

Study Guide

Do I Really Have to Teach Reading?

Content
Comprehension,
Grades 6–12



**Cris
Tovani**

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teachers provided by Stenhouse Publishers



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Summary

“Do I have to teach reading?” This is the question many teachers of adolescents are asking, wondering how they can possibly add a new element to an already overloaded curriculum. And most are finding that the answer is, “Yes.” If they want their students to learn complex new concepts in different disciplines, they often have to help their students become better readers.

Building on the experiences gained in her own language arts classroom as well as those of colleagues in different disciplines, Cris Tovani, author of *I Read It, but I Don't Get It*, takes on the challenge of helping students apply reading comprehension strategies in any subject. In *Do I Really Have to Teach Reading?*, Cris shows how teachers can expand on their content expertise to provide instruction students need to understand specific technical and narrative texts. The book includes:

- examples of how teachers can model their reading process for students;
- ideas for supplementing and enhancing the use of required textbooks;
- detailed descriptions of specific strategies taught in context;
- stories from different high school classrooms that show how reading instruction varies according to content;
- samples of student work, including work from both struggling readers and college-bound seniors;
- a variety of “comprehension constructors”: guides designed to help students recognize and capture their thinking in writing while reading;
- guidance on assessing students; and
- tips for balancing content and reading instruction.

Cris’s humor, honesty, and willingness to share her own struggles as a teacher make this a unique take on content reading instruction that will be valuable to reading teachers as well as content specialists.

The following are suggestions to help groups of educators read, discuss, and extend the ideas from *Do I Really Have to Teach Reading?* into their classrooms. These ideas will come to life as teachers are given opportunities to put them into practice with students. With that in mind, we have developed discussion questions, pulled provocative quotes, and highlighted video clips and

professional development ideas from each chapter that will enable participants to reflect on the text.

The guide is set up with video links so that readers can easily view videos that complement the text. As videos are viewed, readers are encouraged to jot down their thinking on a two-column note (What I Notice/What I Might Want to Try or What I Notice/What I Wonder). The notes can then be used to launch discussions around the video viewing. If you are interested in more video with Cris on comprehending content, see her DVD, *Comprehending Content: Reading Across the Curriculum, Grades 6-12*.

This guide is set up as a study group, but it could also be used individually as a reflective structure for those reading the book alone. The suggestions offered in the guide are designed to foster collaboration, spark new thinking, and support the transfer of new ideas into the classroom.

Chapter 1

Introduction: “I’m the Stupid Lady from Denver...”

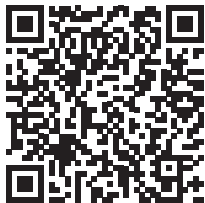
Discussion/Sharing (10 Minutes)

- Think about your history as a reader. What type of reading is hard for you? What type of reading is easy? In what different ways do you approach texts?
- How would you describe a struggling reader? What types of reading do students struggle with most in your class?
- What is the greatest challenge in teaching reading?

Reading Excerpt (15 Minutes)

- Read *My Roots of Learning About Comprehension* on pages 4–5.
- How is this thinking about teaching reading similar to yours? Different?

Video Viewing (15 Minutes)



- View the introduction from *Comprehending Content* (00:00-2:25). This is also an introduction to Cris.
- As you view the video clip, jot down your thinking on a two-column note (What Do You Notice?/What Do You Wonder?).

Quotes Worth Discussing

I would rather my students master a few core skills than be exposed to so many strategies in a short period of time that they don't master any of them (5).

Instead of thinking of this work as teaching “content-area reading” or “reading at the secondary level,” I think of it as teaching students how to remember and reuse the information we ask them to read (7).

Meaning doesn't arrive because we have highlighted text or used sticky notes or written the right words on a comprehension worksheet. Meaning arrives because we are purposefully engaged in thinking while we read (9).

Putting Ideas into Practice (5 Minutes)

What is one idea/concept that you will continue to think about after today and might try out in your classroom?



Chapter 2

The “So What?” of Reading Comprehension

Discussion/Sharing (10 Minutes)

- What strategies have you used that you have found to be successful in supporting students and their reading comprehension?
- What challenges do you face in supporting students’ reading comprehension?
- How do you get students to make authentic connections to texts that deepen their understanding of the content?

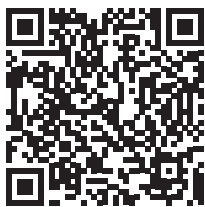
Reading Excerpt (15 Minutes)

- Read *Essential Elements of Comprehension Instruction* on pages 17–18.
- Respond to the elements outlined for comprehension instruction.

