

A Study Guide for  
***Improving  
Comprehension With  
Think-Aloud Strategies***

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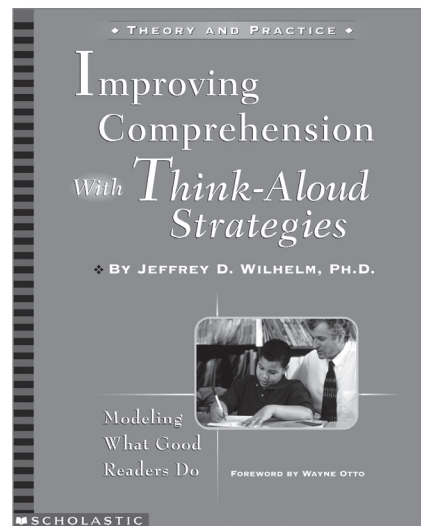
This study guide can be used as a vehicle for discussion and an exchange of ideas as well as a resource for generating actions you can take with your students. The guide is organized into two sections:

1. Thinking About Your Practice, which provides questions to ponder before you start reading *Improving Comprehension with Think-Aloud Strategies*.
2. Guidelines for your Study Groups including the following:
  - A short synopsis of each chapter
  - A quote or excerpt to react to
  - Questions to discuss
  - Take Action, which provides you with activities you can try in your classroom and then discuss in your next Study Group

## Part 1: Thinking About Your Practice

You may wish to use the following questions to begin your discussion before you start reading *Improving Comprehension with Think-Aloud Strategies*:

- How do you currently teach comprehension strategies in your classroom?
- How often do you explicitly teach a comprehension strategy?
- Do you use a consistent format for comprehension instruction?
- How often do your students engage in meaningful discussions when reading a text?
- How often do you use think-alouds to help students learn comprehension strategies?
- Do students have adequate opportunities to practice new comprehension strategies?



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- What types of scaffolding do you provide for students when they are learning a new strategy?
  - How do you currently assess students' use of comprehension strategies?
  - Do you ever ask students to verbalize the process they are using to read a text?
  - Do you ever model your reading process?
  - How often do you ask students to write or draw their responses to a text?
  - How often do you assess students' comprehension?
  - What do you use most often for assessment of comprehension?
  - How do you document growth in comprehension?
  - What resources do you have/use to support comprehension instruction?
  - How extensive is your classroom library?
  - Do you use a wide range of books, poems, and articles to teach comprehension?
  - Do you use articles from the Internet to help supplement reading materials?
  - Do you have plenty of sticky notes and highlighters to support reading instruction?

## Part 2: Chapter Overviews, Study Guide Questions, and Actions

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### CHAPTER 1: Seeing Reading: Making Strategic Knowledge Visible and Accessible to Students

#### Overview

In Chapter 1 you learn what a think-aloud is and how it can be used to help students comprehend. You will also learn how using think-alouds helps teachers develop strategic instructional techniques and how students benefit from think-alouds. The basic processes that all readers use every time they read are explained. These general strategies are the ones that students need to learn before they learn text- and task-specific processes.

#### React To

*Think-alouds are also inexact reproductions of a person's actual thinking about reading; no one can thoroughly or accurately capture all of what he sees in his mind's eye. For these reasons, a think-aloud has been described as allowing us "to track the trail of a porpoise" because it gives us glimpses into hidden activity, allowing us to infer what is happening below the surface of consciousness. (p. 20)*

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## Discuss

- How do you presently track a student's thinking?
- How often do you verbalize your own thinking while reading to your students?
- How does knowing a student's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) determine instruction?
- How can you assess your students' use of general processes while reading? How will this knowledge affect your use of think-alouds?

## Take Action

- Have students do a think-aloud. Have them choose a physical activity that they do often, such as tying their shoes, videotaping a television show, or making a sandwich.
- After students have done their think-alouds, ask them what they learned about doing the activity and have them compare it to having someone else talk them through the task.
- Start collecting articles, poems, newspaper items, and short stories to use when you do think-alouds. Look for articles that will grab your students' attention and motivate them. Then, choose an interesting article to read to your students. Do a think-aloud for your students. After you have read the article, ask them what they noticed or what surprised them about your thinking. Next, have them try a think-aloud on a short piece that they have read. Have them share their thinking with a partner. Ask students to describe how their think-alouds for reading are different, if at all, from their think-alouds when doing a task.

