

Student Background

Marjorie is one of my 5th grade classroom students. She comes from a home which includes her young mother, her mother's boyfriend, who she refers to as her "uncle", and her younger brother. Marjorie does not know her biological father, but is comfortable with her living situation as this man has been in her life since she was very small.

Marjorie tends to have difficulty when in social situations. Most of her problems occur in areas such as the lunchroom and outside recess where there is not a lot of structure. She goes to Central Michigan University every other week, while her mother goes every week. She is working with specialists there on her social skills. I have a "report card" that needs to be filled out daily to report on her behavior in the classroom. She takes this with her when she goes to Central Michigan University so that they can assess her daily behaviors. Marjorie also sees a speech therapist once a week for 1/2 hour. In addition to this, she will start seeing the school social worker once a week in January.

Marjorie spends her regular school day in the classroom, with great attendance. After the 7 1/2 hours of classroom time, she stays after school for a SPARKS program 4 days a week, thus getting an extra 2 hours of time in the school environment.

The reason I chose Marjorie as my subject for this case study was because I wanted to dig deeper into reading skills. While she reads quite fluently at a fifth grade level, her comprehension skills are lacking. Ivey (2002) tells us that "In order for students to read fluently and independently, they should be able to read the words near effortlessly, with at least 98% accuracy...this level of fluency is critical for students to be able to focus on meaning and

develop strategic behaviors.” (p236). (Standard I) Marjorie enjoys reading both to herself and aloud and is not afraid to read aloud to the entire classroom. However, when retelling what she has read, she struggles with many basic things such as characters and setting.

Marjorie sometimes reads around words that she does not know. I am certain that this is one reason for her comprehension to be lacking. If she cannot read the words, she does not know what she is saying. When she does slow down and take the time to figure out the word, she is also losing meaning. Ivey (2002) tells us that “if most of their cognitive resources are used to decode words, then little is left for comprehension” and that “students get sidetracked trying to figure out the words.” (p236) This seems to be only part of what I wanted to look into with Marjorie. While my main focus will be her comprehension, I also want to work on her accuracy.

Before beginning this case study, I talked with Marjorie about my intention to focus on her, specifically her comprehension skills with this study. I made sure that she was okay with this, and she was an eager participant. I told her how the study would progress and what types of things we would work on and talk about and how I would assess her comprehension along the way. This allowed for her to feel more comfortable with the study and made her a more willing participant. (Standard IV).

Each grade level in our building participates in CCT (Community Collaboration Teams). Community Collaboration is a time when all students can work on skills they need at their level. After reviewing different types of data, students are placed into groups based on what they need to work on at the time. (Standard II & III) Title I staff and classroom teachers head up these groups, thus allowing for 7 small groups to be working at one time. Student progress is monitored and groups change periodically as student needs change. During CCT, students work

on phonics, fluency, comprehension, and sight words at this time. If another area becomes prominent, groups change to reflect student needs. These groups take place five days a week and last for 30 minutes per day.

At this time, Marjorie is in my CCT group, which is a low comprehension group. This means that along with 6 other students, Marjorie will be working on strategies that she will be able to use to aid in her comprehension. Using these small groups allows for students to have more one on one time and also provides a safer place for them to be able to speak out as they do not have 28 other students. The students in the group are also struggling with the same types of things, so the student doesn't feel as though they are the only one who does not understand and therefore, they are more willing to ask questions for understanding. (Standard IV)

Lesson Description

For this case study, I chose to first do a pre-assessment to mark a beginning point for this study. Prior testing had shown Marjorie at an Instructional Level with a Level 5 narrative. She was reading 95 words per minute with 100% accuracy, but was only at 50% comprehension for retelling. This test was performed at the end of September. I had Marjorie read a Grade 4 Fluency Passage which equates to a DRA of 40. I did not check her reading rate as I was not concerned about that. I did a running record to determine her accuracy and then asked for retell in order to gauge her comprehension.

