Twenty-First Century Reading: Books and Beyond

Winston Churchill once said, "If you cannot read all of your books, at any rate handle, or as it were, fondle them—peer into them, let them fall open where they will, read from the first sentence that arrests the eye, set them back on the shelves with your own hands, arrange them on your own plan so that you at least know where they are. Let them be your friends; let them at any rate be your acquaintances" (quoted in Gilbar 1990). We know from whence Mr. Churchill spoke. At last count, between the two of us, we had nearly two dozen books on our nightstands of which we had not read a word. But we have held them, flipped through them, and introduced ourselves to them. The pile, however, just seems to grow. So we hold Churchill's words dear, and dream of when we might have time to read them all. This holds true for our children's-book reading as well.

Each year, huge numbers of children's books roll off the presses. We can't read them all; we can't even meet them all. So how do we get to

know more books and get them into the hands of kids? Share those books you love with your colleagues. Spend some time each week talking about books. Your repertoire of picture books, trade books, chapter books, and collections will grow with each conversation. Get up close and personal with the library. School librarians and children's librarians in public libraries have the most in-depth knowledge of children's literature of anyone we know. They regularly read and review publications such as *Horn Book Magazine* and *Book Links*, both of which include extensive reviews of children's books on every conceivable theme and topic. Not to mention blogs from passionate book lovers such as Donalyn Miller and Teri Lesesne.

"Read widely and wildly," suggests literacy educator Shelley Harwayne (1992). The mini-lessons in this book incorporate a wide range of genres, including realistic fiction, historical fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Kids love to read in every genre. It's the compelling text and images in Elizabeth Rusch's *Electrical Wizard: How Nikola Tesla Lit Up the World*, the realistic fiction about peer relationships in Jacqueline Woodson's *Each Kindness*, and the beautiful nature poetry in Joyce Sidman's *Swirl by Swirl* that hook our kids. We need to fill our classrooms to bursting with text of every genre and topic.

We wrote this book, in part, to ease the job of choosing from among so many books, not to mention websites, e-books, and other digital text forms. On the companion website for this book, we have included an extensive bibliography of picture books, trade books, and subject-area texts that has been updated from the previous edition of this book as well as an updated list of web reading. We hope they are both helpful. (See the table of contents for how to access these online resources.) But we know that you may find your favorite picture book or blog missing from these lists. We simply couldn't include them all, so by all means improve this list by adding those you dearly love.

But all of this book love doesn't amount to much if kids don't have access to scads and scads of books and time to read them. In *Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It* (2009), Kelly Gallagher suggests several reasons why kids get turned off to reading, including a dearth of interesting reading material in their classrooms, limited opportunities for kids to choose their own text, and a limited amount of time for real reading and writing during the school day. Guthrie and Humenick found that when kids had access to a wide range of interesting text that they selected and were able to read, their motivation for reading increased, as did their reading comprehension (2004). When kids don't have access to books in their lives outside of school, they need even more opportunities to read in school every day. *Access plus choice plus time equals volume.* Each of these components is essential for kids to develop as readers. Throughout this book, we emphasize the need for extensive free voluntary reading across the day and across the year to grow their literate lives.

Text and Media Matter

Down with innocuous text, both print and digital! Alfred Tatum, author of *Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males* (2005), suggests that literacy holds power for young black men when it relates to their lives and concerns, when it is authentic, and when it raises issues that matter to them. We believe this

holds true for *all* of us. Text in all forms matters—a lot. If children are not reading engaging, interesting, thought-provoking text, why bother? We surround kids with text that includes a variety of perspectives, opinions, ideas, issues, and concepts to read about, write about, and talk about. When students read and respond to text that provokes thinking, they are much more likely to become active, engaged readers. We flood our classrooms with text, images, videos, kidcasts, and infographics of all different types and on tons of topics, so we have a better shot at reaching all of our kids. How we choose text and how kids choose their own makes a difference in their literate lives.

Many of the lessons in the upcoming chapters use text that we've chosen because it furthers the purpose of the lesson. It is important, however, to keep in mind that these lessons can be done with many different texts of various lengths and genres, both online and in print. *Strategies That Work* is all about teaching the reader, not merely the reading. Choose those texts that serve your purpose or that you love, and teach with those.

This chapter shares our thoughts about the need for using a variety of short text forms for literacy teaching and learning, such as picture books, trade books, magazines, newspaper and web articles, and so on. It also describes ways to support teachers in choosing the best possible text for instruction. Last but not even close to least, it shares how teachers can teach their kids to select texts they can and want to read. When kids read text at their level and of interest to them, they are more likely to further their understanding and have a great read. Choice makes a difference for both teachers and kids.

