Reading for Meaning
How to Build Students’ Comprehension, Reasoning, and Problem-Solving Skills

Why Reading for Meaning?
If you could teach only one thing, what would it be?

**reading**

Why Reading for Meaning?
We do not want our students to simply read—we want them to be proficient readers who read for meaning.

So, what does it mean to *read for meaning*?
Why Reading for Meaning?

Give One, Get One

1. Jot down two ideas on what it means to read for meaning.

2. Stand up and find a partner. Give One of your ideas to your partner and Get One in return. If you have the same ideas, work together to create a new one and add it to your lists.

3. Quickly find a new partner. Give One, Get One.

4. Repeat Step 3 until you have a total of six ideas.
   - Work in pairs, not groups (don’t huddle!)
   - Don’t copy each other’s entire lists.

Let’s Get Started

We sometimes forget how challenging it can be to make meaning out of the words on a page.

The following rigorous texts have been selected to remind us that understanding what we read isn’t always a snap. And that our students often face challenges when they read.

Preview all the readings. Then select two for close reading—the one you believe is the most challenging, and the one you believe will be the least challenging.
Let’s Get Started

The following readings come from Reading for Meaning: How to Build Students' Comprehension, Reasoning, and Problem-Solving Skills (PLC Guide)

An Anthology of Rigorous Readings

**Reading One:**
Excerpt from the Federalist Papers, “Concerning the General Power of Taxation,” by Alexander Hamilton

It has been already observed that the federal government ought to possess the power of providing for the support of the national forces; in which proposition was intended to be included the expense of raising troops, of building and equipping fleets, and all other expenses in any wise connected with military arrangements and operations. But these are not the only objects to which the jurisdiction of the Union, in respect to revenue, must necessarily be empowered to extend. It must embrace a provision for the support of the national civil list; for the payment of the national debts contracted, or that may be contracted; and, in general, for all those matters which will call for disbursements out of the national treasury. The conclusion is, that there must be interwoven, in the frame of the government, a general power of taxation, in one shape or another.

**Reading Two:**
“There’s a certain Slant of light,” by Emily Dickinson

There’s a certain Slant of light,
Winter Afternoons —
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes —

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us —
   We can find no scar,
But internal difference,
Where the Meanings, are —

None may teach it — Any —
’Tis the Seal Despair —
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air —

When it comes, the Landscape listens —
Shadows — hold their breath —
When it goes, ’tis like the Distance
On the look of Death —
Reading Three:
A Description of the Healing Process Adapted from a High School Biology Textbook

Endothelial cells bud and grow from existing blood vessels, undergo canalization, and form a vascular network by connecting to other cell buds. New vessels are all similar in appearance, with thin walls made of endothelium. Protein leaks out of the vessels, bathing the wound area in plasma and providing a rich nutrient medium that promotes rapid cell growth. Once this nutrient medium is established, differentiation can begin. Some vessels will become venules, which are large and have thin walls, while others will become arterioles, which have muscular coats. As granulation tissue steadily changes, some vessels will disappear. Those that remain will become part of the capillary bed.

Reading Four:
Excerpt from *The Souls of Black Folk*, by W. E. B. Du Bois

Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word.

Reading Five:
What Is the Hailstone Sequence? Exploring a Mathematical Mystery

One mystery that has puzzled mathematicians for years is a strange series of numbers known as a hailstone sequence. To create a hailstone sequence, take any positive integer \( n \). If \( n \) is even, divide it by 2. If \( n \) is odd, multiply it by 3 and add 1. Then, take the result and repeat the process over and over to generate a sequence of numbers. If we apply this procedure to \( n = 11 \), we get: 34, 17, 52, 26, 13, 40, 20, 10, 5, 16, 8, 4, 2, 1, 4, 2, 1. . . . These sequences are called *hailstone sequences* because the numbers mimic the up-and-down movement of hailstones as they form in clouds.

Notice that the sequence above ends in a repeating pattern—4, 2, 1, 4, 2, 1. . . . It is believed that every value for \( n \) will settle into this 4, 2, 1 pattern. But some values generate long sequences before the pattern emerges. For example, \( n = 27 \) yields 109 numbers before the 4, 2, 1 pattern begins. So what’s the mystery? No mathematician has yet proven that every positive integer will generate a sequence that eventually settles into a repeating 4, 2, 1 pattern.
Let's Get Started

So, how did you do? Did the reading you expected to be more challenging end up being more challenging?

Take a metacognitive approach to your own reading by thinking about this question: *how did you read your selected texts?* What was your mind doing to help you understand what you read?

Review the following list of reading and thinking skills. Check off any skills you found yourself using.

Let's Get Started

Before reading did you . . .

- Draw forth relevant background knowledge to help you put the reading in context?
- Make predictions about what the text would say or include?
- Establish a purpose for reading?

During reading did you . . .

- Apply criteria that helped you separate critical information from less relevant information?
- Pay attention to how the ideas were presented and organized?
- Make notes to help you highlight and clarify important ideas?
- Form images in your head to help you "see" the content?
- Note when the text confirmed or refuted your initial ideas or prereading predictions?

After reading did you . . .

- Reflect on what you read?
- Try to assess and shore up gaps in your comprehension? (What do I need to better understand?)
- Look for opportunities to discuss your ideas with other readers?

Let's Get Started

Thinking About the Skills of Comprehension

- How did the skills you checked off help you understand the texts you read?

- What are some ways you teach these skills in your classroom?

- What are some of the recurring challenges you face in helping students build their reading and reasoning skills?
Before reading did you . . .

