



# **Facilitating Comprehension**

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# **Some assumptions**

- **You have in place a program of comprehension instruction of the type described by Nell.**
- **You have taken a position on what sort of assessments you are you going to use**



# **A few preliminaries**

- **Boring text:** You were referring to the articles you have written by yourself, not the ones we wrote together.
- **It is easier to write boring texts than it is to read them.**



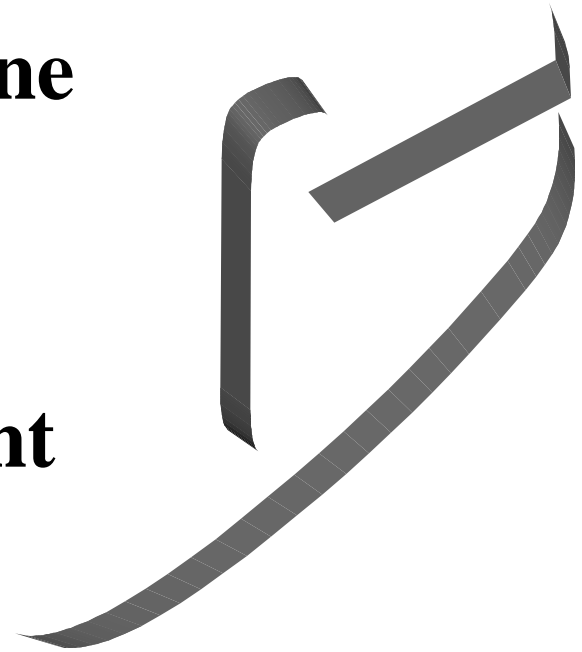
## **2. You need a supportive classroom context\***

- **Opportunity:** large amounts of time for actual text reading
- **Authenticity:** reading real texts for real reasons
- **Range:** reading **THE** range of text genres
- **Talk:** talking about text, with a teacher and one another
- **Words:** Conceptually driven vocabulary development
- **Enabling Skills:** solid base of decoding, monitoring and fluency
- **Writing:** writing texts for others to comprehend

\*drawn mainly from correlational studies, and natural experiments.

# Brought to you by the letter C

- **Opportunity: Chance**
- **Authenticity: Clearly Genuine**
- **Range: Coverage**
- **Talk: Conversation**
- **Words: Concept development**
- **Enabling Skills: Core skills**
- **Writing: Composing meaning**





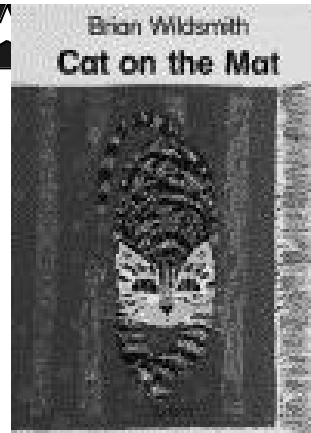
# Opportunity

- **A great deal of time spent actually reading: As with decoding, all the explicit instruction in the world will not make strong readers unless accompanied by lots of experience applying their knowledge, skills, and strategies during actual reading.**



# The nature of texts

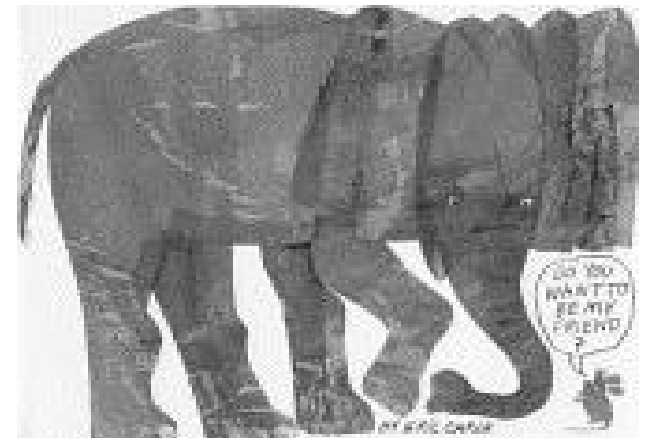
- The texts are interesting and comprehensible and sufficiently varied so that all students can find texts to relate to (interest and motivation).
- Daily, students read texts that are personally interesting and easy to read. *Why?* So that students can consolidate their learning of skills and strategies.
- Also on a daily basis, students read, with teacher support, more challenging texts. *Why?* In order to stretch their knowledge and skill repertoire. Establish tomorrow's prior knowledge.



# The nature of texts in effective programs

1. While common sense suggests that some of these texts should allow students to apply the decoding and comprehension skills they are learning, there is precious little evidence to support the creation and use of special instructional texts for this purpose.

2. The current corpus of children's books contains numerous texts that provide many of the opportunities students need.





**We do NOT need another  
round of 1960s decodable  
texts**

- **Can Nan fan Dan?**
- **Can Dan fan Nan?**
- **Nan can fan Dan.**
- **Dan can fan Nan.**
- **Nan, fan Dan.**
- **Dan, fan Nan.**
- **Nan and Dan can fan the man!**



# **Comprehension Activities in K and early 1**

- **In the context of teacher read alouds**
- **Why?**
  - **Texts that merit the sort of engagement and depth of thinking we want to promote.**
  - **Finesse the decoding issue**
- **Warning: You can't stay there forever.  
Must get to texts kids read themselves**




# Authenticity

- **Experience reading real texts for real reasons. In order to become strong, flexible, and devoted comprehenders of text, students need experience reading texts beyond those designed solely for reading instruction, and experience reading text with a clear and compelling purpose in mind.**



