Tracey then takes her students through a process of drafting a report on a novel they had read as a class—jotting down notes, writing some sentences using the notes as a guide, modeling for them how she would think her way through such a task. The next day she models again with "Little Red Riding Hood," has students work individually on notes about their own books, and tries "to get around to as many as possible," asking questions about their books and answering questions about their writing. But five students remain stuck.

> We went to the back table and had a very good work session. I just got them started telling me what the book was about and I took notes for them. When they understood how I was doing this, they could continue. I think they finally got the idea. I will continue this process and see how it goes ... that's where I am now.

There's no one simple strategy, no sequence of steps or set of practices that will help all learners in all circumstances to develop as writers. Teachers who know some of the theory we have discussed in this chapter, who are sensitive to their students and the contexts of their students' lives, will still have to discover their own ways to work, day to day, with the writers in their classes. Tracey is doing an excellent job of trying out, reflecting on, and revising classroom practices. As a teacher, she is much like the fluent writer who keeps a larger plan or goal in mind, but tries things out to see whether they move her along toward it, taking into account the new things she discovers and learns along the way. For classroom teachers, as well as for student writers, being overly concerned with "getting it right" can block the development of effective processes.

At the end of the semester, when Tracey reviews and reflects on her teaching of writing over the semester, she sees how much she has come to know, or know that she knows.

> I see that one of the major themes I wrote about was *how to teach writing*. This problem has been with me for 1 1/2 years and I feel like this course gave me the chance to sort out some different approaches and ideas and I feel that I have a stronger theoretical background behind me. I like the idea of prewriting and journal writing and have initiated these in my class. I feel the journals have been quite successful so far. I also had my students write up the results of an interview they did and was so pleased with the results. I felt that all the laborious work and small group meetings I did for their book reports was worthwhile! They realize now that writing is a *process* and did 1st, 2nd, and even 3rd drafts on their own. They read each others' papers and helped each other with them. They were able to organize their ideas into coherent paragraphs and present the information to the class. They had actually learned how to write a paper! I felt proud and satisfied.

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CHAPTER 7

Reading and Meaning

In the last chapter we described writing as an active, constructive process—a process that writers use not just to present "right" answers in "correct" formats but also to extend ways of using language to make sense of the world. When people read, they are actively involved in creating meaning, in the same way they create meaning from all of life's experiences. So reading, like writing, should be seen as an inventive, constructive activity. In reading and writing texts, students gain control over their own processes of learning. But reading and writing are more than just similar acts. They are *symbiotic*, to borrow a term from biology; that is, they mutually reinforce, enhance, and shape each other. Reading helps writers discover structures and forms and voices just as writing helps readers uncover meanings and strategies. And reading, like writing, depends on what readers bring to it, as well as what they find through it.

> If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them. They're quite touchy about anything like that, especially my father. They're nice and all—I'm not saying that—but they're also touchy as hell. Besides, I'm not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography or anything. I'll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas just before I got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy. (Salinger, 3)

Reading the opening paragraph of *The Catcher in the Rye*, we can see some of the things readers draw on in creating meaning from this text. They come to this book with several kinds of existing knowledge in their heads that will help them make meaning of the text they read. First, readers bring to the reading, as they do to every activity, the accumulated knowledge and experiences of their lives. Readers know, for example, about childhood and about parents—perhaps about touchy fathers. No reader's experience will have been exactly the same as Holden Caulfield's, and individual experiences may even interfere for a time with an understanding of Holden's story, but the experiences

themselves provide an opening through which readers will look at Holden's experience. Readers know, as well, about language and about texts. This story is told in the first person, and in an immediate present, not in the distant past ("Once upon a time") or about a removed third person ("He had a terrible childhood"). As modern readers, familiar with openings that place them *in medias res* and with stream-of-consciousness narration, readers are tolerant of entering a scene they know little about and of entering the mind of a character who has not been formally introduced. In fact, familiarity with these conventions could keep readers from realizing immediately that the speaker is actually talking to someone, not just thinking to himself. But the language of the text becomes familiar. "If you really want to hear about it" is colloquial, slightly aggressive, and addresses another person. And the language tells even more: the choice of words (*lousy*, *crap*, *stuff*, *touchy*, *goddamm*) is informal, slangy, and would be used only with peers or intimates, or by a speaker who was not particularly concerned with fitting into a formal context—like a teenager.

As readers read Salinger's opening, they draw also on a larger cultural framework, like the reference to David Copperfield. Readers can make sense of this novel without knowing who David Copperfield is, but the association with another book places the speaker's childhood somewhere in relationship to other novels of childhood, and it reveals something about Holden's general education or background. And if readers know *David Copperfield*, they may even hear in Holden's voice the echo of David's opening words: "Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show."

Finally, readers draw on a developing knowledge of the particular text. The first clause, "If you really want to hear about it," tells almost nothing of the world of this text. But by the time they read "I'll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me last Christmas," readers have learned quite a bit about this rather angry and hostile young person who has had a lousy childhood and who doesn't feel like going into it, though he seems to be expected to. So when they read "I got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy," they think that he (and somehow this sounds like a "he") has perhaps had some sort of mental breakdown ("madman stuff") and is talking to an adult in authority (probably a psychiatrist) and they are ready to predict that the speaker will in fact explain what has happened that has gotten him there. And the voice has engaged readers enough that they probably have decided they do really want to hear about it.

Examining even this passage of one novel makes it clear that much of what's demanded of readers is similar to what's demanded of writers. Not only must readers be active and working hard at constructing meanings, but they must also make choices, guess about possibilities,

ask and answer questions as they proceed. In fact, this opening paragraph from the *The Catcher in the Rye* insists that readers question, since it hasn't explained much. It hasn't begun with the standard narrative introduction ("Holden was a deeply troubled sixteen-year-old who, after suffering a nervous breakdown, found himself in a sanitarium, telling his story to a psychiatrist"). Perhaps most important, readers must keep options open and not shape the developing story into a final form too quickly, avoiding the premature closure that Ann Berthoff warns against in writing. If readers decide, for example, that the young speaker is going to tell about what readers might consider real "madman stuff"—violence or murder or self-mutilation—they will be very puzzled waiting for Holden's account of school and girl troubles and general confusion to turn into the story they've predicted. So in reading, just as in writing, readers use all sorts of knowlege to help shape a general plan or schema for what this particular text is going to be. But they keep that plan flexible, just as they do when they write, altering it as new understandings emerge.

As readers read a book, then, they are also "reading" the book, interpreting the words on the page and creating meaning from them. What readers come to know as they read, the meaning they make, is a product of past experience (including cultural and social backgrounds) and present experience (reading). In other words, meaning comes from the language in the reader's head as well as the language in the text.

