

# Book Study Suggestions

## ***Comprehension and Collaboration: Inquiry Circles in Action***

—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 grownups. Though sometimes we get isolated as teachers, we also 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 the students we teach.

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. 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 4 or 5, to ensure time for everyone 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 smaller 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.



**CREATE AN AGENDA:** Make sure you have planned a beginning and ending time and *always* honor those times. Teachers are busy and 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.

**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 setting up 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.

**USE STUDY QUESTIONS:** Some groups find it more comfortable to start with a few questions to get conversation going. A rotating facilitator might:

- ✓ 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 came up as well.

**CREATE A LIST OF NORMS:** Simple expectations that are transparent often make study groups function with greater ease and increase potential for success. These can be simple and 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 skills lessons, any of which may be tried out within the study group.

**STAY FOCUSED ON THE TOPIC:** In the book, we acknowledge the normal human tendencies to do some “settling 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 better idea of how these processes happen for the kids.

**SET DATES FOR THE NEXT MEETING:** Always leave knowing when you will meet again, how each member might prepare, and who, if anyone, will facilitate.

**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!

## Chapter 1

### Kids Want to Know

1. The chapter introduces some provocative ideas. What piques your curiosity?
2. Discuss the potential power of kids asking their own questions.
3. Reread the opening vignettes. What similarities do you see in them? What questions do you have?
4. What do you notice about your own students that confirms the need for more engaged, interactive instruction?
5. How might the “working alone” culture limit students’ development?
6. Share your ideas about the statement “small-group work is a must.”
7. Consider the idea of teaching the reader—not the reading. How might that idea affect teaching 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 vary the way they read for different purposes and in different kinds of texts.



10. The authors talk about the current national political scene and how it is affecting education policy. How are national politics and priorities affecting your school or district these days?

## Chapter 2

### What We Know About Comprehension

1. Discuss your own experience with the MS2 passage. What similarities do you see among the experiences of your students? The study 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.
4. The authors offer a brief look at the research on comprehension. What information is new for you?
5. Spend some time studying the “comprehension continuum.” What examples can you link from your own students?
6. How does the language used in the classroom nurture thinking and cause students to go deeper?
7. 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. Discuss your own teaching in relation to these principles.

## Chapter 3

### What We Know About Collaboration

1. Reread the “eight ways small groups matter.” How might the use of small groups enhance your own teaching?
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, how can we incorporate ways for students to learn productive ways of interacting with others into our curriculum and teaching?

5. Reflect on the six dimensions small groups need. How could you make these part of the community building activities in your classroom?
6. Discuss the challenges 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 on “How Proficient Collaborators Think and Act,” assess your own students’ social skills and consider ways to strengthen them. Or directly ask your students to list the attributes of effective small-group members and then hold a discussion around the chart. Share the results with members of the study group.

## Chapter 4

### 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.”
3. Consider the “Small-Group Inquiry Model” chart. How might this model be useful in instructional planning?
4. How might “slowing down” instruction allow for deeper thinking and more satisfying study?
5. 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.
6. How might withholding interesting and challenging lessons from less-developed readers limit their learning?
7. Look at the list of inquiry-based models. Consider how each of these models provides students with similar opportunities as those offered adults in the “real” world. We sometimes think of inquiry-based learning as a new fangled idea, but there is a robust tradition in this type of approach to teaching and learning. Think back to your own education and consider those times that you remember and that you really learned something. How did that happen for you? What were the conditions that led to your learning? How about in your own practice with kids? What teaching experience do you recall that led to the highest level of engagement with your kids? Why?



