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## Decisions About Reading Notebooks

“WE UNDERSTAND LANGUAGE BY SIMULATING IN OUR MINDS WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO EXPERIENCE THE THINGS THAT THE LANGUAGE DESCRIBES.”

(Benjamin K. Bergen)



Laura sat down next to a table of students and observed them for a moment. They were in the midst of independent reading and forming ideas about the characters in their novels. One student, Danny, stopped briefly to add a few more ideas about the book's main character in an entry he created in his reading notebook. After about thirty seconds of writing, he got right back into his book and began reading. A minute later, another reader, his partner Julia, stopped and added a few examples of what the character said and did to her notebook entry. She also returned to her reading quickly and kept going. What was happening in Laura's classroom was not magic, but it might look like that to others. The class spent the first month of school studying why and how readers use writing as an important tool in their reading and thinking process.

After about thirty minutes of independent reading, students met with their reading partners to discuss their thinking about the characters in their books. The first thing students did was take out their reading notebook entries and their books. The students in the class valued their reading notebooks and chose to write in them on their own for specific reasons. They were aware of the many ways their writing could help them remember what they were thinking and explain it to others. As Julia began to explain her thinking to her partner, she glanced at her notes and then began talking.

In this chapter, we look closely at how we can use writing to help make the thinking involved in interpreting fiction more accessible to students and how it can become an important window for teachers to decide what to teach next. We have seen the ways writing can become a tool for understanding fiction, yet many students don't choose to write or only do so in school when it is required. Most classrooms do not yet look like Laura's, but hers did not always look like this either, and in this chapter, we will explain the key lessons that helped create this "magic" that you can use tomorrow.

When working in classrooms, we see such variety in the types of writing that students create and huge differences in terms of what this writing offers students in their reading process. These differences create limitations in the types of information teachers gain about their students. So our hope is to offer what does work and what does help students use writing to deepen their thinking. The key is authenticity and choice, and in this chapter, we show you how to set this up.

This chapter can help you decide what to teach tomorrow if

- Students do not write about their reading
- You are unsure how to get reading notebooks started
- Students do the minimum required and see writing as a chore



## In this chapter, you will learn

- How to help students see the value in writing about fiction
- Lessons for introducing student-directed reading notebook entries
- Key lessons to teach students to collect, develop, and revisit their thinking
- Common approaches to writing about reading and their limitations
- Ways to use student notebook entries to decide what to teach next

- Writing about reading has become stale and robotic in your classroom
- You are unsure how reading notebooks can help students interpret fiction

We begin this chapter by showing you how to teach writing about reading in genuine ways that connect to your students, offering you a window into students' thinking about fiction so you can decide what to teach next. The majority of the chapter will then take you into classrooms and students' writing so you can learn the lessons that have the biggest impact on students' thinking about fiction. You will leave this chapter knowing where to put your attention and the practices you might want to reconsider because they don't necessarily offer you or your students ways to develop more thoughtful reading practices.

### Why We Really Use Writing as a Tool for Understanding

When researching writing as an access point for understanding, I decided to study my own practices. Over the course of a weekend, I tracked the reasons and ways I genuinely used writing as a tool to help me. As a researcher and teacher, I predicted that most of my writing would be in response to ideas and articles I was reading, and while this was part of my weekend, I also found many other organic ways I wrote. On the next page is a list of what I found.

I did not set aside special time to write over the weekend, but when I looked at how I spent my time, there were several moments and contexts where writing helped me. Some of the writing was about *remembering* such as grocery and shopping lists. Some of the writing was about *organizing* my thinking such as the comparison chart and running workout summary. Some of the writing was about *sharing* with others such as my emails. Some of the writing was about *recording my thinking* for reflection such as my outline and margin notes. I asked

## OVER THE WEEKEND, I WROTE

- Emails to friends about upcoming plans
- Emails to colleagues about our shared projects
- Tweets to teachers, authors, and others I follow on Twitter in response to their posts
- A grocery list
- A holiday shopping list
- Margin notes in a book I was reading
- A summary of my weekly running workouts and what my goals were for next week
- Plans for my demonstration lessons coming up
- A comparison chart about what I noticed was similar between dystopian literature and apocalyptic literature for my book club sessions with eighth graders next week
- An outline of what I thought I would speak about at an upcoming parent workshop
- Answers to questions that were sent to me about word study
- Notes from our veterinarian about one cat's health issues
- Meal ideas for a holiday party

several groups of teachers to replicate this task—to track and record how they were using writing authentically in their lives. When we shared the lists, most of us were surprised at how often we used writing as a tool. After looking across dozens of teachers' lists, we consolidated our reasons why we write authentically into a few categories. We noticed that none of us wrote because we were told we had to or because we were "accountable." Instead, we wrote because it served a real and important purpose in our lives. "Writing is often our representation of the world made visible, embodying both process and product" (Emig, 1977, p. 122).

### REASONS WHY WE USE WRITING AS A TOOL

- To remember
- To record our thinking
- To share with others
- To organize our thinking
- To discover our thinking

After examining the ways we use writing in our everyday lives, we wanted to understand the reasons why we write about fiction reading. In one memorable professional study group activity, we asked participating teachers to list the real reasons why they write about the fiction reading in their lives. We used a T-chart to guide the discussion. The left side read, “Types of Fiction I Read,” and the right side read, “Why I Choose to Write About This Reading.” Below is a sample chart that shows the types of responses we collected and how the teachers used their writing as an access point for understanding.

TYPES OF FICTION I READ	WHY I CHOOSE TO WRITE ABOUT THIS READING
Picture books	To jot down my thinking to share with students in a read aloud
Young adult novels	To keep track of my ideas about the character
Mysteries	To flag parts where the author’s style and craft struck me
Realistic fiction	To track clues, predict, and react
Fantasy	To collect ideas and lessons being learned
Historical fiction	To list questions to discuss and ideas to share with others
Comics and graphic novels	
Book club books	

After we made this chart of reasons why we write about fiction, we discussed what was common among most of us. One teacher had an aha moment when she commented, “Ha! No one wrote down that we write because we were given questions to answer or because we are going to be tested on it.” Everyone laughed and nodded.

**Our goal is for students not just to write in school when being told to do so, but to choose to write as an access point to understanding when they see a real need for it.** These reflective exercises helped us better understand writing as a tool for understanding, and we wanted to help our students develop these tools too.



## Your Turn

Track your “writing as a tool” moments for a full day or weekend and reflect on what you notice. Share these findings with your colleagues. Explain to your students the genuine reasons why you choose writing as a meaning-making tool. Invite them to share their own noticings.

### Current Reality: Why Students Write About Reading in School

In order to better understand students’ perspectives about why they write about their reading, we were part of a group of teachers who decided to interview students. We are sharing this with you because we found a common pattern that can help you get to know your students’ perspectives and, if needed, shift them. We took one period and went to every fourth-grade student in a class and asked them two questions:

1. Why did you write about your reading today?
2. Who is the audience for this writing?

After listening to every student, we tallied up the findings. Students explained the reasons why they wrote about their reading. Most common was the response “To show the teacher I did my work,” a few students shrugged and explained they did not know why they were writing about their reading, and one student explained she wrote about her reading to remember things that she felt were important. Wary of not overgeneralizing the findings from one classroom, we asked the same two questions in dozens of other classrooms—students from a variety of grade levels and from different parts of the country. The chart on the next page shows the most common responses students gave for why they write about their reading in school.

When asked about the audience for their writing about reading, most students shrugged and said they did not know, a few students said “the teacher,” two students said “my reading partner,” and one student responded in a way that sounded like a question by tentatively saying, “I am?” Without a real purpose

or audience, students often admit they get through writing with the minimal amount of work and effort because it is a chore and obstacle, not a tool to help them access meaning.

### TOP 5 REASONS STUDENTS SAY THEY WRITE ABOUT THEIR READING IN SCHOOL

1. To prove to the teacher they did the reading or assignment
2. Because their teacher said they had to
3. To get a good grade
4. "I don't know why."
5. To remember something

These findings were not surprising to any of the teachers with whom we worked. Many students view writing about reading as purposeless busywork. Rather than groan, complain, or blame students for their views, we rolled up our sleeves and spent time rethinking our practices. We can all reflect by discussing

- *What are we communicating to students about writing about reading?*
- *What are we modeling for students?*
- *How are our practices and moves creating these students' perspectives?*
- *What else could we try?*

### Your Turn

Interview your students to find out why they write about their reading. Use our two questions or create your own.

1. Why did you write about your reading today?
2. Who is the audience for this writing?

Once you find out their perspectives, design your lessons based on what you might want to help them shift. Students' perspectives are an important piece of deciding what to teach next.



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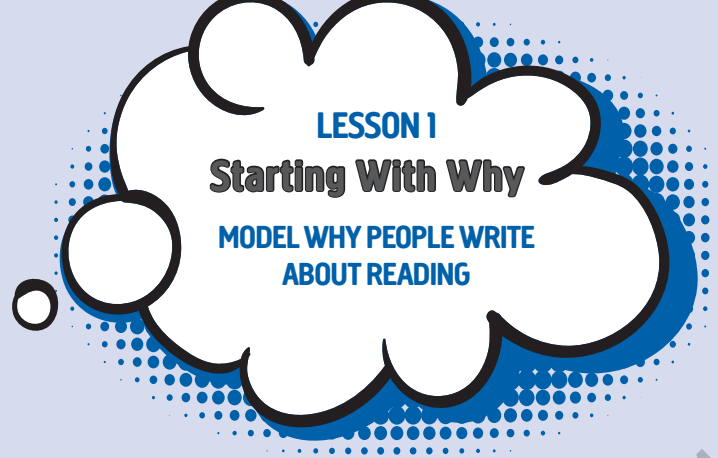
Ask yourself: Why do your students write? Is it for you or for them? It's got to be the latter, or else we risk disengaged students missing opportunities to explore their own identity through their writing about reading.