The Possibilities of Short Text

We often ask teachers to write down the different types of reading they've done over the past few weeks. Usually, they mention blogs, newspapers, magazines, e-mail, manuals, social media, cookbooks, brochures, reports, newsletters, and so on. Many also have a novel, biography, or self-help book going. But about 80 percent of the reading they report is of the short-text nonfiction variety. This is what the "Twitterverse" most often refers to as "short reads." And since the advent of the Common Core State Standards and other new state standards, short nonfiction has also flooded the schools. Well-written short text gives kids an opportunity to read a piece quickly, dig into the themes, and respond to them.

The many forms of short text in magazines, newspapers, and websites—including essays, editorials, feature articles, sports stories—give kids the widest range of possibilities for finding and reading interesting text. And more and more frequently much of our reading and research comes from the web. Internet articles give us the most current and up-to-date information. We need to pack our classrooms with magazines, newspapers, and websites as well as with books. Short reads often rescue us from turning a mini-lesson into what we sheepishly call a maxi-lesson. When we use just a little bit of text for a demonstration, students can get the point, we can stick to the point, and everyone can get on with what's most important: students reading and practicing on their own. (See our list of magazines, newspapers, and websites online. Directions for accessing the list are in the table of contents of this book.)

Choosing Short Text for Instruction

Before she got her iPad, Steph used to haul a carry-on bag the size of a small Buick filled with reading material onto each and every flight. She remembers a time when she checked it by mistake and found herself facing four hours of flying without a single thing to read. While contemplating what she might do during the flight, she reached into the seat pocket in front of her and pulled out *Hemispheres Magazine*, the United Airlines in-flight magazine. Although she flew regularly, she had never opened one before, and her expectations were less than sky high. She turned to an article on cruising, which began as follows:

> *When I was young and slippery as a sea squirt, I spent a sun-splashed summer polishing brass for the glory of waterborne commerce. In those long glorious sea days, we glided into tropical ports—dead slow—in the early morning, the sea like melted glass, the ship causing barely a ripple. You could feel the faint beat of the engines and hear the steady wash of creaming water alongside. The anchor chain went out, the bridge telegraphed "finished with engines" and we looked wonder of wonders on a foreign land. My old cargo line called at dusty little coffee ports, but they were Paris, London and Rome to me. I thought then that traveling by ship was the best way to see the world. I still do.* (Keating 1998)

They say necessity is the mother of invention. If Steph hadn't mistakenly checked her reading material, she would have missed this stunning text. Compelling short text is everywhere. We just need to live in a way that lets us find it. Pore over newspapers, online essays, magazines, travel books, blogs, and picture books. The next time you read an article, a poem, or a short story that really grabs you, think about why. Don't just toss it away. Don't just press *delete*. Save it even if you don't know exactly how you will use it. In all likelihood, you will find a place for it in your teaching sooner or later. When we collect and save short text, we consider the following:

Purpose
When we design instruction around print or digital short text, we need to be clear about what we want children to learn from the particular experience. Do we want to model a specific strategy or build background knowledge on a particular topic? Sometimes a thoughtful picture book may be the best way to launch a discussion about a pressing issue like racism or an unfamiliar topic like the Great Depression. Other times a video or podcast may draw kids immediately into the topic. The clearer we are about our instructional focus, the easier it is to match texts with our teaching goals.

Audience and Relevance
The interests, ages, and learning needs of our students are paramount in choosing texts for teaching. Awareness of our students' backgrounds and experiences is essential if we are to select texts for our students that, as librarian Fran Jenner says, "touch their souls."

Genre
We choose a variety of genres in short-text form, including poetry, short stories, essays, letters, blogs, podcasts, feature articles, and columns to expose our stu-

dents to the different characteristics of each form. The wide variety of available nonfiction trade books has made it possible to teach almost any genre or topic with picture books and other nonfiction text.

Topics

We collect books in relation to a specific topic or curricular focus. In science and social studies, kids do not all have to read the same textbook, nor should they. We keep topic-related texts at a variety of levels in baskets and include trade books, picture books, magazines, and newspaper articles, as well as images, videos, and artifacts. These resources build kids' background knowledge and engage kids in delightful ways to explore, learn more about the topic, and share what they learned. The time we spend collecting these texts is worth it, because it allows us to differentiate instruction and gear our teaching to students' needs and interests. And kids love to join in on the collecting as well. We are often amazed at what they find at home, online, or in the library and bring in to share with all of us.

Writing Quality

We look for vivid writing like that in the cruising article from *Hemispheres Magazine*. A *Denver Post* article that has always appealed to us described a phantom snowstorm as follows: "The forecast for Friday promised much of Colorado a full-fledged affair with the snow, but all the storm could muster was a cheap kiss on the cheek. An overnight snowstorm that swirled its way into the state barely flirted with the metro area but dumped up to 10 inches in parts of southeast Colorado" (Esquibel 1999). What a charming metaphor!

Text and Visual Features

We hunt for and save different short-text forms that showcase a variety of graphics and features. We find articles that are framed around a specific text structure, such as compare and contrast, and look at them closely to better recognize and understand the structure the next time we meet it. We look for pieces containing features and visuals, such as headings, bold print, and charts and graphs, so that we can show authentic examples of these and discover their purpose. Infographics were not even on the radar screen during the previous edition of this book, and now they are ubiquitous. We share them to teach kids how to read them, and kids even create them in their writing.