# **Beware the textoid problem**

- **When we select texts that have been especially written to permit some sort of skill activity**
- **We run the risk of reifying these texts**
- **Making real something that isn't**
- **They only exist on tests and workbook materials designed to get you ready to take the tests.**



**Sue's grandmother lives on a farm. Ellen's grandmother lives in the city. Sue's grandmother, who just turned 55, phones Sue every month. Ellen's grandmother, who is also 55, sends Ellen e-mails several times a week. Both grandmothers love their granddaughters.**

- **How are Sue and Ellen's grandmothers alike?**
  - They both love their granddaughters
  - They both use e-mail
  - They both live on a farm
- **How are they different?**
  - They live in different places
  - They have different color hair
  - They are different ages



# Range

- **Experience reading at least the range of text genres that we wish students to comprehend.** Students will not learn to become excellent comprehenders of any given type of text without substantial experience reading and writing it. Thus, for example, all the experience in the world reading storybooks will not, by itself, enable a student to read, understand, and critique procedural forms of text of the sort found in how to books, instructions manuals, and the like.



## **A special note**

- **Nell's question: Shouldn't we focus on stories?**
- **My revision: Shouldn't we focus exclusively on stories**
- **We want to include instruction and activities in response to stories,**
- **We just don't want to limit our instruction and activities to stories**



# Vocabulary/Concept Development

- An environment rich in vocabulary and concept development, through reading, experience, and, above all, discussion of words and their meanings. Any text comprehension depends on some relevant prior knowledge. To some degree, well-chosen texts can, in themselves, build readers' knowledge base. At the same time, hands-on activities, excursions, conversations, and other experiences are also needed to develop vocabulary and concept knowledge required to understand a given text.



# Three approaches

- **Definitional**
- **Contextual**
- **Conceptual**



# Definitional

- **Look up words in dictionary or glossary**
- **Write down a definition and/or use in a sentence**
- **Generate your own and check with the dictionary**
- **General concern: tends to reinforce what kids already know; doesn't help them figure out where things "fit."**



# **Definitional that does work**

- **Features of definition (Schwartz & Raphael)**
  - **What category does it belong to?**
  - **What features or characteristics does it have?**
  - **What are some examples of it?**
  - **What else is it like**
- **Note (this last activity borders on conceptual approach).**



# Definitional

- **Features of definition: Rotweiler**
  - **What category does it belong to? Dog, Canine, Mammal**
  - **What features or characteristics does it have? Fur, Tail, 4 legs, height**
  - **What are some examples of it? Toby, the one down the street.**
  - **What else is it like? Weimeronner?, Other hounds? Doberman**



# Contextual

- **Try to use words in sentences.**
- **Find sentences in a selection or a chapter in which a word is used, try to come up with a definition.**
- **Very useful as a “problem solving” strategy because we often encounter new words in context. Modeling is a good start.**
- **More important in informational than literary text.**
- **A good thing to do as a class activity on a second pass.**



# Conceptual Approaches

- **A different kind of context: the context of the head and the world, not the context of the page.**
- **If the head is like a dresser, the whole idea is to help kids learn what “drawers” to put new ideas in.**
- **This is what schema theory during the 1980s was all about (still is all about).**

