

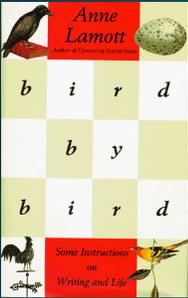
Deep Seas in Which to Swim: Helping Students Discover Meaning in Texts



We read books to find out who we are. What other people, real or imaginary, do and think and feel... is an essential guide to our understanding of what we ourselves are and may become.

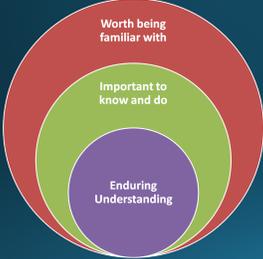
— Ursula K. Le Guin —

AZ QUOTES

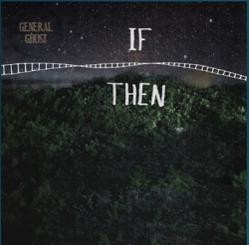


"For some of us, books are as important as almost anything else on earth. What a miracle it is that out of these small, flat, rigid squares of paper unfolds world after world after world, worlds that sing to you, comfort and quiet or excite you. Books help us understand who we are and how we are to behave. They show us what community and friendship mean; they show us how to live and die . . . My gratitude for good writing is unbounded; I'm grateful for it the way I'm grateful for the ocean. Aren't you? I ask."

— Anne Lamott from *Bird by Bird*



A big meaningful idea that is central to a discipline, has lasting value beyond the classroom, and can be used as a frame for and goal of instruction.

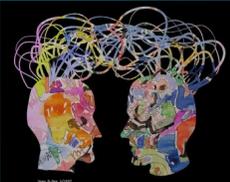


IF we believe that we ultimately read to better understand ourselves, other people and the world around us, THEN how do we teach students to do that?



From Teaching Strategies & Skills . . .

. . . to Making Meaning



The Essence of Thinking

What Did You Notice?	What Do You Make of What You Noticed?
<p>This could be a line or detail that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stood out for you • Raised a question • Confused you • Seemed surprising or possibly significant (even if you don't know why) • Seemed to be part of a pattern • Seemed connected to another part of the text 	<p>This could be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Question • A Wondering • An Observation • An Inference • A Hunch • An Interpretation • An Idea or Theory

What We Know	What We Wonder
What students are able to learn or figure out (i.e., infer) from a text	What students are uncertain or wondering about the text

- spark students' curiosity about what the writer hasn't stated explicitly or revealed yet;
- make students become more aware of when they're confused (which is critical for monitoring comprehension);
- position students to read closely and attentively with a minimum of teacher prompting;
- help students hold onto what they're figuring out and learning;
- see how meaning and thinking grow and evolve across a text;
- develop a vision of the complex and messy work of reading that's transferable to other texts; and
- help us see when and how students' comprehension breaks down, as well as any misconceptions they may have about the work of writers or readers.

From *Dynamic Teaching for Deeper Reading* by Vicki Vinton, 2017, Heinemann.



What We Know	What We Wonder
<p>The old woman named everything: her chair → Fred, her car → Betsy, her best → Boppy, her horse → Franklin.</p> <p>She never sends any letters, only bills. She's outlived her friends. She doesn't want to be a lonely old woman. There's a picture of her with a dog on the cover.</p> <p>A puppy shows up at her gate (1). She feeds the puppy. This tells it to go away!</p>	<p>Why does she name things? What's her name? Did she give her things the names of her friends? Is she pretending the things are her friends because she doesn't have any? Why doesn't she make friends? What does outlive mean? — that her friends have died? — that she lives in the country where no one else could take her out? Were all her friends old too? How does she make a list? Will she find a dog to be a friend? Is the puppy a stray? Does it have an owner? What does she see that the puppy could be her friend?</p>

Reframing Students Wonderings to Wondering about Key Questions or Patterns

What We're Wondering About	What We Know from the Patterns We Noticed	What We Think Might Be the Reason Why
A line of inquiry based on a pattern students have noticed or a question they've raised	The patterns students have noticed or lines in the text that are connected to a particular pattern	What the students think might be the answer to their line of inquiry based on what they've noticed

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WHAT WE WONDER (OUR BIG QUESTION)	PATTERNS WE'VE NOTICED	WHAT WE THINK (OUR MAYBE STATEMENTS)
Why doesn't the old woman see that the puppy could be a friend?	She always hopes for letters, but all she gets are bills. She always names things, but she doesn't name the puppy. She's always talking to her cat, house, bed, and chair like they're people. She always drives to the post office. She's always alone. She always thinks about outliving. The puppy always comes to her gate.	MAYBE she's afraid the dog will die because it's a living thing. (She only names things that aren't alive.) MAYBE she tells the dog to go away because she doesn't have enough room. (She tells the puppy that Roxanne wasn't big enough for both her and a puppy.) MAYBE she doesn't want to be friends with the puppy because the puppy might not last. (Like she didn't name the gate with the rusted hinges because she thought it "wasn't long for this world.") MAYBE she's afraid it's owned by someone else who will come after it, and she doesn't want to make a friend she'll lose. (Like she lost her old friends.)
Are Franklin, Betsy, Fred, and Roxanne real friends or fake friends?	The old woman always feeds it and then tells it to go away. The old woman feels sad.	MAYBE it's because Franklin, Betsy, Fred, and Roxanne don't like dogs. (She tells the puppy that Fred and Franklin don't let puppies sit on them.) MAYBE the dog really is hers and she just doesn't remember. (She's old and talks to her furniture and car.)

