

Getting to Know Collaborative Strategic Reading

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How CSR Works

Of probably all of the things I have done, with pre-AP or the differentiation or the other things the district has thrown at me in seven years, this is probably the only one I will keep and I'm hard to convince. I'm hard to convince and this one has.

—MIDDLE SCHOOL LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHER

I think CSR is wonderful. It's an excellent program. It's practical; it focuses kids; it has all the elements in reading that they need and it's lifelong.

—MIDDLE SCHOOL READING INTERVENTION TEACHER

CSR is an excellent technique for teaching students reading comprehension and building vocabulary and also working together cooperatively. I think it is wonderful. We have been using it with the science text and it's turned out beautifully.

—FIFTH-GRADE TEACHER

In this chapter, we describe CSR. We discuss each of the strategies and provide examples of students working together in small groups. CSR strategies occur before, during, and after reading (see Figure 1.1).

Before Reading: Preview

Students preview the entire passage before they read each section. The goals of previewing are (1) for students to learn as much about the passage as they can in a brief period of time (two to three minutes), (2) to activate their background knowledge about

CSR STRATEGIES

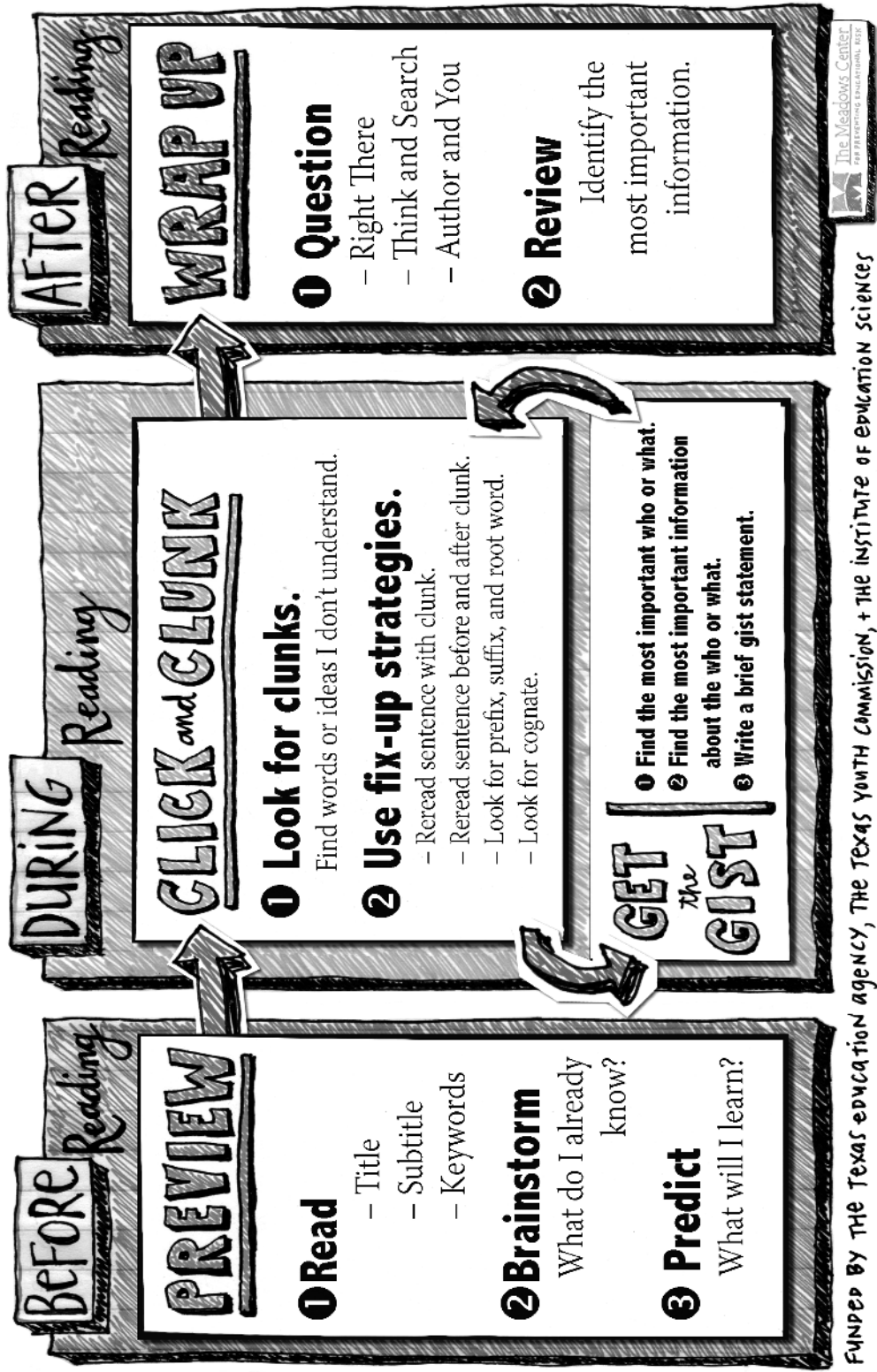


FIGURE 1.1. CSR Comprehension Strategies

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the topic, and (3) to make predictions about what they will learn. Previewing serves to motivate students' interest in the topic and to engage them in active reading from the onset. Preview also provides opportunities to help students develop background knowledge about the reading, and build vocabulary and concepts to enhance their understanding of the passage.

When students preview before reading, they should look at the following:

- The passage's title
- Any headings
- Words that are bolded or underlined
- Any pictures, tables, graphs, and other key information

This will help them do two things:

- Brainstorm what they already know about the topic
- Predict what they will learn about the topic

The teacher leads the preview portion of CSR. In previous versions of CSR,¹ students conducted a student-guided preview while working together in their small groups. Over the years, we have found that students do not always have sufficient background knowledge about a topic or sufficiently understand how the topic of the day's reading connects with other lessons. This is especially true when students begin a new unit of study. Therefore, we now ask teachers to facilitate the Preview. That way, the teacher can preteach a few key vocabulary words; provide a short video clip, pictures, chart, or diagram to help build background knowledge about the topic of the passage; and give students feedback on their brainstorms and predictions, helping them to make connections. While leading the Preview, the teacher asks students to write their brainstorm statements and predictions in their learning logs and to share with one another (either with a partner or in small groups) (see Figure 1.2).

