Food for Thought

Steve Graham from Vanderbilt recently completed a major Carnegie-funded study, “Writing to Read: Evidence for How Writing Can Improve Reading.” After an extensive search, the research team located ninety-three research studies documenting the effect of writing on reading, and they found that any writing done about reading has an extremely large effect on comprehension, outweighing even the effect of focused comprehension strategy instruction. Results were especially dramatic when student responded with personal reactions or interpretive ideas.
Writing about Reading Through the Year to Deepen Comprehension

Jennifer Griffith
Rikki Heggy
Purpose

- Deepen comprehension
- Increase volume of writing
- Provide structure
Format of the Unit

- 4-5 week unit
- Mini-lessons 3-5 days per week
- 20-30 minutes a day outside of Reader’s and Writer’s Workshop
- Reader’s notebook
Writing about Reading Strategies

- Visualization
- Summary and Connection
- Character Chart
- Discovering Theme
Turn and Talk

- What thoughts do you have about this unit?
- Do you see yourself incorporating this unit into your own classroom? How?
Fly Away Home
By Eve Bunting
Turn and Talk

- What thoughts do you have about the writing about reading strategies?
- How do these lessons fit with what you are already doing?
What do I do after the unit?

- Expect students to write 2-3 entries per week
- Read Aloud or Independent Reading
Writing Beyond the Unit

- Pushing your thinking stems
- Adding additional prompts/structures
Writing About Reading Throughout the Year to Deepen Comprehension

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Visualizing

Connection –
Yesterday we were reading the book, *Tiger Rising*. As we were reading, many of you cringed when you thought about the painful blisters on Rob’s legs because you could envision what they must have looked and felt like.

Teaching Point –
Today I want to teach you when we make a movie in our minds, sometimes it helps to sketch and write about that movie in order to deepen our understanding of the story.

Teaching –
Let me show you in my reader’s notebook how I sketched a picture of what I envisioned when I read the description of the oozing blisters on Rob’s legs. (Show picture in notebook)

Now, let’s write a little bit together to describe what I sketched in my notebook and why this part stuck out in my memory. (Write on chart paper, have kids also write in notebooks)

Active Engagement –
Reader’s now I am going to reread another descriptive paragraph to you from *Tiger Rising*. As I read, make sure that you are focusing on the movie in your mind. After I finish, you will have a few minutes to sketch what you have envisioned and write a paragraph about your picture and why that part was important to you or the story.

Link –
Today as you go off to read your own books, remember that you can stop and sketch and write during your reading to help you think more about the important parts of your story.
Writing About Reading – Visualizing Example

T- Tiger Rising
A – Kate DiCamillo
G – Realistic Fiction
D – October 4, 2011
S – 5

Picture what is happening right now. Sketch a picture of the movie in your mind. Then, use words to describe what you are picturing.

I am picturing Rob with these bright red blisters on his legs that are oozing, but he’s just standing there. He’s gritting his teeth trying to be strong because he knows that’s what his dad would want him to do. He’s thinking about his dad saying, “Real men take it.” (pg. 2)
Somebody, Wanted, But, So, Then + Connection

Connection –
Yesterday we finished the book, *Tiger Rising*. As we completed the book, many of us realized that we could connect to the way that Rob was feeling throughout the story.

Teaching Point –
Today I want to teach you that adding a connection to a summary is a way that readers review and think more deeply about their books.

Teaching –
Let me remind you of the really quick and easy way to summarize any story that we read. You remember it’s called, “Somebody, wanted, but, so, then.” Let’s think back to *Stone Fox* and read through the summary that I wrote using this method. (Read summary)

> Little Willy wanted his grandfather to get better and to save the farm. But he didn’t have any money or a way to earn money. So he entered a dog sled race against Stone Fox, who had never lost a race. Then, Little Willy ended up winning the race and the prize money to save the farm.

Now that I’ve reviewed the main points of the story, I’m going to think back to ways that I connected to Little Willy and how he felt about his grandfather. (Show second half of the chart with connection)

> I can remember when I was in middle school and my grandmother had a stroke and had to come live with us for a while. I would have done anything to make her feel better, just like Little Willy wanted to do for his grandfather. One of my jobs was to come home after school and read her favorite poems to her because she couldn’t read to herself anymore.

Readers, notice that I didn’t just talk about the part of my life that the story reminded me of, I also referred back and gave an example from the story.

Active Engagement –
As a class, have students write a “Somebody, wanted, but, so, then” on chart paper about *Tiger Rising*. Then direct students to write a personal connection in their notebooks that illustrates a connection that they had to a character in *Tiger Rising*.

Link –
Today as you go off to read your own books, remember that when you finish a book, one way to reflect on your reading is to summarize the story and make a personal connection to characters within the story.
Writing About Reading –
SWBST + Connection Example

T- Tiger Rising
A – Kate DiCamillo
G – Realistic Fiction
D – October 24, 2011
S – 5

Somebody (Identify the main character.)
Wanted (Describe the character’s goal.)
But (Describe a conflict that hinders the character. What gets in the way?)
So (Describe the resolution of the conflict. How does the character respond?)
Then (How does the story end?)

