

TEACHING THAT MAKES SENSE

Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer

*The Ultimate Strategy
for Reading Comprehension and Response*

by
Steve Peha

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teaching that makes sense
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**“FULL”
VERSION**



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by Steve Peha



The best way to teach
is the way that makes sense
to you, your kids,
and your community.

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Read Like a Reader Read Like a Writer

What do readers do when they read? Sounds like a strange question, doesn't it? After all, readers just read, don't they? Sort of. Actually, the whole question turns on what you think reading is.

Your mind is very active while you process text. You may think you're just saying words to yourself and hearing them somewhere inside your head, but chances are there's more going on — a lot more. Becoming aware of what your mind is doing when you read helps you become a better reader.

Nobody knows for sure what goes on in the mind of a reader. Frankly, there's no way to tell and no two readers read exactly the same way. So, we have to make up a theory about it. I like to think that there are two different ways to read:

- **Reading like a reader.** We might think of this as the “normal” way of reading where we try to figure out what a piece of writing means by understanding the words a writer is using. But even this “normal” way is more complicated than it seems.
- **Reading like a writer.** When we read from the perspective of a writer, we focus less on *what* the writer is trying to say and more on *how* the writer is saying it. Specifically, we look at the techniques the writer is using to get his or her message across and how those techniques affect us as we experience the text.

These certainly aren't the only ways to read. But I think they represent interesting and valuable ways of thinking about a text. The point of all this is to help us enjoy reading more by making it a more active and interactive process. When we read actively, we don't just wait for the meaning to come to us, we go after it — aggressively. We look deeply into the text hunting in certain specific ways searching for clues as to what the writer is trying to say. When we read interactively, we ask questions about the text and our reactions to it, and we use the answers we to develop a sense of how the text works. It's as if we start a conversation between the writer, the writing, and our self.

Read Like a Reader

What's going on here? Personally, I find teaching reading to be rather intimidating because I can never really know for sure how students are doing it. I can look out across a classroom and see a group of kids with their faces buried in between the pages of their books, but I have no way of knowing what's really going on. For all I can tell, they could be sitting quietly, thinking about nothing, and turning pages just to make me feel good.

There's no way to know for sure what goes on in a reader's head. And every reader probably reads a little differently. But here's a list of six things I think all readers do, things that make them more successful, and make reading more fun. I call this "reading like a reader":

Question. Readers ask good questions about the things they read. What kinds of questions do they ask? Just about anything that comes to mind: why something is happening or not happening, why a character feels or acts a certain way, things we wonder about or are confused by, words we may not know the meanings of, and so on. Questions help readers clarify their understanding.

Predict. Readers make guesses about what is coming up next. No reader, it seems, can resist thinking about what a writer is going to say next. It's just part of human nature to anticipate things. Predicting helps readers sort out important information from unimportant information, it helps them organize their thinking as they encounter new material.

Infer. Readers figure out things about what they read that aren't actually written in the text. There's almost always more to a story than just the words on the page. Often, writers leave "clues" that good readers can use to discover important information.

Connect. Readers think about what their reading reminds them of. We can't help but be reminded of our own lives as we read. We're also reminded of similar things we've read in other texts and other parts of the same text we're reading at the time.

Feel. Readers have feelings while they read, they express emotions. Sometimes, it seems like we have a direct connection to what we're reading: sad parts make us feel sad, happy parts make us feel happy, scary parts scare us, and so on. But often, the feelings we have are more subtle, we may feel them only slightly, for example, when we read with more expression. Much of the meaning we get from a piece of writing comes from the emotions we feel when read it.

Evaluate. Readers make judgments while they read. Is this good? If so, what's good about it? Do I like it? Why? Should I keep reading or should I put this down and get something else? Readers are finicky, impatient, judgmental. The evaluations they make help them decide whether or not what they are reading is valuable and, if so, how they might use it.

Reading Like a Reader

Eddie had always been able to fly, but it wasn't until his fifth birthday party that he realized that it would turn out to be a bit of a social problem. Until that embarrassing day on the Johnsons' lawn, Eddie's parents had treated his airborne peculiarity as something of a childish whim. "Boy's gotta stretch out, learn what he can do," said his father. "I just worry that he'll hurt himself, you know, bump into the ceiling or get his eye poked out by a bird, I don't know..." said his mother. For the young Eddie, flying was just another discovery about his developing body, like learning that he could reach out his arm and ring the bell on his cradle railing, or finding that he loved the taste of peas. The first time his parents came into the nursery and found Eddie hovering a foot or two off the floor it came as a bit of a shock. But, after all, parents are forever discovering special little things about their children. Eddie's mother thought that perhaps they should take their son to see a specialist, but his father vetoed the idea. "It's not like anything's wrong with him, and I don't want him getting a complex about it."

— *Opening paragraph from Eddie Takes Off by Ben Hippen*

Question: Is this a fantasy story where people have special powers? Or is the author using the idea of flying to stand for something else? If he can really fly, why aren't his parents a little more freaked out about it?

Predict: I think Eddie's flying is going to get him in trouble. In the very first sentence, the author refers to Eddie's flying as "a bit of a social problem" and to me that hints that things can only get worse.

Infer: Eddie's parents seem strange. They don't sound like real people, more like characters from a bad TV show. I think the author is trying to tell us that they may not be very smart or very sensitive.

Connect: This reminds me of Harry Potter where a boy has special powers. But it also makes me think of other kids I have seen who may be different. Sometimes, kids with unusual abilities aren't accepted by other people.

Feel: I feel sorry for Eddie. I get the feeling that he's going to be lonely because people aren't going to understand him.

