Promoting reading comprehension in social studies

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Using the Scaffolded Reading Experience approach as a framework, the authors provide teachers in middle and secondary schools with concrete techniques for teaching reading and content area subjects.

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I'm not a reading teacher; students should already know how to read when they get to middle school. My job is to teach them social studies content.

As a reading teacher educator (first author) and a social studies teacher educator (second author) we often hear complaints like this in our teacher education courses. We diligently strive to demonstrate why it is crucial for all middle and high school teachers to be teachers of reading and content. Once we establish the importance of teaching reading in all content courses, we must then supply our university students with the tools they will need to teach reading and content.

This article arose from our collaboration as a teacher of reading and a teacher of social studies. We believe that all middle and high school teachers should be teachers of reading. Using the Scaffolded Reading Experience (SRE) as an organizing framework for reading instruction (Graves, Juel, & Graves, 2001), we describe six reader strategies that teachers can help students

develop. We also introduce six accompanying teacher techniques that can be used to help students develop reading strategies and behaviors.

Rationale

Many authors suggest that there is a coming crisis in U.S. middle and secondary schools (Moje, Young, Readence, & Moore, 2000). This crisis comes in the form of reading difficulties. While many primary schools have emphasized word recognition and decoding, decoding does not guarantee comprehension. The result is that many students who can read fluently are unable to comprehend the words that they read (Pressley & Block, 2002). Thus, some middle and secondary teachers may spoon-feed texts to their students, reading a text aloud or summarizing an entire text for them. Other teachers may do nothing to aid their students' comprehension, assigning text to be read without any support. Either scenario is usually because teachers do not know how to help students develop the skills and strategies necessary for reading comprehension (Greenleaf, Jiménez, & Roller, 2002).

Graves et al. (2001) introduced SRE, which is rooted in the notion of scaffolding, as one guide for teachers wishing to help students develop strategic reading habits. Scaffolding draws on the works of Vygotsky (1978), and later Rogoff (1990), who established the importance of students learning through interaction with more

knowledgeable others, usually parents or teachers. In the classroom, teachers scaffold instruction in a way that allows students to accomplish a task they might not be able to accomplish without the additional support. For example, asking students to read through the subtitles, captions, and bold print before reading and then discussing what the chapter appears to be about provides students with a simple scaffold to enhance their comprehension. In order to provide this scaffold, Graves et al. suggested structuring lessons to include activities before, during, and after reading. This division helps students recognize that reading is an active procedure throughout. The before-reading, during-reading, and after-reading distinction also reminds teachers that reading instruction takes place at multiple points; it is not merely an assessment to monitor comprehension at the conclusion of a chapter.

Using this framework as a guide, we extended the implementation ideas to include different types of text social studies teachers are likely to use in the classroom. Throughout SRE, the students' comprehension of the text remains the primary focus. Furthermore, the teacher's goal is to help students become independent readers. Through modeling and practice, the teacher first provides the scaffolds of reading and then is able to gradually remove the supports as students are able to monitor their own comprehension.

Strategy and technique

Here we make an important distinction between what the reader does to comprehend text and what the teacher does to enhance reading comprehension. We list the student reading behavior or skill desired as a reader strategy. *Strategy* refers to the plan that students are able to implement when reading (Duffy, 2003). When comprehension breaks down, students are able to implement a plan or strategy to restore their own comprehension. For example, when reading a textbook about the American Revolution, a student might realize that he or she does not understand what

the Stamp Acts were. He or she might employ such strategies as going back and rereading the section in the text on the Stamp Act or looking up *Stamp Act* in the glossary. We refer to what the teacher uses to help the student comprehend texts as teacher technique.

We have selected six reading strategies and accompanying teaching techniques that can be used with multiple types of text. Researchers suggest that teachers begin comprehension instruction by focusing on a few teaching techniques to model reader strategies. As they implement these techniques, they can expect resistance from students and frustration in their own shortcomings initially (Mosenthal, Schwartz, & MacIsaac, 1992). By limiting the strategies and teaching techniques used, teachers gain increasing confidence in the use of the techniques, and students gain increasing competence and independence with the strategies. These strategies and techniques, represented in Table 1, come from extensive review of the reading and social studies literature, as well as our own experience as teachers and teacher educators. We place these teaching techniques within a framework of Scaffolded Reading Experience in order to help teachers organize their own instruction. Table 1 separates prereading, during-reading, and postreading strategies. For each reader strategy, a separate teacher technique is offered as a vehicle to model the specific reader strategy.

