

Preface

I wrote this book for teachers like me who are committed to help students increase reading comprehension. Over the years, I observed in classrooms, workshops, conference presentations, and graduate education classes that I was a fairly typical teacher. My students would read a literary work and answer questions as they went along—questions from resources either provided by the publisher, found in workbooks at teachers' stores, generated by a district committee, or created by me. However, I was never really satisfied with this approach. Most resources encouraged reader responses that did not allow for individuality or creativity, and it was difficult to tell if students were reading or just copying each other's answers. My students were not being asked to interact with text on personal levels.

A few years ago, I was introduced to the concept of reading workshop, in which students read self-selected texts. They would read in class but also read independently as homework. I wondered how I could generate assessments for each book and know that students were really reading. With readers reading divergent texts, what could I assess? How could I ascertain my students' strengths and weaknesses? Their instructional needs? How could I tell if they comprehended, and how I could help them increase that comprehension? I looked for alternatives to existing assessment practices.

I read Louise Rosenblatt's theory of reader response. I realized how readers construct meaning through their transactions with text, and I recognized the value of response. And so, I directed students "to respond." Dutifully, they either retold the text or looked at me blankly, pens in hand. I realized that, just like any skill or knowledge, response has to be taught and must be guided. Not only do students need to be invited to respond personally, but response instruction needs to be incorporated into the teaching of reading strategies and expanded and refined throughout the year.

With that goal in mind, I planned a yearlong response curriculum, training students to respond to their reading in a variety of ways, moving toward more proficient and more meaningful reflection and moving from teacher-directed control of response to student-directed choice. I designed a program to give my students the tools they needed to assume control of their responses. I then connected the types of responses to the divergent genres and modes of reading and integrated response formats into my language arts curriculum, which includes whole-class shared texts, small-group shared texts (book clubs), and individual reading. I also paired response formats to the reading strategies that I was teaching. I created a Response Journal for students to use, to which I add as the year progresses. These Reading Journals allow my readers and me to keep track of their reading and respond throughout the year.

I found that students not only appreciated that their personal responses had validity, but they welcomed the variety of responses. Adolescents need variety for two reasons: to hold their interest and, after they have mastered the skills, to give them choices. At the

end of the year, my students reflected that they saw the relevance of the different responses and the responses' connection to their texts, and most admitted that the practice had made them more perceptive, insightful readers. Creative ways to respond also appeared to engage reluctant readers.

Each year since, I have included new ways to respond to a variety of texts, honing the process so that the form of response correlates to the focus of each of my reading lessons. By the end of the year, students have been exposed to numerous response formats, and I have been most impressed with how readers have been able to choose the most appropriate ways to respond as they read their individual texts. In cases where I created forms for particular types of response, students have asked me to make all available so that they could choose which ones they wanted to use at different times and with different readings. By the end of each year, students were responding as experienced readers.

A Response Journal is a means through which I can observe the reading thoughts of each student. I am able to confer weekly through the Journals, and truly no child is left behind. The students appreciate the one-to-one communication, and I can tell that they are aware that I am reading by some of the personal comments made to me.

In addition, response journaling gives me a basis for assessment—both formative and evaluative. The record of reading preserved in their Reading Journals provides my students a basis for metacognition about their reading. In this way, adolescents are able to begin taking responsibility for their own learning.

Many times during presentations and teacher workshops, teachers have confided that they are aware of the need for reader response but are not clear about how to begin and how to develop response throughout the school year. Even teachers who already teach or require reading response disclose that they do not have a yearlong plan; they create one response form and use it throughout the year—for all texts and for all students. This approach does not scaffold the teaching of response. It does not take into account individual readers or different types of literature. It also does not promote better comprehension of text.

I wrote *The Write to Read* to meet the needs of teachers who want to employ some type of program of reader response. The book can be used as a practical handbook to enhance students' reading comprehension. It presents a unique, yearlong plan for encouraging and teaching reader response in the middle and high school classroom. Most activities and lessons are appropriate or adaptable for younger students and for both language arts and content area classes. The book contains a blend of theory, practice, practical advice, models, and student samples from my classes.

I teach both heterogeneous and accelerated eighth-grade language arts classes in a suburban community. The skills and activities in this book are demonstrated in language arts classes that each have a yearlong reading workshop plan focusing on gradual release of control through a continuum of shared readings (short stories, poetry, nonfiction articles, a play, and a novel) to small-group readings (book clubs) to individual readings; however, all skills and activities presented are adaptable to language arts or English classes following any reading curriculum.

I have described in this book what I do in my classroom. Each response mode is introduced with a teacher-designed model and reinforced with student-created samples. Significant space has been devoted to examples because of the importance of modeling to scaffolding. In my experience, I have found that modeling does not inhibit the creativity of those who have the skills and that students who "copy" models are those who may lack the confidence to attempt the task at all. This book addresses how to assist struggling readers and writers and build their confidence; as they feel more secure, they should

produce work of higher quality and greater quantity. Teachers, especially those of different grade levels or content areas, will find in this book effective ways to create their own models or utilize examples from their own students. Models and ideas for adaptations to content area classes are included in Chapter 10.

The Write to Read illustrates how, after a lesson and model is introduced and explained, the students are led in a guided practice, either collaboratively or individually, and the results are shared with a partner, a small group, or the entire class. Students are then expected to try the response, when fitting, with at least one reading that week. After mastery, readers are encouraged to employ the different response methods *where* and *when* appropriate throughout the year. Forms for this purpose are discussed in the corresponding chapters. Reproducible materials for teacher use are included in Resource B so that teachers may adapt them for their own purposes.

This book presents literacy tools to train readers to respond to their reading with the primary intent of improving comprehension in a yearlong, scaffolded curriculum. Methods and activities, however, can be used individually. These ideas can be integrated into a reading workshop approach, a designated shared-text curriculum, and language arts or content area classes. While written primarily for Grades 5 through 12, ideas in this book are adaptable to elementary classroom and for differentiated instruction. The primary goal of the book is to help teachers plan for, implement, and evaluate students' divergent text understanding and enjoyment, and it is aimed at promoting and enhancing response to text and engagement in reading, especially of those students who may need some guidance in engaging in reflective text reading and response.