## Lessons That Wake Up Writing About Reading

History and literacy teacher Baynard Woods (2009) explains the power that students experience when they begin to view writing as not just a school task but a life-changing tool: “When students recognize the thinking inherent in writing, they start to recognize their own thinking and then the thinking that invests the world around them with meaning. When they recognize that the human world is made of thought, they realize that the world can be changed” (p. 19). Students’ sense of agency can be developed when they realize the connections between thinking, writing, and changing their worlds.

In the following lessons, we help students understand the many genuine reasons why readers use writing as a tool for understanding fiction texts. If your students do not use writing authentically right now, these lessons offer you a starting point. What follows are five key lesson ideas. You can use one of these lessons, a few, or all five based on the students in your classroom. For the purposes of this book, we numbered them in this order, but you really could start with whichever one you think would best engage your students. All five address the same goal of helping students understand the genuine reasons why readers write about their thinking. While it makes sense to teach these lessons at the start of the school year, it is never too late to reboot your students’ understanding of using writing as a tool.





In this lesson, the goal is for students to get a glimpse into our reading lives as teachers and for them to understand that writing about reading is not a “school task” but a real reading tool. Try to be as real with your students as possible and show your process.



### Decide to Teach This Tomorrow if Your Students

- Do not write when they read
- Do not understand why they write about their reading
- View their audience for writing as the teacher
- Seem to think writing is a chore to get through when reading

### What You Need:

- Several of your favorite fiction texts (for examples of our favorites, refer to Chapter 2 and Appendix B)

**Tell Why:** Explain to students that you read a variety of fiction texts and often write about them for various purposes. Tell the students you want to take a few minutes to show them what you have been reading and how writing has helped you.

**Show How:** Bring in a handful of fiction texts you are reading and show students why you are reading them and why you are choosing to write about them. If you have margin notes, stickies, or notebook entries, you can show them too. Aim for a blend of jots that express emotional responses and responses that help you work through confusion, and flag what you think may come up again. Keep tying your examples back to the *why*.

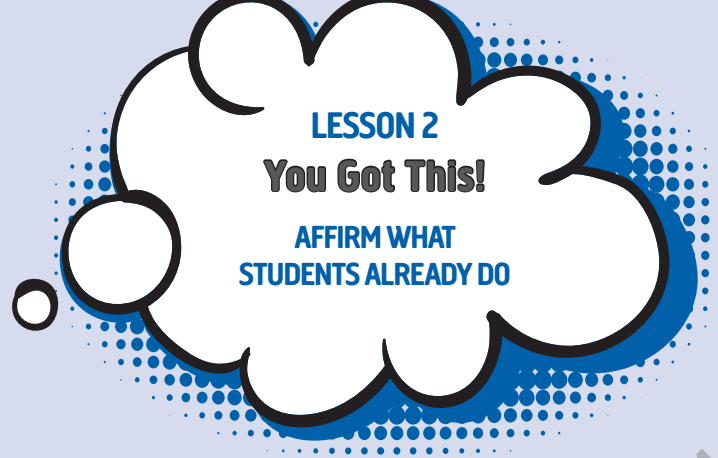
### A Few Tips:

- If you do not really write much about your reading, dig deeper. Consider “out of the box” ways you do this like we explained in the intro to this chapter. What about grocery and to-do lists?
- Take a few of your favorite fiction books and try writing down your thinking about them if you have not done this before. Remember there is no wrong way to record your thinking. It can be as simple as “Wow! Great metaphor” or as complex as likening a character and theme to something in your life.



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What are we after, ultimately? To instill in our readers a sense that reading and writing isn't school work but life work.



In this lesson, your goal is to engage students in learning more about how they already use writing as an important tool for learning, especially in ways they might not have connected to reading fiction.



### **Decide to Teach This Tomorrow if Your Students**

- Do not understand why they write about their reading
- View their audience for writing as the teacher
- Seem to think writing is a chore to get through when reading

### **What You Need:**

- Chart paper and markers
- A fiction read aloud book
- Short video clips

### **Explore Why:**

- Write the inquiry question on chart paper: *How does writing help us think?*
- Take a few days to watch a video, read aloud a fiction book, tell stories, and participate in any other fiction experiences.
- Offer students a few minutes throughout the day to reflect and write a response to the inquiry question after each experience.
- Conduct a class discussion about what the students found by going back to their reflections after each experience.

### **A Few Tips:**

- This lesson can be extended for a few days and done for homework as well.
- If you teach in departments, you can ask your colleagues to help out by doing the same lesson in social studies or science so students understand this is not just an English class practice. Fiction does not just happen in English class. Consider science fiction and historical fiction.



If you choose to teach this lesson, your goal is for students to see how adults they look up to use writing as a tool. In addition to adults, you can involve older students in middle or high school. You will want students to walk away understanding just how important writing is in the reading and learning process for people at different ages and in varying professions.

#### **Decide to Teach This Tomorrow if Your Students**

- Do not understand why they write about their reading
- Seem to think writing is a chore to get through when reading



#### **What You Need:**

- Chart paper
- People to interview
- Webcam technology if doing the interview via the web

**Tell Why:** Explain to students that older students and adults use writing for authentic purposes too, and this is not just a “school skill.” Discuss how lawyers’ reasons and doctors’ reasons would be different, and so would moms’ reasons and college students’ reasons for why they write about what they are thinking as they read.

#### **Discuss Why:**

- Invite older students or adults from the community to be interviewed about why and how they write about their reading. Remember this can even be done via web conference or email if a live visit is not possible.
- Generate a list of questions with the students about how this person reads fiction and writes about it.

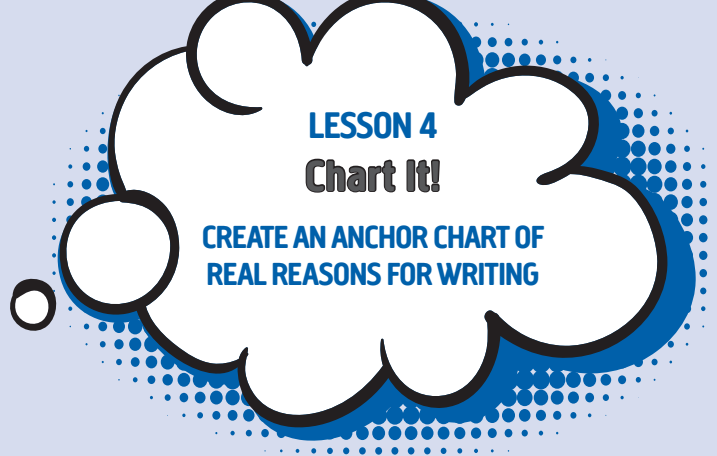
*(Continued)*

- Prep the people being interviewed so they know the questions you will be asking them ahead of time and let them know that you want students to really see the value of writing about reading.
- Let students see the variety of people who write as a way to learn by doing this a few times if possible. (Variation: Have a few people in during one period and run it like a panel discussion.)

**A Few Tips:**

- Try to find a few people whom you know the students respect and look up to.
- Be creative about whom you invite. For example, a soccer coach might not seem like an obvious choice, but he has to read and write notes and ideas too.
- Remember the power of positive role models. Even inviting a few older students sends the message that this is important and powerful.

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This lesson is aimed at helping consolidate and document what students have learned so far about why and how people write about their reading. This chart will anchor the lessons that come up later in this chapter and in the year. Take time to create it with the class and enlist the students' thinking and ideas.

#### **Decide to Teach This Tomorrow if Your Students**

- Are ready to share their new understandings about why people write about their reading
- Need a visual reminder and support to refer to
- Are ready to share their thinking about their own writing about reading with their classmates



#### **What You Need:**

- Several of your favorite fiction texts (for examples of our favorites, refer to Chapter 2 and Appendix B)

**Tell Why:** Remind students of all you discussed in Lessons 1, 2, and 3 about why we write about reading in our lives. Refer back to the charts or books you used in those previous lessons as a concrete reminder for students.

#### **Create an Anchor Chart:**

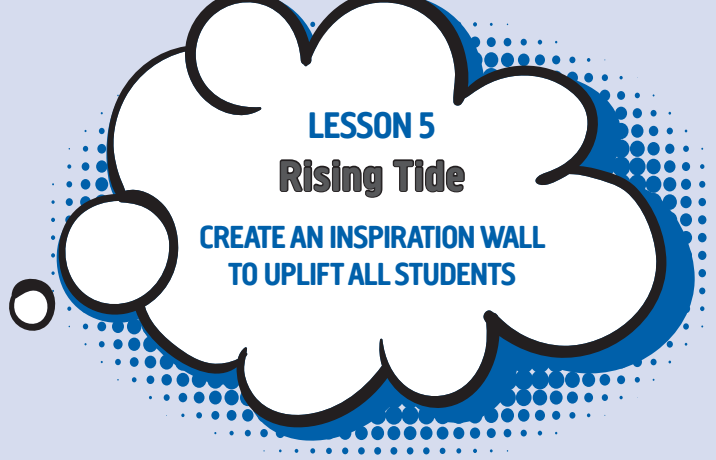
- Create a class anchor chart that lists the reasons you discovered for why people authentically write about their thinking and fiction reading.
- Refer to this chart every time you model writing about reading for the next few weeks. Begin every lesson where you model writing about reading by explaining the reason why you are doing this and point out that reason on the chart.

*(Continued)*

### **A Few Tips:**

- Anchor charts work well when used a lot. If we create them once and rarely look back at them, they become wallpaper. Keep the chart visible and point to it often. Students will begin to use it if they see you using it too.
- Also know when to take a chart down. After about six weeks or when students no longer need it because it is a part of what they now know how to do, you can take a photo of the chart as a reminder and then take it off the wall. Some teachers create a document with all the charts and share it with students so they can always refer back to them digitally.
- Remember to ask yourself if you know why students should write about their reading each time you ask them to do it. If you don't have a genuine reason, consider not asking them to do it. If we contradict what we say about authenticity, students will still view writing about reading as a chore to get through.

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This is really the kick start to a classroom structure that you can keep up all year long. Much like the adage “a rising tide lifts all boats,” displaying students’ writing about reading gives all students the opportunity to learn from—and aspire to—the ways of thinking of peers. You can change the work displayed across the year as your students develop and grow.

#### **Decide to Teach This Tomorrow if Your Students**

- Are writing about their reading and are ready to learn from one another
- Benefit from examples and visuals
- Are working on building a community of fiction readers who help one another



#### **What You Need:**

- Bulletin board and staples
- Copies of students’ reading notebook entries
- Colored paper or big sticky notes and markers

**Tell Why:** Explain that you see amazing examples of students beginning to use writing as a tool for understanding their fiction books. Make this a point of celebration.

#### **Show How:**

- Use large paper to create headings on the bulletin board that correspond to the genuine reasons why readers write about their fiction texts. For example, there could be a section that says, “I write to record big moments,” and another that says, “I write to keep track of the characters.”
- Choose some student examples that match the reader’s purpose to hang up under each category.

*(Continued)*



This is a sample of one classroom's inspiration wall with student examples of notebook entries (from Aimee Carroll's seventh-grade classroom in Paramus, New Jersey). Students use this wall to get ideas for their own notebook entry choices.



- For each student example, take a few minutes to examine and admire it with your class. Ask the students what they notice about it and label the moves the writer made with large sticky notes. There are many examples throughout this book of how we label student work with callouts that you can use to guide what you might write.

#### **A Few Tips:**

- Throughout the year, try to post examples from all the students. In this way, each student's writing is a possible mentor text to others.
- If you don't have the wall space, this could be a digital wall or presentation that students can access as an inspiration tool.
- We suggest you do not grade or write on these entries as then the focus becomes the grade and not the process the reader took to develop his thinking.



## CLIPBOARD NOTES: READING NOTEBOOK ENTRIES

After teaching these lessons on why we authentically write about our fiction reading, you might use an observation tool like this to collect information about your students. These clipboard notes can help guide those “what next” questions.

NAME AND DATE	OBSERVATIONS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Writes to remember</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Writes to record thinking</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Shares writing and thinking with others</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Organizes thinking</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Uses writing to discover thinking</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Other</li></ul>
Notes:	

Once you observe the kinds of writing about reading students are or are not doing, you can focus your lessons on what seems most underutilized. This can be taught in whole class lessons if most students need more practice, in small groups if it is just a few, or one-on-one in a conference.



When students choose how to use their reading notebook as a tool, they experience the process of thinking through their reading, which often leads to engaged and empowered readers.

### Students Create Self-Directed Reading Notebook Entries

Many teachers we support have decided to introduce and model the use of reading notebooks with their students. **What we mean by a reading notebook is a place to collect, develop, and revisit ideas about a text.** Students choose genuine and purposeful ways to record their thinking as needed, not because the teacher assigned them to write. In classrooms where reading notebooks are used, students make the choices about what, how, and when to record their thinking. The notebooks are filled with a variety of entries where the reader himself is the audience, not just the teacher. “Students must feel free to own

their own thinking and aspirations . . . otherwise they will simply do what is asked and nothing more” (Swinehart, 2009, p. 33). Of course, the teacher models how she uses her reading notebook and then allows students to make their own choices of what and how to write in them. Let’s clarify what an entry is, and in the next section, we will explain how to teach students to develop thinking with their notebook entries.

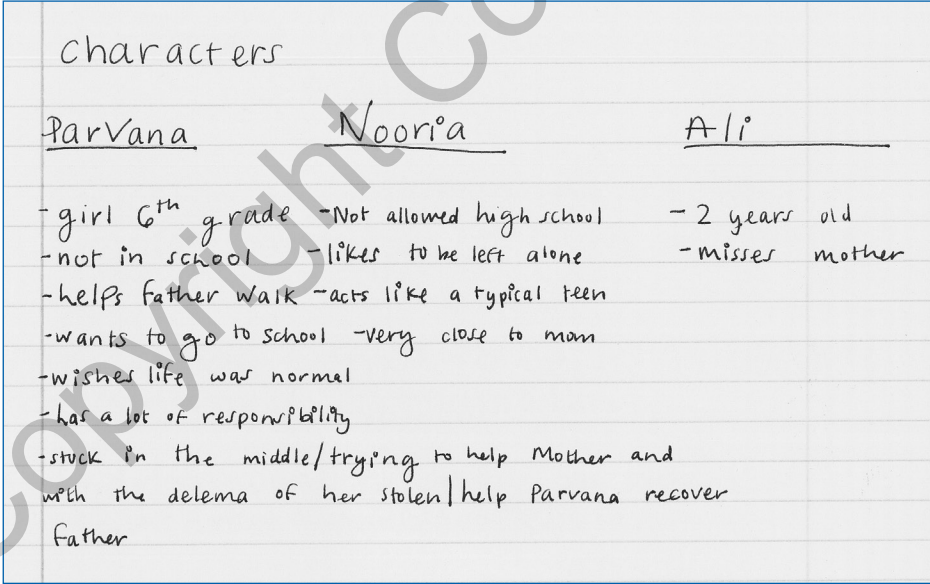
The word *entry* means the act of entering or the right of entering, gaining admission, or access. We choose to use the word *entry* because we see this type of writing as an entering—entering into the world of the book’s deeper meanings, entering into our thoughts, and entering into an experience with intention. For example, think about the way yoga studios set up intentional ways of entering the space. First, the yoga students take off their shoes and place them outside of the studio doors. Then the yoga students enter the room and find a location that feels right for them that day, and they place their mats down on the spot. Next, the yoga students decide what props and supports they will likely need that day and gather blocks, blankets, and belts and place them next to their mats. Finally, they sit quietly and consider how they want their practice to go, checking in with themselves and how they are feeling. These practices become intentional rituals that help the yogis prepare and get ready to begin. This is just like how we envision the use of a reading notebook practice. While someone can practice yoga without the mat, it serves as a reminder and container for going deeply into meditative movement. While someone can think deeply without a notebook, it serves as a reminder and container for going deeply into generating and developing ideas. The props and tools of yoga are like the language prompts and organizers chosen in the reading notebook.





**Readers choose how to collect their thinking, develop it further, and then revisit it as needed.** When students are reading books that take several days to read such as longer picture books, early chapter books, or longer works of literature, the writing they do in the notebook helps them remember what they were thinking and then go back to those thoughts and continue where they left off. In this way, the reading notebook is also like a more sophisticated bookmark. Bookmarks are used to save our places and remind us where we left off in the book. Notebook entries can help us save our *thinking* in those places and remind us where our *thinking* left off in the book. Notebook entries that are developed over time across an entire book can help readers identify patterns in their thinking, critique their own thinking, and synthesize ideas across time and sometimes across texts. Linda Reif (2007) explains why she encourages her students to use notebooks: “For me, it’s having a place where students can gather their ideas so they don’t lose their thinking. . . . It’s a place to look back at what

they were thinking about themselves, their reading, and their world that might merit further development” (p. 195).

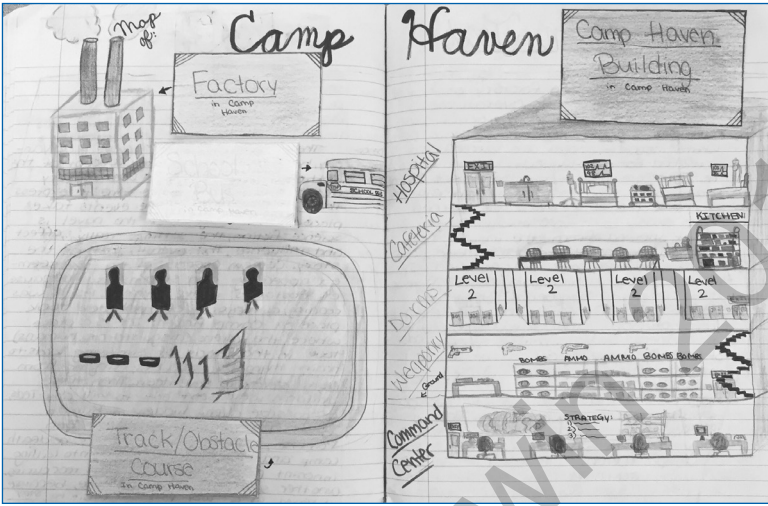
In *Visible Learning for Literacy* (2016), Fisher, Frey, and Hattie explain that the writing practices we teach in reading notebooks are highly effective at improving learning. For example, when students create their own concept maps and use a variety of ways to summarize in writing, more visible learning is likely to happen. They claim that “writing should be a means to uncover one’s own thinking in the process” (p. 125). But writing about reading is much more effective when students create their own thinking maps as a tool for understanding rather than filling out worksheets or creating an entry without purpose. Purposeless writing does not help with learning.

## Types of Entries That Grow Out of a Thriving Reading Culture

TYPE OF ENTRY	EXAMPLE
Writes to remember	 <p>The image shows a handwritten character chart on lined paper. At the top, the word 'characters' is written. Below it, three names are underlined: 'Parvana', 'Nooria', and 'Ali'. Under each name, there are several bullet points describing their characteristics and situations. For Parvana: - girl 6<sup>th</sup> grade, - not in school, - helps father walk, - wants to go to school, - wishes life was normal, - has a lot of responsibility. For Nooria: - Not allowed high school, - likes to be left alone, - acts like a typical teen, - very close to mom. For Ali: - 2 years old, - misses mother. At the bottom, there is a note: '- stuck in the middle/trying to help Mother and with the delemma of her stolen/help Parvana recover father'.</p> <p>The reader created a character chart to remember details about each character and to ensure she did not confuse who was who.</p>

TYPE OF ENTRY	EXAMPLE																								
Writes to record thinking	<div data-bbox="409 291 1339 809" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>CHARACTER COMPARISON</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Carley Connors <b>VS.</b> BRADLEY CHALKERS</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%;">  <p>Carley Connors is the type of person who is going through a hard time. I know this because in the text it says Carley's mom is in the hospital and it seems like Carley is starting to get a little stubborn. Perhaps this could be because Carley is feeling a bit wasted, and could also be insecure, however she doesn't...</p>   </div> <div style="width: 10%; text-align: center;"> <p><b>Similarities</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Insecure</li> <li>2. Going through a hard time</li> <li>3. Secretly caring</li> </ol> </div> <div style="width: 45%;">  <p>Bradley Chalkers is the kid you don't want to mess with.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. He picks fights with girls.</li> <li>2. He tells enormous lies.</li> <li>3. He has no motivation.</li> <li>4. He is sensitive and caring.</li> <li>5. He is smart and willing.</li> </ol> <p>Sometimes believing in yourself is the wall across an open field.</p> </div> </div> <div style="margin-top: 10px;"> <table border="1" style="font-size: 8px;"> <thead> <tr> <th>Before</th> <th>After</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Liked a lot</td> <td>No longer a bully</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Jerk</td> <td>Nice</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Larger</td> <td>in love</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bully</td> <td>Had bunch of friends</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mean</td> <td>Teachers liked him</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Unkind</td> <td>Started making good grades</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Jealous</td> <td>Did homework</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No friends</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Make-believe friends</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>No homework</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bad behavior in school</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div> </div> <p>Images source: Basketball hoop; boy: clipart.com; shoe, giraffe, flooring, crumpled paper, paperclip: Pixabay</p> <p>This is a digital notebook entry where the reader compares two characters' similarities and differences.</p>	Before	After	Liked a lot	No longer a bully	Jerk	Nice	Larger	in love	Bully	Had bunch of friends	Mean	Teachers liked him	Unkind	Started making good grades	Jealous	Did homework	No friends		Make-believe friends		No homework		Bad behavior in school	
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No homework																									
Bad behavior in school																									
Shares writing and thinking with others	<div data-bbox="553 953 1195 1544" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Possible Conversation Topics Chapters 1-4</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taliban thought that the educated people would get too much information about them</li> <li>• Taliban wanted to be in an absolute control of Afghanistan</li> <li>• didn't want anybody to figure out ways to defeat them.</li> <li>• like the Holocaust • Shazia is determined</li> <li>• Will bone digging be a new job for Purvana?</li> </ul> </div> <p>The reader made a list of possible topics to talk about with her book club. These topics are ideas she generated from previous entries.</p>																								

(Continued)

TYPE OF ENTRY	EXAMPLE
Organizes thinking	 <p>The reader created a visual representation of the setting of the book and included details from the text and also her thinking about the setting. Rather than simply use words, she also used pictures to organize the parts of the setting.</p>
Uses writing to discover thinking	<p>The Taliban had really harsh rules</p> <p>one of these harsh rules is that girls had to wear chadors, which are cloths that cover most of your face and body. Also women had to wear a burqua, which covers all of your face and body with a screen for her to look out of. Women had to wear these outside. They could not be outside without a man. Another really harsh rule that the Taliban had was that nobody was allowed to work or school. They thought that they would get too much information. It makes me think that the Taliban wanted to be in absolute control of Afghanistan, and they didn't want anybody to figure out ways to defeat them. maybe it was like the Holocaust</p> <p>The reader started with an idea and wrote it at the top of the page. Then she wrote about the idea to discover new ideas that stem from the first one.</p>



## Your Turn

Begin your own reading notebook practice. During read alouds, begin to model how you

- Set up your entry
- Decide what to write down
- Keep going back to your notebook to look at your thinking on the page
- Use the notebook entry to have a discussion

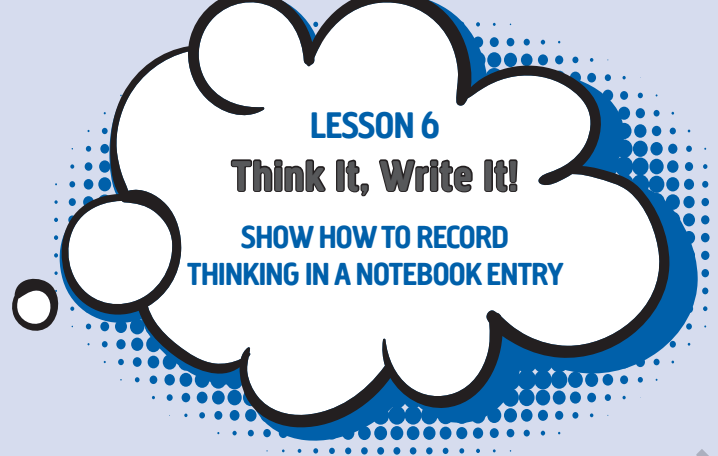
Then invite your students to do the same. Students can bring their reading notebooks to the class read aloud area and begin their own entries that they can use for partner, group, or whole class conversations. The following chart can help you get started.

WHEN I CHOOSE TO USE MY READING NOTEBOOK, I	
• Think about how I want to set this entry up and keep track of my thinking	
• Decide what is worth writing down	
• Keep going back to my notebook to think deeper and put my thoughts together	
• Use my entry to prepare for conversations with others	

## How to Collect Thinking in Notebook Entries

“Writing lets us think of things we don’t know we knew until we began writing. Writing is one way of representing and communicating our thinking to others, using our experiences, our knowledge, our opinions, and our feelings to inform and negotiate our understandings and misunderstandings of ourselves and the world in which we live” (Reif, 2007, p. 191). If we want to encourage students to use their reading notebook entries to collect the kind of thinking Reif describes, we likely need to model for them first what we mean and how they can get started. Over the next few pages, we highlight some key lessons and teaching ideas for helping students understand how to make choices about using their reading notebooks. Our intentional teaching helps students become intentional readers.





In this lesson, we show students the process of stopping, thinking, and creating a fiction reading notebook entry. This is a foundational lesson for students who are just learning the power of using writing as a tool for understanding their fiction texts.



### **Decide to Teach This Tomorrow if Your Students**

- Are not sure how to begin a reading notebook entry
- Are not writing in their reading notebooks at all
- Need help connecting their thinking process to their writing of entries

### **What You Need:**

- Your own reading notebook or chart paper for modeling
- A familiar read aloud fiction text (such as *Extra Yarn* by Mac Barnett, 2012)
- Students' reading notebooks or whiteboards

**Tell Why:** Remind students why we write down our thinking. Refer back to the anchor chart of reasons (created in Lesson 4).

### **Show How:**

- Reread a part of the text.
- Stop and think aloud about why you have a hunch this is something you want to recall and revisit.
- Then record your thinking in an entry. Narrate your process as you show it.
- Tell students we write when we have an idea we want to remember, share, or revisit later.

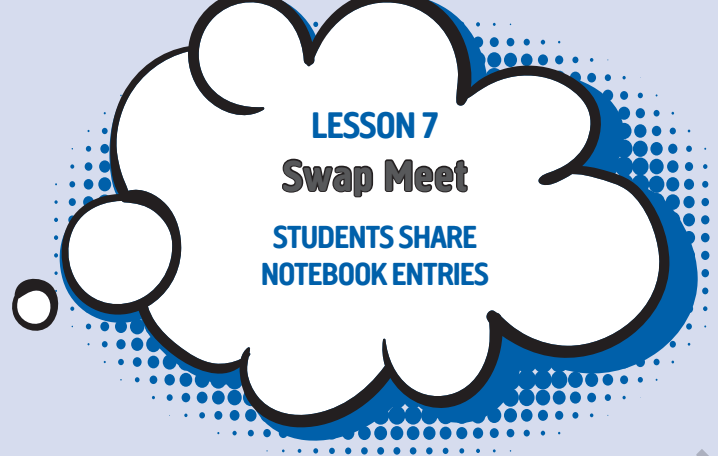
**Practice How:**

- Read another section and guide students to stop, think, and write down their ideas.
- Invite students to share the ways they wrote their thinking down and how it helped them.
- Emphasize there is no one right way to make an entry. As long as it helps them develop their thinking and understanding, it works.

**A Few Tips:**

- If students are brand new to writing about their thinking, they might need charts and examples hanging up of your notebook entries to refer back to.
- Remember we are assigning these entries to students not as tasks to complete for us, but rather as tools they can use to hold on to their thinking. Watch for language that conveys assignments.
- If students are experienced with reading notebooks, end by asking them how else they tend to record their thinking.

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The following lesson helps students understand how they can use their notebook as a powerful tool in more deeply understanding characters and themes when reading fiction.

### **Decide to Teach This Tomorrow if Your Students**



- Do not understand what we mean by writing as a tool
- Write about reading but not in ways that help them understand their fiction texts better (They simply write something quickly at the end of the period and never look at it again.)

### **What You Need:**

- Chart paper and markers
- Students' reading notebooks
- Some of your reading notebook entries

### **Discuss and Develop:**

- Ask students to write down a list of the ways they could use their notebooks when thinking about characters and themes in fiction.
- Conduct a class or small group discussion to share what students wrote down.
- Ask students to jot down any new ideas they heard after the conversation.

The following is an example of a class's list of ways the reading notebook entries can help them understand characters and themes more deeply.

## How Reading Notebooks Can Help Us Understand Fiction

- characters & themes

---

- get to know characters really well
- uncover patterns
- make ideas bigger and deeper
- change our "minds" - revise ideas
- find lessons to use in my life
- prepare to talk and share ideas

### A Few Tips:

- If you worry that your students will not know what to say, you can show them your notebook examples and then ask them what they notice.
- This lesson is not about character and theme analysis, but more about how a reading notebook entry can help your students *think* about those two elements.



