

Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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Tip #33: Read Around the Text

Imagine that you are a struggling reader, but you are lucky enough to be at a school where teachers of literacy surround you across the content areas. Would your day look something like this?

You go to your 1st period reading elective and learn the importance of making a reading plan before attempting to read text. Your reading teacher introduces you to a strategy called "Read Around the Text." She demonstrates the strategy on a weird but interesting article from the Uncle John's Bathroom Book for Kids.

www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/1571458670/qid=1066931934/sr=8-1/ref=sr_8_1/104-4568162-3003914?v=glance&n=507846

Using the overhead, she shows you step-by-step how to navigate through the information by looking at the pictures, reading the captions, skimming the diagrams, reading the first and last lines of paragraphs, etc. (See [attached page](#).) She never really even reads the entire piece. She simply just makes a plan for her reading, and she does it by thinking aloud, which makes her reading process a visible one for you. She explicitly points out features and tips you had never even noticed before.

Then she puts you in a small group with another piece of short text from that very

same book. This time you and your group are asked to "Read Around the Text" being told you will report your reading plan to the rest of the class. You are glad you don't have to do it alone. You figure that all groups have been given the same piece of text to read, but you are surprised when groups share because everyone has something different. You are just a little irritated you have not yet had a chance to actually read the weird stuff in this book. Now it's almost the end of class, but your teacher challenges you to "Read Around the Text" independently using your social studies book. Hmm, she conveniently has a set of those social studies books for you to use.

The bell rings, and you go to your science class. Your teacher says she has a lab planned (yeah!) for later in the week but today wants to give some background information. You are asked to read a chapter from your book. She begins by saying, "Let's "Read Around the Text." She even has a chart up of the steps. You think to yourself that something is definitely up.

It's now 3rd period. You barely make it to class on time because you can't find your book in your locker. You walk in and hear the teacher saying, "Today we are going to start a unit on percentages and ratio. Let's "Read Around the Text" before we begin." Now you know that something is definitely up.



Ok, I think you probably see where I am going with this email tip. Hanshew and Mears were fortunate to hear presentations by Melvina Prichett Phillips yesterday. Melvina was a keynote speaker for the Principals' Conference earlier in the week and agreed to extend her stay to visit a couple of schools. I got to hear Melvina speak to the Hanshew LA/reading staff about content area reading strategies. One of the biggest messages that I heard from her was how consistency can make a huge difference in the lives of our struggling readers.

When she was principal of her middle school, she helped her teachers narrow the focus of their strategy teaching. They came together as a staff and chose a handful of research-based strategies they were all consistently using. Nothing clever and gimmicky. Just good, solid reading strategies that have been around forever: KWL charts, anticipation guides, Venn diagrams, etc. They decided to use the strategies, strategically! In other words, they decided to get rid of the haphazard approach and unify their instruction by agreeing to focus schoolwide on one particular strategy a week. The strategy would initially be introduced by a reading teacher or LA teacher, and then students would get repeated exposure with the strategy in their content area classes all week long.

This was an "ah ha" moment for me. Such a simple thing we can do for our kids. Let's continue to give them strategy instruction, let's continue to use think alouds, and let's continue to gradually release the responsibility to them. But let's do that throughout the entire school and throughout the entire week. With all of us using a similar strategy but applying it in various classrooms and genres, kids will come to own it, and this will in turn improve comprehension. I challenge you to organize your own teams and ultimately your entire staff to make this unified strategy approach actually happen.

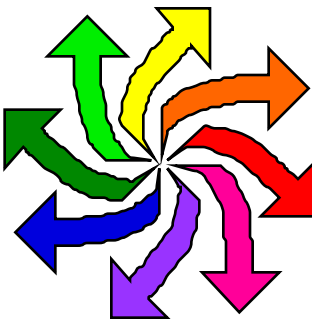


Read Around the Text

1. Look at the pictures. What ideas are being presented?

2. Look at the captions and read them.

3. Look at the maps, charts, and graphs. Discuss what information they present.



6. Ask questions. Give yourself a reason to read.

5. Read the first and last lines of each ¶ for more information.

4. Look at the titles and headings. What is the big idea?

Source: Melvina Prichett Phillips, National Association of Secondary Principals