Two points are worth special note. First, the teaching techniques and the reader strategies selected may be used across the social studies genres—textbooks, primary sources, fictional texts, or a combination. This allows the teacher and students to establish routines for reading, regardless of the type of text used. After teachers become familiar with comprehension instruction, they may wish to add other teaching techniques to their repertoire as students become independent users of each strategy. Such techniques are used not merely for the activity value—something to do instead of lecture—although most students do find the following activities engaging. The

Table 1
Overview of comprehension strategies

Prereading	During reading	Postreading
Reader strategy 1: Establishing the purpose for reading Teacher technique: "Everybody Reads To" (Cunningham & Allington, 1999) **Reader strategy 2:** Making connections to background knowledge Teacher technique: List, Group, Label (Taba, 1967)	**Reader strategy 3:** Understanding the arrangement of the texts Teacher technique: Graphic organizers **Reader strategy 4:** Making connections between texts Teacher technique: Inquiry charts (Hoffman, 1992)	**Reader strategy 5:** Monitoring comprehension through questioning Teacher technique: Reciprocal questioning (Manzo, 1969) **Reader strategy 6:** Synthesizing information across texts Teacher technique: ABC Graffiti

suggested teaching techniques are tools that teachers use as they teach reading and content. Second, although the teacher techniques and reader strategies we review are not new, we ground their application in ease of use for students who may struggle to read and in the social studies content. Social studies, more than other disciplines, require students to read a wide variety of texts, and some students find traditional textbook reading difficult. Students will also be expected to read primary sources, some written hundreds of years ago in a variety of language styles by well-educated and less well-educated authors. Such wide reading demands teacher techniques that can be applied across reading texts. It also demands strategies, or plans, that even struggling readers can implement with ease and confidence.

Examples

Doing social studies offers students powerful opportunities for strengthening their reading comprehension skills while furthering their critical thinking skills (Graves & Avery, 1997). Readings in the social studies embrace various forms of texts (e.g., primary and secondary sources, non-fiction, fiction, poetry, letters, and textbooks).

Exposure to these various text structures provides students with multiple perspectives while enriching their understanding of people and the past. To capitalize on the benefits offered by the variety of texts, students must develop historical understanding skills—the ability to evaluate, analyze, and synthesize historical evidence surrounding problems or issues that have no right or wrong answers. Yet students often "lack the reading skills necessary to gain insights from the past, engage in critical thinking, and follow a complex chain of events" (Graves & Avery, p. 134).

For students to develop these skills, teachers must help them acquire the necessary reading comprehension skills for understanding history (Ciardiello, 2002); however, many social studies teachers in middle and secondary schools are unable to provide the necessary reading support (Fordham, Wellman, & Sandmann, 2002). Without concrete examples of reading instruction in social studies, teachers may be reluctant to try new teaching techniques. To help teachers understand and use this model, we have selected a single topic (the American Revolution), identified text, and developed appropriate examples to accompany each teaching technique. Our chosen topic is a core component of U.S. state and national social

studies curricula at multiple grade levels. Content examples for each phase of SRE are included.

Prereading

During prereading, two reader strategies are emphasized: establishing the purpose for reading and making connections to background knowledge. Frequently, students are assigned reading without knowing why the text was selected or what they should be paying attention to in it. By carefully setting the purpose, the teacher helps students focus their attention on the most important information. Another area of difficulty for students reading social studies texts is connecting a text to what they already know. Because the social studies, particularly history, must be viewed in relation to other places, times, and events, it is crucial for students to begin connecting a cohesive picture of the historical timeline. The following reader strategies and teacher techniques are designed to aid teachers and students in these areas.

Reader strategy 1: Establishing the purpose for reading. ERT is a simple teaching technique, appropriate for helping teachers establish the purpose for reading and model the behavior for students. ERT (Cunningham & Allington, 1999) is an abbreviation for "Everybody Reads To." The teacher first selects a short text to be read. An appropriate amount is usually one to two pages from a textbook, a single primary source, or a short chapter from a fiction text. Next, the teacher establishes the purpose(s) for reading. Students read to find something stated explicitly in the text (denoted by the word *find*) and infer something from the facts in it (denoted by the words *figure out*). For example, when studying the American Revolution in the middle grades, the use of fictional text, such as *George Washington's Socks* (Woodruff, 1991), can spark student interest in history. To prepare students for reading, the teacher would ask them to do the following things.