In addition to showing examples and modeling how to collect thinking in notebook entries, it is helpful to ask students to set their own goals for how to use their notebooks. Setting their own goals allows students to take more ownership of the reading notebook entries. Even if students struggle trying to answer the questions in the following lesson, it is helpful to go through this process as they will not learn without practice.

#### **Decide to Teach This Tomorrow if Your Students**



- Still view reading notebook entries as a task for you, the teacher
- Are working at a variety of levels and experiences and you want to offer more personalization
- Need to develop more ownership of their reading notebook entries

#### **What You Need:**

- Reflection questions for students
- Students' reading notebooks
- Your reading notebook
- Any notes you take during reading conferences with students

#### **Tell Why:**

- Explain how it is important to take time often to reflect on how a tool is being used and to set goals for how we can use it even better. You might even make a connection to another out-of-school tool you use like a dishwasher or running shoes. Tell students that our reading notebooks are tools and we can reflect on how we are using them and what is working and not working so well so we can set personalized goals for next steps.

### Show How:

- Take out your reading notebook and display a list of reflection questions. Some examples follow, but feel free to create your own that match your students.
  - *What are some of your strengths as a reader of fiction?*
  - *How can your reading partner help you?*
  - *What are some goals you have for yourself when reading fiction?*
- Remember to *show how* you generate your answers to these reflective questions by explaining and modeling in front of students.

### Practice How:

- Give students time to answer each reflective question in their reading notebooks.
- As students are writing, walk around and meet with them in conferences. If you currently take notes when you confer, you can refer back to them to help students remember what you have been working on together.

Below is one student's reading notebook entry with reflection and goals. She was able to do this because her teacher modeled the process of reflecting and setting goals.

Self-assessment

I got really good at talking back to the author.

I still want to challenge myself to look at the first & last page of my book to find the author's meaning because I can't really know what the author is trying to tell me.

Thought about what she was now able to do and be proud of

Set a goal for herself that built off of her reflection strength that is specific and intentional

### **A Few Tips:**

- If your students are not yet collecting entries, save this lesson until they have several collected to reflect upon.
- For more information on helping students take charge and set their own goals, you can read *Mindsets and Moves: Strategies That Help Readers Take Charge* by Gravity Goldberg (2016).
- Taking conference notes can help you keep track of what you already taught each student, and these can be referenced as students set goals. If conferring is new to you, consider reading *Conferring With Readers: Supporting Each Student's Growth and Independence* by Gravity Goldberg and Jennifer Serravallo (2007).

Once students really understand authentic reasons to write about reading fiction and how they might record their thinking, it does not guarantee that all students will use writing as a powerful tool. The following lessons are designed for common challenges that we see in classrooms and are meant to help students refine their entries and make the most of them.

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## LESSON 9

### Make It Mine

TEACH STUDENTS HOW TO AVOID  
COPYING FROM THE BOOK

Once students are in a routine of thinking about their goals and intentions and then choosing how they will collect that thinking, you might want to teach them the difference between copying and thinking on the page. When we paraphrase rather than copy, we are doing the vital mind work that leads to comprehension and a transfer of learning. One way to do this is to look at an entry and ask, “Is this from the text, from my head, or from both?”

#### Decide to Teach This Tomorrow if Your Students

- Copy information from the book
- Don't understand the difference between details in the text and thinking about them
- Have trouble making inferences



#### What You Need:

- A familiar read aloud fiction book
- Chart paper and markers

**Tell Why:** Explain that copying details directly from the book has limited value because it takes a lot of time and we could simply just reread the page or part if we need to know verbatim what it said. Remind your students that notebook entries are more useful when we record and develop our thinking about the details of the text.

#### Show How:

- Use a familiar read aloud fiction book that both you and your students know well. This means you don't need to read the whole book and can simply begin by rereading a small part.
- Create a T-chart in front of your students and write, “Details From the Text” on one side and “My Thinking” on the other side.

*(Continued)*



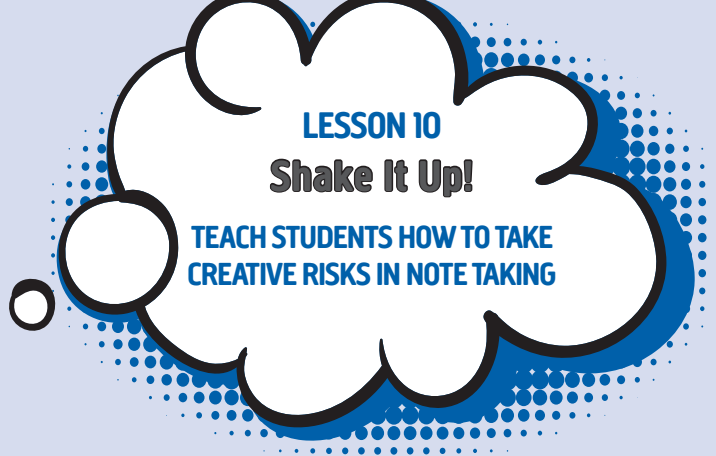
- Show students how you stop as you read and at first are quite literal. Jot down exact details from the book almost verbatim.
- Then show students how you think about the literal details and add your own thinking.
- Compare the “Details From the Text” column to the “My Thinking” column.
- When students understand the difference, remind them they can create their own ways of combining details from the book and thinking together into an entry and that the T-chart is just one way.

The example below is one we used to model this for students.

<u>El Deafo</u> , by Cece Bell	
Details From the Text:	My Thinking...
- Cece is really sick	- I'm worried about her. Hope she is OK!
- Cece can't hear what people are saying and falls a lot.	- She must be so scared. And her family must be both scared, but also grateful she is alive.

#### A Few Tips:

- Inevitably, some students begin to create entries in their notebooks where they copy details from their fiction books rather than collect their own thinking about the information. We suggest you let this happen at first so you don't end up dampening students' willingness to try out notebook entries.
- Letting students be literal and copy a bit from the text at first allows them to clearly see how copying and thinking are different.
- Remember these are first-attempt approximations and will get better with more modeling and practice over time.



Once students have been shown different ways they can choose to collect their thinking, it is easy for them to go on autopilot and simply do whatever you modeled from the class chart. If students seem to be mindlessly choosing a way to collect thinking from your modeling, then you can teach students they can create their own ways to make notebook entries.

#### **Decide to Teach This Tomorrow if Your Students**

- Always write in the same ways over and over again
- Seem stuck in a rut with how they record their thinking
- Write in ways that box their thinking in and narrow it rather than expand it
- Underutilize their graphics and image-based thinking



#### **What You Need:**

- Creative examples of notebook entries
- A chart of possible ways to create entries

**Tell Why:** Tell students how thinking can get stuck in a rut in the same ways our notebook entries can be stuck. Explain how we can and often should be creatively thinking about how to show our ideas in concrete ways on the page. Hold up colored markers, highlighter pens, and other tools to signal that notebook entries aren't just black and white words! Also acknowledge that these techniques for collecting and organizing thinking can feel new and strange if we are not used to doing this, and that is OK.

#### **Show Examples:**

- Display a few creative examples from other students and allow students time to try to figure out what each student was creating. They might even ask the student who created the entry questions about how she came up with the idea.

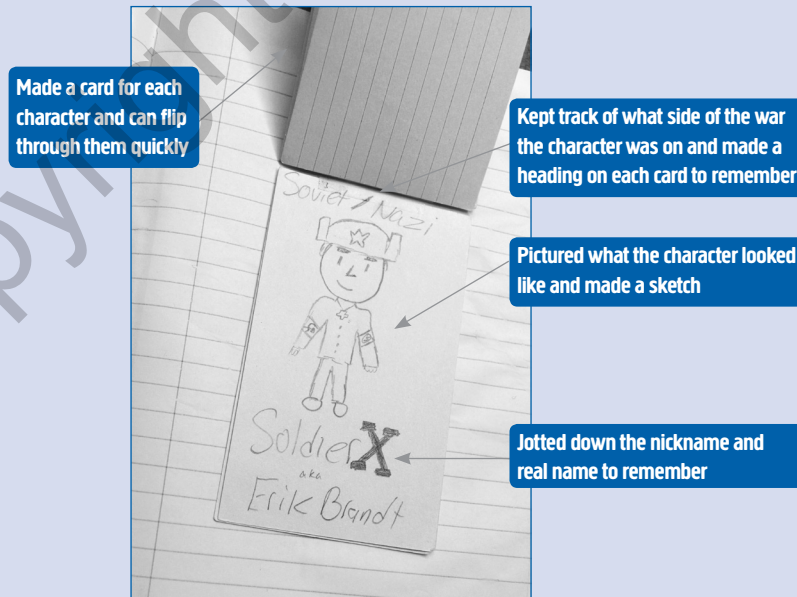
*(Continued)*

- Give students permission to make their own creative entries. We like to use the phrase “What if . . .” and then try something out to see how it works.
- Create a class chart that lists some possible ways fiction readers might make reading notebook entries so students can refer back to it and even add to it over time.

### A Few Tips:

- If your students are not yet being creative with their entries, then use the ones shown in this book, create your own, or collaborate with colleagues to see if they have examples.
- If your students are used to being given explicit directions for exactly what to do, they might need permission to be creative. It might be enough to just let them loose.
- One group of middle school teachers in New Jersey took photos of creative entries tied to clear thinking and purposes and made extensive slide shows. This served as a motivating incentive, and students wanted their work to be chosen. These teachers continue to show these examples to students years later.

One student example appears below. This student chose to create a card for each character in his novel. He turned the cards into a flipbook so he could easily flip through them and remind himself who the character was with important information. He chose this on his own as a tool to keep track of characters.

