

Let's Work Together Teaching Guide

Dear Teacher,

When I think about writing about reading, my mind drifts back to essays teachers in middle and high school assigned. The topic was the same for every student in the class, and we were expected to complete a critical analysis of a book or short text in a few days! That's not the kind of writing about reading I'm discussing with you in this guide. What I'm inviting you to consider is based on the research of Steve Graham and Karen Harris:

For instance, when elementary grade students are directed to write about material they are reading (versus students who mainly read and reread or study this material), their comprehension of the text jumps 24 percentile points, whereas writing about content material presented (by the teacher) in class results in a 9 percentile-point jump on measures of learning. (Steve Graham, *The Reading Teacher*, January/February 2016, p. 381)

Given the research, it's clear that we need to make writing about reading an integral part of our curriculum. Support students by making their notebooks and your notebook the centerpieces for helping them respond to reading!

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Writing About Reading

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MEANINGFUL TALK COMES FIRST

Think about the last time you read a book you couldn't put down. Most likely, you found someone that shared your enthusiasm and together, you had a conversation about the book. Talking about books breathes life into the story and leads readers to places and ideas they had not thought about before the discussion. Your students will benefit from multiple opportunities to talk about your read alouds and their instructional and independent reading books. What's more, they

don't have to be reading the same book to have a meaningful discussion. Here are some open-ended ways for students to discuss different books:

Use Theme (for example, obstacles)

- What kinds of obstacles did the person face?
Were the obstacles people? Were they events?
- How did these obstacles affect his/her decisions?
- Which obstacles did he/she overcome? Why?
- Which obstacles continued to be part of his/her life?

Use Literary Elements for Fiction and Narrative Biographies

- Protagonist
- Antagonists
- Other characters
- Exposition
- Rising action
- Conflicts
- Problems
- Climax and return to normalcy
- Themes

Use Types of Conflicts

- Person vs. Self
- Person vs. Society
- Person vs. Others
- Person vs. Fate
- Person vs. Nature

Use Strategies

- Making inferences
- Identifying personality traits
- Determining important ideas
- Compare/contrast
- Problem/solutions
- Drawing conclusions

To help students understand the kinds of writing about reading you'd like them to complete, use your read aloud and show them your expectations by modeling in your teacher's notebook.

THE WHY BEHIND TEACHERS' NOTEBOOKS

A teacher's notebook is a marble-covered notebook, similar to the readers' notebooks for students. You can use the notebook to model how you complete informal responses to reading and how you plan and write a summary for fiction and narrative biography. It's most effective when you "cold write" in front of students and think aloud to make your planning and writing processes visible.

Cold write using your read aloud texts, as these are texts all students have heard. Here are the benefits of modeling with a teacher's notebook:

- Students observe your thinking and on-the-spot writing.
- Students can develop a mental model of a process, and having a mental model means they can compose a similar response.
- Your entries become resources that you can show students again and again.
- Your expectations become clear to everyone.
- You have a dated record of what you've modeled and students have practiced.

THE WHY BEHIND READERS' NOTEBOOKS FOR STUDENTS

Readers' notebooks for students become a record of their hunches, questions, and responses to your read alouds, and to texts they have read and discussed. I prefer the marble-covered composition notebooks because if students tear out pages, the notebook unravels. I want students to save every snippet of writing so they can periodically review sections of their notebooks, assess their progress, and set a goal.

Here are a few self-evaluations from different grades:

Grade 3: My pictures have more details and help me write.

Goal: write more details.

Grade 5: I started out writing facts. Now I can do compare/contrast.

Goal: make inferences.

Grade 8: I had good ideas—no text evidence.

Goal: skim and reread to find evidence.

I call this "looking back to move forward." When students are able to do this, they can use their notebooks and your models to set achievable goals and move forward.

KINDS OF WRITING ABOUT READING

Here are some types of informal writing students can complete in their notebooks. Remember, talk should always precede writing.

- **Make lists** of characters' personality traits, decisions that changed the course of their lives, emotions the text raised, people who influenced the protagonist, antagonistic forces, etc.
- **Write two to four words** that come to your mind halfway through a book and at the end. Choose one word and connect it to a character, setting, theme, or antagonist.
- **Write two to four emotions** you felt while reading. Choose one and explain what in the book made you feel this way.
- **Choose a phrase or sentence** that spoke to you, write it and its page number in your notebook, and explain why it meant so much to you.
- **Draw pictures** to illustrate your comprehension of three to four literary elements.

You can also show students how to **write a summary** by modeling the entire process in your teacher's notebook, using your anchor text. Here are some guidelines:

- Students can plan a summary using *Somebody Wanted But So*: *Somebody* is the protagonist, then what he/she *wanted*. *But is* the antagonist that got in the way, and *so* is what happened (without telling the end of the book). Then, these notes can be turned into sentences.
- The most important teaching recommendation I have is to make sure students work on their writing plan in class and you initial a plan as complete when it has enough details.
- Once the plan is detailed, the writing of a draft is easy.

TEACHER'S NOTES:
