

The
Thoughtful
Education Guide ● ● ● ●
to
Reading
for
Meaning

To Richard

*Your voice and wisdom are everywhere—
in our hearts, in our minds, in this book.*

The
**Thoughtful
Education Guide** ● ● ● ●
to
Reading
for
Meaning

Harvey F.
SILVER



Elizabeth C.
REILLY



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With Richard Strong, Harvey Silver and Matthew Perini have collaborated on a number of recent bestsellers in education, including *The Strategic Teacher: Selecting the Right Research-Based Strategy for Every Lesson*, *So Each May Learn: Integrating Learning Styles and Multiple Intelligences*, and *Teaching What Matters Most: Standards and Strategies for Raising Student Achievement*, all published by ASCD; *Reading for Academic Success, Grades 2–6: Differentiated Strategies for Struggling, Average, and Advanced Readers* and *Reading for Academic Success, Powerful Strategies for Struggling, Average, and Advanced Readers, Grades 7–12*, both for Corwin; and Thoughtful Education Press’s *Tools for Promoting Active, In-Depth Learning*, which won a Teacher’s Choice Award in 2004.

Preface

Let's try a little experiment in imagination. Imagine that schools could only commit to teaching one thing. What would you want that one thing to be? About two years ago, we tried this experiment with over 500 teachers across the country. We asked kindergarten teachers, high school physics teachers, and every kind of teacher in between. What do you think the most common answer was? *Reading . . .* and by a fairly wide margin.

To say that reading is important is about as profound as saying that exercise is good for you or that major league baseball players are well paid. In fact, it almost seems unnecessary to explain why reading is so important, but let's give it a try anyway. Here's our 30-second version.

Reading is an essential skill in our culture, and life is simply more difficult for poor readers. Reading is a skill teachers rely on because no amount of lectures, videos, or inquiries permit teachers to cover all of the essential material in their disciplines. And reading is thinking. Through reading, students practice and develop important thinking strategies such as making informed predictions, separating essential from nonessential information, forming main ideas, organizing ideas and details, gathering evidence, drawing conclusions and making interpretations, and raising questions, among others.

With so much of students' present and future academic success riding on reading, how can we help each and every student develop a strategic approach to reading deeply and well? Reading for Meaning is one very good answer. It is a highly flexible strategy, easily adaptable to the needs and abilities of all students, from primary students to struggling readers to gifted and talented learners. And, as you'll see in the model lessons throughout, it's every bit as vital in the mathematics classroom as it is in freshmen English.

In a Reading for Meaning lesson, students preview a series of three to seven statements about a text they are about to read. Once students have reviewed these statements, they read the text and collect evidence that

either supports or refutes each statement. As they discuss their findings in small groups, students improve their abilities to make inferences, identify important information, and develop convincing and well-organized explanations of what they have learned.

In this book, you'll be taking a comprehensive look at Reading for Meaning and six variations designed to meet a variety of instructional purposes. Specifically, you will

- Learn the origins of the strategy and the rich research supporting it in Chapter 1. You'll also see how the strategy plays out in different classrooms with different readings.
- Experience the five phases of Reading for Meaning in Chapter 2 by "joining" a high school classroom.
- Learn the seven steps for planning and implementing a Reading for Meaning lesson in your classroom (Chapter 3).
- Explore the connection between Reading for Meaning and assessment in Chapter 4. Here we focus on two different types of assessment: culminating assessments in which students develop and explain a position in an essay, and formative assessments in which you and your students gather data about how well students' reading and thinking skills are developing.
- Learn how to implement six variations on Reading for Meaning in Chapter 5:
 - Main Idea Fist List
 - Inductive Reading
 - Information Search
 - Do You Hear What I Hear?
 - Collaborative Summarizing
 - Comprehension Menus
- Help students turn Reading for Meaning into a learning strategy that they can use independently to solve the reading challenges posed by even the most difficult texts. Chapter 6 also includes reproducible organizers to help you design and implement Reading for Meaning lessons in your classroom.

We hope that you enjoy the journey to helping your students become better readers and more sophisticated thinkers, and we wish you success along the way.