Evaluate: I think the beginning is good. I'm curious about Eddie and his flying. I want to find out if he really can fly and if he's the only kid in the story who can do something like this. I also want to see what trouble he gets into. The author has an entertaining and funny style. I especially like the way he describes Eddie's parents though I don't like them at all, especially Eddie's father. This is exactly the kind of story I like: realistic but with a little bit of a twist.

Read Like a Writer

There's another way to read? Normally, when we read, we focus on *what* the writer is trying to say. When we read like a writer, however, we focus on *how* the writer is saying it. Because we are writers ourselves, we pay close attention to the techniques a writer is using and how those techniques contribute to the meaning of the piece and improve its quality. We may even borrow the techniques we learn for our own writing. I call this “reading like a writer.” When we read like this, there are six things we pay attention to:

Ideas. Ideas are the heart of the piece — what the writer is writing about and the information her or she chooses to reveal about it. When we read like a writer, we try to answer questions like these: How does the writer reveal the main idea? What types of details does the writer use? How does the writer achieve his or her purpose? How does the writer's choice of ideas affect the reader?

Organization. Organization refers to the order of ideas and the way the writer moves from one idea to the next. When we read like a writer, we try to answer questions like these: What kinds of leads does the writer use and how do they pull us in and make us want to read more? What kinds of endings does the writer use and how do they work to make the writing feel finished and to give us something important to think about? How does the writer handle transitions? What techniques does the writer use for sequencing? How does the writer control pacing?

Voice. Voice is how the writing feels to someone when they read it, it's the expression of the writer's individual personality through words. When we read like a writer, we try to answer questions like these: How does the writer demonstrate passion for the topic? How does the writer reveal emotions? How does the writer put personality into the piece?

Word Choice. Word Choice refers to writer's selection of particular words and phrases to express ideas. When we read like a writer, we try to answer questions like these: What techniques (simile, metaphor, strong verbs, etc.) does the writer use to make the word choice more specific, more memorable, and more effective?

Sentence Fluency. Sentence Fluency is the rhythm and flow of the language as we read it, it's how the writing sounds when read aloud. When we read like a writer, we try to answer questions like these: What kinds of sentence constructions does the writer use? How does the writer vary the length and construction of his or her sentences? How does the writer use “sound” effects like alliteration, rhyme, and rhythm?

Conventions. Conventions are the ways we agree to use punctuation, spelling, grammar, and other things that make writing consistent and easy to read. When we read like a writer, we try to answer questions like these: How does the writer use conventions to make the writing easy to read and more meaningful? Does the author use conventions in unusual ways that are successful?

Reading Like a Writer

Eddie had always been able to fly, but it wasn't until his fifth birthday party that he realized that it would turn out to be a bit of a social problem. Until that embarrassing day on the Johnsons' lawn, Eddie's parents had treated his airborne peculiarity as something of a childish whim. "Boy's gotta stretch out, learn what he can do," said his father. "I just worry that he'll hurt himself, you know, bump into the ceiling or get his eye poked out by a bird, I don't know..." said his mother. For the young Eddie, flying was just another discovery about his developing body, like learning that he could reach out his arm and ring the bell on his cradle railing, or finding that he loved the taste of peas. The first time his parents came into the nursery and found Eddie hovering a foot or two off the floor it came as a bit of a shock. But, after all, parents are forever discovering special little things about their children. Eddie's mother thought that perhaps they should take their son to see a specialist, but his father vetoed the idea. "It's not like anything's wrong with him, and I don't want him getting a complex about it."

— *Opening paragraph from Eddie Takes Off by Ben Hippen*

Ideas: A flying baby boy, in the context of what appears to be a realistic setting, is a curious and compelling idea.

Organization: The opening line is great. It certainly gets our attention and makes us want to find out more. The author has us wondering about three things: Eddie's flying ability, his parents' strange reaction, and the embarrassing incident on his fifth birthday.

Voice: The author's voice is light-hearted and playful, just as one might imagine a flying baby boy to be.

Word Choice: The phrase "airborne peculiarity" in the second sentence is both unusual and memorable. It also seems like the perfect way to describe Eddie's unique talent as viewed by his parents, as though it were something just slightly odd or mildly eccentric. In the last sentence, the strong verb "vetoed" tells a lot about how Eddie's mom and dad interact: Eddie's dad is sort of like the "president" of the family; any time he wants he can cancel his wife's ideas.

Sentence Fluency: The parallelism of the two quotes works nicely. And the last sentence, laid out in four pieces, with just a little bit of alliteration near the end, sounds smooth and satisfying.

Conventions: Normally, when quoting characters in a story, we have to start a new paragraph for each new speaker. But here the author quotes the two parents inside a paragraph. The use of the ellipsis at the end of the mother's comment makes her seem even more vague than her clichéd words imply.

Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer

READ LIKE A READER

Question: Is this a fantasy story where people have special powers? Or is the author using the idea of flying to stand for something else? If he can really fly, why aren't his parents a little more freaked out about it?

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Infer: Eddie's parents seem strange. They don't sound like real people, more like characters from a bad TV show. I think the author is trying to tell us that they may not be very smart or very sensitive.

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Feel: I feel sorry for Eddie. I get the feeling that he's going to be lonely because people aren't going to understand him.

Evaluate: I think the beginning is good. I'm curious about Eddie and his flying. I want to find out if he really can fly and if he's the only kid in the story who can do something like this. I also want to see what trouble he gets into. The author has an entertaining and funny style. I especially like the way he describes Eddie's parents though I don't like them at all, especially Eddie's father. This is exactly the kind of story I like: realistic but with a little bit of a twist.