Toolbox Strategy (15 Minutes)

- Reread the description *What Are Double-Entry Diaries?* (12) and Figure 2.1, “Double-Entry Diary Form” (13).
- Try out this tool with the group. You could use a reading excerpt from the chapter or bring in a short piece of text to read with the group.

Video Viewing (15 Minutes)



- View *Modeling What Good Readers Do* (02:25-09:30).
- As you view the video clip, jot down your thinking on a two-column note (What Do You Notice?/What Might You Try?).

Putting Ideas into Practice (5 Minutes)

What is one idea/concept that you will continue to think about after today and might try out in your classroom?

Chapter 3

Parallel Experiences: Tapping the Mother Lode

Discussion/Sharing (10 Minutes)

- What do you notice about students' behavior when they don't understand the text they are reading?
- How does supporting comprehension vary across content areas?
- How might you model your own reading process for students?

Reading Excerpt (15 Minutes)

- Read *Modeling How to Stay with a Text* on pages 31–35.
- Respond to the excerpt. How is this similar to or different from how you might approach helping your students access and stick with a difficult text?

Video Viewing (15 Minutes)



- View *Sticking with Difficult Text* (17:20-25:30).
- As you view the video clip, jot down your thinking on a two-column note (What Do You Notice?/What Might You Try?).
- Between meetings, try out modeling your own thinking for students. What did you notice? What did you wonder?

Quotes Worth Discussing

The problem is that if language arts and English teachers are the only ones teaching reading, students aren't going to learn how to read different types of text (25).

To know how to help readers get through difficult content, I must first identify what they are struggling with. Then I need to put myself in a similar situation and see how I as a good reader would negotiate the difficulty (29).

As expert readers of content, we take certain things for granted. Oftentimes we construct meaning without even being aware of doing so (31).

Putting Ideas into Practice (5 Minutes)

What is one idea/concept that you will continue to think about after today and might try out in your classroom?



Chapter 4

Real Rigor: Connecting Students with Accessible Text

Discussion/Sharing (10 Minutes)

- What strategies do you use if students can't read the textbooks or materials that you planned on using with them?
- Do you provide students a choice of reading materials?
- How can short, engaging text be integrated with textbook reading?

Reading Excerpt (15 Minutes)

- Read pages 39–42, *What Is Accessible Text and Where Do I Find It?*
- Respond to the excerpt on accessible texts. How is this similar to or different from your instructional methods?

Toolbox Strategy (15 Minutes)

- Review the sidebar, *How Exemplary Teachers Avoid the Textbook Problem* (41).
- Think of a book/unit/topic that you teach. Start to brainstorm other texts around the topic that vary in length, format, and genre that could support the unit/topic and be used as accessible text choices for students.
- Between meetings, try providing students accessible texts as needed. What did you notice?

Quotes Worth Discussing

If students are to understand what they read, then teachers must find text that they can read to supplement the textbook—as well as give them time to practice new strategies for understanding the reading during class (39).

I also need to remember what it feels like to read something for the first time. I can't expect my students to be able to read and understand for the first time text that I work at over a period of time to understand (40).

If we don't begin to find accessible text for all adolescent readers, they will continue to fail, only to become someone else's problem the following year (42).

Putting Ideas into Practice (5 Minutes)

What is one idea/concept that you will continue to think about after today and might try out in your classroom?



Chapter 5

Why Am I Reading This?

Discussion/Sharing (10 Minutes)

- How do you help students determine the purpose for their reading?
- What do you see as the challenge to helping students determine purpose?
- What are the benefits when there is a clear purpose/lens for students to read?

Reading Excerpt (15 Minutes)

- Read pages 52–58, *Defining Purposes Before Teaching*.
- Respond to the excerpt on defining purpose. How is this similar to or different from your instructional methods?

Toolbox Strategy (15 Minutes)

- Review Figures 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4, “Instructional Purposes”. The instructional focus sheet is a tool to help teachers think through what is most essential.
- How might you use this instructional planner to help identify the purpose behind assigned readings for students?
- Between meetings, try out the instructional purpose organizer. What did you notice?

Quotes Worth Discussing

Recognizing that purpose often determines what is important and what a reader remembers has major implications for content instruction. It means that teachers have to be clear in their reasons for assigning the reading. Students need to know what those reasons are so they can better determine what is important (52).

Many of us become experts on our content. We become familiar with our textbooks and novels and often forget what it was like to be a beginning student of our disciplines. Inadvertently, we water down our content because we try to cover too much (54).

If we don't help students pull out essential information by giving them a purpose for their reading, they will often get lost in the extraneous details. When we share a clear instructional purpose, we give our students a lens through which to read the piece (59).

