

the Joy of CONFERRING

ONE-ON-ONE WITH YOUNG READERS



DEBBIE MILLER

VIEWING GUIDE

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Happy Reading! (Debbie Miller 2003) and *Reading with Meaning* (Debbie Miller 2002)
are available at www.stenhouse.com

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INTRODUCTION

The Joy of Conferring is a series of two video programs from Debbie Miller's first-grade classroom in Denver, Colorado. The first program in the series, "Listen and Guide: The Dynamics of Conferring" presents six reading conferences with children who have diverse needs and interests. The focus of each conference ranges from decoding and comprehension, to writing authentic responses to books. Debbie shows how she uses ongoing assessments, her own reading process, and her previous experiences with each child to lead the conversation.

The second program in the series, "Three Minutes or Less: Book Selection Quick Conferences" captures a morning of conferences all focused on book selection. Students are routinely asked to sort through and analyze both the range and difficulty of the texts they are reading, and then to select some new books that will provide a more varied reading diet. Debbie shows how teachers can briefly check in with each student to provide support as they become more independent in choosing books.

This guide is designed to help you use *The Joy of Conferring* in workshop settings. The plans provided are flexible and make it possible to tailor viewing to group needs.

We've divided suggestions for viewing each program into six sections:

1. *Notes for Facilitators*. Background information from Debbie's classroom that you might want to provide to participants.
2. *Focusing While Viewing*. Transcripts of interviews, classroom artifacts, and sample forms for note taking are provided to help participants concentrate on specific elements of each program, and prepare the group for thoughtful discussions after viewing.
3. *Questions for Discussion*. Options for guiding conversations before or after viewing individual segments within each of the programs.
4. *Workshop and Classroom Extensions*. Activities designed to help teachers learn how to use concepts from the video with their students.
5. *Short on Time?* Tips for using shorter segments from the programs when time is limited, especially in settings like faculty meetings or curriculum

development planning sessions where the core agenda involves more immediate school issues.

6. *Further Reading.* Connections to specific chapters in the companion text *Reading with Meaning* (Stenhouse, 2002).

PROGRAM 1: LISTEN AND GUIDE: THE DYNAMICS OF CONFERRING

Notes for Facilitators

The first program presents Debbie in a series of six conferences with students who have a range of needs, from decoding and fluency to writing thoughtful responses to their reading. Viewers will see how Debbie does a few things consistently in all conferences. She refers back to her previous conferences with each student (either through notes or in oral exchanges), she looks closely at the text to focus in on a word, concept or page, and she listens to the child read. As Debbie notes in *Reading with Meaning*: “Teacher feedback through conferences is essential; teachers need to let children know when they’ve used a strategy correctly, encourage them to share their thinking with the teacher and their peers, challenge them to think out loud about how using the strategy helped them as a reader, and correct misconceptions when they occur.” (p. 11)

You may want to distribute copies of the following:

- Figure 1: Transcript of Conference with Preston
- Figure 2: Transcript of Conference with Rosa
- Figure 3: Transcript of Conference with Jack
- Figure 4: Debbie’s Assessment Notes from Conferences
- Figure 5: “Conferences are Conversations” by Debbie Miller
- Figure 6: Tricky Word Card

Focusing While Viewing

As participants watch the program, have them set up a two-column notes form to think about the similarities and differences to their classrooms. In order to do this, participants will need to put two headings you've chosen in advance on a blank sheet of paper.

These headings might include:

What I'm Seeing	What It Makes Me Think About
Similarities to How I Confer	Differences
What's New?	How Might I Implement This in My Classroom?

You could also choose to make up sheets in advance with one of these headings, distributing them to participants to fill out as they view the program.

Questions for Discussion

Segment 1-1 Introduction

- a. Debbie's advice is to "relax" when thinking about and participating in reading conferences. What can make conferences stressful for teachers?

