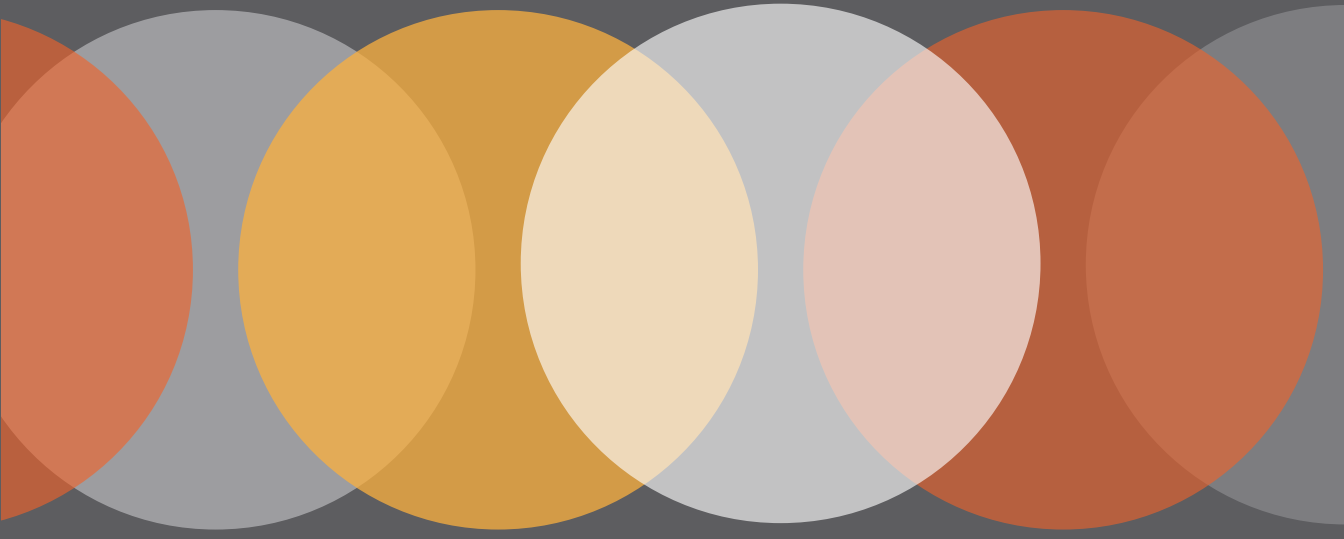
The CORE SIX

Essential Strategies for Achieving Excellence with the Common Core



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Foreword by Heidi Hayes Jacobs

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Foreword

Heidi Hayes Jacobs

The word *core* has special meaning for educators. *Core* suggests what is essential, what is at the heart of teaching and learning. Whether designing curriculum units or laying out instructional plans, teachers make decisions about what to emphasize and what must sit by the wayside. How do we make cogent and meaningful choices about what is core for our learners? How can we have confidence in our instructional sequences so that our students forge a pathway to the core?

These questions take on even more significance with the advent of the Common Core State Standards, as schools and districts dive into unwrapping, scaffolding, and integrating these standards directly into their practice. While we seek guidance on how to address these new standards, we simultaneously wish to adhere to what we know works—the finest of proven teaching methodology.

In your hands, you hold a genuine edu-toolkit loaded with clear, specific strategies to help you and your colleagues address key Common Core–related challenges at all grade levels. Based on years of field experience and action research, Harvey Silver, Thomas Dewing, and Matthew Perini have shaped an eminently practical book focused on six core practices that students need to cultivate to become independent learners. The six strategies clearly address the CCSS, but they do more than that. Given that these Core Six impact lifelong learning, they directly support the mission of the architects of the Common Core to provide the basis for college and career readiness. The Core Six are

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1. Reading for Meaning.
2. Compare & Contrast.
3. Inductive Learning.
4. Circle of Knowledge.
5. Write to Learn.
6. Vocabulary's CODE.