- Read to find out what life was like for soldiers and what motivations soldiers had for fighting in the American Revolution.

- Read to figure out which of the individuals Matthew Carlton met during his adventure were real participants in the American Revolution.

This same technique can be applied to multiple texts for a broader analysis of the social studies topic or concept. For example, before reading multiple sources (including a textbook and primary and fictional sources) centered on the American Revolution, the teacher might establish the following broad purposes for reading.

- Everybody reads to find out the ideas that led to the war for independence.
- Everybody reads to figure out if the American Revolution was revolutionary.

By establishing the purposes for reading either single or multiple texts, teachers help model how to focus on the most important aspects of a text. This is particularly helpful for struggling readers who may not know how to draw the most important facts from texts. ERT helps remind teachers of the importance of asking inferential questions, not just literal (or test-preparatory) questions. By including literal and inferential purposes, teachers model for students how to move away from narrow, fact-based questions and answers and set more global purposes for reading.

With appropriate modeling, teachers can turn over ERT to the students. For example, teachers might give students the objectives for the unit of study; then students might practice setting a purpose for reading. Teachers could next give feedback on how well the students' purposes matched the objectives. With all the teacher techniques, the goal is student comprehension and independence.

Reader strategy 2: Making connections to background knowledge. List, Group, Label, or LGL (Taba, 1967), helps teachers facilitate students' prior knowledge, improve existing vocabulary, organize verbal concepts, and remember new vocabulary. LGL was originally conceived as a way

to help students remember technical vocabulary in science and social studies. However, it is also a technique teachers can use to help students focus on relevant background knowledge. The method is simply applied.

List. First, the teacher selects a one- or two-word topic from the material students will read. This topic is listed on the chalkboard. Next, individuals or small groups of students brainstorm words and phrases related to the topic, and responses are recorded. The list should be kept to a manageable size, approximately 25 to 40 responses. When most students have responded, the listing portion of the lesson is concluded.

Group. The teacher then reads the list generated by the students, allowing each student to hear the correct pronunciation. The teacher may also wish to point out features, such as root words or affixes, or clarify the meaning of new words. Students are then instructed to group the list content into smaller categories. These categories should contain words that have something in common with one another. It is usually helpful to set parameters such as "Each group must contain at least three words." We have found it helpful to suggest that students keep a miscellaneous pile for words they still do not know how to use.

Label. Once students have categorized the original list, they are instructed to label each category with a title reflecting the similar characteristics of the word. These labels are then shared with the whole group. Each group is asked to justify why the words were grouped in that particular way. A completed LGL example is illustrated in Figure 1.

While List, Group, Label may be familiar to content area teachers, it is often used only to introduce vocabulary. However, LGL offers a variety of ways for the teacher to help students connect to prior knowledge. We know that when students access appropriate prior knowledge, they are more likely to make inferences and elaborations that often lead to sophisticated understanding of texts (Pressley & Block, 2002). Unfortunately,

struggling readers may lack prior knowledge about a specific area, or they may associate incorrect or irrelevant prior knowledge with a particular topic. LGL can help strong readers access their prior knowledge and can aid struggling readers by filling in missing knowledge and focusing on relevant prior knowledge. If incorrect responses are listed, the teacher may wish to scaffold the learning by telling the students that certain words or phrases do not fit in this list and that their job is to find which ones do not fit and to explain why. After students have completed the LGL activity multiple times, the teacher may even wish to put in a few typically confusing terms and ideas for the students to discover. If students are not able to discover the ideas that do not fit, the teacher now has an accurate assessment of what needs extra teaching time and what students have under control.

The key to every teacher technique is modeling. The teacher should model a successful list-generation, categorization, and labeling activity. Students need explicit directions on how to accomplish this process. Understanding the process is the first phase in scaffolding student learning and building student comprehension skills (Fournier & Graves, 2002). As students become adept at List, Group, Label, the teacher should encourage them to think about what they already know before they read. A formal LGL activity may be tapered off and replaced by informal discussion about what is already known. Again, the goal is for most students to be able to connect the text to prior knowledge (or recognize a lack of prior knowledge) independent of teacher assistance.