Following this assessment, my CCT group began reading the novel Because of Winn-Dixie by Kate DiCamillo (2000). This lesson was more of a unit plan. Students kept track of their reading by making notes after every chapter. After each group of 5 chapters, they were given a short answer comprehension quiz. This was followed by a mini-lesson focusing on a

strategy that they were to think about and work on for the next 5 chapters. These strategies are presented in all classrooms in our building and are based on research presented in *The CAFE Book: Engaging All Students in Daily Literary Assessment and Instruction*. (Boushey & Moser, 2009). Students also engaged in a small comprehension activity after each group of 5 chapters to help show their understanding of the events in the story. They completed the novel study with a cumulative project based on the story. (Standard V)

The second lesson that I chose to do with Marjorie and my CCT group involved teaching them strategies learned by reading *Constructing Meaning Through Kid-Friendly Comprehension Strategy Instruction*. (Boyles, Nancy, 2004). The students are first introduced to the language of the strategies. Then the strategy is modeled by thinking through a chunked text. When reading chunks of text as a group, students are invited to take a strategy card and share their thinking. The text is then summarized. The rationale behind this is that “Teachers need to teach concepts effectively so that students will have a sufficient number of them in their background knowledge to activate when reading.” (Ehren, 2005) Giving students these other new strategies provides them with another tool for working on their comprehension. (Standard VI)

I chose to end this case study with a post-assessment similar to the one I began with. This would give me a good comparison. Instead of giving Marjorie the same fluency passage as before, I chose to have her read a Grade 5 Fluency Passage (DRA 50). As before, I did not check her reading rate, but did another reading record for accuracy and comprehension.

- Pre Assessment

After talking with Marjorie about the case study and what it would entail, I began with a short pre-assessment. I asked Marjorie to read me a short Fluency Passage. These passages are

used in our entire building by not only the classroom teachers but also the Title I staff as a short, common monitoring tool. Information obtained from these passages can be used to determine which areas need to be looked into further.

I told Marjorie that I wanted her to read the whole passage and she would not be timed. I also let her know that when she finished reading, I was going to ask her to tell me about what she had just read. Marjorie read a Level W Fluency passage which contained 246 words with 4 errors. (Artifact 1) As a team, it was decided that self-corrections would not count as errors in this process as they are using skills to fix their mistakes. This passage is equivalent to a Grade 4 reading passage and a DRA level of 40. When she finished reading, I turned over the paper so she could not look back and asked her to tell me everything that she could remember.

Marjorie's retell was 26 words. She gave me minimal details that were a bit off. While she understood parts of the reading, she wasn't sure on the particulars. For instance, Marjorie told me that the teacher had told the students to "paint only walls". While the passage said that they had "discussed various colors for the classroom walls", it didn't say that the teacher had specified only the walls were to be painted. Another error she had was that she told me "the parents helped decide the color of the walls in the room". The parents helped with the painting, but the students were the ones who chose the colors of paint.

While Marjorie retold what she remembered, she also skipped around a lot. She would first tell me something that happened, then back up to an earlier part of the passage and tell me something from that part. Then she would skip back down to the end. There was no beginning, middle, end in her retelling, just bits and pieces.

Marjorie showed that her fluency level is above the testing level; however, her comprehension is below level. In order for Marjorie to gain comprehension skills, I decided to work with her in a small group setting. This would allow for more focused discussions and modeling of strategies. It would also give me a chance to work closer with her in order to determine which strategies she was using and which were working for her. (Standard IV, V, and VI)

- Lesson 1

After determining Marjorie's needs, she was placed in a low comprehension group in which I was the CCT instructor. The students asked and voted to decide that they would read a novel and work on their skills during this reading. I chose the book Because of Winn-Dixie by Kate DiCamillo (2000). This book is a Reading Level of 4.0, DRA 40-44. This was also the starting point assessment level of the passage I had tested Marjorie with.

Before we began reading the novel, I asked students to make some predictions. Almost all of the students had already seen the movie based on the novel, but none had read the book. We had a discussion about the differences between movies and books. I reminded them not to rely on information from one to determine what's happening in the other.

In order to better assess student reading and comprehension, I chose to have students read aloud. Students took turns reading the novel one page at a time. I also chose to take a turn and read aloud. My reasoning for doing this was two-fold. First, I wanted to speed up the process after a slower reader finished. Secondly, I wanted the students to focus on what they were hearing rather than having to struggle with the words. Chard (2002) tells us that "modeling of fluent reading also seems to boost students' comprehension, as they not only hear how a skilled

reader reads, but are able to understand the text rather than focusing all their attention on decoding”. (p404)

Having the opportunity to stop and talk and teach at different points during the reading enabled me to monitor student understanding as we read. “The NRP (National Reading Panel, 2000) presented the case that instruction in guided oral reading is an important part of a reading program and is associated with gains in fluency and comprehension.” (Chard, 2002, p402)

After reading each chapter, I asked the students to take an index card and on one side of the card, tell something that they had learned and on the other side, write a question that they had. After they finished, we continued to read without talking about their information.

