

# STUDY GUIDE

Learning is inherently social. Though sometimes we feel isolated as teachers, most of us know the benefits of taking time to talk with colleagues. It is in these conversations that we find our own ideas clarified and enriched. Develop a professional learning community that works for the culture of your school. Whether you meet once a week or less often; whether you use a professional book as a centerpiece, student writing, or a big, pressing question that concerns your school—make the leap into conversation. 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. Here are a few things you might consider.

**Consider Group Size:** You may want to kick off discussion with a general question and then break into smaller groups. Often the optimal number is four or five to ensure there is time for all to exchange ideas. 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 conversation going. There are various ways to use questions.

- Put three or four questions in an envelope and randomly pull them out for discussion.
- Create a chart with two or three starter questions and ask the group to generate more, tapping their own personal interests and needs.
- Decide on three or four 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.

**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.

**Stay Focused on the Topic:** Plan a procedure that is transparent. 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.”

**Include Everyone:** Keep groups small enough so that even the quietest member is encouraged to speak. Active listening on everyone’s part will help. Remember that periods of silence should be expected when people are thinking.

**Share Leadership:** Rotate group facilitation. Identify several “duties” for the facilitator. Examples might include 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. This isn’t the place for an “expert”!

**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.

***Set Dates for the Next Meeting:*** Always leave knowing when you will meet again and who will facilitate.

***Engage in Reflection:*** Stop from time to time to reflect on what you are learning and how you might make your group's interactions more productive. Make sure you take time to enjoy one another and celebrate your learning.

The following questions relate to the content in each chapter. These are suggestions, and many more concepts and ideas are presented in each chapter. Enjoy!

# 1 The Teacher on the Sidelines of Independent Reading

1. Discuss how the nature of today's society works against the idea of students choosing to read for enjoyment. What do you currently do to try to instill a love of reading in the students with whom you work?
2. What is the difference between teaching books and teaching readers? How does this idea change the way you might approach reading instruction in your classroom?
3. What concerns do you have about moving to a classroom where students read in self-selected texts? How can you work together as colleagues to answer these concerns?
4. How have you previously used independent reading in your classroom? How might your presence in desk-side conferences during this reading time change the readers in your room?
5. Consider Vygotsky's assertion that growth occurs when students function in their zone of proximal development, an area in which they can be successful only if supported by a "more knowledgeable other." How might that idea shape your thinking about some of the ways your students currently spend their time during your reading class?
6. What is the difference between guidance and support? How would the two look different in a reading classroom?

## 2 : Planning for Engagement: Coloring and Contouring Students' Expectations

1. Discuss your own student experiences with reading and how they shaped your reading habits. How might students' prior experiences with reading affect their commitment to and progress in your class? What are some specific ways you can help students change their negative attitudes about reading?
2. Discuss the idea of building a concept of *reader*. Are you yourself a reader? What habits define you as such—and how might you share those habits with your students?
3. Book talks are a powerful way to engage students in the classroom. How do you currently use book talks in your classroom? What books do your students find appealing? How can you work together to ensure students are introduced to books that might engage them?
4. McKenna identifies classroom culture as a key component in engaging student readers. What steps can you take to ensure that your classroom culture is centered on reading?
5. Allison recommends having students engage in small-group discussion, even though each of them has been reading a different book. Discuss the implications of this idea. What kinds of discussion prompts could you provide that would lead students to a meaningful discussion of the books they are reading—and how would you assess the quality of those discussions?

