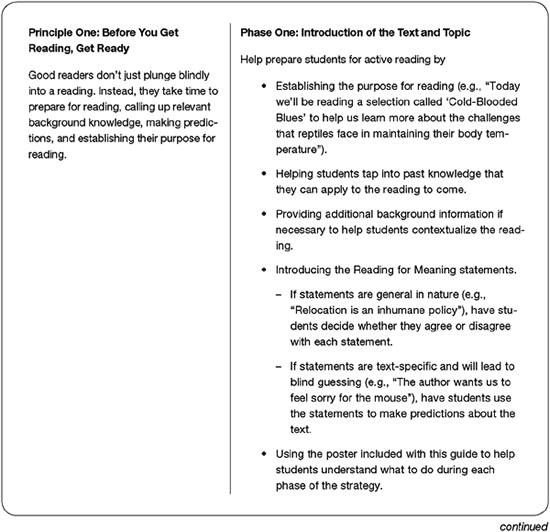
Reading for Meaning in the Classroom

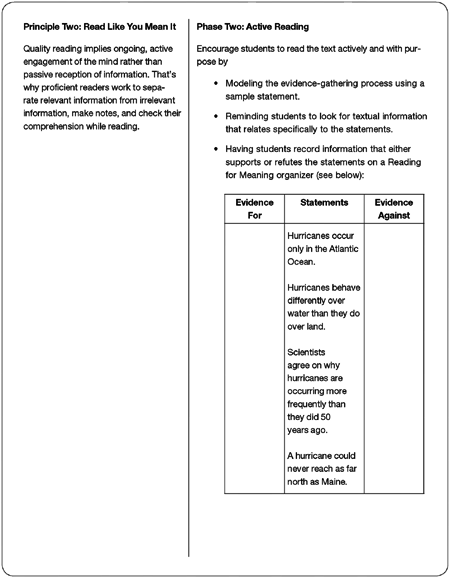
At the heart of any Reading for Meaning lesson is a set of statements about a text, a group of texts, a word problem, a data chart, a painting, a lab experiment, or just about any other source of information that you want students to think about deeply. Using statements to pique interest and increase students' analytical powers while reading and learning is a technique adapted from Harold Herber's (1978) work with Anticipation Guides. It is important to remember that Reading for Meaning statements need not be true. They can inspire debate ("Teaching is more an art than a science"), encourage speculation ("There are probably more reptiles living in Mexico than in the United States"), or be open to interpretation ("Countee Cullen was deeply hurt by the incident in the poem"). Statements can even be flat-out false. What's important is that students gather evidence that supports or refutes each statement or, as is sometimes the case with particularly rich or open-ended statements, that supports *and* refutes the statement.

We all want our students to read for meaning—to be able to understand new ideas, make inferences, and support their thinking with evidence. To help us achieve this goal, let's turn our attention to the four principles of Reading for Meaning. Each principle is tied to a finding from the research on proficient readers. You'll notice that the four *principles* of Reading for Meaning are closely aligned with the four classroom *phases* of Reading for Meaning. Leading your students through these four phases is essential for ensuring students' effective use of the strategy in the classroom.

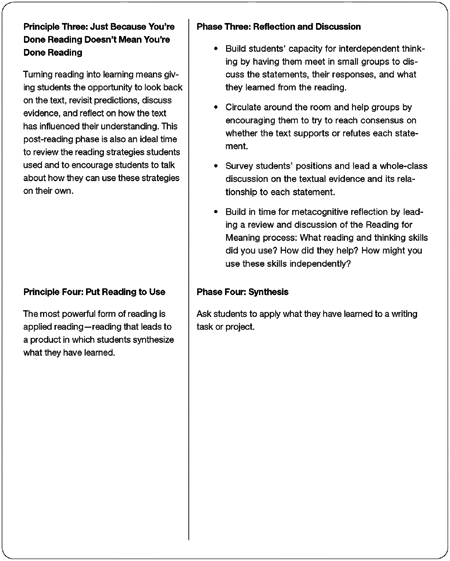
#### The Four Principles and Phases of Reading for Meaning



#### Figure 1.2 (*continued*)



#### Figure 1.2 (*continued*)



## The Strategy in Action

Now let's experience a complete Reading for Meaning lesson designed by a teacher. Angel Sapporo, a high school English teacher, is conducting a thematic literature lesson. The title of the unit, which Angel has borrowed from a famous line in *Macbeth*, is "Cabin'd, Cribb'd, Confin'd: How Authors Help Us Understand What It Means to Be Trapped." Using Hamlin Garland's "Under the Lion's Paw," Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," and poems by Langston Hughes, Angel and his students have been investigating the different ways people can feel trapped—by racial and gender roles, by cultural expectations, and by social and economic barriers. Today, Angel and his students are reading a short story by the Russian author Anton Chekhov to see what new insights they can gather about how and why authors create this feeling of being trapped.