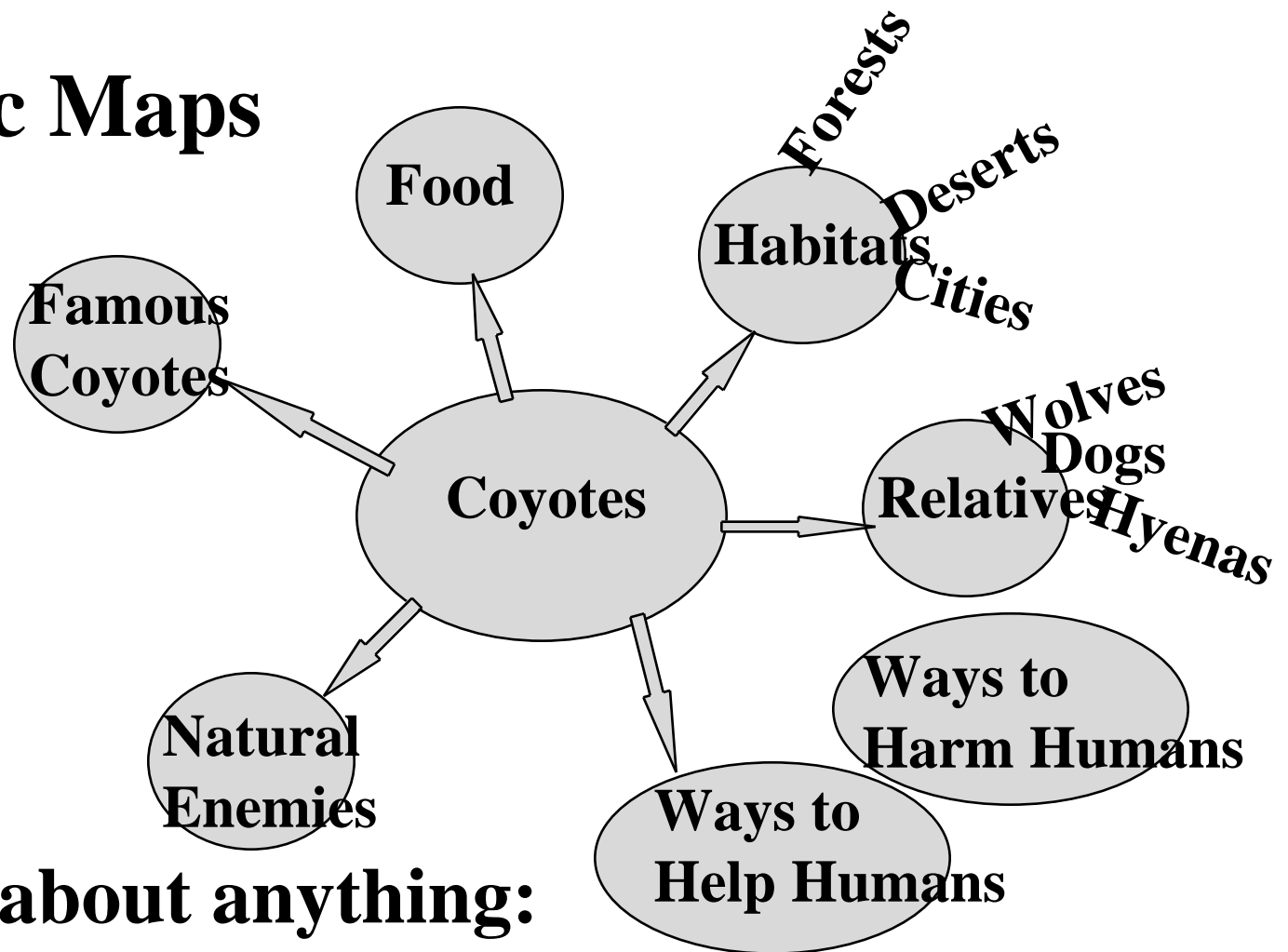


# **Conceptual Approaches, cont**

- **Semantic mapping or webbing**
- **Semantic feature analysis**
- **Inquiry**
- **Any sort of categorization activity**

# Example Visual Displays

## Semantic Maps



**Uses: just about anything:  
even baskets of facts**

# Vehicles

	<i>Cars</i>	<i>Skateboards</i>	<i>Trucks</i>	<i>Bicycles</i>	<i>Motorcycles</i>	<i>Scooters</i>	<i>Buses</i>
<b>Motorized</b>	+	-	+	?	+	?	+
<b>Steering Wheel</b>	+	-	+	-	-		
<b>Handlebars</b>	-	-	-	+	+		
<b>Two wheels</b>	-						
<b>Four wheels</b>	-						
<b>Passengers?</b>	+	?					
<b>Enclosed?</b>	+	-					



# Example Visual Displays

Matrices

	Home	Food	Enemy	Communication
Ants	Hills	Omni		
Bees	Hive	Nectar		Dances for pollen
Termites		Wood		

## Uses:

**Compare/Contrast situations**

**Successive descriptions of  
category members**



**The common element in all of  
these activities is**

- **Conversation: the key; the experiences of other students is as important as those of the teacher**
- **The overall goal is for any new concept is to help kids figure out**
  - **What it is like**
  - **How it is different from what it is like**
  - **Family resemblances**



# Decoding, Fluency, and Monitoring

- **Substantial facility in the accurate and automatic decoding of words. In a recent review of the literature, Pressley (2000) argues compellingly that skilled decoding is necessary, though by no means sufficient, for skilled comprehension.**