Introduction

The Knowing-Doing Gap

In 2000, Jeffery Pfeffer and Robert Sutton, two graduate professors of organizational behavior at Stanford University, gave the world a new way of thinking about underachievement. By comparing the practices of underachieving organizations with successful ones, Pfeffer and Sutton discovered that the differences in achievement had very little to do with knowledge levels. Successful organizations didn't know more than underperforming ones. The difference was that successful organizations were adept at taking the next step, at converting their knowledge into meaningful action. Underperforming organizations, on the other hand, had a difficult time implementing what they knew. They suffered from what Pfeffer and Sutton called the "knowing-doing gap."

In teaching, as in organizational management, the knowing-doing gap carries an important lesson. Today's teachers know better than any generation of teachers before what works in the classroom. Thirty years of educational research have given the educational community a clear picture of what effective instruction looks and sounds like. And still many classrooms remain unchanged by this knowledge: The knowing-doing gap persists.

This is hardly the fault of teachers. Rather, it's more the result of a certain level of disconnect between the research community and the realities of the classroom. Turning research into meaningful action is not an overnight process, no matter how clear the practice or strategy sounds on paper. Mastering instructional strategies and adapting them to the specific needs of your students takes time and effort. This raises the question, How do teachers bridge the knowing-doing gap?

Our research and experience have shown that one of the most effective ways for teachers to bridge the knowing-doing gap is to focus their

instruction on a core group of strategies that we call “best bets” (Silver & Strong, 2005). What is a best bet? A best bet is an instructional strategy that

- Has a rich research base behind it.
- Has proven in classrooms to produce improvements in student achievement relatively quickly.
- Is applicable in a wide variety of content areas, grade levels, and classroom situations.
- Is not overly difficult for teachers to implement.
- Makes provisions for assessing how well student learning is progressing.
- Supports teachers’ efforts to address content and curriculum standards.

In other words, a best bet starts on the knowing side of the gap (we know, through research and classroom application, that a best bet works) and, through its design, makes it as easy as possible for teachers to walk that knowledge across the gap and into their classrooms.

You are holding one such best bet in your hands. Reading for Meaning will show you how to take the best research on improving students’ reading, inference, and evidence-gathering skills and put that research into powerful classroom practice, whether your classroom happens to be a kindergarten, a chemistry lab, or anything in between. Please write us at questions@thoughtfuled.com if you have any questions you’d like to ask, stories you’d like to share, or suggestions for future versions and editions.

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Introducing Reading for Meaning

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO READ FOR MEANING?

Most of us have been reading for so long that we have forgotten just how difficult the act of making meaning from texts can be. Sometimes, it takes a challenging text to remind us that understanding what we read is not always an automatic process. So, let's begin by exploring the question of what it means to read for meaning by way of a poem that's been enchanting readers for almost a century. Below is D. H. Lawrence's short poem "Piano." Like all good poetry, this poem requires—and rewards—close and careful reading. As you read the text, pay attention to your own reading process. What reading and comprehension strategies do you use to extract meaning from the text?

Piano

By D. H. Lawrence (1918)

Softly, in the dusk, a woman is singing to me;
Taking me back down the vista of years, till I see
A child sitting under the piano, in the boom of the tingling strings
And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who smiles as she sings.

In spite of myself, the insidious mastery of song
Betrays me back, till the heart of me weeps to belong
To the old Sunday evenings at home, with winter outside
And hymns in the cosy parlour, the tinkling piano our guide.

(Continued)

(Continued)

So now it is vain for the singer to burst into clamour
 With the great black piano appassionato. The glamour
 Of childish days is upon me, my manhood is cast
 Down in the flood of remembrance, I weep like a child for the past.

So, how did you do? Were you able to make sense and meaning out of “Piano”? Did one word, or image, or stanza in particular give you more trouble than the others? More important, *what* did you do? What kinds of strategies and mental processes did you use to help you comprehend the text? This little innocent-sounding question—*What do you do to help you read well?*—turns out to be one of the most revolutionary questions in the history of reading research.

