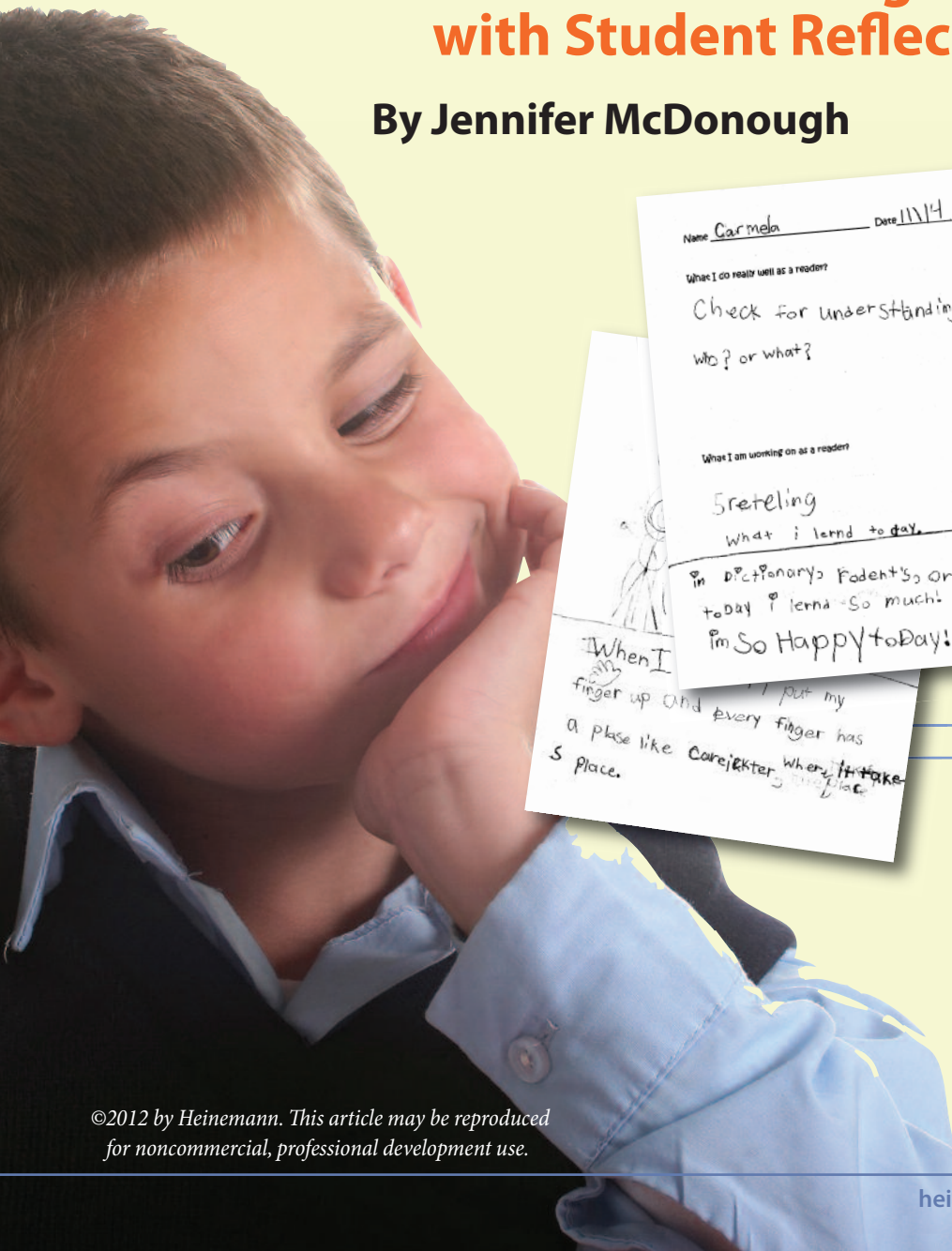


# GO STRAIGHT to the SOURCE

## Enhance Your Reading Strategies with Student Reflections

By Jennifer McDonough



Name Carmela Date 11/14

What I do really well as a reader?  
 Check for understanding  
 who? or what?

What I am working on as a reader?  
 Retelling  
 what I learn today.  
 in dictionary, parent's orp  
 today I learn so much  
 I'm so happy today!

When I <sup>am</sup> put my  
 finger up and every finger has  
 a place like corejckter, when I take  
 S place.

Reading Conferences With: Carmela

Goal: Comprehension

Strategies:		Strengths:
1. retell		1. read the words
2.		2. expressive reader

Date	Observations and Instruction	Next Steps to Meet Goal
10/25	Book: <u>Level 1</u> Student: <u>gave her hands to practice retelling</u> Task: <u>about 5 fingers</u>	Student's Job: <u>read the words or to practice after reading</u> When do we meet next?
11/4	Book: <u>Spit the Cat</u> <u>Level 1</u> Student: <u>knows to mark retelling hand to help others see what she's doing</u> Task: <u>to read to our reading partner</u> When do we meet next?	Student's Job: <u>Use the retelling hand!</u> Stop When do we meet next?
11/10	Book: <u>Level 1</u> Student: <u>Stop every few pages give air who, what, post</u>	Student's Job: <u>Use the reminder - to stop and check</u> When do we meet next?
12/7	Book: <u>Allens Love Panta Claus</u> <u>Level 1</u> Student: <u>great expressions!</u> Task: <u>change ideas for punctuation</u> When do we meet next?	Student's Job: <u>reading by retelling what you did! the previous say</u> When do we meet next?
11/8	Book: <u>Good School!</u> <u>Level 1</u> Student: <u>was supposed to read a chapter book</u> Task: <u>get your mind ready for</u>	Student's Job: <u>read the words</u> When do we meet next?
1/20	Book: <u>Mr. Macky Is Wacky</u> <u>Level 1</u> Student: <u>Using a pocket to guide her reading</u> Task: <u>the guide to read</u> When do we meet next?	Student's Job: <u>read the words</u> When do we meet next?