When choosing short text we need to be thoughtful consumers of fiction and nonfiction. We might ask the following questions:

- Is the information accurate and up to date?
- Is the writing well crafted?
- Does a piece strike our imagination, allow for interpretation, and make us think?
- Is a nonfiction text logically organized and easy to understand?
- Do visuals and features augment the information?
- Is the infographic clear and well organized?
- Is the language clear and vivid?
- Does the author's choice of information and presentation pique our interest in a subject?

We choose short text for the purpose of comprehension instruction for the following reasons:

- It is easily read out loud, which gives everyone in the room a common literary experience and builds classroom community.
- It is readily available on the Internet and is easily projected on interactive whiteboards, document cameras, and visualizers for shared reading and lesson instruction.
- It is easily accessed on all manner of devices, and kids can respond quickly with virtual sticky notes and annotation apps.
- It is often well crafted, with vivid language and striking illustrations or photographs.
- It provides an intense focus on issues of critical importance to readers of all ages.
- It has a beginning, a middle, and an end in short order.
- It is authentic and prepares children for the reading they will encounter outside of school.
- It is self-contained and provides a complete set of thoughts, ideas, and information for the entire group to mull over.
- It is easily reread to clarify confusion and better construct meaning.
- It is accessible to readers of many different learning styles and ages.
- It allows even very young children to engage in critical and interpretive thinking of text they might not be able to read on their own. Ideas about the reading are easily shared and discussed.
- It provides ample opportunities for modeling and thinking aloud.
- It provides students with anchor experiences that they can call upon later to help comprehend longer or more difficult text.

Choosing Short Text to Launch Comprehension Instruction

We recognize that all text—in its many genres and forms—spawns a wide range of thinking, but we find that certain ones lend themselves to particular strategies for the purpose of instruction. When we launch comprehension instruction, we are likely to choose such a text to teach the strategy and support kids to utilize it effectively.

Choosing Text to Introduce a Specific Strategy

Activating and connecting to background knowledge. When kids read text on familiar topics, they are more likely to connect new information to that which they already know in order to construct meaning. So we choose text with topics that kids are likely to have some prior knowledge of, such as family, school, pets, and common childhood experiences. Realistic fiction and memoir often nudge readers to make connections such as these to their own lives.

Questioning. Texts and topics for which readers lack background knowledge often spur them to ask questions. We also choose text that sparks their imagination and initiates wonder.

Inferring. We choose text that is ambiguous and nudges readers to think about what they know. By merging their thinking with clues in the text, kids can make an inference or draw a conclusion. Mysteries often offer opportunities for readers to infer.

Visualizing. We choose vivid text in which the writer paints pictures with the words—shows not tells. Active verbs, specific nouns, and descriptive adjectives prompt mental images. Poetry is often used to launch the visualizing strategy.

Determining importance. We choose text that focuses on a big idea. Text that includes details that come together to support a big idea is ideal for launching the determining importance strategy.

Monitoring, summarizing, and synthesizing are strategies that we use with every text we read right from the start. By the end of each text, we've used a full repertoire of thinking strategies. Certain texts prompt readers to use a certain strategy to comprehend, but thinking strategies are most effective when employed simultaneously and flexibly in conjunction with one another.

Harnessing Technology to Enhance Comprehension Instruction

Technology is a natural vehicle for the active literacy practices and strategy instruction featured in this book. Likewise, comprehension instruction is essential for introducing meaningful ways to use technology in the classroom. It works both ways. We help students see the natural links between the strategies they use in print text and the strategies they use when navigating and reading online as well as some of the differences.

Digital Reading

In a digital world, strategies matter now more than ever. Ziming Liu, a professor at San Jose State whose research focuses on comparing print and digital reading, concludes that "skimming has become the new reading. The more we read online, the more likely we are to move quickly without stopping to ponder any one thought" (quoted in Konnikova 2014). This confirms what we have noticed. The more readers skim and scan, the less they seem to comprehend. So teaching online readers to slow down or stop to think and react to information is essential to their learning, remembering, and understanding.

Recent research on digital literacy suggests that reading and thinking strategies are critical to navigating, learning from, and understanding text online. Julie Coiro (2011) has long reiterated the importance of reading and thinking strategies, but she makes a distinction between offline and online

reading comprehension. "Offline texts," she says, "reside in the familiar and bounded spaces that remain static over time, while online texts are part of a dynamic and unbounded information system that changes daily in structure, form and content" (Coiro and Moore 2012).