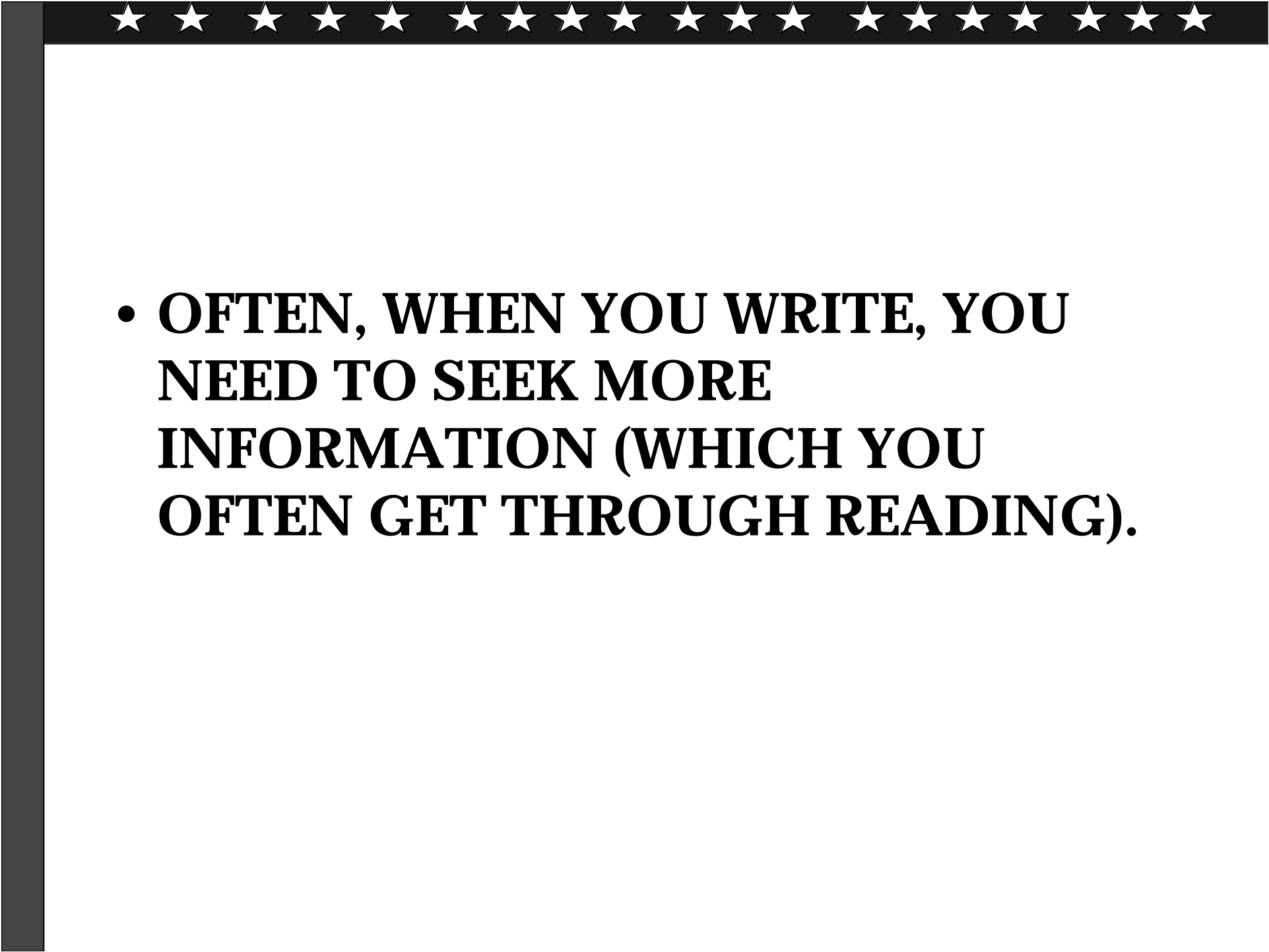
# Writing

- **Lots of time spent writing texts for others to comprehend. Again, students should experience writing the range of genres we wish them to be able to comprehend. Their instruction should emphasize connections between reading and writing, developing students' abilities to write like a reader and read like a writer.**

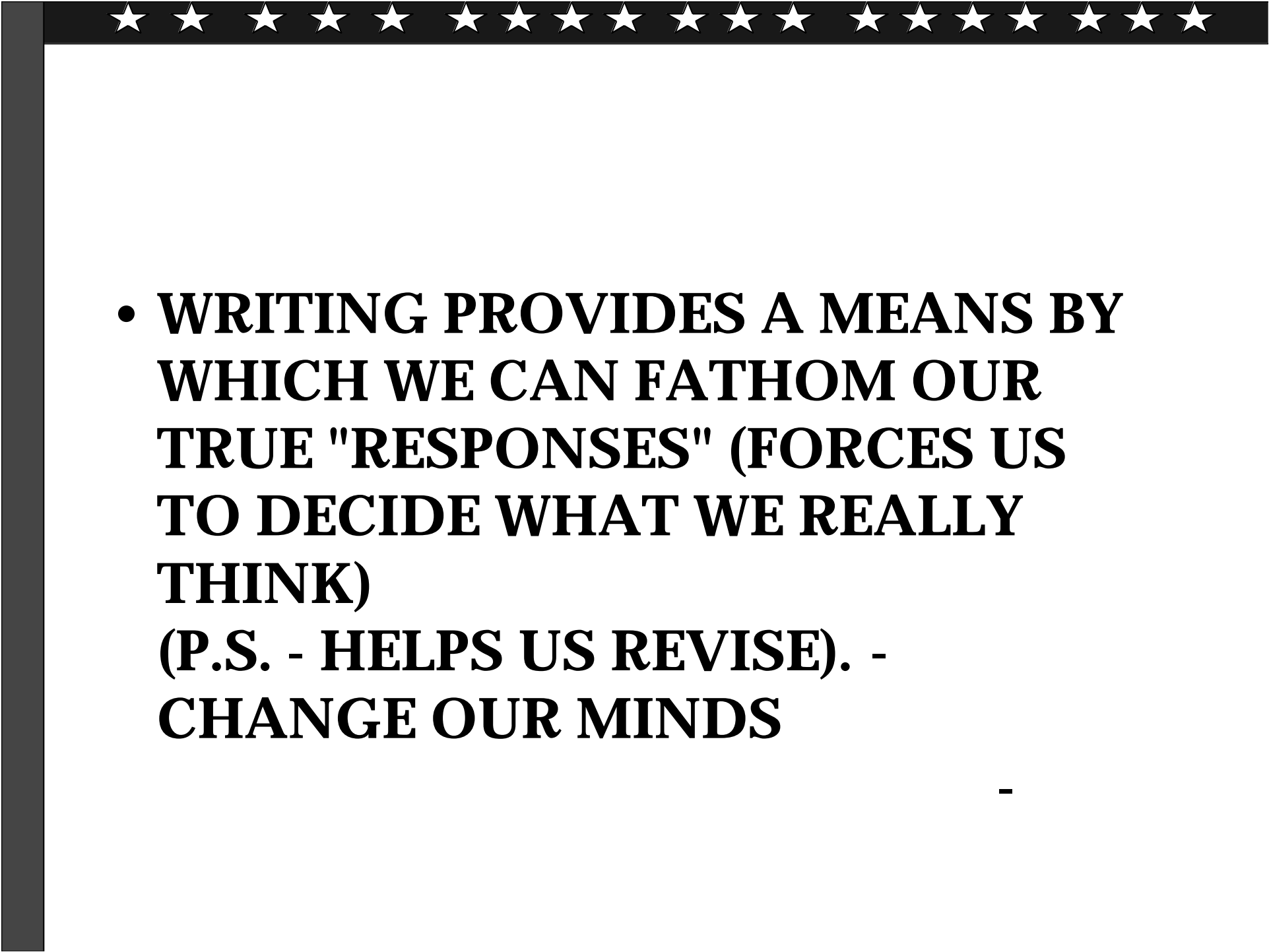


# **Why Writing Helps Reading**

- **YOU CANNOT WRITE WITHOUT READING**
- **(SO EVERY WRITING ACTIVITY NECESSARILY INVOLVES READING).**

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- **OFTEN, WHEN YOU WRITE, YOU NEED TO SEEK MORE INFORMATION (WHICH YOU OFTEN GET THROUGH READING).**

