

# READING WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES

## Flexible Grouping to Promote Learning Video Transcript

**Students:**

"One day, searching will be easier. Sigh. What's your name?"

**Student:**

What's his name?

**Student:**

King Arthur.

**Student:**

Yes, King Arthur.

**Darby Masland:**

Can you explain what slow reading is?

**Student:**

Slow reading is when you, like, reread, but this time, you read to understand what you're reading.

**Masland:**

So everyone should have in front of them the worksheet that has the tough question written on top.

The last few weeks, we've talked about Chinese and Indian civilizations. When we're looking at questions like this that are really big, hard questions -- like, "Are social hierarchies a necessary characteristic of all civilizations?"-- that includes a whole bunch of different ideas, and one of those ideas is that you need to know what a hierarchy is. The structure of the class is a ten-minute mini-lesson, generally going over both content and skills, so we try and integrate the skills into the content a lot.

Is there any social mobility? Social mobility. Characteristics of civilizations. This is a lot of information, right? So when we're breaking down that first big question, the first thing we want to do is we want to look at what are all the little things in this tough big question that we need to understand. Does that make

sense? What kinds of information and prior knowledge do we need to know to answer this question? Over the course of the next two days, we're going to continue working on this. For now, we're going to go to our agenda.

The mini-lesson was ten minutes, and then we have unison reading going on with one group of students who elect and choose what texts they're going to read.

**Students:**

"Spices, porcelain, tea, ivory, pepper..."

**Masland:**

We have conferences happening where I'm meeting one on one with a student.

**Student:**

Because I read it, but then I didn't really understand it, but then as I slow read it, I start to understand more.

**Masland:**

We also have learning groups happening where students can choose a topic or a concept that they're having trouble with and then go off on their own and kind of teach each other about that. Today was one of the days that they actually chose to do a learning group on some vocabulary.

**Student:**

So if you don't follow your dharma, you won't get good karma, and then be reincarnated into something bad or underneath your caste.

**Masland:**

They feel in this setting that they have the ability and they have the agency where they can make that choice on their own without the permission of the teacher, which I think is nice.

**Student:**

The four noble truths. I don't think it's in there, but it's, um, facts about life...

**Masland:**

Students can always find a different way to show their learning, to show what they've been working on. Literacy in the classroom is really visible day to day.

How are you trying this?

**Student:**

You just... I don't know. Qin Chi and... I don't know how to say his last name.

**Masland:**

I have a chance every day in small learning groups and one-on-one conferences to see their thinking as they go through a text.

**Cheyenne:**

She helped me slow read the questions, and slow read is basically, like, you're reading it, but you're reading it to understand, not just reading it just to read it.

**Masland:**

You remember how we pronounced the Q-I-N dynasty?

**Student:**

No, I forgot.

**Masland:**

So you remember this is where the word "China" comes from.

**Student:**

Oh! So... "Chin."

**Masland:**

"Chin," yeah.

**Cheyenne:**

It helped me pick out the important information and what I really had to understand.

**Student:**

We're gonna read "The Silk Road." I picked it out because I like comics and I feel like it's a better way to learn. I'm a visual learner, maybe. I hope that y'all like it.

**Masland:**

And, you know, the four students who are reading that text together work hard to make sure that what they're thinking as they read that text is visible to the group so that they share those thoughts with the group.

**Student:**

So we're gonna start at the title, "Silk Road," and then we're gonna start from the left-hand side.

**Masland:**

In the unison reading group itself, the leader starts the group off by counting down.

**Student:**

Three, two, one.

**Students:**

"The Silk Road. Roman Empire, Chinese Empire. Is the circus in town? I'm a merchant from Rome."

**Masland:**

They read in unison, and then they breach, or stop, the group when they have a question, a point of clarification, or some new understanding about the text.

**Students:**

"Wait, I want to buy some silk first."

**Student:**

Well, what is silk?

**Student:**

It's just another type of fabric. Like, it's cashmere, and leather.

**Masland:**

So those are really nice fabrics you just named, cashmere and leather, so you think silk also might be a luxury fabric?

**Student:**

Yes.

**Masland:**

So the benefit of the unison reading is that those struggles and competencies really come out clearly. When students read independently or when they read in their head, you don't see those as much, both as a teacher and as another student. And when they hear each other talk and when they hear each other reading in unison, they pay attention to what the other students are doing. They pay attention to, "Is she saying this word the same way I'm saying this word?"

Right now, what have we figured out about the Silk Road?

**Student:**

That would be a good place for merchants.

**Student:**

It was used for trade.

**Masland:**

One of the great things about a classroom that has so many different types of learning happening at the same time is that you don't have to choose one brand to go with. Student-driven education naturally encompasses whole language instruction and workshop models and working together, imperative strategies and think alouds and all of those things we talk about in education students naturally do on their own when given the opportunity to create their own sense of agency in their own learning.

**Student:**

After today, we're going to stop vocabulary and we're going to go into mapping, and I think that's just going to be an important part.