For those of us used to pictures and words between two covers, this is new territory for sure. But our kids are growing up and going to school in this constantly shifting, dynamic, "unbounded" environment. We need to expand our literacy toolkit to incorporate practices that help them deal with this ever-changing world. Coiro (2011) suggests that there are four crucial comprehension processes that are essential to online learning:

Approaching Online Reading Tasks with a Purpose in Mind
Active readers approach digital reading with a variety of purposes in mind. Sometimes readers google the answer to a question. Sometimes readers surf the web at their whim. Other times they are looking for specific information that helps them make a decision. They use a variety of strategies to gain understanding, depending on their purpose.

Navigating and Negotiating Online Texts
Just as in print reading, we show kids how to navigate the page, use search features and links, pay attention to bold text, view images, and so forth. Digital readers must determine important ideas and information, question information they encounter, connect information to their purposes for reading, and evaluate the accuracy of information. We explicitly teach kids specific ways to evaluate Internet information: noting hints that may signal less than reliable sources, attending to clues that cue inaccurate information, and/or comparing a variety of sources.

Monitoring Comprehension of and Pathways Through Online Texts
Readers need to constantly monitor their understanding of information and ideas and pay attention to and utilize the most effective ways to navigate their online reading. We teach them ways to avoid Internet distractions and follow their designated search. Even when we read print, we sometimes find ourselves drifting off and thinking about something else. This is compounded exponentially when visiting websites with their constant distractions, such as ads tailored to the individual reader pinging up every moment. Steph has been encouraged to buy her own *Nonfiction Matters* (1998) countless times while surfing the web. She once thought that everyone was getting these ads, until she learned of the modern marketing techniques!

Responding to Online Texts
Digital readers use a repertoire of strategies to respond to information in text and communicate their thoughts about it. Just as we share our learning in the sharing portion of the reading workshop, kids now have the ability to share their responses 24/7 with people from around the globe. Technological tools such as Padlet, digital annotation apps, Edmodo, Google docs, and TodaysMeet all stimulate collaborative conversations in small and large groups with a worldwide audience. As kids respond in all these different ways, we remember to teach them the habits of being solid digital citizens.

Recent research summarized in Wolf (forthcoming) and Konnikova (2014) explores the similarities and differences between book and online reading. This research suggests that the shift from print to digital reading "may come at a cost to understanding, analyzing and evaluating a text" (Konnikova 2014). Many teachers have pondered this as they observe kids flitting from one web-site to another or falling hook, line, and sinker for a compelling but less than accurate piece of information. As we write this book, many studies are in progress. In one study, fifth graders were taught to annotate their reading by interacting with online text (Chen and Chen 2014). Researchers found that explicitly teaching kids to leave tracks of their thinking on an interactive anno-tation app "improved their reading comprehension and strategy use." Konnikova (2014) notes that kids can "read deeply" on devices as long as they receive explicit instruction in how to do so.

It's not difficult to see how the comprehension strategies laid out in this book are woven throughout these approaches to digital reading and are neces-sary for kids' understanding when reading online. Leaving tracks of thinking, asking questions, synthesizing the big ideas—all of these comprehension strategies are essential to online reading and learning. But students may not automatically apply them. We have to explicitly teach them how to think strategically when they are online just as we teach them with print. At the time we wrote the previous edition of this book, online reading was a new experi-ence for many kids, whereas now, it is ubiquitous for all of us. See Part II for a variety of lessons that share how to support kids to construct meaning and remember new learning when reading and researching online. For more infor-mation and lessons on enhancing comprehension instruction with technology, check out our book *Connecting Comprehension and Technology* (Havey et al. 2013)

Principles for Integrating Comprehension and Technology

Since the previous edition of this book, we have had the amazing opportunity to spend time in the fifth- and first-grade classrooms of Katie Muhtaris and Kristin Ziemke at Burley School in the Chicago Public Schools. They have an iPad for every student, which we used to call "one to one," but thanks to tech guru Alan November, we have all come to realize that classrooms where every child has a device are really "one to world," because of the global connectivity. In their book *Amplify* (2015), Katie and Kristin focus on teaching reading and thinking strategies for content learning, and part of that is teaching students ways to navigate, evaluate, collaborate, and communicate through digital resources.

As we enter Kristin's room, one child sketches a squid on the Drawing Pad app, noting its tentacles and sharp beak identified with labels. Another group creates a podcast about which pet they have chosen for their classroom decided by an online survey. Yet another pair creates a reflection video about the book they just finished as a book recommendation for their classmates. Fifth graders in Katie's room use their iPads to research the Berlin airlift as they

surface questions while reading the picture book *Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot* (Raven). Others create imaginative book trailers to share with classmates, their families, and a larger online audience. They work together online, holding real-time discussions, collaborating on documents, and responding thoughtfully to one another's ideas and questions.

Katie and Kristin are guided by six principles that effectively integrate comprehension and technology. To enrich comprehension instruction, we use technology to do the following:

Enable all students to participate and engage more deeply. When we think about collaboration in a digital world, we provide our students with pretty much immediate access to the thinking of others. For example, when kids engage in a back-channel discussion, they view and respond to the ideas of their peers during a read-aloud. Primary kids can share the ideas behind their images on Drawing Pad. These options engage students in multimodal responses and provide additional ways to share and build new knowledge.

