

# Book Study Suggestions

## COMPREHENSION AND COLLABORATION, REVISED EDITION

Inquiry Circles for Curiosity,  
Engagement, and Understanding

—Stephanie Harvey and Harvey “Smokey” Daniels

We are delighted that you have decided to gather a group of colleagues to read, question, discuss, adapt, and apply the ideas from *Comprehension and Collaboration*. Having been happy members of many study groups and book clubs ourselves, we hope you enjoy talking about this book as much as we enjoyed writing it.

As the book argues, learning is inherently social, for both kids and grown-ups. Though sometimes we feel isolated as teachers, most of us know the benefits of taking time to engage with colleagues. It is in that “teacher talk,” as Regie Routman calls it, that we find our own ideas clarified and enriched—and find opportunities to advance our practice with kids.

While there are many ways to structure a study group, it is most important to foster a climate in which teachers feel free and safe to participate in the ongoing conversations and exchange of ideas. To us, the most important kind of activity in such a group is trying out ideas ourselves, both in the study group and in our own classrooms—and then thoughtfully debriefing the results. In other words, the best way to understand different classroom structures and activities is to **do them ourselves**, and then to talk about how to translate them to students of any age.

Here are a few other things you might consider to make your study group more engaging and productive.

**FORM A DIVERSE GROUP:** A key assumption of the book is that the truly big and valuable ideas in education apply to all learners. That’s why we talk about kids from K–12 and topics from across the curriculum. We also argue for kids working in rich, heterogeneous groups. Same goes for teachers. So,

if your situation allows it, feel free to mix grade levels and content specialties in your study group—it will add richness to the discussion and extend the range of creative applications. It's a great way to build consensus across grades, buildings, and even throughout a whole district.

**WATCH GROUP SIZE:** Often the optimal number for lively discussions is four or five, to ensure time for all to exchange ideas and to increase the chance that even the quietest person is comfortable speaking up. If you have a larger base group, split the time between whole and small groups. You may want to kick off discussion with a general question and then break into smaller groups. The larger group can reassemble at the end to debrief.

**USE STUDY QUESTIONS:** Some groups find it more comfortable to start with a few questions to get the conversation going. There are various ways to use questions.

- Put 3 or 4 questions in an envelope and randomly pull them out for discussion.
- Create a chart with 2 or 3 starter questions and ask the group to generate more, tapping their own personal interests and needs.
- Decide on 3 or 4 questions and divide the group by interest in the various topics. This allows for a more in-depth study.
- Make copies of the suggested questions for everyone and invite discussion without deciding where to start.
- Collect questions from the group on the first meeting, review them to determine which are most common, and synthesize them into several big questions, making sure to share some additional questions that come up as well.

**CREATE AN AGENDA:** Make sure you have planned a beginning and an ending time and *always* honor those times. Teachers are busy; knowing there will be a time to start and a time to end is important.

**ENCOURAGE TEXT ANNOTATION AND THE USE OF REFLECTION JOURNALS:** One of the leading strategies of proficient adult readers is to annotate important text with underlining, highlighting, coding, marginal notes, and/or drawings. If teachers own their copies of the book, they should actively annotate; if not,

they can use Post-it notes for the same purpose. Group members may also wish to keep a **journal** in which longer reflections may be written and saved for later sharing. You can even stop from time-to-time during meetings to reflect in journals about what you are learning and what you might like to try with your students.

**STAY FOCUSED ON THE TOPIC:** In the book, we acknowledge the normal human tendencies to do some “setting and joking” before getting down to small-group work, occasionally drifting off the topic, or having unequal distribution of airtime within groups. You may want to talk about these phenomena in advance and plan some procedures to ensure *mostly* on-task discussion. For example, you might start by saying something like “Let’s decide on a signal to use when we feel the discussion is drifting and then have everyone agree to help stay focused.”

**EXPERIENCE THE PROCESS FROM THE INSIDE OUT WHENEVER POSSIBLE:** Peel back the layers of your own thinking process to better understand how you make sense of text, how you work together, and how you research your own questions. This will give teachers a more accurate idea of how this process happens for kids.

**SHARE LEADERSHIP:** In the book, we mostly recommend “leaderless” groups, in which every member takes an equal amount of responsibility for the success of the work. So, if you decide to have weekly leaders, be sure to rotate group facilitation. Identify several “duties” for the facilitator. Examples might include selecting a discussion format, suggesting a big idea from a chapter or group of chapters, and synthesizing or summarizing at the end. Remember that in a study group, *everyone* is a learner.

