

Teacher Commentary – Strategy: Synthesize
 Sample Lesson: Synthesizing Our Thinking in Fiction
 Grade 2, Apryl Whitman, Teacher, Arden Elementary School, Richland One School District, Columbia, SC

Joanne Durham, Interviewer (I); Apryl Whitman, Teacher (T)

Segment	Transcript
<p>LESSON INTRODUCTION</p>	<p>I: So you've been working with synthesizing with your kids in fiction. So tell us about what you've done already. T: OK. We've really been working on fables. I've found that fables, one, are a little bit shorter so it allows more focus. They have more opportunities for synthesizing just from listening to the title. We get a couple of sentences in and the kids see a change and then at the end we have that overall kind of moral or lesson to it. So we aren't focusing on recalling so many details but trying to focus on that overall meaning. Sometimes when I would use longer stories they were more focused on just recalling what happened and summarizing. So when I used fables, they were able to see how that overall meaning is what the whole story is about. And it's good for their attention spans, because they're quick and easy and it set them up for success with that strategy. So we've been working a lot with fables. I started working with a couple of smaller groups of students where I saw they were struggling with the fables, but I really haven't delved into that too much yet.</p>
	<p>I: Why do you think it's important to teach them this whole idea that your thinking changes as you read through the story? T: One, I think it's a strategy that they internally do already, especially at this point in their reading lives, so giving that strategy something that they can name. Also it helps to get away again from that process of just recalling certain facts that are in the story, but looking for what is this all about, why am I reading this, how is this helping me as a reader. Teaching them how to do that helps them to better comprehend the story, shows them why we do read. And again, bringing out those internal thoughts that we're already having, and teaching them how to use that to get overall meaning, it's a great strategy for the kids. I: So really they're using all of these strategies that you've been teaching them all year long, but now they're seeing how that leads them to that big idea. T: It all adds up, exactly. Doing this at the beginning of the year would have been impossible, because they didn't have those other strategies. I heard them making connections, asking questions while they were reading, bringing in some of their background knowledge, so all those different strategies that we've been doing build into synthesizing. So that's why we're doing it at this time of the year and why it was important to do all the other strategies first.</p>
	<p>I: How did you choose your book? Why did you use this book? T: It's such an awesome book. I love that they clapped at the end because it is such a great story. But we are in the heart of our butterfly unit, that's our science unit, and it connects into ELA, so as you saw in our lesson we've already been doing a lot with butterflies. So I still wanted it to be relevant to them, and I knew that if it was something that we're already in the midst of, they would be engaged and excited. Also because it was about the Painted Lady, it made that wonderful connection. So I could keep their attention while I was also teaching a new strategy, and they could learn information from it as well. So we had a lot of points with one book. I: And as you were reading it, you really saw them making those connections about it and really enjoying I think the</p>