Eddie Takes Off

Eddie had always been able to fly, but it wasn't until his fifth birthday party that he realized that it would turn out to be a bit of a social problem. Until that embarrassing day on the Johnsons' lawn, Eddie's parents had treated his airborne peculiarity as something of a childish whim. "Boy's gotta stretch out, learn what he can do," said his father. "I just worry that he'll hurt himself, you know, bump into the ceiling or get his eye poked out by a bird, I don't know..." said his mother. For the young Eddie, flying was just another discovery about his developing body, like learning that he could reach out his arm and ring the bell on his cradle railing, or finding that he loved the taste of peas. The first time his parents came into the nursery and found Eddie hovering a foot or two off the floor it came as a bit of a shock. But, after all, parents are forever discovering special little things about their children. Eddie's mother thought that perhaps they should take their son to see a specialist, but his father vetoed the idea. "It's not like anything's wrong with him, and I don't want him getting a complex about it."

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Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer

READ LIKE A READER

Question: What will Eddie's parents do about his flying? How is Eddie starting to feel now that he's getting consistent negative reactions to his flying?

Predict: It looks like Eddie is in for a tough time. His flying just doesn't fit in with normal life.

Infer: Eddie's flying is a special talent and something that he enjoys doing. But his parents look at it as just a big problem.

Connect: In a way, this is a common struggle parents have with their kids. Little kids are always "acting up" in ways their parents aren't happy about.

Feel: I'm beginning to like Eddie. He seems like an adorable and very interesting child. I'm also getting more and more worried that things just aren't going work out well for him.

Evaluate: This paragraph was very effective. In just a few sentences, it accurately captures the problem that I think Eddie is going to have all his life. The example about the grandma is perfect — and it's funny, too.

In fact, Eddie's flying soon became an annoyance to his parents. Broken light fixtures, crayon marks on the ceilings, and lost objects that had to be retrieved from the tops of bookcases soon exasperated them. Once when Eddie was three, his rather senile grandmother came for a visit. As she was sitting in her favorite armchair watching TV, Eddie, who had been playing behind the chair, appeared in the air over his grandmother, ready to drop a rubber ball on her graying, addled head. His father shot him a look so full of "No!" that Eddie desisted at once and sulkily spent the rest of the day firmly seated on the carpet. As the months and years passed, Eddie learned to be reticent about his ability in order to avoid parental displeasure; this had the added benefit of not provoking awkward questions from grandparents and visiting relatives. Eddie's mother and father also took certain prudent precautions such as a gentle restraining hand during diaper changing and remembering to close the sun roof of the family car when Eddie was inside.

Sentence Fluency: The author shows wonderful variety in sentence length and terrific control over sentence structure. The first sentence has two parts. The second sentence, three. The next sentence has two again. But the sentence after that has five parts and is 36 words long. Yet, it's still clear and very readable. There's also some nice alliteration here: "sulkily spent" and "prudent precautions."

Conventions: The author has done good work here with "inside" punctuation: great use of commas and a semi-colon to make long sentences easy to read. I also like the use of the passive voice in the second sentence. This single paragraph could have been broken up into three but keeping it all together in one big block slows us down as we read and contributes to slow, patient feeling I think the author wants us to have.

READ LIKE A WRITER

Ideas: The little scene with grandma is a perfect example of "showing" detail. This paragraph is full of great details that help us understand how Eddie behaves and how the world reacts to his behavior. The little bits about diaper changing and closing the sun roof on the car are very clever.

Organization: The words "In fact," provide an easy transition from the last sentence of the previous paragraph. The first sentence is a perfect "topic" sentence. The rest of the paragraph consists of details that serve as examples. This is a long paragraph (as was the previous one). The pace here at the beginning is slow. The author seems to want us to focus on one or two big ideas at a time as he sets up his story.

Voice: On the one hand, it's clear that all the adults are becoming "exasperated" with Eddie. But the paragraph has a very calm, easy-going quality to it that makes me feel like the adults are overreacting. The voice here is understated even though what's being described is not.

Word Choice: I love the phrase, "a look so full of 'No!'" It's perfect and yet I've never heard it before. Overall, the word choice in this paragraph is terrific. There are many good strong verbs ("exasperated", "desisted", "provoking"), some terrific adjectives and adverbs ("addled", "sulkily", "reticent"), and some very memorable phrases ("avoid parental displeasure", "provoking awkward questions", "a gentle restraining hand").



Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer

READ LIKE A READER

Question: What kind of trouble is Eddie going to get in now? Why is some neighbor offering to throw a birthday party for Eddie?

Predict: Something's going to happen at the party that gets Eddie in trouble again. It's going to have something to do with his flying.

Infer: Eddie lives in an upper middle class, suburban neighborhood where stay-at-home moms have lots of time on their hands to set up important social events for themselves and their children. These events serve to "sort people out", to let everyone know who is important and who is not. Eddie's mother seems very interested in the "social" opportunity here. She probably sees it as an opportunity to raise her standing, and that of her family, in the neighborhood. She's obviously attracted to the Johnson's because of their position in the community. I think she's more interested in social standing than she is in being a good mom. After all, why isn't she throwing the party for Eddie's birthday?

Connect: I didn't grow up in a neighborhood like this but I know people who did. Though I never experienced anything like this directly, I always felt that it existed. Sometimes friends would tell me stories that sort of sounded like this party.

Feel: With each passing paragraph, I feel a little worse for Eddie. Not only is he different than other kids, I feel like he's growing up in a family and in a community where conformity is highly valued and differences are soundly rejected.

Evaluate: The story is getting better and better. The author is leading us to up to some kind of troublesome event and I can't wait to find out what it is.