Provide access to resources, specialists, and texts that would not otherwise be available. Technology totally changes the nature, depth, and variety of content kids can experience and learn from. These online explorations provide kids with real-time experiences that are immediate, not vicarious. For instance, second graders become ornithologists as they watch a webcam at Cornell University, observing eaglets hatch in real time. Eighth graders interview geologists at Palmer Station in Antarctica to discuss melting glaciers and climate change with those who are experiencing it firsthand.

Open up a real-world audience for thinking and learning in the classroom. Communicating to a wide audience gives learning an authentic purpose, exposes kids to a wide range of ideas and perspectives, and enables them to participate in a world that was previously reserved for adults only. As kids blog, they publish their ideas, read the work of others, and have their own work read and commented on. They communicate regularly with kids in other classrooms, their extended families, and the larger online community.

Monitor and assess digital products and projects. Technology allows for 24/7 assessment. As kids annotate with Edmodo on their devices, the teacher can see the class screen at a glance and note who is participating, interacting, and thinking. Kids create reflection videos to share their learning for themselves as well as their teachers and parents. Technology can help both kids and teachers organize work, follow up on and communicate progress, and reflect on goals.

Meet the needs of diverse learners. Adding a visual or auditory component to a learning experience provides natural differentiation and continued learning. Kids watch videos to build background knowledge about new and unfamiliar concepts. They can take lessons on just about anything on YouTube. They read infographics of all sorts to get information quickly. And teachers can design digital text themselves, creating e-books filled with visual and sensory images that are a valuable scaffold for all kids. Options abound!

Build a foundation for 21st century digital citizenship. Just as we teach our students to practice good citizenship in their face-to-face lives, we need to teach them the same kinds of skills for their online lives. Internet safety and

responsibility go hand in hand. We teach kids about protecting their privacy, avoiding inappropriate sites, treating people with respect, steering clear of cyberbullying situations, and sharing any concerns that arise with adults they know. In turn, we teach them to respect and cite the work of others and contribute content appropriately and responsibly.

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(Adapted from Harvey, Goudvis, Muhtaris, and Ziemke [2013]
and Harvey and Daniels [2015])

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Access for All: Differentiate with Technology

Resources on the web for reading, learning, and understanding have infinite possibilities. Graphics, both videographic and image based, allow kids who might not be able to read the text or are learning a new language to effectively comprehend information they might not otherwise have access to. When kids are reading on a personal device, no one is the wiser about the level of the text they are reading. So kids don't have to worry about others knowing that they are reading a book below their grade level. This has powerful implications for reluctant readers since we know that one of the most important factors in reading achievement lies in what kids think of themselves as readers (Howard 1992).

Podcasts are an especially engaging way for kids to get information and bridge the gap between their reading level and their comprehension level. We believe in equity and don't want to deny kids access to information that might be beyond their reading level. Technology provides a way to give kids access to complex and more challenging information without having to decode it.

Digital tools such as smartpens allow kids to hear the passages as they read in order to understand the text. Speech-to-text programs transcribe spoken words into text. Technology doesn't even have to be fancy. We know teachers who use iPods or phones to record information that kids can listen to as they follow along in the text, which encourages both comprehension and fluency. And just to be clear, all of these tech approaches or devices require kids to use the same tried-and-true comprehension strategies that they use when reading print.

And let's not forget audiobooks. We love them! They captivate us. We don't even mind traffic jams any more as long as we have a good audiobook. According to recent research, kids are no different (Flynn et al. 2016). Mary Burkey (2016), in an article on the website the Booklist Reader, reviews the study of Flynn et al. on the importance of "just listening" to audiobooks. It turns out that just listening matters, a lot. She cites findings that compared second- and third-grade students who listened to audiobooks for a total of an hour a week at school and forty more minutes at home to those who didn't. The treatment group outperformed the control group on measures of reading comprehension, understanding vocabulary, and, most surprisingly, reading motivation. Burkey suggests that the implications are that kids should do more listening: in school, in the car, during summer, at home, just about anywhere. We wholeheartedly agree. For more information on audiobooks, check out her "Voices in My Head" column for *Booklist* and her book *Audiobooks for Youth: A Practical Guide to Sound Literature* (2013).

The Jury Is Still Out

There are a number of current research studies comparing print and digital reading. Most of these studies, however, are with college students or young adults, which implies that they focus on proficient readers, not young children learning to read and understand. Some of the findings suggest that readers are more adept at skimming, scanning, and getting details when reading digitally and more proficient at understanding complex ideas, inferring underlying themes, and getting the gist of a problem when reading in print.