> Reading does not consist merely of decoding the written word or language; rather, it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world. Language and reality are dynamically interconnected. (Freire 1988, 29)

In *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* Paulo Freire describes his own beginnings as a reader, and the ways in which he learned to "read the world" before he learned to "read the word". He sees the two—the world and the word—as continuous; just like reading words, reading the world requires understanding the symbolic nature of objects as signs to be interpreted. As an example of the continuity of reading the word and the world through signs, Freire recounts his own experience as a young boy who first learned to read the changes in a mango's color as a sign of the fruit's ripening or the behavior of animals as signs of their playful or angry moods. He tells us:

> My parents introduced me to reading the word at a certain moment in this rich experience of understanding my immediate world. Deciphering the word flowed naturally from reading my particular world; it was not something superimposed on it. I learned to read and write on the ground of the backyard of my house, in the shade of the mango trees, with words from my world rather than from the wider world of my parents. (32)

Freire was fortunate because his school experiences extended this early introduction to reading, so that texts, like the world, offered signs to be interpreted and understood, rather than "scanned, mechanically and monotonously spelled out." What he learned about the nature of reading and writing through his own experience shaped how he saw his role as a teacher:

> I would find it impossible to be engaged in a work of mechanically memorizing vowel sounds, as in the exercise "ba-be-bi-bo-bu, la-le-li-lo-lu." Nor could I reduce learning to read and write merely to learning words, syllables, or letters, a process of teaching in which the teacher *fills* the supposedly *empty* heads of learners with his or her words. On the contrary, the student is the subject of the process of learning to read and write as an act of knowing and of creating. The fact that he or she needs the teacher's help, as in any pedagogical situation, does not mean that the teacher's help nullifies the student's creativity and responsibility for constructing his or her own written language and for reading this language. (34–35)

All teachers are shaped by their early experiences as readers and as writers. But unfortunately school experiences have too often been divorced from the contexts of real life and a continuous reading of the world. Like many writers with both useful techniques and rigid rules, teachers carry a mixture of false notions of what reading is and what texts are, along with a few effective strategies that help them understand the texts they read.

What we do when we read

Here's a student's account of her reading:

> I noticed while reading a book by Faulkner that I was constantly trying to put his thoughts into a complete idea. I would constantly go from one page to another in hope of gaining his point. When that did not work, I found myself flipping back pages to see if I had missed something. I then began to try and associate the characters of the book with other books that I have read.... If the name Snope was mentioned I would try to recall what part he played in another book and by doing so, hoping to get to the inner meaning of the text I was reading.
>
> At one point I tried to picture myself as a character of the book. One of the characters in the book *The Hamlet* is called Flem. Whenever Faulkner describes him, which is through the eyes of another character, or lets him talk for himself the book becomes fuzzy. I can never really grasp the meaning of what is taking place. So at one point I tried to portray myself as Flem. I began to actually realize the emotions of what the character was going through. I began to despise people and use meanness to get to them....

> As I read on I began to notice that Faulkner had a great way of exhausting the semantic possibilities of words. Words that would first appear as innocent, would eventually come to acknowledge a totally different thing. I would constantly have to reread a passage to try and catch the true underlying meaning of sentences in the book. Still at times, I would have to wait for class to find out the real meaning....
>
> What has come to my attention is the fact that while in high school all the books I read appeared to only have had one level of meaning. Now, however, I realize that every book can be interpreted with different meanings. I might find the theme to be one thing, and someone else another. Who is right? Who can say? (Geraldine)

Reading is usually an unconscious process. Readers pick up a book and either get it and get into it or don't get it and set it aside. Only with school reading do they feel compelled to stick to a book even when they're not getting it. Geraldine is struggling with the reading of a difficult novel for a literature course, and, for the first time, trying to notice what she does in the course of that struggle. Her account shows several things about what she does when she reads. She tries to get an overall sense of what the book is about: "I try to put his thoughts into a complete idea." When she's unsuccessful, she tries other strategies. She draws on her knowledge from other reading—here the knowledge of what parts these characters played in other books by Faulkner. She imagines herself as a particular character, drawing on her own experience of what it's like "to despise people and use meanness to get to them" in order to understand his perspective. She associates words with her own preconceived thoughts and emotions. In every case, she brings her experience—of emotions, of words and their meanings, of other texts—to the reading of this one. And she draws on all of that knowledge to help her make sense out of the words on the page.

Geraldine has definite ideas about reading and about texts. Despite the fact that she draws on her own experience, she believes that the "inner meaning" of a book is in the text itself. So she flips back pages to look for it there. She rereads passages "to catch the true underlying meaning of sentences." And when she doesn't catch it, she waits to get to class to find out "the real meaning." Yet she is beginning to find that "every book can be interpreted with different meanings," and this leaves her more confused about the "reading" of a book.

Although Geraldine still tends to see meaning as something fixed on the page, her own process of reading is an active one. Not only does she use her past experiences to shape her reading, but she uses the immediate experience of the text itself, as she flips back to earlier pages and as she redefines words as they recur. Her reading process isn't linear, moving along word by word and controlled by the sequence of words in the text, but recursive, moving back and forth within the text and between the text and her experience of the world. It's not only active but interactive and therefore dynamic.

Still, though Geraldine's questions begin to acknowledge that the reader has a role in the process of creating meaning, she isn't ready to consider that role an active one. (Her use of the passive voice exposes the passive view she takes of her own reading: "Every book can be interpreted with different meanings," rather than "Every reader interprets a book differently.") For Geraldine, the fundamental issue continues to be one of correctness or truth, as she asks "Who is right?"

Geraldine's picture of what meaning is and where it resides, a picture given to her in high school, is much like that of many readers. And her questions express the uncertainty many readers feel if that picture starts to change. Her concerns lead us into the concerns of this chapter: how reading is taught in school contexts, how fluent reading works, how fluent reading is like fluent writing, what teachers can do to create fluent readers, and how they can reconceive the relationship between readers and texts—particularly literary texts.

Reading in school

If, as Freire reminds us, readers read the text as they read the world, and shape its meanings as they shape understanding of life's experience, why does Geraldine have so much difficulty seeing the reading process as an active one and acknowledging her own role as an interpreter? Why is her experience of reading, unlike Freire's, discontinuous with her experience of the world? Most likely it's because she didn't learn to read and write under the mango trees in the backyard of her house, but learned in the sort of classroom Freire would not teach in—the classroom where learning to read and write is reduced to memorizing vowel sounds as in "ba-be-bi-bo-bu."

In fact, the theory that's dominated reading instruction in the United States has focused on just this sort of reduced literacy—on having children learn the alphabet with sound/letter correspondences, teaching children to sound out individual letters, then to blend those sounds to form words, and finally to read out series of words to make sentences. There's much emphasis on moving from alphabetic symbol to the sound that it represents (phonics), on "decoding" from symbols to spoken words, and little emphasis on the meaning of the words and sentences that are decoded. Jeanne Chall, an influential reading educator who represents a moderate version of this traditional reading pedagogy, suggests that individuals move through a series of separate stages toward facility in reading. After a "prereading" period, in which children develop perceptual skills needed for beginning reading and acquire general knowledge about letters, words, and books from the larger literate culture, children enter stage one, an "initial reading or decoding" stage (grades one and two), in which they learn to associate letters with the

corresponding parts of spoken words, and then stage two, "confirmation and fluency" (grades two and three), in which children learn "to use their decoding knowledge, the redundancies of the language, and the redundancies of the stories they read" to gain fluency and speed with familiar materials. In Chall's view, it's only in later stages (grade four and up) that readers begin to use reading to discover meaning and come to new understandings (41–44).

The implementation of Chall's stage approach to reading in classroom instruction has led to emphasis on decoding individual words and phrases *before* a student is allowed to understand how those words and phrases work toward larger units of meaning. While Chall sees that some children don't require emphasis on the code in order to learn to read ("Brighter children and those from middle and high socioeconomic backgrounds also gain from such an approach but probably not as much. Intelligence, help at home, and greater facility with language probably allow these children to discover much of the code on their own, even if they follow a meaning program in school"), she would maintain the emphasis on isolated skills for nonmainstream children ("Children of below-average and average intelligence and children of lower socioeconomic background do better with an early code emphasis"). (83–84)

There's little compelling evidence to support Chall's position. The discussion in Unit 1 demonstrates that school often presents unfamiliar expectations and practices to children of nonmainstream families, and early standardized reading materials do little to make meaningful connections to their existing knowledge and experience. Reading is meaningful only when it connects with the learner's existing ways of knowing. When it doesn't, all that the child will acquire is a mechanical skill in translating letters into sounds. Early reading instruction that focuses heavily on decoding and ignores the ways in which children make meaning by drawing on their knowledge of the world only contributes to the frequently noted failure of "children of lower socioeconomic background" when they must begin to read for meaning and to acquire information.