And then, shortly before his fifth birthday, Eddie's mother received a phone call from her neighbor three houses down. Mrs. Johnson was offering to throw a little birthday bash for Eddie's fifth with some of the neighborhood kids. Eddie's mother eagerly accepted, and the two agreed how wonderful it would be for Eddie and the Johnsons' five-year-old, Alex, to make friends. Eddie's mother was secretly pleased at the invitation for another reason: Mr. Johnson was on the community council, and the Johnsons lived in the biggest, nicest house in the cul-de-sac. This might be a great social opportunity for the parents as well as the children.

READ LIKE A WRITER

Ideas: Introducing the idea of Eddie's mom as a status-conscious social-climbing suburban housewife is a great "back story" detail that gives Eddie's situation a rich context. He's certainly on his own here, not even his mother is looking out for his interests.

Organization: As with the previous paragraph, the author uses a simple two word transitional phrase ("And then,") to get us into the next section. The ending of this paragraph sets us up perfectly for the next. All of a sudden, the story isn't about Eddie anymore, it's about his mother.

Voice: The tone seems to have changed here just a bit. In the previous paragraph, I felt like Eddie's flying was a harmless, though frustrating, thing for his parents. Now I have the feeling that it's going to be a huge deal for his mom and a huge problem for him.

Word Choice: I love the phrase "a little birthday bash." I can just see two women giggling over the idea as they plan it out.

Sentence Fluency: Again, each sentence flows smoothly. Sentence lengths are varied although it's becoming clear that, at least at this point in the story, the author favors longer sentences.

Conventions: Nice use of a colon in the sentence that begins "Eddie's mother was secretly pleased...." This breaks a potentially long sentence into two, shorter parts that are easy to read and understand. Correct placement of the apostrophe in "Johnsons'" after the "s". I often get that wrong.

Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer

READ LIKE A READER

Question: Can Eddie really fly? I keep asking myself if Eddie is literally flying or if the author is sort of playing with the idea a little bit. I don't know why I get this feeling. Maybe it has something to do with the way adults often exaggerate the behaviors of little kids. Or possibly it has something to do with the realistic setting of the story and the fact that Eddie's parents react so non-chalantly about his ability. If he isn't really flying, then what is he doing? Some little kids are very quick and they like to jump. Maybe that's what his "flying" is like.

Predict: Eddie's mom is going to turn against him because he just embarrassed her socially. She's going to punish Eddie and he's going to feel really bad about what he did even though he was just trying to protect himself.

Infer: Eddie's mother is very self-centered. She pays no attention to Eddie. She doesn't even notice when he begins having trouble with Alex. Also, after the incident, she ignores him when he tries to tell her what happened.

Connect: I think anyone who has ever been wrongly blamed and then ignored when trying to make an explanation could relate with this.

Feel: I'm past feeling sorry for Eddie. Now I'm getting mad. I don't like the way he is treated by the adults or the other kids.

Evaluate: This is another very successful scene. I'm impressed by the author's ability to provide such clear examples a single paragraph at a time. He obviously knows his characters well and has a solid grasp of what he wants to say.

On the big day, Mrs. Johnson met Eddie and his mother at the Johnsons' front door and showed them to the back yard after a brief tour of the house. Eddie and Alex, after some preliminary shyness, got down to the serious business of playing with a set of toy trucks, and eventually seven other youngsters arrived, escorted by various parents and babysitters. Eddie was treated to a large assortment of presents and Mrs. Johnson's cake proved popular with both children and adults. Soon the bedlam of children who have eaten too much sugar reigned, so nobody noticed that Eddie and Alex were having a disagreement over possession of one of the toy trucks. Alex, who was large for his age, was keeping a particularly desirable blue garbage truck out of Eddie's reach. Eddie's cries of "Mine, mine!" went unnoticed by his mother, who was standing with her back to the yard near the house with Mrs. Johnson, listening sympathetically to the trials of the life of a community council-member's wife. Alex, growing impatient with Eddie's disputation of the truck's ownership, began hitting Eddie with a chubby, half-closed fist, holding the blue garbage truck just out of Eddie's reach with the other arm. Although this, too, escaped the attention of Eddie's mother, she was instantly aware seconds later that all of the children and adults in the backyard had simultaneously fallen completely silent. Even before she turned around, Mrs. Johnson's gaping stare told her what she would see. There, in the middle of the yard, Eddie floated, several feet above Alex, out of the reach of the chubby fist. Alex stared up in such shock that he dropped the blue garbage truck, everybody else in the yard was speechless. Eddie caught his mother's eye, and one look at the expression on her face told him all he needed to know; he immediately dropped out of the air into a heap on the ground.

READ LIKE A WRITER

Ideas: The author continues with the basic theme of Eddie's flying getting him in trouble. This is the first time, however, that such an incident has occurred with another child. And, predictably, it's the worst thing that's happened to Eddie so far.

Organization: Once again, the writer introduces the paragraph with a brief transitional phrase ("On the big day,"). Since he's done this in every paragraph so far, I'm surprised that it's not getting monotonous. But it's not. As in each of the previous paragraphs, this one has a clear and effective progression of ideas. It's like a "mini-story" unto itself.

Voice: Something about the tone here is not quite right to my ear. The language seems a bit forced, not as natural as in previous paragraphs.

Word Choice: Some of the words and phrases in this paragraph don't work for me. "Gaping stare" doesn't seem quite right, though I think I know what the author means. And, "Eddie's disputation of the truck's ownership" seems awkward and overdone as does "Soon the bedlam of children who have eaten too much sugar reigned". On the plus side, I like "chubby, half-closed fist" a lot. It describes perfectly how 5-year-olds try to hit each other.