You see, for many years, reading research was focused largely on the problems and difficulties that struggling readers faced. The prevailing concern was with what readers could not do rather than with what they could do. Then, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a paradigm shift occurred. A new generation of researchers—Robert Tierney, P. David Pearson, Ruth Garner, James Cunningham, Annemarie Palinscar, Ann Brown, Michael Pressley, Peter Afflerbach, and others—began asking a new question: What do good and great readers do that makes them more successful than their peers? What this new generation of researchers discovered was that proficient readers engage in a common set of skills and behaviors that help them read and understand even the most challenging of texts. And what was the most common finding of all, the finding that united all the research? Good readers are always active readers; their minds are busy with the work of making meaning before they read a single word of text and all the way through the process, including well after they have closed the book. Michael Pressley, one of our foremost experts on reading instruction who conducted a comprehensive review of more than sixty proficient-reader studies, puts it this way, “in general, the conscious processing that is excellent reading begins before reading, continues during reading, and persists after reading is completed” (Pressley, 2006, p. 57).

Reading for Meaning is a strategy built from the findings of the proficient-reader research. But its origins can be traced further back, to a well-known reading strategy called an Anticipation Guide (Herber, 1978). A typical Anticipation Guide previews the content of reading using simple statements. Statements can be true, false, or open to interpretation. Students read the statements and then decide whether they agree or disagree with each one before they read the text. After completing the reading, students go back to the statements to determine whether their initial predictions held or changed. An Anticipation Guide is shown in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1 Anticipation Guide

The Origin of the Universe				
BEFORE READING			AFTER READING	
Agree	Disagree		Agree	Disagree
_____	_____	1. People have come up with many myths and theories about the origin of the universe.	_____	_____
_____	_____	2. Cosmologists and scientists tend not to agree on one explanation about the origin of the cosmos.	_____	_____
_____	_____	3. The big bang theory contends that all the material and energy in our present universe once existed in an atomized single particle.	_____	_____
_____	_____	4. Mathematics has been used to prove that the galaxies all began at a single point and are spreading apart at a terrific rate of speed.	_____	_____
_____	_____	5. The evidence to support the big bang theory is conclusive.	_____	_____



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Reading for Meaning takes the statement-orientation of an Anticipation Guide and updates it in light of some of the most salient findings from the proficient-reader research. But before we tell you how the strategy incorporates this important research, we'd like to show you. So, let's revisit the poem that opened this chapter, D.H. Lawrence's "Piano."

First, let's imagine that you're a high school student who's facing down Lawrence for the very first time. Now, let's imagine that before you were asked to read "Piano," you were given a simple set of statements about the reading on an organizer like the one shown in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2 Reading for Meaning Organizer for "Piano"

<i>Evidence For</i>	<i>Statements</i>	<i>Evidence Against</i>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There are two singers in the poem. 2. The child under the piano is the poet. 3. The poet wants to re-experience his childhood. 4. The past is stronger than the present. 	

Now, imagine that you

1. Previewed all of the statements before reading and used them to make some predictions about the poem.
2. Used the organizer to collect information and evidence while reading. Whenever you came across any evidence from the reading that supported one of the statements, you would put it in the "Evidence For" column. Evidence that refuted a statement you would put in the "Evidence Against" column (see Figure 1.3).
3. Shared your interpretations of the reading and the evidence you found to support your interpretations with a group of fellow readers.
4. Reflected on and summarized how your prereading predictions changed, evolved, or were confirmed by the text.

What effect would these moves have on your understanding of the text?

Figure 1.3 Partially Completed Organizer

<i>Evidence For</i>	<i>Statements</i>	<i>Evidence Against</i>
Poem seems to start in present. The singing woman takes poet “back down the vista of years.” He remembers his mother. So, two singers: woman and mother.	1. There are two singers in the poem.	
He’s remembering his mother playing the piano and singing on Sunday evenings. It makes sense that the child is the poet because he’s reliving his own past.	2. The child under the piano is the poet.	
	3. The poet wants to re-experience his childhood.	“In spite of myself”—line 5 “Betrays me back”—line 6 Poet is crying at the end. Suggests he doesn’t want to relive the past.

Reading for Meaning makes understanding and interpreting difficult texts easier because it models and instills many of the skills and behaviors that good readers use before, during, and after reading. Figure 1.4 (on page 6) outlines nine of these proficient reader skills and behaviors and explains how Reading for Meaning incorporates each one. Can you see how Reading for Meaning incorporates these nine skills?