When we had finished with five chapters, we had a discussion about what we had read and what had happened. This was usually after two days of reading aloud. Students were encouraged to talk about what they had written on their cards as part of the discussion. Based on what strategies I had noticed with students reading aloud and what I heard from discussions, I determined which strategy to focus my mini-lesson on. The students would then take a short answer comprehension quiz followed by a short comprehension activity. The quiz answers and the activities helped me to determine their comprehension at that point in the novel.

The day following a discussion and before we read on, I would present a mini-lesson addressing one of the strategies from our CAFÉ board; which is present in all fifth grade classrooms in our building. As these strategies had already been introduced in whole group settings, I chose to do a lot of modeling. I first asked students what they could tell me about that particular strategy and what it “looked like”. I would then model the strategy for them using a

short picture book and doing a “think aloud” as I read. I would then tell the students that this strategy was going to be our focus when reading the next five chapters and that I would be looking and listening for this. Making them aware helps students “become more involved in planning their strategies” (Blanchowicz & Ogle, 2001, pp. 118), and reminds them to use the strategy in their reading.

We continued in this manner throughout the book, varying the comprehension activities based on the strategy focus. When the novel was complete, students were assigned a cumulative project that would reflect their understanding of the novel. They could choose from things such as a time capsule, a book cover, a collage, or a puppet play. This was assigned on a Thursday and the following Monday they brought in their projects to share and we finished with a party similar to the one at the end of the novel.

Marjorie chose to make a shoe box diorama of the party that takes place at the end of the book. She did not choose to take a book home with her for reference. Her project was awed by all in the group. Not only did she make clay figures of the Preacher, Opal and Winn-Dixie, but she included a tree (for the bottles), little clay pickles, and a table of food. She lined her box with paper and put colored streamers in just as they did in the book. It was an excellent show of the ending scene. She shared her story, once again, adding details about who the people were, why they were there and gave a brief summary of the story.

Throughout this process, Marjorie had ups and downs. She maintained her fluent level of reading, but her comprehension wavered. After the first set of chapters, she did an excellent job on her Character Map (Artifact 2). She chose to talk about Opal and included a lot of important details from the reading. Then the next Character Activity (Artifact 3) was not even close. She

was supposed to choose a character that's like her or how she would like to be. She appeared to put in random answers. Then at the end of the book, they were to use their five senses to make an Imagery Tree (Artifact 4). Marjorie again hit on the details like the rain and the pickles Otis brought.

- Lesson 2

After completing the novel reading, I chose to continue working with strategies. I wanted to be sure that the students had plenty of strategies that they could activate while they were reading. The first lesson had students reading aloud a long piece while using their known strategies to aid in their comprehension. More “think aloud” modeling needed to be done for the students to be able to continue using what they now. Using language from *Constructing Meaning Through Kid-Friendly Comprehension Strategy Instruction*. (Boyles, Nancy, 2004), I introduced students to the new strategies.

I first found a short, two-page story to use in modeling and “thinking aloud”. I did a “think aloud” before reading, using language such as “noticing, guessing, wonder, figure out, and connections”. This helped the students think about prior knowledge and making predictions before reading. “Students learn to set purposes for reading by predicting what the text will be about, then listening to confirm or revise their predictions” (Ivey, 2002, p242)

The next step was to read aloud the first chunk of the text, then do another think aloud using the same vocabulary. This process was repeated through the end of the story, doing a think aloud after a short chunk of the reading. The same vocabulary was repeated as this is the vocabulary that names the strategies being introduced. After modeling, the strategy names were introduced along with strategy cards for reference. (Artifact 5)

The group was given a short text to read. As a group, chunks of the text were read. After reading a chunk, the strategy cards were laid on the table. Each person from the group took one card and had to use that strategy to share their thinking. “Students will learn most when they are actually making cognitive decisions on their own as they read.” (Ivey, 2002, p242) Having students make the choice of which strategy they want to share with will help them become familiar and comfortable with this strategy and make the decision to use it in their reading. After the entire text was read, students were then asked to give a verbal summary of the text.

During the modeling and think aloud portion of this lesson, heads were nodding and words were being added to my thinking. Everyone was on board and getting it. Then when the cards came out, it was more obvious that they understood the vocabulary and what it meant. When students were asked to share their thinking after chunked text in the small group, the comfort level changed.