In the following example, students from an eighth-grade language arts class are sharing their predictions while reading "The Odyssey":

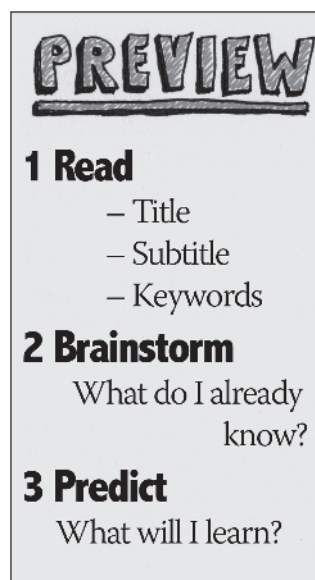


FIGURE 1.2. The Preview Process

- Gabrielle:* Do you guys have what you think might happen today?
- Nate:* I have mine.
- Cassidy:* Yes, me too, I have it.
- James:* Mmm, I don't know . . .
- Gabrielle:* Well, I thought that we might learn about his journey from Achilles, because I looked ahead and I got to see the picture.
- Cassidy:* Mine is sort of like yours. I said that I think he [Ulysses] is going to be learning about, um, the land of the dead, because that is obviously the title, and that can help, so that's what I think it's about.

In the next example, seventh-graders are sharing their predictions about an article that describes the melting of the polar ice cap. The teacher has already conducted a whole-class Preview and has asked students to share their predictions. David is an English language learner (ELL) with learning disabilities who reads at about a second-grade level.

- Cinthia:* Okay, I think that I might learn what is happening in the North Pole and the effects of the ice melting and what it can do and what can happen.
- David:* Good job, Cinthia.
- Cinthia:* Thank you.
- Laura:* I might learn about the topic, how to help the environment and how to keep the ice, keep it safe. David?
- David:* I think I'm gonna learn how to find out what the climate is and how it is changing.
- Katy:* Okay, I put that I think that we will learn about how to prevent this and what we can do about it.

Although David might not be able to read every word in the passage, he was able to glean enough about the passage from previewing it and from hearing his peers' predictions to come up with his own prediction.

During Reading: Click and Clunk

Students Click and Clunk while reading each section of the passage. One section of a passage typically consists of one to three paragraphs. Sometimes sections of text in a textbook are set off by subheadings that make it easy to separate them. At other times, the teacher decides where to separate the passage. Three sections of text for one day's reading works well. Students learn to think about what they are reading and to determine if there is a word or concept that they do not understand. They learn to refer to this as a *clunk*. Students are then asked to underline or write down their clunks.

