

Strategies for Literature Spiral Review

to support comprehension in fiction

Taken from *The Reading Strategies Book* by Jennifer Serravallo

6.14 Interactions Can Lead to Inferences

Strategy Notice a place where a secondary character is interacting with a main character. Think about what a secondary character's actions are making the main character feel, think, act. Shift your perspective. Look at how the main character's actions and words are causing the secondary character to feel, think, and act. What ideas do you have about each of them, and about their relationship?

Lesson Language Because of *Winn-Dixie* (DiCamillo 2000) is a great example of a book with many different characters interacting in different situations throughout the book. This would be a great book for thinking about how we can try to understand a character's perspective, and look at the interactions between that character and another one in the story to learn more about each of them. Let's think for a moment about an interaction between India Opal and her father, the night when Opal asks her father to tell her about her mother. If I look at this scene through Opal's eyes, I am thinking that she's feeling excited to learn about her mother. She's probably feeling a little sad, too, because her mother isn't with her and some of the things her father says are hard to hear. Still, the fact that her father trusts her with this information probably makes her feel sort of grown up and mature. Now, if I shift my thinking to the father's perspective, I'd say he's probably feeling nervous, and a little sad too. It's hard to bring up old, painful memories. He's also probably realizing that he can't protect Opal from the truth forever, and that may make him feel a sadness for the end of her childhood. When I think about both characters, I think this scene shows what a strong relationship they are starting to have, and that maybe their relationship is not just one of protector dad and innocent child—instead, she's starting to grow up.

Prompts

- Find a place where the characters are interacting.
- How is (character name) treating (character name)?
- That's a thought about one character. What do you think about their relationship?
- Explain how (character name) is causing (character name) to feel?

Character: Iris
 Book: Iris and Walter series
 Iris loves her best friend Walter. She wants them to be best friends forever. Iris is happy when Walter is around. Walter's cousin Howie comes to visit. Howie is mean to Iris. Howie said "Does she have to do every thing with us?" Iris is sad. The next day Walter came to Iris's house. He said "Sorry" - Iris said "It is ok?" Iris and Walter are glad Howie is gone.
 Continue

Who is this for?

LEVELS

M and above

GENRE / TEXT TYPE

fiction

SKILLS

inferring, determining cause and effect



Hat Tip: *Fresh Takes on Teaching Literary Elements: How to Teach What Really Matters About Character, Setting, Point of View, and Theme* (Smith and Wilhelm 2010)

6.22 Consider Character in Context

Strategy When you read about people in history, you need to think about them in the context of that time. As you read, think about who the character was, where the character was, what was happening to your character, and why. As you read, collect the clues that you think matter most and be prepared to discuss them with your book club. Through your discussion, you'll come to those details and ideas that are most important to understanding your character.

Lesson Language When reading *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* (Curtis 1995), you could collect many clues about any of the characters and think about what's important in the context of that time. Let's try it with the big brother, Byron. We have clues about him: for one, he thought he was really cool. His younger brother calls him a "juvenile delinquent" because he's always getting into trouble. Also, he sticks up for his brother when he's being teased about his eyes. A lot of these details about who he was could work for a character who is thirteen in a novel set in present day. But then we get some details about him that clearly place him in the time period. Like when he refers to other kids as "squares" (91), when he uses a hair relaxer on his hair, or how he responds to the very significant historical event of the church bombing—in a way, the event brings out a kinder, more caring side of him. If I were going to meet with my book club, I'd bring all of these clues so that together we could work to form a theory about who he is as a person, both with the details from the historical time period and other details about him that might be true of a thirteen-year-old today.

Prompts

- What did you learn about your character in this part?
- What details did you notice about what was happening to your character because of the time period?
- What seems unique about your character because of the time period?
- How does your character seem to fit with the time period? What does she or he do or say, how does she or he act?
- What clues about your character would help your club best get to know him or her?
- What seems most important about your character?

Consider your Character



In the Context of History

Who is this for?

LEVELS

P and above

GENRES / TEXT TYPES

historical fiction,
biography

SKILLS

determining
importance, inferring



Hat Tip: *Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension for Understanding and Engagement*, second edition (Harvey and Goudvis 2007)

7.12 Dig Deeper to Find a Story's Topics

Strategy To determine a story's theme, it helps to first name some topics—one-word issues, ideas, or concepts. It is likely that any one story will connect to more than one topic. You can think about the struggles that character is going through, the way the story ends up, and/or the title to help you figure out what those words might be.

Teaching Tip This is a great strategy to introduce during whole-class read-aloud, and then to build a chart like the one pictured on this page for students to use as a reference. Although some may refer to these one-word topics as themes, I prefer to teach children that a **theme** is something stated as a sentence, like a claim or thesis statement. You may see strategy 7.13 for an idea of how to build upon this naming of a single word, to a complete idea about the book.

This strategy, as with others, can be adapted for different levels. The words you would include on a chart for second graders reading at K–M might be *friendship* and *loneliness*, whereas for eighth graders it might be more like *innocence* or *authority*.

Prompts

- Can you think of one word that fits with this story?
- Think about the character's problem. If you said it in one word, what would it be?
- Check the chart of words that are common topics in books. Do any fit with this one?
- Explain your thinking.
- You might say, "I think it could be ____ (topic) because ____."
- Think about how the story ends. What's the last thing you're left thinking about?



Who is this for?

LEVELS

K and above

GENRE / TEXT TYPE

fiction

SKILLS

inferring, determining importance, synthesizing