During the "learning to read" period (generally grades one through three), school reading instruction most often consists of two activities: reading orally in groups (usually "tracked" according to "reading ability"), and completing, as deskwork, workbook and worksheet activities that reinforce the attention to discrete skills (matching up the letter *b* with words that begin with that sound, for example). Oral reading demands that the child pay most attention to sounding out each word correctly, rather than to working out the developing meaning of the text. It's perfectly possible to sound out the words without thinking about their meaning at all. (Parents become good at reading aloud to their children while thinking of other things, and can often complete pages of a story

without remembering anything of what they've read.) Schools implicitly recognize the fact that focusing on sound alone impedes the development of fluency in reading, and later discourage "lip reading," to get readers to make the transition to reading silently.

Students in Ellie's theories of literacy course traced their early experiences with literacy and with reading. They wrote of their preschool years as involving storytelling and/or storyreading, playing house or school, playing family alphabet or word games (particularly in the car; many students mention road signs as an example of their earliest reading), and learning from watching parents that the reading of books and newspapers and the writing of letters were important activities. But their accounts of literacy past school age tell of two different sorts of activities. Outside school, they continued to participate in games, fantasy play, informal reading and writing (baseball cards, comics, notes, and letters), and, for some, reading library books and writing poems and stories. But in school they described being placed in reading groups—high or low—where they were praised or reprimanded. (Several students recounted embarrassing experiences in these groups. One told of how she thought she could read until she was called on to demonstrate. Then she stumbled over a word, and was told that this was a "baby" word and that she would have to be placed with the nonreaders.) They remembered school reading texts as boring and repetitive, and particularly hated the SRA series with its cards of short readings on different topics followed by comprehension questions, the competition to move through the colored sets of reading cards (often with wall charts marking students' progress), and the requirement that they work through all of the early sets before going on to the longer, more interesting stories. They also remembered spending a lot of time on worksheets, and even on flashcards, which focused on the reading of isolated words. One student found an old report card that showed a low grade in reading, with the teacher's explanation that the child was taking too little time with her worksheets because she was too eager to turn to her library book.

What was striking about this set of responses was the disjunction between students' early experiences around literacy in their homes and families and their experiences in schools. These students, many of whom were or would be teachers, had either succeeded in school tasks or had, after being tracked away from college (one student wrote of having to spend four years of high school learning the correct form of a business letter), come back to school at a later point in their lives. Those who had succeeded had enjoyed being praised. But no one remembered traditional school reading instruction as enjoyable or interesting. No one attributed a later love of reading and learning to their work in reading groups, on worksheets, with SRA or other basal reading texts. And no one talked of doing any writing, except for short

worksheet answers, in conjunction with early reading. Their early school reading had focused on isolated decoding skills and fragmented, meaningless tasks, and eventually on getting the "right" answers to questions that followed reading selections. For most students in high school and college classrooms, the pattern of early reading instruction was similar, and it has influenced their practices and attitudes toward reading, particularly school reading.

How fluent reading works

In *Understanding Reading*. Frank Smith looks at the relationship of reading to ways of knowing through language. He demonstrates that because of the limits of short-term memory, it's impossible for readers to move step by step through the sounds or words of a text. Fluent readers predict what is likely to come next in a text, and scan large chunks of text quickly, to either confirm or discount those predictions. In reading, readers are constantly creating a schema for the text and revising that schema as they get new information.

> The twin foundations of reading are to be able to ask specific questions (make predictions) in the first place, and to know how and where to look at print so that there is a chance of getting these questions answered. (176)

In asking questions and seeking answers, readers depend on the existing frames of knowledge we described above: knowledge about texts, and knowledge about the world outside a text. And, although Smith doesn't say so specifically, both of these kinds of knowledge are, in fact, cultural.

Most children in a literate society do have some knowledge about some texts. Growing up in a culture in which print *is* seen as meaningful and is widely used, children develop, long before they actually learn to read print themselves, a sense of what print is and an understanding that reading is somehow linked to matching up clusters of alphabetic symbols with the things they represent. Cereal boxes, street signs, billboards, all suggest that the symbols on them stand for words that have meaning. Growing up in a pervasively literate society, children learn to read not only the signs of color or behavior significant and meaningful in the world of Freire's childhood, but also some of the signs for these signs, the printed words—the mango sign over the display of fruit in the market.

Teachers can help learners extend their own developing literacy not through workbook exercises sterilized of their associations with real life, but from stories that come from learners' growing knowledge of the world. As Unit 1 shows, people learn by linking new knowledge to

old, by using what is already known to guess about what isn't yet known. Through time and experience, those predictions get revised and strengthened. As they read, then, learners look for connections with their own experience in order to make sense of the events of the text and they use their own language in order to make sense of language in a text, drawing on intuitive knowledge of familiar syntactic patterns, for example. Consequently, when school reading is completely separate from a reader's experience or language, it fails to support or extend literacy.

Smith argues that there is nothing more important to the development of fluent reading than to be read to. Children who are read to learn intuitively about some of the most important elements in reading, like voice, rhythm, context. They learn to hear the "reader-voice," the sound that directs their own later silent reading. The writer Eudora Welty describes the voice this way:

> Ever since I was first read to, then started reading to myself, there has never been a line read that I didn't hear. As my eyes followed the sentence, a voice was saying it silently to me. It isn't my mother's voice, or the voice of any person I can identify, certainly not my own. It is human, but inward, and it is inwardly that I listen to it. It is to me the voice of the story or the poem itself. The cadence, whatever it is that asks you to believe, the feeling that resides in the printed word, reaches me through the reader-voice. (14)

Readers who hear voices in texts listen for meaning, and they will later read for meaning.

Children who are read to come to another kind of shared knowledge about texts—that texts have particular forms and unfold in particular ways. They learn naturally about genres of literature: that when they hear "once upon a time," a fairy tale is about to begin, that when they hear two lines that end with rhyming words like *snow* and *go*, a regular pattern of rhymes is likely to follow. They connect meanings from the text to their own experiences, but at a comfortable distance, as they listen to the story of a little girl whose curiosity leads her to danger in a forest with talking bears. Heath and others who have studied the family reading practices that best prepare children for extended school literacy describe the ways in which parents discuss a story with the child, anticipating possible outcomes (what the bears might say if Goldilocks doesn't run away), making connections to things the child has seen in the real world (the bears they saw in the zoo last weekend), seeing ways in which the events of the story are comparable to real events ("Remember the time at Uncle Ned's that you wandered off to a neighbor's yard and got scared when the man asked what you were doing in his garden?"). The parent builds connections between the child's knowledge and the world of the text; the parent's questions help the child to extend that

knowledge, providing a supportive structure for the child's learning through a process referred to as *scaffolding*. In Heath's *Ways with Words*, Maintown parents who talk about books with their children, like Trackton families who gather together on the front porch to discuss a letter, engage in reading as a constructive, and social, and affirming act.

But in school reading groups, reading aloud and even being read to focuses on the errors—or the "miscues" of reading—rather than on its meanings, and there is therefore a lot of emphasis placed on reading each word correctly. Smith's study of the reading process demonstrates that readers don't read every word when they read to themselves; in fact, they *can't* if they're to read for meaning. The brain acquires information in chunks, rather than in individual letters or words, and fills in larger patterns from small bits. So readers predict, skip whole words and phrases, looking for clues to confirm meaning. This process happens rapidly and unconsciously, but you can see it happen if you watch the eyes of a reader reading. You'll see the eye move back and forth very quickly along the line of type rather than focusing from left to right. The reader is storing information and picking up new information, predicting meaning and circling back to repredict, and all almost without conscious or deliberate effort.