The goal of teaching students about Click and Clunk is to get them to monitor their understanding while they read and to determine whether they have “meaning” breakdowns. In other words, Click and Clunk helps students develop the metacognitive awareness that is so important for successful reading.

Many students with reading difficulties fail to adequately monitor their understanding while they are reading. Click and Clunk is designed to serve as a trigger for monitoring their understanding. Clicks refer to portions of the text that make sense to the reader: *click, click, click*—comprehension clicks into place as the reader proceeds smoothly through the text. When students come to a word, concept, or idea that does not make sense, they are taught to think of that as a

clunk, a bump in the road where comprehension breaks down. Initially, the teacher asks, “Is everything clicking? Who has clunks about the section we just read?” Students know that they will be asked this question and are alert to identify clunks during reading. Over time, students take on the responsibility for identifying their own clunks. See Figure 1.3 for a summary of Click and Clunk.

Learning to identify clunks is important. But what do students do after they determine that there is a word or concept they do not know? Students use fix-up strategies to figure out the meaning of clunks. The first two fix-up strategies rely on context clues, or “reading around” the word or words in question. The second two fix-up strategies require looking within the word. One relies on studying word parts (i.e., morphology) and the other asks students to consider if there are cognates in another language that can help. Here are the four strategies to fix up a clunk:

- *Fix-up strategy one:* Reread the sentence with the clunk and look for key ideas to help you figure out the word. Think about what makes sense.
- *Fix-up strategy two:* Reread the sentence with the clunk and the sentences before or after the clunk looking for clues.
- *Fix-up strategy three:* Break the word apart and look for a prefix, suffix, or a root word.
- *Fix-up strategy four:* Look for a cognate that makes sense.

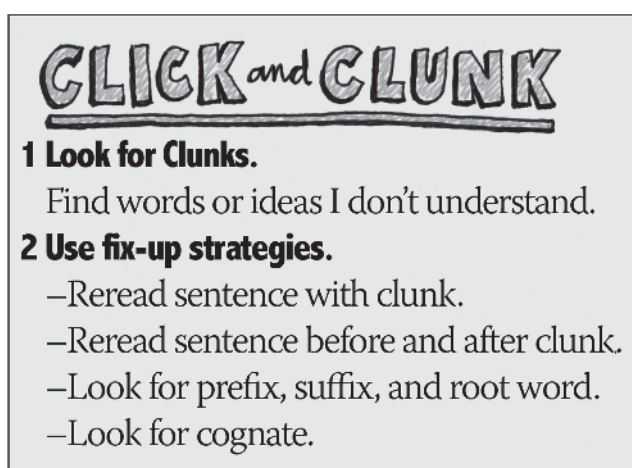


FIGURE 1.3. The Click and Clunk Process

After reading a section of text, the Leader in a CSR group asks everyone to write down any clunks they have. Then the Leader asks, “Clunk Expert, please help us out.” The Clunk Expert then asks if anyone in the group knows the meaning of the clunk. If that is the case, the student who knows the meaning of the word or concept explains it and makes sure everyone understands. Before moving on, students reread the sentence with the clunk to make sure the definition makes sense. If no one in the group can explain the meaning of the clunk, then the Clunk Expert guides the group through the application of the fix-up strategies as they try to solve the clunk. If they are still stuck, the Leader asks for the teacher’s assistance.

In the following example, students in a seventh-grade class are helping one another figure out the meaning of a clunk, *noxious*. Two of the students are struggling readers (Julie and Michael) and two are average to high achievers (Cinthia and Raul). Note that it was an average to high achiever who came up with the clunk.

- Cinthia:* Noxious.
- Julie:* Do you know; does anyone know what this clunk means?
- Michael:* What’s your clunk?
- Cinthia:* Noxious.
- Raul:* Isn’t it a feeling you get when like . . .
- Cinthia:* That’s nauseous (laughing).
- Raul:* Oh.
- Cinthia:* Nauseous is, like, when you want to throw up.
- Michael:* It’s, like, a chemical—
- Julie:* —a chemical that kills.
- Raul:* OK, let’s reread the sentence, come on. “Cotton plants, for instance, are often smothered with *noxious* chemicals to keep away bugs and weeds.” Noxious.
- Julie:* So, it kills, so it’s a chemical.
- Cinthia:* So, it’s like something bad if it kills the bugs and weeds.
- Julie:* It’s something that kills—
- Raul:* —bad for the environment.
- Michael:* Yeah.
- Cinthia:* It’s something that’s not good.
- Michael:* It’s something that kills.
- Raul:* It’s like toxic.