During reading

Researchers consistently establish the need for students to understand how texts are arranged in order to comprehend them (Alvermann & Phelps, 1998; Blachowicz & Ogle, 2001). Strong readers create a mental representation of the text as they read (Ogle & Blachowicz, 2002). A sense that a narrative story has a beginning, middle,

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Figure 1
List, Group, Label—Grouped concepts
of the American Revolution

Outcomes of revolutions
Change
Overthrow of authority
Conflict
War
Rebellion
Freedom
Liberty

The war
1776
Fourth of July
Declaration of Independence
Lexington and Concord
Saratoga and Yorktown
Valley Forge
Philadelphia

Economic reasons for rebellion
Economic
Money
Stamp Act
Boston Tea Party
Exploitation
Taxes

Social and political reasons
for revolution
Social unrest
Political oppression
Human rights
Liberty
Equality

Patriots
Samuel Adams
Crispus Attucks
Benjamin Franklin
John Hancock
Thomas Jefferson
Paul Revere
George Washington

Opposition
British Redcoats
Great Britain
King George III
Loyalists

Political changes
Declaration of Independence
New government
The Constitution
Rule of the law
Independence
Natural rights of man

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and end usually develops early in a child's school career. Yet, when these strong readers encounter the nonfiction text structures of cause and effect, sequential, descriptive, and others, they have no mental image for such text; nor do they know how to navigate the text and create connections between texts. Two teacher techniques, graphic organizers and inquiry charts, or I-charts (Hoffman, 1992), show how to help students during this type of reading.

Reader strategy 3: Understanding the arrangement of texts. Reading in social studies is different from reading in other content areas (Hennings, 1993). Social studies by nature are a composite of many disciplines, such as history, geography, anthropology, political science, economics, sociology, and psychology (National Council for the Social Studies, 1994); consequently, social studies reading requires wider comprehension skills and can be very challenging and difficult for middle school (Ciardiello, 2002) and secondary students (Graves & Avery, 1997). Reading in the social studies requires that students collect relevant facts, organize those facts into patterns, and interpret

Table 2*
Text structure

Text structure	Sequence or chronological order	Geography	Cause/effect	Compare/ contrast
Explanation	Relationships with time Chronology Sequencing	Establish location of events Spatial understanding Conceptualization of environment	Events influence subsequent events Why?	Constant change Similarities and differences Establish relationships
Key words	Initially Before, after Next, then Today Finally Following Preceding Over the years Not long after	Relationships Where x and y are in relation to z Places Locations Climate Temperature Architecture of homes Resources	Not only...but If...then Nevertheless Because Since This led to...so Consequently Because of As a result of May be due to For this reason	Unless Different from Similar to Although But Either...or Same as On the other hand Similar to Instead of As opposed to
Aids	Dates Words	Maps Geography—physical, human, and environmental Pictures	Facts Organize Find and interpret patterns	Group facts Identify relationships

*Compiled from Hennings (1993) and Irving (2002)

the facts and patterns (Hennings). Not only is it important for readers to identify the type of text, such as fiction, nonfiction, poetry, letters, or primary sources, but they must also be able to identify how the text is organized. Readers need to understand the context and the structure of the text to understand the content, yet many students lack the necessary skills for text structure identification and comprehension of complex relationships among concepts, facts, and generalizations

often found in social studies texts (Ciardiello). Various text structures commonly occur in social studies texts, such as sequence or chronological order, geography, cause and effect, and comparison and contrast (Ciardiello). Table 2 explains these text structures and key words that will help students identify the text.

The first step for teaching text structures is explicit teaching about external text features, such

as the index, table of contents, titles and subtitles, and boldface vocabulary words. Once students understand these common external features, the second step is for them to understand the internal structure. When teaching internal text features, we use creating outlines and graphic organizers as our teaching technique. Outlines and graphic organizers provide students with a visual representation of the text. There is a variety of graphic organizers, but teachers need to start with one or two and model their use consistently. We like flowchart organizers because they are adaptable to many text structures. For example, as we teach the events that led to the American Revolution from a typical textbook, we begin by exploring the titles, subtitles, and boldface words within a passage. Next, we model looking for key words that might indicate the internal text structure. In a passage on events leading to the American Revolution, we see words and phrases such as *because*, *since*, *this led to*, and *as a result.* Thinking aloud, we might say something like

> The title of this passage is Events That Inspired Americans to Challenge Authority. The phrases in this section make me think that this passage is organized by cause and effect. I'm going to create a flowchart that helps me remember the major events, or causes, that led to the American Revolution.

