

STRATEGIC READING

The political rhetoric surrounding issues of education tells us that today's students are graduating from high school reading below average. But what does that mean? Talent Development High Schools' (TDHS) studies show that often students come to high school reading an average of four years below grade level. Struggling readers who have made it this far often have developed a variety of coping mechanisms that have allowed them to do reasonably well in school. Unfortunately, when they reach high school, the difficulty level, as well as the volume, of independent reading expected of students in all content courses can be enough to completely bewilder a student who had been relatively successful up to this point.

The Problem. . .

When students enter high school having not learned the strategies necessary to be successful, life-long readers, teachers often observe the following challenges:

- Students have difficulty reading materials written on grade level.
- Students do not enjoy reading and avoid having to do it.
- Students lack basic strategies to access relevant prior knowledge or draw conclusions or meaning from context.
- Students' writing reflects a lack of reading.
- Students often not only cannot visualize what they are reading but also feel it lacks relevancy to their own experiences and lives.
- Students may become disruptive out of frustration/boredom or may ultimately drop out of school.

Because the process of bringing meaning to print – reading – is complicated, many secondary teachers who are not trained reading specialists understand neither the extent of the problems poor reading habits can cause nor how they – as content-area specialists – can help students improve their reading skills. The resulting frustration for both the teachers and the students often establishes a non-communicative classroom environment where neither feels understood or valued by the other. If left untreated and allowed to worsen, teachers are left feeling overextended and burnt out, and students may decide to leave school out of frustration and hopelessness.

The Solution. . .

Strategic Reading (SR), aims to give students reading two or more years below grade level an opportunity to accelerate their reading in an age-appropriate, motivational, and innovative classroom. By using a balanced-literacy approach, SR teachers help students to build skills and strategies that they may have missed. Additionally, students have opportunities to relate prior knowledge and experience to texts so they are better able to understand how reading applies to their own lives and future learning. SR also provides varying levels of materials for the teachers of these classes.

The Literacy Initiative by TDHS brings accelerated reading strategies to students who might otherwise be forced to try to "get by" with limited reading skills. At TDHS we believe that all students can improve their reading skills, no matter how far along they are in the education system. Frequently we see reading-intervention programs that are tailored to elementary or middle school-aged students. These programs are beneficial, but what about the high school student who needs an opportunity to build and strengthen his/her reading skills? Who is helping not only this student

but also the teacher who is being challenged to meet needs not commonly associated with secondary-level students? SR is a ninth grade course designed especially for students who are beginning high school; it is not an adapted elementary-based program. By addressing high-school aged students' specific needs and developmental stages, SR students gain confidence and improve their reading.

Strategic Reading offers a unique learning environment in that many students begin the semester with a pronounced dislike for reading and ultimately come to both value and enjoy it.

A Literacy “Double-Dose”

Ninth grade students take *Strategic Reading* (SR) in the first semester. The purpose of this 80-90-minute “double-dose” course is to build and strengthen the skills students will need in order to be successful when they enter their required English I class in the second semester. The double-dose model allows challenged readers to accelerate learning, making gains in their reading that would not otherwise be possible.

SR uses a balanced-literacy approach where students move through four timed components each day.

- Reading Showcase (20 minutes)
- Focus Lesson (20 minutes)
- Student Team Literature (30 minutes)
- Self-Selected Centers (20 minutes)

These components allow students to practice a variety of skills that improve their reading: predicting, visualizing, listening to good reading, reading independently on their own levels, analyzing style as a way of conveying meaning, recognizing unidentified vocabulary through context, increasing their knowledge of frequently used words in upper-level texts, answering critical-thinking questions about what they have read, and applying what they have read to other readings, knowledge, or real-world situations. These strategies help students increase both their reading comprehension and vocabulary recognition, while increasing their overall confidence about approaching new and complex texts.

Texts and Materials

SR contains five texts of different reading levels with fully developed lesson plans and student materials. The texts range from fourth-ninth grade reading levels and have a variety of formats, themes, and possibilities for writing and enrichment activities. Students strengthen both their confidence and facility as the reading level of the texts increases. Thus, students are making gains and getting closer to reading on grade level.

One of SR’s most successful components is the extensive, varied curriculum materials that allow teachers to customize for their particular classes. A wide variety of assessment tools monitor student progress, including an end-of-the-semester post test. The post test allows teachers to determine the gains students have made and to identify any areas in which students may require additional practice and assistance.

We also suggest teachers introduce students to the Talent Development Approach to Writing. It focuses less on students’ rote-learning of the writing process or responding to prompts, and instead asks students to analyze writing questions and access prior knowledge, experience, and readings when developing their writing. Students also learn authentic ways to incorporate grammar and mechanics instruction, thus emphasizing the importance of both the content and structure of a piece of writing.

