

MINI-LESSON: INTRODUCE READER SYNTHESIS

Below is a transcript of a 9-minute lesson for introducing synthesis to readers.

The video is available for free on WWW.SMEKENSEDUCATION.COM.



As we start today's mini-lesson, let me first remind you of the voices in a reader's head. We've been learning to use our *Reading Voice* to sound out the words. But we've also got to make sure our *Thinking Voice* is talking, too; it can have a lot of different thoughts.

So far this year we've learned that our *Thinking Voice* can retell and summarize what we read; it determines the most important information—the main ideas. We can also see things in our minds because we can visualize, even when there's no pictures. We've learned to start asking questions when we read and even make connections. Today, I

want to introduce you to synthesizing: the sixth comprehension strategy.

Now synthesis is awesome because it's so powerful. And to really understand its power, I want to quickly review how the other inferences, or types of thoughts, work.

When we read, we read a few lines, and then we have a thought. We read a few more lines and have a thought. And we keep this *Reading Voice/Thinking Voice* conversation going on all throughout the text. But every once in a while, we read something, have a thought...and then another thought...and another thought. And we keep thinking about what we just read. We can't stop thinking about it. And after we've had multiple thoughts, we realize something. We've learned something. We've discovered something we didn't know before. And when that happens, it's a synthesis.



A synthesis is a lot like baking a cake. When you first buy a cake mix, open it up, and pour the powder into the bowl, you don't have much. You just start with powder...until you add the other ingredients. You add the water and then the oil and then the eggs. After adding those ingredients and mixing them up and putting it in the oven, you form a cake.

That whole cake-baking process is exactly how synthesizing works for readers, too. The powdered cake mix is your text. And you open it up, and you pour some in the bowl. That's you reading and having a thought about what's been read. And you read a little more, and you think about it. Read a little more and think about it. But, every once in a while, you read something and you think more than just a moment about it. You are thinking about it, and it makes you wonder...

It reminds you of other texts you've read, experiences you've had. It reminds you of things you've learned previously and what experts say or other perspectives on this topic. It makes you start to think about nagging questions, things you're wondering about or curious about. You might think about what was going on in the setting, what was happening in that time period. We're considering everything about the text, including our emotions. What are we thinking about? What are we wondering about? How are we feeling?

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And when we put any of these extra thoughts into our first thought, and we start to mix it and combine it and really consider it, what we have when we're done is a brand new thought—a synthesis.

Let me show you the difference between a synthesis and the other five inferences. Instead of using print text, though, I'm going to use a visual text (photographs).

For this portion of the lesson, reveal several photos personal to you.

- **PHOTO #1** Here's a photo of my three kids, and I could think in the form of a retelling. And I could **RETELL** about the time our family went to the Hard Rock Café.
- **PHOTO #2** Or, I could **RETELL** about the time we went to Yellowstone. But oh man, the **VISUALIZATIONS** that I could create would be fabulous, too.
- **PHOTO #3** And here's another text—again of my three kids. I'm making a **CONNECTION**—a text-to-self connection. I'm thinking about when my parents made me read when I was a kid.

Have you ever pulled out a bunch of old photos and started flipping through them or scrolling through them on one of your devices? Have you ever moved through several photos, having a quick thought about each one? But then, every once in a while, you get to a photo, and you pause. You're going to be there a little longer. You're not just having one thought, you're having several thoughts. This is you having a synthesis.



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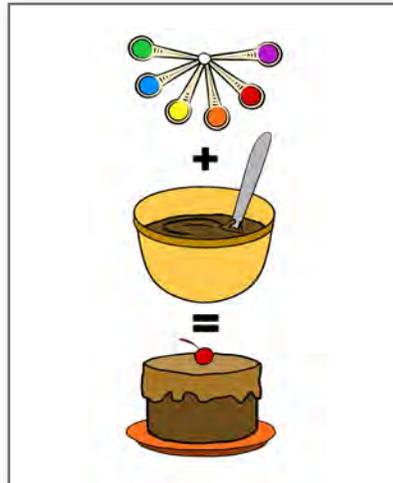
When I was first going through the photos, and I looked at each one, I had a quick thought and moved on. Until I got to this one (**PHOTO #4**).

