READING 3: OAKHILL DRIVE ROUND TERM 1, 2022

This reading comprises two short extracts:

1. **CRITICAL THINKING:** Extract from chapter 3 in *Strategies that Work: Teaching Comprehension for Understanding, Engagement and Building Knowledge Grades K-8,* Stephanie Harvey & Anne Goudvis, Revised 2017 This extract discusses the importance of critical thinking along with the culture necessary to engender it.
2. **PLANNING FOR THINK ALOUDS.** Extract from Chapter 1in *Think Big with Think Alouds: A Three-Step Process That Develops Strategic Readers.* This extract deals with the theory behind think alouds and the importance of planning and practice to ensure they are effective.

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Teachers can help kids understand anything they read more completely by posing questions that encourage kids to work out the meaning. Some question prompts adapted from Peter Johnston's books *Choice Words* (2004) and *Opening Minds* (2011) follow. Keep in mind that these are not questions with a designed answer, but rather questions to encourage discussion and conversation.

Discussion Prompts to Support Understanding of Complex Text

- What in the text makes you say that?
- How do you know?
- What makes you think that?
- How did you come up with that?
- Where is the evidence for that?
- Where in the text did you get that idea?
- Who has another idea?
- What is the evidence for that idea?
- Who might disagree?
- How might you explain the different interpretations?
- How might you persuade someone to change his or her mind?
- What is the author trying to prove?
- What kind of proof does the author use?
- What is the author assuming the reader will agree with?
- Is there something the author leaves out that would strengthen the argument?
- Is there something the author included that hurts the argument?
- Does the author adequately defend the argument?

Critical Thinking

The trend toward teaching critical thinking is perhaps the most important trend in reading practice and theory since our previous edition. According to critical thinking specialist G. Randy Kasten, "The ability to think critically is one skill separating innovators from followers. Critical thinking reduces the power of advertisers, the unscrupulous and the pretentious, and can neutralize the sway of an unsupported argument" (2015). In this era of "alternative facts" and "fake news" this is the ultimate skill for the survival of our democracy. Kasten goes on to say that most students enjoy thinking critically "because they see immediately that it gives them more control." And Kasten points out that "every educator is in a position to teach students how to gather information, evaluate it, screen out distractions and think for themselves . . . When students are educated about information-gathering and critical thinking, they have the tools necessary to see through spin and make decisions based on fact, rather than myth or propaganda" (2015).

We couldn't say it any better. Our take on critical reading and thinking is pretty straightforward: it's not a program to be trotted out at 2:00 p.m. when

it's "thinking skills time." For starters, kids need to be strategic and agentive, to read and think with a critical eye and a skeptical stance every time they open a book, listen to a podcast, or fire up their tablet. But what does this mean and how can we ensure kids are prepared? In a culture of nonstop information, images, and TMI on a daily basis, preparation and vigilance in the thinking department make a lot of sense.

If kids are to become thoughtful, versatile, independent readers and thinkers who can read between the lines, they need a classroom community that values and expects kids to interact, think, and question all day, every day. The critical thinker in chief, of course, is the teacher who works to enculturate an environment where critical thinking flourishes.

In these classrooms, teachers do the following:

- ***Foster a strategic spirit.*** Tishman, Perkins, and Jay suggest that "the truly versatile thinker is one who is able to construct, invent or modify a thinking strategy to meet the unique demands of the situation" (1994). This kind of original and flexible thinking energizes learning, so students are inclined to troubleshoot, solve problems, and take action through creative thinking.
- ***Cultivate creative confidence.*** David and Tom Kelley offer another take on immersing kids in a culture of thinking. They extoll the virtues of creative confidence. "Creative confidence is the natural human ability to come up with breakthrough ideas and the courage to act on them . . . When you have creative confidence, you can change things. You can do what you set out to do" (2013). As Kasten says, too often people do not "recognize the significance of their own perceptions" (2015). We need to work hard in our classrooms to change this. Confidence has the potential to move mountains.
- ***Develop kids' sense of agency.*** Agency represents the idea that "the environment is responsive to our actions" (Johnston 2004). Kids with a sense of agency believe that they are the kind of kid who can figure things out, find and solve problems, and make things happen. But kids are unlikely to develop a sense of agency if they lack strategies. When kids are reading independently and come to an idea, word, or issue they do not understand, they can move forward only if they have a repertoire of strategies to fall back on. According to Dyson, "A child must have some version of 'Yes, I imagine I can do this.' And a teacher must also view the present child as competent and on that basis imagine new possibilities" (1999, quoted in Johnston 2004).

