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## Effective reading strategies for the diverse classroom

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

"Effective Reading Strategies for the Diverse Classroom"

A Thesis Submitted to the

University Honors Program

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree

With Upper Division Honors

Department of Literacy

By

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DeKalb, Illinois

May 7, 2004

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Capstone Approval Page

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ABSTRACT (100-200 WORDS):

The purpose of this research paper was to explore different types of comprehension reading strategies and their effectiveness in a classroom filled with diverse learners. Current research from educators and researchers in the field of literacy are compared and contrasted to the findings of this project.. This paper also examines the specific strengths and weaknesses of each strategy with a variety of different learners. The academic, emotional, and social gains from teaching comprehension strategies is also exposed. This research paper can serve as a helpful guide for teachers to learn more about which reading strategies are effective for their classroom.

### **Effective reading strategies for the diverse classroom.**

The National Reading Panel, recommends that reading instruction be given in five areas: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (2000). Two lead authors on the subject, Opitz and Rasinski, discuss the importance of focusing on the most essential aspect of reading, which is comprehension (1). Comprehension has been defined as "intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through the interactions between text and reader" (Harris & Hodges, 1995). The truth is that in order to create that interaction between text and reader, comprehension strategies need to be taught. Through doing this you are not only helping their reading performance, but also all other subjects that requires them to understand the content of what they are reading. The poor reader may learn a lot from lecture and hands-on activities in science class, but essentially the information must also come from reading the textbook. In addition, although he may appear to have an understanding of some concepts that he learned in class, he will have to be able to show his knowledge by reading and understanding the questions on the test. This is another point where comprehension plays such a vital role in every subject area. The inability to comprehend the written questions may in turn paint an inaccurate picture of his knowledge. The test may primarily show his reading comprehension. The philosophy that comprehension came naturally with decoding made teaching strategies to aid in comprehension seem unnecessary for many years. However, researchers Linda Fielding and P. David Pearson (1994) describe how this philosophy has changed: "Once thought of as the natural result of decoding plus oral language, comprehension is now viewed as a much more complex process involving knowledge, experience, thinking, and teaching" (Harvey & Goudvis 6). Since comprehension is not

something that just occurs naturally like we once thought, teaching students a variety of strategies has become essential.

Every student is going to think and respond differently to the various reading strategies; therefore, it is important to teach more than one strategy. All students will not find every strategy useful; so by giving students as many resources as possible you are able to empower them with different ways to deal with reading problems. Some reading problems they encounter may need a strategy that is more based on literal comprehension questions, meaning they have one correct answer. Others may require a reading strategy that helps them with high-order comprehension problems, such as interpretative, critical, or creative thinking. This means that the questions are more open-ended and require thought. The student will use these two types of strategies at different times for different purposes.

These strategies can be compared to having a variety of tools in the trunk of your car, so that you are equipped to deal with a variety of problems that may arise. A person does not only have jumper cables in their trunk, but probably a spare tire, a jack, an ice scraper and possibly other helpful tools. The reason is because we know that you cannot only use one tool for every problem that arises. If your battery is dead, the ice scraper is not going to do you any good. When it comes to reading, we know that one strategy is not going to help them comprehend every type of material or fix every reading problem that your students are going to come across. Therefore, we want to fill our students' "trunks" with as many "tools" as we can. This will empower them to use a variety of strategies for comprehension and solving problems, and be able to use a different "tool" if the one they tried fails.

During my research I focused on six "tools" with my third grade class. After observing their reading behaviors, I decided that comprehension and vocabulary strategies would be most helpful and relevant to their age group. I started by researching different strategies and decided to investigate the following six strategies in more depth: Think-aloud, PreP, GIST, Anticipation Guide, List-Group-Label, and the Keyword method. Next, I examined the findings and research done by other teachers and researchers. I did this by reading through journals and books that specifically discussed each particular reading strategy. I summarized the research I came across and included the general consensus of other people in the field.

I then integrated the strategies into my lessons. I picked which reading strategy I would use based on how effectively it would fit into the lesson. As I implemented the strategy, I kept anecdotal notes on what I was observing and the effectiveness with high and low ability students. I also looked for specific strengths and weaknesses associated with the strategy.

Lastly, I gave an overall evaluation of the strategy explaining the strengths and weaknesses I noticed as I implemented these strategies. In this section I looked to see how my research correlated with the results others had found, and whether or not I agreed with other researchers. I also included specific examples where possible to reinforce my evaluation of the specific reading strategy.

## **I. THINK-ALOUD STRATEGY**

Students need help in learning how to solve reading problems, which makes this strategy one of the most important strategies. It is a strategy that is used along with all

other reading strategies to some degree and is very flexible with what you can do with it. The purpose of this strategy is to help readers observe a teacher verbally model what she is thinking as she reads, as well as how she handles different reading problems that may arise, such as decoding a multi-syllabic word. The teacher may also focus on areas such as visualizing, making predictions, comparing and contrasting, and making connections. This strategy really helps struggling readers think about how they make meaning when they read. According to Davey: "The modeling process is founded on the belief that if teachers describe their thoughts about a text (so that students can see a mind responding to a specific passage) the students will realize how and when to do the same" (Tierney et al, 285).

#### **Research that has been conducted about the Think-Aloud:**

According to research, this strategy has been helpful in providing a more systematic and structured approach to guiding students on how to improve comprehension. For the most effective use, researchers have noted that student interaction is essential. Research has shown that in cases where student interaction is limited or non-existent, students hardly received any benefit from the instruction. Baumann, Jones and Seifert-Kessell proved this when they conducted research on the effectiveness of three different reading strategies. Sixty-eight fourth grade students were randomly put in one of the three experimental groups. The first group received explicit instruction in the Think-Aloud strategy. The second group received Directed Reading-Thinking Activity in which students were taught a predict-verify strategy for reading and responding to stories. The last group received the Directed Reading Activity training, an instructed control in which students engaged in a non-interactive, guided reading of

stories. The researchers concluded from their research that: "The consistently poor performance of the DRA group reinforces the idea that non-interactive instruction fails to promote students' comprehension monitoring abilities. It is clear that teacher-led instruction in strategies like Think-Aloud and DRTA, or others which cultivate student responsibility and control for reading comprehension are effective for developing comprehension monitoring skills" (Baumann et al).