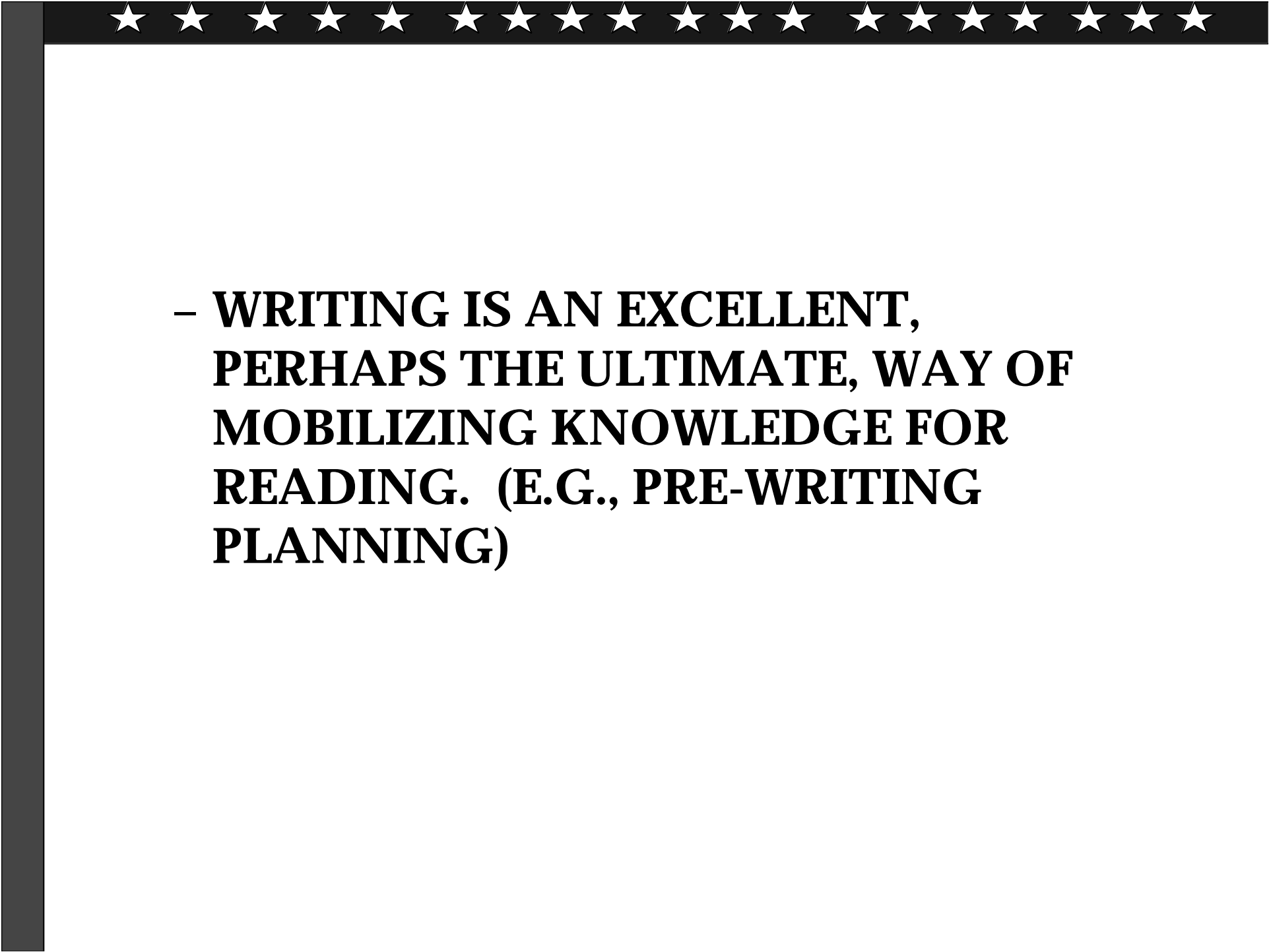
- 
- **IT MAKES THE METAPHOR OF BUILDING A "MODEL OF MEANING" COMPLETELY EXPLICIT**

- 
- **WRITING PROVIDES A MEANS BY WHICH WE CAN FATHOM OUR TRUE "RESPONSES" (FORCES US TO DECIDE WHAT WE REALLY THINK)  
(P.S. - HELPS US REVISE). -  
CHANGE OUR MINDS**

-



- **Writing is more transparently  
METACOGNITIVE**
- **Thus enabling monitoring**

- 
- WRITING IS AN EXCELLENT, PERHAPS THE ULTIMATE, WAY OF MOBILIZING KNOWLEDGE FOR READING. (E.G., PRE-WRITING PLANNING)**

- 
- **WRITING PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY TO UNDERSTAND WHY COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES MAKE SENSE.**



- **Early on: A more natural and vivid way of expressing vague constructs like phonemic awareness**
- **Later on: Much of what we do in writing mimics, again in a vivid way, what we do in reading.**
- **Text organization (big and little ideas)**
  - **Main idea-details**
  - Summarizing**
  - Critical reading**
- **Texts we read are great sources of models for how to write in certain ways.**