**CREATE A LIST OF NORMS:** Simple transparent expectations often make study groups function with greater ease and increase the potential for success. These might include ways to invite a tentative member into the conversation, expectations about listening, start and stop times, and a procedure for refocusing. Chapter 7 lists many such social skill lessons, any of which may be tried out within the study group.

**SET DATES FOR THE NEXT MEETING:** Always leave knowing when you will meet again and who will facilitate.

Create a blog or create a Twitter hashtag to share your questions, thoughts, and ideas with your group. Or, better yet, use the Twitter hashtag #compandcollab to collaborate with people beyond your study group who are also reading the book.

**CELEBRATE LEARNING:** Make sure you take time to enjoy one another and celebrate your learning. Bring lots of healthy snacks—but don't forget the chocolate!

The following questions relate to the content in each chapter. At the end of Chapters 7–11, we have provided a more ambitious Into the Classroom suggestion. Enjoy!

## PART 1: WHY SMALL-GROUP PROJECTS?

### **Chapter 1**

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#### **Kids Want to Know**

1. The chapter entices us with some provocative ideas that researchers found when they studied kids' curiosity at home vs. at school. How can this research help us transform our classrooms so that they turn *on* rather than turn *off* student engagement and interest?
2. Discuss the potential power in kids fueling their learning by asking their own questions.
3. Reread the opening vignettes. What intrigues and excites you in these four stories?
4. What do you notice about your own students that confirm the need for more engaged, interactive instruction?
5. Consider the potential in the statement that “once curiosity is switched on, we attend to and remember *everything* around us better.” How might we use this understanding to increase student learning?
6. Connect the idea of more kid collaboration in school with the research that social skills are just as important for success in the workplace as test scores.

7. Consider the idea of teaching the reader—not the reading. How might that idea affect teaching and learning in the classrooms in your school?
8. How could you use the principles of inquiry circles in your curricular planning?
9. Discuss the need for students to be flexible as readers and to vary the way they read for different purposes and in different kinds of texts.
10. Silva suggests that interesting topics have three characteristics: they are *novel*, *complex*, and *comprehensible*. How might we use these characteristics to create curiosity and drive learning?
11. Look over the “Inquiry Project Locator.” What topics do you think might pique your students’ curiosity?

## **Chapter 2**

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### **What We Know About Comprehension**

1. Discuss your own experience with the MS2 passage. What similarities do you see among the experiences of your group?
2. Consider the ways cognitive strategies move from automatic to deliberate when we hit a snag in our reading. How might this insight be woven into our teaching so kids clearly see this shift?
3. Discuss the strategies proficient learners use as they read, listen, and view as a means for understanding and finding enjoyment.
4. The authors offer a brief look at the research on comprehension. What information is new for you?
5. We often worry about students’ lack of background knowledge. Talk about the possibility that exciting content might so engage students that *they* increase understanding and enhance their own background knowledge.
6. Reread the section “Close Reading.” Discuss how close reading is really *strategic reading*—the kind of reading where readers use kind the strategies outlined in the chapter as a means for understanding.

7. Look over the close reading and viewing tips. Discuss what you'd like to try and apply in your own teaching.
8. How does the language used in the classroom nurture thinking and cause students to go deeper?
9. Discuss how emphasizing teaching for understanding rather than focusing on text complexity might result in more thoughtful, engaged readers.
10. Spend some time studying the “comprehension continuum.” What examples can you link from your own students?
11. The authors cite Richard Allington's three principles that lead to better reading instruction. Consider your classroom teaching and learning through the lenses of these three principles, the volume principle, the response principle, and the explicit instruction principle. Share your thoughts and discuss your own experience in relation to these principles.

## **Chapter 3**

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### **What We Know About Collaboration**

1. This chapter begins with some compelling research about collaboration. Discuss why collaboration is more important than ever and how you might maximize the suggestions in this chapter to incorporate it into your classroom.
2. What benefits do you see in incorporating small-group work into your instruction?
3. Look over the problems sometimes encountered when we use small groups. How do these compare with your own experience? Can you think of others?
4. If success with small groups depends on students' social skills, what can we learn from this chapter and how can we incorporate into our curriculum and teaching ways for students to learn productive ways of interacting with others?
5. Reflect on the statement: “Effective groups are made, not born.” What are some ways we can be more strategic and intentional in ensuring success with small groups?

6. Discuss the challenges and predictable problems that accompany small-group work.
7. What benefits might teachers realize by participating in their own collaborative work around instructional planning?
8. Using the chart “How Proficient Collaborators Think and Act,” consider your students’ social skills and identify ways to strengthen them. Or, directly ask your students to list the attributes of an effective small-group member and then hold a discussion around the chart. Share the results with members of the study group.