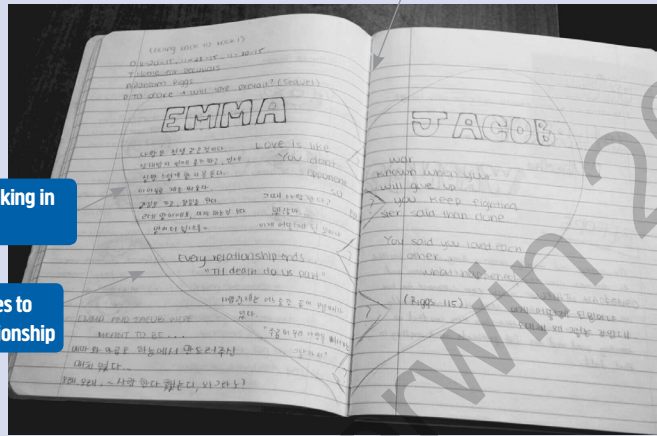


Let's look at another example. This student wanted to show the relationship between the two characters she was thinking about. She used a combination of images, words, and both her native language and English to create this entry.

Drew a heart with a broken line down it to symbolize the characters' relationship at this point in the text

Wrote down her thinking in her native language

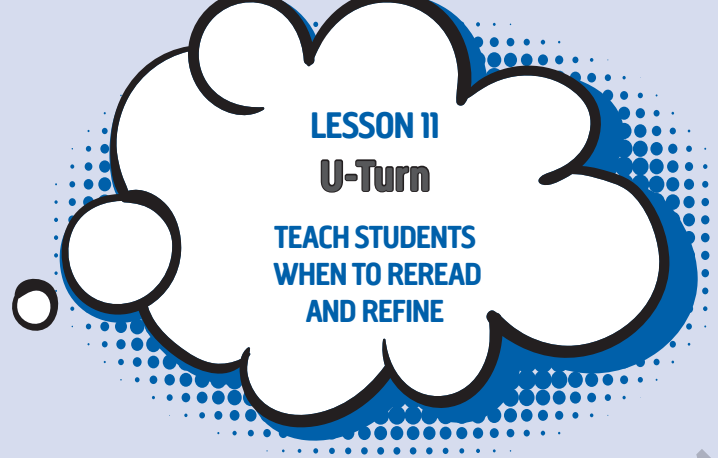
Chose key quotes to show their relationship



Below is a chart that the teacher, Pam, created with her class after studying what other readers in the class were beginning to try out in their notebooks.

### Different Types of Reading Notebook Entries

- ① Green-Blue-Reds
- ② Expanded Post-it (<10 different kinds!>)
- ③ T-chart: Character Feeling... Evidence
- ④ T-chart: Character Trait... Evidence
- ⑤ Close Reading... First Impressions  
Vocab/Words  
Patterns  
Now I think...
- ⑥ Character Feeling timeline
- ⑦ Thoughts → what from the book makes me think this
- ⑧ "what my character is doing → How I feel about that" chart
- ⑨ Character "web"
- ⑩ Letter to character



Once students know how to collect thinking in their notebook entries, you will likely want to show them how to develop their thinking even further. It can be easy for the entries to become something that students get through fast—like a product to complete—rather than a tool to develop and refine ideas. A few key lessons can help students break the focus on completion and remember to revisit their thinking once it is collected.



#### Decide to Teach This Tomorrow if Your Students

- Rarely revisit and reread entries
- Skim the surface and could go deeper with their entries

#### What You Need:

- Your reading notebook
- Sticky notes
- A book you wrote about to refer back to

**Explain When:** Explain how you take a few minutes to reread what you collected in your notebook entries at specific times. You can display a list of when you might choose to do this rereading of an entry.

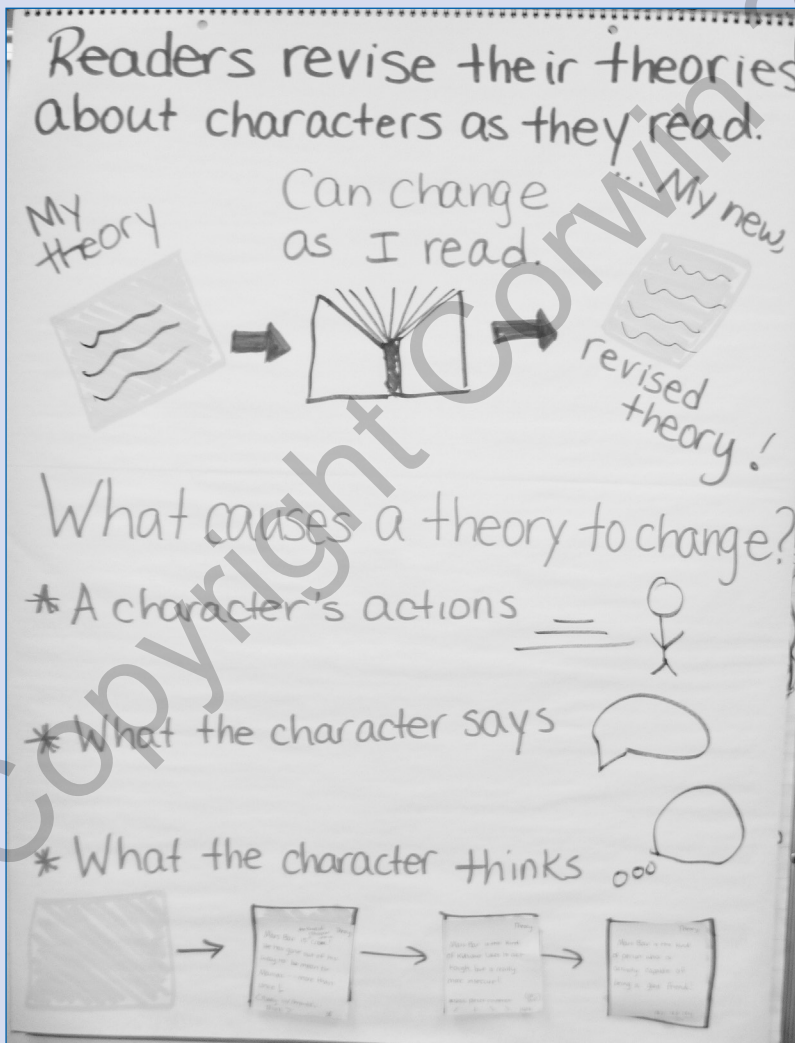
#### REREAD AND RETHINK ABOUT ENTRIES WHEN YOU

- Finish reading a chapter of the text
- Finish reading the whole text
- Come across a new event that supports your thinking or that challenges your thinking
- Are about to discuss your thinking with a partner or book club
- Have not stopped to think about the characters or themes for a while

### Show Examples:

- Take out one of your more quickly created reading notebook entries and show students how you reread it. When you reread your entry, you can ask, "What am I thinking about all of this now?"
- Show students how you put a sticky note on top of the original entry or simply add to the entry you first created.

This is a chart that Pam used with her students to show them how and why we revise our thinking in an entry.



### A Few Tips:

- Try giving students a few minutes toward the middle and end of reading time to reread and rethink on the page. You can build in time explicitly for this purpose until it becomes more natural for students and you can stop telling them when to do it.
- Find student examples of rereading and rethinking and show them off to students.
- Remember to highlight the importance of thinking and not just writing more for the sake of it.

Let's look at an example from a student who went back and added more to one of his entries about a character's motivation. As he read further in his book, he came up with a revised idea. This rereading and rethinking allowed the student to come up with ideas he did not originally have when he began reading the novel.

Acknowledges he had a different thought at first

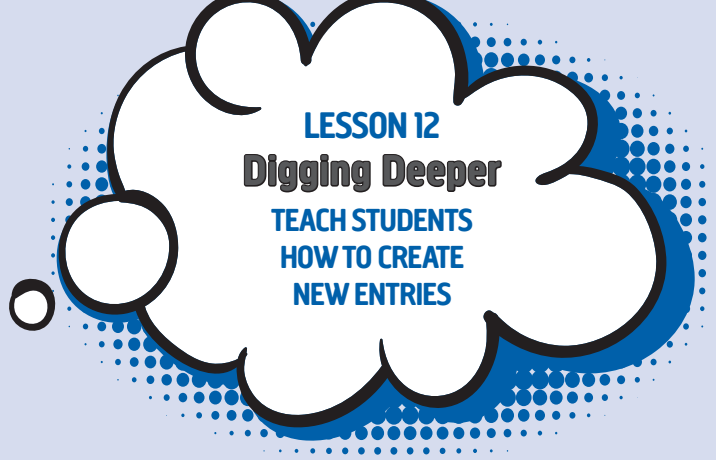
Uses the thinking language of "Now I think..." to show a change

Adds why his thinking changed

At first I thought the guy was doing graffiti on purpose, Now I think he did it for a reason so he could make his family happy.

\*because he was doing it in a black suit in a black night.

😊 because his family enjoyed it.



Once students have created a few entries with a common focus, it is helpful to show them how to consolidate their thinking and to create a new entry that highlights the biggest ideas from across several entries or texts.

### **Decide to Teach This Tomorrow if Your Students**

- Don't see how the parts of their text go together
- Don't connect entries and thinking
- View each entry as its own separate thinking rather than part of the whole of the text



### **What You Need:**

- Your reading notebook
- Sticky notes
- A book you wrote about to refer back to

**Tell Why:** Tell students how each entry with the same focus or from the same text can go together in some way. Rather than view each entry as standing alone, they can look across entries to see bigger ideas, themes, and commonalities.

### **Show How:**

- Model how you read through a few entries with the same focus from your reading notebook.
- Show your thinking about the patterns and bigger ideas you are seeing across each entry. These could be common themes, ideas, or questions that came up across pages.
- Create a new entry that shows the common ideas in one place. This could be a new list, chart, or visual.

*(Continued)*



Let's look at one student's new entry she created after reading through a few entries from two different novels. She wanted to look closer at the expressions the characters faced. She read her past entries from both books and used a combination of visuals and words to show her newer and more developed thinking.

Thought across two novels with the same focus

D 11-20 11-22 11-29  
T City of Bones  
M CASANDRA CLAKE  
P To remember: expressions of both books?

Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children:

DETERMINATION

- Finding the portal
- Avenging grandfather's death
- Prove his grandfather to not be a psychopath.

FRIGHTENED

- seeing the monsters
- searching for the peculiar house
- meeting wights

OVERWHELMED

- seeing his grandfather pass
- chased by monster
- killing the monster

AMAZED

- Realizing only he can see monsters
- Kissed under fig tree (emma)
- whistles everyone's peculiar abilities

city of Bones:

STARSTRUCK (lovestruck)

Love at first sight  
a) doesn't even know the boy and yet she fell in love w/

TRAUMATIZING

• seeing her "first love" die while picking up black blood...  
Is that traumatizing enough?

DOUBTFUL

• Did she see what she's seen?  
a) Simon couldn't see them / hear them  
b) They said "how can you see w... who are you."  
• Is she special... like Jacob?

Drew visuals to show the expression (The eyes are also a symbol.)

Created headings to describe the expression

Used details from the text to support her thinking

### A Few Tips:

While conferring with students and looking at their notebook entries, you might ask the following questions. You can use these questions to guide your note taking and decide what to revisit and teach again.

- Why did the reader write this entry?
- How is this entry helping the reader understand this fiction text?
- What are the reader's intentions, and how are they being met?
- How is the student making decisions about the type of entry he is making?
- Is the student revisiting entries and going deeper with his thinking?
- Often students need to see another model or have a shared practice with another class read aloud text.

## What's Next?

So far in this chapter, we have discussed why authenticity is important, the role of the reading notebook, and several key lessons for teaching students to use their writing to collect, develop, and revisit thinking. In the next section, we take a brief interlude to examine some common writing-about-reading practices and how they might actually be limiting our students and our decision-making processes. Now that we know what is possible to decide to teach, it is helpful to reflect on how we currently teach students to write about their reading. This can help us identify shifts we might make in our practices. The next section starts with a reflective questionnaire you can take to decide how to use the next section, where we discuss the common limiting practices and why they might not be serving us or our students.



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Reading notebook entries helps students not only develop their thinking, but *trust* their thinking, which serves them well as they read new books and study characters.

# SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONNAIRE

## READING NOTEBOOKS



Check all that apply. Celebrate what is checked off and use what is not checked off to set goals for your students.

### **When I listen to and observe my students, I notice they**

- Have a clear intention for why they write about their reading
- Vary the ways they write to match their intentions
- Use the entries to more deeply understand their texts
- Revisit their entries to add to and refine their thinking
- Use their entries to begin conversations with others
- Collect information and thinking in the entries
- Value and are proud of their entries
- View their writing as a valuable part of the reading process

**The area of my students' reading notebook entries I am most proud of is . . .**

**If I could change one thing about my students' reading notebook entries, it would be . . .**

**One goal I have for my students' reading notebook entries is . . .**

## What We Might Let Go of When Asking Students to Write About Reading

As we wrote this book, one of the current best sellers was *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing* by Marie Kondo (2014). All of our friends were reading it, and one of the big takeaways everyone mentions is how they must not take their time and go little by little as they declutter their homes. Instead, they must decide to go all in and get rid of the things they own that no longer bring them joy. It is in this fast and complete fashion that the decluttering happens and the joy can come forth. We see a lot of connection to making changes in our classrooms. If a practice is not bringing you or your students joy, then maybe it is time to swiftly remove it, declutter your teaching, and make room for joyful reading. In this chapter so far, we have examined several key lessons about how to set up reading notebooks with students so they are self-directed, motivated, and able to think deeply. Let's turn now and look at a few common practices in schools that may be cluttering up our time and getting in the way of this deep and joyful reading. Like Marie Kondo, we suggest you take an honest look and then “tidy up” the ways you ask students to write about their reading.

### Worksheets, Reading Guides, and Comprehension Questions

One of the most widely used practices we see in classrooms is giving students questions to answer about what they read. These questions are typically in the form of worksheets, reading guides, or quizzes, and most are called comprehension questions. Some are part of a basal series, some are teacher created, and some are part of test preparation materials. While we understand this is a common practice, we see many limitations for both teachers and students when the majority of students' reading is followed by answering someone else's questions.

The following example is a worksheet that students filled out in response to the short story “The Fight” by Adam Bagdasarian (see *First French Kiss*, 2003). The story is about a teenage boy who challenges another boy to a fight and then reveals how much he regrets the decision. Much of the story centers on his tension between not showing his weakness to his classmates and realizing how poorly he has treated them because he was a “popular” kid. Most of the story builds around this tension until the final fight scenes where the narrator is beaten up and has a self-realization that he deserved to be “de-crowned” as the king of the school because of the way he abused his social power. Shannon filled out the questions as she read, and her work is shown on the next page. We used arrows to point out what we noticed in her answers.

These are accurate and literal facts from the book.

She identified one detail from the text accurately, then made a very general statement. She is missing other key details revealed by the narrator's internal thinking.

This is not totally accurate. There was lots of discussion about whether there should be rules or not, and they did go back and forth about whether kicking and scratching should be allowed.

This shows a misunderstanding of the motivation for the fight. Yes, they did elbow each other in basketball, but the narrator was talking about how he could beat Mike up after school and was bragging about his ability, and this got back to Mike who took the challenge. Reputations and pride really caused the fight.

This is accurate and directly from the text.

While this is true, the reader is missing the other fight going on in the story—the internal fight between right and wrong and pride and common sense for the narrator.

Again, she is missing the other meaning of the fight and how it was a fight between his pride and his own survival. He would rather be beaten up than show weakness.

The Fight  
By Adam Bagdasarian

1. What game was the narrator playing in gym class?

Basketball

2. Which friend did the narrator walk home from school with?

Kevin

3. Why don't most of the kids at school think the narrator will win the fight?

Because the narrator ~~was~~ was 3 inches shorter than Mike. ~~and~~ Also, Mike was better at other stuff.

4. What are the rules of the fight?

There were no rules to the fight.

5. What is the main conflict in the story?

Two boys got into a fight because one of them elbowed the other which made them fight.

6. Who wins the fight?

Mike won the fight.

7. Why did the author title the story *The Fight*?

Because two kids got into a fight.

8. Is this a good title for the story? Tell why or why not?

Yes it is a good title for the story because two kids got into a fight.

If we look at Shannon's answers to the questions, we do gain some information about her understanding of the story. The following lists what we and her teacher were able to learn about Shannon as a reader when we studied her answers together.

- Able to answer some literal recall questions and get them correct (1, 2, 6)
- Identifies who wins the fight (6)
- Seems to be missing the tension going on around why he really does not want to fight but does anyway (3, 5, 7, 8)
- Missed some of the explanation around the rules of the fight (4)

After we looked at this list, we asked, "So what does this show us about what to teach Shannon next? Why did she miss some things, and how can we help her?" The room was silent as we really had no idea. We knew there were some big gaps in her understanding from looking at these answers, but we were not sure where they came from.

*The Limitations.* When we are given a set of questions to answer, what we pay attention to is already chosen for us. Our main goal in reading then becomes to find the correct answers. Frey and Fisher (2013) explain, "If students are asked only recall and recitation questions, they learn to read for that type of information" (p. 60). This is so limiting, because in reality engaged readers have many questions running through their minds as they read, and these self-created questions help them better understand the text than any given to them by others. It's no surprise, then, that in surveys of student readers they often say that the questions given to them by others never match the real questions they have as they read.

**When we look at answers to reading questions, we can guess what went right or wrong and why, but we really don't have a clue about what and how the reader was thinking as he read.** For example, perhaps Shannon did not think about the character's motivation or the many layers of the fight. Or perhaps Shannon struggled to understand the meaning of some of the words. Maybe Shannon had little background knowledge on the topic, or maybe she knew a lot about fights and trying to be "top dog." These questions did not let us know any of this. By only looking at her answers, we really don't know why and how Shannon went about reading this text. This means as teachers we may end up making our best guess about what Shannon needs to learn next and getting it wrong. We might end up using trial and error and wasting lots of time teaching strategies she does not need.

The following chart shows the possible limitations in the decision-making process when using worksheets and comprehension questions created by someone who is not the reader herself.

POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS OF BASING DECISIONS ON WORKSHEETS AND COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS	
<b>For Readers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narrows the focus for what is worth paying attention to</li> <li>• Creates a “hunting for answers” experience without really reading</li> <li>• Takes away some of the joy of reading</li> <li>• Can interfere with students’ understanding of information</li> <li>• Presents reading as a task to prove to the teacher students can answer questions correctly</li> <li>• Takes away from actual time spent reading</li> <li>• Provides little room for reflection or personalization of the reading process</li> </ul>
<b>For Teachers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unclear why a reader got a question right or wrong</li> <li>• Unclear what strategy to teach next</li> <li>• Could lead students to think that reading is about skimming the surface and not understanding</li> <li>• Could waste a lot of time trying to guess what to teach next</li> <li>• Could be turning students off to reading</li> <li>• Leaves little room for reflection on which parts of one’s teaching are effective and which are not</li> </ul>



### Your Turn

Ask your students to list the questions they have as they read a short story, then compare them to the questions you were planning on assigning. Then consider asking students to focus more on their own questions as they continue reading. Watch what happens to students’ engagement and their ability to understand the text.

Self-questioning (as opposed to teacher questions) has a huge impact on student learning with an effect size of 0.64 (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2016).

### Teacher-Assigned Written Responses

Many of the schools we support have moved away from giving students worksheets and questions, and instead assign students to write responses to their own reading. These written responses are usually selected from a menu of options. In our early careers, we gave students bookmarks that listed options for what and how they could respond, and then we collected and graded the responses weekly. Some of these options included writing a summary, writing a review, making a map, and choosing a key fact to describe in their own words. Students in many classrooms are given similar lists of options and then expected to create a written response daily at home or at school. The following written response was created by a reader who also read “The Fight.” This student, Amanda, chose to write a summary of the story. Her response and our noticings follow.