Sentence Fluency: I love the way the author slows down the rhythm with all the commas in the sentence where everyone notices Eddie flying: "There, in the middle of the yard, Eddie floated, several feet above Alex, out of the reach of the chubby fist." I love the way breaking up this sentence increases the suspense and forces us to pay more attention as we read.

Conventions: There are over 300 words in this paragraph and many long sentences. And yet, it works! In the phrases "community council-member's wife" and "chubby half-closed fist" the writer uses hyphens effectively to create compound adjectives.

Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer

READ LIKE A READER

Question:

Predict:

Infer:

Connect:

Feel:

Evaluate:

“Just what are you trying to prove?” sputtered Mrs. Johnson. “I don’t know what kind of stupid trick this is, but you just scared the *bejeezus* out of all the children. Someone could have gotten hurt. Out, now! I want you out of my yard, and *don’t ever come back!*”

Eddie’s mother grabbed him by the hand and began dragging him away. Eddie’s desperate attempts at explanation displaced his tears. “Mommy, he was hitting me.... He’s bigger than I am....” But his pleading was swallowed by his mother’s mortified silence. As they reached the sidewalk they could hear the agitated mutterings of the group on the lawn behind them: children beginning to cry, parents trying to reassure them that it was just a trick, that it wasn’t real. Alex’s voice reached them just as they turned on to the sidewalk to go back to their own house: “*Weirdo!*”

READ LIKE A WRITER

Ideas:

Organization:

Voice:

Word Choice:

Sentence Fluency:

Conventions:

Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer

READ LIKE A READER

Question:

Predict:

Infer:

Connect:

Feel:

Evaluate:

That evening Eddie lay in bed, miserable. He tried snuggling into his sheets; he tried levitating a few inches above the mattress, which until today had always comforted him when he was trying to get to sleep. He felt embarrassed, ashamed that he had hurt his mother. He felt exposed in a way that was new to him. And so Eddie made a promise to himself with the intensity of a child's confused pain: he would never again allow anyone to see him fly.

For the first week or so after the party Eddie stuck to his promise. He continued to amuse himself with an occasional loop just under the dining room ceiling, but never when his parents or anyone else was present. After a couple of weeks his promise faded from a daily mantra to a vaguer intention, but the habit stuck of never letting anyone see him fly. His parents noticed, of course. "I hope nothing's wrong," said his mother. "I just want him to be normal and happy like other children." "It was just a phase," said his father. "I figured he'd grow out of it." And Eddie did seem happy, which took some of the sting out of the fact that Eddie's mother never was invited back to Mrs. Johnson's house.

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READ LIKE A WRITER

Ideas:

Organization:

Voice:

Word Choice:

Sentence Fluency:

Conventions:

Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer

READ LIKE A READER

Question:

Predict:

Infer:

Connect:

Feel:

Evaluate:

Eddie slowly shuffled out of the school building carrying his book bag. Only three days into ninth grade and already it was a drag — boring classes, no new friends, too much homework. He walked down the sidewalk, lost in depressing thoughts about school, until he became aware, seconds too late, of the footsteps of three boys running up behind him. He felt the first blow on his back, causing him to stumble and drop his bag, which was promptly kicked into the bushes by another of the three. Books and papers flew everywhere. As he turned to face his attackers a fist slammed into his stomach, knocking the wind out of him and causing him to collapse on the ground. He heard laughter and a familiar voice shout “*Weirdo!*” above him. The three boys ran off, one of them saying, “Good one, Johnson!”

READ LIKE A WRITER

Ideas:

Organization:

Voice:

Word Choice:

Sentence Fluency:

Conventions:

Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer

READ LIKE A READER

Question:

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Connect:

Feel:

Evaluate:

Eddie sat there for a minute trying to regain his breath. Then he crawled over to the bushes on his hands and knees and half-heartedly began collecting the spilled contents of his book bag. As he reached for the math worksheet due tomorrow a small, delicate hand wearing nail gloss and a pinkie ring grabbed it. He looked up at the owner of the hand. She was blond, with more freckles than he'd ever seen in his life.

"Hi, I'm Jane. I'm in your Science class. Here, lemme help you." She picked up the remaining books and put them into Eddie's bag while he held it open. "What's your name?"

"Um, Eddie."

"Nice to meet you, Eddie." She smelled great. "That Alex Johnson is the biggest jerk. I don't know why he's so mean. Well, that's all your stuff. I gotta run. See you tomorrow in class." As Eddie watched her walk away he didn't notice his aching stomach. And he didn't notice that he was grinning like an idiot.

READ LIKE A WRITER

Ideas:

Organization:

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Word Choice:

Sentence Fluency:

Conventions:

Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer

READ LIKE A READER

Question:

Predict:

Infer:

Connect:

Feel:

Evaluate:

Eddie suddenly developed an intense interest in Science class. He took advantage of every opportunity to say a few words to Jane: “Here, you dropped your pen.” “Think it’ll rain during gym class this afternoon?” Once Eddie and Jane were lab partners. They finished the assignment successfully, although Eddie burned his thumb on a Bunsen burner. He barely even noticed, he was so nervous. Jane was always polite, but she never really got involved in conversation with him. In fact, she didn’t treat Eddie any differently from any of the other boys in the class. Jane, on the other hand, was all that Eddie could think about. Eddie would lie awake in his bed at night thinking about her. He would slowly levitate off the mattress, raising his brown comforter from underneath, looking like a loaf of bread rising in the oven.

READ LIKE A WRITER

Ideas:

Organization:

Voice:

Word Choice:

Sentence Fluency:

Conventions:

Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer

READ LIKE A READER

Question:

Eddie didn't know what to do. One evening he approached his mother, who was sitting in front of the TV knitting something large and blue with great determination.