## **Chapter 4**

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### **What We Know About Inquiry**

1. How does organizing classroom instruction around inquiry change the role of the teacher?
2. Compare and contrast an “inquiry approach” with a “coverage approach” using the chart in the chapter.
3. Consider the idea of “15 percent free time.” How can we use the ideas in this chapter to enhance our students’ learning by incorporating passion, purpose, and play through open inquiries?
4. The chart entitled “11 Ways to Find Time for Inquiry” offers a variety of entry points for incorporating inquiry into our classrooms. Talk about how you might use one or more of these.
5. Consider the “Small-Group Inquiry Model” chart. How might this model be useful in instructional planning?
6. How might “slowing down” instruction allow for deeper thinking and more satisfying study?
7. Just as Steph and Smokey do in this chapter, reflect on your own school experiences. Discuss your insights and how they might apply to and affect your own teaching.
8. How might withholding interesting and challenging lessons from less developed readers limit their learning?

9. How might using conventional project models limit students' learning?
10. In what ways does the teacher's role shift in a collaborative, inquiry-focused classroom?
11. How do the ideas outlined in the discussion about the "Maker Movement" offer provocative ideas for classroom application?

## PART 2: PLANNING FOR SMALL-GROUP INQUIRY

### **Chapter 5**

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#### **Setting Up Your Inquiry-Based Classroom**

1. What effect does an inquisitive teacher have on students?
2. Share your thoughts about David Perkins' quote that begins "learning is the consequence of thinking. . . ."
3. The authors offer ten principles to consider. How do these elements combine to offer rich learning opportunities for our students?
4. What role does the environment play in creating a context for learning?
5. Great resources are important ingredients for success in an inquiry-based classroom. Think of ways to tap some of the ones mentioned and how you can expand students' access to them.
6. How might including objects and artifacts enrich study for all students, including English language learners?
7. We have a growing body of research about how teacher talk affects our students' learning. Discuss ways we as teachers can encourage and support as students extend their thinking. Share a time when your language scaffolded classroom conversation and enhanced student understanding.
8. How might the use of small groups affect students' individual needs?

9. The authors suggest three types of questions when reading in the content areas: the definition question, the consequence question, and the action question. How do these three question categories provide a framework for supporting students as they uncover ideas?
10. What is the role authenticity, relevance, and significance plays in promoting student engagement?
11. Discuss the importance of making students aware that purpose affects the way we read. What insights are gleaned from considering P. David Pearson's example of Nike (Just do it!) reading vs. Sherlock Holmes (close and careful) reading and Rosenblatt's aesthetic vs. efferent stances?
12. Much of this chapter talks about the physical arrangements, values, and belief structures that undergird inquiry-based teaching. Looking at your own teaching through all these lenses, what do you see? In what ways does your teaching already facilitate student inquiry? What could be added, changed, or refined?

## **Chapter 6**

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### **Digital Tools for Inquiry-Based Classroom: Surfing, Searching, Blogging, Tweeting, and More**

1. How does the explosion of online learning impact the classroom?
2. Discuss the ways in which online and digital tools support the key principles of inquiry circles.
3. What resonated with or surprised you about Sara Ahmed's kids' experiences?
4. Technology has vastly altered the way we live. What do these new technologies mean for us as teachers? What skills might we need to incorporate in our teaching to ensure students' success? Discuss how reading online may present different challenges for students. Think of ways to address these in your teaching.

5. How can technology be used as a tool for differentiating?
6. The authors discuss info-literacy skills. Share your own challenges and experiences as you incorporate these new ways of learning into your classroom instruction.
7. Today's students have access to infinite amounts of information. How would students benefit from evaluating how appropriate and reliable a website might be?
8. Check out some of the fake websites that are mentioned in this chapter or google "fake websites" and work with another teacher in the study group to evaluate these and think about how your kids could distinguish these from real sites.
9. How might your school collaborate to establish safeguards for students and still take advantage of the potential technology offers?
10. New learning tools make inquiry even more exciting. Discuss how you might incorporate them into your teaching and offer authentic outcomes that incorporate "real" audiences.
11. The authors wrap up this chapter with some important considerations. Talk with colleagues about these considerations and the challenges incorporating new tools and technologies might create.

## **Chapter 7**

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### **Lessons in Comprehension, Collaboration, and Inquiry**

1. The gradual release model is a foundational framework for planning, teaching, and learning. Discuss how using the framework of "I Do It, We Do It, You Do It" supports learners as you shift responsibility to them. What happens if we move too quickly (or too slowly) in our teaching?
2. Look over the forty key lessons in comprehension, collaboration, and inquiry included in the chapter. As you scan the list talk about how the lessons offer processes and practices that work across the grade levels. Which ones are particularly exciting to you?

