

Study Guide



second  
edition

# Reading *with* Meaning



Teaching  
Comprehension  
*in the*  
Primary Grades



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Miller

In the second edition of *Reading with Meaning*, Debbie Miller shares her new thinking about comprehension strategy instruction, the gradual release of responsibility instructional model, and planning for student engagement and independence.

It has been ten years since the first edition, in which Debbie chronicled a year in her own classroom. *Reading with Meaning, Second Edition* supports that work and expands her vision of strategy instruction and intentional teaching and learning. Debbie believes that every child deserves at least a full year of growth during each classroom year and offers planning documents with matching assessments to ensure that no child falls through the cracks. The second edition also provides new book recommendations that will engage and delight students, and current picture books for reading aloud and strategy instruction.

This new edition reflects Debbie's professional experiences and judgment, her work in classrooms and collaboration with colleagues, and the current research in the field, showcasing her newest, best thinking.

The following are suggestions to help groups of educators read, discuss, and extend the ideas from *Reading with Meaning, Second Edition* into classrooms. These ideas will come to life as teachers are given opportunities to put them into practice with their own students. With that in mind, we have developed discussion questions, pulled provocative quotes, and provided examples of student work from each chapter that will enable participants to reflect on the text and the reading lives of their students. We also encourage groups to try some new practices in their classrooms using specific workshop suggestions that are designed to foster collaboration and spark new thinking.

Since the first edition of *Reading with Meaning* was published, the Common Core State Standards (2010) have burst upon the world of education. The Common Core paints a portrait of students who meet the standards set forth in the document. This portrait includes the following descriptors:

- They demonstrate independence.
- They build strong content knowledge.
- They respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline.
- They comprehend as well as critique.
- They value evidence.
- They use technology and digital media strategically and capably.
- They come to understand other perspectives and cultures.

As you read the second edition of *Reading with Meaning*, think about how Debbie incorporates these descriptors within her teaching.

## Chapter 1: Guiding Principles

### Key Questions for Group Discussions

- What are your guiding principles as an educator?
- What do you see as essential components for building a learning community?
- How do you create a climate and culture for thinking?
- How do you instruct for independence?

### Quotes to Ponder

- “When we know the theory behind our work, when our practices match our beliefs, and when we clearly articulate what we do and why we do it, people listen” (10).
- “So now, instead of keeping the whole group together in way-too-long mini-lessons, I send children off—release them—much earlier, so that they get to be the ones doing the reading, writing, talking, and learning” (12).

### Professional Development Idea

- Have participants look at Samantha Bennett’s “catch-and-release” workshop model in *Reading with Meaning, Second Edition* (Figure 1.1). Ask participants to draw a visual that reflects their reading workshop. Think about the time distribution in which students are independently engaged. How is Debbie’s model similar to or different from yours?

## Chapter 2: Setting Students Up for Success— The Structures and Routines of Workshop

### Key Questions for Group Discussions

- What do you want your students to walk away with this year? What do you want them to be able to do?
- Why does reading matter?
- How do you gather insights from parents in regard to their children, your students?

### Quotes to Ponder

- “I begin with the big picture—I think about what I want students to walk away with at the end of this year, and what I want them to remember ten years from now and forever. These big ideas reflect who I am and what I believe, and guide me and my work with children throughout the months, weeks, and days of the school year” (29).
- “Reading workshop in September is less about teaching children how to read and more about modeling and teaching children what good readers do, setting the tone for the workshop and establishing its expectations and procedures, and engaging and motivating children to want to learn to read” (30).

### Planning for Instruction

- Read Debbie Miller’s “Big Ideas for the Year” in the September Plan on page 31 of *Reading with Meaning, Second Edition*. Have participants sketch out their big ideas for the school year.
- On page 32, Debbie outlines her guiding questions, learning targets, and assessments for learning for September. She uses this process as she plans out her instruction each month and throughout the calendar year. Have participants sketch out a September Plan. What are their guiding questions, learning targets, and assessments for learning for students at the start of the year?

## Chapter 3: How Do I Know They Are Growing? How Do They Know?

### Key Questions for Group Discussions

- How do you keep track of student learning?
- How do you involve students in the assessment process?
- How do you support students in book selection?

### Quotes to Ponder

- “I believe children need to spend their reading time reading text that is ‘just right’—and I believe we need to broaden our definition of what ‘just right’ means” (56).
- “But I was missing an important partner in all this assessing: the child. And although I’d always said, ‘My children share in the responsibility for their learning,’ when it came to assessment, it was pretty much all about me” (59).