Segment 1-2 Preston: Rereading and Fluency

- a. Preston is reading *Frog and Toad* as a "read break" book. How does Debbie help Preston get the most out of this easy book?
- b. Preston called Debbie over to him. What opportunities do students have to initiate conferences with you in your classroom?
- c. At the end, Debbie asks, "What did you learn about yourself as a reader?" What questions do you ask in conferences with students?
- d. What opportunities do students have in your classroom to share their discoveries about themselves as readers with their classmates? How could you provide more of these opportunities?

Segment 1-3 Rosa: Finding the Teaching Point

- a. What strategies do you have for conferring with students who are reading books that are unfamiliar to you?
- b. Why does Debbie have Rosa spend so much time retelling the story to her?
- c. How does Debbie use her own experience as a reader to teach Rosa?
- d. At the end of the conference, Debbie gives Rosa a task and also tells her that she wants her to come back and tell her what she finds out. How do you provide follow-up for conferences?
- e. Debbie explains to her students what she is writing in her notebook. How do you share assessment with students?

Segment 1-4 Jack: Decoding and Sight Word Vocabulary

- a. How does Debbie use her notes from the previous conference within this conference?
- b. What comprehension questions does Debbie ask during the conference?
- c. How does Debbie use the Tricky Word Card to help Jack? What materials do you have available for students to use to support their independent reading?
- d. Debbie asks, “How did you get that word ‘mermaid’?” Why is it important for Jack to name what he did? How will that help him as a reader?

Segment 1-5 Molly: Questioning Simple Texts

- a. Why is it important to talk about comprehension when reading even the simplest texts?
- b. Debbie says this is a perfect example of a conference where she is “just having fun with a book.” Even though she is having fun, does she gain information about Molly in this conference?
- c. Debbie begins the conference by saying, “Have you been asking yourself questions as you read?” in an expectant tone. What questions do you use to begin conferences?
- d. What role do song books play in your classroom?

- e. Students in Debbie's classroom use sticky notes in a variety of ways. What writing materials do your students use during independent reading? How do they use them?

Segment 1-6 Charles: Authentic Written Response

- a. How does Charles' written response support his reading comprehension?
- b. What parts of the written response does Debbie ask Charles to read? Why?
- c. What does Charles learn about themes through his written response?
- d. How does Charles' explanation of his written thoughts help Debbie in her assessment, and also help Charles in his understanding?

Segment 1-7 Leanna: Fiction and Nonfiction Files

- a. How does Debbie use the conference to discuss attributes of fiction and nonfiction?
- b. How does Debbie guide Leanna to record information in more systematic ways?
- c. Debbie gets Leanna to think more deeply about her work by asking her to write down words or page numbers. Why do you think she gives Leanna this task?

Workshop and Classroom Extensions

1. Distribute any two conference transcripts (Figures 1-3) and have participants code the questions Debbie asks students. What patterns do participants see in the way Debbie prompts students? What differences are there in the questions?
2. Distribute copies of Debbie's Assessment Notes (Figure 4). Talk in small groups about the patterns in Debbie's notes, and the types of notes participants use to assess student learning during conferences.
3. Distribute the "Conferences are Conversations" (Figure 5) handout, where Debbie describes connections between conferences she has with adult read-

ers and conferences with students. Discuss in small groups how conferring with children is like conferring with adults, and how it is different.

4. Have everyone read Chapter 1 of *Reading with Meaning* silently for fifteen minutes. Talk about structures that support conferring in the classroom, and what needs to change for participants to allow them to improve their conferences with kids.

Short on Time?

Mini-Workshop: Watch only two of the conferences, focused on similar themes. Good conference pairs include:

- Preston (Segment 1.2) and Jack (1.4) Both of these conferences involve issues of decoding and fluency.
- Charles (1.6) and Leanna (1.7) Both of these conferences involve issues of written response to reading.
- Molly (1.5) and Rosa (1.3) These conferences focus on comprehension.