Although some research has shown some of the benefits of the Think-Aloud reading strategy as an aid with comprehension, some limitations have been noted. First, since the teacher demonstrates only her thinking patterns as she reads, students may feel they are expected to follow the exact same Think-Aloud behaviors. Second, the Think-Aloud may not actually have a definite positive effect on comprehension. As mentioned earlier, teaching one thinking pattern is not going to work for every person; therefore, it is important to have students develop some of their own thinking patterns and Think-Aloud behaviors. The more student-based it is, the more the students are going to make it their own and find it useful..

#### **How the Think-Aloud was implemented:**

I examined and used this strategy in three different ways. First, I had used the Think-Aloud with the visualization strategy. We did a unit on the Titanic and I had the students visualize themselves in the story by acting out parts. I first modeled it by pretending to be a passenger and acting scared and frantic. I used words and acted using my body, since visualizing means putting yourself in the situation. Students pretended to be a passenger, the captain, or a musician. As I came to their groups, they would act out and verbalize the feelings of that particular character, providing me with evidence of their

understanding. They would say things like "I am so scared that I won't get on a lifeboat" or "Send off the fireworks!" I had the students imagine what the characters' facial expressions would be and the feelings they would experience by changing characters every few minutes. We then discussed how when we have a hard time comprehending or understanding the story that we should put ourselves in the story in our minds, like we had just done. We discussed how we are not always going to get up and act out every book we read, but that we are going to connect ourselves to the story by imagining ourselves there.

I extended the activity by giving students a chart (See Appendix 1). Next I had them listen to music that started with happy sounding music and then became music that became more intense, allowing them to experience the emotions of the characters. As they listened, students wrote down what they were visualizing and imagining on Appendix 1. I encouraged students to look at pictures in the book and imagine the things they may see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. They were also given an opportunity to close their eyes and imagine themselves in that setting. After the music stopped, I asked students to come to the front one by one and write in the circles I had drawn resembling the handout. Each student had an opportunity to write one thing they had visualized and explain it to the class. By doing this, students had an opportunity to see what their classmates were thinking and to hear of other things they may have not thought about.

Second, I had students use their own experiences to make personal connections to the story. I first modeled making personal connections by telling students of a time I was very excited and then another time I was really scared. I had them think of a time they were scared or a time they were very excited about something and share it with a partner.

We then discussed how the people who traveled on the Titanic were probably very excited at first, but then became very scared once the ship started sinking. I had students share some of the feelings.

The last way I used the think-aloud strategy was having students looking at suffixes and prefixes to understand the meanings of words. We first reviewed the meaning of suffix and prefix, and then had students discuss what certain prefixes and suffixes were and what they meant.. I handed out note cards, some with words and some with prefixes or suffixes. I then asked a student to come to the front of the class and tell us what his/her word meant.. For example, the student would show the class the word "able" and explain that it means "something you can do." Then I would ask someone who thought he/she had a suffix or prefix to come to the front of the class and add to the word so that the meaning was changed. Another student with the prefix "un" would come to the front of the class and hold his/her card next to the first student's card forming the word "unable." The student would then explain how the prefix meant "not" and how the word now means "not able to do something." We continued this activity using a variety of suffixes and prefixes. We then read our story aloud. Before asking the students to help me determine the definition of the word based on what they knew about suffixes and prefixes, I showed students my thinking process using the Think-Aloud strategy. I said "Unstoppable? That is a pretty big word. I know that stop means to not move anymore or to brake. The suffix "able" means something you can do. Does it mean able to stop? No, because there is a prefix I need to also look at too. I cannot only look at part of the word. The prefix is "un" and I know that means the same as "not." Therefore, "unstoppable" must mean "not being able to stop." Once students observed

me model my thinking process, I asked students to stop me when they noticed a suffix or prefix in a word. I then asked them to share their Think-Aloud with the class.

### **Evaluation of the Think-Aloud:**

I found this strategy very helpful and was impressed with the results I observed. In many ways my results correlated with those I had researched. I especially noted how students were having a hard time at first with the various strategies as I was explaining them. Without them trying it for themselves and reporting out their thinking, I think the students probably would not experiment with these think-aloud procedures on their own. As Baumann mentioned in his research, having the students interact and participate trying the strategy showed them how the strategy could encourage them to think more deeply about their reading.

For the first Think-Aloud where I had the students visualize themselves in the story, I noted that this strategy was fairly successful for students of all ability groups. Even the students who generally had a harder time with reading and comprehension were able to imagine themselves to some extent being on the Titanic. I did, however, notice that although I modeled some abstract feelings and emotions, the students did not produce many on their own. There were only a few high ability students who were able to think about some more abstract feelings and experiences. I believe that this was not a result of the strategy being ineffective, but rather the developmental stage the students are at in third grade. I enjoyed observing some students come up with some unique ideas as they were acting out the certain characters. One student showed a passenger being seasick which really showed me that he was envisioning what problems may arise while being on a ship. When I extended the activity, I noticed that students enjoyed listening to

the music. I asked them how they felt as they listened and what they were visualizing. Students remarked that at the more intense parts of the music, they saw the Titanic crashing into an iceberg and people being scared. For this particular story, incorporating music fit in very well and I could tell that the students enjoyed it.

What impressed me most with this strategy was that while we were reading I asked students to tell me how we could help ourselves understand a story better.. One boy commented that we could visualize ourselves in the story, and he continued to explain how we could do that. I was impressed to see how he had made that particular reading strategy his own. Another student had commented to me how they were imagining they were on the magic school bus taking a field trip. It is exciting to see students make reading strategies their own.

## **II. PReP-STRATEGY**

The PReP-Strategy was developed by Langer in 1981 with the goal of giving students an opportunity to brainstorm their own ideas before reading, as well as to be used as a tool for teachers to assess students' prior knowledge about a particular topic that they will encounter before reading (Tierney et. al 253). The PreP-Strategy consists of the three different stages. The first stage requires students to think about what they already know about the particular topic. They may discuss familiar vocabulary words and definitions that are written down so that they can later be evaluated. The second stage is where students reflect on what they have come up with and where they had made these associations. Students ask themselves and respond to questions such as "Why did this response come to mind?" and "What made me think of ..?" The last stage for the PreP-Strategy happens after reading the selection. It is where students reflect on the

discussions that have occurred before reading and verbalize any changes in their thinking. This helps students observe other student's thinking processes and understand their methods of constructing meaning (Tierney et al. 253).