Next, we model the flowchart organizer on the overhead, using boxes to designate the causes that inspired Americans to challenge authority and rectangles as the effects (see Figure 2). Events are also sequenced to help students develop an understanding of how tensions between Great Britain and the American colonies were intensified over time. Graphic organizers can also emerge from the text when students are reading. As they encounter key concepts and events, students develop a visual representation of these ideas. Relationships between events are developed as students identify how each one contributed to the final outcome or the main idea. These relationships are illustrated with lines connecting the concepts or events. Understanding the relation-

ship between events and the main idea is the key to understanding social studies text structure.

Teachers should give attention to those organizers that allow students to adapt them to independent use. For example, Ogle's (1986) organizer, What I know, what I want to learn, and what I have learned (K-W-L), works well for the teachers when the whole class is reading and discussing a text. However, middle and secondary students may feel that the strategy is too elementary and that they cannot use K-W-L when they read independently (Laverick, 2002). For building student independence, we like B.F. Jones, Pierce, and Hunter's (1988/1989) five-step process of teaching students how to construct their own outlines. We have adapted their five steps to include outlines and graphic organizers, as follows.

1. Students skim the passage to be read and decide what organizational pattern, if any, the authors used. It is important for teachers and students to recognize that more than one text structure may be exemplified in the same passage.
2. Students write down a predicted outline or graphic depiction of the passage.
3. Students read the passage.
4. Students revise their outlines or organizers.
5. Students use their completed outlines or organizers to create a written or oral summary.

With appropriate modeling and practice, students should be able to identify the text structure(s) and create their own outline or graphic organizer to illustrate the text.

Reader strategy 4: Making connections between texts. While outlines and graphic organizers help students understand the format of individual texts, they do not enhance students' connections between texts. However, we know that when students read social studies sources, much of their reading is from a variety of primary sources, such as letters, census information, and original documents. Such primary sources do not lend themselves as readily to a particular text structure. Thus, we must help our students keep track of

Figure 2
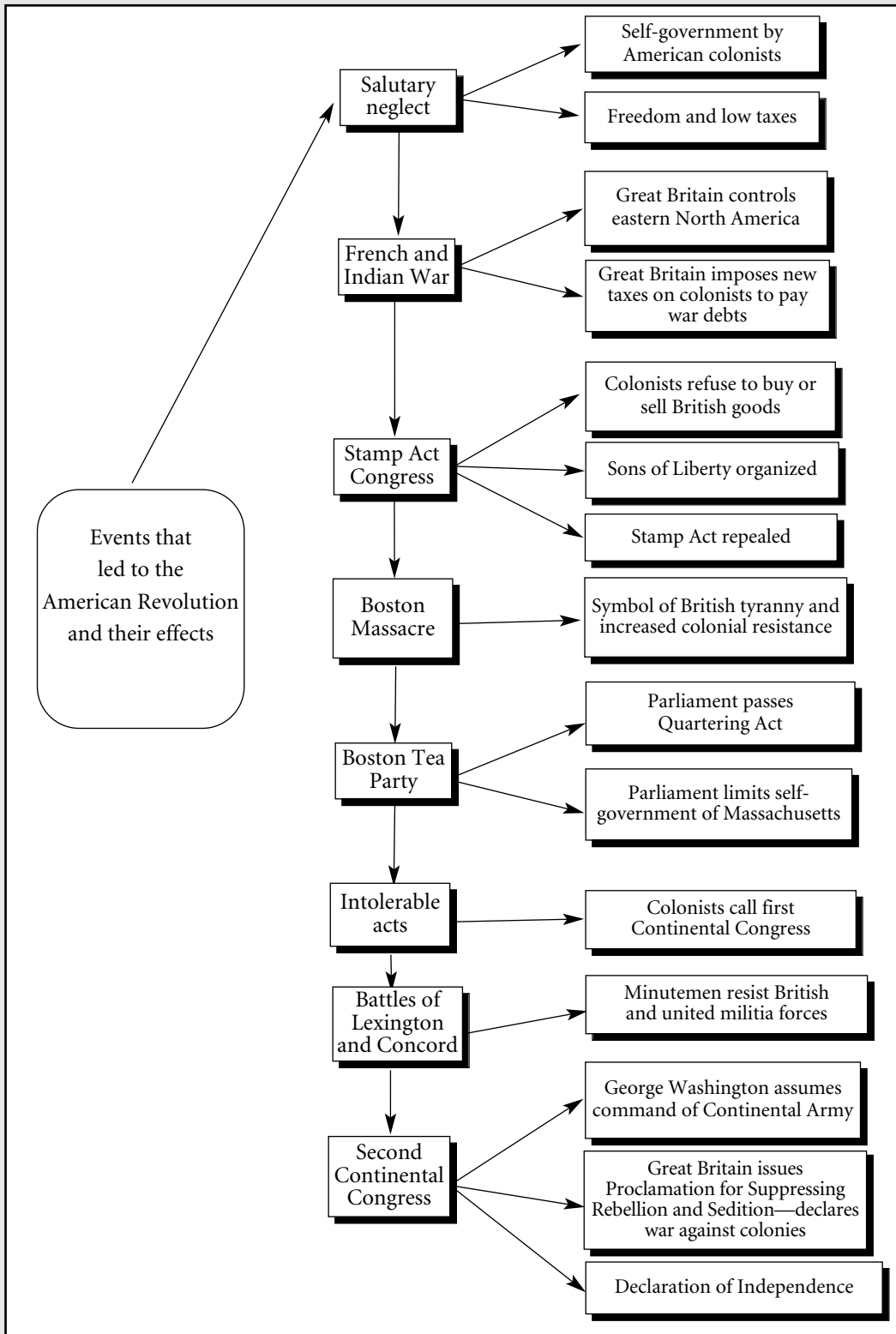**Graphic organizer—Causes and effects of**
the American Revolution