- Draw forth relevant background knowledge to help you put the reading in context?
- Make predictions about what the text would say or include?
- Establish a purpose for reading?

During reading did you . . .

- Apply criteria that helped you separate critical information from less relevant information?
- Pay attention to how the ideas were presented and organized?
- Make notes to help you highlight and clarify important ideas?
- Form images in your head to help you “see” the content?
- Note when the text confirmed or refuted your initial ideas or prereading predictions?

After reading did you . . .

- Reflect on what you read?
- Try to assess and shore up gaps in your comprehension? (What do I need to better understand?)
- Look for opportunities to discuss your ideas with other readers?
Thinking About the Skills of Comprehension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How did the skills you checked off help you understand the texts you read?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are some ways you teach these skills in your classroom?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are some of the recurring challenges you face in helping students build their reading and reasoning skills?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What Is a Proficient Reader?

So, what is a proficient reader? The first answer is—if you checked off several of the skills from the list—you. Proficient readers use a set of skills to help them derive meaning from even the most difficult texts.

Here are some of the most important findings to emerge from the body of proficient reader research. Think about the impact this research might have on your work in reading instruction.

What Is a Proficient Reader?

Good reading is active reading.

Good readers are actively engaged not only while reading but also before reading—when they call up what they already know about the topic and establish a purpose for reading—and after reading, when they reflect on their understanding and seek to deepen it. Michael Pressley (2006) summarizes it this way: “In general, the conscious processing that is excellent reading begins before reading, continues during reading, and persists after reading is completed” (p. 57).

What Is a Proficient Reader?

Comprehension involves a repertoire of skills, or reading and thinking strategies.

Susan Zimmermann and Chryse Hutchins (2003) synthesize the findings of the research on proficient readers by identifying “seven keys to comprehension,” a set of skills that includes making connections to background knowledge, drawing inferences, and determining importance.
What Is a Proficient Reader?

These comprehension skills can be taught successfully to nearly all readers, including young and emerging readers.

For example, in *Mosaic of Thought* (2007), Ellin Oliver Keene and Susan Zimmermann show how teachers at all grade levels—including primary-level teachers—teach comprehension skills in their classrooms.

A wide body of research shows that teaching students comprehension skills has “a significant and lasting effect on students’ understanding.” (Keene, 2010, p. 70)

Now that you know a little bit of the story and research behind the list, consider this question: *how might this research affect the way you teach students to “read for meaning”*?
Introducing Reading for Meaning

When used well, the Reading for Meaning strategy helps teachers and students meet the following six learning goals.

GOAL #1: Find Main Ideas
GOAL #2: Gather and Evaluate Evidence
GOAL #3: Develop Powerful Explanations and Interpretations
GOAL #4: Build Students’ Note-Taking Capacities
GOAL #5: Improve Students’ Writing
GOAL #6: Develop Students’ Habits of Mind

Introducing Reading for Meaning

Which of the six goals of Reading for Meaning is most important to you, and why?

Reading for Meaning in the Classroom

At the heart of any Reading for Meaning Lesson is a set of statements. These statements can be about
• a text,
• a group of texts,
• a word problem,
• a data chart,
• a painting,
• a lab experiment, or
• any other source of information you want students to think about deeply.
It is important to remember that Reading for Meaning statements need not be true. They can inspire debate, encourage speculation, or be open to interpretation. Statements can even be flat-out false.

What’s important is that students gather evidence that supports or refutes each statement or, as is sometimes the case with particularly rich or open-ended statements, that supports and refutes the statement.
**Reading for Meaning in the Classroom**

**Mark Problem Statements**

Read the statements below. Think about the problem and determine what you agree or disagree with. Then, respond with your own and write your responses.

1. Mr. Smith had more $5 bills than $10 bills.
2. The problem is to determine that the total money - $5 bills and $10 bills.
3. The possible number of dollars was in the explanation of the problem. To find the number of dollars, write the problem.
4. The amount of money Mr. Smith took is represented in the table.
5. The problem statement included the total money.

---

**Reading for Meaning in the Classroom**

A high school English teacher uses Reading for Meaning to help students interpret a scene from *Romeo and Juliet.*

---

**Reading for Meaning in the Classroom**

A middle school science teacher helps students develop meaningful conclusions during a lab.
A 5th grade teacher builds students' data-analysis skills using Reading for Meaning.

An elementary school student analyzes an imaginary creature called a "Woggle" using Reading for Meaning statements.

A high school student uses Reading for Meaning as a note-taking technique.
A student in a career and technical education craft skills program creates a Reading for Meaning organizer in her notebook to help her read a text on stonemasonry.

A Spanish teacher uses statements to help students analyze Goya’s etching “And There’s Nothing to Be Done.”

Looking at the Potpourri of Samples

- How do statements deepen student thinking?
- What effects would they likely have on comprehension and on classroom discussion?
- Which applications caught your attention?
- Which applications would work best in your classroom?
Section 1: Why Reading for Meaning?

Reading for Meaning in the Classroom

The following readings come from Reading for Meaning: How to Build Students’ Comprehension, Reasoning, and Problem-Solving Skills (PLC Guide)

Figure 1.1  Reading for Meaning Potpourri

A primary teacher writes three statements about *Frog and Toad: Dragons and Giants* on an easel to help students learn how to find evidence in a reading.
A 2nd grade teacher builds students’ word problem-solving skills by asking them to analyze a problem using statements.