In order to make this information meaningful to the teacher, Langer suggests that the teacher analyzes the free associations that the students make. Depending on the student's answer, the teacher will determine if the student is well-informed, partly-informed, or ill-informed. The first level shows that the student has a lot of prior knowledge about the concept or topic. This will be apparent through their definitions, analogies, or even linking the concept to other concepts. If a student is at the second level, he/she may show some prior knowledge about the concept or topic. This will be seen if their discussion is generally based on examples or characteristics. Students will probably need some help from the teacher in order to successfully comprehend during reading. The third level is when the student has little or no prior knowledge about the particular topic or concept.. This is apparent since the student will make low-level associations and will sometimes give words that sound like the targeted word but they are not correct.. Another area that will make the lack of prior knowledge obvious would be the fact that students will share experiences that are unrelated (Tierney et al. 254-255).

Once the teacher has determined the different levels of the students, the type of instruction that will be needed can then be planned. Students who displayed a vast amount of prior knowledge will probably be able to read the selection with few problems. The students who displayed some prior knowledge will probably find some teacher guidance helpful as they read. The students who were unable to indicate much prior

knowledge will probably need a fair amount of direct instruction on the particular concept.

### **Research that has been conducted on the PReP Strategy**

Students and teachers both have a lot to gain from this strategy. According to the findings of Holbrook: "Pre-reading activities like this one enable students to tackle difficult content in a thorough manner" (368). He continues to explain how it is a great strategy especially with content area reading material (369). Irvin, Lunstrum, Lynch-Brown, and Shepard state the importance of using a pre-reading strategy in content areas when they agree that: "Proficient learners build on and activate their background knowledge before reading ... poor learners begin without thinking" (56). The PreP reading strategy has been shown to truly help students with activating that knowledge to help increase their comprehension.

Tierney et al. states that this strategy is also very helpful in the classroom since it gives a teacher a straightforward framework to prepare the students for their reading, yet it is not so rigid that the teacher cannot make needed adjustments. What makes this strategy more effective too, is the fact that students brainstorm and then reflect on what they have come up with repeatedly. Other reading strategies that include this brainstorming part do not always tie it in so closely with the instruction that needs to be given, which makes this strategy a step above the others of its type. Research conducted by Langer and Nicholich (1998) has also been able to show the effectiveness of the response analysis section. They concluded that this method was actually a better predictor of reading comprehension of a selection than were standardized or IQ tests (256).

Although this reading strategy has numerous strengths, some weaknesses have also been associated with it. The fact that determining the true score of a student's prior knowledge level is not that cut and dry makes the validity of the classification system slightly questionable. The number of students who are misclassified will always be unknown, since the teacher may not always have the time to analyze each student in depth. Time with this strategy becomes a huge factor and can sometimes be the downfall of its helpfulness. Tierney suggests that this strategy would be more helpful if it was used after students had read a paragraph or two, since their comprehension level could then be determined more easily and accurately (256). Although educators have described this strategy's strengths and weaknesses, no conclusive research has been conducted to validate its effectiveness.

#### **How the PreP Strategy was implemented**

Before students read the selection of the week, a story about the Titanic, I had the class brainstorm as a group some of the things they knew already as I wrote them on the board. I decided to use this strategy with a selection that contained more content (social studies) related information, as the readings suggested. I knew that most students would have heard about the Titanic before and would have some prior knowledge. I also knew that some students may not know much at all, or may have some of the facts skewed which made this strategy a great strategy to use with this story.

As we started with the first stage of the strategy, brainstorming our initial associations, all the students were very anxious to tell me that it was a ship that had sunk many years ago. I asked students to tell me approximately when it happened, and one student had responded with fifty years ago, while another student disagreed and said it

was a couple hundred years ago. I could tell on other students' faces that they were trying to determine which date was the correct one. I gave students no indication of whether or not their answers were correct, incorrect, or even close. I wanted students to disagree or agree with what was being said based on their own prior knowledge.

One student mentioned that many people drowned because there were no lifeboats. Another student quickly disagreed and said that it was actually because there were not enough lifeboats. I decided to ask the students how many people had been on the Titanic, because I realized that it would show the level of their understanding and their knowledge about the size of the Titanic. One student told me that there were a million people on the ship, and I was surprised to see that nobody had disagreed with her. This showed me that most students did not truly understand how much a million people were. As students were brainstorming, I documented the stages of their level of prior knowledge for analysis (see Appendix 2).

For the second stage of the PreP strategy, we started to reflect on what was written on the board, and I asked students to tell me how they knew the information. Many students mentioned that television or books had taught them about the Titanic. Some students had learned more through somebody telling them about the story of the Titanic. It was interesting to see how some students were having a hard time separating *Titanic*, the movie, from the actual events involving the boat, Titanic. One student said that they knew somebody had lost a precious necklace on the Titanic because they had seen it in the movie. It was then that I realized that younger students assume every detail is true when they learn a movie is based on a true story. The idea of embellishing a story is a concept that they have a hard time understanding.

### Evaluation of the PreP Strategy:

I found the PreP strategy to be very helpful for this particular story. The misconceptions and amount of background knowledge was very apparent. One possible problem that could arise with this particular strategy is the problem of whether or not it would work as well with other selections. The story I chose was based on an historical event, which made the level of knowledge about the particular event easy to determine. Students also had a vast amount of resources from which they had learned about the topic, like television, movies, books, and other people. If the story had been about a girl and her adventures at the park, this strategy would probably seem somewhat futile. The second and third stage of the PreP strategy would tend to seem redundant and unnecessary to students. The importance of picking your selections carefully is essential to make this strategy work effectively.

I also noticed the significant amount of time it took to implement the strategy. The class discussion and analysis of student responses is something that takes a lot of class time, if done properly. As I mentioned earlier, this strategy would be a waste of time if it was used with a story where most students had a great deal of prior knowledge about the particular topic. It is the type of strategy I would use occasionally with selections that are slightly harder and unfamiliar to the students.

