

CONTENTS

Preface.....	iii
--------------	-----

PART 1

Using Short Texts to Enhance Student Engagement and Comprehension.....	1
Introduction	1
Benefits of Short Texts.....	2
Accessing Complex Texts	2
Rereading for Deeper Analysis	3
Increasing Reading Stamina	3
Creating Interest and Engagement	4
Building Conceptual Understanding	4
Generating a Starting Place for Further Exploration	5
Building Comprehension.....	6
Comprehension Strategies	6
Historical Thinking and Comprehension	7
Strategy vs. Activity	8
Before, During, and After Reading	8
Think Alouds	9
Gradually Releasing Responsibility.....	11

Part 2

Ten Activities to Use with Short Texts	13
Introduction	13
Activity 1: Use Short Text as a Think Aloud Model	14
Activity 2: The Metacognitive Flowchart: What to Try When It Doesn't Make Sense	20
Activity 3: Close Reading	23
Activity 4: Divide and Conquer	29
Activity 5: Dramatic Interpretations	32
Activity 6: Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DRTA)	35
Activity 7: List, Group, Label, Theorize	37
Activity 8: Questioning the Text	40
Activity 9: What Does It Look Like?	43
Activity 10: Important Questions	46
Moving Beyond Short Text	48

Part 3

Topics in American History: Lessons and Texts	53
Introduction	53
Era of Exploration	56
Colonial America	60
African American History	62
Women's Suffrage	64
American Revolution	67

The New Nation	71
Writing the Constitution	74
Slavery	77
America, 1828–1850	81
Westward Expansion	84
Sectionalism	87
Civil War	90
Labor History	92
Reconstruction	97
Gilded Age	99
Immigration	104
Early Twentieth Century	106
Progressivism/Age of Reform	109
World War I	111
1920s	115
Great Depression	118
World War II	121
Cold War	124
1950s	127
Civil Rights	130
Vietnam War	133
1960s	136
1970s	139
Native American History: Lesson 1	143
Native American History: Lesson 2	145
Recent History	148
September 11	150

Bibliography 153

Appendices 155

Appendix A, Template for Think Aloud 155

Appendix B, Metacognitive Flowchart 157

Appendix C, Template for Directed Reading-Thinking Activity 158

Appendix D, Template for List, Group, Label, Theorize 159

Appendix E, Template for Important Questions 160

PART 1

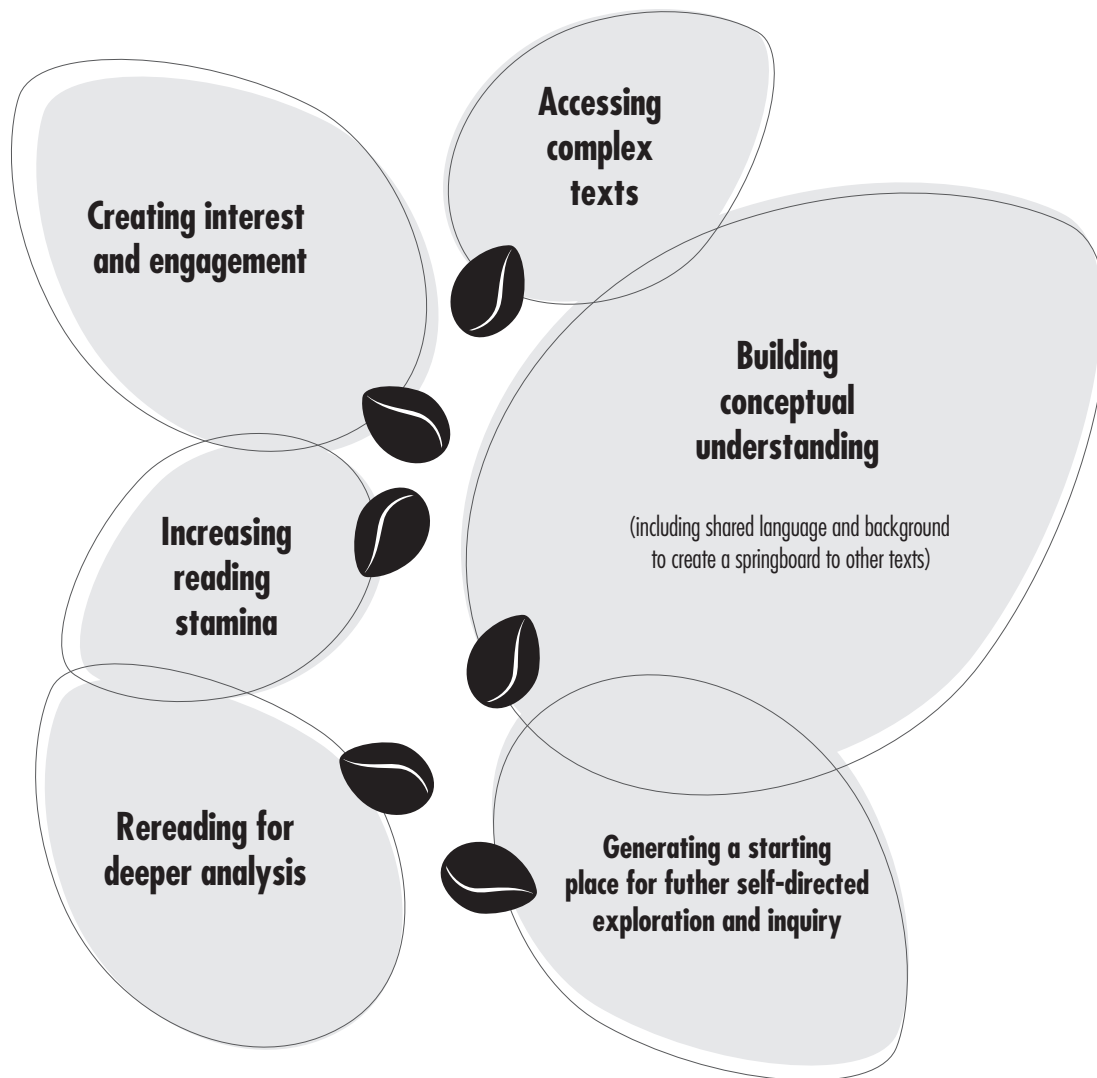
USING SHORT TEXTS TO ENHANCE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND COMPREHENSION