With these Core Six, the authors have taken the candid and refreshing point of view that you have already steeped yourself in the Common Core State Standards and are fully aware of the importance of this national initiative. Rather than providing a primer on the Common Core, the authors show how six essential strategies can provide a central focus for faculties, a common ground for schoolwide efforts to improve performance and increase student engagement.

Each core strategy is unpacked and revealed through examples for classroom practice with suggested phases, questions, and activities to assist any teacher in any subject. The book is loaded with charts, activity excerpts, images, and text features that make it easy for all teachers to implement the strategies. At the same time, creative teachers will be able to tweak and build on these numerous examples for adaptation in the classroom.

Most important, these Core Six are for our learners. The only person who can improve his or her performance is the individual student. We cannot do it for our students. Our task is to coach them, direct them, and support them so that they know how to assess and improve their own work. To do this well, students need strategies. I believe that these Core Six can easily be translated from teaching strategies to learning strategies for today's students—learning strategies that can be directly fused with 21st century tools and contexts. With the Core Six under their belts, students will be better equipped to tackle the challenges of the future.

Silver, Dewing, and Perini have a spectacular track record of giving educators throughout the world approaches, strategies, and ways of thinking to reach learners and collaborate effectively. With *The Core Six,* the authors have generated another rich contribution to the field, helping us to make astute and critical choices about what should be core in our classrooms.

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Finally, we are thankful for Heidi Hayes Jacobs, who lent her distinctive voice and passion to this book's foreword within an almost impossible time frame. Heidi has a rare gift for connecting what's new in education to what's always been true about good teaching and learning.

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Introducing the Core Six

Let's begin with what this book is *not*. This book is not a guide to the Common Core State Standards. In it, you will not find the story of how the Common Core emerged, a detailed description of what the standards cover, or an explanation of how the standards are organized. For this information, we recommend visiting the Common Core website (www.corestandards.org) or, for a deeper look, reading John Kendall's (2011) *Understanding Common Core State Standards*.

The Core Six is for educators who already have a strong grasp on the Common Core and are eager to do something about it. In this book, we offer a collection of research-based strategies that will help teachers and students respond to the demands of the Common Core, particularly the *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects*, which are a "shared responsibility within the school" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA Center], Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010a, p. 4) and affect every subject area and grade level.

Regular use of the strategies in this book will help students become better at

- Reading and understanding rigorous texts.
- Evaluating evidence and using it to support positions.
- Conducting comparative analyses.
- Finding important patterns and structures built into content.
- Mastering academic vocabulary and integrating it into speech and writing.

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- Understanding and contributing to meaningful discussions about content.
- Using writing to advance learning and clarify thinking.
- Writing comfortably in the key Common Core text types: arguments, informative/explanatory texts, and narratives.

Figure i.1 describes each of the six strategies offered in this book and highlights some of the Common Core skills that each strategy builds.

Making Research Work

Thanks to more than 40 years of research on classroom practice, we know better than ever what works. We know which strategies are likely to increase engagement and raise student achievement, and we know which are not worthy of instructional time. Every strategy in this book is backed by a strong research base.

But research is only part of the story. There is a real gap between research and practice, and any strategy can fall flat in the classroom. Take Compare & Contrast, a strategy that extensive research has found correlates with sizeable gains in student achievement. Ask a few hundred teachers about Compare & Contrast, however, and you will likely get a different take. We actually *did* ask a few hundred teachers about their experiences with Compare & Contrast and learned why a strategy with such a rich research base often fails and how to make classroom comparisons powerful and effective. Here's the gist: if you want to get results, you need to treat Compare & Contrast as a learning strategy rather than an end-of-learning assessment; make sure students have clear criteria for comparing items; and guide students to deeper thinking in phases.

When teachers make moves like these, student learning takes off. The promise of the research is realized. That's why, during the last 35 years, we have worked with thousands of teachers who have helped us test and refine strategies so that they are not only research-based but also classroom-proven. This holds true for every strategy in this book: all of them have been refined over time with the intent of making research come to life in the classroom.