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	<p>fact that there was this book written about something that they are already doing</p> <p>T: And that they are an expert on.</p> <p>I: It really did seem that their background knowledge enhanced their enjoyment of the book</p> <p>T: It did.</p>
	<p>I: Talk about your anchor chart.</p> <p>T: Well it's one that I've used a similar model with to show that it's developmental, it does grow and our thinking grows as we're reading the story. I added the graphics on there to tie in with the analogy that our thinking is like a caterpillar, a butterfly, it's going to change over time. So I included the graphics so they could make that connection. Then I put the sentence starters on there as well, not only for my modeling, but for their thinking as they were recording their thoughts. They had a guide while they were recording their thoughts. As I noticed in my lesson, a lot of my children verbally understood the story and the process but they had a hard time transferring some of their comments onto the paper. This guides their thinking so they are not so stuck on the writing process but they're getting down what they're thinking.</p> <p>I: I wonder if you keep using that notion of the butterfly and that changing like the butterfly if that will help them</p> <p>T: To make that connection</p> <p>I: To keep that notion of how our thinking changes in their heads.</p>
<p>CONNECT AND ENGAGE</p>	<p>I: Talk about your thinking in terms of what you chose to do to connect and engage. What you decided you wanted to do and needed to do to start the lesson.</p> <p>T: I didn't want to give away too much of what the story was about so that it wouldn't hinder their synthesizing, but I wanted to point out that it was about a Painted Lady. So automatically they were ooo, that's something we're learning about, so they were excited. But even the title, when I said, "Butterfly House," you could see that a lot of them were like, what, a house for a butterfly? Someone said, "A house is for a person." So just raising that question and getting their little minds going about how you would make a butterfly home. So automatically they were starting to bring in their background knowledge of what we've been learning about, making those inferences of what I would put in a house and what do I think the story is going to be about set the stage not only for excitement but for what was going to come in the story, and setting some expectations for what we were going to learn about in the book.</p> <p>I: And then you also set them up for thinking about the strategy as well.</p> <p>T: Yes, I looked back as to what we had done before, with the previous anchor chart and referenced back to a story that we had already done to bring that back up, remember how we read The Lion and The Mouse and you did these things and our thinking changed in fables, so they can remember that process that we went through. Then we've been talking about that big word, synthesizing, that is so hard to say, but connecting to something that they had already done, they were already familiar with that strategy, so they knew what we were going to do. I started talking about that analogy of the butterfly changing, so they knew that our thoughts were going to be changing as we were reading the story.</p> <p>I: So they're set up just a little bit with the idea of what the book is about, and excited about the book, and they're also clear</p> <p>T: About what the strategy is that we're going to do.</p>

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<p>MODELING</p>	<p>I: So when you got to modeling, talk a little bit about how you chose where you wanted to stop, to model, and then to release them to guide.</p> <p>T: The spots that I chose were spots where for me as a reader, my thinking changed. So I literally was choosing spots where I wanted to do my think alouds where I changed my thinking as I was reading. I knew they would be more obvious points in the book where the story shifted in the overall meaning. So I went through it as a reader myself and chose those spots where I knew the kids would say ooh, that's different. You could see the reactions, oh, wait, hold on – especially when she became older, as soon as I turned the page I saw an immediate reaction because that's the reaction I had when I was reading the story as well.</p> <p>I: And in terms of how many you chose, what was your thinking around that?</p> <p>T: I really wanted to stick to three or four, because, one I didn't want to overload them with their thinking changing so much and turning and talking so much. We've been working on three with our fables – our first thoughts, the middle of the story and then at the end. There were a couple at the end where there were some abrupt changes, from her letting the butterfly go, then she's old, then there's the overall meaning, so there are a couple of shifts right there. I didn't want to overwhelm them with having to do so much writing, so that's why I stuck to about four.</p> <p>I: And if you do too many, you break up the continuity of the story too, right?</p> <p>T: Yes, then they see it as kind of a monotonous thing that I'm doing, I've got to stop to record my thinking. They lose the overall excitement of the book.</p> <p>I: It seemed like enough to make clear what you want them to do, but not so much that the story gets lost in the process.</p> <p>I: When you were listening to them turn and talk, what kinds of things did you hear?</p> <p>T: When we first started, a lot of them mimicked what I was thinking, and that was fine, because that's the point of modeling, for them to take on, kind of shadowing what I'm doing and then go into their own thinking. As we got in a little bit deeper, I started to hear more of the feelings, the reference of them being a passion. Some of the things that they said, "It's about loving things." So they got away from recalling these tiny little facts and they started to see that there might be more to this story.</p> <p>I: And some of the language – did that passion thing come from the kids?</p> <p>T: Yes! We were talking- he started it, he said it's a passion and I went, Whoa, yes it is, it's a passion. What is a passion. And I said, "What is a passion?" and he said like me playing baseball, it's a passion. So I chimed in with what is your passion and we all started talking. So they were coming up with a lot of that language on their own, which was fantastic.</p> <p>I: Because I think then when you had them share that language –</p> <p>T: It grew</p> <p>I: And that really helps the other kids</p> <p>T: The ones who are struggling</p> <p>I: to see what's important</p> <p>T: And that's why it's important to share, because some of them get stuck, and it's better for them to get their thoughts from someone else than from me, so they are learning from each other.</p> <p>I: And the child who said passion might not have known that that was so</p>