Other research suggests that when students read in paper text, they are more engaged and attentive, which results in deeper understanding (Willingham 2016; Dartmouth and Kaufman 2016; Sparks 2016). In one of few studies done with younger children, Merga and Roni (2017) report data from nearly 1,000 intermediate-grade children in Australia. The study found that kids who had regular access to e-readers, tablets, and mobile phones did not use these devices primarily for reading, even though the kids were daily book readers. A more stunning finding was that the more devices a child had access to, the less he or she read in general. One interpretation is that print books are still preferred by kids this age when it comes to reading.

From our standpoint it is not a competition. Books still matter, especially if understanding and deep reading are the goals. We have both noticed that when we really need to dig in to understand newer, more complex ideas, we want the book in hand, or a printout of the article. It's still much easier to reread and annotate our thinking right on the page to synthesize the information. But you can't beat devices for instant access. So ultimately, we offer a range of possibilities, both print and digital, to connect kids with the big, wide world through reading.

The Possibilities of Picture Books

Picture books offer certain unique advantages when we deliver instruction. Of all literature that lends itself to reading comprehension strategy instruction, picture books top the list. Why? We believe that interest is essential to comprehension. If we read material that doesn't engage us, we probably won't remember much. Engagement leads to remembering what is read, enhancing understanding, and acquiring knowledge. Picture books, both fiction and nonfiction, are more likely to hold our attention and engage us than dry, formulaic text. There's nothing like a striking photograph of the flukes of a killer whale jutting out from a sky-blue sea to capture a reader's interest. Readers are more likely to comprehend material that interests them and that is written in a compelling way.

Picture books have been a prominent feature of elementary classrooms for decades. Elementary teachers the world over share compelling picture books with kids. But elementary kids can't have all the fun! There is a picture book for every reader and a reader for every picture book. The wide range of themes, issues, language, and ideas reach out into classrooms like tentacles drawing in each member, regardless of the different learning styles, ages, reading levels, or prior experiences. We need to think about *all* the students who can benefit from picture books. The teachers portrayed in this book use picture books with the broadest spectrum of students for many different reasons.

Building Background Knowledge and Teaching Content

Teaching students to read text strategically sharpens and enhances their understanding of the content. At the same time, we can bring up issues, problems, and concerns without deluging students with facts and information. Unlike longer nonfiction or reference materials, picture books and other short texts focus our attention on one issue or topic at a time. Curricular stalwarts such as history and geography benefit from an ever-growing collection of picture books covering every conceivable time period and culture. Science trade books provide ample opportunity for children to ask and answer many of the questions they have about the natural world.

Challenging Kids to Think

Just as we read difficult texts ourselves, it's important to share books that are a stretch for children. We've noticed that stories and narratives set in foreign cultures or unfamiliar historical periods often result in more rather than less interest. We know many students who would rather read nonfiction than a riveting mystery or adventure story. Students are fascinated by books on unfamiliar but compelling topics, such as *On a Beam of Light* (Berne), a story about Einstein's curiosity; *Enormous Smallness* (Burgess) the story of e. e. cummings's life in poetry; and *Will's Words: How Shakespeare Changed the Way You Talk* (Sutcliffe), all books about remarkable people. We have found over and over again that we should never underestimate what kids can understand when motivated to do so.

Differentiating Instruction

Picture Books with Young Children
We have found that we can begin teaching comprehension in preschool and kindergarten. When we read out loud to kids, we expose them to more sophisticated text that requires them to think. We eliminate the barriers that face young readers who can't decode text yet.

Picture Books with Older Children
Traditionally viewed as a genre reserved solely for younger children, picture books lend themselves to comprehension strategy instruction and guided discussion at every grade level. Older kids may balk when you first share picture books with them. Comments such as "Why are you reading those baby books?" will dissipate, however, when you share powerful picture books that are filled with sophisticated content best suited to older students.

Picture Books with Striving Readers
Equity matters. All kids deserve books that contain inspiring, sophisticated content and prompt stimulating discussion. Kids should not be left out because they have difficulty decoding the text. There are no better print materials to use with developing readers than picture books. The pictures complement the text to help less proficient readers access meaning. Readers can choose from many

different levels and genres on a single topic. The shorter form is less intimidating than longer chapter books and other forms of dense text.

Picture Books with Linguistically Diverse Learners

For kids who are learning English, any text with pictures can be a lifeline. When illustrations, photographs, and other features make content and vocabulary concrete and visible, kids have a better shot at making sense of the sophisticated ideas, compelling story lines, and complex information in the text. Picture books on science and social studies build background and make the content comprehensible for English language learners. Adding interesting picture books into our daily lessons makes a huge difference in kids' interest, engagement, and understanding. See our video *Reading the World: Content Comprehension with Linguistically Diverse Learners* (2005b) for additional ideas for teaching English language learners.