Predict:

"Mom," he started, "there's this girl in my Science class...."
 "What's her name?" His mother kept knitting.
 "Her name's Jane, and she's... well, I mean, I kind of —"
 "What is it, dear?" Knit, knit, knit.
 "Never mind, Mom."

Infer:

Connect:

Feel:

Evaluate:

READ LIKE A WRITER

Ideas:

Organization:

Voice:

Word Choice:

Sentence Fluency:

Conventions:

Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer

READ LIKE A READER

Question:

Predict:

Infer:

Connect:

Feel:

Evaluate:

The next evening Eddie made up his mind to call Jane and ask her out on a date. He waited until after dinner, then left his parents in front of the TV to use the upstairs phone. He paced for about twenty minutes, his palms getting sweaty. He picked up the phone, held it for a while, then put it back down and paced some more. Finally, barely realizing what he was doing, he picked up the phone again and dialed Jane's number. She answered on the second ring. "Hello?" Eddie couldn't make a sound come out of his mouth. "Hello? Is there anybody there?" Jane hung up, leaving Eddie listening to the dial tone for a minute. Then he set down the phone and went to bed.

READ LIKE A WRITER

Ideas:

Organization:

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Word Choice:

Sentence Fluency:

Conventions:

Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer

READ LIKE A READER

Question:

Predict:

Infer:

Connect:

Feel:

Evaluate:

For the rest of the school year Eddie was inconsolable. He no longer even had the courage to try to make small talk with Jane. When she would make some casual comment to him in class he would stammer and flee as quickly as he could. It felt like the only social contact he had for all those months was the continual baiting and occasional beating from Alex Johnson. Eventually it was spring, and then the last day of school. This was it, Eddie knew; if he didn't ask Jane out today he would never make it through the summer. After the last class he waited in the hall near Jane's locker. When he saw her walking to her locker he stepped toward her, forcing himself not to think about anything except for what he needed to say.

READ LIKE A WRITER

Ideas:

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Sentence Fluency:

Conventions:

Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer

READ LIKE A READER

Question:

Predict:

Infer:

Connect:

Feel:

Evaluate:

“Hi, Eddie, it’s good to see you. How’re you doing?” Jane smiled. It seemed like she was genuinely glad to see him. Maybe, just maybe, she would agree to a date. Eddie felt a surge of optimism. In fact he felt almost giddy, so giddy that he was on the verge of lifting into the air without even realizing it. His heels were off the floor, leaving him standing on tiptoe. If only Jane knew how special he was! He could show her, she would understand! He felt so happy that he hadn’t realized that someone was standing behind him. *Bam!* He went flying into the lockers face first, then crumpled to the floor.

“*Weirdo!*”

“Alex! Pick on somebody your own size!” Jane was watching Alex Johnson and his friends run away down the hall. She turned back to Eddie, who was wiping at the blood that was starting to run from his nose. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. Have a good summer, Jane.” Eddie walked down the hall and out of the school building as fast as he could.

It was a long, miserable summer for Eddie.

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READ LIKE A WRITER

Ideas:

Organization:

Voice:

Word Choice:

Sentence Fluency:

Conventions:

Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer

READ LIKE A READER

Question:

Predict:

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Connect:

Feel:

Evaluate:

The senior prom wasn't turning out at all like Eddie had expected. He had never really gotten over Jane. He had managed a couple of dates with other girls during high school, but they never really amounted to anything — compared to Jane, any other girl fell short. The biggest impact she had wound up having on his life was that since that humiliating last day of ninth grade he had never flown again, not even in private. He wasn't sure if he was even still able to fly, and he wasn't sure if he cared. Over the years he had thought many times about taking Jane to the senior prom, but wasn't really surprised to find himself here tonight, not with the girl of his dreams, but with a couple of his buddies, Max and Jerry. "Stag night!" they'd said to each other, and laughed. *Loser night*, they'd thought to themselves, and sighed. Still, the night hadn't been that bad, and Eddie had arranged for them to wind up at an after-dance party that he knew Jane would be coming to. At least he would get a chance to see Jane tonight, even though he knew that he wouldn't be able to talk to her without going to pieces.

READ LIKE A WRITER

Ideas:

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Sentence Fluency:

Conventions:

Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer



READ LIKE A READER

Question:

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Evaluate:

Jerry came back from the kitchen carrying three cans of pop to the corner where Eddie and Max were standing. None of them really knew what to do at a party, so they stood there sipping and trying to look nonchalant, when the front door opened and Max said "Here come some happy couples." Eddie saw Jane walk into the room. She was wearing a long blue dress which bared her freckle-covered arms. She had her hair swept up on top of her head. For a moment the image of the gangly ninth grader that Eddie had first fallen for flashed in front of his eyes, only to be replaced by the sight of the beautiful young woman she had become. Eddie twitched with a spasm of heartache.

READ LIKE A WRITER

Ideas:

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Conventions:

Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer

READ LIKE A READER

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Feel:

Evaluate:

Then he noticed who Jane had walked in with and spilled his pop on his rented tuxedo. Jane's prom date was *Alex Johnson*. Eddie felt faint. The blood drained out of his face. Max noticed and asked if Eddie was okay. It sounded like Max's voice was coming from the bottom of a swimming pool. *Alex Johnson!* Every injustice, every disappointment, everything that had ever gone wrong in Eddie's entire life seemed like nothing compared to this. Fortunately more and more people were showing up at the party, so he could hide in the corner and silently listen to Max and Jerry make stupid jokes about arriving couples and what they were wearing. He had no idea how much time had passed when he realized that Max and Jerry's infantile commentary had taken a new turn. Max had overheard that "...some of them are going out to the lake past the Valley Acres development to build a bonfire and stay up all night."

