



Notebook Connections: Strategies for the Reader's Notebook

Aimee Buckner

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The question I grappled with was how to move students from “couch-potato” readers who can answer basic questions with one word—to readers who think while reading—to readers who think beyond their reading.

—Aimee Buckner

In *Notebook Know-How*, Aimee Buckner demonstrated the power of notebooks to spark and capture students' ideas in the writing workshop. In *Notebook Connections*, she turns her focus to the reading workshop, showing how to transform those “couch-potato” readers into deep thinkers.

Buckner's fourth-grade students use reader's notebooks as a place to document their thinking and growth, to support their thinking for group discussions, and to explore their own ideas about a text without every entry being judged as evidence of their reading progress. Buckner describes her model as flexible enough for students to respond in a variety of ways yet structured enough to provide explicit instruction.

Notebook Connections leads teachers through the process of launching, developing, and fine-tuning a reader's notebook program. Teacher-guided lessons in every chapter help students create anchor texts for their notebooks using various comprehension and writing strategies. As students become more proficient, they grow more independent in their thinking and responses and will begin to select the strategies that work best for them. In the process, the notebook becomes a bridge that helps students make connections between ideas, texts, strategies, and their work as readers and writers.

Notebook Connections, filled with lesson ideas and assessment tips, provides a comprehensive model for making reader's notebooks the centerpiece of your reading workshop.

Notebook Connections: Strategies for the Reader's Notebook Details

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Jennifer says

I'm so grateful Jennifer Saravallo recommended this book at ILA. It is a gem. It has helped me really understand how to maximize readers notebooks in my classroom. The strategy lessons are strong and innovative. I can't wait to try a few! I also love how she connects the strategies to writing. I got so much from this book I ordered her other two books!

Kym says

This has been a wonderful "serious" read this summer. I worked on some of her strategies personally in my own "beginning" notebook, and it really opened my eyes to some of my own beliefs about reading.

She has constructed an interesting approach to specifically getting students to write about their comprehension/what their thinking about as they read.

Although written for older students, I am excited to dabble with some of these ideas with my younger students.

Shaeley Santiago says

Quite similar to Buckner's Notebook Know-How: Strategies For The Writer's Notebook but with more focus on reading strategies such as Leaning In, Fab Five, History of a Reader, What I Know to Be True about Reading, and Character Connections. A fairly quick read with lots of student examples to add depth to her descriptions.

Dona Howe says

Several of Aimee's "strategies" or activities that she illustrates in the book look fantastic. I think they would be useful. This book wasn't exactly what I was looking for, however. Although I recognize and embrace the reading-writing connection, this book was really more about the writing than the reading. I was looking for guidance in using reading notebooks in the classroom to help with assessment (formal and informal) during reader's workshop. Although Aimee does talk about assessment and provide some rubrics, I found it lacking in the read "how to" when it comes to connecting with reading strategy instruction and reflection.

Donalyn says

Like Aimee Buckner, I have often been frustrated with the poor quality of my students' reading response entries. Aimee provides practical solutions for teaching students how to respond and provides rubrics, lesson plan ideas, and reflections to use with students.

I do not always agree with her approach, for example, I do not grade students' grammar, spelling, etc. when assessing response entries (perhaps I should). I will need to tweak some of her ideas to make them work with my philosophy about teaching reading, but isn't this what all teachers do? Take someone else's kernel of an idea and make it our own? Thanks, Aimee, for the kernels...

Madi Houston says

A quick read for many good little tips for readers' notebooks. This book is definitely geared toward upper elementary or middle school, but there is still a lot to adapt for the high school teachers!

Jamie says

The strategies were clearly described and organized. Although I felt the earlier book, *Notebook Know-How*, had more a-ha moments for me, I do think this book has valuable ideas to offer. I'm not sure these are strategies I will lift out and use exactly as described, but I did find myself inspired to write notes to plan for my students based on passages in this book.

Cindy says

I know this will get me tarred and feathered but I really think homeschooling parents should be required to take continuing education credits just like real teachers. I'm not sure how I'd finance this requirement but I am certainly missing out on all the new and improved strategies in education (of course, on the flip side, I'm also missing out on all the here today-gone tomorrow strategies as well). I am so motivated by the idea of the reader's notebook. Although I felt like the author could have organized her book better, I've picked out the ideas and rearranged them to fit us. We've implemented this strategy in our home and already I see greater story understanding and appreciation. My next goal: writer's notebook. Thanks, Kym!

Erik says

Where her first book *Notebook Know-How* centered on the writer's notebook, Buckner shifts her attention to the reader's notebook, and how reading like a writer, and writing about that heightens both student interest and learning. In essence, all the mini-lessons and strategies she outlines reinforce the old adage of reading like a writer, and even its inverse, writing like a reader.