Choosing Picture Books Just Because We Love Them

We remember the words of the writer C. S. Lewis when we choose books for reading and instruction: "No book is really worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally (and often far more) worth reading at the age of fifty" (quoted in Cullinan 1981). When we find a book that inspires our teaching, we can hardly wait to see how children will respond to it. We are hopeful that it will engage them. The best reason of all to read a picture book to a group of students is simply that you love it. Anne and her colleague Nancy Burton made frequent trips to a local bookstore to purchase books for their classroom library. One day they became so engrossed in choosing books that they never noticed when an overly efficient bookstore employee unloaded the mountain of books they had stacked in their cart. Thinking no one in their right mind would buy that many books, she had quietly reshelved each one of them. So, unless you live next door to the public library, beware. Children's books can be habit-forming.

Enthusiasm for books is contagious. Sometimes we become so focused on a theme or curricular topic that we put off sharing our favorites. Big mistake! Steph still often reads Margaret Wise Brown's *The Sailor Dog* to kids regardless of their age. It was the first book she ever really read, and she can't not share it with kids because it means so much to her. Kids pick up on this. Invariably, the moment she closes the book, they leap up and grab for it en masse, even eighth graders. We also choose books we have always wanted to read but have never gotten around to. Anne has a list of several dozen. Once in a while, she picks one up and reads it to the kids. In this way, they learn about the book together, which gives everyone a fresh, authentic experience.

Sharing our thoughts about why we love a book allows students to get to know us better and shows them how discerning we are about what we read. Children in classrooms where everyone talks about books, teachers included, aren't afraid to venture their own thoughts. There's no better way to encourage readers than to ask them to contribute their favorites to a classroom text set. And students can't resist when we consistently ask them to voice their honest opinions.

Beyond Picture Books: Choosing Longer Text

Many of the texts that launch the lessons in this book are short—picture books, magazine and web articles, poems, and so on. Don't get us wrong. We love long text too, and our kids all read novels and other longer forms as well as short pieces. As we work with book clubs and literature circles or when everyone in the class has a different novel going, we remind our kids of the many lessons we have done with short text so they will apply what they learned to their ongoing independent reading in longer text.

Our kids read long novels and love them. And they also read lengthy nonfiction—anthologies and trade books. They may not read these nonfiction books cover to cover, but they get important information from them. Books like Phillip Hoose's *We Were There, Too!* a compelling compendium of vignettes of children in American history, engage students who are surprised at the roles kids played in history, and Joy Hakim's series on history (A History of US) and on science (The Story of Science) are among our favorites for getting essential content information written in an interesting way. So as you work with the strategies in Part II of this book, think of ways to apply them in longer text.

Choosing Books: Interest, Readability, and Purpose

When teaching kids to choose text, Cris Tovani (2003) focuses on the following three criteria:

Interest
Readability
Purpose

Interest

Of course, we read out of interest. Nothing compels readers more than their personal interest in a piece of text. We have noticed that readers can read more difficult books if they are interested in the material. Text that addresses a reader's interest promotes engaged reading. Fifth grader Julia was so engaged in reading *Mistakes That Worked*, Charlotte Foltz Jones's book about inventions like Post-it notes that came about serendipitously, that she simply couldn't put it down. Her enthusiasm burst forth in a letter to Mary Urtz, her fourth-grade teacher, in which she mentioned that she would soon get back to a science book titled *Ocean Life* but not until she finished *Mistakes That Worked* (see Figure 4.1). For personal reading, adults primarily choose books based on their interests. Why expect kids to be any different?
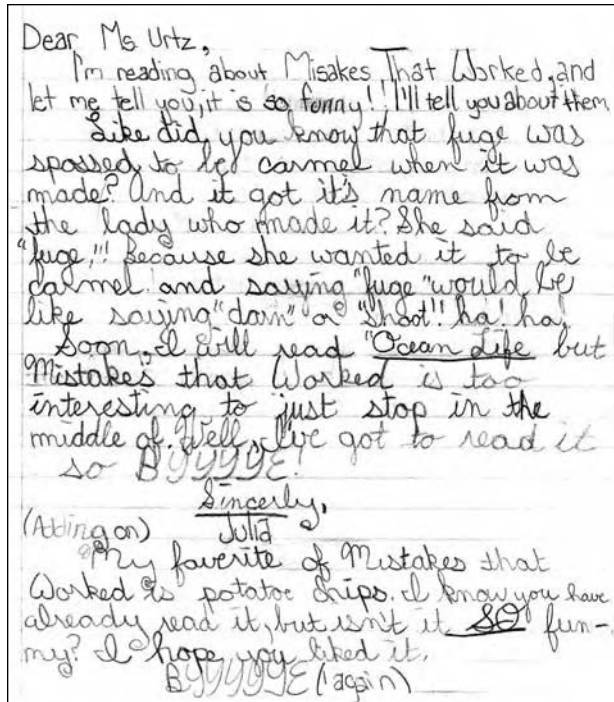

Figure 4.1 Julia's Letter About *Mistakes That Worked*

Readability

In recent years, leveled books and leveled libraries have proliferated in schools, and they are a useful guide for teachers to support kids to find books they can read. But we mustn't become slaves to reading levels. We know we're in trouble when we ask a young reader what she's reading, and she answers, "I'm an M." Reading is about so much more than a level. And choosing what to read is about more than kids reading "at their level." But they need to be able to read what they choose. So we share three different categories of books:

- *Easy books.* An easy book is a book in which you can read every word and understand all the ideas.
- *Challenging books.* A challenging book is a book where there are many words you can't read and many ideas you can't understand.
- *Just-right books.* A just-right book is a book where you can read most of the words, but not all, and you can understand most of the ideas, but not all.