As the readings suggested, this strategy tends to leave a large gray area when it comes to truly determining the level of prior knowledge a student possesses. What a student says could be misunderstood or analyzed incorrectly. The student I thought had the most prior knowledge about the Titanic was the student who eventually told me that

there were a million people on the ship. This one fact she had given me changed my mind significantly about her level of knowledge about the particular topic.

As we reviewed some of our answers after we read the story, I noticed how students changed their minds about their initial opinions. The girl who had said there were a million people on the ship quickly changed her mind when she read the story and actually pointed it out to me. Personally, the fact that I saw students evaluate their answers and change them as they received new information without me saying anything was a real strength of this strategy. Whenever we can encourage students to monitor their own thinking processes and evaluate their answers, then we are helping them grow as critical thinkers.

Another disadvantage to evaluating students' answers was that it was virtually impossible for me to analyze the quiet, more shy students due to their lack of input and brainstorming. The solution to that problem is to sometimes use this strategy in a small group setting, where the quiet students may be more inclined to contribute their thoughts. According to the research that has been done, the weakness in this strategy is incorrectly analyzing students or not having an opportunity to analyze other students. My experiences definitely correlated with their findings in that area. Overall, I thought this strategy had a lot of strengths and could definitely be helpful to the teacher in the classroom. The key, however, to making this strategy work is using it with the correct selections. Selections that will provide a variety of levels of prior knowledge, as well as selections that will make the evaluation process helpful to the teacher, should be chosen.

### III. GIST STRATEGY

The GIST (Generating Interactions between Schemata and Text) reading strategy was developed by Cunningham in 1982. It was developed as an after-reading strategy to help students with comprehension and summarizing. Klingner and Vaughn refers to the goal of the GIST strategy as: "The goal of getting the gist is to teach students to restate in their own words the most important point as a way of making sure they have understood what they have read" (34). This strategy also encourages students to use higher order thinking skills, because they have to analyze and synthesize the content they are reading (Phillips 2004).

The first step to the GIST reading strategy according to Cunningham, requires the teacher to model reading a selection and then summarizing it. During this part of the strategy, students need to play an active role by refining the basic summary the teacher has made. They may add or take away parts of the summary, depending on whether or not they think the information is important (Tierney et al. 276).

Cunningham then suggests giving students a short selection and asking them to read the first sentence silently. He also recommends having the sentence visible on the board or an overhead with fifteen blank spaces underneath. Next, the teacher asks some students to give a brief summary, in their own words, of that sentence using less than fifteen words. Students are encouraged to generate their summaries based on memory. Once they are satisfied with their summary, students are shown the original piece and are then given an opportunity to revise their summaries. The important piece of advice given to teachers, according to Cunningham, is that: "Teachers should be careful not to

interfere with the student's decision making, even if the student's statement represents the exact duplication of the text" (Tierney et al. 277).

At this point, the teacher will add another sentence to the first one, and ask students to summarize both sentences again using only fifteen words. The teacher will continue the process of adding sentences as students adapt their summary to include only fifteen words with the added information. Once students have used the GIST strategy a few times, the teacher may start giving a full paragraph and having students write a fifteen word summary. As students master the art of summarizing, the teacher may lengthen the selection that students need to summarize.

#### **Research that has been conducted on the GIST Strategy**

A great strength that has been mentioned about this strategy is that of having students revise their own summaries and critically determine their adequacies (Tierney et al. 278). Through doing this they learn to look at a selection in depth and truly determine what the bigger picture is - the gist. Another strength that has been associated with this strategy is the theory that if students know what the gist is, they are more likely to remember what they have read. If this strategy is used in a setting where students are able to critique each others' summaries with supporting information, then it also teaches students to critique their own summaries and look for possible weaknesses (Klingner & Vaughn 34). A research study was conducted on fourth grade students by Cunningham (1982) that determined that the gist strategy was more valuable for teaching to summarize than using nothing or any other writing experiences (Tierney et al. 278).

A limitation for this strategy, unfortunately, is the fact that students may not be able to transfer finding the gist from a sentence to a paragraph to a whole text. As the

selection becomes larger, some students may find it harder and harder to sift through the information and find the most important points. Cunningham also points out that not all selections can really be successfully summarized. Complex and fact filled selections can become very challenging to summarize when you are trying to be concise. The assumption that summaries can be made by reading in a linear, sentence-by-sentence fashion is something that is under scrutiny with this strategy (Tierney et. al. 278). As with all activities that are used repeatedly, the danger with this reading strategy is that it can easily become wearisome for the students.

### **How the GIST strategy was implemented**

I used this strategy in one of the content areas, science, that I was teaching in my third grade classroom. In science we had been learning about animals, and I decided to have students practice summarizing a section about the loggerhead turtle. I first gave students one sentence about the turtle and asked them to see if they could exclude anything from the sentence to make it shorter.. We concluded that the sentence was very short and to the point already.

Next I gave students another sentence and asked them to combine the two sentences into one short sentence. Students gave me a shorter sentence which included most of the information from the two sentences that I had given them. At this point I noticed how the majority of the students had no problem in summarizing or combining the sentences. The higher ability students seem to be able to exclude a few words, where I noticed that the low ability students just combined the sentences with an "and" in the middle. As we continued the process of adding sentences, I noticed that students were having a harder time determining what was not important.. Instead of having students put

their summaries into fifteen words, I decided to limit them to one sentence after I noticed that the use of a number was overwhelming to them. They seemed very worried about not getting the exact amount of words and lost focus of the bigger task.. I realized that at the third grade level, assigning a specific number of words did not work well with them. Instructing them to limit their information in order to create a short and concise sentence seemed to work better..

By the time we had five sentences to summarize, I asked students what information we could leave out.. It was at this point that I noticed the low ability students having a hard time leaving parts out.. They would read the sentences to me as one sentence, and only leave out words like articles and prepositions. I could tell that they thought these words were not as significant as the other pieces of information and that they were safe in doing so. We talked through the sentences as a class, and I was impressed with how easily the high ability students were able to grasp the gist of the sentences. A problem area that I noticed all the students had was creating good, solid, flowing sentences. The flow between words and transitions were a little shaky.