FIGURE 7.3 Third-Grade Chart to Extend and Deepen Thinking

"We search for patterns, you see, only to find where the patterns break. And it's there, in that fissure, that we pitch out tents and wait."

Nicole Krauss, *Great House*





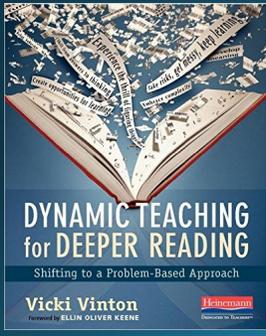
I prefer to talk about the meaning in a story rather than the theme of a story. People talk about the theme of a story as if the theme were like the string that a sack of chicken feed is tied with. They think that if you can pick out the theme, the way you pick the right thread in the chicken-feed sack, you can rip the story open and feed the chickens. But this is not the way meaning works in fiction.

When you can state the theme of a story, when you can separate it from the story itself, then you can be sure the story is not a very good one. The meaning of a story has to be embodied in it, has to be made concrete in it. A story is a way to say something that can't be said any other way, and it takes every word in the story to say what the meaning is. You tell a story because a statement would be inadequate. When anybody asks what a story is about, the only proper thing is to tell him to read the story. The meaning of fiction is not abstract meaning but experienced meaning, and the purpose of making statements about the meaning of a story is only to help you experience that meaning more fully.

Flannery O'Connor



Meeting the Standards are the by-product of students reading deeply, thoughtfully and authentically to consider the meaning of a text.

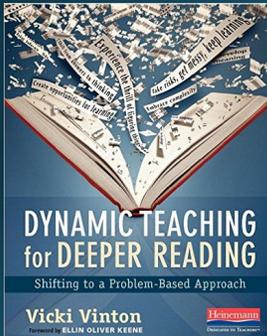


STEERING THE SHIP

TEACHING MOVES TO SUPPORT STUDENT THINKING AND MEANING MAKING

- Notice and name confusion as something every reader experiences—and uses to read closely.
- Chart students' thinking without judgment.
- Draw arrows to help students see how meaning and thinking evolve as you read.
- Ask students to explain their thinking so others can see their thought process.
- Notice and name how readers connect details to figure out what the writer hasn't stated explicitly (detail + detail = inference).
- Recast students' predictions, speculations, or theories as wondering questions.
- Use students' comments to bring in the author, which helps students become more aware of the author's role and choices.
- Notice and name when students ask more penetrating "Why?" questions.
- Notice and name when students are engaged in thinking about how this might be connected to that even if the thinking will later need to be revised.
- Notice and name when students are engaged in any of the aspects or dispositions of creative or critical thinking.
- Celebrate the diversity of thinking in both talk and writing.

FIGURE 4.8 Steering the Ship



STEERING THE SHIP

TEACHING MOVES TO SUPPORT STUDENT THINKING AND MEANING MAKING

- Revisit the learning by building on what students have already been thinking (as captured in their wonder chart).
- Create a new chart as a starting place for deeper thinking.
- Choose or ask the class to choose one of their "Why?" questions as a line of inquiry.
- If students don't have a penetrating "Why?" question, notice and name any explicit patterns on their knowmore chart (later connected through analog or metaphor).
- Ask students if they've noticed any patterns.
- Show students how any pattern can become a line of inquiry by prefacing it with why, and then choose one to track.
- Notice and name how readers can begin to see what a writer might be showing them by paying attention to when patterns change and break.
- Invite students to pay attention to when patterns change and break.
- Frame students' observations as major statements to keep their minds open and flexible.
- Release more responsibility to students by asking them to let you know when they think patterns are changing and breaking.
- Remind students that the writer is the one calling the shots for a purpose, and their job is to consider what that purpose might be.
- Notice and name when students' ideas are incorporating one or more patterns.
- Notice and name how readers must revise, and sometimes let go of, ideas when they learn how the story ends.
- Explain how an ending can reveal what the writer wants us to see.
- Invite students to express their final ideas and celebrate both the diversity of thinking and how that's expanded.

FIGURE 4.8 Steering the Ship



- In the **BEGINNING**: Readers try to figure out the who, what, when, where and why of a story to draft a first impression of the characters and the kinds of problems they may face.
- In the **MIDDLE**: Readers keep revising their understanding based on how the characters are developing or changing and how they're dealing with the problems they face.
- At the **END**: Readers revise their understanding one last time by thinking about implications of the ending. They then zoom out from the particulars of the story to consider the more universal ideas about people and life the writer has explored.



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