3. Without meaning to, we often complicate learning for our students as they journey through school. How might using these lessons throughout the grades address that concern and create coherence in your school or district?
4. How could you embed these lessons in your own curriculum planning and teaching?

### ***INTO THE CLASSROOM***

Select one of the 40 lessons that fits into your teaching this week, and try it out with your kids. Report back to the study group, bringing stories, samples of kids' work, or classroom videos to share the experience.

## PART 3: FOUR MODELS OF SMALL-GROUP INQUIRY

### ***Chapter 8***

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#### **Mini-Inquiries**

1. How might these small-group investigations be used as a framework to engage students in answering spontaneous questions that arise out of their own natural curiosity?
2. Talk about ways this mini-inquiry model might be used to explore how longer inquiries will work in the classroom.
3. The chart entitled “Small-Group Inquiry Model Adapted for Mini-Inquiry Projects” explains how the small-group inquiry model is specifically adapted for the mini-inquiry process. Discuss the opportunities this adaptation offers.
4. How and why do authentic questions create engagement and foster motivation in kids?
5. Flexibility in thinking is more important than ever. Think about and discuss the ways in which this model offers students a chance to explore a question and various ways that question might be answered.

6. What are some of the opportunities and benefits you see in question-driven teaching as you read the vignettes in this chapter? How do these reflect and translate to the “real world”?
7. Jot down a list of researchable questions in your own “wonder book” as Steph does in this chapter. Then talk with a partner about your questions and choose one to research. Investigate your own authentic questions as the study group continues and share your findings at a later group meeting. In what ways does modeling our own curiosity as teachers affect our students?
8. The authors discuss the use of anchor charts as a way to capture and archive both the process and products of the inquiry cycle. How might you use anchor charts similarly in your own classroom to make thinking visible?
9. Think about P. David Pearson’s words: “Today’s new knowledge is tomorrow’s background knowledge.” Talk about some of the potential advantages of mini-inquiries in building and increasing what kids know.
10. Discuss the advantages of using an inquiry approach. What essential strategies and skills do students develop that have lifelong benefits?

### ***INTO THE CLASSROOM***

Watch for or create an opportunity for a mini-research project, along the lines of the mosquito bite or Ipecac stories. Use the lessons in Chapter 7 as well as the classroom accounts here to support your planning and work with kids. Share the ongoing results with members of the study group. What works? What is difficult? Why? What do you notice kids saying and doing that’s different from everyday work? If possible, visit one another’s classrooms to observe and chat. Report back to the study group, bringing stories, samples of kids’ work, or classroom videos to share.

## Chapter 9

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### Curricular Inquiries

1. How could you incorporate the “four screens” offered by Wiggins and McTighe into your own instructional planning? What would be the benefit?
2. Study the chart entitled “Small-Group Inquiry Model Adapted for Curricular Inquiry.” What excites you about trying out this model?
3. Discuss how you might mine your own curriculum for content possibilities to use as a small-group model adapted for curricular inquiry.
4. Select one of the small-group inquiry stories to discuss in depth.
5. Compare and contrast “content” and “process” learning.
6. Skim the chapter, looking at the visuals. What do you notice?
7. How are the cognitive strategies woven into the studies so they become the means for asking and answering questions to deepen understanding?
8. Students’ academic work improves when teachers set expectations. What are the benefits of the chart—“Develop Group Ground Rules”—like the one Mary developed?
9. So many new opportunities to share exist within the digital world. What are some of the potential forms students might use to take their learning “public”?

#### ***INTO THE CLASSROOM***

Identify one chunk of curriculum that comes up in your teaching and make plans to teach it inquiry-circle style. Use the lessons in Chapter 7 as well as the classroom accounts in this chapter to support your planning and work with kids. Share the ongoing results with members of the study group. What works? What is difficult? What are the kids saying and doing that’s different from everyday work? If possible, visit one another’s classrooms to observe and chat. Report back to the study group, bringing stories, samples of kids’ work, or classroom videos to share.