Strategic Reading has two direct, immediate outcomes:

- Students build skills and strategies that will assist them with negotiating grade-level texts they would otherwise find challenging.
- By taking SR in the first semester, students’ reading levels may actually be higher when they begin English I than they would have been had they taken English I in the first semester without assistance.

Both of these outcomes lead to the success of a greater number of students in their required English I course.

Strategic Reading Class Model

Reading Showcase

20 minutes

During Reading Showcase, teachers read aloud from a selected text. As the teacher reads, he/she pauses to "think-aloud," modeling the internal monologue a reader typically has by asking questions about what an author means, the plot, vocabulary, or relating a personal opinion/experience to what is being read. In addition to listening to good reading, the activity's emphasis is twofold: first getting students to predict, question, and engage with what is being read; and second, asking students to visualize what is being read to help them to get in the habit of participating in their reading, as opposed to treating it as a task to "get through." A variety of texts are provided for teachers to use during this time, and teachers are also welcome to supplement with their own texts.

Focus Lesson

20 minutes

During the second 20 minutes of class, teachers directly instruct students in a skill or concept that they will be immediately applying to that day's (or an upcoming day's) Student Team Literature. The purpose of the Focus Lesson time is for teachers to not only explain but also model the selected skill or concept. Additionally, students are given an opportunity to practice during this time in an authentic or meaningful way. By limiting the time for direct instruction, teachers are more likely to keep challenged readers' attention while giving them the modeling and practice time they need to actually incorporate a skill into their own knowledge base.

Student Team Literature

30 minutes

During this 30 minute block, students work intensively with one of the five core texts:

***One More River to Cross* (an anthology of non-fiction essays about African Americans)**

***The Friendship* (a novella by Mildred D. Taylor)**

***America Street* (a multicultural anthology of short stories)**

***Walk Two Moons* (a novel by Sharon Creech)**

***Leaving Home* (a short-story anthology)**

***Coming of Age in America* (a multicultural anthology)**

The texts are written on various grade levels and have differing levels of conceptual difficulty. A wide variety of activities accompany these texts including: motivational and pre-reading activities to team discussions, partner activities, individual questions and extension activities, and vocabulary and literature tests.

Self-Selected Reading & Writing Learning Centers

20 minutes

For the final 20 minutes of class, students work in one of four independent work stations: Composer's Square, Self-Selected Reading, Data Central, and Word Play. Each of these stations helps students to develop their independent reading and writing skills. Additionally, because these are unconventional and somewhat fun activities, students are also learning to enjoy reading. The center focuses on the development of creative writing and publishing, silent reading, information retrieval and application, and the creative use and categorization of words.

TDHS OFFERS THREE LEVELS OF ON-GOING LITERACY SUPPORT

The TDHS *Literacy Initiative* also provides support to 10th and 11th grade students who are still reading two or more years below grade level. In addition to the 9th grade *Strategic Reading*, consider how these 10th and 11th grade courses will help students in your school to graduate reading on grade level.

READING & WRITING IN YOUR CAREER: This 10th grade first-semester acceleration course continues the gains students made during 9th grade and boosts their abilities further in preparation for the 10th grade required English course second semester. The course focuses on themes of career exploration and setting life goals.

COLLEGE PREP READING & WRITING: This 11th grade first-semester acceleration course is ideal for students still reading two or more years below grade level or for students who want to explore and build the skills they will need to be successful in the college or career worlds. The course will also help students face the types of assignments they will encounter in their required English courses, graduation requirements, and state-based testing.

TALENT DEVELOPMENT HIGH SCHOOLS OFFERS A WIDE ARRAY OF COURSES:

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Strategic Reading (9th Grade)
Reading & Writing in Your Career (10th Grade)
College Prep Reading & Writing (11th Grade)
Literacy Lab

MATHEMATICS

Transition to Advanced Mathematics (9th Grade)
Geometry Foundations (10th Grade)
Algebra II Foundations (11th Grade)

SOCIAL STUDIES

Freshman Seminar (9th Grade)

If you would like a course prospectus or more information on any of our courses, please contact us, and we'll be happy to forward you additional information. You're also invited to visit our website at www.csos.jhu.edu for complete information on Talent Development programs and curriculum.



Talent Development High Schools
3003 North Charles Street
Suite 150
Baltimore, Maryland 21218

Telephone: 410-516-5191
Facsimile: 410-516-5572
Email: TDHS@csos.jhu.edu
www.csos.jhu.edu

JOHNS HOPKINS
UNIVERSITY