**Problem:** Carly has three sweaters and two pairs of jeans. If she has an orange sweater, a purple sweater, and a red sweater plus a pair of blue jeans and a pair of black jeans, how many different outfits can she make?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Carly can make an outfit with an orange sweater and a pair of blue jeans.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To answer the problem, all you need to do is add.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The answer to the problem will be more than three outfits.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A high school English teacher uses Reading for Meaning to help students interpret a scene from *Romeo and Juliet*.

*Romeo & Juliet — Act III, Scene II*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree?</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Your Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1. Juliet’s soliloquy (lines 1–31) reveals how young and naive she is</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>2. Juliet’s attitude towards Romeo changes over the course of the scene.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>3. Juliet cares more about Tybalt’s death than Romeo’s banishment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>4. Juliet is in control of her emotions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1.1 (continued)

A middle school science teacher helps students develop meaningful conclusions during a lab.

Gravity Lab Statements
USE YOUR EXPERIMENTS AND COMPUTER MODELS TO COLLECT EVIDENCE FOR AND AGAINST EACH OF THE FOLLOWING CONCLUSIONS.

1. The size of an object does not affect its gravitational force.
2. The closer you get to an object, the stronger the gravitational force.
3. Gravity is only an attractive force.
4. If the mass of one of two attracting objects is doubled, the gravitational force will be doubled.

A 5th grade teacher builds students’ data-analysis skills using Reading for Meaning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Evidence/Calculations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Seattle receives more precipitation in a year than Boston.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Over the course of a year, Denver sees more snow than rain.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. On average, January is the coldest month.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. If you were spending Independence Day in Boston, the temperature would not be above 81°F.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average temperatures recorded in degrees Fahrenheit (°F)
Average precipitation amounts recorded in inches (in.)

A 5th grade teacher builds students’ data analysis skills using Reading for Meaning statements. Students analyze the weather data (see inset table) and collect evidence for or against each statement.

continued
An elementary school student analyzes an imaginary creature called a “Woggle” using Reading for Meaning statements.

Figure 1.1 (continued)

A high school student uses Reading for Meaning as a note-taking technique.
Figure 1.1 (continued)

A student in a career and technical education craft skills program creates a Reading for Meaning organizer in her notebook to help her read a text on stonemasonry.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Stone is an easy material to work with.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. High skilled stonemasons are in greater demand than ever.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Stone is only used for decoration.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Stonemasons don’t need to work with a variety of materials.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Stonemasonry is both an art and a science.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Spanish teacher uses statements to help students analyze Goya’s etching “And There’s Nothing to Be Done.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidencia a Favor</th>
<th>Declaraciones</th>
<th>Evidencia en Contra</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>La artista no es optimista de la guerra.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Los soldados están haciendo su trabajo.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>El prisionero es desafiante.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Looking at the Potpourri of Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do statements deepen student thinking?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What effects would they likely have on comprehension and on classroom discussion?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which applications caught your attention?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which applications would work best in your classroom?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Four Principles and Phases of Reading for Meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principle Two: Read Like You Mean It</td>
<td>Phase Two: Active Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle Three: Just Because You’re Done Reading Doesn’t Mean You’re Done Reading</td>
<td>Phase Three: Reflection and Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle Four: Put Reading to Use</td>
<td>Phase Four: Synthesis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample Lesson: The Mouse at the Seashore

Directions: Read the statements before you read the story. Then read the story and collect evidence in the text that either supports or refutes each statement. Meet with a group and share your evidence. Then, as a group, decide if you agree or disagree with each statement.

Sample Lesson: The Mouse at the Seashore

Reading for Meaning Organizer
**Before**

The mouse thought he ought to go to the ocean.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Refute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The mouse had no real reason to leave home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Refute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

When the end is good, even a difficult journey is worth it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Refute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The author probably wants us to feel happy for the mouse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Refute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
A mouse told his mother and father that he was going on a trip to the seashore. “We are very alarmed!” they cried. “The world is full of terrors. You must not go!”

“I have made my decision,” said the mouse firmly. “I have never seen the ocean, and it is high time that I did. Nothing can make me change my mind.”

“Then we cannot stop you,” said the mother and father mouse, “but do be careful!”

The next day, in the first light of dawn, the mouse began his journey. Even before the morning had ended, the mouse came to know trouble and fear.

A cat jumped out from behind a tree.

“I will eat you for lunch,” the cat said.

It was a narrow escape for the mouse. He ran for his life, but he left a part of his tail in the mouth of the cat.

By afternoon the mouse had been attacked by birds and dogs. He had lost his way several times. He was bruised and bloodied. He was tired and frightened.

At evening the mouse slowly climbed the last hill and saw the seashore spreading out before him. He watched the waves rolling onto the beach, one after another. All of the colors of the sunset filled the sky.

“How beautiful!” cried the mouse. “I wish that mother and father were here to see this with me.”

The moon and the stars began to appear over the ocean. The mouse sat silently on the top of the hill. He was overwhelmed by a feeling of deep peace and contentment.
Sample Lesson: The Mouse at the Seashore

A mouse told his mother and father that he was going on a trip to the seashore. "We are very alarmed!" they cried. "The world is full of terrors. You must not go!"

"I have made my decision," said the mouse firmly. "I have never seen the ocean, and it is high time that I did. Nothing can make me change my mind."

Then we cannot stop you," said the mother and father mouse, "but do be careful!"

The next day, in the first light of dawn, the mouse began his journey. Even before the morning had ended, the mouse came to know trouble and fear. A cat jumped out from behind a tree. "I will eat you for lunch," the cat said.

It was a narrow escape for the mouse. He ran for his life, but he left a part of his tail in the mouth of the cat.

By afternoon the mouse had been attacked by birds and dogs. He had lost his way several times. He was bruised and bloodied. He was tired and frightened.