# Talk about Text

- **An environment rich in high-quality talk about text. This should involve both teacher-to-student and student-to-student talk. It should include discussions of text processing at a number of levels, from clarifying basic material stated in the text to drawing interpretations of text material to relating the text to other texts, experiences, and reading goals.**



# **We are pretty good on this score**

- **Beware levels of questions**
- **The point is to get to the point of the piece we are reading**
- **Good models**
  - **Book Club and Literary Circle**
  - **Grand Conversations**
  - **Instructional Conversations**





# Questions for Stories

- **Read the text for the big ideas**
- **Generate some probes to get at them**
  - **Go from general to specific**
    - **So what is important about this story**
    - **So is this story more about the plot or the characters**
    - **So what does this story tell us about how human beings look out for one another?**
    - **O’Flahavan: How is ignorance like a prison?**
  - **Go for Response before Comprehension**
  - **Go for comprehension to support response or claims**
  - **Work for a unified understanding of plot, character, feelings, motives.**



# **Going back to Nell and Scott**

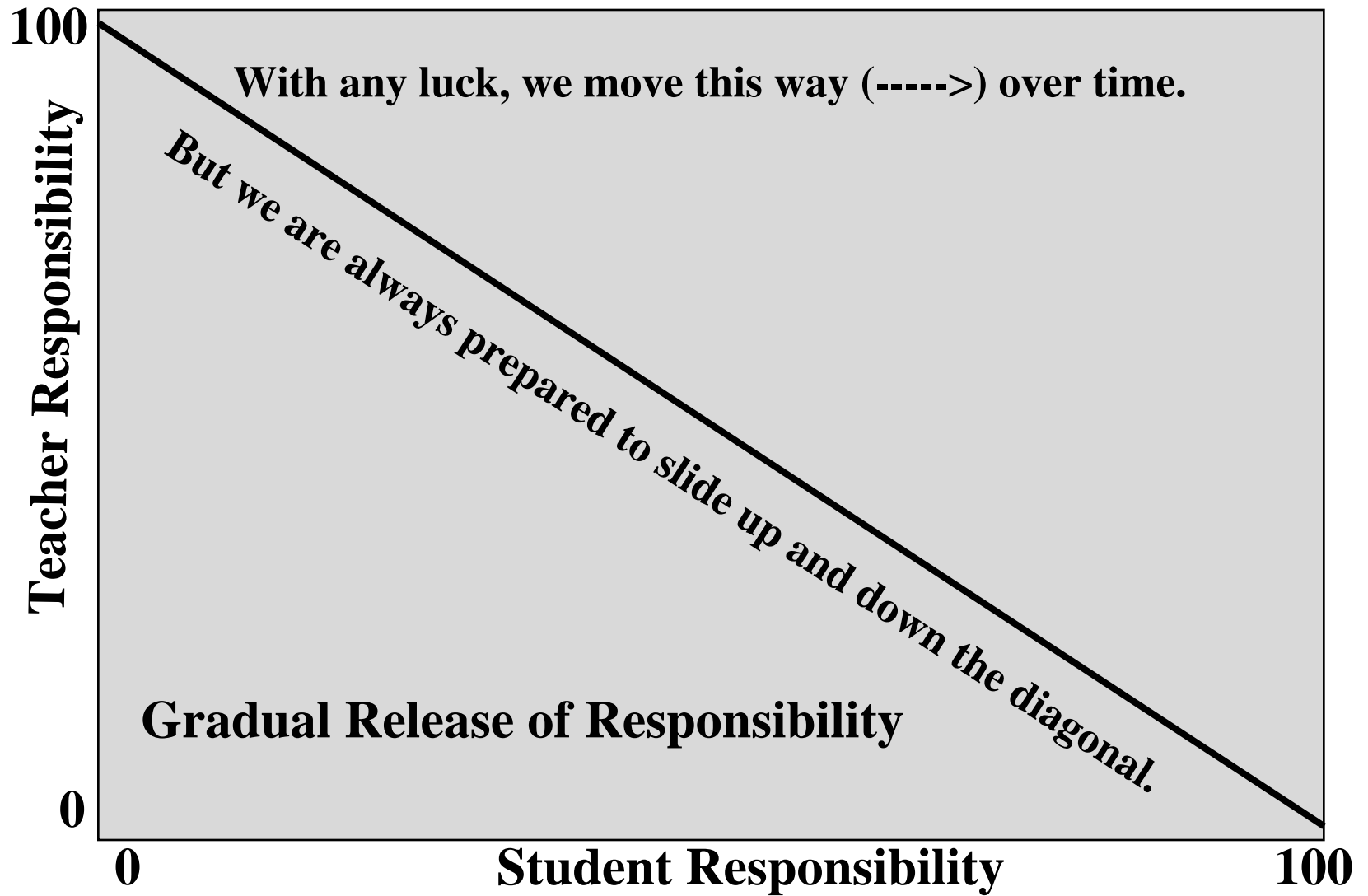
- **A good model**
- **Solid instruction**
- **Thoughtful assessment**
- **Supportive instructional environment**
- **Formula for a Renaissance**
- **I can think of no better place to start the Comprehension Renaissance than the State of Reading**



# **One more point**

- **If we think comprehension has been wandering in the wilderness in the last decade,**
- **What about critical reading and critical thinking.**
- **Gwen's reminder about our responsibilities for promoting democracy and freedom remind me to remind you about the centrality of critical inquiry in a democratic society.**
- **Never more important than at a time of crisis.**
  - **We must resist the temptation to suspend the rules**
  - **We must promote critical analysis over blind nationalism**
  - **Our patriotism must be grounded not in jingoism**