Somebody, wanted, but, so, then…
Rob misses his mother a lot because she died and wants to talk about her, but his dad won’t let him. So, he keeps everything locked inside his “suitcase” and has trouble fitting in at school. Then he becomes friends with Sistine and she helps him release some of his pain.

Connection (make a personal connection)
In the story The Tiger Rising, Rob tries to ignore his feelings about his mom by pretending they weren’t there. When my dog died, I tried to ignore my feelings, hoping they would go away. I didn’t talk about my dog for months and refused to look at any pictures of him. However, ignoring my feelings only made things worse and I felt sadder because I wasn’t expressing my true feelings.
Writing About Reading –
SWBST + Connection

T – Title of book
A – Author of book
G – Genre
D- Date
S – Score/Rating

Somebody (Identify the main character.)
Wanted (Describe the character’s goal.)
But (Describe a conflict that hinders the character. What gets in the way?)
So (Describe the resolution of the conflict. How does the character respond?)
Then (How does the story end?)

Somebody, wanted, but, so, then…

Connection (make a personal connection)
Creating Character Charts

**Connection** –
Yesterday we were reading the book, *Stone Fox*. As we were reading, we noticed that we learned some things about Little Willy.

**Teaching Point** –
Today I want to teach you that when we notice the traits of the characters, we better understand a story and are able to grow ideas about our reading.

**Teaching** –
Let me show you one way that we can organize our thinking about a character’s personality. (Display chart sized version of character chart.) In this chart, I was thinking that Little Willy was a hard worker. (Think aloud the example from the story to illustrate that trait.)

**Active Engagement** –
Have students work in partnerships to think of two additional traits that describe Little Willy. They should also find supporting examples from the text. Listen as groups are talking and add some of the ideas to the class chart.

**Link** –
Today as you go off to read your own books, think carefully about the characters in your books and remember that creating a character chart is one way to write about your reading.
### Character Chart (different character, same traits)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Example from story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little Willy</td>
<td>worried</td>
<td>Little Willy was worried about winning the race against Stone Fox. If he doesn’t win the race he and Grandfather will lose the farm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandfather</td>
<td>worried</td>
<td>Grandfather is worried because he didn’t make enough money to pay his taxes and he is about to lose his farm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doc Smith</td>
<td>worried</td>
<td>Doc Smith is worried about Willy running in the race against Stone Fox.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Character Chart (Same character, different traits)

<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little Willy</td>
<td>Hard-worker</td>
<td>Little Willy was a hard-worker because he plowed the fields and harvested the potatoes when Grandfather was too sick to do it himself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Willy</td>
<td>Worried</td>
<td>Little Willy is worried about his Grandfather because he is sick and won’t get out of bed. He is also worried about winning the race against Stone Fox.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Willy</td>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>Little Willy is caring because he takes care of his Grandfather by combing his hair and feeding him every day while he is sick.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Character Chart

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Discovering Themes

Connection –
Over the past couple of weeks, we have been looking for common themes found throughout our read-alouds.

Teaching Point –
Today I want to teach you that sometimes there is a central idea that we notice throughout a whole book. As readers, we need to think about how this overlying theme connects all of the characters in a story.

Teaching –
So, as I thought back to our read-aloud, Because of Winn-Dixie, I found three themes within the story. Those themes were friendship, loneliness, and acceptance. Loneliness was the theme that I could relate to the most. Let’s look at the t-chart that I created that shows us what loneliness is and isn’t to me. (Show t-chart)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What it is…</th>
<th>What it isn’t…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>Happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No friends</td>
<td>Surrounded by people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By yourself</td>
<td>Lots of friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhappy</td>
<td>Smiling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy heart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now that we know what loneliness is and isn’t, I’m going to show you how I would pick a character in the book and write about how they are lonely. (Show example)

_Gloria Dump was lonely because she lived by herself and the kids in the neighborhood thought she was a witch so no one would come to visit her._

Active Engagement –
Now, in your reader’s notebook, think of other characters from Because of Winn-Dixie that showed loneliness and write about how you knew that they were lonely.

Link –
Today as you go off to read your own books, try to notice any themes that seem to be found throughout your entire book. Then, you can use our strategy of defining the theme and using examples from the story to write more deeply about your book.
Writing About Reading – Theme Example

T – Fly Away Home
A – Eve Bunting
G – Realistic Fiction
D – January 12, 2011

Theme: Perseverance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What it is</th>
<th>What it isn’t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Working hard</td>
<td>• Giving up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Never giving up</td>
<td>• Not following through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Doing your best</td>
<td>• Being pessimistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trying to reach your goal</td>
<td>• Not trying hard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evidence of the theme found within the text…. 

1. The bird in the story showed perseverance because when it was trapped inside the airport it continue to fly around looking for an exit until finally it found a way to escape.

2.

3.

4.

5.
Writing About Reading – Theme

T
A
G
D

Theme: ________________________________

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Evidence of the theme found within the text….

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
Thought Prompts to Push Your Thinking

1. I see…

2. This makes me realize…

3. In addition…

4. This is important because…

5. This is giving me the idea that…

6. The thought I have about this is…