Introduction

Every teacher who has assigned reading has watched as students flip or scan through the text to see how many pages they will have to read. The sighs that follow lengthy history readings abound. The results fall short of achieving expectations for independent and knowledgeable readers. However, one of the quickest ways to surprise students is to hand them a short text of three or four paragraphs to read. The typical response from students is, “Is this all? Where’s the rest?” At first glance, short texts are inviting and this alone lays the foundation for bringing students into the text. Getting students to choose to read is a powerful motivation for ensuring that students will complete the reading. Of even greater importance is the essentiality of reading to building contextual knowledge and comprehending history. Thus, short texts offer many benefits for teachers and students, including:

- accessing complex texts,
- rereading for deeper analysis,
- increasing reading stamina,
- creating interest and engagement,
- building conceptual understanding (including shared language and background to create a springboard to other texts), and
- generating a starting place for further self-directed exploration and inquiry.

Short texts create pathways to new learning and to helping students understand the past. Short texts inspire curiosity and interest, which are essential to independent learning.



Benefits of Short Texts

Accessing Complex Texts

The Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers [NGA & CCSSO], 2010) have re-emphasized the significance of short text as an important tool for developing independent readers. The oversimplification of content has created greater dependence of students on teachers. Students have become conditioned to being told what to think and read; as a result, they lack confidence in their ability to initiate learning or inquiry. The *Publisher's Criteria* noted that the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) “require students to read increasingly complex texts with growing independence” (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012, 3). Yet, for students

to be able to more fully comprehend and appreciate complex texts, multiple exposures and experiences are needed. The limited time in each school day balanced with the amount of content coverage makes it unrealistic to revisit longer works. Short texts offer viable opportunities for accessing complex text, particularly for “students at a wide range of reading levels to participate in the close analysis of more demanding text” (Coleman and Pimentel, 2012, 4). The comprehension tools used with short texts easily transfer and reinforce learning in meaningful ways that promote the sustained interest in content needed for sophisticated texts.

Rereading for Deeper Analysis

In addition to allowing for complete reads during a single period or part of a period, short texts permit students time to reread. While an initial reading allows students to get the gist of the information—what Gallagher (2004) refers to as first draft reading—rereading frees up mental capacity for analysis, the emphasis of many of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Analyzing, as required by the Common Core, “requires a response that demonstrates an ability to see patterns and to classify information into component parts.” Such analysis might include focus on identifying text details, text structure, writer’s craft, sequences, connections to other texts, author’s purpose, perspective, and connections between texts, to name a few. When we skip rereading, we fail to introduce students to the richness of the text and the comprehension that comes from sustained thinking about a text.

Rereading in school has become associated with drudgery for many students. They have been asked to reread the same text they just completed, often to focus on speed and fluency. The emphasis on literacy skills has overshadowed and devalued the content in light of teaching students to become fast readers. What has been lost in this process is the opportunity to introduce content from multiple sources and to explore various perspectives through horizontal, across-text reading. The time necessary to reread large sections of text is prohibitive. However, rereading does not have to be a chore and it can serve content goals. Rereading for the sake of rereading isn’t a purpose most students enjoy. However, rereading in order to perform a section, for example, frequently engages students not just for one reread but for multiple rereadings and teaches students to value the process as an inquiry tool.

Increasing Reading Stamina

Reading stamina is developed just like physical stamina. If we want students to be able to focus on long, complex texts, we must build their stamina. By starting with short texts and gradually increasing the amount of text, as well as the complexity of the text, we gradually build students’ attention and stamina for longer texts. Stamina also has content benefits. The more students read history, the more they will learn about history. Stamina as a form of exposure to content becomes a process for increasing familiarity with the academic language of the discipline and the concepts associated with essential and enduring ideas like time, continuity, change, context, perspective, causation, and argumentation. Stamina can be understood as sustained interest that promotes the compelling questions leading to historical inquiry.