Putting Ideas into Practice (5 Minutes)

What is one idea/concept that you will continue to think about after today and might try out in your classroom?

Chapter 6

Holding Thinking to Remember and Reuse

Discussion/Sharing (10 Minutes)

- What strategies do you use to help students hold their thinking?
- What challenges have you faced in helping students remember and reuse what they know?
- How are Cris's strategies similar to or different from yours?

Reading Excerpt (15 Minutes)

- Read pages 68–70, *Time for Thinking*.
- Respond to the excerpt on marking text. How is this similar to or different from your instructional methods?

Toolbox Strategy (15 Minutes)

- Review Figures 6.6–6.11, “Comprehension Constructors”.
- Comprehension constructors help students hold thinking. They provide a concrete way of taking students through an abstract process, and the simpler and more authentic they are, the better. How might you incorporate these into your instruction?
- Try out one of these comprehension constructors in the group using a short piece of text. You could also use the article from Figure 6.2 as your text.
- Between meetings, try one of these with your students. What did you notice? What did you wonder?

Quotes Worth Discussing

When students find ways to capture their thinking while reading, they are more willing to return to texts (68).

Thinking held on paper not only informs our instruction and can be used as an alternative assessment tool for a more accurate picture of student learning, but also helps students rehearse their thinking before they begin a writing assignment (70).

Having a lot of different tools not only helps keep the interest high, but also helps kids have different options for remembering what they've read (74).

Putting Ideas into Practice (5 Minutes)

What is one idea/concept that you will continue to think about after today and might try out in your classroom?



Chapter 7

Group Work That Grows Understanding

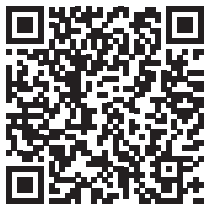
Discussion/Sharing (10 Minutes)

- What are your thoughts on group work during class time?
- What is your role during class discussion groups?
- How do you ensure that all voices are heard in your classroom?

Reading Excerpt (15 Minutes)

- Read *Rehearsal for the Big Show* (93–98).
- Respond to the excerpt on using writing as a way to rehearse and construct meaning before having to write about the reading. How is this similar to or different from your instructional methods?

Video Viewing (15 Minutes)



- View *Day 1: Building Background Knowledge: Recent Wars* (00:55-9:45). As you view, focus in on the group work.
- As you view the video clip, jot down your thinking on a two-column note (What Do You Notice?/What Do You Wonder?).
- Between meetings, try out group work with your students. What did you notice? What did you wonder?

Quotes Worth Discussing

Writing assignments are always better when group work is done beforehand. Group discussions give students an opportunity to rehearse and construct connections before they sit down to that daunting blank screen or piece of paper (93).

I can't expect students to get better at discussions if I don't give them specific and immediate feedback (97).

Talk helps all learners articulate their thinking. Small groups also give more students a chance to participate in a way that they wouldn't do in large groups (98).

Putting Ideas into Practice (5 Minutes)

What is one idea/concept that you will continue to think about after today and might try out in your classroom?



Chapter 8**“What Do I Do with These Sticky Notes?” Assessment That Drives Instruction****&****Chapter 9****“Did I Miss Anything? Did I Miss Everything?” Last Thoughts****Discussion/Sharing (10 Minutes)**

- What are your beliefs about assessment? How are they similar to or different from Cris’s?
- What are some different ways that you assess student learning? Do students have multiple opportunities to demonstrate their learning?
- How do you involve students in the assessment process?

Reading Excerpt (15 Minutes)

- Read *Teachers Care About Tests Too* on pages 102–103.
- Respond to the excerpt. How do you assess and grade students? What has worked well? What do you find to be continued challenges?

Toolbox Strategy (15 Minutes)

- Review *Conversation Calendars* (106–110) and Figure 8.3, “Sample Calendar from Talea” (109).
- Conversation calendars are one way Cris gets to know her students. They also allow students to be part of the assessment process. Take a look at Figure 8.3. Talk about the potential benefits and drawbacks of using this idea with students in your classroom.
- Between meetings, try one of these with your students. What did you notice? What did you wonder?

Quote Worth Discussing

This book will help you in your teaching only if you trust yourself enough to listen to the voice inside your head that says, “I do know how to help these students become better readers” (122).

Wrapping Up: Putting Ideas into Practice (15 Minutes)

- How have your thinking and beliefs about supporting students with reading comprehension changed from reading the text and watching Cris in action?
- How might your instruction and assessment practices be tweaked or change as a result of this experience?
- What is one idea that you hope to implement in your classroom?