It is busy, sometimes overwhelming, to be a teacher. We have so much coming at us every day. With Common Core State Standards, high-stakes testing, new school initiatives, parent pressures, curriculum changes, and oh yes . . . the kids, we can end up exhausted trying to get to some invisible finish line. We run so fast at times, we forget what we are really about: teaching the students in front of us.

[Continued on p. 32]

It is more important than ever that we take time to stop and figure out what our kids *really* know and not what the standards, curriculum, and testing tell us they *should* know. Children's self-reflections can be a perfect way to gather this kind of information.

### Using Reading Reflections

Every few weeks, ask your students to jot down responses to the following questions:

- **What do I do well as reader?**
- **What am I working on as a reader?**
- **What does that look or sound like when I try it out?**

Lay the reflections side by side with your conferring notes and ask if your thinking aligns with the child's thinking. How can you use the child's reflections to inform instruction? Does this child have any misconceptions about how a strategy looks and sounds?

As I discovered by using reflection sheets, *my* plan for the child didn't always align with what the child was able to do on his or her own. I was able to pinpoint these subtle gaps or misalignments in my teaching. The child may not have been fully comfortable with a skill or strategy, and moving on may have led to problems later.

Reading is a complicated process for beginning readers; they use many different reading systems at once. We need to help each reader know and be able to articulate one goal to focus on. I think of this as "spotlighting" one reading strategy, knowing that the children will be using many others as they work through text.

### Reflections of a First-Grade Reader

Carmela is a confident, voracious reader who makes a teacher think, "What could I possibly teach her that she doesn't already do well?" Using Carmela's reflection sheet to guide me and taking a little time to reflect on my teaching helped me refine my goals for this reader.

Carmela writes in her reflection that she checks for understanding and asks herself who and what she is reading about. She tells me that she is working on retelling. Carmela knows that good readers stop while they are reading and check to make sure they can remember what they have read. She gets that reading has to have meaning, but does she understand what it means to retell?

Carmela's explanation shows that she focuses on story elements (as you read on, you will discover why!) and that she leaves out one of the most important aspects of recalling text—being able to identify actions that help move the story along. This important step will enable her to synthesize later.

Here are some things I record as I confer with Carmela:

- **"Gave her a retelling hand to practice retelling the story across her fingers."**
- **"Retell the story using character name, setting, problem, and solution."**

I realize that in my haste to want to make retelling very concrete for Carmela by having her retell the story using story elements, I inadvertently ignored that she was not noticing the actions that move the story along. Carmela is so bright and willing to learn that she internalized exactly what I was teaching her very quickly, but after looking at her reflections, comparing them to my conference notes, I realize that maybe I was nudging her in the wrong direction.

When I think about myself as a reader, I don't describe the text using the story element script. I focus on what the book is about and the details I remember reading. Knowing that Carmela also lacked action in



her writing, I decide that all of my nudging toward story elements isn't really helping her become an authentic reader or writer. I need to remind her to stop every so often and ask herself what just happened, thus putting more focus on actions and details. Then, instead of retelling to a story element script, she'll do what good readers do: talk about the text in her own way and in her own words. Doing quick retells as she reads would help her remember what she read and be able to talk about it.

I made this slight adjustment so that Carmela and I were back in alignment. A few conferences later, she knew she was supposed to stop and think about what was happening—the actions in the story—but she wasn't doing it independently yet. I gave her a sticky note with the words "What is happening?" to place every few pages to remind her to stop and do a quick retell. My amazing reader still had some work to do! This subtle but important realization that came from reflecting on my teaching, her reflections, and my own experience as a reader helped me clarify what Carmela needed most.

There are many more examples of the insights that can be gleaned from paying attention to what your students are telling you. They know what they know and no matter what pressures push you from behind to that finish line, you can't forget to grab the hands of the children around you and get them to that finish line too. Take the time to let your students reflect on themselves as readers, make sure you think about what you do as a reader, and then use what you learn to guide your instruction. The students will end up with a solid foundation and a love of reading!

**Jennifer McDonough** is a first-grade teacher and literacy coach at the Benjamin School in North Palm Beach, Florida. She has taught first grade and kindergarten for 13 years and has been a part of literacy training for teachers for more than six years. Jen coauthored *A Place for Wonder: Reading and Writing Nonfiction in the Primary Grades* along with Heinemann author Georgia Heard. Jen also serves as a Heinemann Professional Development consultant.



To continue to engage with Jennifer on this topic go to [www.heinemann.com/pd/journal](http://www.heinemann.com/pd/journal).