To create an environment that builds a strategic spirit, a sense of creative confidence, and agency in every student, teachers must

- let kids know that their thinking matters and ensure that they can speak up without fear of being criticized;
- make sure kids feel comfortable expressing their opinions and taking a stand;
- give kids time to explore on their own and run with their passions;
- ensure that kids have daily opportunities to read, listen to, and view a variety of sources with many different perspectives;
- encourage kids to express their curiosity and inquisitiveness;
- value kids' ideas and honor their open-mindedness;
- refrain from stigmatizing mistakes and encourage kids to experiment;

- provide multiple opportunities for kids to try out new ideas and take risks;
- support kids in thoughtfully and respectfully challenging each other's ideas; and, above all,
- model and create these conditions in their classrooms—showing kids what this kind of learning environment looks like and how to live it every day.

Critical thinking is all about reading between the lines, being able to interpret underlying messages that may not be obvious on the surface, and discerning what the communicator is actually trying to say. Unfortunately, we live in a world where many people—politicians, marketers, celebrities, bloggers—put forth whatever they choose whether it's truthful or not, often intending to mislead people. If readers swallow everything they read or hear whole, we've got a problem. Critical thinking, therefore, becomes an increasingly important 21st century skill.

We must teach kids to sort and sift accurate information from hyperbole, ferret out fact from fiction, distinguish an off-the-top-of-the-head opinion from an informed opinion, and develop the habits of mind to trust their own interpretations and decisions. In Parts II and III of this book, we have tried to include lessons and practices that spark critical thinking.

Critical thinkers are encouraged to do the following:

- Reread, rethink, and reflect
- Adopt a skeptical stance
- Look beneath and beyond the information given to gain insight
- Ask authentic questions about information, ideas, evidence, expertise, and so forth
- Develop empathy and imagine the world from multiple perspectives
- Give credence to varied opinions, interpretations, and ideas
- Question varied opinions, interpretations, and ideas based on evidence to the contrary
- Analyze and synthesize to make connections across disciplines
- Create their own take on information and issues
- Imagine possibilities and formulate original interpretations, including how things could be different
- Integrate thinking to see all aspects and facets of a problem
- Go beyond problem solving: discover and surface potential problems before they occur
- Develop world awareness: be a global citizen, aware of our impact on the environment and society both close to home and beyond

Sounds like a tall order, but we don't have a choice! Eleanor Roosevelt punctuates this point: "Every effort must be made in childhood to teach the young to use their own minds. For one thing is certain: If they don't make up their own minds, someone will do it for them" (quoted in Beane 2005).

2. PLANNING FOR THINK ALOUDS.

There are many steps between knowing what an effective teaching strategy is, and knowing how to do it. The more I prepared and tried out think alouds, the more confident I became in my knowledge that this was something I both *should* do and *could* do.

What strikes me most from the comment above is this teacher's conviction about the instructional value of think alouds, as well as her self-efficacy about how to approach them. Just as our K–5 students need to increase their self-efficacy about their reading abilities, teachers need to build their procedural, adaptive, and reflective knowledge on applying think alouds with confidence (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005).