You can see this process in your own reading. If you read the sentence "The captain ordered the mate to drop an ——," you fill in the remaining letters based on the context you've predicted. You no doubt predict the word *anchor*. The language of the sea and the association between drop and anchor tell you that's the right word without your reading it. But suppose the sentence continued and you read on: "—and the furry, long-nosed animal scurried across the deck." Your eye would instantaneously take you back to the *an* —— to see where you'd misled yourself. You would read *anteater* and continue, with some greater interest in the text perhaps than before, for you'd be wondering why an anteater would be aboard the ship. Misreading is often not misreading at all, but mispredicting, and that's a normal part of the fluent reading process.

When we understand the way reading works toward meaning, it's clear why worksheets or flashcards that remove words from context lessen rather than enhance ability to read for meaning. If teachers use flashcards or worksheets that remove words from sentences, so that the child can no longer tell that the letters *goat* name a thing that *kicks* or *runs*, they make the job of reading unnecessarily hard, if not impossible. And if teachers focus attention in reading groups on sounding out letter combinations without helping children draw on their knowledge of syntactic contexts, on their expectations about the relationships of subjects and verbs in English, they divorce reading from other uses of language, and create a situation in which children who're quite adept at using their language to represent their world become "poor readers."

Reading whole texts helps readers see words in their familiar syntactic settings. And talking about texts helps readers connect those words with a familiar world. Learners who discuss real-world goats and their behaviors before they read "The goat kicks and runs" will be able to predict "kicks and runs" from what they know of the nature of goats, as well as from what they know about sentences, or they'll be able to move back and read *goat* once they read about the animal's behavior. Selecting texts that draw on what readers know of the world can help them proceed confidently. So it's important that the world of the text confirm knowledge that the beginning reader brings to it.

But what about the child who's never seen a goat? What about texts that call on readers to understand something beyond their experience of the world? The child who knows nothing about the workings of a farm, who has never seen seeds planted or sheep shorn, will bring little or no experience to the reading of *My Animal Friends at Maple Hill Farm*, just as the teenager who knows little about Puritans will have trouble finding a way into *The Scarlet Letter*, and the adult who knows little about physics will have trouble finding a way into Stephen Hawking's book on cosmology, *A Brief History of Time*. Like Pat Conroy's island students, who couldn't identify their island, their state, or the ocean that surrounded them, and who found only alien words in a geography book, readers who have no *repertoire* or knowledge of subject outside the text have difficulty making meaning. While it's important for beginning readers to have some texts that refer to the world they already know how to read, as it was important for Conroy's students to read about the snakes whose habits were already part of their knowledge (if not Conroy's), it's also important to extend the experience of learners and to create new common knowledge in the classroom. A class of city children reading *Maple Hill Farm* can talk about animals they do know, squirrels and dogs and pigeons and cats, as a way of creating connections to a text about farm animals they have not seen.

Establishing such knowledge depends a great deal on talk (and talk encourages active learning). The combination of oral reading groups and seat work does not provide nearly enough productive talk for beginning readers. Traditionally, children haven't spent much time in their reading groups discussing what they're about to read or have just read, and they generally haven't had the chance to work together even on decoding or on worksheet activities. This is true despite the fact that in many communities adult reading practices are communal and constructive. The reading that people do in the real world is almost always related to contexts, things they know or have expectations about. Reading in the real world is almost always done for confirming and extending, or reseeing and questioning, what's already known and the principles of "real life" reading can and should be applied to even early reading

pedagogy. Simply talking about stories before they're read and during the process of reading can accomplish a great deal.

The behaviors Smith describes for fluent readers are like those of fluent writers. Both are actively involved in the construction of meaning. Both keep an overall plan in mind as they go along, but a flexible rather than a rigid one, so that it can change as new meanings unfold. And for readers as well as writers, being able to take risks is important to developing fluency and to moving to deeper levels of interpretation. But in most schools, where reading is separated from writing, students have little opportunity to see that the two processes are similar and related, and that the active construction of understandings is central to both. In school, writing usually follows reading because it is used as a proof that reading has taken place. Reading precedes writing because it is used to give content to the writing.

The "write to read" or "whole language" pedagogies in the early grades mentioned in the last chapter present reading and writing and speaking and listening as related activities in an integrated curriculum, rather than as fragmented bits of skills. Beginning readers are engaged with their own stories, and they quickly learn not only to read out the words that appear in them but to write those words as well, gradually expanding their "dictionaries" of significant words, which they use again for new stories. The difference in approach makes a real difference in children's attitudes about reading. Gloria Norton, a teacher in a whole-language program at a bilingual school that Shirley Heath worked with, asked children from different elementary schools what reading is. Children who were learning to read in traditional school ways thought reading was "answering questions," "working in workbooks," "sounding out words," "figuring out what the teacher wants." But children from her school, who had been writing and reading their own stories, thought of reading as "living in a world that the author creates."

Other teachers of reading have likewise found the value of making the words for reading come from the context of learners' own lives and stories. Sylvia Ashton-Warner, working with poor Maori children in New Zealand, asked her pupils to tell her the words that were important to them—the words they wanted to own—and she would write each of these words out on a card for the child to carry around and use. The significant words for these children were often those that exposed the violence of their home lives—*knife*, *rage*, *fight*—and were linked to subjects that were immediately important to their reading of the world, words and subjects not to be found in the nationally prescribed textbooks. Like Ashton-Warner, Freire found it essential to use *generative* words for the texts of his literacy programs, words from the "word universe" of the learners, "expressing their actual language, their anxieties, fears, demands, and dreams," and often inserted pictures representing real situations in the learners' lives (1988, 35). With these texts, learners

engage in a critical reading of their own situation of the world that supports their developing reading of text.

Reading in high school

Unfortunately, by the time many students reach high school or college classrooms, they have been affected by years of instruction that treats reading and writing as separate skills, with both separated from the activity of learning and experiencing. Many of these students will have been labeled *problem* or, more euphemistically, *developmental* readers. And they see themselves this way. "I don't like to read," one student said. "I always was in the low group." The emphasis on correct performance in these reading groups has made such readers fearful of taking risks, making predictions, putting their own associations into texts they read; they have too often had painful experience with being judged wrong. They may still sound out words, not knowing how to read for meaning. They hesitate to ask questions, for questions seem to offer proof of their failure to understand. And they see little reward in keeping at this painful activity. The basal readers used in early grades, with their limited, grade-leveled vocabulary and their bland stories, have made reading seem uninteresting. Because progress with basal readers is measured by movement through the series, there has been little encouragement for students to extend their reading outward in other directions. And the workbooks and exercise sheets that accompany basal readers have taught teachers to surround reading with discrete, decontextualized exercises rather than the sort of discussion and writing that would provide reading with real context. By the time students enter high school, too many of them have decided that reading is confining, not broadening, and that it should be confined to school.

For all readers, basic and advanced level, fluent and halting, first grader or college freshman, however, the tenets of the reading process remain the same. We want to summarize them once again here.

1. Reading depends upon whole contexts.

Vocabulary lessons are the high school equivalent of flashcards. To remove a word like *lithe* (a word that appears on the lists of a standard high school vocabulary test) from both its syntactic context (from the larger sentence in which it would act as an adjective, describing and modifying a thing, a noun), and from its semantic context (the meaning that it might take on in a real situation, as a quality that could inhere in real people or objects), leaves little chance for a reader to predict its meaning or connect it to what the reader already knows, and forces "learning" through rote memorization.

Ellie's family gives context to this kind of rote learning by making vocabulary tests a dinner-table game. Each week they take the list of unrelated vocabulary words her son Kenny has to learn, and they all try to place the words they know in contexts that are clever and amusing. Ellie's favorite newly contextualized word is *lithe*, and Kenny still remembers the meaning a year and a half after they came up with *Saturday Night Lithe*.