In order to reinforce the idea of the *gist* of a paragraph, I decided to ask students to tell me what various paragraphs were describing using one or two words after they had read it silently. For instance, one paragraph explained the appearance and weight of the turtle in great detail.. I had wanted students to tell me that the paragraph was about what a turtle looked like or its appearance. However, I was surprised to see that the sentence about the turtle's weight seemed to be the overwhelming *gist* of the paragraph according to the students. As I evaluated why almost all the students chose that piece of information, I realized that it contained very specific facts that could not be summarized

according to them. As we discussed it more, I asked students whether or not that was the only information the paragraph contained. Students gradually realized that other body features of the turtle were also being discussed. I took this opportunity to remind them that in order to have a good summary it is very important to read through the entire selection given first, before picking the vital information. I decided to highlight this point, since I had noticed that students had stopped after they found the sentence about the weight of the turtle.

At this point I wanted to do an overall informal evaluation of each student to see what their level of understanding of summarizing, or finding the gist was. I assigned a paragraph from the loggerhead turtle selection, and asked students to summarize it in one sentence. During this informal evaluation I clearly noticed how the low ability students were struggling with excluding information; their summaries still contained too many details.

### **Evaluation of the GIST strategy**

Overall, I was very impressed with this strategy and found it to be a very valuable tool to the students. I liked the step-by-step approach to teaching summarizing, especially at the third grade level. At this age, students find excluding information in a passage a concept that is more abstract and hard to implement. By walking through the steps with them slowly, I noticed that they felt more confident trying it on their own. I noticed students volunteer who ordinarily not do so. The fact that there is not only one correct answer made them more ready to take a risk, which I found encouraging and a definite strength of this strategy.

A problem with this strategy is that your low ability students may have a harder time excluding information and could easily become frustrated, especially with larger selections. I, therefore, believe that starting with chunks that are manageable to students is essential to avoid negative associations with its use. One does not want students to feel that the strategy is so much work that it is not worth the effort. As research has suggested, I noticed how this strategy could easily become tedious or frustrating to the students if used too often.

#### **IV. ANTICIPATION GUIDE**

Using an anticipation guide is another pre-reading strategy to help activate students' prior knowledge. Anticipation guides help students start thinking about certain elements that they will encounter in the story. These guides might include questions, lists of words, or a presentation outline. According to Herber, it is defined as "a strategy that prompts students to think about the key concepts of a story or selection before they read it" (Johns et al. 1). It is usually structured by giving students a set of statements that are related to the story, with which students can agree or disagree. The statements that are given to the students cannot be open-ended, they have to be yes/no or agree/disagree statements.

Before reading, the teacher will model how to complete the anticipation guide by reading the first statement and asking students to say what they think by circling one of the options. Once the teacher has done this, students will complete the rest of the anticipation guide independently. After the students are done, the teacher will remind them to think about the statements as they read the selection. Once students have

finished reading the selection, they will reflect on their answers again and see whether or not they still agree with their initial responses, based on their reading.

### **Research that has been conducted on the Anticipation Guide**

Some educators have noted that this reading strategy is a great tool because it is so versatile. Similar to the PreP strategy, anticipation guides can help teachers determine the level of understanding students have on a particular topic before and after reading a selection. Through this informal assessment a teacher can determine what instructional decisions need to be made or changed to accommodate the different students. The importance of knowing misconceptions students may have before reading a selection was determined by Lipson (1984) when she found that learning accurate information was inhibited by those misconceptions (Tierney et al. 260). Anticipation guides give teachers that opportunity to correct the misconceptions before they negatively influences students' learning.

It has also been determined that anticipation guides are of little value when the statements given are based on facts, instead of experiences. It is essential that the statements encourage higher-level thinking, and not just true/false type answers. The student needs to be introduced to particular elements of the story that they need to focus on and think about through these statements. If any of these parts are excluded, the anticipation guide becomes a less effective strategy.

### **How the anticipation guide was implemented**

Before reading the book, *Ramona Quimby, Age 8*, I gave students an anticipation guide to complete (see Appendix 4). They had the opportunity to reflect on events and scenarios that were going to be brought up in the book before they actually read it. I

thought that this anticipation guide was particularly well-written since it included statements that could create controversy or varied opinions. After students completed the anticipation guide, I collected and kept the sheets for use after we had read the book.

After we had read the entire book, I returned the anticipation guides to the students. I then read the statements aloud and asked students to share whether or not they had changed their opinions about the specific statement or if the book reinforced what they initially believed. As students shared their answers, I asked them to give me examples from the book that reinforced that statement. By doing this, students were challenged to make connections between the statements and the story they had just read. It also clearly showed their level of comprehension, which is why this strategy is so helpful.

#### **Evaluation of the anticipation guide**

This strategy was probably one of my favorite strategies because the results were overwhelmingly positive. To start with, this particular strategy does not require a lot of class time, yet seems to yield great rewards for both the teacher and student. Another obvious strength I noticed of this strategy was the fact that it helped students focus on certain elements of the story. As they filled out the anticipation guide, I noted how some students looked at the statements from a variety of perspectives making the discussion more meaningful. By keeping the anticipation guides for the students until the end of the book, you did not have students tempted to change their answers. It is very important to stress to the students that they will not be penalized for changing their mind, and that in fact they are encouraged to do so if the book influenced them in some way.

As we continued reading, occasionally a student would mention one of the statements and explain why he/she agreed or disagreed with it based on the book. I enjoyed seeing students making these connections and focusing on the particular elements from the anticipation guide. After we had completed the book, I was excited to see students change their answers and discuss their rationale with their classmates using examples from the book..

This strategy is great tool for a teacher, but its weakness is the fact that students cannot truly use this on their own, which makes it a little less helpful at times in regards with students implementing it themselves. However, through filling out an anticipation guide one would hope that students would adopt the idea of thinking about critical underlying themes in the book as they see examples given. Anticipation guides are also great for using with non-fiction selections where students are able compare the knowledge they learned in class with common misconceptions students may have about that particular topic.