- When I first look at this photo, I immediately go into a **RETELLING** mode, and I remember when Nana came and visited my kids in 2004. But there's so much to this photo—so much happening in my mind, that I keep thinking.

- Like, I start to think about when this happened. I consider the **SETTING**. I know it was 2004, but she came from Wisconsin. Nana drove two days down from Wisconsin twelve years ago. Look how young my kids are.
- As I keep looking at this picture, I remember how fun it was. I'm just taking in the **EMOTION** and remembering how much laughter the kids exuded that day when playing Perfection. Nana would start to scream every time that board popped up, and the kids would laugh.
- That memory causes me to ponder and pull on some of my own **BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE** about when I was a kid, and my grandparents came to visit me. But not often—only like one time or two times a year. I didn't see my grandparents very often. They lived far away.
- Now some people think that's kind of sad. Their **PERSPECTIVE** is that I really missed out. But, you know what? It wasn't sad for me. It was just normal. It's the way things were.
- You know what? As I look back, and I think back about that visit and so many others, you know what I'm realizing? You know what I'm synthesizing? I'm realizing there was a kind of perk for grandparents living far away. Yeah, they only visit every once in a while, but those visits are so special. They're so special because we cram like a year's worth of fun into just a couple days.

Did you see it? Did you see what happened there? I had a synthesis! Did you notice how I looked at the picture and had an initial thought. But then I paused and another thought came and then another and another and another. I didn't know how many thoughts were going to come, but after I paused and had several thoughts, I paused once more. That was me combining, mixing my thinking. It's when I realized that for me it wasn't sad that I didn't see my grandparents very often. In fact, it made it kind of extra special. It was the perk. That was my synthesis! I hadn't stopped to think about that before. I had this new realization after reading (looking) at the photo and taking into account all of my thoughts.

So today's lesson was all about synthesizing—it's the sixth type of reader thought. The *Thinking Voice* can synthesize. And it's this powerful inference that your mind can make by simply reading the text and thinking, adding, combining, mixing, and producing a brand new realization. When you synthesize, you learn something you didn't consider before.



You will need:

- Background Knowledge
- Emotional Reactions
- Genre Considerations
- Setting & Context
- Other Viewpoints
- Lingering Questions

Recipe for Making a Synthesis

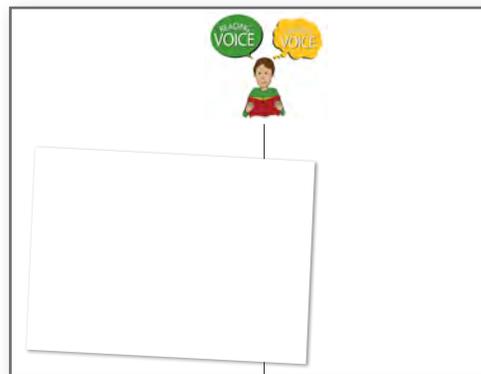
- 1 read** Read the text. Continually check for overall understanding. Use the Stop & Say Something strategy to retell/summarize.
- 2 pause** Be on the lookout for important parts, lines, or quotes. Pause to ponder them.
- 3 ponder** Consider if you have any related thoughts.
 - Add in background knowledge.
 - Add in setting & context.
 - Add in emotional reactions.
 - Add in other viewpoints.
 - Add in genre considerations.
 - Add in lingering questions.
- 4 combine** Mix together your summary with your added thoughts. Combine them all together and think about what it means. Take a few moments to ask **Why does this matter?** (What are you realizing?)
- 5 support** Add textual evidence to support (or discredit) your initial synthesis. Present your complete inference/synthesis with support in writing.

Be patient! Don't rush this step!

READING VOICE

THINKING VOICE

- I **retell** and **summarize** when I read.
- I pick out the **main ideas** when I read.
- I **visualize** when I read.
- I ask **questions** when I read.
- I make **connections** when I read.
- I **synthesize** when I read.



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