A similar classroom exercise can give students the opportunity to recontextualize words by playing with them and thus creating ways of retaining their meanings. A better way to help students learn new words, however, is to find real contexts in what students are reading and writing and discussing in class. Students will learn the meaning if they have a reason to, and a good reason is that the word expresses a quality they want to describe.

Too much time in high schools is spent on vocabulary instruction from separate vocabulary texts. We learn new words best as part of larger meaning-making activity, to name and label what we perceive in the world, and to make finer discriminations among things or to present different aspects of them in different situations. Because of limitations on the memory, no one can remember very many words learned outside a meaningful context or schema. Dictionaries are useful in confirming the meaning of a word that readers have heard or read in a particular context. But since they give decontextualized meanings, they don't help readers actually use the words they contain.

It's easy to see the effect of such decontextualized vocabulary instruction in the sentences that students produce. "My skirt was corrugated from being in the suitcase," Ellie's daughter, Karen, wrote after looking up *corrugate* in the dictionary for a recent homework exercise. In a 1987 article, "How Children Learn Words," Miller and Gildea look at vocabulary teaching in schools. They point out that the average seventeen-year-old has learned vocabulary at a rate of five thousand words per year for over sixteen years, while in school vocabulary instruction they learn no more than a hundred to two hundred words, and most of these do not become part of their useful vocabulary. Miller and Gildea give many examples of sentences like Karen's. In each case, the students have applied the dictionary meaning in a way that would seem correct. For example: looking up *correlate*—"to be related, one to the other"—produces "Me and my parents correlate, because without them I wouldn't be here." Looking up *meticulous*—"very careful"—produces "I was meticulous about falling off the cliff." Looking up *stimulate*—"to stir up"—produces "Mrs. Morrow stimulated the soup." And the examples go on in this way, providing more and more material for Lederer's *Anguished English*.

When readers don't understand the meaning of a word or phrase, they try to make sense of it in terms of the things they do know. Like

Holden, who makes meaning from a phrase he's misheard: "If a body catch a body comin' through the rye." Holden makes this line of a song mean something to him, and the meaning he makes of the line comes to represent the meaning that he's trying to make about his life. He would be the catcher who would try to keep kids like himself from going over the cliff. Holden has created the sort of context that readers need in order to make sense of words and phrases.

2. Reading depends upon knowledge of the world.

Hirsch has rightly emphasized the importance of shared knowledge to successful reading, and the need for readers to acquire a great deal of new knowledge in order to become skilled. But for students who don't bring that knowledge base, Hirsch would create a common fund of cultural knowledge in the classroom by having students memorize the content of lists of culturally important facts. When students in groups discuss Hirsch's list of culturally important terms, sharing their associations and working together to construct common understandings, they ask questions, make associations, scaffold, use their own frames of knowledge and meaning, and stimulate others to do the same. They also use linguistic knowledge, and they draw on personally based experiential associations. In working together to pool shared knowledge, they create a new context of meaning for these words, creating a framework in which they fit. Hirsch's term *Poohbah*, for example, falls outside the cultural frame of reference of many students in our university classes. But remembering some associations with Saturday morning cartoons, they decide that the term refers to someone of importance, or self-importance. They may never get to the "correct" association of the term with Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*, but they do come to a common understanding of its culturally shared associations. The very things these students do to create meaning from the list are the things all readers do as they read. And teachers can use such group processes to create shared knowledge.

By high school, much of the knowledge of the larger culture and the world comes through books, and a knowledge of other texts becomes an important part of what it means to be literate—to be able to understand the references and allusions that work to define a world of shared meaning based in books other people would have read. The first paragraph of *The Catcher in the Rye*, with its reference to David Copperfield, shows the importance of this kind of knowledge. Because Holden is a reader who makes sense of his life in part through the things he reads, readers are drawn increasingly into a web of references to other literature that create a framework of meaning for Holden and for readers: *Out of Africa*, *The Return of the Native*, as well as *David Copperfield*.

Holden has internalized the judgment of others and his string of school failures to conclude that he is "quite illiterate." He sees no

contradiction between that judgment and the fact that he reads a lot (and is a good writer). Holden sees himself as illiterate because he doesn't put things in school terms, either in his writing (he'd rather describe his brother's baseball mitt than the room that his roommate's teacher suggested) or in thinking about his reading. He reads out of personal interest and need, and he doesn't describe what he reads in terms of literary criticism, but in terms that show how a book answers those needs—what knocks him out is wishing that the author was "a terrific friend of yours." The fiction that deals with fundamental human concerns like that of Dinesen of Hardy draws this response; he'd like to call up "this Isak Dinesen" and talk to her whenever he felt like it.

For students to develop, through reading, a broad cultural perspective, they must read broadly. Memorizing lists won't do. And this reading must connect in some way with their world and the things they already know, while expanding beyond that world (and beyond the traditional canon) to provide new perspectives. But too often the readers who turn to books to learn about the world have had to discover on their own—and in contradiction to what the school teaches—what books offer. They find their own meaningful context in spite of, not because of, classroom reading instruction.

Malcolm X was such a reader. In his autobiography, he talks about his early love of school, particularly of English, which abruptly ended the day his well-intentioned English teacher suggested it was unrealistic for a black man to aspire to become a lawyer, that he should consider carpentry for his career. At this point the young Malcolm X closed off school. Like so many students, he begins just to go through the motions. "I came to class, and I answered when called upon. It became a physical strain simply to sit in Mr. Ostrowski's class" (37). And his formal education ends shortly after, with eighth grade. But years later, in prison, when challenged by a visitor who argues that he knows nothing of his own black heritage—"You don't even know who you are . . . you don't even know your true family name, you wouldn't recognize your true language if you heard it"—he begins to read again in a new context, searching through history and philosophy for that knowledge. As he reads, he writes long letters to Elijah Muhammad that connect his learning to his life as a Black Muslim. He talks with other prisoners, joins a debate team, begins writing himself out of a desire to explain what he's learned. In prison, he expands his world to become the "self-educated" and articulate spokesman for a large group of followers. Though, of course, it's really his exchanges with others that have provided the context for this education.

Teachers often try to encourage their students to engage in such "self-education" by offering outside reading lists that will expand their cultural knowledge and will encourage them to read for pleasure instead of necessity. But students read these books in isolation, with no discussion. Without encouragement to make personal connections to the

classics that appear on these lists, individual readers become easily discouraged by the difficulties and turn away from them. There's no reason high school students should be required to spend the summer before their junior year reading *Wuthering Heights* and then hate forever the thought of reading anything by the Brontës or even from nineteenth-century British literature. It would be better to use out-of-school reading to extend interests created and developed in class—to read a second Dickens novel, or to turn to an American critic of his society like Mark Twain—to use ideas discovered in the classroom to support additional reading. In their honest desire to give students enough background reading to support their learning, teachers need to be careful about assigning long lists that serve mainly to frustrate rather than support:

> I believe much of teachers' insistence that students read innumerable books in one semester derives from a misunderstanding we sometimes have about reading. In my wanderings throughout the world there were not a few times when young students spoke to me about their struggles with extensive bibliographies, more to be devoured than truly read or studied. (Freire 1988, 33)

Such reading is not generative or empowering.