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FIGURE I.1 The Core Six

Reading for Meaning helps students develop the skills that proficient readers use to make sense of rigorous texts. The strategy helps build these Common Core skills:

- Managing text complexity.
- Evaluating and using evidence.
- Developing the core skills of reading (e.g., finding main ideas, making inferences, and analyzing characters and content).

Compare & Contrast teaches students to conduct a thorough comparative analysis. The strategy helps build these Common Core skills:

- Conducting comparative analyses of academic content (e.g., renewable versus nonrenewable energy).
- Conducting comparative readings of two or more texts.
- Integrating information from multiple sources.

Inductive Learning helps students find patterns and structures built into content through an inductive process (analyzing specifics to form generalizations). The strategy helps build these Common Core skills:

- Finding patterns and making logical inferences.
- Supporting thinking with evidence.
- Mastering academic vocabulary.

Circle of Knowledge is a strategic framework for planning and conducting classroom discussions that engage all students in deeper thinking and thoughtful communication. The strategy helps build these Common Core skills:

- Speaking, listening, and presenting.
- Integrating and evaluating information.
- Collaborating with peers.

Write to Learn helps teachers integrate writing into daily instruction and develop students' writing skills in the key text types associated with college and career readiness. The strategy helps build these Common Core skills:

- Developing higher-order thinking through writing.
- Writing in the key Common Core text types: arguments, informative/explanatory texts, and narratives.
- Writing for a wide range of tasks, audiences, and purposes.

Vocabulary's CODE is a strategic approach to vocabulary instruction that improves students' ability to retain and use crucial vocabulary terms. The strategy helps build these Common Core skills:

- Mastering academic vocabulary.
- Improving literacy across all strands (reading, writing, speaking/listening, and language).
- Building background knowledge as a foundation for success in school, college, and career.

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Six Tips for Inspired Instruction

Even a strategy that has been refined through classroom use is not a magic bullet; it won't increase student engagement or learning on its own. What's more, if you treat a strategy as a list of steps to follow, then the learning you get back will be similarly prosaic. To ensure that your work in strategic instruction is inspired rather than tired, we offer the following six tips.

1. Capture students' interest. Both common sense and research tell us that when students are engaged in what they are learning, their achievement increases (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Marzano, 2007). Whenever you begin a lesson, you will experience better results if you take the time to design a good "hook." A hook is a question or an activity that provokes student thinking and activates prior knowledge related to the content to come. A well-designed hook will establish a strong sense of intrigue or curiosity at the lesson's outset. To design an attention-grabbing hook, try using

- *Mystery*. On paper, the U.S. Civil War was a mismatch. So why did it last for more than four years? Generate some ideas.
- *Controversy*. Look at these famous masterpieces of modern art. Some use only basic shapes or a single color. Is this really art? What is art?
- *Personal experiences*. Have you ever felt so guilty about something that you thought others could tell you did something wrong just by looking at you? How can guilt be like a stain?
- "*What if" questions*. What if there were no plants? How might the world be different?

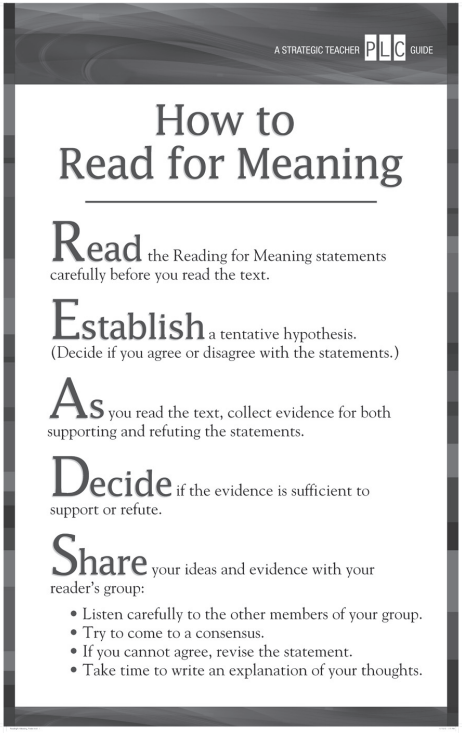
Hooks can also focus on the specific strategy you'll be using. For example, if you're about to introduce the Compare & Contrast strategy, you might ask students to think about a time they had to compare two or more things to make a good decision.