## **V. LEVIN'S KEYWORD METHOD**

Levin created the keyword method in 1983 based on the process of recoding, relating, and retrieving (Tierney et al. 323). This strategy is based on a mnemonic device by which students learn new information by associating it with an interactive visual image that has been created. Tierney, Readence, and Dishner give a great example of how this strategy can be effectively used:

"An example might be the word *potable*, which means suitable for drinking. *Potable* is recoded to the familiar word, *pot*, which is then related to the original words by the use of an actual picture or mental image of a pot of cool spring water sitting in front of you after you have crossed a hot desert. With recoding and relating established, students are now able to use the keyword to retrieve the correct meaning when they

encounter the new word. In other words, on seeing the word *potable*, students are reminded of the keyword *pot*. This, in turn, leads them to think of the picture or an appropriate visual image that then leads them to the correct response of "suitable for drinking" (323).

The procedure the teacher needs to follow to make this strategy successful is as follows. First the teacher needs to scan the text and determine which vocabulary words need to be studied. The next step is to then find an appropriate keyword for those words, as well as a visual image that could be used. This part of using the keyword strategy is going to be most time consuming.

Next, the teacher needs to explain how this strategy is used by explaining it in the same manner as *potable* was explained above. It may be necessary to use more than one example for the students to truly understand the method. Once the students have a grasp on the strategy, the teacher will hand out a short passage about the first word, along with an illustration. It is important that the original word, along with the keyword, is used as a caption for the image. Students should then be given some time to read the information accompanying the picture, as well as thinking of why this keyword and image would be helpful in remembering the definition of the word. The class should then discuss why they made the connections and why it was helpful; this will deepen their ability to recall it later.

At this point, students will be ready to independently create their own mnemonic strategies for remembering the other vocabulary words. It is helpful to divide students into small groups and have them work on these together. When the students come up with their own mnemonic devices, it is more likely that they will remember them. Students should then be given the opportunity to share their creations with the rest of the

class. In order for this strategy to transfer, students should be given the opportunity to use this strategy in different subject areas. Encouragement and feedback are the two essentials in helping students get the most out of this strategy. (Tierney 324-325).

### **Research on the Keyword method**

Unlike many other strategies, the keyword method is a well-documented strategy for being successful. In the book, *Reading Strategies and Practices*, Tierney, Readence, and Dishner indicate how unlike other strategies, this strategy has proved to be highly effective with good and poor readers at all levels (325). Levin and colleagues (1979) conducted a series of experiments where time was set aside everyday to teach students a few new words. They found that the keyword method was no more effective than were other methods when applied to groups of adolescents, but that it was more effective than other methods when working one-on-one. They also found that the technique was more effective with elementary school children than it was with older students (Campos 2003).

The research that has been conducted on the keyword method has yielded very positive results. According to the Illinois Reading Association, however, the good results are sometimes short-lived with certain students. Another disadvantage that has been observed is the fact that the gains from the strategy were shown to start fading with some students after only a week. Although some students seem to respond very positively to using the keyword method to learn vocabulary words, it has been shown that low-ability students seem to have a harder time benefiting from it.

A disadvantage teachers face with using this strategy is the amount of time it takes for the teacher to generate the keywords and images. Unfortunately, the great responsibility that is placed on the teacher in turn limits student involvement. As with

many other strategies, whether or not students are able to transfer the strategy to other areas has not been determined (Tierney et al. 325).

**How the keyword strategy was implemented:**

I used this strategy in science class to help students learn their vocabulary words about animal behaviors. At the beginning of class, I asked students if they knew what a *mime* was. One student responded by telling me that it was a person with white paint on their face who acted like this (she *imitated* one using her hands). I then asked students to tell me if they noticed anything about the word *mimicry*. One student mentioned that it had some of the same letters as the word *mime*. I then explained to students that *mimicry* is when one animal pretends to be another animal in order to not get eaten. Just like a *mime* pretends to do things people do without really doing it, an animal does the same. So when you see the word *mimicry* think of the word *mime* and remember how it mimics other people, then think of an animal doing the same. I then handed out a sheet with a picture of a mime, the word *mimicry*, and its definition. We discussed the definition and picture in order to determine how it would help us remember the word.

For the next picture on the page I had students determine why the picture would help us remember the vocabulary word. For this vocabulary word I just read the word and its definition and had students determine how the visual aid could help us remember the vocabulary word. The word was *instinct* and the visual was a picture of a skunk giving off an odor. I was impressed with how a lot of students made the connection of a skunk automatically (instinctively) giving off a stink when he is scared, therefore remember *instink*.

I then decided to give students an opportunity to create their own mnemonic devices. I gave them the word *hibernate* and had them come up with pictures and keywords. I had them work in small groups and they seemed to really enjoy it. The one group came up with this idea: *hibe* almost looks like *hide*, and in the winter animals hide and sleep during the cold months. Another group said that the word *ber* sounds like *brrr*, which means cold and that is when animals sleep/hibernate. The students were so excited when they saw the different devices them and their classmates had come up with. I also noticed how many students remembered the words much better with this method.

#### **Evaluation of the keyword method:**

Both the students and I loved this strategy. The fact that it was very effective with the low and high ability students made it a great strategy. A strength of this strategy was that the students loved it and that they were very excited about using it. I also loved their enthusiasm and creativity. Shortly after we discussed the various keywords and meanings, I quizzed students on the vocabulary verbally, and just about everybody remembered the meanings. Its effectiveness was overwhelming!

The disadvantage to this strategy is the fact that the teacher has to come up with some of the visual aids and keywords, which can be time consuming and difficult sometimes. Although I enjoyed doing it, I also noticed that with certain vocabulary words that connection would be very hard to make. Not all words have those keywords or connections that are easy to point out or find. Therefore, the teacher should not feel inclined to do this for every vocabulary word, but rather only those that seem to repeatedly pose a problem for the class.

## VI. LIST-GROUP-LABEL

The list-group-label strategy, which is also known as semantic mapping, was designed by Taba in 1967. This strategy, according to Rasinski, is: "a generic vocabulary and background-building activity that draws on students' own knowledge of a topic and then invites them to organize the information. The strategy consists of three parts: listing, group/labeling, and follow-up (Tierney et al. 306).