Eddie heard himself say "Who's going?"

"A bunch of them. Greg and Allison, Jeremy and Lisa, Alex and Jane —"

Jerry chimed in: "Yeah, they're gonna have a real party out there tonight!"

READ LIKE A WRITER

Ideas:

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Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer

READ LIKE A READER

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Evaluate:

Eddie chugged the rest of his pop in one huge gulp. He looked for Jane in the crowd, hoping for one last glimpse of her before his life was ruined forever. There they were, Jane and Alex, standing a bit apart from the rest of their friends. It looked like they were having a disagreement. Jane kept shaking her head, and Alex was raising his voice. As Eddie watched, Alex grabbed Jane's wrist, not very gently, and began dragging her in the direction of the front door. As Alex jerked her into motion, Jane's hair came undone and fell over her shoulders. Without thinking, Eddie threw down his empty pop can and rushed towards them. He stretched out his arms in front of him and unconsciously propelled his body by flying, rushing over the carpet so low that nobody realized that he wasn't just running. He slammed into Alex, who let Jane's wrist go and slammed into the wall so hard that his head made a small indentation in the plaster.

READ LIKE A WRITER

Ideas:

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Conventions:

Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer

READ LIKE A READER

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Evaluate:

Everyone in the room stared, frozen and speechless. Alex stood and turned to face Eddie, his hands balling into fists. But he stayed where he was. Something in him whispered that Eddie had hit him with more force than should have been possible to build up by simply running across the room. And something about the surrounding crowd, staring and silent, triggered a memory of a five-year-old boy who had just dropped a blue garbage truck and was confronted by the impossible spectacle of another five-year-old boy floating in mid-air above him. For a moment a battle raged in Alex's mind: the cocky teenager, livid with rage, struggled with the little boy whose bullying had provoked an impossible, terrifying situation. The little boy won. Alex ran for the front door and bolted outside. Moments later everyone in the house heard the roar of his Camaro as he sped away. Eddie became aware of Jane's hand on his shoulder. "Oh, God," she said. "Let's get out of this place." The two of them walked out the front door together. Nobody in the room had said a word.

READ LIKE A WRITER

Ideas:

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Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer

READ LIKE A READER

Question:

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Feel:

Evaluate:

Outside it was cool. The moon was full and cast their shadows in front of them as they walked. Jane stopped and turned to face Eddie. "Thanks. I feel so stupid. I don't even know what I was doing there with him. I should have known it would turn out bad." She put her arms around Eddie and hugged him. He put his arms around her and hugged back. He started to say something, then stopped. He started to move his face closer to hers, then stopped. She looked up at the moon and said, "It's such a beautiful night. I wish that we could just get out of here."

Eddie tightened his grip around her waist. "Maybe we can." His feet lifted from the sidewalk. He felt the surprise in Jane's arms as they tightened around him. And then, without word, the two of them began rising into the calm night air.

READ LIKE A WRITER

Ideas:

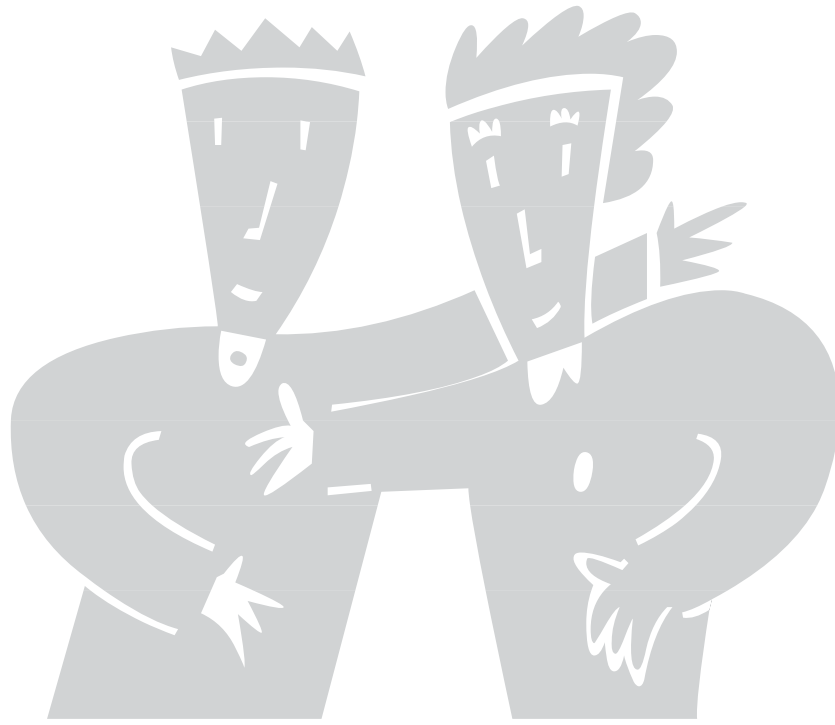
Organization:

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Word Choice:

Sentence Fluency:

Conventions:



Let's work together to
make your teaching
the best it can be.

Please contact me any time!

Even the best workshops and teaching materials can't meet the needs of every teacher all the time.

That's why we need to stay in touch. Send me an e-mail any time you have a question.

*I'll do my best to get back to you quickly with answers, additional teaching materials,
or other resources.*

Please send suggestions, questions, and corrections to:
stevepeha@ttms.org

Learning Patterns

Teach Smarter Not Harder

Imagine a structure 13 years tall, 180 days wide, and five subjects deep. This is a K-12 education. Each cell in this structure represents a single class period in a single subject for a total of 11,700 educational opportunities.