At evening the mouse slowly climbed the last hill and saw the seashore spreading out before him. He watched the waves rolling onto the beach, one after another. All of the colors of the sunset filled the sky.

The moon and the stars began to appear over the ocean. The mouse sat silently on the top of the hill. He was overwhelmed by a feeling of deep peace and contentment.

Designing a Lesson: Weighing the Elephant

Now that you've experienced a Reading for Meaning lesson for yourself, it's time to try your hand at crafting some statements.

Read the "Weighing the Elephant" story and think about what ideas you would want your students to focus on.
Almost two thousand years ago, there lived a very smart young Chinese prince named Cao Chong.

When the prince was seven years old, an envoy from Siam presented his father with a huge elephant. The king and his court had never seen a creature like this before, and they marveled at its great size and wondered how much it weighed.

“Why don’t we find out?” asked Cao Chong.

“How?” asked his father. “We don’t have a scale big enough!”

Cao Chong thought for awhile. “It’s not that hard,” he said. “Follow me to the river, and I’ll show you.”

Now, the important people in court—the lords, the ladies, the generals—all hesitated. They knew that Cao Chong was brilliant, but he was just a little boy. Everyone looked at the king to see if they should take Cao Chong seriously.

The king knew his son. Smiling, he rose from his royal throne and said to Cao Chong, “Go ahead. You are the commander. We’ll all follow your orders.”

So out they marched. Cao Chong and the king led the way, carried on a magnificent royal litter, followed by the big elephant decorated with silk and precious stones, generals and lords on horseback, the queen and princesses in sedan chairs, and servants and guards on foot.

As they went down the street, more and more people followed. By the time they arrived at the riverbank, Cao Chong had an audience of several thousand. Everybody was curious and anxious to see how a seven-year-old would weigh such a huge animal.

As soon as the royal family stopped, Cao Chong hopped out and started giving orders. First, the elephant was led onto a boat which sank several inches right away under the beast’s weight. Cao Chong marked the boat’s new water line with chalk and led the elephant out. Then he ordered servants to pile big rocks into the boat until it again sank to the marked water line. When the rocks were carried back to shore, he weighed them one by one on a regular scale. With an abacus, Cao Chong quickly added all the weights. Finally, he looked up and announced: “The elephant weighs 130 dan*.”

The king heaved a sigh of relief and smiled broadly. He didn’t say anything. There was no need to—the spectators were wild with applause, and all were proud of the young prince.

*1dan is about 110 pounds
Designing a Lesson: Weighing the Elephant

Weighing the Elephant: A Study in__________

What word (i.e., concept or big idea) would you use to fill in the blank?

Using this same word, create a statement that you would want your students to support or refute with evidence from the reading.

Designing a Lesson: Weighing the Elephant

Which of these words do you think is more important for your students to know?

- commander
- marveled

What are some synonyms for these words?

Designing a Lesson: Weighing the Elephant

From the reading, what are some critical vocabulary words you would want your students to know?

Jot down your vocabulary words. What are some synonyms you would use to help students understand these words?
Designing a Lesson: Weighing the Elephant

What problems or points of tension would you want students to focus on in the story?

Do you think the king had confidence in the little prince?

Designing a Lesson: Weighing the Elephant

Review “Weighing the Elephant” and compose six Reading for Meaning statements you would use to teach a lesson on this story.

Designing a Lesson: Weighing the Elephant

Here is a list of Reading for Meaning statements that we developed for this story. How does your list compare?

- People are intrigued by things they have never seen before.
- Children can be smarter than adults.
- You can tell what a child will be like as an adult by the way he or she goes about solving problems.
- A good leader needs to be creative and clever.
- The king and his court were surprised that the elephant was so large.
- The king was very confident that his son, the prince, would be able to meet the challenge.
- The little prince was very clever.
- The people were excited to learn how much the elephant weighed.
- The king was surprised that someone so young could solve the problem of how to weigh the elephant.
- The little prince will make a good king someday.
Statements for “Weighing the Elephant”

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Customizing Reading for Meaning Statements to Meet Specific Objectives

Reading for Meaning statements are extraordinarily flexible tools for building students' reading and critical thinking skills. The following list shows how teachers of a wide variety of content areas and grade levels use statements to help students build 12 different reading skills and overcome common reading challenges. As you examine the list, think about how you might use different types of statements to enhance your Reading for Meaning lessons.

Forming Main Ideas

Develop statements that require students to think about the overall meaning.

- The author's main point is that film noir is a style, not a technique.
- A good title for this piece would be “We Can Work It Out.”

Vocabulary Comprehension

Develop statements that help students use context clues to determine a word's meaning.

- The king and his court were surprised that the elephant was so large. (This statement is designed to help students figure out what marveled means in the sentence, “… and they marveled at its great size and how much it weighed.”)
- Portuguese sailors used the astrolabe to help them calculate where they were on the Earth's surface.

Inference

Develop statements that compel students to “read between the lines.”

- There are probably more reptiles living in Kansas than there are in Canada.
- We can tell that Pooh and Piglet have been friends for a long time.

Visualization/Forming Mental Images

Develop statements that draw students' attention to image-laden portions of the text.

- A good physical representation of a geometric point would be the tip of a pin.
- The author's language helps me imagine what the inside of an aerospace laboratory looks like.
Customizing Reading for Meaning Statements to Meet Specific Objectives

Making a Case
Develop statements that ask students to take a strong position.
- Relocation is an inhumane policy.
- Insects are more helpful than harmful.

