

The cover features several stylized, light green leaf motifs scattered across a yellow background. Each motif consists of a stem with two leaves pointing in opposite directions.

READING AND WRITING TO LEARN

**Strategies across the
Curriculum**

KATHERINE WIESOLEK KUTA

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Reading and Writing to Learn

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Katherine Wiesolek Kuta



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*This book is dedicated to special people who have been
connected to me in my life.*

*My daughter, Melanie, who is now 15, who talks about reading and writing with
me and truly has been an inspiration for me to write.*

*My nieces and nephews, Kristine, Joe, Karly, Laura, Elizabeth, Richard, Katie,
Jarrett, John, and Hannah, who know that their aunt always talks about books
with them and promotes the importance of education for success.*

*My students at Maine East High School in Illinois, who have grown as readers
and writers, and have matured into lifelong learners.*

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Preface

The purpose of this book is to offer teachers a resource that contains reading, writing, affective, cooperative, and best practices activities for all content areas. Since much of the text that teachers ask students to read is written above their instructional or independent reading level, students need strategies, skills, and practice to help them gain understanding of the material that they are expected to read and understand in all disciplines. Teachers tend to be experts in their own teaching fields and are quite adept at reading and teaching those subjects. However, in every class there are a wide range of readers, various degrees of motivation among students, and different levels of writing skill. I have found that teachers appreciate finding alternatives to help their students learn in a variety of ways. Once teachers and students experience success with a new idea, they are willing to repeat the strategy, skill, or activity again and again.

This book offers more than 60 activities on reading to learn and writing to learn, including lessons geared to accommodate different learning styles, a range of reading abilities, and various levels of motivation. Students need to feel comfortable and safe to want to learn; this area is the affective domain of teaching and learning. Several activities in this book will motivate students and help them connect to one another so the class can function as a team. Extensive research in the field of reading makes it quite clear that both reading and writing are processes, and both processes are necessary for learning. Reading improves writing, and writing improves reading.

Since the cognitive, affective, reading, and writing processes are all intertwined in the learning process, the activities in this book are organized in three sections, based on the major focus of the activities, with 20 activities in each section. Part 1 contains reading to learn activities; part 2 reading and writing to learn activities involving affective and cooperative learning; and part 3 writing to learn activities. Within each activity are suggestions for continued guided practice. Best practices suggest that teachers model first, then offer guided practice, and finally lead students to independence.

All the activities and lessons in the book have been successfully used at various grade levels in all content areas. I have taught all grades in more than thirty years of teaching and am currently teaching high school and conducting workshops with content teachers, and as a result all of the ideas have been used, evaluated, changed, and shared with other colleagues. My most challenging and rewarding students have been those who walked into my classes as nonreaders and nonwriters and left as motivated readers and writers as well as lifelong learners.

I have been fortunate to work with and to learn from some very talented educators, who have been willing to share their expertise and model great teaching. This book allows me to share some of my “best” teaching ideas with others. All learners appreciate choice and variety in learning. I hope that this book of ideas offers your students success both in their reading and writing, to increase their ownership of learning.

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Introduction

I developed this book as a resource for teachers to use to improve student learning based on current research in best practices for classroom instruction and learning strategies. In all the activities, good teaching involves doing the following: Model the lesson first and teach a mini lesson if necessary, then provide guided practice in groups or pairs, then move students toward independence. All of the activities have been used in real classrooms by teachers in various content areas at various grade levels. Students need to interact with text actively and be able to write about their learning, no matter what the subject or grade level is. The basic premise of this book, based on research, is that reading and writing are interconnected processes and reading improves writing and writing improves reading. If one process is neglected then the other suffers as well.

Current reading researchers such as Ellin Keene (Keene and Limmermann 1997), Stephanie Harvey (Harvey and Goudvis 2000), Timothy Shanahan (Tierney and Shanahan 1991), and others, agree that there are basic habits or skills that increase comprehension and learning in all content areas. This is the focus of part 1, “Reading to Learn,” which contains 20 activities. Each activity includes an explanation of the activity and how to use it, plus a number of handouts (43 in this section) for students to use in the activities. The comprehension skill areas covered are previewing, asking questions, finding main ideas, using vocabulary, visualizing, making inferences, monitoring, connecting to text, synthesizing, and practicing fluency.