Angel is using Reading for Meaning to help students

* Review what they already know about the theme of being trapped and apply that knowledge to Chekhov's story.
* Develop and discuss their insights into the story.
* Take a position on the story and defend that position using textual evidence.

## The Model Lesson

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| *Note to participants:* As you review this lesson, keep in mind the principles of Reading for Meaning, the role of the students, the role of the teacher, and the goals of the strategy. We also encourage you to *be* the student by completing the student activities throughout the lesson. You'll notice that we have included "You Try It" activities throughout, as well as space for you to record "Your Thoughts on the Model Lesson" at the end (p. 31). This is part of the process we call "Do, Look, Learn," which puts the power of metacognition, or thinking about thinking, to work. Too often, we go through the motions of learning a new strategy or technique without reflecting on our own thought process. So as you "do" the lesson, "look" in on your own thought process and see what you can "learn" from your own experiences. |

### Phase One: Introduction of the Text and Topic

Angel begins the lesson by saying, "OK, so we've been busy looking into how authors create the feeling of being trapped. And as we were exploring this theme, some of us started asking why so many authors seem to be drawn to this theme. After all, stories about being trapped certainly aren't feel-good stories. They don't lend themselves to happy, Hollywood-style endings. So what are some of the reasons authors spend their time and talent on this theme of being trapped? Let's review."

Using the poems and stories from the unit to guide them, Angel and his students review their discussion on why authors write about being trapped. Angel records the reasons they've come up with on the board:

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| **Why do authors write about being trapped?**   * To show injustice and bring about social change. * To express their frustration. * To help readers identify with others. * To create a conversation about difficult issues like race, gender, and inequality. |

Next, Angel says, "Today we're going to read the final story in this unit. This story is by the great Russian author Anton Chekhov. You'll notice that the story is very short. One thing to keep your eye on is how Chekhov is able to create such a great effect with so few words. Of course, we're also going to be paying close attention to how and why Chekhov creates the feeling of being trapped in his story." Angel then distributes copies of a Reading for Meaning organizer to his students (see Figure 1.3, p. 24) and reveals that the story they'll be reading is called "A Nincompoop."

### Figure 1.3. Reading for Meaning Organizer

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| **Evidence For** | **Statements** | **Evidence Against** |
|  | Julia accepts her wages from the narrator without protest. |  |
|  | Julia is used to being powerless. |  |
|  | Julia respects the narrator. |  |
|  | The narrator is more interested in conducting a social experiment than in teaching Julia a life lesson. |  |
|  | Chekhov would disapprove of Hemingway's "iceberg" theory of literature (most of what's happening lies below the surface). |  |

Angel asks the students to preview the five statements about "A Nincompoop" on the organizer and to use the statements to make two or three predictions about the story.

### You Try It: Making Predictions

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| **Use the space below to make two or three predictions about "A Nincompoop" based on the statements in Figure 1.3.** |
| 1. |
| 2. |
| 3. |

# Phase Two: Active Reading

Angel's students have used the Reading for Meaning strategy several times before, so they are familiar with their roles. Angel encourages students to refer to the Reading for Meaning poster (included with this guide) to help keep themselves focused.

Students read "A Nincompoop" on their own. As they read the story, they collect evidence on their Reading for Meaning organizers (see Figure 1.3). Angel reminds students that whenever they discover something in the story that relates to one of the statements, they should stop; ask themselves, "Does this information support the statement or refute the statement?" and record the information in the appropriate column.