By using *Teaching That Makes Sense® Learning Patterns™* we can reduce this academic load for students, simplify planning and instruction for teachers, and help more kids learn more things in less time and with less teacher effort.

Learning Patterns are cross-curricular tools optimized for successful teaching in any subject or grade. They are designed to be used, re-used, and shared across classrooms without requiring extensive training or preparation.

By analyzing standards documents and the methods of effective teachers, *Teaching That Makes Sense* has identified underlying commonalities in learning targets across the curriculum. These commonalities represent dozens of potential assignments that can be taught and learned through a small set of foundational skills.

Consider exposition. Students consume and create expository information in many ways: they read expository texts, write expository essays, create reports, answer test questions, etc. As varied as expository expression is, it has a simple underlying structure that can be explained by a single *Learning Pattern*.

Some *Learning Patterns* cover skills like narration, exposition, and persuasion. Others help teachers and students with things like assessment, reading comprehension, and memorization. The same patterns can be used across grade levels and subject areas as well, so kids take their learning with them as they grow.

For more information about Learning Patterns click [here](#).



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”

Agile Transformation

Building Collective Capacity for School-Wide Change

We are discovering better ways of improving schools by doing it and by helping others do it. Through this work, we have come to value:

- **People.** *Individuals and interactions* over policy and politics;
- **Achievement.** *Maximum potential* over minimum competence;
- **Courage.** *Fierce collaboration* over comfortable compromise;
- **Agility.** *Responding to change* over following a plan.

The items on the right are important, but we value the items on the left more.

Agile Transformation is grounded in two principles: **(1)** People are more successful when they enjoy their work; and **(2)** Schools are more successful when they support people in developing the autonomy, competence, and relatedness that makes their work more enjoyable. Features of *Agile Transformation* include:

- **Paired Practice.** Nobody works alone. Everyone has a team and a teammate.
- **Rapid Iteration.** Sprint through big problems one small problem at a time.
- **Making Sense.** What do we do? Why do we do it? How do we know it works?
- **“Stand Up” Sessions.** What did you do yesterday? What are you doing today? What do you need to be successful? Agile leaders remove impediments.
- **Successful Failure.** Fail fast, fail smart. No blame games. Apply what you learn as you move closer to your goal with each iteration.
- **Souls and Roles.** Aligning what we do with who we are.
- **“Just in Time” Solutions.** Handle problems as they arise. Respond as needed.



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”

Essential Elements of Agile Schools

The Qualities of Effective Educational Communities

1. **Agile schools work because people choose to make them work.** We believe in freedom of choice, and that making the choice to participate fully in teaching, learning, and leading is the most important choice we can make.
2. **Agile schools love to learn.** We believe that learning is inherently enjoyable and that giving learners a responsible degree of autonomy in their individual pursuit of knowledge and skill makes it even more so. Agile educators are learners, too.
3. **Agile schools take a constructive approach to failure.** We believe failure is a normal part of success. Kids struggle to learn. Teachers struggle to teach. Administrators struggle to lead. We all experience failure on the way to solving new problems. The faster we fail, the more solutions we try. The smarter we fail, the more knowledge we bring to the next iteration. Instead of looking back at problems, Agile schools look forward to solving them.
4. **Agile schools are always getting better.** We believe there's almost always a better way of doing something, and that it's almost always worthwhile trying to figure out what that better way is. Agile schools value progress, and the appropriate measurement thereof, because progress is the true indicator of learning.
5. **Agile schools empower people to empower others.** We believe that individuals—not systems or policies—are the true sources of power in our schools. Our responsibility is to use our power in service of the greater good, and to teach students how to use their power that way, too.
6. **Agile schools achieve extraordinary results.** We believe in transformative learning that goes far beyond incremental improvements in test scores. Adults in Agile schools also strive for extraordinary achievement in their profession as well.



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”

Essential Elements

continued...

7. **Agile schools are based on deeply-held beliefs, clearly-articulated values, and a firmly-rooted sense of commitment.** We believe that the most successful schools are those run by people who know what matters most to them and who possess an unshakable determination to get it.
8. **Agile schools are communities where people make a difference and connect with something greater than themselves.** We believe that the drive to contribute is part of human nature. Our role is to guide people in directing their contribution toward its highest and best use.
9. **Agile schools value ownership, positive attitudes, high expectations, and unwavering optimism.** We believe that making a good life is about making good choices, that the pursuit of happiness is an inalienable right, and that self-mastery is the key to its rightful exercise.
10. **Agile schools embrace the risk inherent in the achievement of great things.** We educate for maximum potential not minimum competence. We believe that all learners have within them extraordinary strengths and untapped resources, and that learning is only limited by our willingness to attempt what has never before been attempted. We welcome change, we innovate, and we seek out challenges that organize and measure the best of our energies and skills.
11. **Agile schools affirm self-knowledge as the most valuable knowledge and self-determination as the most basic right.** We believe that introspection, self-disclosure, and intellectual honesty are essential to personal transformation. We seek to support young people in becoming the adults they want to be.
12. **Agile schools are communities where no one is above the rules, everyone has a voice, freedom is sacred, equity and excellence are not mutually exclusive, and the highest goal of education is contributing to the present and future well-being of individuals who can thrive independently in a modern democracy.** Agile schools value college preparation, career fulfillment, and engaged citizenship, but we value something else even more. Collegiate, career, and civic achievement are important, but they are means to ends, not ends in themselves. Human happiness, meaningful contribution, and sustained well-being of self and community are the ultimate ends to which Agile schools aspire on behalf of the children and families we serve.



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”

TEACHING THAT MAKES SENSE



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”