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	<p>T: Something so awesome I: So awesome until you reacted and shared it with everybody else, so bringing it out that way also helps those kids to realize this is the track T; that I need to be on.</p>
GUIDED PRACTICE	<p>I: When they were still up there on the rug, how did you confer into that to support them? T: Some children were still writing down basically what happened on this page. And I know for future reference that those are kids we'll have to go back in small group and maybe do a little more searching. For a couple of those kids what I did was, Ok, it's about that, that's an important part of the story, but getting you to sometimes think, OK, what do you think Eve Bunting really was trying to say. How could you take this and go into a different part of your life or a different story. Some of them said I think the author is trying to tell us it's all about taking care of butterflies. Do you think it's just about butterflies? Do you think it might be about more? I don't want to give them the words to think, I don't want to think their own thinking, I want to lead them there. Sometimes I find it to be a little difficult with some of them who are really, really stuck. I don't want to just give them the thoughts, I want to lead them up to that. As we continued going through the story, I think that helped a bit more. I: And then I guess – they're second graders – so some of them are going to be much more literal-minded than others. This story wasn't one of those knock-you-over-the-head with the moral like a fable is, T: It's a little bit deeper I: so they are beginning to move into a little more subtle what it's about T: And I think they did well I: Yes, definitely. T: Going from a short story such as a fable to one that is a little more lengthy, and then still pulling out some of those feelings and overall meaning, even if they were able to pull out just a little more than a basic recall fact, I think that was a great success. I: Right, and as you said, you'll take it on into small group and keep working on it T: Keep going.</p>
INDEPENDENT PRACTICE	<p>I: What decisions did you have to make moving on into independent practice? Why did you decide to do what you did with that, and as the kids grow in their ability to synthesize, how might that independent part change? T: At the very end, I did want them to jot down their final thoughts before they left, I wanted them to jot it down to get it out and put it into words, because sometimes that transfer from what I'm thinking and sharing, when I go to write it down I might have more difficulty. So talking about it first really helps them. Then when it was time to go, I asked some of them to stay on the carpet because I didn't want to send them out and then just sit there and be struggling. I wanted to offer them more scaffolding. And a couple of them were hesitant, I could see on their faces. I didn't want them to feel this is embarrassing if I stay on the carpet because I don't know what to do. But no, I just need some more time, I want to talk about it a little longer, and that's OK. So they stayed freely and then the rest went. We were</p>