After students have collected and shared their ideas, bridge the discussion to the lesson: "Good! You have come up with some great examples of how we use comparison in our everyday lives. Now, let's learn how we can make our comparative thinking even stronger using the Compare & Contrast strategy."

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2. Explain the strategy's purpose and students' roles in the strategy. Students don't come to school with a strategy gene. Strategic thinking does not usually come naturally. Whenever you use a strategy, take the time to tell students its name and explain how it works and why it is important. Most essential, teach students the specific steps in the strategy and explain what you expect them to do at each step. Research (Brown, Pressley, Van Meter, & Schuder, 1996) shows that explicitly teaching the steps and making expectations clear enable students to use strategies independently. One highly effective tool for teaching strategies directly to students is a classroom poster. Figure i.2 shows a classroom poster delineating the steps of the Reading for Meaning strategy (Silver, Morris, & Klein, 2010).

FIGURE I.2 Reading for Meaning Classroom Poster



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3. Teach the thinking embedded in the strategy. For example, collecting and evaluating evidence is one crucial thinking skill embedded in several Core Six strategies. To teach this skill, discuss the concept of *evidence* with students. What is evidence? When and how is it used? What's the difference between an argument that uses evidence and one that doesn't? Model what good evidence sounds like using simple claims like "Taking care of a pet is harder than taking care of a plant." Whenever students make a claim during a lesson, use it as an opportunity to explore the evidence behind the claim.

4. Use discussion and questioning techniques to extend student thinking. To move students from superficial to deep understanding, extend student thinking through questioning and discussion. A simple but powerful technique for improving classroom questioning and discussion is Q-SPACE (Strong, Hanson, & Silver, 1998), a strategy described fully on page 42.

5. Ask students to synthesize and transfer their learning. Challenge students to pull together what they have learned and transfer that learning to a new context. For example, after completing a Circle of Knowledge discussion in which 5th grade students debate a local issue (should their small town allow a big-box store to build on a vacant lot?), you might present three more debatable issues for students to discuss in teams, using what they have learned about civil debate and compromise to resolve each issue.

6. Leave time for reflection. When using a strategy, students need time to think back not only on the content but also on the process. For example, you might say, "Let's think back on our use of 3 x 3 Writing Frames [a tool that's part of the Write to Learn strategy]. How did the 3 x 3 Writing Frame help you plan your essay? What might you do differently next time you use a 3 x 3 Writing Frame?"

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1
Reading for Meaning

Reading for Meaning in a Nutshell

Reading for Meaning is a research-based strategy that helps all readers build the skills that proficient readers use to make sense of challenging texts. Regular use of the strategy gives students the opportunity to practice and master the three phases of critical reading that lead to reading success, including

- Previewing and predicting *before reading*.
- Actively searching for relevant information *during reading*.
- Reflecting on learning *after reading*.

Three Reasons for Using Reading for Meaning to Address the Common Core

1. Text complexity. Reading Anchor Standard 10 and Appendix A in the Common Core State Standards for ELA & Literacy (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010a) both call for increasing the complexity of the texts that students are expected to be able to read as they progress through school. Reading for Meaning builds in all students the skills used by proficient readers to extract meaning from even the most rigorous texts.

2. Evidence. The Common Core's Reading Anchor Standard 1 and Writing Anchor Standards 1 and 9 all highlight the vital role of evidence in supporting thinking. As the English Language Arts standards' (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010a) description of college and career readiness states, "Students

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cite specific evidence when offering an oral or written interpretation of a text. They use relevant evidence when supporting their own points in writing and speaking, making their reasoning clear to the reader or listener, and they constructively evaluate others' use of evidence" (p. 7). Few strategies put a greater premium on evidence than Reading for Meaning, which provides direct, supported training in how to find, assess, and use relevant textual evidence.