OK, so maybe you’re saying to yourself something like this: *This strategy seems wonderful—if you happen to be a secondary English or humanities teacher who’s interested in teaching poetry. But I really don’t see how it will work in my classroom.* The truth is, Reading for Meaning works at all grade levels and in all content areas, because it teaches universal skills, like evidence-gathering and developing quality explanations, and because, as the saying goes, every teacher is a reading teacher. Quite simply, there isn’t a grade level or discipline on the planet in which good readers don’t have a significant advantage over poor and average readers.

In the next sections, we’ll take a look at how two teachers are using Reading for Meaning in their classrooms. And just to make sure we explode the myth that Reading for Meaning is a secondary humanities strategy, we’ve chosen to highlight two teachers who definitely don’t have D. H. Lawrence or poetic imagery on their minds or in their standards documents.

Figure 1.4 How Reading for Meaning Models Proficient Reading Behaviors	
Before Reading	
<i>Proficient Readers . . .</i>	<i>How Reading for Meaning Develops This Behavior/Skill</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Activate their prior knowledge. 2. Make predictions about the text. 3. Establish a purpose for reading. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prereading statements spur the mind. They require students to think about what they already know about the content of the reading. 2. In a typical Reading for Meaning Lesson, students decide whether the prereading statements are true or false. What they are doing is predicting what the text will reveal about each statement. 3. Reading for Meaning teaches students what it means to read with purpose: Readers must look for information and evidence within the text that either confirms or challenges the truth of each statement.
During Reading	
<i>Proficient Readers . . .</i>	<i>How Reading for Meaning Develops This Behavior/Skill</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Know how to separate the relevant information from the irrelevant. 2. Often create notes that help them make the meaning of the text clearer. 3. Are aware of when their comprehension is weak. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reading for Meaning statements provide readers with a filter for separating the important information from the trivial. During reading, students ask themselves, "Does this information help support or refute one of these statements?" 2. The Reading for Meaning organizer teaches students a powerful note-making technique for capturing the important information in any reading. 3. Once again, statements make the difference. If a student receives no information about a statement, it is a strong indicator that a particular section or concept has eluded him or her. Over time, students learn to go back and reread key sections for meaning.
After Reading	
<i>Proficient Readers . . .</i>	<i>How Reading for Meaning Develops This Behavior/Skill</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reflect on the reading and their learning. 2. Assess and shore up gaps in their comprehension. 3. Summarize and/or apply their new understanding. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reading for Meaning does not end with reading the text. After a typical lesson, students reflect on the statements, their initial predictions, and how their understanding has grown with the reading. 2. During group and class discussions, students get the opportunity to compare their interpretations and reading strategies with others and refine their understanding of the text. 3. Reading for Meaning includes an application task that asks students to summarize and synthesize their learning.

READING FOR MEANING IN THE PRIMARY GRADES

When primary educators first encounter the Reading for Meaning strategy, they sometimes ask, “Will Reading for Meaning work with my young and emerging readers, or are the skills and expectations too advanced?” The fact is, with a little adaptation, Reading for Meaning is an ideal strategy for helping young readers develop their comprehension and inference skills early in their reading development—even as they are still developing more basic skills in decoding and fluency.

In the lesson that follows, you will see how a second-grade teacher has adapted Reading for Meaning by reading aloud, allowing for collaborative evidence-gathering, and recording the class’s search for textual evidence on poster paper.

Ellysa Fischer teaches second grade and loves to explore important ideas by reading stories aloud to her students. Today, Ellysa wants her students to think about the consequences of making judgments about others without really knowing much about them. She has selected Alison McGhee and Harry Bliss’s (2004) *Mrs. Watson Wants Your Teeth* to read with her students. It’s a story about a young girl with a loose tooth who lets another student scare her into believing that her teacher, Mrs. Watson, is an alien who craves and collects children’s teeth.

Before she starts the book, Ellysa writes three statements on a large piece of poster paper behind her. On either side of the statements are columns labeled “Proof For” and “Proof Against.” She reads the statements with her students and asks them to make some predictions as to what they think the book will be about.

