of share sessions (Calkins, 1994, p. 190). In this context, they gradually develop a sense of audience. The more they think about a potential reader, the more attention they pay to what the reader needs to know or what might be interesting or humorous for the reader. Publication celebrations are held when students are ready to publish and share their finished work (p. 190).

### **Looking Ahead**

In this book I focus on teaching reading-thinking strategies in the context of authentic literature experiences in which elementary school students respond to literary texts in peer discussions and journals. In subsequent chapters I describe a literary/literacy program in which strategy instruction is woven into literature study experiences. Each chapter includes excerpts from some of the lively discussions that evolved in the course of the cumulative read-aloud/think-aloud group sessions that formed the core of the literature units described in this book. These excerpts illustrate students' personal responses to literary texts and the way they practiced and internalized reading-thinking strategies as they engaged in literary study and collaborated to construct meaning in response to shared literary texts, to explore multiple perspectives, and to elaborate on these meanings through critical thinking and literary interpretation.

The literature units described in this book highlight elements of comprehension instruction embedded in a literary/literacy program designed to help elementary school students discover the joy of literary learning as they engage in the process of becoming thoughtful readers and writers. Teachers who read this book are invited to create their own literature units to fit their unique teaching styles and curricular goals and to meet the diverse needs and interests of their students. They are encouraged to use literature units as a framework for teaching and practicing reading-thinking strategies. "Comprehension instruction is a creative process, and no two teachers will approach it exactly the same way . . . . The creative instruction students receive in learning how to comprehend during elementary school will accrue over time in heightened reasoning abilities as they make their way through the grades to high school and beyond" (Barton & Sawyer, 2003/2004, p. 346).



How can we—as elementary school teachers—move beyond basal readers to strategies that encourage our students to truly understand what they're reading and connect the work they're doing in the classroom with the world around them?

For Joy F. Moss, the answer has been to build a literature program in which both struggling and highly able readers learn a series of "reading-thinking strategies" as they study literature together. This program is made up of literature units designed to help students grow as independent readers and writers and develop long-term connections with literature that allow them to more fully understand texts, themselves, and others. These practical units are structured around cumulative read-aloud/think-aloud group sessions in which students collaborate to construct meaning and explore intertextual links between increasingly complex and diverse texts.

In addition to the rich annotated lists of children's and young adult literature found in this book, Moss offers teachers a framework for developing units in which comprehension instruction is embedded in the study of text sets that are geared to the particular interests and needs of their students. This helps teachers bring the literary/literacy learning experiences into their own classrooms.

National Council of Teachers of English

1111 W. Kenyon Road Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096 800-369-6283 or 217-328-3870 www.ncte.org