Salutary neglect
- Self-government by American colonists
- Freedom and low taxes

French and Indian War
- Great Britain controls eastern North America
- Great Britain imposes new taxes on colonists to pay war debts

Stamp Act Congress
- Colonists refuse to buy or sell British goods
- Sons of Liberty organized
- Stamp Act repealed

Boston Massacre
- Symbol of British tyranny and increased colonial resistance

Boston Tea Party
- Parliament passes Quartering Act
- Parliament limits self-government of Massachusetts

Intolerable acts
- Colonists call first Continental Congress

Battles of Lexington and Concord
- Minutemen resist British and united militia forces

Second Continental Congress
- George Washington assumes command of Continental Army
- Great Britain issues Proclamation for Suppressing Rebellion and Sedition—declares war against colonies
- Declaration of Independence

Events that led to the American Revolution and their effects

Table 3
Inquiry chart — George Washington

Topic: George Washington	Early life	How early life shaped political career	Beginning politics	How early politics shaped decisions in later life	Other interesting information
Source 1	Born in Westmoreland County, Virginia, on February 22, 1732 1748—began career as surveyor at 16 years in Shenandoah Valley	Two key interests: military arts and western expansion	May 1775—elected Commander in Chief of the Continental Army Leader in the Constitutional Convention at Philadelphia in 1787	Defined the role of the president Did not infringe upon the policymaking powers granted to Congress by Constitution	Lived less than three years in retirement at Mount Vernon
Source 2	Born February 22, 1732, the first son of Augustine Washington and his second wife, Mary Ball Washington Education included the study of mathematics, surveying, the classics, and rules of civility	Promoted to lieutenant colonel at age 22 1753 won first military victory June 15, 1775 Washington named Commander in Chief of the Continental forces	1759–1774—member of House of Burgesses, served 1774–1775 as a delegate to the Continental Congress Retired from the army December 23, 1783	Unanimously elected president and took office April 20, 1789 Supported Alexander Hamilton's policies over Thomas Jefferson—created political controversies	In 1798, reluctantly accepted command of the army when war with France seemed imminent Died on December 14, 1799, and was buried on his estate

what they are learning and begin to make associations between the texts. To do this, we use the inquiry chart as our teaching technique. The I-chart provides a useful tool for students working cooperatively or independently with a variety of texts. For example, if students were studying George Washington, an I-chart that includes text and primary sources would look like the one in Table 3.