Marjorie is very familiar with predicting in reading. Given the choice, she frequently selects that strategy. One of the vocabulary words used in this lesson was “guessing/predicting”. I found that when cards were placed on the table, Marjorie grabbed for that one every time. Her comfort zone was with predicting and she was having a hard time moving from that. I had to stop giving her that choice in order to move her to make other choices.

While Marjorie preferred guessing/predicting, when having to make another choice, she picked various cards each time. She did not find another comfort level and stay there, but rather tried out different strategies. The first time she chose a card, she stumbled a bit, but by the second time she had the answer ready.

This was telling me that Marjorie was able to use the strategies that she had known and any new ones that were presented. The question was if she would use them on her own without prompting from anyone and would she use them during reading to help with her comprehension. It felt like she was ready to move on, so I decided to test her once again.

- Post Assessment

This time, I chose to test Marjorie at a higher level than before. I knew she was fluent at a fifth grade level, but was looking for a better comprehension score than she had in September. As with the pre-assessment, I first explained to her that she would be reading a passage and then would have to tell me about what she had read.

Marjorie read a Level Z Fluency passage. This passage had 211 words and she read with only two errors. (Artifact 6) This is a Grade 5 Fluency Passage (DRA 50). As before, I turned over the paper when she was finished and asked her to tell me what she had read. This time Marjorie's retell was 49 words, up from 26 with the pre-assessment. While Marjorie did have a bit of confusion still, she was much improved over the pre-assessment. She remembered many more details and retold in the order in which she read. Her errors were minor and did not change the meaning of the text in any way. She does have a couple of issues with multi-syllabic words and vocabulary that may be a deterrent with her comprehension, but she did show overall progression.

Analysis

Based on the findings with the post-assessment, it appears that by focusing in one strategy at a time, Marjorie has learned to depend on those strategies for her comprehension. By choosing to spotlight one strategy, I was able to re-introduce Marjorie to the strategy, model it for her, and

make her aware of it while she read. She had only one tactic to work with while she read. Using modeling and thinking aloud helped her to see the strategy being used and how she could use it while she read.

Being in a small group and having only a few other students who are working on the same skill helped Marjorie also. In the classroom with all other students she is more reluctant to answer questions, as if she's afraid that she will be heckled for getting something wrong. The small group setting provided a safer environment for her to open up and talk about her learning. She also was able to hear from others with the same struggles and see how they handled it.

Reflection

Looking back at this case study, I would definitely make some changes. First of all, I would have done the second lesson first and then read the novel. That would have given Marjorie more choices from the beginning. It seemed as if after using the strategies on small chunks like we did in lesson 2, Marjorie was more aware of the strategies.

Both lessons provided for small group active participation, so I don't feel that was an issue. Since the students were taking turns reading aloud in the first lesson and sharing their thinking in the second, they all were pretty well engaged. There was not a time when they were off task. If these lessons were presented whole group, it may be harder to keep their attention. This is a good lesson for small group participants.

The data that was collected was added to Marjorie's folder. After having another data meeting last week regarding our CCT groups, it was determined that three of the students in this group would be moved out of it as their performance was significant.

Marjorie will remain in my group for the next four weeks. One factor in this decision was that the other group she would be moving to is led by a teacher that she clashes with. Marjorie works best in safe, structured environments that she is used to. It was determined that she can still benefit from further comprehension teaching, although more independently at this time.