### 3 : Clever Matchmaking Between : Students and Books

1. Allison stresses the importance of a well-constructed classroom library. Discuss ways to build and maintain a classroom library that will include a wide range of choices including current fiction and nonfiction. How might the availability of these books in your classroom increase the amount of reading your students do?
2. Discuss the idea of the book shopping spree. What specific titles do you think would be most likely to intrigue your students? How might conducting these sprees change the level of engagement in your classroom? How could the information gathered on the record sheets inform your instruction?
3. Allison offers several ideas for making time spent in the school library more productive for students. She specifically stresses helping students understand that their job in the library is to find a book they will understand, finish, and enjoy. Discuss how you currently handle student book choice in the library. How could the idea of finding a book they would finish and enjoy change your students as readers?
4. Many students, particularly those who seem to avoid reading the most, prefer nonfiction texts. This often provides a challenge for teachers who are used to using fiction texts in their classrooms. How familiar are you with quality nonfiction? Collect various titles from your school or classroom libraries or take a trip to a local bookstore to look at the nonfiction titles for adolescents there. How might these books engage your student readers?

# 4 : Direct Instruction and Routines in the Independent Reading Classroom

1. Allison recommends limiting direct instruction to fifteen minutes or less. How would this change the way you plan your lessons? What challenges would this present to you as a teacher? What might be the advantages to students if you made this change?
2. As a group, make a list of five things you plan to teach in the next few weeks in your reading class. Think about how you yourself apply these skills or strategies to your own reading. Choose at least one skill or strategy and together determine the declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge you will have to provide for your students if they are to be successful in applying this new learning.
3. Allison anchors her lessons in short texts from trade books. Using a stack of fifteen to twenty randomly selected books from your school or classroom libraries, work together to find excerpts you could use to anchor your upcoming lessons. Think aloud as you search for the texts. What specific characteristics must the text you choose have to be a good model for the lesson?
4. Review the ideas presented on creating anchor charts and reading responses. Work together to develop an anchor chart for the skills or strategies you are targeting. Using one of the short texts you have selected, fill in the chart as you would while teaching the lesson. How might this type of response shape students' thinking about the texts they are reading? How might it help them grow as readers?
5. Allison asserts that instruction in an independent reading classroom should be "seamless." Discuss the implications of this statement. What is the relationship between the minilesson, the anchor text, the anchor chart, and the reading response? What kind of planning would such seamless instruction require?

# 5 : Teaching Through Deskside Conferences

1. Discuss the idea of deskside conferences. How might these conferences serve as a tool for differentiating instruction in your classroom?
2. Allison states that deskside conferences are “teacher initiated, but student driven.” Discuss the implications of this idea. What unexpected confusions might you uncover during these conferences and how might you respond to them?
3. Keeping meaningful notes on conferences is an important element in an independent reading classroom. What note-taking systems have you tried in the past? What might you try now? What types of notes might you make that would help you know where to go next with your instruction? How might these notes be useful in parent conferences or in discussions with counselors and administrators about individual students?
4. Look back at the lessons you developed based on Chapter 4. What might your conference questions be to assess student understanding of the targeted skills or strategies? What kinds of confusions do you expect to uncover—and how will you redirect confused student thinking?

## 6 Capturing the Attention of Our Disengaged Readers

1. Allison asserts that no matter their label there are three types of readers in a classroom: “those who are progressing as expected, those who have fallen behind, and those who are surging ahead.” How are you currently meeting the needs of each of these groups of students?
2. Allison prefers the term *delayed reader* to the more common *struggling reader*. How could this change in terminology reflect a difference in teachers’ attitudes toward these students?
3. Discuss a delayed reader from your own classroom. How did you identify this student as delayed? What behaviors does he or she exhibit in the classroom? What stands in the way of this student and success? How might deskside conferences accelerate the progress of this student?
4. Think about the on-level readers in your classroom. Do you agree or disagree with the statement that “unless teachers realize that their needs are worthy of focused attention, these readers are in danger of stalling out and failing to make continued progress”? How might this change your teaching?
5. According to Reis and McCoach, a need to conform to their peers coupled with a lack of challenge in the classroom often causes gifted students to become underachievers. How can self-selected reading and deskside conferences be used to reinvigorate and challenge gifted readers?
6. Discuss the sample conferences in the chapter. Focus particularly on Allison’s comments. What does she do to draw out the reader’s thinking and how does she redirect it when she uncovers a student’s confusion?