### Keeping Students at the Heart of Our Conversations: Looking at Student Work

- Look at Figure 3.1 in the text. This is Olivia’s story map. Debbie’s learning target was to get students to identify important information in fiction. She then moved on to showing them how to identify the key ideas or themes in the story. What do you notice in this sample of student work? What does the student know? What do you still wonder? What might be next steps?

## Chapter 4: Digging into the Thinking Strategies; Focus on Schema

### Key Questions for Group Discussions

- Debbie refers to the book *Understanding by Design* by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (2005) and talks about how she uses backward planning, or planning with the end in mind. How is this similar to or different from your planning process?
- Who is doing most of the reading, writing, and talking during reading workshop? How many minutes a day would you say that your students are engaged in independent reading and writing?
- Debbie talks about using exit tickets with students at the end of work time as a quick assessment for the day's learning goal. What do you see as the benefits of this strategy?

### Quotes to Ponder

- “Thinking about assessment up front—before designing specific lessons and activities—gets us away from ‘covering the curriculum’ with a bunch of set lessons and activities, and moves us toward more thoughtful, intentional teaching and moves children toward more thoughtful, focused learning” (71).
- “Be precise when you share your thinking. Say what you need to say as clearly and concisely as you can, then move on. Use real language and standard terminology when talking with children; nothing says *inferring* quite like *inferring*” (73).

### Keeping Students at the Heart of Our Conversations: Looking at Student Work

- The Common Core State Standards (2010) ask children in grade one to “Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story using key details.” Debbie also wants children to go deeper by making connections to characters within, between, and among texts. Look at Figure 4.3 in the text. This is Emily’s Venn diagram. Debbie had students compare and contrast books with similar stories. What do you notice in this sample of student work? What does the student know? What do you still wonder? What are possible next steps?

## Chapter 5: Poetry Genre Study; Focus on Sensory Images

### Key Questions for Group Discussions

- Debbie uses the strategy of thinking aloud with students to model concepts. How might you incorporate or modify how you use this strategy within your own classroom?
- What are some of your favorite books to use as anchor texts with students when teaching them how to create mental images? What are the benefits of using poetry with students for this purpose?
- Debbie often builds upon student suggestions and ideas. An example of this is when Kenta suggests writing about their mental images: “My table thinks we should write about our mental images, too. Can we? Please?” (108). How do you incorporate student ideas into instruction while keeping the big picture in mind?

### Quotes to Ponder

- “Focusing on just a snippet or two from a picture book or poem allows children time to practice developing an image completely. Asking questions like ‘How many candles are on your cake?’ and ‘What kind is it?’ gives children permission to add details that personalize their images and make them unique” (103).
- “I’ve learned that the best decoders aren’t necessarily the most thoughtful readers, nor are the most thoughtful readers necessarily the best decoders. Asking children to read and respond to the same text creates additional opportunities for children with different strengths to listen and learn from each other” (103).

### Keeping Students at the Heart of Our Conversations: Looking at Student Work

- Look at Figure 5.2 in the text. These are Whitney’s sketches of her mental images for the book *Greyling* by Jane Yolen. Debbie had modeled for students the strategy for sketching out mental images. Students also had the opportunity to sketch out their mental images using poetry. What do you notice about Whitney’s work? What does Whitney know? What do you still wonder? What might be next steps?

## Chapter 6: Book Clubs; Focus on Asking Questions and Inferring

### Key Questions for Group Discussions

- By January, Debbie is preparing students to participate in book clubs. What opportunities do you give students to talk about books and take conversations to a deeper level?
- Debbie shares that, when her questions became less literal and more sophisticated, the children's did too. What are your thoughts on this? How do you continue scaffolding instruction around asking questions so that the questions stay authentic and sophisticated?

### Quotes to Ponder

- “It’s one thing to share thinking and listen respectfully, and quite another to listen actively and respond thoughtfully to others in order to understand another’s point of view or inform one’s own” (114).
- “Questioning is an essential thinking skill, learning skill, and democratic skill. There is no one set of ‘right questions,’ but rather, everyone needs the opportunity to figure out the questions that are the right ones for them to ask” (133).

### Keeping Students at the Heart of Our Conversations: Looking at Student Work

- Debbie uses a two-column note format to help students organize their thinking as they practice inferring. They mark the text, record their thinking as it evolves, and ultimately come up with what they think the poem or the text is about. Look at Figure 6.6 in the text. This is an example of Seth inferring for meaning with poetry. What do you notice in regard to Seth’s thinking? What do you wonder? What might be next steps?
- Figure 6.9 in the text is an example of Matthew’s questioning web for the book *Amelia Bedelia Goes Camping* by Peggy Parish. What do you notice in regard to the learning target of questioning and inferring? What does Matthew know? What do you wonder? What might be next steps?