*The Fight*

*Summary*

**She wrote a topic sentence about what the story was mainly about, but missed the other layer about the internal struggle with pride.**

*This is a story about a boy who fights another kid at school. The characters are Mike, Kevin, Linda, and the narrator. The setting is at school and outside of school. The problem is that the two boys fight each other. The solution is that Mike wins the fight. I recommend this story to boys who like fighting stories.*

**She identified the characters and setting, but with no elaboration about which characters are more important than others and the roles they play, and no mention of how the setting impacts other elements of the story.**

**This is missing the real problem and solution because it focuses solely on the external events and misses what the characters are really feeling and motivated by.**

**She considers whom to recommend this book to but sees this only as a story about fighting and misses the internal struggle to fit in, save face, and maintain a reputation. It is also unclear if the reader enjoyed the story herself.**

If we look at Amanda's written response, we do gain some information about her understanding of the story. The following lists what we were able to learn about Amanda as a reader when we studied her response together with our teacher group:

- Able to identify the characters by name
- Unsure if she knows who is who and what each character's role was
- Able to name the setting for most of the story
- Unsure if she sees any connections between the characters and the setting
- Seemed to recognize the external conflict between the characters (the fight) but not the internal conflict about what was motivating the fight and what was going on for the main character
- Misunderstood the problem and solution



- Only views the story from a plot layer—thinking it is just about the fight—and misses the tension between appearing tough and being tough and between the popular boy and trying to keep his power and status with his peers

After we made this list, one teacher commented, “Well, we really only get such a small glimpse into what Amanda understood because we just are getting to see her paragraph summary.” End products in the form of written responses give us very little to go on when deciding what to teach tomorrow.

*The Limitations.* These types of written responses feel like a fill-in-the-blank activity. What we mean by *fill-in-the-blank activity* is that the student writes, “This is a story about . . . The characters are . . . The problem is . . .” and then all but one sentence in the paragraph are literal details she took from the text. The problem with formulas for reading is that they oversimplify what reading really is and send the message that if you can fill in the blank, you fully understood.

Years ago, we sat in the audience at Teachers College to hear one of the master reading teachers, Ellin Keene, speak. She stood in front of hundreds of teachers and explained that she wished she had never written about connections in her book *Mosaic of Thought* (Keene & Zimmerman, 2007). There was a collective gasp in the room as everyone was shocked. In almost every classroom across the country, teachers had been telling students to make self-to-text and text-to-text connections. When the murmurs of the teachers finally died down, Ellin went on to explain how she saw so many students mimicking the language of connections and using the terminology, but what they were actually saying, writing, and doing with connections was not helping them better understand their books. I am sure we have all heard a student (or a hundred) explain, “I have a self-to-text connection! I have a cat!” And then there is the uncomfortable pause because the pet cat was not relevant or important in the book at all. We might have to fight the urge to say, “So what?” What Ellin was pointing out was that filling in the connection blank with a detail from the text is not the process of making meaning. Many of the written responses we see are versions of this. This is true not just for connections but for many of the written response menu options. Most of what Amanda wrote was filling in the “I learned” blank and then writing down the parts she recalled.

Another of the main limitations for teachers when we try to use teacher-assigned responses to assess and understand students as readers is that we gain such limited information when students *write to fit a formula*. Amanda’s teacher commented, “This could be anyone’s summary. Nothing about it seems to be unique to Amanda. Anyone in my class could have written this.” Another limitation of teaching students written responses in this way is that all students’ work starts to look the same and we don’t get glimpses into how readers think and develop ideas differently

across time. In this book, we show you several examples of how students' thinking developed over time using student-directed reading notebook entries.

The following chart shows the possible limitations in the decision-making process when using written responses chosen from a menu of options.

POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS OF BASING DECISIONS ON ASSIGNED WRITTEN JOURNAL RESPONSES	
<b>For Readers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narrows the focus for what is worth paying attention to</li> <li>• Creates a formula for reading and writing about it</li> <li>• Takes away some of the joy of reading</li> <li>• Can mask whether students are understanding the text</li> <li>• Presents reading as a task to prove to the teacher students can write a good response</li> <li>• Takes away from actual time spent reading</li> <li>• Leaves little room for reflection or personalization of the reading process</li> </ul>
<b>For Teachers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doesn't clarify what strategy to teach next</li> <li>• Might end up teaching formulas instead of reading strategies</li> <li>• Might end up asking students to simply fill in the blank without impacting meaning making</li> <li>• Could waste a lot of time trying to guess what to teach next</li> <li>• Could be turning students off to reading</li> <li>• Leaves little room for reflection on which parts of one's teaching are effective and which are not</li> </ul>



Read through some recent student responses you assigned and ask yourself three questions:

1. How did this help the reader more deeply make meaning and understand the text?
2. What am I learning about the way this reader thinks about fiction text?
3. Can I see the individual differences in student thinking from these written assignments?

If you are not getting the type of information that would help you make an intentional decision, and if students do not clearly benefit from their notebook writing, consider shifting this practice to include more genuine student entries. Remember you can declutter your reading time so more joy and deeper thinking happen by letting go of some of these common practices.

It can be tricky to see the differences between assigned written responses and reading notebook entries because sometimes they both happen in a physical notebook. In *Writing About Reading* by Janet Angelillo (2003), the difference between a reading journal and a reading notebook is clarified: “A reading journal serves the purpose of proving to the teacher that the student has read the book by requiring students to write summaries or retellings after most or every reading session. . . . The journal exists to prove the act of reading to the teacher. However, the reading notebook differs in that it is for the reader’s benefit, not for the teacher” (p. 47). Let’s compare how these two types of writing are actually very different in the following chart.

ASSIGNED WRITTEN JOURNAL RESPONSES	READING NOTEBOOK ENTRIES
Audience is the teacher	Audience is the reader and maybe the reader’s partner or book club members
Purpose is to prove a student read and understood the book	Purpose is to record thinking and then develop it even further—to create meaning from the text
Written at the end of the reading session or book	Written as the reader is reading whenever an idea is worth writing down
A product created at the end	A part of the reading process done throughout the reading time
Often ignored after created	Often used for conversations with partners or book clubs, for revisiting ideas over time, and for self-reflection
<p><b>What the Teacher Learns:</b></p> <p>If a student read the book</p> <p>If the student can follow directions and create the product</p> <p>If a student had some understanding at the end</p>	<p><b>What the Teacher Learns:</b></p> <p>How a student organizes thinking</p> <p>Types of thinking a student chooses to focus on</p> <p>The reader’s process of thinking and forming ideas</p> <p>How thinking changes over time</p> <p>Aspects of narrative structure the student seems to understand or needs more support with</p> <p>Aspects of craft the student seems attuned to or seems to be missing</p>

When students self-direct what, why, and how, they will create entries in their reading notebooks in which they are more motivated to think deeply than when we assign the task. By taking the time to teach students what a reading notebook is and the authentic ways we use the entries, we are beginning to invite students into the real ways readers use writing as a tool for thinking. In this chapter, we

looked at several key lessons and examples of notebook entries you can teach your students. While it does take time and modeling, the benefits for students are totally worth it. The following chart shows some of the benefits for both readers and teachers when using student-directed reading notebook entries.

BENEFITS OF MAKING DECISIONS BASED ON STUDENT-DIRECTED READING NOTEBOOK ENTRIES	
<b>For Readers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows students to choose how they want to track and organize their thinking</li> <li>• Allows students to pursue their own ideas and questions as they read</li> <li>• Invites more ownership of the process</li> <li>• Allows students to transfer experiences and ways of using writing as an access point</li> <li>• Can improve comprehension</li> <li>• Reveals the real reasons why students are writing</li> <li>• Allows for less time spent writing during reading class</li> </ul>
<b>For Teachers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides a glimpse into how readers think as they read</li> <li>• Gives opportunities for thin-slicing student thinking</li> <li>• Shows the reading process closer to how it unfolds and not just as a product at the end</li> <li>• Allows teachers to more clearly figure out where confusions came up or where thinking was generated in the text</li> <li>• Allows teachers to see the unique ways a reader is making meaning</li> <li>• Involves less to read but more information gained</li> <li>• Leads to knowledge of what to teach next</li> </ul>



## READING NOTEBOOKS: AN ACTION PLAN

As you get started teaching students how to use writing as a tool in the reading process, consider the current reality in your classroom. Think about whether a reboot of the initial lessons on authenticity and writing about reading is needed or if your students just need some further modeling of how to use reading notebooks for deeper understanding. Use the information you gather from these conferences to decide what to teach next.

### GETTING STARTED WITH WRITING ABOUT FICTION READING

- Find out the reasons why your students currently write about reading (see page 60).
- Introduce genuine writing-about-reading lessons to students (see page 64).
- Explain to and show students what reading notebook entries are and why we create them (see page 64).
- Show students different ways to record their thinking in notebook entries (see page 80).
- Reflect with students and help them set personalized goals and intentions (see page 84).
- Inspire creative notebook entries by showing examples (see page 89).
- Take the **Self-Reflection Questionnaire** on page 98 and decide on some goals.
- Consider the practices you might want to let go of (see page 99).



Videos and viewing guide may also be accessed at  
<http://resources.corwin.com/GoldbergHouser-Fiction>



**The Power of Using a Reading  
Notebook: The Goal**

Video 3.1



**The Power of Using a Reading  
Notebook: Small Group Discussion**

Video 3.2



**The Power of Using a Reading  
Notebook: Deciding What  
to Teach Next**

Video 3.3



**Conferring About Reading  
Notebook Entries**

Video 3.4



**Conferring About Reading  
Notebook Entries: Deciding  
What to Teach Next**

Video 3.5



**A Reading Notebook Conference:  
The Lesson**

Video 3.6



**Reflecting on a Reading  
Notebook Conference:  
Deciding What to Teach Next**

Video 3.7