# CHAPTER 2: What All Good Readers Do: Introducing General Reading Process Think-Alouds

## Overview

Chapter 2 provides you with examples of how the author plans and conducts general-process think-alouds. The steps for planning and using think-alouds are explained so that you can start using these think-alouds right away. Teaching moves that you use to help students internalize new strategies as well as prompts that guide students to use the general reading strategies, are presented.

## React To

*After hearing a classmate read, Jon said, "I can't believe you do all that stuff when you read! Holy crap, I'm not doing...like nothing, compared to you." His classmate Ron, a teammate on the wrestling team, concluded a long commentary by saying, "If you don't do all that when you read, then you're not reading! It's like wrestling man, you have to be there! You have to know the moves and make the moves! If you just sit there you'll get pinned to the mat!" (p. 66)*

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## Discuss

- Survey your students to find out what they think reading is and to learn about how they read. How can you use this information to help you plan instruction?
- How does the gradual release of scaffolded assistance and responsibility help you differentiate instruction? How do think-alouds help provide assistance to struggling students?

## Take Action

- Share the strategies. Start a strategies list with students and post it on the wall as a reference for all. Have students select a strategy that they can share with a classmate. Have the student explain how they use the strategy and why it is important in helping him or her comprehend what he or she is reading.
- Review the General Reading Strategies prompts on pages 61–66. Develop a plan, deciding on which strategies you will focus on with your students and the order in which you will present the strategies. Determine a start day and begin!

# CHAPTER 3: Using Free-Response and Cued Think-Alouds to Show the Link Between These Processes

## Overview

Chapter 3 highlights ways that think-alouds help students understand how they currently read and ways for students to take on specific new reading strategies. Cued and free think-alouds develop students' ability to notice particular features of a text and to apply strategies to interpret those features. Free think-alouds that allow readers to report everything they are aware of doing as they read are explained. Using “cued think-alouds” will guide students to notice certain things about a text and about an author's craft.

## React To

*Our ultimate goal, of course, is for students to independently evaluate and adapt their own reading procedures. The reading process must be adapted in specific ways when engaged in task- or text-specific processes. (p. 87)*

## Discuss

- What kinds of baseline data do you now collect that help you understand if students are aware of their own reading processes?
- Reflect on your awareness of the Rules of Notice. Have you ever used the Rules of Notice? How do you plan on using the Rules of Notice when teaching the free and cued think-alouds?

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## Take Action

- Select a book by an author who writes about especially strong characters. Use this book to do a cued think-aloud. First explain to students why you like this author and why the characters are so appealing to you. Then do the cued think-aloud to build students' awareness of the important codings the author has used to make the reader aware of the inner thoughts, details, and asides that give an understanding of the characters.
- In your Study Group, work together to select several articles for which you can plan a Directed Reading and Thinking Activity. Have each person in the group plan the activity, write it up, make copies, and share with the group. This will help you all start building a resource of activities you can use with your students.

## CHAPTER 4: Navigating Meaning: Using Think-Alouds to Help Readers Monitor Comprehension

### Overview

In Chapter 4 you will learn ways to use think-alouds to give students strategies for monitoring comprehension and for “fixing up” their comprehension when it falters. With these think-alouds, students will learn how to recognize problems when they occur, how to isolate problems and name the source of confusion, and how to use the strategies to overcome their confusion.

### React To

*I asked him to recall the point at which the story had stopped making sense. I'll never forget how sad he looked when he said, "Reading is supposed to make sense? Reading... school...it's never made any sense to me. No sense at all." (p. 95)*

### Discuss

- Think about the students you have taught. Are there any students that are like the student above for whom reading did not make sense? What did you do then to help that student? Now that you have read this book, how will you help students understand that reading is supposed to make sense?
- These are three common responses of struggling readers:
  - They plow through readings, decoding words but not comprehending.
  - They don't bring meaning forward with them to build upon it as they work through a text.
  - They give up easily.
- Have students reflect on their own reading. What do they do when they run into a problem while reading? What strategies do they use to help them get past the trouble?
- How are you going to use think-alouds to help these struggling students?

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## Take Action

- Create a new bulletin board using the Flow Chart of Comprehension-Monitoring Behaviors as the topic. Encourage students to check this chart as they are encountering difficulties while reading (p. 91).
- Try the Teacher Does/Students Must Help! activity on page 108. Have students bring in an article they think will confuse you. Choose a short section from the beginning of the article that you will read. As you are doing your think-aloud, isolate the areas that are giving you problems and talk through the strategies you are using to help you comprehend.