Before viewing the paired conference video segments, ask participants to consider what they learned about conferring around the same theme (i.e., fluency/decoding, written response or comprehension) with different students to focus the viewing. Discuss what was learned in small or large group after the viewing.

Further Reading

Reading with Meaning Chapter 1.

PROGRAM 2: THREE MINUTES OR LESS: QUICK BOOK SELECTION CONFERENCES

Notes for Facilitators

Two of the biggest concerns teachers have about conferring with students are that there is never enough time, and it is a challenge getting students to choose the right books for independent reading. How can a teacher provide individual attention to students during daily workshops when she has twenty five or more children requiring attention? How can teachers help children learn how to select books that provide a balanced diet of genre and challenge? “Three Minutes or Less” presents in almost real time the ways Debbie is able to check in with an entire class of students. Many of these conferences are less than a minute long, yet Debbie still manages to find time to instruct, listen carefully, and leave students with challenges.

The focus of all the conferences is on book selection. Every two to three weeks, Debbie presents different mini-lessons on how readers choose books, asking students to sort books they have in their reading piles according to genre and difficulty (“easy”, “just right,” “challenging”). Students then pick new books that will provide greater variety in their reading over the coming few weeks. This ongoing book selection lesson and conferring cycle is crucial in helping students become more independent and reflective readers.

You can also refer participants to Chapter 4 in *Reading with Meaning*, where book selection is discussed.

You may also want to distribute copies of the following:

- Figure 7: Questions While Conferring
- Figure 8: Book Selection Lessons and Conferences
- Figure 9: Building a Classroom Library for Book Selection (Excerpt from *Reading with Meaning*)

Focusing While Viewing

While viewing the program, participants might record their observations on two-column notes forms, as described on page 6 of this guide.

Or, you might ask participants to list three students who struggle to choose appropriate books on a sheet of paper before beginning the video. As they view the program, ask everyone to note any students Debbie confers with who remind them of their struggling students, jotting down notes of how they could use Debbie's strategies when conferring with particular children.

Questions for Discussion

- a. What strategies does Debbie have for conferring with so many students in one workshop period?
- b. How does Debbie teach students to help each other?
- c. How does Debbie teach students to make good use of the classroom library?
- d. When and why does Debbie stop and listen to children read?
- e. In what conferences does Debbie teach something other than book choice? Why do you think she does this?
- f. What strategies does Debbie use to ensure students have a balanced stack of books?
- g. How does the set-up of the room support quality book choice, conversations and conferences? How can you create more spaces that do this?
- h. How does Debbie help students take responsibility for book choice?
- i. Why does Debbie confer with students in so many different places in the room (i.e., tables, bookshelves, the floor)?
- j. How does Debbie use book choice conferences to teach children about authors and genres?
- k. At one point, Debbie reads a book with a child. How does this shared reading help this child in her independent reading? Why does Debbie do this?
- l. Debbie says book choice is a skill that is "never finished". Book choice is something that she comes back to all year. What other skills, strategies or behaviors do you come back to all year in conferences?

Workshop and Classroom Extensions

Have a “Trading Spaces” workshop. Ask participants to pick a partner, and visit each other’s classrooms during the following week. Each participant must view the arrangement of the classroom library, and make suggestions for rearranging the space to improve students’ abilities to select books. Questions participants might ask themselves as they trade spaces include:

- a. What categories might be useful for baskets or tubs of books?
- b. How are students able to find a range of books on similar topics at different reading abilities?
- c. What are some ways your partner might display books in different ways to pique interest?

Short on Time?

Mini-Workshop (15-20 minutes)

Have participants read the one-page handout giving background information on book selection conferences (Figure 8). View only the first five minutes of the book selection conferences. Have participants jot down what book selection skills Debbie is teaching students in each conference as they view the program. In the whole group discussion, talk about what skills they noticed, and what conferences didn’t involve book selection skills. Talk about Debbie’s style in conferencing, and how it differs from that of the participants.