3. *Reading is supported by talk about texts.*

Despite (or perhaps because of) our early experience in reading groups, reading is most often seen as a solitary activity. Certainly long works of fiction, which ask readers to enter and live in the world being created for us, require close attention. And yet, to the extent that readers really do enter the world of the text, they reenter the world with new perspectives and new ways of seeing things that can best be used in real life if connections are talked about. This process of connection works both ways: making the connections with the real world of experience explicit helps readers enter the world of the text, and helps them bring the world of the text back into real experience. Talk connects the books written and read with the words said and heard and makes both text and readers become part of one extended conversation about human life and experience. Needing this kind of talk, Holden visits a former teacher whom he'd liked. He talks about a class that he failed, in Oral Expression, and how the students had to "stick to the point" when what interested him was the digressions, how the teacher, Mr. Vinson, kept telling him "to unify and simplify all the time," and how "you can't hardly ever simplify and unify something just because somebody *wants* you to." The teacher responds with advice and encouragement:

> Many, many men have been just as troubled morally and spiritually as you are right now. Happily, some of them kept records of their troubles. You'll learn from them—if you want to. Just as someday, if you have something to offer, someone will learn from you. It is a beautiful reciprocal arrangement. (246)

Holden's teacher has the general idea, but he doesn't have it quite right. Entering into a larger conversation with others who have thought and worried and written about common human concerns *is* important and valuable. But the reciprocal arrangement doesn't have to mean that one studies and reads and learns from others, and then, having acquired all the knowledge, turns to pass it on. The conversation, the one that Holden is seeking, needs to go on *along with* the studying and the reading; it's an important part of the learning. And it can take place inside the classroom with peers and with teachers.

In working with teenagers and adults who haven't yet learned to read successfully or critically, teachers can begin to undo some of the damage that's been caused by a limited model of reading instruction. They can try to discover generative themes and texts in literature that will speak to learner's hearts and souls. Teachers prepare readers for reading these texts by making connections with readers' lives explicit and showing how experience might be *re*presented in the text, by making informal, unconscious knowledge formally stated and conscious. They can encourage learners to be predictors and questioners, asking them what is likely to happen next and encouraging them to use the unfolding text as a context for what is still to come. They can read *to* students, so that students can hear the expanding power of the words, and read *with* them, exploring possibilities as a Maintown parent might do in reading to a child. (In fact, one-to-one "lap-reading" has been a particularly successful route to remediation for delayed readers.) Teachers can initiate group reading and talking about texts, so that students can bring real-world strategies into the classroom and begin to establish, through sharing, the shared knowledge they need. They can encourage readers to ask questions as they read, and help them know how to find answers both within and outside the text (in library reference materials, for example), and encourage them to revise their understandings as they read. And, finally, teachers can encourage readers to write.

4. *Reading is supported by writing.*

Writing is important to reading for all learners, not just for children, because it establishes and records active engagement with the text in a continuing act of interpretation, an interpretation that derives from both the text and the world. A limited view of reading, which many students hold, is that the meaning is wholly in the text, buried there like a golden treasure, and the accomplished reader (usually only the teacher) is the one who knows how to find it. Such a view emerges from classrooms where the teacher's questions concentrate only on

facts, where there is only one right answer to any question, where texts contain answers the teacher knows and the students must find: "What was stolen from Silas Marner before he found the child?" "What was the name of Pip's stepfather?" "What does Hester Prynne's scarlet A symbolize?" And it emerges from writing used only for the teacher's evaluative purposes, so that the student can show possession of these "right" answers. Reading instruction that asks students to read isolated paragraphs and look for the "main idea" reinforces the notion of one "right" answer.

When readers write as they read, they record their speculations, their predictions, and their associations with a text, and the writing becomes a way to help them interpret actively the text they're reading. Journals, in-process notes, responses to sections of texts, bits of created dialogue, all are ways of encouraging meaning making by making writing a tool for interpretation.

Readers and texts

This chapter began with a paragraph from *The Catcher in the Rye* and talked of the ways reading the text both drew from and built knowledge, combining readers' experiences with life, reading, and culture and an evolving knowledge that came from reading the text itself. Once they have learned to read, readers tend not to pay much attention to this complex process of making sense of and interpreting texts. Unlike readers, literary critics have made the interpretation of texts their primary concern and have traditionally focused on texts themselves, not what readers bring to them. They've seen knowledge as fixed in the text, not evolved by a reader in the process of reading.

The idea that knowledge is in the text, existing apart from what readers bring to and make of it, is a dominant theory of literacy, of the differences between spoken and written language. But in few sentences, either in texts or in life, is the meaning wholly in the words themselves. Whether the teacher says or writes, "You did a great job on this essay," the meaning must still be interpreted by the student based on both the immediate context (the other words that were written, or the teacher's expression or tone—whether sincere or sarcastic) and the larger context (the past practice of the teacher and the past experience of the student).

Although primary attention has usually been given to the text itself, and to the elements within the text that support interpretation (like the New Criticism in most of the twentieth century), literary criticism has occasionally shifted its emphasis over the years, pausing every so often to focus attention away from the text and the knowledge within it. In the nineteenth century in the Romantic period, criticism looked toward

the writer, and now, in the late twentieth century, it often looks toward the reader. The Romantic movement glorified the soul of the poet, whose inspirations were "divine" and who simply translated the world for readers to appreciate. Romantic critics believed the best way to locate meaning for the text was therefore by understanding the poet's mind at work, understanding his life and the sources of the writer's inspiration as the real way to understand the text. If you were a Romantic critic, knowing as much as possible about J. D. Salinger's life would be the key to a good reading of *The Catcher in the Rye*. And, of course, a Romantic critic would have a tough time with Salinger, since he's spent his life trying to prevent anybody from knowing anything about that life.

The arguments that grew up around an approach to interpretation that focused primarily on the author resulted, in the twentieth century, in a "New Criticism." "We don't have access to the poet's mind," the New Critics said, "and, what's more, why should we believe what the poet says about his work?" "The word uncag'd, never returns", wrote Horace in the first century B.C., and the New Critics focused their attention on the word as it existed apart from the creator of it, as it lived by itself in a text. New Criticism—a movement designed to shift the attention away from the author and onto the text—has dominated critical responses to literature and the teaching of literature for most of this century. Most current university English professors were trained in this tradition, and most English majors have studied in it. For New Critics, any literary text can and should be read apart from the context of time and author, meanings can be found by accomplished readers, and the same meanings are found through all accomplished reading. If readers differ in their interpretations of a text's meaning, one reader has the right interpretation or later will get the right one. The right reading comes about through the techniques of *close reading*, with intense attention to language, to metaphor, to thematic structure, to genre. The New Critic who reads *The Catcher in the Rye* might begin as we did earlier in this chapter, looking at the words of the text, seeing what the language is like, how themes get brought up and reinforced, how character is developed, how narrative conventions like first-person narration are used.

More recently, in the last twenty years, literary critics have argued against New Criticism by insisting that the reader makes the crucial difference in interpretation; that texts don't mean very much apart from the reading of them. The tree that falls in the forest makes no sound, they might say, unless there's someone there to hear. While New Criticism asserts that because different readers interpret in different ways, critics must stick to the text, reader-response criticism asserts that it's precisely because they interpret in different ways that critics have to look at readers' interpretations. For this reason—the emphasis

on the hearer or reader and the consequent variability of interpretation—reader-response critics are sometimes called *subjectivist* critics; because of their emphasis on the object of the text. New Critics are characterized with the opposite term, *objectivist*. The better term for the reader-response critics is probably *reader-oriented*, for while these critics vary in the degree to which they assign responsibility to the reader in making meaning, all insist on taking the reader into account in the interpretive process. Reader-response critics would look at various readers' reactions to the opening of *The Catcher in the Rye* to find out what meanings they made from the text, and to see, perhaps, how important knowing about David Copperfield might be to their early enjoyment of the novel, how much readers identify with Holden's teenage struggles, where and how they make predictions about what will happen next.