The following example is from a fifth-grade class. Students are using CSR while reading their science textbook. Diana is the Leader and Greg is the Clunk Expert. Pablo is an ELL with learning disabilities. Greg offers procedural and conceptual explanations and checks for understanding:

- Diana:* Click and Clunk?
- Pablo:* Calcium.
- Greg:* Try to read sentences in the back and in the front to try to get a clue. Think if you see any sentences in the back or in the front that can help you. Did you get anything?
- Pablo:* No.
- Greg:* OK, now I do, I get something. It is a tiny crystal-like mineral. Do you know what a mineral is?
- Pablo:* Yeah.
- Greg:* What is it?
- Pablo:* It's like a kind of vitamin.
- Greg:* OK, calcium is a type of element that there is in the bones. And, the bones need that. Calcium helps the bones in order to make them strong. Do you now understand what calcium is?
- Pablo:* Yes.
- Greg:* What is it again, one more time?
- Pablo:* It is a type of element that helps the bones grow.
- Greg:* OK, good.

During Reading: Get the Gist

In CSR, students learn to use two strategies while they read, Click and Clunk and Get the Gist. The previous section described how teachers can help students determine clunks and then use fix-up strategies to better understand these clunks. In this section, we describe how teachers can use Get the Gist with their students to facilitate their ability to determine the main idea of a text and to write or state the main idea in their own words.

Students get the gist by identifying the most important idea in a section of text (usually about two paragraphs). When students can restate in their own words the most important information about what they read, it is a very good indicator of reading comprehension.

In addition to improving understanding, learning to effectively Get the Gist of targeted text promotes students' memory for what they have learned. Also, getting the gist across multiple paragraphs in a section of text requires higher-level thinking. Students must synthesize information, decide what is more important, and determine which details to leave out (see Figure 1.4).

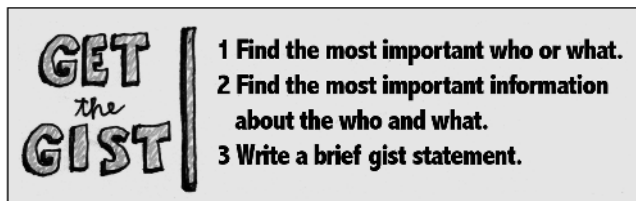


FIGURE 1.4. The Get the Gist Process

group to name the topic, or, in other words, the most important who or what the section of text is about. Once students agree on the topic, then the Gist Expert asks all in the group to write their own gists in their learning logs. Once students have had time to do this, the Gist Expert asks everyone to share. Students then evaluate each others' gists, pointing out when they think a gist includes details or leaves out an important idea. The goal of CSR at this point is for students to engage in a rich content-focused discussion about the important ideas in the text they are reading.

In the following example, the same seventh-graders we heard from previously are now getting the gist. Note how Raul questions Julie about her gist, pointing out that she left out some important information (i.e., "the bad part").

- Julie:* OK, go ahead, Cinthia.
- Cinthia:* Many of the companies make clothes out of chemicals that hurt the earth, but earth-friendly fabrics help the earth.
- Julie:* OK, mine was, Clothes and shoes involves chemicals and energy but now involves corn sugar.
- Pause (three seconds)
- Julie:* So let's just keep going.
- Raul:* No, but the bad part. This was the thing they were trying to do; this was the bad part. We didn't quite get the bad part.
- Julie:* What do you mean, the bad part?
- Raul:* (*pointing to the text*) They're using synthetic fibers from petroleum (*pointing to the words in the passage and tapping them*) and they get it from the ground, processing it from the oil . . .
- Cinthia:* Well, if you did all that, it wouldn't fit.
- Julie:* Yeah, and I did kinda write it cause I wrote that clothes and shoes involves harsh chemicals and energy, but now they are trying to make it out of corn sugar—
- Raul:* —with corn sugar.
- Julie:* Yeah, now they're trying to make it, um, to (*reading*) "overcome this reliance, some companies have experimented with creating materials from substances such as corn sugar."
- Cinthia:* 'Cause if you put all those things that they make it out of, it will like take—
- Julie:* —take too long.