Further Reading:

Reading with Meaning Chapter 4

Discussion Questions for DVD Extras

Conference with Frank

- a. Why do you think Frank switched books when Debbie began taking a running record?
- b. What is Frank learning about himself as a reader?

Book Selection Mini-lesson (from *Happy Reading!*)

- a. How is helping children categorize books an ongoing task?
- b. What categorizing skills do children exhibit from previous lessons?
- c. How does Debbie reinforce the skills discussed in the lesson in individual conferences?

Discussion of Charts

- a. What is the purpose of anchor charts in Debbie's classroom?
- b. How do these charts change over time?
- c. How are these charts similar to or different from charts in your classroom?

Figure 1: Transcript of Conference with Preston
Rereading and Fluency

1. Preston: Mrs. Miller? I sort of thought um this book would be good because I haven't read one in so long. So I'm gonna get back to *Frog and Toad*.
2. Debbie: So how does it feel getting back to *Frog and Toad*?
3. Preston: Good.
4. Debbie: Yeah? What's good about it? Why do you like it?
5. Preston: Because they're fun and because it's not so long.
6. Debbie: Yeah.
7. Preston: And so it's sort of just like a read break book.
8. Debbie: A read break book? So you read a bit and then stop. And the stories are short?
9. Preston: Yeah.
10. Debbie: Can you read just a bit of it? Starting with *Frog and Toad*...
11. Preston [reading]: Frog came running down the hill. He pulled toad out of the snow. I saw everything said Frog.
12. Debbie: You did very well by yourself. You know what else I notice? Since you have practice reading this book, and now it's pretty good for you, it's almost easy? Do you notice how you are reading it, almost as I would read it aloud? It's called reading with expression. You're going, I saw everything said Frog. That's so perfect.
13. Debbie: Let's read just one more. How would toad read this?
14. Preston [reading]: I did not, said Toad.
15. Debbie: Perfect.
16. Preston [reading]: But there is one thing that I can do all by myself. What is that? asked Frog.
17. Debbie: So good!
18. Preston [reading]: I can go home, said Toad. Winter may be beautiful, but bed is much better.
19. Debbie: So what did you learn about yourself as a reader today?
20. Preston: That just because umm I got some practice now I'm stopping at the periods. And then stopping and going on to the next sentence.
21. Debbie: So even though you can read all the words, there are still things to learn about a book and a reason to reread them, right? You know what? I think that would be such smart information to share with everybody. Would you share that? And would you also think about how you used to read it? And read a line like you use to read it? Like Frog. Came. Running. Down. The. Hill. And then read it the way you way you read it now?
22. Preston: Okay.
23. Debbie: Think about that, okay? Keep going sweetie. Good job.

Figure 2: Transcript of Conference with Rosa
Finding the Teaching Point

1. Debbie: Hi Rosa.
2. Rosa: Hi.
3. Debbie: What are you up to?
4. Rosa: I'm reading *Jackal's Flying Lesson*. And I think it was sort of weird.
5. Debbie: What was weird?
6. Rosa: Because you know... the mom didn't of... her baby birds. She didn't really understand. And she didn't know that jackals couldn't fly. And so she sacrificed her babies. 'Cause she thought she was gonna die if she hadn't.
7. Debbie: Really!
8. Rosa: So she had to let them down. And she was trying to protect them. And she was thinking jackals could also climb trees. So she dropped one of her babies down. Like right there. And he ate it. And then he ate the other one.
9. Debbie: Oh my gosh. So what are you thinking about all that? Why do you think she did that?
10. Rosa: I'm not sure why. But it seemed sort of queer to do that. I mean.
11. Debbie: Yeah.
12. Rosa: Maybe just if you haven't learned that much. Or you haven't known about the creatures.
13. Debbie: [interruption] Sorry.
14. Rosa: And it just happened to a jackal. And see this big bird is trying to... She's putting him on a trip. She heard that the pigeon's babies got eaten by the jackal. And so she's tricking the jackal into flying. And she knows that they can't fly. And so he's trying to fly right there. And she's blinking where the mother was. And he sort of gets scared. Because she was going to lift him up on her back and start flying up so he could get the baby. And then she was going to see how scared he was.
15. Debbie: Oh my gosh.
16. Rosa: And he was really scared. So she did that. But it actually flew farther than the tree. That's how she wanted it to go.
17. Debbie: So what are you writing on here? Is this your thinking about the story?
18. Rosa (reading): Sometimes books might be queer. Well this book is. Would there...would another book be queer? As queer as a bird letting her...let's change that to her...babies go down and die so she could survive? I didn't..
19. Debbie: So was it about her surviving? Is that...there's got to be some reason I'm thinking in

