

## Assisting Struggling Readers

## Struggling readers include

- English Language Learners
- Children from impoverished environments

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It's tempting to "help" struggling readers by giving them assignments that are below grade level...

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...but that just makes them fall farther and farther behind.

It makes more sense to maintain standards, and give struggling readers the means to meet them.

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## You can help struggling readers by

- making primary sources and other challenging reading materials more accessible to them,
- introducing them to academic language and showing them how to use it, and
- using graphic organizers for note-taking and pre-writing.

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## Two reasons that teachers give for not using primary sources are

1. the vocabulary is too difficult, and
2. the documents are too long

for students to read.

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Prepare your students to take on challenging primary sources...

...with a pre-reading vocabulary exercise.

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Select words from the document that

- are difficult to understand,
- are crucial to an understanding of the document, or
- you wish to emphasize for some other reason.

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...list them in a vocabulary pre-reading chart...

Word	Know it	Heard, but don't know it	Never heard it	My guess	Definition
Undertaken					
Solemnly					
Covenant					
Furtherance					
Aforesaid					

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..and have your students work in pairs or small groups to

1. indicate whether they know each word, have heard it (but don't know it), or have never heard it, and
2. make a guess as to what each word means.

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Go over each vocabulary word in class, indicate its meaning, and have students write the definitions in the last column of their pre-reading charts.

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Reduce the size of lengthy documents by "chunking."

Students do not need to read a complete document to gain value and understanding from it.

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## Why chunk?

Struggling readers tend to be overwhelmed by lengthy reading assignments, but gain confidence from short, manageable ones.

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## How to chunk:

Select short passages from the document that both address the Standard you are teaching, and convey its essential meaning or main points.


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## Jigsaw the chunks:

Divide the class into small groups and assign a chunk to each. Have each group “translate” its chunk into contemporary language and share with the whole class.


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## Primary sources aren't the only challenge.


Textbooks present a different type of problem to students.

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Students are taught how to read literature but not expository text. When confronted by the latter, they therefore tend to read it like literature, and fail to grasp much of what the text has to say.

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## Show students how to “pre-read” their textbooks.

Textbooks contain many features that can help students better understand what they read.

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Before starting a new chapter in their textbook, students should read

- the chapter title and subtitle,
- any focus questions at the beginning of the chapter,
- the chapter introduction or first paragraph,
- every boldface subheading,
- each paragraph's topic sentence,
- the chapter summary or last paragraph, and
- any other end-of-chapter material.

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They should also pay attention to

- any typographical aids, and
- any other visual aids.

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Be forewarned: students **hate** to do this! It seems like “extra work.”

But make them do it anyway -- what they gain is worth the fight.

One way to accomplish this is to make it an assignment -- give students a worksheet to complete.

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Textbooks pose a particular challenge to struggling readers because of the “academic language” found in their pages.


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Textbooks, teachers -- and the *Standards* -- use words and phrases that, while basic to academic activity, are unfamiliar to many students, such as “analyze,” “illustrate,” and “summarize.”

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In order to succeed at academic activity, students first must be taught its vocabulary.


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Graphic organizers are another way to help students by

- making tasks seem more do-able,
- emphasizing key points, and
- organizing information and notes.


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Tasks seem more do-able when they are clearly finite.

Struggling students are easily discouraged by seemingly limitless assignments.


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When key points are emphasized, students can focus on what's important.

Struggling students are often overwhelmed or confused by too much information.


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Organized notes and information lead to better written work.

Struggling students frequently do not know how to bring information together in a coherent manner.

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Struggling students can achieve at grade level...

...and you can help reduce their struggles.

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