The first step is for the teacher to give students a one or two word topic. Students are then asked to come up with as many words that make them think of that particular original word. For instance, if the teacher gives them the word *space*, students may come up with words such as *planets, sun, stars, meteors, moon* and so on. The teacher should write these responses on the board, making sure not to have more than twenty-five words (Johns 219).

To start the grouping/labeling section, the word and its pronunciation need to be read aloud again to the class by the teacher. The students are then asked to look at the list and make smaller lists using the words on the board on the basis of what they have in common. Students need to be reminded that there has to be at least three words in each group. Based on the characteristic they picked, students need to label each smaller list. The last part of this strategy is the follow-up. In this section, students share their groupings with the class and justify their answers. By doing this, students are opened up to possibilities they may have never thought about before.

The uniqueness of this strategy is that it can be used as a pre-reading or post-reading activity, as mentioned in the book *Reading Strategies and Practices* (Tierney et al. 309). When used as a pre-reading activity, it assists the teacher in determining what

words may need to be taught.. However, when it is used as a post-reading activity, it assists the teacher in determining what areas need re-teaching.

### **Research**

Research has shown that many teachers have found the list-group-label strategy very helpful with a diverse group of students. Karen, a Title I teacher, explains her perceptions of the list-group-label strategy: "The part I like best about this activity is that it gives students some control over the process. It also requires kids to do some pretty sophisticated and creative analysis of words and concepts" (Rasinski 135). Another strength, according to Tierney, is the modeling and sharing that is built into this strategy (308). Giving students the opportunity to observe a teacher go through the steps of this strategy could be very helpful for the low-ability students. By sharing their findings with classmates, this strategy also emphasizes the tendency for students to learn from each other.

Although this strategy has many strengths, there have been some weaknesses that researchers have found. Some students may be inclined to look for commonalities among the words, like the letter it starts with or the amount of syllables it has (Tierney et al. 309). Unfortunately, in doing so, this strategy becomes useless to the student, which makes it important to emphasize looking for semantic and meaning-oriented groupings.

### **How the list-group-label strategy was implemented:**

I also used this strategy in one of the content areas, since it seemed to fit in well with what they were learning. In science we were learning about space, and the students had an immense amount of vocabulary to learn. The first day of class I started by asking students to give me words that they already knew about space. As students responded, I

wrote the words on the board. I allowed each student to give me one word, which ended up giving us a total of twenty words. We then read through each word aloud again before the students started the activity. I asked the students to work with a partner and to put the words in groups that they thought went together. I also told them to label the groups with an appropriate title.

I could tell that a lot of students were excited about the challenge. As students started grouping their words I noticed two different approaches. One group of students, which was generally the lower ability students, put a lot of the words together in only a couple of categories. As research had indicated, I did have a few students who were focusing on commonalities in the words. Once I modeled to them how to do it again, they seemed to focus more on the meaning. The other group of students, generally the higher ability students, seemed to be very particular about certain words being grouped together. They would sometimes have too many categories, and I would have to remind them to have at least three words in category. Overall, I felt like the students did fairly well with this strategy. I liked walking around and observing how the students were categorizing the words. As a teacher I could see how this step would be very helpful for determining what instruction students may need and how much they may need.

Once everyone had completed their categories and labels we discussed it as a class. It was fascinating to see how differently many students approached the organization of the words. What caught the attention of many of the students was to see that others had similar groupings or labels for their word groups. It was also a good way to start discussing some old and new vocabulary with the students.

### Evaluation of the list-group-label strategy:

Although I did like this strategy, I realized that it did require a lot of time if done thoroughly. I also noticed that when I was writing the words on the board and we were brainstorming, some students seemed to get a little restless. Keeping the students involved and accountable for paying attention is what will help to make this strategy successful.

For content areas, I felt that it was especially helpful and I saw how it helped students start thinking about what they know or don't know. I especially liked the fact that it gave me great insight into what the students knew and what I needed to review with them. The fact that the students are exposed to the vocabulary words before teaching begins seemed to help them with comprehension. One student even referred back to the activity during a discussion by mentioning what group they had put it in.

Although I did not use this as a post-reading activity, I could definitely see the value in doing that with the class. As a teacher there have been many times when I wondered how well the students have understood the vocabulary, and this strategy could be used as a great assessment tool.

### CONCLUSION

Throughout my research, I noticed the immense importance of teaching comprehension reading strategies to students. As I had mentioned in my opening paragraph, these strategies affect all other subject areas that require them to understand the content of what they are reading. This was very apparent as the strategies were implemented in various subject areas, not only in language arts. Through my experiences and observations of the various strategies, I felt that the value of the keyword method and

the anticipation guide surpassed all the other strategies by far. Although I saw a definite value for using the Think-Aloud strategy, it was sometimes very hard to determine how valuable it was to students. The List-Group-Label and GIST strategy both yielded positive results, yet indicated that they could easily get redundant if overused. The time spent implementing the different stages of the PreP strategy, along with all the unknown factors involved, makes this strategy one to be seldomly used.

Although some strategies were more helpful than others, I was left with the question of whether or not these strategies that I had implemented had more than just academic value to the students. The question had arisen to me after I noticed a sense of excitement at times from certain students, as well as some positive feedback I had verbally received. I decided to see if any other research had been done on the effects comprehension strategies had on students' attitudes about reading. I was amazed when I found an article wherein Baumann, Hooten, and White had done such research:

"The purpose of our inquiry was to integrate comprehension strategy instruction into literature reading and response activities. Although we hoped to develop the students' reading comprehension skills and strategies, we did not wish to do so at the expense of the interest in or attitude toward reading and books. Therefore, we posed two research questions: (a) What is the nature of fifth graders' reading comprehension development as a result of our literature strategies program? (b) What is the nature of fifth graders' attitudes toward reading and literature as a result of our literature strategies program?" (Baumann et al. 40).

The results astounded me, since they yielded the positive results I had anticipated. The first conclusion they came to was that students valued reading more after being taught different reading strategies and also reported reading more in their free time. In the surveys students were given in the beginning of the year compared to those given at

the end of the year, reading time had almost increased by thirty minutes. Students had also reported reading more books and discussing them with their classmates.