3. The core skills of reading. Reading for Meaning helps teachers build and assess the exact skills that the Common Core identifies as crucial to students' success, including identifying main ideas, making inferences, and supporting interpretations with evidence. Because Reading for Meaning uses teacher-created statements to guide students' reading, teachers can easily craft statements to address any of the Common Core's standards for reading. See Figure 1.2 (p. 14) to learn how you can design statements to address different anchor standards.

The Research Behind Reading for Meaning

Reading for Meaning is deeply informed by a line of research known as *comprehension instruction*. Some scholars attribute the beginning of the comprehension instruction movement to Dolores Durkin's (1978/1979) study "What Classroom Observations Reveal about Reading Comprehension Instruction". Durkin discovered that most teachers were setting students up for failure by making the false assumption that comprehension—the very thing students were being tested on—did not need to be taught. As long as students were reading the words correctly and fluently, teachers assumed that they were "getting it."

Thanks in part to Durkin's findings, a new generation of researchers began investigating the hidden skills and cognitive processes that underlie reading comprehension. A number of researchers (see, for example, Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995; Wyatt et al., 1993) focused their attention on a simple but unexplored question: What do great readers do when they read? By studying the behaviors of skilled readers, these researchers reached some important conclusions about what it takes to read for meaning, including these three:

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1. **Good reading is active reading.** Pressley (2006) observed, "In general, the conscious processing that is excellent reading begins before reading, continues during reading, and persists after reading is completed" (p. 57). Thus, good readers are actively engaged not only *during* reading but also *before* reading (when they call up what they already know about the topic and establish a purpose for reading) and *after* reading (when they reflect on and seek to deepen their understanding).
2. **Comprehension involves a repertoire of skills, or reading and thinking strategies.** Zimmermann and Hutchins (2003) synthesize the findings of the research on proficient readers by identifying "seven keys to comprehension," a set of skills that includes making connections to background knowledge, drawing inferences, and determining importance.
3. **These comprehension skills can be taught successfully to nearly all readers, including young and emerging readers.** In *Mosaic of Thought* (2007), Keene and Zimmermann show how teachers at all grade levels teach comprehension skills in their classrooms. What's more, a wide body of research shows that teaching students comprehension skills has "a significant and lasting effect on students' understanding" (Keene, 2010, p. 70).

Reading for Meaning is designed around these research findings. The strategy breaks reading into three phases (before, during, and after reading) and develops in students of all ages the processing skills they need during each phase to build deep understanding.

Implementing Reading for Meaning in the Classroom

1. Identify a short text that you want students to "read for meaning." Any kind of text is fine—a poem, an article, a blog post, a primary document, a fable, or a scene from a play. Mathematical word problems, data charts, and visual sources like paintings and photographs also work well. The "Other Considerations" section of this chapter (p. 15) provides more details on nontextual applications.

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2. Generate a list of statements about the text. Students will ultimately search the text for evidence that supports or refutes each statement. Statements can be objectively true or false, or they can be open to interpretation and designed to provoke discussion and debate. They can be customized to fit whichever skills, standards, or objectives you're working on—for example, identifying main ideas or analyzing characters and ideas. (See Figure 1.2 on page 14 for details.)
3. Introduce the topic of the text and have students preview the statements *before* they begin reading. Encourage students to think about what they already know about the topic and to use the statements to make some predictions about the text.
4. Have students record evidence for and against each statement *while* (or *after*) they read.
5. Have students discuss their evidence in pairs or small groups. Encourage groups to reach consensus about which statements are supported and which are refuted by the text. If they are stuck, have them rewrite any problematic statements in a way that enables them reach consensus.
6. Conduct a whole-class discussion in which students share and justify their positions. If necessary, help students clarify their thinking and call their attention to evidence that they might have missed or misinterpreted.
7. Use students' responses to evaluate their understanding of the reading and their ability to support a position with evidence.

Reading for Meaning Sample Lessons

Sample Lesson 1: Primary English Language Arts

Erin Rohmer introduces her 1st graders to the concept of evidence by posing this statement: "First grade is harder than kindergarten." After finding that all her students agree with the statement, Erin asks students why they agree: "What are you being asked to do this year in school that you didn't have to do last year? What new things are you learning that are more challenging than what you learned last year?"