# 7 : Differentiating Instruction Through Deskside Conferences

1. Discuss the idea that “books that students don’t want to read will not help them grow as readers.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Give specific reasons and examples to support your position.
2. Think about books you have loved and those you have abandoned. What about the books prompted your decision to finish or abandon them? Are your reasons similar to those in Figure 6–1? How would a discussion of this during a minilesson help the readers in your classroom?
3. Allison recommends addressing the issue of distractions in a minilesson. What distracts you while you are reading—and how do you get back into the text after these distractions?
4. Allison details ways to assess the comprehension of disengaged students. Discuss this section of the text. What exactly does Allison do in these conferences that helps these readers understand how to change their approach to the text? Think of a specific student in your class who often seems disengaged from reading. How might this type of conference change that reader?
5. Allison calls questions “the vehicle that drives reading forward.” Discuss this idea in detail. Think about what questions you automatically and probably unconsciously generate as you read. How could you share this habit with your students and help them adopt it as well? How could the idea of picking a writer’s brain help them understand the difference between simple questions focused on details and richer questions that push the reading forward? How might you address these issues in deskside conferences?

# 8 Teaching Comprehension in Fiction Texts

1. Discuss the idea that engagement and comprehension are inseparable. How could this idea shape the instruction in your classroom?
2. Most reading teachers are familiar with teaching story structure and character analysis. How do the ideas presented in this chapter fit with how you already approach these ideas in your classroom? What changes might you make based on what you read in this chapter?
3. What confuses the readers in your classroom as they begin to read more sophisticated texts? Using a collection of books from your classroom or school library, look for excerpts that you could use to help your students understand these points of confusion. What key points would you use in your lesson? What declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge would the students need to have? What questions could you ask in conferences that would uncover these confusions over the way advanced texts are written?
4. Pronouns can be confusing for students both in first-person narratives and in dialogue. From the same collection of books, find excerpts you could use in minilessons to help students understand to whom pronouns refer and how this understanding shapes student understanding. How will you recognize in a conference that pronouns might be the problem?

# 9 Teaching Comprehension in Nonfiction Texts

1. How do you currently address the challenges of nonfiction texts in your classroom? What steps do you take to be sure students understand how to choose and understand expository texts?
2. Consider the idea that “curiosity is what drives people to read nonfiction.” How does this affect your commitment to using nonfiction texts in your classroom? What types of texts might you use? How can you find nonfiction texts that will engage your students?
3. Consider your district and state curriculums. How could nonfiction texts be used to teach required elements in your curriculum? What types of minilessons might you provide? What kind of direction might you need to provide in deskside conferences to make students more successful in comprehending these texts?
4. How do you use the K-W-L strategy in your classroom? How could you transfer this knowledge to the reading of informational texts? How would this shape your deskside conferences?
5. Ask your school librarian to provide a list of the most popular books in your school library. How many of them are nonfiction? What are the most popular nonfiction books? How could you use these books in your classroom?

# 10 : Assessing Independent Readers

1. Discuss the true meaning of *assessment*. How do you currently assess the readers in your classroom? How does this assessment inform your instruction?
2. Bring notes from your recent deskside conferences; trade notes with the other members of your study group. What can you tell about the students from the notes their teachers have taken? What direction does instruction need to take to address student needs? How does this inform the instruction in *your* classroom? Discuss the types of comments that best direct instruction in the classroom.
3. Make a list of three to five skills or strategies that you will be teaching in the next few weeks. What graphic organizers might be used as reading responses when these skills or strategies are taught? How will you model their use? How will you use these graphic organizers to assess your students?
4. Bring sample reading logs from your classroom. Work as a group to analyze these logs, looking for what each tells about the reader who completed them. What direction needs to be provided for each of these students so that they can grow? Then look at what these logs can tell you about books your students love. What genres and authors are popular? What specific titles are the students reading and *finishing* the most?

# Final Reflection

How might the ideas presented in this book change your instruction in the classroom?