## Chapter 5

### Preparing Your Active Learning Classroom

1. What affect does an inquisitive teacher have on students?
2. Share your thoughts about David Perkins' quote that begins "learning is the consequence of thinking. . . ."
3. Discuss how the ten elements the authors discuss on pages 76 and 77 combine to offer rich learning opportunities for students.
4. What role does the environment play in creating a context for learning?
5. Think about the resources available in your classroom and school. What else might your students need to give them more variety and choice?
6. How might including objects and artifacts enrich study for all students, including English language learners?
7. How does teacher language encourage and extend or inhibit students' learning? Share a time when the language you used played a supportive role in tapping students' thinking.
8. How might the use of small groups help meet students' individual needs?
9. The authors suggest three types of questions in content area reading: the definition question, the consequence question, and the action question. How do these three question categories provide a framework for helping students uncover ideas?
10. What relationship do you see between authenticity, relevance, and engagement?
11. Discuss Rosenblatt's two reading stances—efferent and aesthetic—and how they affect a reader's purpose.
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 strengthened?

## Chapter 6

### Surfing and Searching: Internet Research in School

1. Think and talk about what Will Richardson says about today's learners and the implications it has for us as teachers.
2. Technology has vastly altered the way we live. What changes might we consider in our teaching as we work with "digital natives?"

3. The authors write about some of the ways extracurricular activities build on and enrich students' background. What other ways might you consider?
4. Discuss how reading online may present different challenges for students. Think of ways to address these in your teaching.
5. Today's students have access to infinite amounts of information. How would they benefit by evaluating Internet sites?
6. Check out some of the fake web sites that are mentioned in this chapter or Google "fake web sites" and work with another teacher in the study group to evaluate these and think about how your kids could distinguish these from real sites.
7. How might your school collaborate to establish safeguards for students and still take advantage of the potential technology offers?
8. New learning tools make inquiry even more exciting. Discuss how you might incorporate them into your teaching.
9. Spend one study group meeting in a computer lab (or with laptops for all members) surfing and chatting, showing each other cool work your kids have done or sharing great online resources. Discuss your own experience with using technology in teaching. What have been the successes? The pitfalls? You may wish to bookmark sites as you go—or work together to compile a list of great websites, databases, or services.

## Chapter 7

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

1. The gradual release model is a foundational framework for planning, teaching, and learning. Discuss the ways you could use it to support and then shift responsibility to learners.
2. What happens if we move too quickly (or too slowly) in our teaching?
3. Look over the twenty-seven key lessons included in the chapter. Notice that there are three groups of lessons categorized as either comprehension, collaboration, or inquiry. Select and discuss lessons that are of particular interest to you.
4. How might using these lessons throughout the grades address coherence in your school or district?
5. How could the lessons be embedded in your own curriculum planning?

**INTO THE CLASSROOM:**

Select one of the 27 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.

## Chapter 8

### Mini-Inquiries

1. Talk about ways that the “small-group inquiry model provides a framework for instructional planning.”
2. Think about how the small-group inquiry model is specifically adapted for the mini-inquiry process.
3. How and why do authentic questions create engagement and foster motivation in kids?
4. What advantages do you see in question-driven teaching? How does it reflect and translate to the “real world?”
5. Jot down a list of researchable questions in your notebook as Steph does in this chapter. Then talk with a partner about your questions and choose one to research. Investigate your own questions as the study group continues and share your findings at a later group meeting. In what ways does modeling your own curiosity as teachers affect your students?
6. The authors discuss the use of anchor charts. Think about ways these charts capture and archive both the process and products of the inquiry cycle.
7. Talk about some of the potential advantages of mini-inquiries. How would you use them in your classroom?
8. Look over the charts in Chapter 8 and discuss the role these charts play in students' learning.
9. Discuss the benefits of using an inquiry approach. What essential strategies and skills do students develop?

**INTO THE CLASSROOM**

Watch for or create an opportunity for a mini-research project, along the lines of the mosquito bite, Frog and Toad, or Ipecac stories. 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? If possible, visit each others' classrooms to observe and chat. Report back to the study group, bringing stories, samples of kids' work, or classroom videos to share.