Figure 2: (cont.)

the story that she would do that. Don't you think?

20. Rosa: Yeah.

21. Debbie: I mean it just wouldn't happen like that. And you know, sometimes when I'm reading a story like this and it's like you saying thinking it's really queer or odd that that's happening. Do you know what I do sometimes?

22. Rosa: What?

23. Debbie: Well I reread it and I'm really just thinking about that thing that seems so odd to me. So would it be that thing about, Why would a mother throw her babies down to a jackal when she knew he was going to eat them? Right? Is that the part that is so odd to you?

24. Rosa: Yeah.

25. Debbie: So I would almost keep that thought in my head, reread it, and see if you could come to some new understanding or figure out why would she do that. Can you do that and just focus in on that one thought?

26. Rosa: Yeah.

27. Debbie: Okay. So I would start at the very beginning, "It was springtime in South Africa" and that whole time I'd be trying to come up with "what's the reason?" And just keep that thought in your head. And I'm thinking that there is going to be some reason why she did that. There must have been something that he either tricked her, or something that she didn't know about.

28. Rosa: Yeah.

29. Debbie: Do you see? Because it just doesn't make sense that that would happen. Right? Isn't that what you're thinking? So will you reread it and then you might need to take a couple of days like the rest of today and tomorrow? And then would you share that with me? Because you know what I want to do? I want to read this book too because that seems really odd to me too.

30. Rosa: Yeah.

31. Debbie: Okay. So I'm going to put down here that you're going to reread *Jackal's Flying Lesson* and you're going to try to figure out why the mom would do that to her babies. Right?

32. Rosa: Yeah.

33. Debbie: Okay. Good luck! I can't wait to hear what you find out.

Figure 3: Transcript of Conference with Jack
Decoding and Sight Word Vocabulary

1. Debbie: Hi Jack.
2. Jack: Look at the picture.
3. Debbie: Oh, are you doing that because you came to a word you didn't know?
4. Jack: Umm-hmm.
5. Debbie: Which word are you thinking about?
6. Jack: Okay, I don't know the word. Will..
7. Debbie: Here, remember? Now let's look. When you come to a word you don't know what will you do?
8. Jack: Look at the picture.
9. Debbie: Okay, so let's do that. What will you do next?
10. Jack: Point and slide.
11. Debbie: Point and slide and then go on. So let's go back. Let's start right here.
12. Jack [reading]: I am coming home with you...then
13. Debbie: Look again.
14. Jack: If they will...Ohh, that kind of helped me out.
15. Debbie: Let me show you something. They walked along...
16. Jack: And there was a duck.
17. Debbie: Okay. This time I'm going to...
18. Jack: Hello.
19. Debbie: Hang on a minute. I'm going to take a running record of your reading. So can you put your feet down? I want you to start right here with hello.
20. Jack [reading]: Hello Duck, said Little Bear. Father Bear is coming home today. Guess where he was.
21. Debbie: So where are you thinking he was?
22. Jack: At the ocean.
23. Debbie: At the ocean. Okay, let's go right here.
24. Jack [reading]: Where? asked Duck. Fishing, said Little Bear. Or out on the sea...out with...
25. Debbie: So what's this word right here?
26. Jack: Ocean. Out where the matters are made. Maybe, Maybe?
27. Debbie: So is there a word in there that doesn't make sense.
28. Jack: Out where the... this one!
29. Debbie: That's exactly right.
30. Jack: M-E-R
31. Debbie: What could that be?
32. Jack: Matters?
33. Debbie: Out where the matters are maybe? Does that make sense? No.
34. Jack: [shakes head "no"]

Figure 3: (cont.)

