

Preface: The A+ Reader

Chances are good that if you purchased this book, you're an educator. But the chances are even better that you're a reader. Nonreaders buy few books, rarely visit libraries, and are much more likely to go online to play video games than they are to check out the latest research on the human genome project or participate in a chat room discussion on the achievements of Satchel Paige or the tragedy of Manzanar.

This is a book about how you can turn average or below-average readers in secondary school into thoughtful, high-achieving readers—readers, like yourself, who can find and remember the information they need, reason out the implications of powerful and challenging ideas, and feel at home in libraries and bookstores, both virtual and real.

But I'm Not a Reading Teacher! Why Does Reading Matter to Me?

This book is not just for reading teachers. It is not even just for teachers. It is for any secondary educator who is concerned with student achievement and success in the Information Age. Whether you teach English, Math, Social Studies, Science, or any other subject; whether you work with average, advanced, or special-needs students or, as is most likely, a combination of all three; whether you're a principal, director of curriculum, professional development specialist, or school leader; whether you are about to enter the education profession, or have twenty-five years of service under your belt, reading is important. We can think of three reasons why:

1. *Reading is an essential skill in our culture.* Pretend you are a parent (if you already are one, this should be easy). You are faced with a choice between two high schools. One promises that by the end of senior year, your child will know the three stages of cellular respiration and the facts of the Nullification Crisis. The other school guarantees that your child will be able to read and understand any

text he or she encounters in college and in life, no matter how difficult. Which school would you choose?

2. *Reading is a skill we count on.* No amount of lectures, videos, or inquiries will permit you to cover all the essential material in your discipline. As educators, we rely on students' abilities to learn through reading. Textbooks, articles, literature, online resources, primary documents, lab manuals—all of these and many other resources serve as the foundation for powerful teaching and learning. This means that students who can't read at a high level of proficiency are missing a vital piece in the learning puzzle.

3. *Reading is thinking.* Well-written texts model good thinking. Through reading, essential learning and thinking strategies, such as gathering evidence, organizing ideas, forming images, drawing conclusions, and raising questions, are regularly modeled, practiced, and internalized. Thus, thoughtful readers become thoughtful problem solvers—and better students.

How many more reasons can you imagine to make good reading a central part of your curriculum?

Can We Really Improve Reading in Secondary School?

The answer is unequivocally yes. But twenty years ago, it wasn't so easy to be so unequivocal. Why? Because, for decades, research on reading focused almost exclusively on the difficulties readers faced. You might say this research was more concerned with what readers could not do than with what they could do—with readers' disabilities rather than their abilities. Then, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, reading research took a sharp turn in a different direction. Under the leadership of researchers such as Robert Tierney, P. David Pearson, Ruth Garner, James Cunningham, Annemarie Palinscar, Ann Brown, and others, reading research began to focus on the mental activity of proficient readers. What these and other researchers asked themselves was this: What do good and great readers do with their minds while reading that makes them more successful than their peers? What they found was that good and great readers shared five characteristics that made them A+ rather than C+ readers:

- A+ readers know how to organize ideas and information to fit the task at hand.
- A+ readers know how to use questions to filter out the most important information and to clarify points of confusion.
- A+ readers know how to use their imagination to make predictions, draw inferences, and create pictures that mirror important concepts in the text.

- A+ readers know how to use conversation, dialogue, and retelling to deepen their understanding of the texts they read.
- A+ readers recognize when their understanding of texts is confused or mistaken and use strategies to repair their comprehension.

Armed with this new vision of the talents and skills employed by successful readers, teachers and researchers alike began to craft instruction in these skills into strategies teachers could use to improve reading while continuing to teach their specific content. And, because of the new research base behind them—because the focus was on ability rather than disability—the strategies worked. Weaker readers grew stronger. C+ students earned more A's.

How This Book Is Organized

This book is a collection of the strategies that have emerged from the proficient-reader research. Each chapter is focused on a specific reading challenge students face in secondary school and the strategies that will help them meet that challenge.

- *Chapter 1* focuses on that most pervasive and often difficult source of information in secondary school: *the textbook*.
- *Chapter 2* turns our attention to the importance of *note making* as a tool for focusing attention and building reading comprehension.
- *Chapter 3* is designed to help students learn how to manage and master the wealth and variety of *vocabulary* that they confront in all content areas.
- *Chapter 4* contains strategies that develop students' abilities to read beyond the information given, to move from the gist to deeper, more *inferential reading*.
- *Chapter 5* asks, How can students become better and more thoughtful readers by tapping into the power of *questions*?
- *Chapter 6* demonstrates how to use *informal writing and journals* to keep readers active, reflective, and connected to their own interests and experiences.
- *Chapter 7* looks at students' individual *reading styles* and helps teachers to differentiate and individualize teaching and learning so that all students receive the reading instruction they need and deserve.

In addition to the strategies, each chapter contains two other special features: *Applications to Specific Content Areas*, which shows how to vary and adapt the strategies to the demands of different disciplines, and *Strategies for Struggling Readers*,

which provides tips and tools for working with our weakest readers in heterogeneous classrooms or special-needs settings. Many of the strategies come with full-page reproducibles, named *Resources*, to facilitate classroom lessons; we encourage you to copy, use, and modify them to best suit your needs.

We all want our students to learn. And we all know the importance of reading to both academic and lifelong learning. The strategies and tools within these pages will help you nurture the skills your students will need to become confident, thoughtful, A+ readers.