Another result from teaching comprehension strategies was that students appreciated books and literature more. It did not seem to indicate inhibited enjoyment according to this research, but instead that students felt more open to sharing their opinions with each other. They also shared their preferences when it came to genre, authors, and styles (Baumann et al. 50).

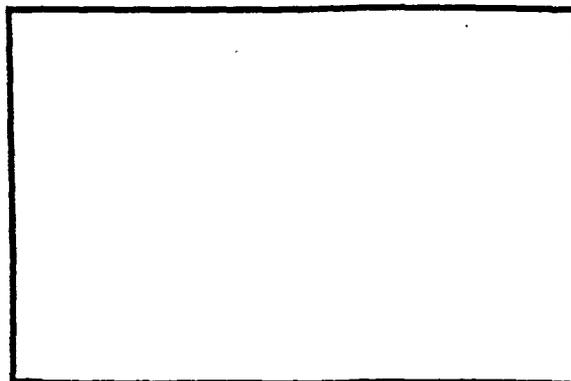
As I read the results to their study, I realized that the positive response I had received in the classroom was the tip of the iceberg to the effects that teaching comprehension strategies could have on students in the long run. As teachers, one of our goals are to have students feel motivated to enjoy reading in their own time. The results that Bauman, Hooten, and White yielded from their research, along with the experiences I had while teaching comprehension strategies, has made me realize that not only will students receive significant academic value, but that their attitudes toward reading could also be greatly impacted.

## APPENDIX 1

## What Do You-Think?

Read each of the statements below. If you agree with a statement,, write *yes* on the line. If you do not agree, write *no*. Draw a picture of yourself in the box.

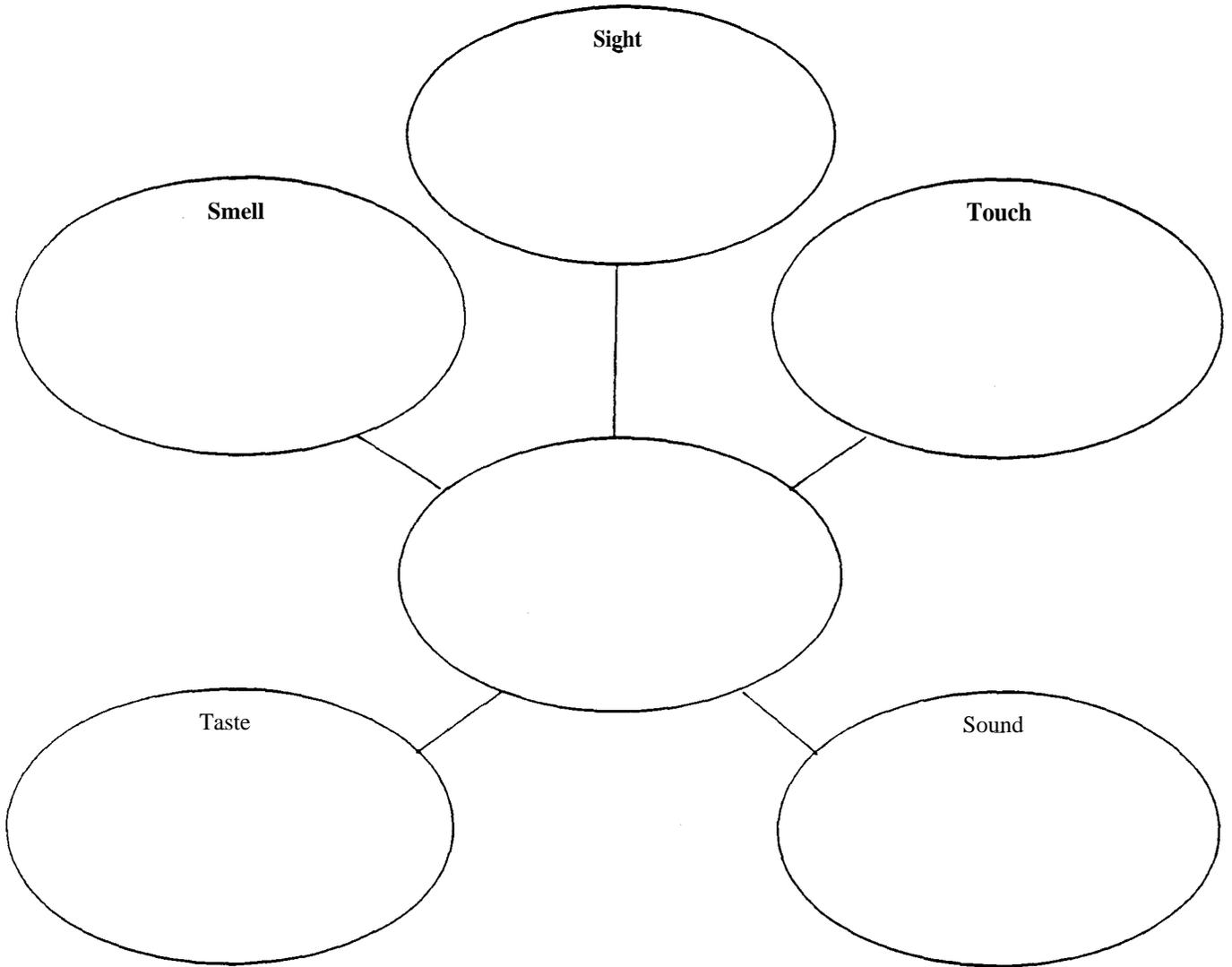
1. \_\_\_\_\_ Families should stick together.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ When people call you names, it means they don't like you.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ You should be nice to people even when you don't like them.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Grownups forget what it's like to be a child.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Bigger kids should always be nice to younger children. regardless of what the younger children do.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Children should be expected to have jobs in the family.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Changes at home or at school can make children angry.



## APPENDIX 2

<i>Student</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Level</i>
A	It was a ship that hit an iceberg and sank.	well-informed
B	There were a million people on the ship.  This happened fifty years ago.	ill-informed
C	This happened a couple hundred years ago.	ill-informed
O	There were no lifeboats on the ship. Everybody drowned.	ill-informed
E	There were not enough lifeboats on the ship.	well-informed
F	The girl lost her precious necklace When the Titanic sunk.	ill-informed

APPENDIX 3



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