Why Think Alouds Are Relevant Today

The high academic standards in classrooms today hold students accountable to sophisticated levels of reading comprehension; students are asked to compare and contrast, to evaluate and analyze, to explain their thinking with text evidence, and to judge and interpret. It is no longer enough for a student to recall basic facts and events while answering the lightweight questions that teachers pose (Williams, 2010). Gone are the days when a crafty student could substitute his or her background knowledge for subtle nuances in text-to-self connections; now we demand concrete text evidence. Instead, we expect a kindergartner to compare and contrast the adventure of the owl in Arnold Lobel's *Owl at Home* (1975) to that of the owl in the Edward Lear poem "The Owl and the Pussy-Cat" (Lear, 1871) (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010, RL.K.9). While reading *Charlotte's Web* (White, 1952),

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third graders must differentiate their point of view about Wilbur the Pig from that of Fern Arable, as well as from that of the narrator (CCSS Initiative, 2010, RL.3.6). We demand that fourth graders make inferences between the protagonist's actions and a cholera outbreak in *The Secret Garden* (Burnett, 1911). Students don't naturally learn these skills on their own; they build these skills through the carefully planned think alouds delivered by proficient teachers.

Think alouds also tie into today's instructional push for close reading. Close reading is the instructional practice of having students critically examine a text, especially through multiple readings. To engage in close reading—or critical reading—students must be ready to interrogate a text and dig deep into the author's purpose in writing it. As explained by Fisher and Frey (2012), close reading is usually teacher centered, with the teacher modeling through a shared reading. Inherent in teacher modeling are think alouds, where the teacher can showcase the text-dependent questions and the repeated readings of short passages of complex text.

The Educational Theories Behind Think Alouds

Underpinning the notion of teaching students to think aloud is Pearson and Gallagher's (1983a) work on the *gradual release of responsibility.* Originally developed for reading instruction, this instructional framework shifts the cognitive load from the teacher to the student. The goal of this framework is for students to take on the responsibility for the focal task so that students work independently. This model consists of several purposeful steps, moving from the teacher as model, to joint responsibility of the teacher and learner, to independent practice and application by the learner:

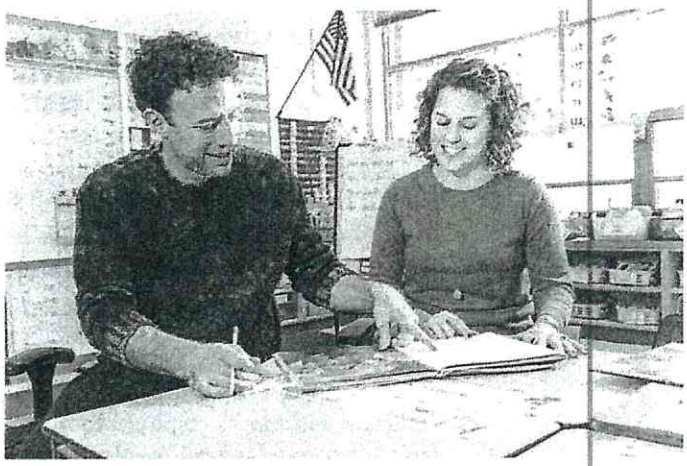
1. **Teacher-provided explicit description of the strategy.** Here the teacher defines the strategy in student-friendly language. The teacher explains the benefits of the strategy, as well as how and when to use it.
2. **Teacher modeling.** The teacher models, explains, thinks aloud, and shows students how to do a particular skill. Students observe as the teacher holds the primary responsibility.
3. **Guided instruction.** Here, teachers prompt, question, facilitate, or lead students through tasks that increase understanding of a particular text. The student and teacher work together to apply the metacognitive strategy.
4. **Collaboration.** In a group setting, students work collaboratively to practice the strategy. Here the teacher observes, coaches, provides feedback, encourages, and clarifies.
5. **Independent practice.** Students are now ready to try the strategy independently. Here the teacher assists, evaluates, and responds.

The overall notion of the gradual release of responsibility is to progress in a cyclical and fluid fashion from teachers holding the primarily instructional role to students holding the primary responsibility for their learning. As students hold more responsibility, they can competently and independently apply a new learning strategy. This process is explained in further detail in Chapter 7.

Practice Makes Perfect: The Three-Step Process to Planning Think Alouds

Jeffrey Wilhelm literally wrote the book on thinking aloud, first in 2001 and later with a 2013 revision. In his text, Wilhelm cites research that identifies the six recursive steps to explicit instruction:

1. The teacher explains what is meant by the focal reading comprehension strategy.
2. The teacher explains the rationale for the reading comprehension strategy.
3. The teacher explains when to use the strategy in authentic reading experiences.
4. The teacher models how to perform the strategy.
5. The teacher guides learner practice.
6. Students independently use the strategy.