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As Erin collects students' ideas, she explains that the reasons and examples they are coming up with are *evidence,* or information that helps prove an idea. Erin goes on to explain that the class will be practicing the skill of collecting evidence from a story.

Today, the class is reading Janet Stevens's (1995) *Tops & Bottoms*, a story about a clever hare who tricks a lazy bear. For this initial use of Reading for Meaning, Erin asks students to consider just one statement: "The hare deceived the bear." Notice how Erin is helping students master an important and challenging vocabulary term—*deceive*—with this statement. After clarifying the meaning of the new vocabulary word with students, Erin reads the story aloud while students follow along. Students stop Erin whenever they find information in the story that seems to support or refute the statement. The class discusses each piece of evidence together and decides whether it helps prove or disprove the statement. Erin records students' ideas on an interactive whiteboard using the organizer shown in Figure 1.1.

FIGURE 1.1 Support/Refute Organizer for *Tops & Bottoms*

Evidence For	Statement	Evidence Against
	The hare deceived the bear. (Remember: deceive means to trick.)	

After finishing the story, Erin asks students to work in small groups to review the assembled evidence and then to nominate the three best pieces of evidence from the organizer. As the groups work together, Erin listens in to assess students' emerging ability to evaluate evidence.

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Sample Lesson 2: Elementary Mathematics

Note: The following sample lesson has been adapted from Reading for Meaning: How to Build Students' Comprehension, Reasoning, and Problem-Solving Skills *(Silver, Morris, & Klein, 2010)*.

Third grade teacher Heather Alvarez uses Reading for Meaning statements to help her students analyze and think their way through mathematical word problems before, during, and after the problem-solving process. First, she poses the problem: "Most 3rd graders get their hair cut four times a year. Human hair grows at a rate of about 0.5 inches a month. If you get 2 inches of hair cut off during a year, about how much longer will your hair be at the end of that year?"

Heather then asks students to decide whether they agree or disagree with these statements before they begin solving the problem:

1. The first sentence contains relevant information. (This statement is designed to build students' skills in separating relevant from irrelevant information.)
2. Human hair grows at a rate of 1 inch every two months. (This statement is designed to focus attention on the central information.)
3. To solve this problem, you need to find out how much hair grows in a year. (This statement is designed to help students expose hidden questions.)
4. You need to do only one operation to solve this problem. (This statement is designed to help students think through the steps in solving the problem.)

Students review the statements again after solving the problem to see how the problem-solving process challenged or confirmed their initial thinking.

Sample Lesson 3: Middle School Science

Directions: As we work through this lesson, I will be showing you some computer simulations on the whiteboard. You will be asked to collect evidence for and/or against each of these possible conclusions:

1. Most of the volume of an atom is empty space.

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2. The electrons orbit the nucleus of an atom in much the same way that planets orbit the sun.
3. A carbon atom is more complex than a helium atom.
4. Most of the atomic mass of an atom comes from its electrons.

Planning Considerations

To develop a Reading for Meaning lesson, think about what you will need to do to introduce the lesson and to prepare for each phase of the lesson.

- Begin by asking yourself, "What standards do I intend to address?"
- After you select the reading for your lesson, ask yourself, "What article, document, or passage needs emphasis and intensive analysis? How will this reading help me address my chosen standards?"
- To analyze the reading, ask yourself, "What themes, main ideas, and details do my students need to discover?"
- To develop Reading for Meaning statements, ask yourself, "What thought-provoking statements can I present to my students before they begin reading to focus and engage their attention? How can I use different kinds of statements to help my students build crucial reading skills found in the Common Core?"
- To decide how to begin the lesson, ask yourself, "What kind of hook, or attention-grabbing question or activity, can I create to capture student interest and activate prior knowledge at the outset of the lesson?"
- To develop leading questions that provoke discussion, ask yourself, "What questions about the content or the process can I develop to engage my students in a discussion throughout the lesson and after the reading?"