In addition, many of the activities include the practices of cooperative learning established by Johnson and Johnson (1989), which engage students and reinforce “interdependence” while working in teams. Research-based strategies of classroom instruction drawn from Robert Marzano’s (2004) work are the foundation of the activities in this book. His research suggests nine categories of strategies that improve student learning: (1) identifying similarities and differences, (2) summarizing and notetaking, (3) reinforcing effort and providing recognition, (4) doing homework and practicing, (5) nonlinguistic representations, (6) cooperative learning, (7) setting objectives, (8) providing feedback, and (9) generating and testing hypotheses.

In addition, I based the activities on brain-based learning on the research of David Sousa (2006), and Eric Jensen (2005). Their work seems to agree that students need active, meaningful learning; accurate, helpful feedback; a rich, stimulating environment; and a safe environment: this is the affective domain. Students need to feel comfortable in order to pay attention and focus on learning. This area is the focus of the 20 activities in part 2, “Reading and Writing to Learn Involving Affective and Cooperative Learning.” These activities each also include an explanation of the activity and how to use it, as well as handouts (25 in this section) for students to use.

In the area of writing, Harvey Daniels (2007) and William Strong (2006) are two experts who promote the necessity of having students “write to learn” to increase processing, connecting, and ownership of learning. In part 3, “Writing to Learn,” the 20 activities are designed to engage students in writing to process information, do authentic writing, and practice formal writing. They also include explanatory material and handouts for students (24 in this section).

A major goal for teachers is to have students become lifelong readers, writers, and learners. To accomplish this goal, students need strategies and practice to achieve ownership of their learning. With high-stakes tests facing both teachers and students, this book will empower both and be a practical resource in any content area.

For literacy coaches or staff developers, the strategies and activities can be shared with content teachers to promote reading and writing within the curriculum. Once teachers experience success with a strategy, technique, or lesson, they, like their students, will improve and use it again. Although teachers are experts in their content areas, the wide range of students’ abilities makes teaching more and more challenging. The literacy coach can use this book as a resource for ideas to use with teachers to improve student learning in the classroom.

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Part I

Reading to Learn

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Activity 1

Reading to Learn (Pre- or Post-): Content Continuum

Purpose of the Activity

The purpose of this activity is for teachers and students to preview the knowledge and concepts of a unit or lesson. The students are directed to make choices based on their background knowledge, former experiences, and values structure and to defend their choices orally, with details.

How to Use the Activity

After duplicating and distributing handouts 1B and 1D or creating a continuum on large poster paper, have students write opposing concepts, viewpoints, or feelings at each end of the arrows. The two discussion statements should be based on the main ideas of the reading selection or content of the unit. (Handouts 1A and 1C contain examples of discussion statements; more are listed below.) Statements should be placed at the top and the bottom of the vertical arrows. If there are more than one set of statements and several continuums, Post the continuums in the four corners of the room. Place statements about the content unit that may be controversial or opposing conceptual statements on the continuums for the students to critically think about and take a position on, using the sticky dots. Students will need a sticky dot for each continuum. For accountability, ask students to write their initials on each dot. After previewing the statements and explaining the activity, ask students to walk around the room and place one colored sticky dot on the vertical line of each continuum.

After all students have completed the task, follow up by asking randomly chosen students to explain why they placed their dots where they did. Also, ask students to note any patterns of the placement of the dots.

At the end of the unit, use the activity again with the same set of statements and different colored dots so the teacher can see changes in opinion, growth of knowledge, or personal insights.

Examples of discussion statements:

- The North is responsible for the Civil War/The South is responsible for the Civil War.
- Textbooks are easier to read and comprehend than they used to be./Textbooks are harder to read and comprehend than they used to be.
- The more one reads, the better reader one becomes./How much one reads has no effect on one how well one reads.

Use handouts 1C and 1D at the beginning of a course or during a discussion on reading. Students are asked to critically think about the statements and make a choice based on their own background knowledge about reading and writing problems. Each student *must* place one dot by one choice. (This is not optional.) Discuss the answers with the whole class and provide an explanation for each choice. The multiple choice format offers another continuum for a whole class activity for asking questions about content as a preview or a review for a test. One or several multiple choice continuums can be used at the same time in the classroom.

Evaluation

This activity can be given a participation grade or simply used as a previewing, motivational activity. The cognitive and affective growth will not be realized until the end of the unit, when the activity is revisited or there is a more formal assessment.

Variation(s)

Another possibility is to use the activity after a reading. By using a continuum at both the beginning and end of the lesson or unit, the teacher and the students can easily see changes in opinion; growth in knowledge; and affective connections to a philosophical idea, content concept, or affective mindset.