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OPPORTUNITIES FOR USING

The
Writing Strategies
Book

as a **SUPPLEMENT** to a **BASAL READING SERIES**



Dear colleagues,

Teachers, coaches, and school leaders sometimes ask me for advice about how to use *The Writing Strategies Book* alongside scripted programs for reading and writing. I recently sat down with a student book and teacher's guide from one reading series to learn how they are organized, what sorts of work they ask students to do, and the types of texts that students will encounter. From what I learned, I thought I could offer some helpful tips for ways to include strategy instruction in your literacy block, alongside whatever series or program you use. I'm offering this help to those of you who are in districts where the expectation is that you use the reading series materials the district has provided to you.

From my exploration, I found many opportunities for offering students more explicit strategies like the ones in the *The Writing Strategies Book*, and lots of opportunities to provide differentiation beyond what a teacher's guide suggests. This means that although you may still choose to follow the general scope and sequence of a program, use some or all of the student writing activities and/or use some or all of the tasks the resource suggests, there are places where you can differentiate more in order to better meet student needs. For example, I may offer you ideas for how you can step aside for ten minutes while students are working independently to pull together a small group, change the language of a lesson to make it more explicit, and/or consider adding in some free-choice writing as a place to do more one-on-one conferences. In lots of instances, I found myself suggesting that instead of simply assigning a task, activity, or question as the book suggests, you might teach students *how* to go about doing it. That's where strategies come in.

I hope these noticings and suggestions are helpful to you, and above all that that they help to bring about increased growth in your students!

Best,

Jennifer Serravallo

Opportunities for Using *The Writing Strategies Book* to Support Students with Writing Tasks from a Basal Reading Series

What I notice when looking at a student book

Students are asked to correct the grammar in sentences.

Advice I might give to a teacher using these materials along with *The Writing Strategies Book*

In the chapter focusing on conventions (Grammar and Punctuation), you will find strategies that help students know *how* to do this. Often, if you can simply tell a child to do it and they can do it, then they didn't need the practice in the first place. If you tell a child to do it and they struggle, they need a strategy to know how. You could regard the task as an assessment, then sort the student papers into piles—which students need strategies for capitalization, for example? Which need help with comma placement? Which are inconsistent with ending punctuation? You can then target specific strategies to match the types of conventions support the students need.



What I notice in student books

Every forty-five pages or so in the student book, there will be a writing task. For example, after one chapter students are asked to complete a narrative writing task and are then given a checklist to proofread their work.

How to incorporate *Writing Strategies*

First, identify the genre of the work that is being assigned. Every strategy in *Writing Strategies* has a genre aligned to it, so that you'll be able to find appropriate strategies quickly.

Second, consider taking your students through the writing process with a series of lessons. You can learn more about the writing process in the "Getting Started" chapter, and you'll find that each strategy is annotated with a step of the writing process to help you match them to students at the right time.

After students work through the process, instead of just filing it away or grading it, take a close look at their work and use it as a piece of formative assessment. Try to identify what goals you might have for them, from a quality of good writing perspective—do they need help focusing (sticking just to the prompt), organizing, elaborating (adding detail or more carefully considering word choice), or with conventions (punctuation, spelling, grammar)? There's a chapter in *Writing Strategies* for each of these areas. Once you pinpoint what each student needs, you can decide to teach them to improve their writing—either in this piece and/or future pieces.

What I notice in student books

Connected to the writing task, students are asked to look at a student exemplar/mentor text.

In the teacher's guide, the directions will often be to "guide students to _____," but the guide doesn't specify *how* to guide students.

Teach/Model sections in the teacher's guide ask teachers to explain and describe, but often there aren't language examples for what a model may sound like.

How to incorporate *Writing Strategies*

In *Writing Strategies*, you'll find language you can use with students to help them study mentor texts to learn about the craft techniques authors use. If you are looking for additional writing mentors, many texts are recommended throughout *Writing Strategies*.

Teachers may find that they could use some support for language to use for this guidance—the strategies and prompts in *Writing Strategies*, as well as the lesson language sections can help teachers with samples of what to say and how to say it.

Writing Strategies can offer language examples for what a demonstration (as opposed to an explanation) could sound like. When teachers model their own writing in front of students, it helps students to see *how* a writer works through problems through the use of strategies, rather than the work simply being summarized for them.

What I notice in student books

Students are asked to work with partners during different parts of the process (i.e., to plan out what they want to write, to proofread each others' work).

Students are given scaffolded writing frames, specific prompts, and opportunities for guided writing.

How to incorporate *Writing Strategies*

Working with partners may not come naturally to all students. In Chapter 10, "Writing Partnerships and Clubs," there are specific strategies meant to support students as they work collaboratively as writers. Using the strategy language, prompts, and visuals (charts, tools, etc.) will help give students the *how* they need to be productive in peer writing situations.

To help this teaching stick, it's helpful to gradually release responsibility to independent practice. One of the first steps to being an independent writer is the ability to come up with your own topic. In Chapter 3, you'll find strategies to support students in whatever genre you're practicing in the reading series. Students can come up with their own topic, or a spin on the assigned topic. As students work on their self-selected topics, you can assess what qualities of writing they could use more support with—focus, organization, elaboration, conventions, and so on. Flip to the corresponding chapters in *Writing Strategies* to support students with specific strategies for improving the qualities of their writing.

What I notice in student books

Phonics/Phonemic Awareness lessons and activities

Writing tasks are aligned to a genre and a skill focus. For example, in one fourth-grade teacher's guide, a lesson is denoted to be for "personal narrative" and to help students practice "organization."

Writing tasks are largely completed independently.

How to incorporate *Writing Strategies*

To ensure students aren't viewing these exercises as isolated skills, it's important to teach them to explicitly transfer what they learn to real writing contexts. In Chapter 8, "Conventions: Spelling" you'll find lots of strategies to help students apply their phonics knowledge when drafting, and to search for the spelling features they learn about to edit their work.

It's possible that many of the skill focuses and genre focuses that are mentioned in the teacher's guide are in similar language to what you'll find in *Writing Strategies*.

As students write, watch their level of engagement. Are they focused? Do they have the stamina to write for long stretches independently? Do they seem to enjoy writing? For any students needing support with engagement, you'll find strategies in Chapter 2 of *Writing Strategies*.