

Elements of an Effective Reading Comprehension Lesson:

Effective reading instruction engages students in proving what an author is trying to communicate and analyzing how the author is trying to communicate it.

Students engage in the struggle.

- We reject I-we-you teaching in which students watch a teacher model and then imitate the teacher's approach. A teacher thinking aloud puts the thinking on the teacher; effective reading lessons put the thinking on the students.
- Students must use what they know to struggle with and logically attack a new question that requires them to integrate the text, not focus on one strategy or skill in isolation. If students fail, then the teacher may provide more scaffolding through guided questions, but the class must have a chance to succeed through struggle.
- Students must be pushed to articulate their thinking, even when that articulation is a struggle.

Texts are carefully chosen are at the right level of rigor – the level at which students need to struggle to understand the full meaning but through struggle, can grasp the complete meaning.

- Texts must be chosen intentionally as individual texts and when considered cumulatively. Throughout the year, teachers must expose students to a variety of genres and subjects.
- Decisions are purposefully made about when and how reading happens. For example, teachers must purposefully decide whether the text should be read at home (encouraged in upper grades where decoding is not an issue), read by students at school, read in partnerships, or read aloud to students.
- Exposing students to overly advanced texts is not rigor because teachers scaffold these texts too much. For example, middle school students cannot fully grasp *Hamlet*, so reading it is not rigorous – it instead requires a teacher to reduce a rich text to a simplistic level.

Students must engage with the text to answer a meaningful question that pushes students to think more deeply about the text than they would on their own.

- Questions require text evidence to answer.
- Questions force students to think about the author's purpose and choices – not about their own opinions.
- Good questions can force students to the macro level of understanding the structure or theme of the text as a whole. Good questions can force students to the micro level of understanding how a specific word or sentence is important in developing the text as a whole. Teachers should prompt thinking at all levels – the word, sentence, paragraph, section, and whole text level.

- “What would you do next if you were the main character?” is not a good question. “Did you like the book?” is not a good question. “Who would you most like to be friends with: character A or character B?” is not a good question. “How is Elephant’s personality different than Piggie’s?” is a good question. “Why does Lorraine Hansberry choose to include both of these encounters in the same scene of the play?” is a good question. Both of these require evidence from the text and a deep understanding of the text to answer.

Reading discussions progress logically, following a plan that demonstrates a deep understanding of the text.

- Students are given time to talk about the text, using evidence and explaining how the evidence supports their interpretation.
- Students need to be pushed to consider their classmates’ thoughts and opinions. Students need to be challenged to consider the merit of their own and their teammates’ thinking based on whether there is text evidence to support that interpretation.
- In order to evaluate the evidence used by their peers, students should track the evidence that their teammates are citing.
- Connections between texts must be made transparent.

All students are engaged throughout the lesson; they are engaged in the work, engaged in learning from others, and engaged in monitoring, articulating, and refining their own thinking.

- Engagement doesn’t mean every hand is up but it does mean every student is tracking the conversation and able to contribute at any moment. Students should be participating meaningfully at many times throughout the lesson; this could be achieved through cold calling, partner or group talks, quick writes, or other means.