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Here, second-grade teacher Doug Distefano and I plan a think aloud. If you are getting started with think alouds, it's helpful to work with a colleague.

As I work in classrooms and with teachers, I have witnessed far too much of Steps 1 and 2. Teachers are quick to explain what an inference is and why it helps us become purposeful readers. They provide a definition of author's purpose, and convince their students of its importance in reading. Yet we fall short on Step 4; there is not nearly enough modeling. The overarching objective of my book is to expand on Step 4—or the "teacher does/student watches" step (Wilhelm, 2013). I delineate this process into three easy steps so that teachers can readily think aloud, from start to finish. This three-step process, explored in detail with multiple examples, is unique to this text.

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The first step in thinking aloud is a close examination of the text. We peruse the text searching for the comprehension opportunities in its pictures, words, and layout. We begin planning our think alouds with a stack of sticky notes in hand. The purpose of this first reading is to mark the pages or paragraphs where we identified "juicy stopping points." A juicy stopping point offers a range of possibilities, either comprehension opportunities or stumbling blocks. Chapter 3 provides guidelines to help you recognize these stopping points. In my first reading, I may identify upwards of fifteen juicy stopping spots in a standard children's picture book!

Read Twice: Determining Where and When to Think Aloud

In our second reading, we examine each stopping point and critically reflect on the need for that particular point. The goal here is to truly focus on what stopping points are appropriate and related to the overarching objective of the think aloud. Chapter 4 provides reflective questions to determine the usefulness of each juicy stopping point. The aim is to narrow down our original stopping points to a more manageable number. These reflective questions help to identify the stopping points that are critical versus those that can be eliminated. Because the overarching goal of the think aloud is to model metacognitive processes, we do not want to overwhelm our students with stopping unnecessarily and detract from the comprehension process. The process of condensing and eliminating stopping points also must be purposeful. We must keep several factors in mind as we make our decisions, including our overall purpose for selecting this particular text, our learning objectives in this lesson, and which comprehension strategies are familiar or unfamiliar to our students prior to reading this text. After our second reading, we typically end up with about five to seven stopping points; these are the bare bones of the think aloud that we will model in front of our students.

Read Three Times: Writing the Scripts on Sticky Notes

The goal of our third reading is to identify the script of exactly what we will say in front of students. We literally write out, in first-person narrative, what we will say in response to a text, so as to give students the chance to eavesdrop on our reading processes. Fisher, Frey, and Hattie (2017) write that think alouds should use "I" statements, explaining that the first-person pronoun "activates the ability—some call it an instinct—of humans to learn by imitation" (p. 58). Chapter 5 provides a wide variety of sentence starters or prompts to jump-start the script writing.

A Final Note About the Three-Step Process

I've adapted the three-step process from Lapp and colleagues' (2008) work with struggling adolescent readers. In their observations of a high school science teacher's interactive read aloud, they conclude that think alouds "were neither unplanned nor inconsequential. Instead they were deliberately planned to provide commentary and conversational support for comprehension, word study, and engagement by noting where students might need explanation, elaboration, or connection" (p. 377). I have modified their three-column chart as the basis for the stopping points in my approach. The following figure provides a glimpse of "The Think Aloud Chart" (see also Appendix E). Chapters 3, 4, and 5 walk you through exactly how to use it. In the first column, we write the text *exactly as it appears.* The last sentence in each row corresponds to the sentence indicating a stopping point. In the second column, we write a first-person narrative of exactly what we say to students. In the third column, we identify which comprehension strategy (or strategies!) our think aloud evokes.

The Think Aloud Chart

What the Text Says	What I Say	The Comprehension Strategy I Model

Though this process may be time-consuming initially, the explicit nature of writing think alouds increases our confidence in implementing these lessons. I equate this process of writing the script of a think aloud to teaching a young child to ride a bike with training wheels. Just as training wheels provide stability and confidence in learning a new skill, so does the word-by-word script of a think aloud. Our end goal is to be able to think aloud with comfort, ease, and skill, just as a young child hopes to ride a bike independently.