Appreciating Style, Technique, and Genre
Develop statements that focus attention on how the text is written or how well it represents a particular genre.
- The author of the editorial fails to anticipate possible counterarguments.
- Lincoln’s language conceals the horrors of the battlefield at Gettysburg.
- The story of John Henry is an example of a tall tale.

Customizing Reading for Meaning Statements to Meet Specific Objectives

Making Interdisciplinary Connections
Develop statements that include concepts from other disciplines.
- Francis Bacon would approve of Batman’s notion of private justice.
- Figuring out what’s wrong with a car requires using all the steps in the scientific method.

Exploring Metaphors, Similes, and Symbols
Develop statements that help students see how ideas can be represented metaphorically.
- A colony is a lot like a child.
- A good symbol for the Mastery style of learning would be a paper clip.

Customizing Reading for Meaning Statements to Meet Specific Objectives

Empathizing
Develop statements that encourage students to identify with others’ feelings and situations.
- Countee Cullen was deeply hurt by the incident in the poem.
- The author wants us to feel sorry for the mouse.
- The National Baseball Hall of Fame has treated “Shoeless” Joe Jackson unfairly.

Connecting the Reading to a New Context
Develop statements that require students to explore themes and ideas in a new context.
- The little prince will make a good king one day.
- The Second Amendment is outdated.
Customizing Reading for Meaning Statements to Meet Specific Objectives

Understanding a Process or Procedure
Develop statements that ask students to apply or analyze a sequence or procedure.
- Based on this scenario, we can conclude that the officers did not follow the proper procedure for collecting and documenting evidence.
- The best way to solve this word problem is to use the “guess-and-check” method.

Developing a Personal Perspective
Develop statements that invite students’ values and beliefs into the conversation.
- Emerson’s feelings about personal responsibility are much like my own.
- My life would be very different if Thomas Edison hadn’t been an inventor.

New Insights
- What new insights about Reading for Meaning statements do you have?
- Which types of statements are you most eager to include in your lessons? Why?
- Can you write a statement or two for a lesson you teach that builds one or more of these focus skills? Try it out.

The Strategic Teacher Approach to Reading for Meaning

Why Reading For Meaning?

- The Strategic Teacher
- Customizing Reading for Meaning Statements to Meet Specific Objectives
- New Insights
- The Strategic Teacher Approach to Reading for Meaning

Silver Strong & Associates
Thoughtful Education Press

17
Customizing Reading for Meaning Statements to Meet Specific Objectives

New Insights

What new insights about Reading for Meaning statements do you have?

Which types of statements are you most eager to include in your lessons? Why?

Can you write a statement or two for a lesson you teach that builds one or more of these focus skills? Try it out.
Strategy Overview

At one of our recent workshops, a thoughtful and seasoned history teacher, when asked about her biggest challenge in the classroom, shared this with us:

Reading, reading, reading. I’d love to run more lessons around primary documents and first-rate history writing, but to be perfectly honest, I’m not sure my students have the skills they need to read rigorous texts like historians that is, with a strategic approach in mind.

When we surveyed the room afterward, we found that more than 80 percent of the teachers—across all grade levels and content areas—agreed that too many of their students were having a hard time reading important texts critically.

The question then becomes, with so much of students’ present and future academic success riding on their abilities as readers, how can we help all students develop a strategic approach to reading that develops their inference skills without cutting into content? One answer to this question is Reading for Meaning. In a Reading for Meaning lesson, students are provided with simple statements that help them preview and predict before reading, actively search for relevant evidence during reading, and reflect on and synthesize what they have learned after reading.
The Strategy in Action

As part of his U.S. history course, 8th grade teacher Robert Bukowski has students conduct close readings of *Texts That Changed American History*. This day, Robert and his students are studying a key document in Civil War history and perhaps the most famous presidential address ever delivered—the Gettysburg Address. Robert begins his lesson by distributing to each student a Reading for Meaning organizer (Figure 6.1), which includes five statements about the Gettysburg Address.

Robert tells students:

Tapping into their prior knowledge is something that all good historians do before they read a new text to help them get a grasp on what they’re going to be reading. So, what I’d like you to do is to tap into your prior knowledge by thinking back on what you know about Abraham Lincoln, the Civil War, and the Gettysburg Address.

Robert directs students to their Reading for Meaning organizers, asking them to preview the five statements and then to use their prior knowledge to anticipate what the text might be about.

Once all students have made their predictions, they begin reading. As they read, they collect evidence on their organizer that either supports or refutes each statement. For example, Figure 6.1 shows the Reading for Meaning organizer, along with evidence that a student collected as proof against the first statement, *Lincoln believes the soldiers have died in vain*.

Afterward, Robert has students meet in their readers’ groups to discuss the reading, the statements, and the evidence they collected. Students share and compare ideas and work to reach consensus on the accuracy of each statement. As students work, Robert circulates around the room to listen to group members negotiate their ideas. When disagreement occurs, Robert coaches the group in using evidence to justify opinions. After the group discussion, the whole class convenes to share insights about the content and reactions to the process. For homework, Robert asks students to develop a retelling of the Gettysburg Address that a 3rd grader could understand.