# 3. a model: Cognitive apprenticeship



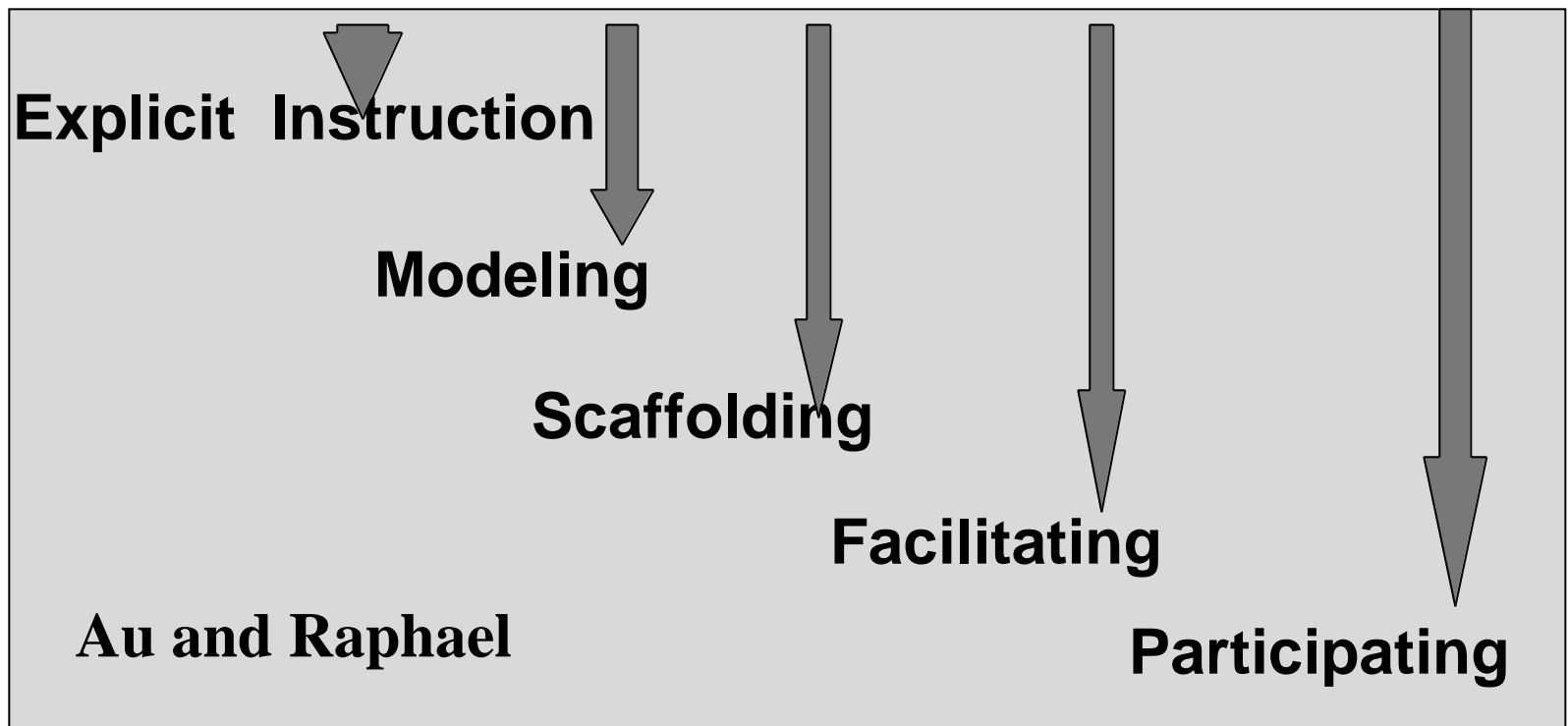
# Changing Teacher Roles

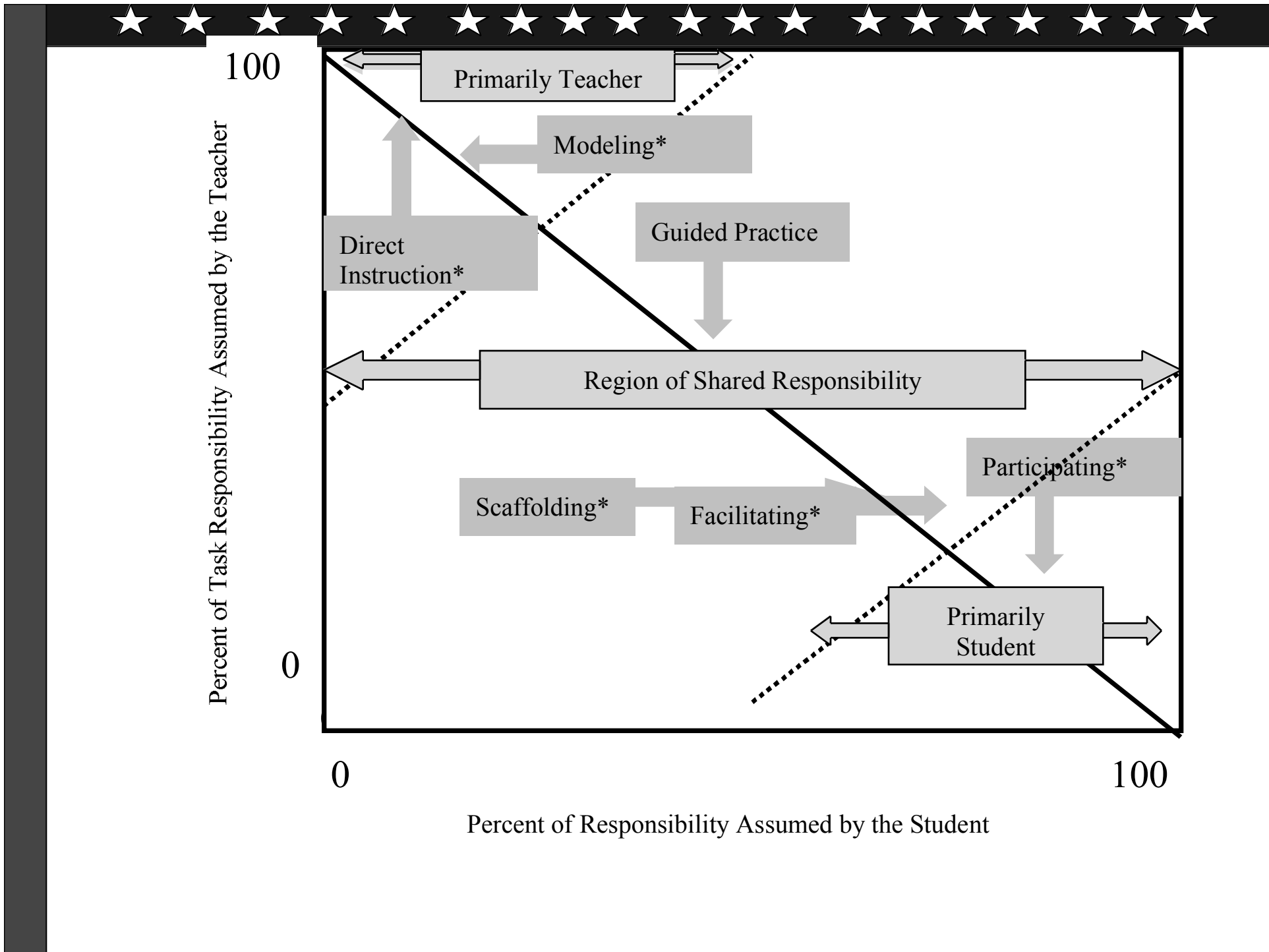
**High Teacher**

**Low Teacher**

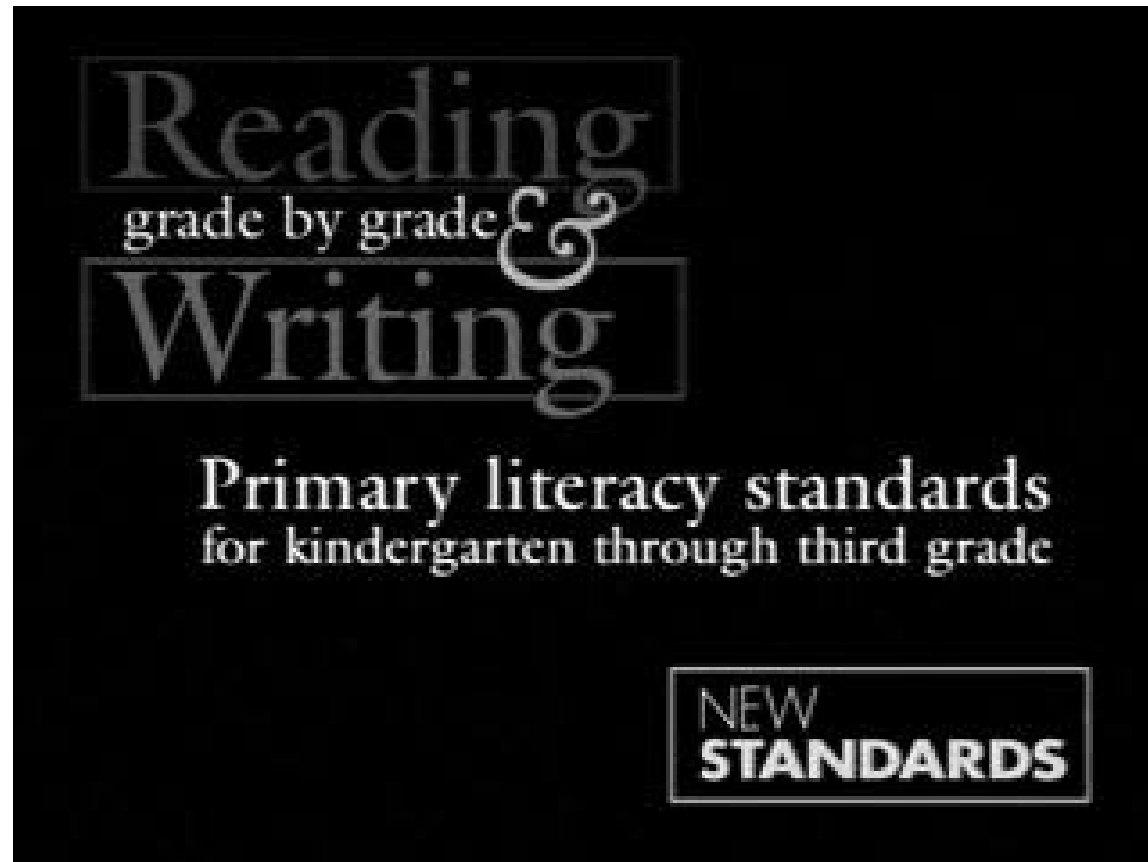
**Low Student**

**High Student**





# Teacher sliding up and down the scale



Jennifer's gr 3 class and the finger puppets



- **What counts**
- **Political decision**