This simple framework allows students to begin making connections between and across texts to answer an established question or learn more about a particular topic. Across the top of the framework are the areas of focus and the purposes for reading. These will initially be set by the teacher, but as students become more adept at using this strategy they may establish their own questions. These questions reinforce the prereading strategy of setting the purpose for reading. Struggling readers are better able to navigate the text because they focus on finding specific information.

These during-reading teaching techniques, the graphic organizers and I-charts, facilitate independent reader strategies, such as offering a

way to monitor comprehension by pointing to what a student may not know and distilling the text into manageable parts for summary.

Postreading strategies

Postreading strategies are crucial for extending comprehension beyond the literal level. We have chosen reciprocal questioning (RQ), or ReQuest (Manzo, 1969), as an alternative teaching technique to the typical postreading question-and-answer period as a way to develop students' abilities to monitor their own comprehension. We have also modified Graffiti (Gunter, Estes, & Schwab, 2003) as a teaching technique to allow further cooperation between students and extend comprehension through writing.

Reader strategy 5: Monitoring comprehension through questioning. Teachers typically ask questions as a follow-up to reading. However, these questions are often confined to literacy-level recall questions. We propose questioning that allows students and teachers to monitor reading comprehension through reciprocal questioning. While RQ can be used throughout the reading process, we focus on its use after reading. It serves as a way for students to generate their own questions and answers to those questions. Question asking has been one of the most common ways of teaching and assessing comprehension; however, most questions assess what students have learned (or already know) instead of helping them learn (Alvermann & Phelps, 1998). RQ, or ReQuest, offers an alternative to the traditional teacher-led questioning and helps students become more engaged and independent in forming and answering questions. Instead of the teacher asking questions, students create their own to ask the teacher. Student-centered questioning can be very powerful in helping students understand social studies texts (Beck & McKeown, 2002). For example, when reading Abigail Adams's letter to her husband John Adams (see Meltzer, 1993) regarding remembering women's rights, students might ask these questions:

- Who wrote letters to her husband, urging him to remember to give women representation? (Abigail Adams)
- What would be the outcome if women were not given equal rights? (Abigail Adams said that women were determined to form a rebellion.)

These questions are answered explicitly in the text. In turn, the teacher might respond with questions like these, which require synthesis and analysis:

- How did Abigail Adams show revolutionary thought for her time?
- Abigail Adams suggested that women should have representation. How is the theme of representation carried out throughout the Revolutionary War?

Thus, the teacher begins to model analytic thinking for the students.

The procedure for ReQuest is as follows:

1. Identify a section of text and prepare a few higher level questions for each part of it.
2. As students read, they are to think of questions they will ask the teacher.
3. After students have read the text, they ask the teacher as many questions as they can think of from that section. The teacher should respond without looking at the text.
4. When students have asked their questions, they close their books and the teacher asks them questions. These questions should serve as a model for higher level questioning.

Repeat this procedure with successive segments of the text.

As teachers and students become comfortable with this procedure, they may wish to extend ReQuest into reciprocal teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). Reciprocal teaching follows a similar format: Teachers model reading, then model asking questions. In addition to asking questions,

teachers model three other reader strategies so that over time students have heard the teacher model raising questions, summarizing information, making predictions, and clarifying confusions while reading sections of text. Gradually, the teachers release responsibility for each of the four strategies to the students. Reciprocal teaching as a technique takes longer to model and longer for the students to apply independently than ReQuest, but, as Palincsar and Brown found, the results can make significant improvements in students' reading comprehension.

Reader strategy 6: Synthesizing information across texts. In the social studies, students are asked to pull from a variety of texts—textbooks, multiple primary sources, and even fiction—to better understand an area of focus. The variety of texts poses problems for students and teachers when it comes to comprehension. We designed ABC Graffiti as a way for teachers to help students synthesize information across multiple texts. ABC Graffiti is a process that combines two reading comprehension techniques, ABC Brainstorming (R. Jones, 2000) and Graffiti (Gunter et al., 2003). We have modified these techniques for the specific purpose of helping students to organize and understand social studies. In addition, we structured ABC Graffiti to capitalize on the benefit of peer conversations and collaboration to increase reading comprehension (Gallavan, 2002). This comprehension technique builds a foundation for extending student learning through writing (field trials by Heafner, 2002; Massey, 2002). Students brainstorm information from the reading, work collaboratively to synthesize this information in prose, and develop thesis statements about the reading to capture the key social studies concepts. This final step is a great jump-start for individual student writing. The process is outlined in the following steps.