One strand of reader-oriented criticism attempts to combine subjective and objective perspectives on reading. *Transactional* critics try to account for the ways in which the world the reader brings to the text and the words the reader finds there work together in creating an interpretation. The work of one such critic, Louise Rosenblatt, has been particularly influential with teachers because it provides an approach to literature that takes into account the needs and perspectives of learners without denying the importance of the text in shaping the reader's understanding. Her approach looks at the text and its author *and* the reader. In Rosenblatt's description, both reader and text merge in the act of interpretation, into what she calls the "event" of creating the "poem." Because she is so useful to teachers and so clearly connected to the arguments we've been making here, we want to summarize some of the most important tenets of her theory of reading literature. The connections to Frank Smith's studies of reading are clear:

1. The reader is active, building meaning out of responses to a text.
2. The reader pays attention to text as only one element in producing meaning, and draws as well on associations, feelings, images, ideas evoked by the text's words.
3. The reader's past experience is important to making sense out of verbal signals on the page—"built into the raw material of the literary process itself is the particular world of the reader" (11).
4. The reader's response is self-ordering and self-correcting. The confident reader will enter into a reading knowing that he'll recognize where elements don't fit, where adjustments have to be made to achieve a coherent meaning.

If the reader is active and necessary in interpretation, Rosenblatt argues that the text plays an important role as well:

1. The text is a stimulus, activating the reader's experience with literature and life.

2. The text is a blueprint for ordering, rejecting, selecting what is evoked from the reader.

In Rosenblatt's model, the reader and the text are put into relationship with each other. So meaning is not the property of the reader or of the text, but emerges from the transaction between the two.

> Part of the magic—and indeed of the essence—of language is the fact that it must be internalized by each individual human being, with all the special overtones that each unique person and unique situation entail. Hence language is at once basically social and intensely individual. (20)

The transaction is not merely then between the reader and text in producing the poem or the event of meaning. It is a transaction between individual and community, between thought and language, and thus reading illustrates, symbolizes, and provides a specialized instance of what humans do all the time as they experience and reflect on experience in their worlds. The very physical signs of the text—its verbal symbols—allow the reader to break through his own individual world and move outside and beyond the personal world. Transactional literary criticism insists that the text be part of the event of meaning, so that the text becomes a way to influence and check a reader's response while the classroom community helps students to corroborate their own subjective interpretations.

Rosenblatt would revise the usual distinction between literary and nonliterary texts, focusing not on differences between kinds of texts but between kinds or purposes of reading. (This is comparable to Britton's revision of the rhetoric of discourse in terms of functions of or purposes for writing.) Rosenblatt distinguishes between two types or uses of reading, which she calls *efferent* and *aesthetic*. Both are defined in terms of the reader's purpose, and she asks, "What does a reader read for?" In efferent reading, the reader reads with an eye toward what she will get out of the reading, what will remain after she completes reading. We read efferently when we study for a test or prepare to recite or look for relevant quotations to use in an essay, or when we're trying out a recipe or replicating an experiment (just as Britton would say that we engage in transactional writing when we write for these purposes). In aesthetic reading, the reader reads to be involved in the moment of reading itself. "In aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is centered directy on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text." (25)

In most classrooms, these two sorts of reading are separated (as are creative and expository writing) according to the content of each book, and there's the assumption that books in most disciplines will be read efferently. (In high school, even the reading of literature is most often assumed to be for the purpose of extracting information and not for

aesthetic response.) But, in Rosenblatt's terms, texts themselves are not inherently either efferent or aesthetic. A book on cell biology may seem efferent by definition to many readers, but a reader with an interest in cells may appreciate the moment of discovering something new about their formation. And a writer like Lewis Thomas will write a biology book that most readers will respond to aesthetically. Hepsie's math teacher in high school used to talk about the beauties of the quadratic equations in the eleventh-grade math book. Her appreciation for the skill of a student who mastered one on the blackboard was an aesthetic reaction to the balance of the formula as she saw the student develop it. In contrast, when Hepsie's English class studied prosody (patterns of rhyme and rhythm in poetry), students looked at Marvell not to experience "To His Coy Mistress" but to figure out the pattern that emerged from the poet's careful manipulation of lines and stanzas. They read the poem for what they could learn about formulas from it. In other words, they read efferently.

For the teacher, two questions arise immediately about reader-oriented approaches in the classroom: how does a teacher effect the sort of transaction between reader and text that would help students enter the works they read through observing their own personal response and making connections with their own experience, building toward a reading not just of that experience but of the literary work? And how does a teacher help her students find the aesthetic reading instead of always and only the efferent one?

A cooperating teacher who was also one of our graduate students explored these issues in her master's essay. As a teacher in a large high school in Boston, she had often found that her "low-level" students were "turned off by" the books they read—even by those that seemed relevant to their lives. Their own experiences did not help them enter the world of the text, but were irrelevant to or interfered with their ability to enter it. While she was thinking about her students' reading, Joyce herself had a similar experience with a text she expected to find relevant, Andrea Lea's novel *Sarah Phillips*. Joyce had expected to find confirmation of her own experiences of family, religion, and race in this novel. Instead she found herself frustrated and angered by the protagonist's actions and responses.

> The fact that Sarah and I share a common race had me especially eager to read the novel. Unfortunately, I hoped for too much satisfaction from the reading because of this issue. Experience taught me to believe that no matter how many varying backgrounds black Americans have, they have a commonality which may be as simple as mutual respect for the same race. Sarah complicated my thinking on this issue when I read of her desire to reject her blood and by implication her race. (13–14)

Just as Elbow used his own experiences with writer's block as a starting point for learning about the composing process and developing effective pedagogy in composition, teachers can use their experiences as readers to help them understand and respond to the reading of their students. In this case, Joyce explored reader-response theory and decided to observe in detail her own responses, as an active reader, to this surprisingly frustrating text. She wrote about her own experiences, and she annotated the text as she read. She kept a double-entry notebook in which she noted parts of the text annotated the text as she read. She kept a double-entry notebook in which she noted parts of the text that evoked her responses and then reflected on those parts and those responses. She reread, letting her prior experience of the text reshape her expectations and using what was in the text, rather than what had been in her experience, to predict what was to come. And when she had come to an understanding of this text and of the process that she as a reader had used to gain this understanding, she applied what she had learned to developing a sequence of writing and reading and double-entry notebook assignments for her students that would allow them to move back and forth between their experiences and a text they were reading.

For her students, Joyce adapted the activities that had supported her own reading. She wanted them to learn to focus their attention on different areas of the text, so she had them use the double-entry format twice, once with students' selection of excerpts and reflections on them, and once with her selection of excerpts for them to reflect on. The second set of selections moved students toward a larger experience of the text—toward considering, in a now familiar format, aspects of the text they'd not found immediate connections with, and toward using this new experience of the text to resee their earlier reading of it. Although Joyce found that her students continued to respond more from their experience of the world than of the text, "they were able, in the end, to connect that experience with the larger themes of the text" (36).

Reading for the pleasure of the text, like bringing the experience of the reader into a consideration of the text's meaning, has important implications for the English classroom. Reading sometimes for pleasure rather than for information can free students to engage with and really think about the things they read, to develop beyond presenting the safe facts of the text (the details of plot, characters' names, etc.) to seeking the significance of those facts. Students can come to interpret the events of a story, the images of a poem. They can make associations with their own lives and see how their own experiences affect their readings of the text. They can read actively and imaginatively. And in doing so, they move from what's known to what's unknown and use the latter to resee the known, to see larger significance in familiar events.