References

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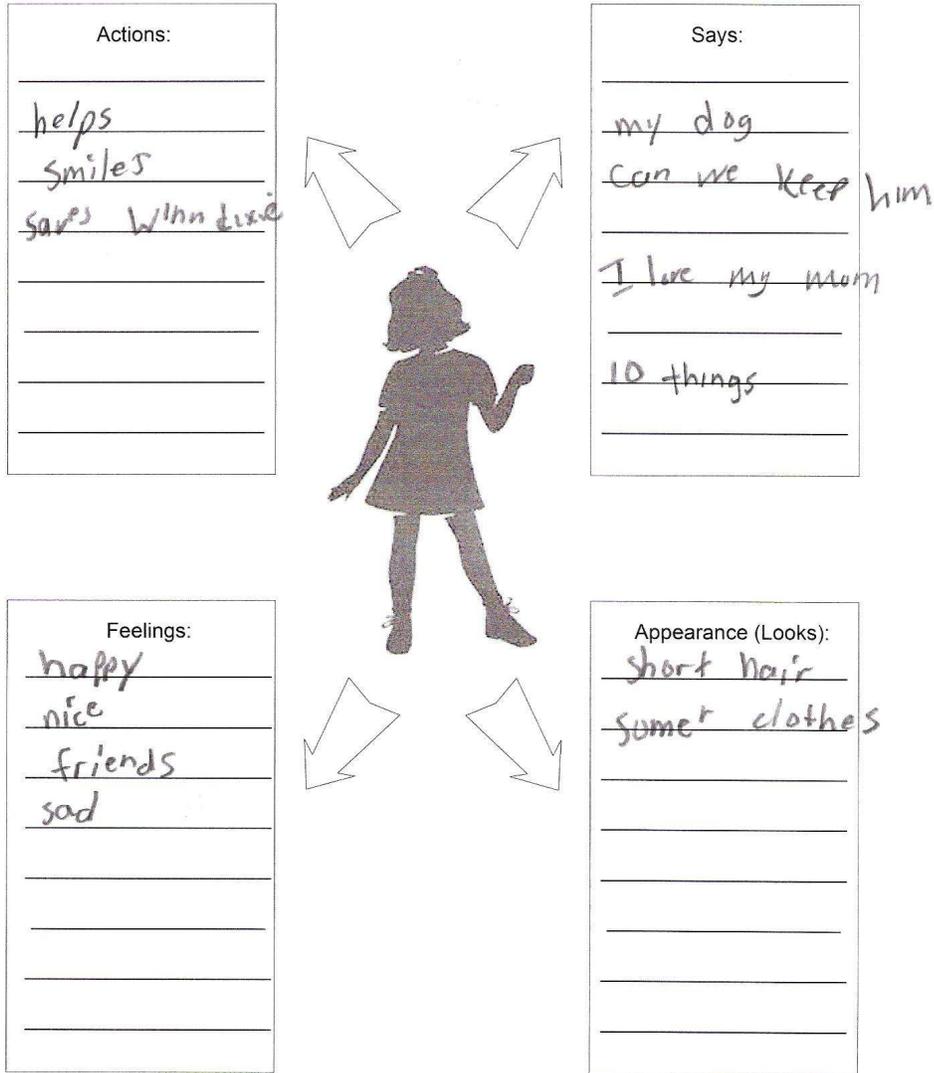
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Artifact 2

MarJorie Character Map



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Artifact 3

Name <i>MarJorie</i>	Date	Period
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Character Study

Other people think that I...

like dogs

What I really like is...

dogs

One day I will...

fly

Draw a picture in this space.

MOM



I really dislike...

to read

I like people who...

sleep

My favorite thing to do is...

sleep

Artifact 4

MarJorie

Imagery Tree

Directions: Record your observations for each of the five senses.

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Artifact 5

Connecting



Wondering



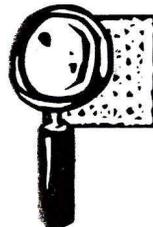
Picturing



Figuring Out



Noticing



Guessing



Artifact 6

DRA 50 Grade 5

Reading a-z

LEVEL 4

Fluency Passage

Success Stories

Name Maryjane

Word Count: 211

Finding Refuge

"Freedom!" was all Sierra thought as she walked outside of the Chicago airport. 14
 Her home in the Middle East had been bombed while she went to market. Her home 30
 was a smoldering pile of rubble, but luckily, her aunt had also escaped unharmed. 44
 War had surrounded their lives for years. Her father and two brothers had lost 58
 their lives in a car bombing. Sierra wanted to walk down the street without feeling 73
 frightened. Her aunt was determined to send her out of the country, to a place 88
 beyond the violence. She promised herself not to forget her legacy. She loved her 102
 family but felt forced to seek out a better life. 112

Sierra's friend, Reisha, met her at the airport. The two girls hugged with a 126
renewed sense of happiness. Reisha had come to the United States with other Middle 140
 Eastern **exiles** a few years earlier. She graduated from a local university and was 154
 now a top doctor. Reisha was a **humanitarian**. She used her medical skills to help the 170
 less fortunate. Sierra planned to be a teacher. She could not speak English as **fluently** 185
 as Reisha but hoped that would change. 192

Sierra noticed people laughing and smiling while they walked. A stranger even 204
 said, "Hello." Had Sierra finally found **refuge**? 211

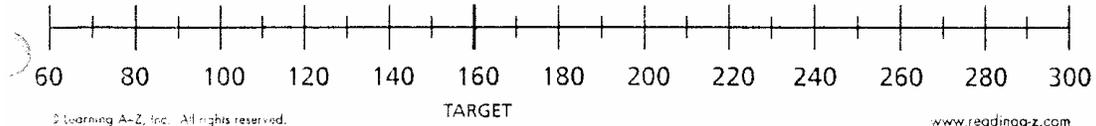
Revised 49 words
 *don't know words
 *don't know words