35. Debbie: What do you think it could be?
36. Jack: Out where the...
37. Debbie: Let's do part of the word at a time. Like what's that...
38. Jack: Mermaid!
39. Debbie: You got it! So how did you?
40. Jack: Mermaid.
41. Debbie: Now stop and look at me a moment. How did you get that it was mermaid? Like what did you do?
42. Jack: Well, I'm like last time that I read it. It said when they were thinking, going back all the way back to those days... And I'm like hmmm. Mermaids.
43. Debbie: So you're thinking back in your head and then you called the word up.
44. Jack: Yep.
45. Debbie: That is so fun. You know, do you remember when we had our last conference you were learning the words would, could, and should. Do you remember that?
46. Jack: Yes.
47. Debbie: Now did you keep those words in your head? Can you see them in your head?
48. Jack: C-O-U-L-D
49. Debbie: Perfect! Look, you remembered. C-O-U-L-D What about the word would? How do you see that?
50. Jack: W-O-U-L-D
51. Debbie: Listen to you. And what about should?
52. Jack: S-O-U-L-D
53. Debbie: No. (Looks up, closes eyes)
54. Jack: S-U-L-
55. Debbie: Get a picture in your head. No. Close your eyes and look up. Or look up. Should. How do you see it?
56. Jack: S-H
57. Debbie: Yep
58. Jack: -U-L-D
59. Debbie: You're so close. Look. S-H-O-U-L-D. Now look at it again.
60. Jack (reading on page, then closes eyes): S-H-O-U-L-D
61. Debbie: Yep. Okay. Now close your eyes. Do you have it?
62. Jack: S-H-U... O-U-L-D
63. Debbie: Perfect. Okay, let's keep reading. So where are we?

Figure 5: Conferences are Conversations By Debbie Miller

The most important piece of advice I'd give to a new teacher when it comes to conferencing, or someone just launching a readers' workshop is "relax." Think about it as a conversation. Know that in the beginning it may very well feel a bit awkward. But aren't all first conversations?

Think about how you might start a conversation with a friend about her reading. I'm always asking people I know, "So what are you reading now? How is it? What's it about?" I ask, and listen, because I really want to know. I write down titles and jot notes about what they say so I won't forget. When I pose these questions to friends, people I know well, I already know that later, maybe over coffee or lunch, we'll REALLY talk about a particular book—our opinions, how it reflects what we believe, what we noticed about ourselves as readers, how the book changed us. We can do that because we're friends, we've gotten to know and trust each other over time.

In the beginning, conferencing in the classroom sounds much the same. I know we're going to go way beyond these kinds of questions (What are you reading? How is it? What's it about?) in the days ahead, but before that, I'm all about building relationships. I'm all about getting to know kids as individuals. I'm learning about the kinds of things they are interested in, how they see themselves as readers; I'm learning who they are and how they tick and think. I already have their scores from the DRA, but that's just the beginning. There's much more I need to know in order to teach them well. And they are learning about me, too. They're learning that I love to read, and that I'm hoping they will, too. They're learning about the kinds of things I'm interested in and all the kinds of books I'm reading. They're learning that I care about them and that I love being their teacher. And they know right off that I think they are smart. They know we're in this together.

All this pays big dividends down the road. When I end a conference with a challenge (and I almost always do) kids accept. I think they accept because they know I'm not going to ask them to do anything I know they can't do. They understand that what I'm asking them to do will be hard work, but it will never be something that is out of their reach. And they know I'm going to come back and check with them to see how things are going.