Crafting Reading for Meaning Statements to Address Common Core State Standards

Figure 1.2 shows how you can design Reading for Meaning statements to address specific Anchor Standards for Reading.

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FIGURE 1.2 Aligning Reading for Meaning Statements to Anchor Standards

Anchor Standard Concepts	Sample Statements
Determine what a text says explicitly. (R.CCR.1)	• Everyone is unkind to Little Bear. • Animals prepare for winter in different ways.
Make logical inferences from a text. (R.CCR.1)	• We can tell that Pooh and Piglet have been friends for a long time. • Without taking Franklin's data, Watson and Crick wouldn't have succeeded.
Identify main ideas and themes. (R.CCR.2)	• The moral of the story is that teams can do more than individuals. • Structure and function are intricately linked.
Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop, connect, and interact. (R.CCR.3)	• Pickles goes from being a bad cat to a good cat. • After Maxim's revelation, the new Mrs. de Winter is a changed woman. • The seeds of social change for women in America were planted during WWII.
Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text; distinguish between what is said and what is meant or true. (R.CCR.6)	• Chekhov wants us to judge Julia harshly. • The writer's personal feelings influenced his description of this event.
Integrate and evaluate content that is presented visually and quantitatively as well as in words. (R.CCR.7)	• Munch's *The Scream* shares many stylistic elements with Impressionism. • According to the table in this article, sun worshippers would be happier living in Phoenix than in Seattle.
Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or compare the authors' approaches. (R.CCR.9)	• The two fables we read are more similar than different. • The Cherokee people's account of their relocation differs from the account in your textbook.

Source: Adapted from *Tools for Thoughtful Assessment*, by A. L. Boutz, H. F. Silver, J. W. Jackson, and M. J. Perini, 2012, Ho-Ho-Kus, NJ: Thoughtful Education Press. © 2012 Silver Strong & Associates/Thoughtful Education Press. Used with permission.

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Writing Extension: Written Arguments

Use a Reading for Meaning statement to help students develop the kinds of written arguments called for in the Common Core (W.CCR.1). The statement can come from a completed Reading for Meaning lesson, or you can introduce a new one. Either way, the statement should sit at the center of the content, tie back to your instructional objectives, and require students to draw heavily on the text to make their case. A 3 x 3 Writing Frame is a great tool to help students plan and structure arguments because it makes clear what the beginning, middle, and end of their arguments need to contain. It also helps students communicate their ideas with the kind of clarity and precision that define careful thinkers. Figure 5.1 (p. 58) shows how an elementary school student used a 3 x 3 Writing Frame to plan an argument essay on Harriet Tubman.

Other Considerations: Almost Everything Can Be "Read" for Meaning

Although Reading for Meaning has the word *reading* in its name, its use is not limited to texts. The strategy works well with any information source—data charts, paintings, film clips, websites, lab experiments, and so on—because it forces students to analyze information closely and justify their interpretations with evidence. For example, an elementary school teacher asked students to analyze a data table showing the average monthly temperatures and precipitation amounts for various cities throughout the world. To help students build their data-analysis skills, she asked them to use the data from the chart to either support or refute these statements:

1. London receives more precipitation in a year than Vancouver.
2. Over the course of the year, Warsaw sees more snow than rain.
3. On average, January is the coldest month among all the cities.
4. If you were spending Independence Day in Philadelphia, the temperature would probably not be above 87°F.

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Silver, Dewing, and Perini have recently collaborated on *Inference: Teaching Students to Develop Hypotheses, Evaluate Evidence, and Draw Logical Conclusions (A Strategic Teacher PLC Guide)*. With Richard W. Strong, Silver and Perini have also collaborated on a number of best sellers in education, including *The Strategic Teacher*, *So Each May Learn,* and *Teaching What Matters Most*, all published by ASCD; and Thoughtful Education Press's *Tools for Promoting Active, In-Depth Learning*, which won a Teachers' Choice Award in 2004. Most recently, Silver and Perini have developed an innovative and practical teacher evaluation model, The Thoughtful Classroom Teacher Effectiveness Framework.

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