As students bring their different readings into the classroom, they can talk with others, in a community of readers, and see the common meanings that are made as different readers come together, and share their different readings of the text. But this classroom interaction can raise new questions for the teacher who wants to honor each student's response to a text and yet create a functioning interpretive community in the classroom. Marjorie Roemer raised these concerns in a 1987 *College English* article, "Which Reader's Response?" Roemer recognizes the appeal that reader-response theory has for teachers like herself, who "see themselves effecting a more dynamic, more empowering classroom situation with readers who are being invited to make active and personal engagements with the texts they encounter." But she worries that classrooms communicate "a set of dominant values and manners." It's likely that those values will be in conflict with the readings that at least some students will take from the literature they read, and that there will still be a silencing of whatever experiences lie outside of the dominant community.

> The teacher is not merely directing her class through a survey of methodological styles. If she is really eliciting reader response, she is opening a space in her classroom where diverse cultural codes of all kinds will be contested.... Much critical debate proceeds as though the world were divided between old "new critics" and new "poststructuralists" [including reader-response critics], but the divisions in the world are much deeper and more complicated than that. (914–915)

It's a continual challenge to the teacher to recognize the force of her own authority, not to subdue students' divergent responses to the texts they read, but to encourage readers to *name* those responses, as Freire would have them do, and through that naming to resee the world and see ways of acting on it. But making a place for those responses in the classroom and opening up dialogue with students about the texts they read is an important place to begin.

Teaching *The Catcher in the Rye*

A student teacher who observed and then taught classes on *The Catcher in the Rye* reflected on approaches to that reading in her journal. She (and, through dialogue, her cooperating teacher) moved from an approach that focused on "right answers" and an acceptance of students' passive response, to a transactional approach, bringing together the experience of the reader with a close examination of the text and attention to the author, combining writing and reading, encouraging readers to become active learners, and trying to create a community that values the experiences that shape different students' responses. Sela

begins by imagining alternative ways of introducing the novel so as to engage the imagination of the students.

> I felt frustration as I watched B put a set of questions on Chapter 1 on the board for kids to answer in class. Then, she added another set of questions on the overhead for kids to do as homework regarding Chapter 2. To me, it was a very mechanical way to begin one of the most controversial contemporary novels, or to begin any piece of literature for that matter. Kids were obviously unengaged. They needed a means of stimulation to get them involved.
>
> If I had been able to kick off *Catcher*, I would have given them some background on Salinger, who certainly is something of a character. It also might have been interesting to distribute excerpts from book reviews that came out when the book was published to show what diverse response it has engendered. In addition, I would have pointed out that *Catcher* has been the most censored book in American educational history, and I then would have asked them to be on the lookout for possible offensive material as they read it. Even considering the peculiarity and obscurity of the title as an introductory activity would have given kids motivation to want to read the novel and find out where the title comes from.

She recognizes the importance of background knowledge and of putting such information in terms that are familiar to students.

> Something that shocked me was when B asked me if I knew the "David Copperfield and all that crap" reference on the first page. Kids thought it was a reference to a contemporary magician!! They don't take into account that the novel was published way back in 1951, before the magician in question was on the scene. When I replied that David Copperfield was the name of a Charles Dickens novel about a boy who had a lousy childhood, [they] said that [they] hadn't heard of it....
>
> She asked me to clarify his *Out of Africa* reference, so I began by asking how many kids had seen the movie version a few years ago? Some had. Then, I explained that this had been adapted from a novel written by a European woman who had married a wealthy man and moved to an African plantation, where she began to write....

As students move from mechanical question answering to reading and discussion, they become involved.

> This morning I felt much better at how the class shaped up. B had them start reading Chapter 3 out loud, pushing to elicit responses to the text. Kids got involved and really seemed to enjoy the narrative. They laughed at the humorous parts without indulging in any silliness. I was impressed at how mature they were about the farting incident.
>
> B asked them why Holden would call himself "illiterate" and yet make all kinds of references to works of literature that he had read. Kids felt that he meant that he had trouble reading what he read. One kid added that maybe Holden was referring to his lousy vocabulary. B

asked them if Holden in fact had a poor vocabulary and what evidence there is, if any, for difficulty in reading. "Is he being too hard on himself?" she asked. "Is he putting himself down?"

I finished up the reading of Chapter 3 with the kids. Two Vietnamese girls volunteered to read, and I helped them out when they stumbled over words. One of them was having trouble with "sonovabitch," and I joked that by the end of the book she'd have no trouble saying it. Kids laughed.

Through discussion, students become aware of their conflicting readings. Sela uses this opportunity to turn their attention back to the text.

Several kids again asked how old Holden is, and I explained that he is 16 when the events of the story take place. Someone interjected that he thought Holden was 17. I responded that when Holden is recounting the events of the story after they happened, he's 17. Since kids still seemed confused, I had them turn to page 1 again and look at his reference to getting run down and having to take it easy at "this crumby place." I explained that this is Holden's not very direct way of letting us know he's had a nervous breakdown and that the narrative represents his looking back at the events leading to his mental collapse.

And Sela draws on students' own experiences to help them understand the motivation and responses of the novel's characters.

Before considering Stradlater's attitude about girls and Holden's feelings about Jane, I mentioned that as we continue to read the novel, they should pay special attention to Holden's encounters with women—to note which ones are upsetting to him and which ones are satisfying to him.

In helping the kids perceive Stradlater's lack of respect for women, I pointed to his remark about a previous date being "a pig" and asked them what that shows us about Stradlater. It was interesting to me that Loretta didn't think it showed a lack of regard. She emphasized that he was calling a "specific girl" a pig rather than saying that all girls are pigs. Kim added that "maybe the girl really was a pig," so Stradlater was justified in calling her one. I wasn't sure if the kids attached the same meaning to "pig" that I do, so I asked them what the term suggests. Somebody said, "fat," and Randy replied that Stradlater wouldn't go out with any fat girls, that since he was so handsome he'd want a gorgeous girl. Then, I asked them what having to think about Jane's name and then getting it wrong—calling her "Jean"—shows us about Stradlater. Had he been paying attention when he met her? What was he interested in? Randy answered "himself." I asked the girls how they would feel if they were out on a date with a guy and he called them by someone else's name. Loretta replied, "I'd tell him to take a hike."

To follow up, I'll have them write on the following topic: "With whom would you rather go out on a date, Holden or Stradlater? Why?"

While these discussions went on, students wrote in journals in class and wrote essays at home. In fact, beginning-of-class journal writing was first instituted because the cooperating teacher wanted an activity that would help with discipline, demanding students' immediate attention as they entered the classroom. Sela suggested that they write in journals about their responses to the previous night's reading and she found that this significantly increased their involvement in the discussion. Writing answers to the teacher's text-based comprehension questions was postponed until after class discussions (and was sometimes done in small groups) and by that point students were comfortably involved with the text (sometimes enough so that they questioned the questions). Little by little, these students and their teachers worked at finding ways into this novel, through writing and reading and talking and developing shared knowledge and negotiating common understandings. In the process, students changed their roles in the classroom from passive and silent to active and engaged.

The reticence and disengagement of many high school and beginning college readers arises from the fact that reading seems so external to them, wholly dependent on outside authority. The most successful college "remediation" programs are not those that work on isolated skills in either reading or writing, but those that help students resee their relationship with what they read and write, that help them feel their own interpretive authority as readers. The approaches to reading we've discussed in this chapter empower readers and allow students to have authority over their reading. In particular, they open a way for writing to be used to enhance reading and interpretation, as a way of reading the text. Too often students see both the texts produced by other writers and their own writing as very distant from themselves. They fear to take authority for interpreting others' texts in the same way they fear to take authority for their own. But as students are encouraged to see reading and writing not as separate activities with subsets of discrete skills to be mastered but as interpretive acts, they learn to see their own reading as imaginative and their own writing as literature; they see themselves as engaged imaginatively in using language to make meaning of the world.