## Chapter 9

### 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. What possibilities do you see for your own school or district in the “small-group model adapted for curricular inquiry?”
3. Select one of the small-group inquiry stories to discuss in depth.
4. Compare and contrast “content” and “process” learning.
5. Skim the chapter, looking at the visuals. What do you notice?
6. Notice and talk about the ways the cognitive strategies are woven into the studies.
7. Students’ academic work improves when teachers and students set expectations. What are the benefits of the chart—“Develop Group Ground Rules”—like the one Mary developed?
8. What are some of the potential forms students might use to take their learning “public?”

#### INTO THE CLASSROOM

Identify one chunk of curriculum that is coming 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. What works? What is difficult? What are the kids saying and doing that’s different from everyday work? If possible, visit each others’ classrooms to observe and chat. Report back to the study group, bringing stories, samples of kids’ work, or classroom videos to share.

## Chapter 10

### 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?
2. Discuss the effect of authentic extensions rather than contrived projects that follow literature circles.
3. During one of the study group meetings, engage in your own mini-literature circles with three or four short articles. Read one of your choosing and then talk about it with several other study group members. Jot down any questions you have after the reading and discussion. Then

as the study group continues, research some of your questions together and share the findings with others in your lit circle.

4. Study the chart entitled “small-group inquiry model for literature circle 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?
6. What are some of the procedural things teachers must consider in planning literature circle inquiries?
7. Writing fuels thinking. What are some of the ways you might see this occurring for students in writing circles?

### **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 in this chapter 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 each others’ classrooms to observe and chat. Report back to the study group, bringing stories, samples of kids’ work, or classroom videos to share.

## **Chapter 11**

### **Open Inquiries**

1. What do you see as some of the possibilities and challenges inherent in open inquiries?
2. Notice and discuss the balance of responsibility between teacher and kids in the “small-group inquiry model adapted for open inquiries.”
3. What interests and/or surprises you when you read through the open inquiries 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.

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 choice plays.
9. How do you see writing as an authentic way of extending and cementing learning within inquiry?
10. Look closely at the section about backmapping. Talk about your observations.
11. How does the teacher's role shift in open inquiries? Why might that be?

### **INTO THE CLASSROOM**

If possible, set aside some classroom time (perhaps after the annual “testing season”) and try out an open inquiry with your students. Carefully help kids to discover “hot topics” and “burning questions” they really want to investigate and then form 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' findings to state or local standards to see if their inquiry circles are actually reinforcing mandated skills and concepts. If possible, visit each others' classrooms to observe and chat. Report back to the study group, bringing stories, samples of kids' work, or classroom videos to share.

## **Chapter 12**

### **Assessment and Evaluation**

1. There is often confusion around the terms “assessment” and “evaluation.” Discuss the differences and talk about the ways each offers insight into students' learning.
2. Many teachers (and parents, too!) worry about individual accountability during group work. Read through the list of ways you might ensure accountability. What others can you think of to add?
3. Consider ways rubrics used throughout the inquiry process inform and monitor learning.
4. 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?
5. 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 new found knowledge lead to?

6. As you experiment with different kinds of inquiry circles in your own classroom, share the assessments you develop yourself, adapt from the book, or construct with students.

## Chapter 13

### Management Q&A

1. In what ways do you see the four types of inquiry as complementary? What questions might you still have that will drive your own inquiry?
2. What scheduling constraints, if any, would you have to overcome to incorporate inquiry studies? Discuss possible solutions.
3. Reflect on the idea that inquiry might be seen as a replacement, rather than an addition to less productive practices.
4. Reread and reflect on the important organizational aspects of keeping up with materials and resources. What additional ideas do you have from your own experience?
5. What excites you the most about this approach? Why?
6. What positive effects might occur in whole-school implementation?
7. If you experiment with different kinds of inquiry circles in your own classroom, bring along your own management questions and brainstorm solutions in the study group.

For more information, ideas, and resources for inquiry circles, please visit Steph and Smokey's website [www.heinemann.com/comprehensionandcollaboration](http://www.heinemann.com/comprehensionandcollaboration).