I know what I'm asking them to do will not be out of their reach because I've gotten to know them (as readers and people) well. And because I do, I know just how hard I can push, just how much is enough. And because I know about teaching kids to read, I know just where they need to go.

We're building here. We don't start fresh each conference...one builds on another. Just like our relationships/friendships deepen, so do the levels of our conferences.

Figure 6: Tricky Word Card

Tricky Word Card

What do you do when you come to a word you don't know?







	<p>Look at the picture. Think about the story.</p>
	<p>Go back.</p>
	<p>Get your mouth ready. Point and slide under the word.</p>
	<p>Read to the end of the sentence.</p>
	<p>Try a word. Does it make sense? Does it sound like language? Do the letters match?</p>
	<p>Go on.</p>

Figure 7: Sample Questions Debbie Asks During Book Selection Conferences

Are you making some good choices?

Do you know the title?

When you said this would be a good theme book, what made you think that?

Are you doing okay Brendan? Did you find some other *Henry and Mudge* books?

Do you know what kind of books those are?

Do you see any books that look interesting?

Have you read *Dinosaur Days*? What about *Duckling Days*?

Why don't you go back and point and slide with your finger?

So what is that word?

Do you like that [book] better than this one?

So now what do you think about your selection?

Can you think of anything else that you need?

Have you made your choices?

What's up?

Do you know what I'm thinking?

Does that make sense to you?

Is this a good book?

Do you need any help with your other selections?

What did you notice?

What does the label say here?

It looks like it is in medieval times, right?

How can I help? What is going on?

Do you have a topic?

When you are thinking about nonfiction books, what kind of topic are you interested in?

What are you thinking you want?

Why don't you go up to the library, and check if they can help you with *Eyewitness* books?

Do you need some nonfiction books?

What kind of topic are you thinking about?

What do you want to learn about?

What do you have schema for?

Have you ever heard of Picasso?

Do you want to take a look at the books here, or take them back to your seat?

What are you thinking about—what books do you want to keep?

Do you think it [the book] is good for you?

Figure 7: (cont.)

What do you have here?

If these are the books that you have, two fiction and a nonfiction, what kinds of books do you think you need?

Do you remember where the picture books and poetry books are?

What are you thinking? Can you think out loud about how you are sorting these? What are you doing?

What is this pile?

Are these the ones you are putting away? How did you decide? What made you know or understand what you are putting away?

Have you read them all?

Are these books for me? Do I want to read them?

Do you have an idea about these books? What are you thinking about these?

You want to keep these books—is it just because it is just right, or are there other reasons?

The gorilla book is what kind of book? Fiction or nonfiction? What about this book?

What kinds of books do you think you might need now?

What will you do with these books? What will you look for? Books that are what type of text?

Do you remember where you can find those books?

Are you going to teach him how to read that book?

So what do you have now?

You like Rosemary Wells, right?

Do you remember this one by Jonathan London?

What do you think?

You remember it has that same pattern?

What else do you need, taking a look at these?

These are fiction, right? You might need a little bit of nonfiction?

Do you think you'd like that one?

Do you know the book you're going to ask him for?

Do you know what it's about?

You know a lot about this story, right? So have you found the problem yet? What are you thinking?

What have you learned? Since you have been talking about it, what have you learned?

Are you just right here, can you read a little bit?

Is there a kind of animal you would want to learn about?

Do you remember the book—who was reading that crocodile book? Do you know where that book could be?

Now what are you thinking about your selection? Do you think you need something else or do you feel pretty good about that?

Figure 8: Book Selection Lessons and Conferences
By Debbie Miller

Every five or six days, children have the opportunity to select new books. And almost always, all year long, a lesson on book selection comes first. Lessons focus on things like:

- what easy, just right and challenging text means, and how to use what you know about yourself as a reader to make good choices;
- readers read a variety of types of text—fiction, nonfiction and poetry, and they access them in different ways;
- readers read a variety of levels of difficulty, depending on purpose;
- the power of rereading books... for fluency, for comprehension, for turning a just right book into an easy book;
- readers read the same book for different purposes.