While working in their small groups, students Get the Gist after reading a section of text, right after they have finished figuring out their clunks. The Leader asks the Gist Expert to take charge. The Gist Expert then asks everyone in the

Cinthia: Yeah.

Julie: That's why I just wrote the chemicals. OK, who wants to read the third section?

The next example is from a fifth-grade class.

Mario: What is the most important idea we have learned about the topic so far? José?

José: That when drugs are abused, drugs can be dangerous and very harmful.

Laura: That when drugs are taken as directed, they can help.

José: But, drugs can also be misused or used improperly.

Mario: OK, but can we put those together?

Laura: Drugs help when used properly but can be dangerous when misused.

After Reading: Wrap Up

Like the Preview stage, Wrap Up occurs only once and at the end of reading the assigned text. Wrap Up gives students the opportunity to think about the entire text and what they have learned. The goals are to improve students' knowledge, understanding, and memory of what they have just finished reading. Wrap Up has two parts. First, students formulate teacherlike questions about the important ideas in the text. They take turns asking and answering these questions in their small groups. To help them generate different types of questions, students learn three types of question-answer relationships (QAR). (QAR is a tool for helping students understand that they need to consider information in the text as well as their background knowledge when generating and answering questions):²

- *Right There*, for which the answer is in one place in the text
- *Think and Search*, for which the answer can be found in multiple places in the text and must be synthesized
- *Author and You*, for which some of the information needed to answer the question is in the text and other information is from the reader's background knowledge

Students might also use question stems, such as the following:

- How were ____ and ____ the same? How were they different?
- What do you think would happen if ____?
- What do you think caused ____ to happen?
- What other solution can you think of for the problem of ____?
- What might have prevented the problem of ____ from happening?
- What are the strengths (or weaknesses) of ____?

These question stems can be helpful for all students and especially for ELLs.

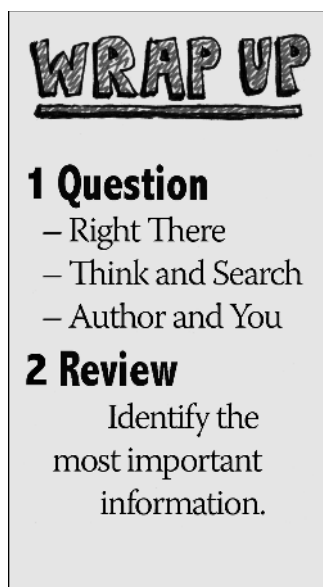


FIGURE 1.5. The Wrap Up Process

Next, as the final step in their small groups, students review the important ideas they have learned. They write down a few key ideas from the text, share them with peers, and justify why they think they are important (see Figure 1.5). To help them think about what was important, students review their learning logs, paying particular attention to the gist statements.

When it is time to Wrap Up, the Leader asks the Question Expert to guide the group in writing, answering, and discussing questions. The Question Expert might remind the group of the three question types. The Question Expert also makes sure that students answer their classmates' questions and agree on the response. The Leader then guides the Review of important information by asking all to write down the most important ideas they have learned and then asking who would like to share. Next we provide two examples, one of questioning and another of review.

In this first example, fifth-graders answer Tasha's question. Note that Tasha exaggerates a bit—ideally, this is something the teacher would pick up on and clarify.

- Tasha:* What might happen if your bones did not contain enough calcium?
- Luis:* They will break.
- Tasha:* OK, they will probably break. But can we add a little bit?
- Rolando:* Well, first of all, what is calcium? And then we can figure out what it says and how it helps the bones.
- Luis:* OK, calcium is something that keeps the bones healthy and stuff like that.
- Erica:* Tasha?
- Tasha:* If you don't have enough calcium the bones will rot and you will be dead. And, then after you die you know your bones decay and you turn into dust. Your bones will like decompose in your body which will destroy and corrupt. If it does not have enough calcium, then the bones will get weak and break.
- Erica:* OK, I would say the same thing because the bones without calcium are nothing.
- Rolando:* All right, well, we finished this.

Next, a group of seventh-graders review the most important ideas in a passage they read about the polar ice cap melting. Laura, Katy, and Cinthia all are average achieving, and David has learning disabilities and reads at about a second-grade

level. Note that the teacher provides a brief minilesson about review statements. She did this because she had read the students' learning logs and noticed that they seemed to be writing more about interesting aspects than the most important points of readings.