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	<p>able to discuss and share, and again me not giving them their thoughts but getting them from each other. We revisited some of the book to help them through their thinking. Once they verbalized it, I got them started on their sentence and then sent them out. Then I was able to go around to each of the groups.</p> <p>Independently, that's my ultimate goal of any reading strategy is for them to do it by themselves. I leave the anchor charts up. We have independent reading every day. I confer with the students 1-1 through their processes and their thinking. So my goal is that they will do this by themselves. To get there, we'll go into some small group lessons, and helping them on that one on one basis, and then prompting them with the strategy during independent reading time.</p> <p>I: So today was a good start in letting them kind of transfer what they were thinking on the carpet into what they were doing a little bit more on their own. Then later on they can move into transferring it from the book you are reading into</p> <p>T: small group</p> <p>I: First the book in small group and then their own books.</p> <p>T: Exactly.</p> <p>I: So as you were conferring with the kids during the independent practice, what did you see they needed support with?</p> <p>T: We're struggling even at the end of the year with that spelling, don't worry about it being perfect, we can go back and fix that, let's just get our thinking down.</p> <p>T: Some of them were still struggling in this stack with, I think it was J___, put in a final thought, I think caterpillars are scary to ward off predators, a fact that she just knew. When I spoke with her, I didn't want to just say that fact doesn't belong there, erase that off, because that's an important fact, I'm glad you know that fact, I'm glad you learned that in class, but was that in our story? She said, well no. I said, well, do you think that's something that Eve Bunting wanted us to walk away with was the way caterpillars keep away prey? She said, no. So should we include that in our final thought. And she said, no. So she erased it. I didn't want to say, oh, that doesn't belong, get that off of there. I led her to that.</p>
<p>ANALYZING STUDENT WORK</p>	<p>T: I can see a lot of their thinking – some chose to draw first. Like M___, he knew there were three important parts of the story that gave it its overall meaning, when she was young, when she grows up, and when she shares that passion. And he includes in here that the story is about sharing our passion and our responsibility to others. So I could see his tracks of thinking and how it changed. He included what he thought was important but it all got into that overall learning. I thought that was fantastic. And making sure that I include drawing. They're still second graders. A lot of times they can express themselves better with drawing first and then going into the drawing, so that was fine.</p> <p>I: He did the drawings first, although he had jotted down on the other paper</p> <p>T: He was just transferring</p> <p>I: But then the drawing kind of helps him</p> <p>T: Bring it altogether</p> <p>I: Yes, I think so.</p> <p>T: One other one that I didn't expect, as a reader I didn't pull it out, was D___, The book was about you shouldn't let anything happen to nature because nature will thank you later, and that's why the butterflies came back to the little girl. So when we shared at the carpet, she was expressing that when you do good, good is going to come back to you. So</p>

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	<p>that was a fantastic message that she pulled from the story. Then once she did that, other children thought, I thought that too. They connected to one of the fables. So even pulling a deeper thought – because most of them are pulling – it’s about love and patience and their passion – they picked that up from Q___, but she had something very unique.</p> <p>I: And something that really did come out just in that last part of the story that you could take from that whole magical thing.</p> <p>I: And then some of them did you work with some of them on expanding what they started to say?</p> <p>T: Some of them were just OK, the book is about caring. It is about caring. What else was she caring for? She was caring about butterflies. Oh, that was something she really loved. Well don’t you care for things in your life. So I would make some connections to get them to stretch their thinking a bit more, prompting them. Like Q___, right here, it was about caring, love and patience. But then he goes on, It’s about more than just butterflies. So he kept going on – it s about love, patience and caring. And the last part I want to go back and revisit with him about the life cycle and then he kind of got off on a tangent at the end and starting going off. But he realized it’s not just about butterflies, there’s more to this story, and that’s what the strategy is about. It’s going beyond the little details that were in the story.</p> <p>I: And I was noticing with some of them when they got that first sentence down, if you asked them, so can you take that further, that’s a great beginning, what else does that make you think? Then some of this other stuff started to come out.</p> <p>T: They started adding these other details from the story.</p> <p>I: Because even in terms of writing down our thoughts, sometimes that very first thought you can expand on it and help it grow.</p> <p>T: I think that has to do more with when we were doing the fables, since it was so short, you could only get one or two sentences for their final thoughts. There’s so much you can pull from this story that we need to work a bit more, maybe some longer stories like this, and you might get a final thought down, but we can stretch that out further, so taking that first thought and adding to it might be my next step.</p> <p>I: The other thing maybe to get them to say why from the text. We won’t worry about that right now, but as they get better at this, to be able to say, I think it’s about caring because she –</p> <p>T: That’s what she did.</p> <p>I: Or even just the reasons in the text, because she made those beautiful pictures inside the box and she spent so much time taking care of it, so they are linking the</p> <p>T: Examples</p> <p>I: the literal part of the story to those bigger ideas –</p> <p>T: Gotcha</p> <p>I: Not right now – but as they get there.</p>
	<p>T: A lot of them – one of the overall meanings they were sharing with each other – in this particular paper, at the end when she releases them, she’s sad because she has to let it go, and they were getting that if you love something you let it go, he put that a butterfly – he said, you let things go because you love it and what he wrote after that was, “so the butterfly can be free, and lay its eggs, and it starts all over again.” And once they got on that cycle, they started</p>