Number of Errors

1	2	3	4	5	6
✓	✓				

Accuracy (%):

Reading Rate (Words Per Minute):



Lesson 1: Comprehension Strategies**Subject:** Language Arts**Grade Level:** 5th Grade**Duration:** Approx 10 days, 30 minutes per day – during CCT small group time**Lesson Objectives:** In this lesson students will become more aware of and focused on comprehension strategies. They will read a novel and practice different strategies along the way.**GLCE's:****R.CM.05.01** connect personal knowledge, experiences, and understanding of the world to themes and perspectives in text through oral and written responses.**R.CM.05.02** retell through concise summarization grade-level narrative and informational text.**R.CM.05.03** analyze global themes, universal truths, and principles within and across text to create a deeper understanding by drawing conclusions, making inferences, and synthesizing.**Materials:** Copy of Because of Winn-Dixie by Kate DiCamillo for each student, Character Map, Give 'em a Hand, Character Study, Imagery Tree, Section 1-5 Comprehension Quiz from A Guide for Using Because of Winn-Dixie in the Classroom Literature Unit by Teacher Created Resources**Resources:** A Guide for Using Because of Winn-Dixie in the Classroom Literature Unit:Teacher Created Resources (2003)**Rationale/ Background:** Students will work on using CAFÉ strategies during read aloud time. Students need to have knowledge of many different strategies in order to be able to make good choices when reading for comprehension. By having these skills available, they can quickly use the strategy and move on with their reading.**Opening:** The teacher introduces the book Because of Winn-Dixie to the students and asks them to make predictions based on just looking at the cover and hearing the title. Students are asked to access prior knowledge to determine what might happen within this story. Students will then begin to read aloud the novel.**Middle:** After each chapter, students will write down one thing they learned from their reading and one question they still have. After each 5 chapters, the group will have a discussion, referring to those cards, and then take a short comprehension quiz. After the quiz, the students will do a short comprehension activity related to the book. This will continue through the entire book.**Conclusion:** When the students have come to the end of the book, they will be given a choice of a project that they can do that will relay their understanding and go along with the book. They will be given approximately five days to complete this project. On the final day, they will bring

in their project and present it to the class along with the reason they chose that project and an explanation of what it represents. While students present, they will also be having a “party” much like the one that is at the end of the novel. This will wrap up the story.

Adaptations and Extensions: For students who have difficulty writing their questions and findings, the teacher will either help them spell the unknown words or write for them. For students who are unable to come up with a question or something that they have learned, the teacher will help them retell the previous chapter with prompting in order to get them thinking and talking so that they can come up with their information.

Assessment: Assessment will be based on section comprehension quizzes, discussion participation and the final project and presentation.

Lesson 2: Constructing Meaning – Introducing new Strategy Vocabulary**Subject:** Language Arts**Grade Level:** 5th Grade**Duration:** 30 minutes – during CCT small group time

Lesson Objectives: In this lesson students will be introduced to new strategy vocabulary that they can use while reading. The students will practice this vocabulary after reading chunks of text in order to become familiar with them. Students will then use these strategies in their everyday reading.

GLCE's:

R.CM.05.01 connect personal knowledge, experiences, and understanding of the world to themes and perspectives in text through oral and written responses.

R.CM.05.02 retell through concise summarization grade-level narrative and informational text.

Materials: Strategy vocabulary cards (set of 2 each card), short text to read in chunks

Resources: Constructing Meaning Through Kid-Friendly Comprehension Strategy Instruction, Nancy Boyles (2004)

Rationale/ Background: Students will be able to have a wider variety of strategies to use while they are reading. This will help them understand their reading better (comprehension) and allow for better retelling.

Opening: The teacher introduces the strategies to the group. The teacher will model how to think through each piece of a chunked text using those strategies.

Middle: In a group, students will read chunks of a text. When finished with each chunk, the student will choose a strategy card. They will then be invited to share their thinking that is linked to that strategy card.

Conclusion: When the students have read through the text and practiced sharing their thinking, one student will be chosen to verbally summarize the story that was read.

Adaptations and Extensions: For students who have difficulty reading the strategy cards, pictures will be added to the card to help them. For students who have difficulty remembering what the strategy is, larger sized posters will be displayed with pictures and words as a reminder.

Assessment: Assessment will be based on discussions and shared thinking.