# You Try It: Collecting Evidence

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| **As you read "A Nincompoop," record evidence from the story that either supports or refutes each statement in the Reading for Meaning organizer (Figure 1.3).** |
| A Nincompoop  by Anton Chekhov |
| A few days ago I asked my children's governess, Julia Vassilyevna, to come into my study.  "Sit down, Julia Vassilyevna," I said. "Let's settle our accounts. Although you most likely need some money, you stand on ceremony and won't ask for it yourself. Now then, we agreed on thirty rubles a month. …"  "Forty."  "No, thirty. I made a note of it. I always pay the governess thirty. Now then, you've been here two months, so. …"  "Two months and five days."  "Exactly two months. I made a specific note of it. That means you have sixty rubles coming to you. Subtract nine Sundays … you know you didn't work with Koyla on Sundays, you only took walks. And three holidays. …"  Julia Vassilyevna flushed a deep red and picked at the flounce of her dress, but—not a word.  "Three holidays, therefore take off twelve rubles. Four days Kolya was sick and there were no lessons, as you were occupied only with Vanya. Three days you had a toothache and my wife gave you permission not to work after lunch. Twelve and seven— nineteen. Subtract … that leaves … hmm … forty-one rubles. Correct?"  Julia Vassilyevna's left eye reddened and filled with moisture. Her chin trembled; she coughed nervously and blew her nose, but—not a word.  "Around New Year's you broke a teacup and saucer; take off two rubles. The cup cost more, it was an heirloom, but—let it go. When didn't I take a loss! Then due to your neglect, Kolya climbed a tree and tore his jacket; take away ten. Also due to your heedlessness the maid stole Vanya's shoes. You ought to watch everything. You get paid for it. So, that means five more rubles off. The tenth of January I gave you ten rubles… . ."  "You didn't," whispered Julia Vassilyevna.  "But I made a note of it."  "Well … all right."  "Take twenty-seven from forty-one—that leaves fourteen."  Both eyes filled with tears. Perspiration appeared on the thin, pretty little nose. Poor girl!  "Only once was I given any money," she said in a trembling voice, "and that was by your wife. Three rubles, nothing more."  "Really? You see now, and I didn't make a note of it. Take three from fourteen … leaves eleven. Here's your money, my dear. Three, three, three, one and one. Here it is!"  I handed her eleven rubles. She took them and with trembling fingers stuffed them into her pocket.  "Merci," she whispered.  I jumped and started pacing the room. I was overcome with anger.  "For what, this—'merci'?" I asked.  "For the money."  "But you know I've cheated you, for God's sake—robbed you! I have actually stolen from you! Why this 'merci'?"  "In my other places they didn't give me anything at all."  "They didn't give you anything? No wonder! I played a little joke on you, a cruel lesson just to teach you. … I'm going to give you the entire eighty rubles! Here they are in an envelope all ready for you. … Is it really possible to be so spineless? Why don't you protest? Why be silent? Is it possible in this world to be without teeth and claws—to be such a nincompoop?"  She smiled crookedly and I read her expression: "It is possible."  I asked her pardon for the cruel lesson and, to her great surprise, gave her the eighty rubles. She murmured her little "merci" several times and went out. I looked after her and thought: "How easy it is to crush the weak in this world!" |

#### *Figure 1.4 shows the evidence one student collected from "A Nincompoop." How does the student's evidence compare with yours?*

#### Figure 1.4. Student's Completed Reading for Meaning Organizer

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| **Evidence For** | **Statements** | **Evidence Against** |
| * "Not a word" * She takes only 11 rubles when she's owed 80. * She says "Merci." | Julia accepts her wages from the narrator without protest. | In the beginning, she protests   * Forty rubles a month. * She counters him:   + - "Two months and five days."   + - "You didn't." |
| * "In my other places they didn't give me anything at all." * She isn't able to stand up for herself even though she's being taken advantage of. | Julia is used to being powerless. |  |
| * She says "Merci." * She stops protesting and accepts what he gives her. | Julia respects the narrator. |  |
| * "How easy it is to crush the weak in this world!" * Lesson seems more for his own curiosity than for her. * He's cruel to her. | The narrator is more interested in conducting a social experiment than in teaching Julia a life lesson. | * But … he does give her the money and tells her he's teaching her a lesson. |
|  | Chekhov would disapprove of Hemingway's "iceberg" theory of literature (most of what's happening lies below the surface). | * He would almost definitely approve of the "iceberg theory." All that's going on inside Julia's head is not revealed to the reader. |

### Phase Three: Reflection and Discussion

Once students have read the story and made their notes on their organizers, they meet in small discussion groups. Students review each statement and explain their position on the statement using evidence from the story. Some of the discussion groups get rather lively, so Angel reminds students that disagreement is natural, but that all positions should be treated with respect and should be based on evidence from the text.

After a few minutes of small-group discussion, Angel reconvenes the class for a whole-class discussion. During the discussion, Angel asks students to share their ideas about the story, about how Chekhov handles the theme of being trapped, and about their own thinking and reading processes.

### Phase Four: Synthesis

"OK," says Angel. "Now it's time to develop your own interpretation of this wonderful little story. Take a second look at our four reasons authors write about being trapped [see p. 23]. Which of these reasons do you believe was foremost on Chekhov's mind when he wrote 'A Nincompoop'? Or do you think Chekhov had something else in mind?"

After reviewing the four reasons carefully, students begin their task of writing a brief essay with three guidelines in mind:

1. State your position clearly and up front.
2. Include at least three specific pieces of evidence from the story in your essay.
3. Include at least one possible counterargument to your position and defend your position against it.

# You Try It: Synthesizing Your Learning

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| **Discuss your position. Do you believe Chekhov was most interested in revealing injustice to promote social change, expressing frustration, helping the reader identify with Julia, or creating a conversation about a difficult issue? Use the space below to collect your ideas from the discussion.** |

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#### Assignment:

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| **1. How did Reading for Meaning help Angel achieve his lesson goals?** |
| **2. How do the phases of the strategy support the principles behind the strategy?** |
| **3. How is Reading for Meaning similar to what you already do with your students?** |