As Robert and his students continue to read *Texts That Changed American History* throughout the year, he teaches students how they can use the Reading for Meaning strategy on their own, as a way to manage difficult readings. Whenever a text becomes confusing, Robert explains and models how students can stop reading and instead focus on developing a short statement that they believe tells what the passage is about. Students can then use their statement to find out whether the reading supports or refutes their belief.
Jeffrey Berger also uses Reading for Meaning, as a way to help his 2nd graders develop the critical skill of collecting evidence and using it to support their personal reactions to literature. Today, Jeffrey is reading Arnold Lobel’s short story “Dragons and Giants” from the book *Frog and Toad Together* out loud to his students. Behind Jeffrey sits an easel. On the easel are three columns: The left and right columns are labeled “Proof For” and “Proof Against.” Down the center column are four statements:

1. Being brave means you are never afraid.
2. Actions are more important than appearance.

---

**FIGURE 6.1** Reading for Meaning Organizer with Sample Student Evidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proof For</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Proof Against</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Lincoln believes the soldiers have died in vain.</td>
<td><strong>Agree</strong></td>
<td><strong>Disagree</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Lincoln is convinced great nations survive challenges.</td>
<td><strong>Agree</strong></td>
<td><strong>Disagree</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Lincoln sees a clear relationship between the past and present.</td>
<td><strong>Agree</strong></td>
<td><strong>Disagree</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A good slogan for the Gettysburg Address would be “We can work it out.”</td>
<td><strong>Agree</strong></td>
<td><strong>Disagree</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Lincoln’s intent is to make Americans feel guilty about the war.</td>
<td><strong>Agree</strong></td>
<td><strong>Disagree</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

—

“gave their lives that this nation might live”
“The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it…”
“We here highly resolve that these dead men shall not have died in vain…”
3. Frog and Toad needed each other to survive their adventure.
4. Even make-believe stories can inspire us to do great things.

Jeffrey asks students to think about these statements before he begins reading. Then, as Jeffrey reads, he stops at key points and asks students if they notice anything that might help them figure out if each statement is true or false. Jeffrey records students’ ideas in the “Proof For” or “Proof Against” columns and then continues reading. Afterward, Jeffrey and his students discuss the reading, the statements, and the process they used to determine if the evidence was responsive to the statement.

Why the Strategy Works

Reading for Meaning is adapted from Harold Herber’s (1970) Reading and Reasoning Guides but places much greater emphasis on developing students’ inferential skills than Herber’s original work. Reading for Meaning has also been updated in light of a large body of recent research into how proficient readers approach and process texts. The strategy answers the crucial question “How can we help all our students become better readers?” in two distinct ways:

1. **The strategy engages students in the process known as “strategic reading.”** Research shows that a strategic approach to reading involves three phases of mental activity: pre-reading activity, during-reading activity, and post-reading activity. Young, Righeimer, and Montbriand (2002) explain that effective readers outperform ineffective readers because they use specific strategies during all three phases. For example, effective readers activate prior knowledge and clarify purpose before reading, monitor comprehension and pay attention to context clues during reading, and reflect and summarize after reading. Reading for Meaning helps students become more strategic readers by adopting this three-phase structure as follows:
   - **Pre-reading**—During pre-reading, students examine a set of statements about the reading before they read it, thereby helping them form an intuitive sense of the text’s content and structure. The teacher may also ask students whether they agree or disagree with each statement. This serves to activate students’ prior knowledge, which they use to make predictions about the text. Both of these activities—developing an intuitive sense of a text’s structure and using prior knowledge to make predictions—have been shown to improve students’ overall reading skills (Tierney & Cunningham, 1984).
Part Three: Understanding Strategies

- **Active reading**—During the active-reading phase, students’ reading is filled with a sense of purpose. Because they must find and collect evidence that will support or refute their pre-reading predictions, they naturally slow down to search the text deeply for key information.

- **Post-reading**—During the post-reading phase, students reflect on their initial predictions and determine how specific evidence in the text has either confirmed or led them to revise their initial ideas about the content of the reading. Often, students will conduct this reflection session in small groups, where they must negotiate their ideas and use evidence to help the group reach consensus on each statement. Teachers usually assign a synthesis task as well, asking students to apply their learning in a meaningful way.

2. **The strategy helps readers overcome common reading difficulties.** Reading for Meaning statements are extraordinarily flexible tools for building students’ reading skills. With a little practice, you can design different types of statements to address a host of critical reading issues and help students overcome common reading challenges. Ten types of Reading for Meaning statements, along with development tips and examples, follow.

**Ten Types of Reading for Meaning Statements**

1. **Vocabulary comprehension**—To focus students’ attention on specific vocabulary words, incorporate synonyms or near-synonyms for critical words into your statement. For example, if you want 3rd graders to figure out what the word *marveled* means in the sentence “All the villagers marveled at the size of the elephant” an appropriate Reading for Meaning statement might be
   - The villagers were surprised that the elephant was so large.

   Vocabulary-based statements also help students use context clues to determine the meaning of academic vocabulary words, as in this statement:
   - Portuguese sailors used the *astrolabe* to help them calculate where they were on Earth’s surface.

2. **Forming main ideas**—To help students discover the main idea of a reading, develop statements that force them to think about the overall meaning of the entire piece:
   - The author’s main point is that film noir is a style, not a technique.
   - A good title for this piece would be “We Can Work It Out.”

3. **Building inference**—To help students discover deeper or even hidden meanings, challenge them to read between the lines with statements such as these:
There are probably more reptiles living in Kansas than there are in Canada.

We can tell that Pooh and Piglet have been friends for a long time.

4. **Making a case**—To help students build a case, craft your statements so that they force students to take a position:
   - Relocation is an inhumane policy.
   - Insects are more helpful than harmful.

5. **Creating mental images**—To help students visualize what they read, develop statements that draw their attention to image-laden portions of the text:
   - A good physical representation of a geometric point would be the tip of a pin.
   - The author’s language helps me imagine what the inside of an aerospace laboratory looks like.