Although I'm personally a huge fan of her philosophy and pedagogy – in an ideal classroom, that is – I am

wary of the overambitious and all-too-broad mini-lessons. Some may call it a whole language approach, which I believe does not adequately serve lower socio-economic and English language learners as effectively as intended and implemented *per se*. That is, the students she works with here are predominantly middle-class white kids in suburban Georgia. Not only is this a little acknowledged bias on her part, but also on the part of the publisher and the districts who buy this kind of book to give schools like mine, who serves lower-income Hispanic, black, white, and Asian Americans. As much as I love the kind of thinking that she details in this remarkable concise professional development tool, I have serious reservations. Do these exact strategies, as delivered as open-ended as she writes them, serve my students best? Case in point: The dearth of explicit vocabulary and grammar instruction does not address or lessen the vocabulary gap between my students and hers; which I would argue is necessary in order to help my students be on par with hers. That is, the best well-crafted strategy lessons can fall on deaf ears if they don't have the academic vocabulary in the first place to understand what you're talking about. In short, I would argue that my time and efforts are better spent reading tried-and-true pedagogy that addresses the very different needs to English language learners and those entering in our public school system whose vocabularies are significantly truncated the moment the walk in the Kindergarten door on day one of their K-12 education.

However, there are some gems that are useful here in these pages which transcend the socio-economic backgrounds of our nation's students. One such is her Fab Five Summaries, which is singularly the best of its kind I've every come across. (And most teachers would readily admit that summaries are often the most monstrous of beasts that can turn kids into regurgitation machine with ten too many superfluous details, and which often don't make much sense.)

And then there is her reprinting of Brian Cambourne's Conditions of Learning – a theoretical model that combines many truisms that any teacher would agree with. However, I do have reservations in regards to how his conditions – all of which I agree with in theory – are limited by students' socio-economic background. That is, the notions of expectations, responsibility, employment, and approximation can and are used in schools, but can be absent in their lives outside school; which in turn thwarts the best and well-intentioned efforts of teachers who serve lower socio-economic students, particularly if the latter come from generational (versus situational) poverty. What works in a school setting can looks completely useless for life at large for our hardest to reach kids, as their world does not operate by the same rules, assumptions, means, and ends.

Fortunately, Buckner's book is an easy and enjoyable read, and its limitations do not detract from the genuinely high-quality and higher-thinking strategies that she effectively details with examples from real students and their work. Skip that enormous Fountas & Pinnell tome, *Guiding Readers and Writers*, and spend an afternoon (as opposed to many months) reading this. Trust me: You will get more bang for your buck -- and time.

Debbie says

I picked up this book for two reasons. One: I am doing interactive notebooks with my English 1 Support students and I thought it would give me good ideas. Two: it's about the "reader's notebook," which was something I wasn't familiar with.

All in all, I wasn't disappointed with the book. The writers give clear reasons for why they developed certain strategies, how to do it (including a mini-script, in some cases), and goals and procedures. Often, there are student examples, too. I haven't gotten a chance to implement anything in this book - I think it's going to take

some planning over the summer to translate them to lesson plans with handouts, useful scaffolding, and a better concept of evaluation - but I look forward to that. Truly a smart book, especially for those teachers who spend more time teaching reading than writing.

Tina Brown-Larkin says

Great resource. Full of valuable insight and practical applications.

Kathy Mathey says

...even better second time around...

Nika says

I am gravely disappointed by this resource, after hearing so many good things about this teacher/author. There is nothing new here! There is an artificial tang throughout. She did not help me connect reading and writing notebooks in any way other than I would have done it before picking up this book.

Michele Knott says

Writing about reading is hard for me, so I can imagine kids having difficulty with it. Aimee Buckner lays the information out in a way that seems sequential and makes sense to my mind. This was a very helpful read, and one that I am eager to put in place.

Lou Broughton says

A quick read with practical extended response teaching ideas for the reader's notebook that will help intermediate teachers assess the level of understanding and frequency of use of comprehension strategies with their students. However, this book mostly focuses on fiction. Even though the author states in the beginning of the book that her suggestions extend to all genres, most do not extend to non-fiction.

I liked how the author referred to how her work with reader's notebooks pairs nicely with The Comprehension Toolkit by Harvey & Goudvis and how she took ideas from Kelly Gallagher's book Deeper Reading and adjusted the ideas to specifically work with grades 3-5. Overall, this is a great resource for teachers wanting their reading instruction to move from isolated skills and strategies to a more holistic approach.