## Chapter 10

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### Literature Circle Inquiries

1. Consider the evolution of literature circles and add your own experiences. Have you been in an adult book club or used lit circles in your own classroom? Share your own experiences and how those might shape similar experiences for students.
2. Discuss the effect of authentic extensions rather than contrived projects that often follow literature circles.
3. During one of the study group meetings, engage in your own mini-literature circles with three or four short articles, poems, or short stories. Members read one of their own choosing and then talk about it with other group members. Consider how this framework provides opportunities to sharpen the reader's focus and enhance understanding.
4. Study the chart entitled "Small-Group Inquiry Model for Curricular Inquiries" and talk about what the teacher does to support students at each stage.
5. How does using this approach to teaching and learning address the diverse needs of students? In what ways does it honor and support individual differences?
6. What are some of the procedural things teachers must consider in planning literature circle inquiries?
7. Writing fuels thinking. How do you see writing used to support students' thinking?
8. Writing circles offer yet another way to capitalize on all the benefits of inquiry-based learning. What benefits do you see in incorporating them in your own classroom?

#### ***INTO THE CLASSROOM***

Conduct a round of literature circles in your own classroom, perhaps with short text, picture books, articles, or poetry. Lead kids through the process of noticing lingering questions and inquiring further after they finish the book. Use the lessons in

Chapter 7 as well as the classroom accounts here to support your planning and work with kids. What works? What is difficult? What are the kids saying and doing that's different from everyday book clubs? If possible, visit one another's classrooms to observe and chat. Report back to the study group, bringing stories, samples of kids' work, or classroom videos to share.

## **Chapter 11**

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### **Open Inquiries**

1. What exciting possibilities and payoffs do you see in kid-driven open inquiries while still addressing required skills?
2. Study the chart entitled “Small-Group Model Adapted for Open Inquiries.” What do you notice about the balance of responsibility between teacher and kids?
3. What interests and/or surprises you when you read through the stories of “negotiated curriculum” in Chapter 11?
4. Consider the range of possibilities in open inquiries. What advantages and challenges do you see?
5. Modeling is mentioned often in this chapter. What similarities and differences do you see in the type of modeling in this and previous chapters?
6. Review all of the small-group inquiry charts from each of the inquiry chapters and discuss the nuanced differences between the different types of inquiries. How does the teacher's role change in terms of topic selection, questions, and process?
7. How might you utilize the natural connections among individual inquiries to foster collaboration and provide support for students?
8. Notice and talk about what happens to kids' reading in inquiry-based classrooms—the genres they read, the amount they read, and the role of choice plays.
9. How do you see writing as an authentic way of extending and cementing learning within inquiry?

10. Teachers are responsible for the content in our curriculum. But look closely at the section about backmapping and discuss how, through careful planning, we don't veer away from curriculum; we move deeper into it.
11. There is a powerful idea in the heading "Learning to Love to Learn." In what ways might the ideas in this and the other chapters create classrooms filled with students who love to learn?

### ***INTO THE CLASSROOM***

If possible, set aside some classroom time and try out an open inquiry with your students. A perfect time to experiment is after the "annual testing season." Carefully help kids discover "hot topics" and "burning questions" they really want to investigate and then gather them into inquiry circles by topic affinity. Use the lessons in Chapter 7 as well as the classroom accounts here to support your planning and work with kids. What works? What is difficult? What are the kids saying and doing that's different from everyday work? Try to backmap the kids' open inquiry work to state or local standards to see if their inquiry circles are actually reinforcing mandated skills and concepts. If possible, visit one another's classrooms to observe and chat. Report back to the study group, bringing stories, samples of kids' work, or classroom videos to share.

## **Chapter 12**

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### **Assessment and Evaluation**

1. What are the take-aways from Daniel and Devon's story that begins this chapter?
2. There is often confusion around the terms *assessment* and *evaluation*. Discuss the differences and talk about the ways each offers insight into students' learning.
3. Reread the section entitled "Assessing Thinking and Understanding." What insights do we gain as teachers in each of the ways?

4. Many teachers (and parents, too!) worry about individual accountability during group work. Read through the list of ways you might ensure accountability. What stands out to you? What others can you think of to add?
5. What are some of the problems inherent in standardized assessments for teachers and students?
6. Consider ways rubrics used throughout the inquiry process inform and monitor learning?
7. What challenges do you see in documenting students' learning in inquiry studies? How might you work with teams of educators to address the concerns and challenges?
8. Discuss the idea that sometimes the "final product" does not have a concrete representation but may just be the student's knowledge acquisition. What might this newfound knowledge lead to?
9. As you experiment with different kinds of inquiry circles in your own classroom, share the assessments you develop yourself, adapt from the book, or co-construct with students.
10. Finally, consider these last words from the authors: "None of us joined this profession with the dream of raising some kid's score by .00003 percent on some standardized test. We got into this business because we love kids, learning, and knowledge." Discuss how this book can help us rekindle the joy in teaching and learning in every classroom.