6. **Making connections between the text and other content areas**—Incorporate concepts and content from other content areas into your statements to help students make interdisciplinary connections:
   - Francis Bacon would approve of Dirty Harry’s notion of private justice.
   - Teaching is more of an art than a science.

7. **Exploring metaphors and symbols**—Help students develop fresh and insightful perspectives on content with statements such as these:
   - A colony is a lot like a child.
   - A good symbol for the Mastery style of learning would be a paper clip.

8. **Appreciating style and technique**—To help students see how authors achieve intended effects, focus their attention on *how* the text is written:
   - The author of the editorial fails to anticipate possible counterarguments.
   - Lincoln’s language conceals the horrors of the battlefield at Gettysburg.

9. **Empathizing**—To help students identify with other people’s (or the author’s) positions, feelings, and situations, create statements like these:
   - Countee Cullen was deeply hurt by the incident in the poem.
   - The author wants us to feel sorry for the mouse.
   - The Baseball Hall of Fame has treated “Shoeless” Joe Jackson unfairly.

10. **Developing a personal perspective**—To help students draw on their feelings and experiences as resources for understanding texts, write statements that invite them personally into the content:
• Emerson’s feelings about personal responsibility are much like my own.
• My life would be very different if Thomas Edison hadn’t been an inventor.

How to Use the Strategy

1. Provide students with (or help students create) a Reading for Meaning organizer listing four to eight statements keyed to major ideas in a reading. You can ask students to perform the following tasks.
   • Preview the statements and anticipate what the text might be about.
   • Decide whether they agree or disagree with each statement. (This option works well when your statements are not too text-specific. Text-specific statements, such as “The author wants us to feel sorry for the mouse,” lead to blind guessing. More general statements, such as “Relocation is an inhumane policy,” force students to call upon prior knowledge and take a position, which the reading will ultimately challenge or confirm.)
   • Determine the degree to which they agree or disagree with each statement. (For example, with a statement such as “Birds can fly” or “Polygons have four sides,” you can ask students to decide if the statement is always true, sometimes true, or never true.)
   • Read two opposing statements (“The designated hitter is good for baseball” and “The designated hitter is bad for baseball”) and choose the statement that they agree with the most.

2. Instruct students to read the text, look for evidence that corresponds to each statement, and record it on their organizer, in either the “Evidence For” or “Evidence Against” column.

3. After reading, ask students to meet with other students to discuss their evidence and to try to reach agreement on whether the text supports or refutes each statement.

4. Lead a discussion in which you survey students’ positions on each statement and discuss the role of textual evidence in defending positions.

5. To extend the learning, challenge students to use their new knowledge to create a summary, develop an interpretation, or complete a synthesis task.

6. Build independent reading skills by teaching students how to develop statements and use them to verify understanding.
Planning a Reading for Meaning Lesson

Developing a Reading for Meaning lesson means answering a set of questions:

- When you select the reading, ask yourself, “What article, document, or passage needs emphasis and intensive analysis?”
- When you break the reading into essential components, ask yourself, “What themes, main ideas, and details do my students need to discover?”
- When you develop your four to eight Reading for Meaning statements, ask yourself, “What thought-provoking statements can I present to my students before they begin reading that will focus and engage their attention?” In developing your statements, it is also a good idea to ask, “How can I use different kinds of statements to help my students build a variety of critical reading skills?” (See Ten Types of Reading for Meaning Statements presented earlier in this chapter for help.)
- When you develop leading questions to provoke discussion, ask yourself, “What questions about the content or the process can I develop to engage my students in a discussion throughout the lesson and after the reading?” and “What kind of hook, or attention-grabbing question or activity, can I create to capture student interest at the outset of the lesson?”
- When you design a synthesis task, ask yourself, “What will my students do to apply the ideas and information they gathered from the reading?”

Variations and Extensions

In this section we explore three variations on Reading for Meaning. First, we show how Reading for Meaning statements can help students solve challenging word problems in mathematics. Next, we outline a strategy called Information Search, which uses the same three-phase reading structure as Reading for Meaning (before–during–after), but provides struggling readers with extra support in each phase. Finally, we discuss how Reading for Meaning statements can be used to build students’ thesis-writing skills.

Using Reading for Meaning to Solve Math Problems

Despite their prominence on state and national tests, word problems are still one of the most commonly cited sources of difficulty and frustration for math students. Unlike other problems in math, word problems combine quantitative problem solving with inferential reading, and this combination can bring out the impulsive side in students.
Rather than slowing down and taking the time to figure out what the problem is asking them to do, many students leap to solutions. Reading for Meaning, when applied to mathematical word problems, helps reduce impulsivity and develops students’ problem-solving skills through pre-solution thinking, collaborative planning, and post-solution reflection.

For example, 6th grade teacher Maggie O’Connor presents her students with this word problem:

A train containing cars and trucks is en route to an auto dealership in Bowling Green. Before they arrive, the owner of a group of dealerships receives an invoice showing that a total of 160 vehicles will be delivered to her four locations. Unfortunately, the portion of the invoice detailing how many of each kind of vehicle is missing. Because she knows you know algebra, the owner asks for your help. The invoice states that the total mass of vehicles is 182,800 kilograms. Each truck weighs 1,400 kg, while each car weighs 1,000 kg. How many cars and how many trucks will be delivered?

Maggie has designed five Reading for Meaning statements that highlight different aspects of the problem.