1. Students read selected texts (including a variety of primary, secondary, and fictional texts) and then complete ABC Graffiti sheets individually. Students are expected to brainstorm concepts from the reading that begin with the letters of the alphabet. Ideas can be either a single word or a phrase. Students should not be allowed to use the text. Give students approximately 3 minutes to complete the task.

2. Organize students into four groups. Arrange each group in a diamond or circular shape. This configuration will be helpful when rotating papers between groups. Each group completes one ABC Graffiti sheet. It is completed in the same manner as in step 1, but the task is a collaborative effort. Give groups approximately 5 minutes to accomplish the task.

3. Collect the ABC Graffiti sheets and give each one to another group. Once papers are distributed, each group continues the brainstorming process on another group's ABC Graffiti sheet. Give groups approximately 5 minutes to accomplish the task.

4. Collect the ABC Graffiti sheets and give each one to a third group. This time, however, students will be allowed to use the text to brainstorm concepts. Give groups approximately 10 minutes to accomplish the task.

5. Collect the ABC Graffiti sheets and give each one to a fourth group. The task is different in this rotation. Groups will be asked to evaluate and synthesize the list of ABC concepts in a summary paragraph. The paragraph should integrate all concepts in an organized manner. Give groups approximately 15 minutes to accomplish the task.

6. Collect the ABC Graffiti sheets and give each one back to the group that first worked on it. Groups should synthesize the summary paragraph and write a thesis statement that describes the meaning of the concepts identified. Give groups approximately 10 to 15 minutes to accomplish the task.

At the conclusion of this rotation, each group shares its summary paragraph and thesis statement. A brief discussion is conducted to highlight important concepts from the text. The focus is on points identified in the summary paragraphs and thesis statements. Teachers may also require students to write individually about the text. The writing prompt in each case will be the thesis statement that the student's group developed. Figure 3 demonstrates a completed ABC Graffiti sheet on the American Revolution.

**Figure 3
ABC Graffiti—American Revolution**

Title of text: Liberty Begins to Catch On
Topic: American Revolution

African Americans	Native Americans
Bourgeois revolution	Oppression
Constitution	Pursuit of happiness
Declaration of Independence	Quest for change
Equality	Rights of man
Free	Slavery
Great compromise	Three fifths of a human being
Humanity	Unalienable [*sic*]
Iroquois Indians	Vote
Justice for all	Women
Kinship	X-out freedom
Liberty	Young nation
Men	Zealots

Summary paragraph
The Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution were the result of the spirit of freedom and justice and concern for the unalienable [*sic*] rights of man to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. However, the idea of liberty and equality was applied primarily to men of property while women, African Americans, and Native Americans were, at best, no better off than before. For slaves, especially, oppression was often worse after the Revolution and any opportunity for equality was [an] x-out with the prevailing concept that slaves were three fifths of a human being. Native Americans, too, experienced oppression and inequity, but in the form of nonrecognition and annihilation as represented by the Iroquois and the Six Nations being driven from their land with no atonement for their loss. Women were not much better off as they continued to be perceived as unequal to men. Women were still denied the right to vote and were often considered the property of men.

Topic sentence
Although the new ideas of liberty, equality, and justice for all benefited some Americans, others such as women, African Americans, and Native Americans were not included in this new order.

A place to start

This article prescribed six reader strategies to promote reader independence in the social studies. To accomplish the goal of reader independence in strategy use, we shared six teacher techniques to facilitate students' use of comprehension strategies. Although these reader strategies and teacher techniques were selected for their ease of use by teachers and potential for independent use by students, they also meet the most current research criteria for best practices in comprehension instruction. These include using knowledge of text structures, creating summaries, generating questions, and drawing inferences between texts (Smolkin & Donovan, 2002). In an ideal world, all students would know how to read and comprehend when they enter middle and high school. However, we

do not live in an ideal world. Therefore, it is crucial that middle and high school teachers become teachers of reading as well as teachers of content. The preceding strategies and techniques offer a beginning, a place for teachers to start teaching comprehension through modeling and guided practice (Brown, 2002). Effective instruction provides the key to creating effective adolescent readers.

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