To demonstrate how we choose books by readability, we bring in examples of our own books that fall into each category. We model how we choose easy, just-right, and challenging books for ourselves. We share one of each type—easy, challenging, and just right—and create an anchor chart of these categories. We do this authentically so kids can see that even though we are grown, proficient readers, we still encounter books we want to read that are a challenge. And they also see that we still read beach books. As our demonstration nears an end, we reiterate that if we choose only easy or challenging books, we won't get better at reading so we try to choose just-right books most of the time.

Another thing we share with our students is an exciting outcome of classifying books into these three categories: as we grow as readers, books that were once challenging suddenly seem just right and eventually even become easy. These easy, just-right, and challenge designations can help readers recognize reading progress.

Purpose

Readers read for many different purposes. We want kids to think through why they are reading. Cris Tovani (2011) demonstrates this by asking her readers to list some different purposes they have for reading, and she records their responses on a chart. The following are some of their purposes:

- To compete school assignments
- To find out information
- To be entertained
- To read instructions
- To cook something
- Just for fun

Cris emphasizes that these are but a few of the many purposes for reading and that purpose affects our book selection. She encourages the students to add more purposes to the chart whenever they arise.

Joaquin, a seventh grader at Horace Mann Middle School in Denver, noted that one of his purposes for reading was to put his little sister to sleep at night. Cris asked him if he chose easy or hard books to do that. He said easy books, so his five-year-old sister could understand them. And as for interest, he said he might choose Cinderella because princesses were a big deal to his sister. In other words, his primary purpose in this instance was reading to his little sister. Help your students think of the many purposes for reading. Ideally, they won't forget enjoyment. If they neglect to mention it, add it, or any other purpose you deem worthy, to the list.

Helping Kids Select Books to Read

To scaffold book selection, we ask kids how they choose a book. What exactly do they do when they reach for a book on the shelf? We record their responses on a chart in hopes that some of these suggestions will be contagious. The kids in Leslie Blaumann's fourth-grade class compiled the following list for how they choose books:

- Reading the back
- Reading the flap
- Reading the first page—an interesting lead can reel us in
- Reading the first few pages
- Reading the table of contents
- The title
- The length
- The level
- Flipping through the pages
- Reading the last page
- The pictures
- The cover
- The author
- The subject
- The series
- The genre
- Recommendation

All of these are helpful suggestions, but Leslie understands that if she merely copied this list each year and posted it, the kids in her class would likely ignore it. This list makes sense to them because they create it based on their own needs and practices.

Don't be afraid to weigh in here, however. You, too, are a member of the reading community in your classroom. Leslie recognized that she generally chose a book based on the recommendation of someone close to her. "Recommendation" never made the original list. So Leslie added it. Books recommended by friends and family who know her tend to be books that capture her interest.

Teachers need to pay close attention to students' interests in order to fill the room with books they want to read. Post a chart where kids can record their interests and, more specifically, some topics they would like to read about. That way, when you order books or head off to libraries, garage sales, and bookstores, you can look for those special books that kids in your classrooms yearn for. Debbie Miller, author of *Reading with Meaning* (2012) and *Teaching with Intention* (2007), suggests three questions kids can ask themselves when it comes to text selection:

- Can I read most of the words?
- Is it interesting?
- Does it give me something to talk and think about?
  (Miller 2017)

A Word About Reading Aloud

Jim Trelease, author of *The Read-Aloud Handbook* (2013), says that the purpose of literature is to provide meaning in our lives. He believes that literature is the most important medium, more important than television, film, and even art, because it "brings us closest to the human heart." He says that reading aloud serves to "reassure, entertain, inform, explain, arouse curiosity and inspire our kids."

We wholeheartedly agree. Some of our best moments have come from reading aloud or being read to. Steph first encountered Dr. Seuss in kindergarten when Miss Buehler read *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*. Anne remembers reading E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web* to her five-year-old daughter, Allison, and finding herself unable to continue through the tears when Charlotte died. The recent proliferation of audiobooks illustrates our love affair with listening to great read-alouds.

Thoughtful teachers everywhere dedicate time each day to read out loud to their students in all genres and content areas. When teaching reading comprehension, we do a good deal of instruction via reading aloud. But we need to remember that if we read aloud only for the purpose of instruction, we will ruin reading aloud. We need to read aloud every day for the sheer joy of it!