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	<p>making a connection that this is a cycle in the book, that the grandpa passed it down to the little girl and now we assume the little girl is going to pass it down to someone else, and this passion is just going to keep cycling through. So that was a neat little theme to see them come up with on their own.</p>
<p>SHARING</p>	<p>I: So when we got to sharing, you've been doing some work to help them make it more of a discussion, go deeper. Talk about that a bit.</p> <p>T: We have been practicing, probably daily, on sharing, and how to ask questions, and make connections that add to your learning as well. We didn't hear as many questions today. I hear a lot of questions when we do nonfiction texts, when they share facts, they'll ask questions about those facts. It takes a lot of practice, a lot of modeling, because some questions might just be how did you color that? Or why did you pick that? So working on asking questions that will help me as a learner. What I hate is that you missed, afterwards one of the students said, "I have another question for M___ about why he drew that picture, can I go ask him?" And I said, yes, of course, go do that. And they did make comments about how I liked how you made that connection. I did have to prompt A___, he said I like how you put that it's about caring. Well, I knew that he had written the same thing, and it was probably because he had made that connection. So I still have to do some prompting, but I think it's so important, because it lets them own their learning, and they become leaders of their own learning and I'm just the facilitator. But it takes a lot of practice and modeling from me as well. We do it in a lot of venues, nonfiction, math, science, reading, constantly asking each other questions and discussing with each other.</p> <p>I: I think also they're picking up on some of the language, like A___ could say perhaps, I thought the same thing. We can get past the just, "I have a connection," but "I had the same idea," "I thought about it this way." Maybe there is some other language that they can start using</p> <p>T: Start adding on</p> <p>I: Start to see how it works like that. You could see them listening more attentively to each other when they're thinking about how they are going to relate</p> <p>T: How I'm going to react to what they said.</p> <p>I: And they're trying to understand even as they're trying to think of a question or comment, they're having to think about what did this person really say.</p> <p>T: Yes, it keeps them accountable for listening to the other person instead of just sitting there thinking about what I'm doing. I need to respect what they're saying because I might learn from it or I might have a question or I might be able to connect to them as well. It also helps the person who is sharing as well, because they then have to know that someone is going to ask me something, so I need to be prepared to answer their questions as well</p> <p>I: To defend my thesis!</p>
<p>FINAL REFLECTIONS</p>	<p>I: Any final thoughts – what do you think went really well today, anything that you had concerns about or you're thinking about where, not necessarily concerns but next steps?</p> <p>T: I was expecting a little bit more of recalling facts and just summarizing what the story is about, and we got a little</p>

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	<p>further than that. That's a good step in the right direction. We still have – this takes time, this process, this strategy, so what I would like to see them do more of, kind of like what you said, it's a great idea, getting that first thought down, that first sentence, and then going back and adding, because what did you see in the story that made you think that, what were some examples in there. So I'd like to do that. I like to do it more in small group, so I can see individual reactions and where they may need some guidance and prompting and scaffolding. Then once I do some more small group, coming back to some whole group lessons with some books that are going to have some more detail in them than just fables. I will do the small group first, and then some whole group stretching out their final thoughts and thinking.</p> <p>I: One thing they did stay so engaged in the story, I think the way you read it T: They loved it I: The excitement you had about it T: I loved this story! I: All those things you were excited about connecting up with what they were doing T: I noticed that some of them were pulling out on the word choice, and the way the story is like a poem. I didn't really want to discuss it at that point in time, but we might go back and read it again and talk about the similes in here, and the figurative language, and how Eve Bunting wrote it like a poem. There are a lot of writing opportunities in this book as well. So this is definitely a text I will use again for different strategies.</p>