

Foreword

Recently, while spending my time riding subways to and from Columbia University or to New York Public Schools reading a book in Erin Hunter's *Warriors* series, the excitement picked up when Bluestar, the Windclan leader of the group of wild cats, and two of her apprentices are attacked by rats. Bluestar is fatally injured and Firepaw, the orange tabby protagonist, is very concerned whether or not Bluestar is still alive. To his joy, Bluestar recovers, explaining that she lost the fourth life the Starclan Warriors (departed warrior cats whose spirits reside in a constellation) had given her. Later, when Bluestar confesses that she had actually lost her seventh life during the rat attack, Firepaw's anxiety rises again. This time he expresses his grave worry that the Windclan leader will leave them if two more fatal injuries occur.

In the second book of the series, Bluestar is stricken with "green cough" during the leaf bear (winter) season and loses an eighth life. Firepaw has been promoted from apprentice to warrior, and is now named Fireheart. He, as well as the other warriors, becomes very protective of Bluestar, refusing to allow her to participate in any other activities that place her in harm's way.

Although I have pulled only two scenarios from this totally mesmerizing series of books (mesmerizing especially if you, like me, are a cat lover), I use the previous paragraphs to illustrate my engagement with the book. In fact, I was so moved beyond merely reading the words that I missed several subway stops! I analyze my reading below.

I used information from my *background knowledge* (e.g., cats have nine lives) to *infer* that even though gravely ill, Bluestar could be revived. I *created meaningful connections* from my experiences of loyalty to school/university communities where I have taught and educational networks in which I have been a member, in order to understand the whole concept of honoring a "warrior code," holding the clan leader in a position of respect, having concerns about losing a leader.

I *inferred* from Fireheart's reaction that losing the fourth life was not good, but that Bluestar could still feel and function. To do this, I *drew conclusions* by using my knowledge of cats and several bits of text information: Only the help of Barkley allowed Bluestar to be freed from the gnawing rats; Bluestar was left with serious wounds; the warriors gathered spiderwebs to close the wounds; cats have nine lives, which left Bluestar with five; Bluestar opens her eyes and speaks to the waiting clan members; she is able to make the trip back to the Windclan Camp.

I created meaningful connections with my previous reading experiences with fantasy books (e.g., *Watership Down*, and my brief inquiry into mystics and new age thinking). I made *text-to-text connections* from these sources to help me understand the mystical qualities Hunter uses in her writing as she describes some of the environment, beliefs, artifacts, messages through dreams, and the setting of the warrior cats.

In all of my interactions with this text, I was *self-regulating*, using the sub-components (skills) of this and other strategies, to support my comprehension and create a realistic interpretation of Hunter's story. For example, I figured out that a road with moving vehicles is called a thunderpath.

My dialogue exemplifies a belief we must share about comprehension and comprehension instruction if we are to teach all children to become literate. James Flood and Diane Lapp (1991) ask educators to alter their belief that each text has one, true accurate meaning and accept what Rosenblatt (1978) calls "transaction" or interrogation between the text and the reader (p. 736). Therefore, to discuss my reading as I did, I had to bring as much to the page as the page brought to me.

The preceding discussion may not have been enough to get you to run out and buy a copy of the first book in the *Warriors* series, but one middle school child in New York City Public Schools did just that. He saw me in the school during my visit after I gave a book talk to his group about *Warriors: Into the Wild*. He excitedly walked up and said, "I got the book!!!" (Really his teacher went to the bookstore and bought it for him.)

We enjoyed a conversation about where he was in the first book, *Into the Wild*, where I was in the series, and our hopes and fears for Fireheart and the other members of the Windclan. The student was not able to use the italicized vocabulary that I used above to describe his reading. Nor did he realize that in order to fully comprehend Hunter's message and create an interpretation of her work, a reader may access one strategy and meld information and processing gleaned from several supporting skills while also integrating another strategy. But, I feel that this boy, if taught by a teacher who read, internalized, studied, and reshaped her teaching using Lois Lanning's book, *Four Powerful Strategies for Struggling Readers, Grades 3–8*, would be able to use some of the same language and behaviors I used to describe how he made sense of the struggles between the four clans of wild cats trying to survive in their territories that are being overtaken by "two-legs" (humans).