As Ellysa reads the book aloud, she pauses frequently to ask her students to think about the statements and whether the information makes each statement seem true or false. If a student has information that a statement is true, Ellysa writes it in the “Proof For” column. If a student’s information suggests a statement is false, then she adds it to the “Proof Against” column. When students disagree because they interpret elements in the story differently, Ellysa uses the opportunity to discuss the different ideas and encourages her students to find information in the text to support their ideas.

After Ellysa and her students finish the book, they review the statements and the reading. She and her students discuss how their initial ideas changed after reading the book and why it is important not to rush to judgment. By using Reading for Meaning in this way, Ellysa is helping her students develop the important skills of generating ideas and collecting evidence, skills that will help her students read and interpret literature as they progress through higher grade levels.

(Continued)

(Continued)

Figure 1.5 Ellysa's Statements

Proof For	Statements	Proof Against
	Mrs. Watson really is an alien.	
	You don't always have to believe what others tell you.	
	It's important not to rush to judge someone.	

But this is not the first time Ellysa has used Reading for Meaning in her classroom. Way back, in the very beginning of the school year, Ellysa introduced the strategy to her second graders using not three or two statements, but one. For example, while reading Janet Steven's (1995) *Tops & Bottoms*, a story about a clever rabbit who gets enough food by tricking a lazy bear, Ellysa asked students to focus their thinking on just one statement: *The rabbit deceived the bear*. By concentrating students' attention on that one statement, Ellysa was able to accomplish three things with her students:

1. She helped them master a critical and challenging vocabulary term—*deceive*.
2. She was able to teach students what a good interpretation looks and sounds like. After a discussion based on conflicting interpretations, Ellysa and the class developed a simple definition of *interpret*. "To interpret," the class agreed, "is to explain your opinion using details from the reading."
3. She laid the foundation for future use of the Reading for Meaning strategy and prepared students for the challenge of finding evidence for multiple statements.

READING FOR MEANING IN MATHEMATICS

At first glance, Reading for Meaning may not seem to be a natural fit in the mathematics classroom, but nothing could be further from the truth. This is especially true in light of recent research that shows that careful and analytical reading of word problems is a prerequisite for success on state math tests (Carter & Dean, 2006). In the lesson that follows, a middle-school math teacher shows students how to analyze and solve challenging word problems using Reading for Meaning.

Eighth-grade math teacher Cristina Marte knows that Reading for Meaning can help her students control their impulsivity and process word problems more thoroughly and thoughtfully. She also knows how important these skills are on her state's math test. Today, Cristina is using Reading for Meaning with this problem:

Wicked Widgets Worldwide, a technology and gadget company outside of Boston, has developed a new universal accessory for MP3 players. The company has fixed operating costs of \$1,750 per week. Each MP3 player accessory costs the company \$2.25 to produce while the company sells each accessory for \$8.95. So, what is the company's break-even point each week?

Students read the problem carefully before reviewing the five Reading for Meaning statements that Cristina designed to go along with the problem. Cristina's five statements (shown below in italics) highlight different aspects of the word problem. Some statements focus on

- The facts of the problem:

The WWW company has no costs other than the production of individual accessories.

- Hidden questions embedded in the problem:

Identifying the profit made on each accessory is critical to solving this problem.

- The problem solving process:

The best way to solve the problem is to set up an equation.

The total cost of producing x accessories in a given week can be written as $y = 1750 + 2.25x$.

- The answer to the problem:

The solution can only be written as a whole number.

(Continued)

(Continued)

Cristina gives her students time to consider each statement and decide whether they agree or disagree. Then, students break up into small groups so they can discuss their ideas and develop a plan for solving the problem. As her students solve the problem on their own, Cristina reminds them to note how their problem-solving plan worked or needed to be revised. Once every student has completed the problem, Cristina opens up a whole-class discussion. During the discussion, Cristina presents similar problems for students to analyze by having them create their own statements. Students share their ideas and explore how they can apply and adapt what they've learned to new word problems involving profit and loss.

So, that's Reading for Meaning. Here it is again, this time in a nutshell.