- **The Facts of the Problem**
  Statement 1: Trucks have a greater mass than cars.
  Statement 2: We already know the total number of vehicles to be delivered.
- **The Process for Solving the Problem**
  Statement 3: The best way to solve this problem is to set up an equation with a single variable.
- **The Hidden Questions Embedded in the Problem**
  Statement 4: The fact that there are four dealerships is irrelevant to finding a solution.
- **The Answer to the Problem**
  Statement 5: The solution will require two different answers.

After they decide whether they agree or disagree with each statement, Maggie breaks the students into groups to discuss their responses, resolve their differences, and develop a plan for solving the problem. Students then solve the problem on their own, noting how their pre-solution plan worked or needed to be revised. Afterward, Maggie holds a discussion in which students talk about their difficulties, explore their various problem-solving strategies, and look for ideas and techniques they can apply to future word problems.

**Information Search**

Like Reading for Meaning, Information Search (Strong, Silver, Perini, & Tuculescu, 2002) is a comprehension-building strategy that revolves
around the three phases of strategic reading. Information Search is built from the well-known strategy Know-Want-Learn, or K-W-L (Ogle, 1986), and is especially helpful with struggling readers and learners because it

- Actively engages students in assessing and organizing their memories, intuitions, questions, and feelings to build a visual pre-reading framework;
- Teaches students how to use a simple text-marking system to determine the importance of specific material in the text; and
- Harnesses the power of reflection by asking students to elaborate on how their understanding has been changed by the reading.

Information Search moves through four basic steps:

1. **Select a reading, identify the main chunks or subtopics, and convert each subtopic into a question.** For example, Wayne Cutillo is teaching a unit on exploration and wants students to explore both the tremendous accomplishments and terrible atrocities associated with the explorers known as the conquistadors. Using an article titled “Explorers or Exploiters?” Wayne converts the article’s main subtopics into these four questions:
   - Who were the conquistadors?
   - What did the conquistadors accomplish?
   - How did they treat the Native Americans they encountered?
   - How should history remember the conquistadors?

2. **Ask students to identify what they know, what they think they know, what they want to know, and how they feel about each question.** Make sure students know that background knowledge is only a starting point. Encourage students to talk about what they think they know, where their natural curiosities lay, and what their personal reactions might tell them about each question. Then, using the class’s input, create a comprehensive map that illustrates students’ pre-reading understanding. Figure 6.2, for example, shows the map Wayne created with his students.

3. **Teach students how to use reader’s punctuation to search for information and connect their reading to the map.** If possible, provide students with photocopies of the reading so they can mark it up directly. Alternatively, you may choose to provide students with sticky notes they can attach to the reading. A simple set of reader’s punctuation looks like this:

   - ! This is new information.
   - = This information agrees with the information on the map.
FIGURE 6.2  Pre-Reading Map for a Reading on the Conquistadors

Know
Explorers

Think We Know
They came to Mexico.
They were Spanish.

Want to Know
Did they know where they were going or was it an accident like with Columbus?

Feelings

Know
They sailed across the Atlantic.

Think We Know
They discovered Mexico.
They were brave.
They found gold.

Want to Know
Why do they call it discovery if the Native Americans were already there?

Feelings

Know
They were brave.
They were cruel.

Think We Know

Want to Know
Who decides how history should remember people?

Feelings
It’s a little hard to think about their accomplishments when they were so cruel to the Native Americans.

Know
They were cruel.
They killed many Native Americans.

Think We Know
They gave the Native Americans diseases.
They had guns but the Native Americans didn’t.

Want to Know
Did they give the Native Americans diseases on purpose?

Feelings
It’s hard to understand how people can be so cruel to others.

The Conquistadors: Explorers or Exploiters?

Know

Think We Know

Want to Know

Feelings

Who were the conquistadors?

How should history remember the conquistadors?

What did the conquistadors accomplish?

How did the conquistadors treat the Native Americans?
* This information disagrees with the information on the map.

? I have a question about this. (Open questions can become the basis of further investigation, either as part of the unit or as an independent study project.)

4. **After students have read and marked the text, have them synthesize their new understanding by creating a revised map or an organizer of their own.** A post-reading task that asks students to look back on the original map, note how their understanding has changed, and then synthesize that new understanding in a comprehensive and visual way is an ideal method for helping students solidify their new learning. You may want students to create a new and revised map, or to devise a graphic organizer that suits the information from the reading. For a set of common graphic organizers, see page 30.

**Thesis Writing and Reading for Meaning**

Students’ abilities to distinguish between essential and nonessential information, to scour readings for specific information, and to support their responses with evidence are among the most commonly assessed skills in the new state tests and assessments. For this reason, Reading for Meaning, with its emphasis on inquiry-based reading, on developing and supporting positions, and on writing carefully considered arguments, is perfectly suited to the development of thesis-style assessment tasks that will enhance students’ performance on state tests. For instance, think about the skills and attitudes required for the following elementary assessment task.

We have now been studying spiders for one week. What do you think about them? Have any of your opinions of spiders changed during this week? Below is an article that describes five different spiders and how each different type of spider affects the people, animals, and plants around it. As you read, I want you to collect evidence that proves or disproves this statement:

*Spiders are more helpful than harmful.*

Once you have collected evidence from the reading, you will be asked to write a persuasive essay that argues either for or against this statement.

If you know how to develop a Reading for Meaning lesson, then creating Reading for Meaning assessment tasks is easy. To develop a task, follow these four steps:

1. Select a reading or set of thematically linked readings.
2. Identify the themes, main ideas, and key details in the reading(s).
3. Develop a single Reading for Meaning statement that is central to the reading(s). Make sure the evidence you collect can support or refute the statement. The statement should be open-ended so that the student can argue either for or against it.

4. Develop assessment criteria that you and your students will use to assess their writing.