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SECTION I

Developing the Mind's Eye

When the teacher makes a point of regularly providing opportunities for students to develop and appreciate their mental pictures, most young children respond quite fully. Their reading and writing expand in depth and creativity. Comprehension and enjoyment deepen.

But some children have difficulty visualizing. Some studies reveal that twenty percent of the children do not visualize. These children need more than just reminders, opportunities, and encouragement. They need to be taught how to create mental images.

The activities in this section present a sequence of exercises designed to involve each of your students in visualizing actively. These exercises provide a clear path to the development of visualization in discouraged readers and give them the gift of a fresh start in the business of learning how to read. Indeed, your whole class will enjoy and profit from participating. The exercises are like mental gymnastics—everyone's brain will become stronger and more flexible through this use.

Once all of your students can and will visualize, you will find that they can use their visualization skills in the activities in the rest of this book to enrich both reading and writing.

HOW TO USE THIS SECTION

When to Do the Exercises

I recommend that you do the exercises in this section of the book at the beginning of the school year and in the order that they are given. Each builds upon the skills that are strengthened in the preceding exercise. By the time you have completed this section, most of your students will be making a habit of visualizing.

If you have a class that has done a lot of visualization with teachers in earlier classes, and you are quite sure that all of your students are independent visualizers, then you might sprinkle these exercises throughout the school year.

- Use your library in many ways. When students finish with their work early, they can select a class book. When you have ten extra minutes in the day, ask the whole class to select books to read to themselves or to a partner.
- Use your library for your homework program.
- Use your library for your read-aloud selections. Ask cross-age tutors to read these books to your students. Have volunteers read to small groups of children, especially to those who do not get supported at home in their reading.
- Let your child-of-the-week or your birthday child select a book from the bins for you to read to the class at story time.

A SILENT AND SHARED READING TIME

The initials SSR have commonly been used to mean Silent Sustained Reading. In my classroom, the letters mean Silent and Shared Reading. I find that when my students read with partners, there are many benefits. Children teach each other, they discuss, they share favorites, and they model for each other. During shared reading time fully half of my students are reading aloud at any given time (in contrast to one student at a time getting a turn in a reading group).

So, while I sometimes have a Silent Reading Time, and I sometimes have a reading group in which students take turns reading aloud, most often I have Shared Reading.

Both Silent Reading and Shared Reading can be done a number of ways. Here are some suggestions:

SILENT READING

If a child has a special book in mind to read, or if someone wants to continue reading in a chapter book, he or she can get it at the beginning of the period, but once the reading time has begun, students must pick from just the books in the bin(s) I have placed on their table(s). This procedure prevents excessive wandering. Everyone is expected to read quietly for about twenty minutes (depending on your grade level), including myself and any other adults who are in the room.