I have read and reread the chapters of *Four Powerful Strategies for Struggling Readers, Grades 3–8*, and through Lois Lanning's explanations, examples, and practical teaching recommendations, I can explain my comprehension processing using her terms. And, I do not feel I would have described my comprehension processing in the same way before reading her book. The first step in effective teaching requires us to have a thorough, research-based understanding of what we are trying to teach. We (teachers), like our students, benefit from the words of David Wood (1998): If children [teachers], (1) do not know what is relevant to the task as set, and (2) cannot analyze and grasp what they need to take into account, and if they are (3) unsure of the teacher's [comprehension teaching] motives, or if

(4) they assume that there is more to the problem than meets the eye, they will appear incompetent.

Lois makes us competent about the comprehension process and its most efficient strategies by citing numerous studies, papers, and authorities who are recognized as leaders in comprehension research. In addition, she has tested the words of these authorities by working with numerous groups of teachers and children implementing the theories that she built into her model of comprehension instruction. In her writing, Lois practices the research on transfer by using Bransford and Swartz's (1999) overriding principle of presenting new material: (1) in multiple contexts throughout the book, (2) through "what-if" problem solving for teaching comprehension strategies, and (3) by requiring us to invent solutions to a broad class of applications for teaching comprehension strategies rather than simply a teaching idea or graphic organizer to teach a single strategy.

Yes, I have heard the mantra from some teachers, "I don't want research, or theories, or models! I want practical ideas I can use tomorrow."

Through Lois's thorough, teacher-friendly descriptions of identified "best practices" in teaching comprehension, she gives examples of what this research means for effective teaching throughout her narrative. She follows this with practical descriptions of how to put these research ideas into practice in classroom situations. Her lesson examples are stellar and provide a road map for teachers to use in constructing other lessons around the skills and behaviors that lead to her Four Powerful Comprehension Strategies—*summarizing, creating meaningful connections, self-regulating, and inferring*—using a Gradual Release Lesson Model of strategy instruction.

I feel this book will become a major contribution to building an effective comprehension curriculum for struggling readers from Grades 3–8. But even further, the author herself challenges us to read many different sources, letting us know that this book will become one of a group of books that will assist us in moving toward effective teaching of comprehension to *all* children.

I would strongly encourage the readers of this book to read several of the books on teaching comprehension cited as well as others. Only by studying the literature can one begin to understand the complexities of comprehension. By reading widely and comparing authors' thinking, confusion and overlaps involving terminology become apparent (see p. 2 of this volume).

And I know this advice comes from Lois Lanning's heart, her own belief system, and her own practice. Lois and I have a history spanning many years. When she completed her master's degree in reading education at Ashland University, Ashland, Ohio, the faculty unanimously agreed that she should receive the "Outstanding Reading Educator Award." Her industry, quest for learning, willingness to challenge her thinking and the thinking of others, and her dedication to finding the best practices for helping all children learn earned her this award. As I watched her move from District Reading Consultant, to Principal of an elementary school, to Assistant Superintendent of Schools, and completion of her doctoral studies, this industry and quest for best teaching never ceased. She was and continues to be the administrator we dream of who understands teaching, studies with her teachers, and challenges herself and

others to stretch their learning and mastery of teaching all children. She also found funds in budgets and grants to provide excellent staff development, which also provided instruction for students needing extra help in summer programs that continued through the school year.

In the late 1980s, Lois and I became colleagues when she moved to Connecticut and brought me in as a consultant to work with her teachers studying “Teaching for Integration of Sources of Information During Small Group Reading Instruction.” As she moved from district to district, we continued to work together, watching children, teachers, and each other. We spent evenings in her home, eating the wonderful dinners cooked by her husband, Sam, boring him with our discoveries of the day. From this beginning work, we decided to branch out into her current studies and investigations of comprehension instruction for struggling students in upper elementary and middle school.

As she mentions in the Introduction, after a conversation at the very beginning of writing this book, our careers took us in different directions. Although we meet periodically at conferences, through e-mail, and during phone conversations, my current duties as Senior Primary Reading Advisor to the Columbia University Teachers College Reading and Writing Project prompted me to encourage Lois to write the book alone.

Reading the book in order to write this Foreword was an excellent opportunity for me to view the work she has done with her teachers over the past years, and marvel that she can still stretch my thinking through her written words. She will do that for you also as you work your way through these pages. Be prepared to dog-ear pages, use post-its, and insert your notes when you try something, but also be prepared to learn from a wonderful teacher, colleague, and dearest friend of mine.

—Joseph F. Yukish, PhD
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