## Chapter 7: Nonfiction Genre Study; Focus on Questioning (Continued) and Determining Importance

### Key Questions for Group Discussions

- By the end of fourth grade, the Common Core State Standards expect a 50:50 split between literary text and informational text in the classroom. What role does informational text currently play in your classroom?
- Debbie shares that, during her nonfiction genre study, she focuses on questioning and determining importance. How are these learning targets similar to or different from yours?

### Quotes to Ponder

- “All these years later, I still remember this quote by Piaget from my college days: ‘Each time one prematurely teaches a child something he could have discovered himself, that child is kept from inventing it and consequently from understanding it completely’ (1970, 715)” (154).
- “In his book *I See What You Mean*, Steve Moline writes about the skill of reading selectively: ‘If we teach children that all reading is reading for the story we overlook many useful strategies that we employ when reading selectively. Some of these strategies include scanning, skimming, accessing the text through the index, using headings as signposts to the information we want, or just strolling through the pictures in order to orientate ourselves in the text’ (2011, 18)” (157).

### Keeping Students at the Heart of Our Conversations: Looking at Student Work

- At the end of the genre study, Debbie asks students to synthesize and share their learning. The purpose is to check their understanding of informational texts, their strategies of questioning and determining importance, and their ability to share learning. How students share is up to them. Debbie asks them to include their question, to put their learning and answers in their own words in a way that makes sense to them without telling too much, to use at least one nonfiction convention, and to cite their sources of information. Take a look at Devon’s question in Figure 7.1 and Caroline’s project in Figure 7.2 of *Reading with Meaning, Second Edition*. What do you they know? What do you wonder? What might be next steps? Now look at Mitch’s project, shown in Figure 7.6. What does Mitch know? What do you wonder? What might be next steps for these students individually and also for the group?

## Chapter 8: Book Recommendation/Opinion Piece for Book Lovers' Festival; Focus on Synthesis

### Key Questions for Group Discussions

- Debbie incorporates authentic learning opportunities into the classroom so students can practice the targeted learning skills. If students are absent, Debbie might ask a student to retell or synthesize a story that another student missed. She might also ask students to synthesize the day so that they can share with parents. Another example of an authentic learning experience that reinforces learning goals is having students make book recommendations. How do you incorporate opportunities for students to practice targeted learning goals so that they become independent?
- In Chapter 2 of the book, Debbie discusses the importance of working from her “big picture” plan. In Chapter 4, she talks about using precise language with students. These strategies thread layers of learning together within and across studies. In this chapter, Debbie gives students a framework for retelling as they synthesize. She teaches them to tell what’s important, in a way that makes sense, without telling too much. This is the language used when working with students to present their new learning in their non-fiction genre study. How do you thread the layers of learning together for students so that foundations created in the beginning of the year are built upon within and across units of study?

### Quotes to Ponder

- “Sometimes teachers ask, ‘But what about retelling? Isn’t that enough? And really, doesn’t it get at the same thing?’ Retelling is important, but no, it doesn’t get at the same thing. And it really isn’t enough” (172–173).
- “I liken synthesis to throwing a rock into a pond: first there’s a splash, and then the water ripples out, making waves that get bigger and bigger. Synthesis is kind of like that, too, I tell students. When you read, your thinking evolves when you encounter new information, and your understanding of the story gets bigger and bigger, just like the ripples in the pond” (173).

### Keeping Students at the Heart of Our Conversations: Looking at Student Work

- Look at Figure 8.1 in the text. This is an example of Whit and Frank’s synthesis of the book *Oliver Button Is a Sissy* by Tomie dePaola. In addition to creating the poster, they also share their thinking orally. Whit says, “So you see how we got to the final synthesis? We just kept adding on and adding on and adding on to make our thinking. It got

bigger and bigger and bigger, and now we totally know what the book is all about! You might want to try it in your reading today” (168). What do you notice about this piece of student work? What do they know? What do you still wonder? What might be next steps?

- Figure 8.3 is Bret and Maggie’s synthesis of *A Color of His Own* by Leo Lionni. What do notice in regard to their understanding of synthesis? What do you wonder? What might be next steps?
- Look at Figure 8.7, Max’s synthesis of *The Story of Jumping Mouse* by John Steptoe. What do you notice in regard to his understanding of synthesis? What do you wonder? What might be next steps?

## References

Common Core State Standards. 2010. [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org).

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