



STRATEGIES for Reading a Tough Text

1 **Chunk the text into smaller bits.** Find out just how tough this text is by reading until you notice the text not making sense. Repeat. Take notice of how big each chunk of text is: A paragraph? A page?

2 **Reread each chunk to find what happened and some emotion.** For each chunk, reread and try to name what people are doing or what is happening—anything you can pull out. Then see if you can add an emotion someone is feeling or a mood.

3 **Summarize often.** Pause often (every page or few pages) to be sure you know the gist of what has gone on, and reread if you find yourself confused.

4 **Research the book and author.** Context helps. Look online to see what people talk about when they talk about this book. What was the author all about? Use this as you read to make sense of what is important in the text.

5 **Get help.** No one said you had to read this book alone. Make sure you check in with a classmate or someone who is reading or has read the book. Help each other.



STRATEGIES to Have Better Conversations About Books

1 **Come to the conversation ready.** Be ready to talk! Jot down a few ideas that could be good conversation starters on sticky notes or in your notebook before your book-club talk. Try to find some ideas your club might disagree on.

2 **Talk about one idea at a time.** As you begin your conversation, have one person go first, and then work to talk about that idea for a while before someone else offers a new conversation starter. Use talk prompts to help you say more.

3 **Look for disagreements.** The best conversations are often ones where people disagree a little. Look for scenes that might not fit with the ideas being discussed, or argue about exact traits, emotions, or motivations of the characters.

4 **Decide to be and act engaged.** Come to your book club ready to participate; it's good training for life. Nod when people talk, jump to offer your ideas, indicate that something someone said was smart or interesting. Lean in!

5 **Debate word choice and rank significance.** If the conversation hits a lull, come up with many words to describe the character, themes, or author motivations and debate which wins. Or decide which moment was the most important in the reading.



STRATEGIES for Interpreting Texts

1 **Name big problems in the book.** Themes live in conflict. Name what problems you see, and try to describe those problems in a word or phrase (like love or friendship or fitting in). Decide which are most significant to the text or to you.

2 **Track scenes with those problems.** Once you have zeroed in on an important idea, (like loss), look for scenes that have to do with that idea. Slow down in those scenes. Reread them a couple of times. Make sure you scoop up the details.

3 **Analyze scenes by looking for causes and effects.** Whenever you find a scene that involves a theme, pause and analyze it. Ask whether there is in this scene a cause of the problem, an effect, a lesson, a solution. Jot down your ideas as you go.

4 **Categorize and rank each scene.** As you are finishing the book, start to look across your notes. Which ideas from different scenes go together? Which stand out? Which scenes feel the most important and what do they suggest about the theme?

5 **Look for the universal message of the book.** Work to sum up what this text is saying about the issue you have analyzed. Be sure that your idea is universal—that is, applies to many people and/or books—and that it addresses as much of the book as possible (not just one scene).



+1 WAYS to Push Your Thinking

Use these when you are thinking, writing, or talking about a text. **The goal is to think new things—keep pushing until you have a thought you didn't have before.**

1 **This is important because . . .** Why does this idea matter, either to the characters, for the book, or in life?

2 **The reason for this is . . .** What caused this to be true? Why is it true?

3 **As a result . . .** What are the effects of this idea, particularly on the characters' choices, motivations, or beliefs?

4 **On the other hand . . .** Is there another way to look at this idea? Is there an alternate theory?

5 **This connects to . . .** What other parts of the book relate to this thinking? How do these parts of the book connect to each other?

So what I am really trying to say is . . . Once you have wandered in your thinking a little bit, step back and ask, "What conclusions can I make about the characters, the theme, or the book now?"