

A Veteran Teacher's Lessons: Reading Strategies

One thing I learned during my 34 years as a teacher is to be explicit in providing reading instruction. Don't assume secondary students know how to tackle difficult textbooks and non-fiction sources. Choose from a variety of reading strategies, model it, and give students lots of reading practice.

Let's start with the ABC's, reading strategies for the social studies textbook. We may like them or hate them, but most of us use the textbook. So, help your students meet their new textbook by providing a simple [Scavenger Hunt Lesson](#), introducing your students to the structure of their book. Then help them tackle reading a textbook chapter with a reading strategy like [THIEVES](#). The metaphor is that by enlisting this strategy students steal lots of information before reading the entire chapter. With THIEVES students see what they can learn from the title, headings, visuals, and vocabulary in a chapter. They also look at the chapter questions at the end of the chapter, establishing a purpose for reading.

For in depth textbook reading have students take notes as they read. There are lots of different note taking strategies. A common one I've used is [Cornell Notes](#), where students design questions and take notes on answers found in the text. I particularly like this template because I can provide them with an essential question, and students need to write a summary of their reading, as well. As with any strategy you use, it is important to model it first with students. Here is a [Cornell Notes Model on Greek City States](#), the very first chapter in our World Studies book.

Let's talk about reading strategies for primary and secondary sources we often use in our social science classrooms. One strategy that is excellent for helping students read critically is [text annotation](#). Students read and mark up a document, circling words or phrases they don't know, underlining main ideas, making their own comments in the margins. I created a model for my World Studies students by annotating the famous [Funeral Oration by Pericles](#). It is a short primary source, but a tough one for my sophomores. Annotation engages students in "talking to the text," a strategy designed by WestEd's [Reading Apprenticeship](#) (RA). It is a very useful reading strategy, limited only by your photocopy allowance.

One of the most engaging strategies for helping students read difficult primary source documents is [Reader's Theater](#). English teachers commonly use this strategy to have students read and perform portions of plays and novels. A social science teacher can adapt it by picking a powerful primary source, like an excerpt from [Frederick Douglass' West India Emancipation speech](#). You know the speech from Douglass' famous line, "If there is no struggle, there is no progress." After I make a class set of the speech excerpt, I script parts by highlighting a sentence or phrase on each handout, so that the entire excerpt will be read aloud. I like to have kids do this in pairs, so typically I'll highlight 17 or 18 sentences or phrases. Next, kids look at their highlighted portion and talk with their partner about what it means. Students also take turns reading their portion, practicing it aloud. Finally, it's time to perform. The student with the first line reads it aloud, followed by the second, the third, until the entire excerpt has been performed by the class.

You can combine reading strategies, too. For example, in my [Gettysburg Address Activity](#), I have students annotate Lincoln's speech, answer questions about it, and then we perform it with Reader's Theater. Try this one. It will bring a primary source alive.

Teach reading strategies throughout the year. As students tackle difficult texts, they will learn more social studies. And you will have given them a gift that keeps on giving.