READING FOR MEANING: THE TWO-MINUTE REVIEW

The most commonly asked questions regarding Reading for Meaning:

What Is This Strategy?

Reading for Meaning uses simple statements to help students develop informed, evidence-based interpretations of the texts they read. The strategy is built from a base of research known as *proficient-reader research*. Proficient-reader research identifies the skills and behaviors that good and great readers use before reading, during reading, and after reading to make their comprehension deep and rich.

What Will My Students Learn From This Strategy?

Students will

- Learn to find main ideas and make inferences.
- Learn to identify and use evidence from a text.
- Learn to develop informed interpretations.
- Analyze and discuss their own and others' textual interpretations.
- Learn a core set of reading skills and behaviors that will help them become powerful lifelong readers.

When Do I Use the Strategy?

The Reading for Meaning strategy works best with relatively brief but challenging texts. Poems, mathematical word problems, primary documents, textbook chapters, storybooks, articles, essays, and many others are all ideal candidates for a Reading for Meaning lesson.

What Is the Students' Role in This Strategy?

The students' role in this strategy is to preview the statements before reading the text and to decide whether they agree or disagree with each statement. This process incites their curiosity, helps them tap into their prior knowledge, and enables them to develop an intuitive image of the text's structure and content before reading. The students must then read the text actively and purposefully, looking for evidence from the passage to support or refute the statements and working to determine whether their predictions were true. The learners then meet in small groups to share their observations. During this collaborative postreading activity, students explore and attempt to resolve their differences. The class then reconvenes to discuss statements that provoked disagreement as well as general ideas about the passage and the process. Students also reflect on how their understanding has changed or evolved as a result of the reading. Often, students are asked to show what they've learned by completing a synthesis task.

How Is This Strategy Relevant to the Real World?

Countless studies show that students' communication skills are troublingly low precisely as the Information Age is making communication and the interpretation of complex ideas more important than ever. By providing students with a method for extracting essential information, marshalling evidence to support their opinions, examining others' viewpoints, and discussing and evaluating complex ideas, Reading for Meaning helps students become the skilled readers and more sophisticated thinkers we need them to be.

Will Students Learn to Use the Strategy Independently?

Yes, if you make it a point to teach them how. Nancy Spaniak, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development at Homewood-Flossmoor Community High School, puts it this way:

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Student-directed Reading for Meaning—in other words, being actively engaged in the reading process—is a key component of any reading program. We want students to take ownership of their thinking during the reading process; therefore, we teach them to preview their texts in order to make predictions and create questions and statements. Then, as they read, we instruct students to be actively engaged in the discovery process—to see if their predictions were correct and if they can find out answers to their questions and evidence that supports their statements. In this way, the students are taking charge of their own reading—an essential hidden skill of academic literacy. (personal communication, October 13, 2008)

Homewood-Flossmoor, by the way, raised its No Child Left Behind reading scores 10% between 2003 and 2006, and while national SAT reading scores have been declining nationwide, Homewood-Flossmoor's scores have risen from an average score of 540 in 2004 to an average of 564 in 2008. Average ACT scores for reading have also been on the rise at Homewood-Flossmoor, moving from 21.2 in 2003 to 21.9 in 2008 (beating both state and national averages). The school received an Award of Excellence from the Illinois State Board of Education in 2006 for its reading initiative. If you'd like to learn more about Homewood-Flossmoor's successful reading program and the role that Reading for Meaning plays in it, see Nancy Spaniak's article in Educational Research Service's *Spectrum*, Summer 2007.

PROCESSING CHAPTER 1

To process deeply the overview of Reading for Meaning you have just read, take time to reflect metacognitively. *Metacognition* is active reflection after a period of learning that deepens the learning experience and facilitates the process of transferring short-term learning into the long-term memory. Metacognition also gives the learner time to analyze his or her own thinking and to identify those elements of the learning experience that may still be vague or partially misunderstood (Costa, 2001).

- Active reading involves three stages; what are they? How are they incorporated into Reading for Meaning?
- At this point, what are some questions you have about the strategy?
- What are some texts you might consider exploring using Reading for Meaning?
- How have you used active reading in your own life? How was it of use to you?