# CHAPTER 5: Intensified Involvement: Getting Visual, Emotional, and Verbal With Texts

## Overview

Chapter 5 will help you increase student involvement with the text. You will learn the three major ways of promoting engagement, which are to improve the way we visualize a text, to improve the way we engage emotionally with it, and improve the way we converse with authors and “talk back” to them about their work and the ideas they express. Students who deepen their involvement with the text have a deeper level of comprehension and understanding.

## React To

*When I read a story, I feel as though I am in that story world. Sometimes I am a character, sometimes I accompany the characters and act on their behalf—or try to. I intensively visualize characters, settings, situations and events—so much so that I can describe places and activities that are not described, or are only hinted at, in the text itself. (p. 113)*

## Discuss

- Engaged students, like the author, also lose themselves in a story. Poor readers do not. Why do you think these struggling students are not engaged? How do you think getting students engaged visually, emotionally, or verbally with a text will change the way they interact with a text? Why?
- What think-alouds do you currently use that get students more deeply involved with reading? Share them with the group.

## Take Action

- Do an Internet search. Go to [www.eskimo.com](http://www.eskimo.com) to find interesting articles about physical science or to [www.essortment.com](http://www.essortment.com) to find articles about music history. Print out the articles and share them with your colleagues. Select one or two of the articles and plan a think-aloud lesson using the Conversing with the Author (p. 122) activity.

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- Pair students. Have each student read an article or story that they especially like. Partners should read each other's stories or articles. Have each student pretend to be the author of the article or story he or she has chosen. Students can prepare for an interview by researching facts about the author. Then have the partners converse with each other in their roles as author.

## CHAPTER 6: New Genres, New Reading Moves: Using Think-Alouds to Teach Students About Text Types and Text Features

### Overview

When students come to the middle grades, they are introduced to text types that are new to them and they are asked to use specialized strategies that are probably unfamiliar to them. To compound that problem, we often stop teaching these strategies just when students need them most. In this chapter, you will look at the specific demands of common text types and learn how talk-backs and cued think-alouds can help students recognize and meet those demands.

### React to

A poem written by a student after learning about fables.

*I thought fables were just for school  
But I was wrong, fables can be cool  
They can help you get justice and speak what's true  
And let people know what they never knew  
Though it might sound strange  
Fables can do your work for change  
And this tip:  
You can stay out of trouble too—  
If nobody knows the author was you!*

### Discuss

- What genres are your students most successful at reading. What gives them difficulty?
- What aspects of the text give them difficulty?
- How do you plan for genre instruction? What tools do you currently use that make genre instruction successful? How can the Inquiry Square (p. 140) help you when introducing a new genre?

### Take Action

- Review the text that you use most frequently in your classroom. What makes the text difficult? Make a list of these difficult features. Discuss in your group how you help students handle these difficulties using think-alouds.

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- Experiment on your own to determine the expectations that particular kinds of text-types place on readers. Do think-alouds of your own so you can see what the successful readers do to grasp the material that the less successful ones don't do when they are reading various types of texts.
  - Go to the Internet and type "Unreliable narrators" into a search engine. Learn the impact on comprehension by reading about unreliable narrators.

## CHAPTER 7: Making it Meaningful: Using Think-Alouds for Performance-Based Assessment

### Overview

Chapter 7 shows you how think-alouds can be used as motivating, effective assessment tools. You will learn how think-alouds can be used to make a student aware of his or her strengths and to help them see their own progress.

### React To

*After Walter made his reading activity known to me with a think-aloud, I began to point out all the expert strategies he was using as a reader. At one point, this seventh grader interrupted me, and with a surprised expression dancing across his face said, "Hey, maybe I can get good at this!" (p. 162)*

### Discuss

- Throughout this book you have read statements by students who were frustrated, elated, and surprised by what they could and could not do as readers. Now that you have read most of this book, what have you learned about yourself as a reader? What have you learned about your students while doing think-alouds?
- How has your instruction in reading changed since you started using think-alouds? Which think-alouds have brought about revelations for your students? How are you going to use think-alouds to determine student growth?

### Take Action

- Read over: A Boon to Teacher Research on page 163. Plan how you are going to use think-alouds to assess your own teaching.
- Teach your students how to self-assess. Develop a plan so that your students can not only assess their reading, but also so that they can set goals for themselves which allow them to grow as readers.
- Reflect on the think-alouds you have used. Which think-alouds have worked for your students? Which think-alouds haven't you used? Select three think-alouds that you have not tried and plan to use them in your instruction.