- Katy:* Write one or more of the more important ideas in this text.
- Teacher:* When you're writing this part I want you to make sure that you're writing what's most important. Not what's most *interesting*, but what's most *important* in terms of understanding the information that's in the article. They presented a lot of different ideas and a lot of different information, but out of that I want you to be ready to tell your group why you think that's most important . . .
- Laura:* I put the temperatures are increasing so the perennial ice is melting and the perennial ice is the thick, thick ice, didn't it say that? It's like really, really thick.
- Katy:* I said the same thing as her and that the perennial ice is melting and that's worrying because the ice has frozen for many, many years.
- Laura:* And it's like really thick ice. Like it shouldn't be melting.
- Cinthia:* I put that temperatures are not the usual which has brought lots of damage like the annual ice. Which is like vulnerable 'cause that's the ice that's been there, too.
- Katy:* Are you finished, David?
- David:* Yeah, I put that the temperatures are increasing and causing the thick ice to melt.
- Katy:* That's mostly what we all wrote.
- Cinthia:* Yeah.
- Katy:* So it is a very important thing that it said in the article.
- Cinthia:* 'Cause it could do a lot of damage to us.
- Katy:* Mmm hmm. And that's all. But that's 65 percent. That's really big to me 'cause that just happened in a year imagine what can happen in one other year, three years it could all be gone—
- Laura:* —be gone.
- Cinthia:* Yeah, it says that unusual cold has raised hopes, so maybe we'll recover it, but maybe not.
- Laura:* 'Cause like—
- Cinthia:* —Maybe there won't be a chance.
- David:* A chance, yeah.

- Laura:* 'Cause maybe it will start to break again and maybe it will be bigger, like 75 percent next year. 'Cause this was 2008, 65 percent, and now we're 2009 so—
- Katy:* How much damage happened already?
- Cinthia:* We don't know that, and we don't know that we're causing this.

Whole-Class Wrap Up and Follow-Up Activities

Once students have finished generating questions and reviewing what they have learned in their CSR groups, the teacher leads a quick, whole-class Wrap Up to emphasize important information and help students make connections with other lessons and the big ideas or “essential questions” the class is focusing on. The teacher may also clarify misunderstandings noticed while students were working in small groups and engage students in higher-level thinking activities using the information they have learned. This whole-class Wrap Up might be done very quickly at the end of the period before students leave as a way to bring closure to the lesson. Or it might be much more involved and include follow-up activities.

Follow-up activities can vary depending on the goals of the class, the age and needs of the students, and the focus of the class. Tiffany Bart used a Numbered Heads Together³ activity in her diverse fifth-grade classroom using questions students had generated in their groups. Students first numbered off. Mrs. Bart asked a question, and then students wrote their answers and discussed them in their groups, putting their heads together to make sure everyone in the group knew the answer to the question. Then Mrs. Bart rolled two dice; one number indicated which group should respond and the second number represented which student in the group to call on. Mrs. Bart kept score to make the activity more like a game. Students enjoyed this activity and always were very highly engaged when they played.

Another activity Mrs. Bart's students loved was “Jeopardy,” again using questions they had generated. Right-There questions were worth ten points each, Think-and-Search questions were worth twenty points, and Author-and-You questions were worth the most points. Mrs. Bart also sometimes had groups send their best question to a neighboring group to answer in a version of “Send a Problem.”⁴

Not all of Mrs. Bart's follow-up activities involved questions, though. She also had students complete a variety of tasks to reinforce vocabulary, including putting clunks and their definitions on a word wall and creating clunk books as homework. Sometimes students checked the accuracy of the definitions they had come up with using fix-up strategies in their groups. They liked to play games with their clunks, such as “Clunk Concentration,” which involved matching clunk words and their definitions.

Teachers might also provide additional instruction in prefixes, root words, suffixes, and cognates. Students might develop clunk graphic and semantic organizers or engage

in other activities to reinforce new vocabulary learning. They could also write longer summaries of multiple passages they have read on the same topic.

To Sum Up

When it is up and running and working as it should, CSR brings out the best in everyone involved. Teachers are able to circulate around the classroom and provide support on an as-needed basis. They have the time to provide individual assistance to students who are in need or feedback, to an entire small group, or to the whole class. Students are all actively involved in learning and supporting one another.