Lessons like these and others are repeated throughout the year—learning how to choose books wisely takes time!

Once children have selected their books, they understand that they will be keeping them for a while, probably around five or six days. Sometimes children will need to add books to their selection, but it's not the norm. The norm is we thoughtfully choose a variety of types of text and levels of difficulty so that we can become better readers. We stick with it. We get better by rereading, practicing, getting to know ourselves as readers and teaching others.

Before the lesson, I let children know we are going to choose new books today. I ask them to look carefully at their books and make some decisions. I ask them to think about: Which books do I want to keep? Which books do I want to keep working with? Which books do I want to put away? Which books do I no longer want?

I ask them to make two piles—one pile of books they want to keep, another pile of books they no longer need or want. Then I ask them to put the books they are finished with away.

How do they know where the books go? I've taught them. We don't use dots, or numbers—there's really no thinking there and it doesn't teach the child to think logically about where a book might go. Once the tubs of books are organized and in their places, I don't move them around. If the reptile tub was on the shelf next to the aquarium, that's

Figure 8: (cont.)

where kids could count on that tub of books being, all year long. I also taught kids to take a look at the books in the tub and do some thinking: "Hmmm, it looks like all the books in this tub are Little Bear books, and it says Little Bear on the front of the tub, so this must be where the Little Bear books go!" After we've done some work like this, I might randomly hand out books to kids and ask them to think out loud about where the book goes, and why. And then put it there. Or I'll hold up a book and say, "Everybody point. Where does this book go?" I also tell them that if they can't figure out where a book goes, I don't just put it in any old place. Put it in this tub by my chair, and when we all come together, we figure out where it goes.

After the lesson, children move about the room, making choices. I confer with them all the while, listening, recommending, finding out if they need my help. Once they've selected their books, children begin reading.

Figure 9: Building a Classroom Library for Book Selection
(Excerpt from *Reading with Meaning*)

Once we decide that it's important for children to have a say in the books they read, not only must we teach them to make wise choices, we must also make available high-quality selections that offer a wide variety of levels, topics, and types of text. This probably sounds as if I have a huge collection of books in the classroom. I do. But it hasn't always been that way.

Check out your school and local libraries. They almost always have great children's collections, both for reading and thinking aloud and for independent reading. Get to know librarians—they can be wonderful resources, and they'll often let you check out large numbers of books for long periods of time if they know your purpose. Borrowing books from libraries also lets you try them out first and decide which ones you might want to own or order.

Be choosy. Build your collection slowly. For thinking aloud, look for high-quality literature that is likely to prompt thinking and discussion, has believable, compelling characters, and deals with real childhood issues, especially complex ones. When we believe it's important for children to construct meaning by interacting with the text and developing personal perspectives, we must select books that give them the opportunity to do so. Childhood is not all happy, not all sad, not all good, and not all bad. Don't be afraid to let kids know you know this.

Be choosy about what you select for kids to read independently, too. You don't like Captain Underpants or Scooby Doo? Don't let them invade your classroom! Children should be reading well-written books that promote thinking and have believable, compelling characters who talk the way real people talk and do the things real people do.

Many first graders would give their eyeteeth (if they had them) to read chapter books. I do have a few in the room, but even if the children can read them, I don't encourage them to do so—picture books are often better written and more thought-provoking for young readers. And besides, what's the rush? Children have years and years of chapter books ahead of them.

Beware, too, of the giant boxes of books dropped off in the lounge from the Kiwanis Club's annual book drive. I know they mean well, but do we really want our children learning to read with someone else's old basal readers, Walt Disney's cartoon versions of the classics, pop-up books that no longer pop, or picture books scribbled on by a three-year-old long since grown? Yes, there will be treasures. Just don't get into thinking all books are equal. Just like the outcast computers that come our way, quality really is better than quantity!

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