



A QUICK-START GUIDE FOR EASY ACCESS



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As we set out to write this book, we had one main goal in mind—to help teachers feel confident and intentional in their decision-making process. As former teachers and now literacy consultants, we know firsthand how many decisions a teacher makes in the day. Each part of this book is designed to help you save time and have more of an impact with each choice you make when teaching students to read fiction well. So, here’s the “why” of each chapter so you will understand how we decided to frame things as we did, and can more easily dip in and out of sections with speed and ease.

You know how you ask students to look at a novel’s cover and make some inferences? Well, the first thing we want you to do is see that we asked the designer to make the visuals fun, because working with readers is fun. From cover to cover, use the visuals to feel energized, like you are a superhero with amazing powers of seeing readers.

thin
slice



The Central
Metaphor!

Thin-slicing, the book's metaphor. Yep, think about julienning carrots like a master chef does. That's the decision-making speed of a teacher, all right. You'll read more about it starting on page 4. Look for this icon whenever you want to zoom in on when we are especially doing our decision making.

Chapter 1: Each Classroom Moment Is an Instructional Decision. We explain the theory and practice of decision making when it comes to that essential question, "What do I teach readers tomorrow?" This chapter helps us understand why it is essential to get to know our students' thinking well enough to plan our next teaching steps based on what they need. No matter what reading program or model you use, it is never as effective as basing our instruction on the needs of the students in front of us. In this chapter, we explain

- A decision-making process that streamlines planning while maintaining integrity based on the concept of "thin-slicing"
- Common decision-making styles and habits we might want to shift to be our most effective selves
- Why it is essential to let our students be our guides

Chapter 2: Decisions About Book Selection: Characteristics That Matter Most for Teaching Fiction Readers. In this chapter, we show book covers and summaries of fifteen of our current favorite fiction texts. We also explain the characteristics and qualities to look for when choosing fiction texts, and offer examples of lessons you can use them with. This chapter is make or break in the sense that all the work of the later chapters will be far easier if you fill your classrooms with high-quality literature. That one move alone offers up richer teaching possibilities and more ambitious decisions to make, because in essence we are asking our students to get into the minds of the smartest authors to ponder the very content, inferences, and inquiries they have. In this chapter, you will find

- A list of high-quality and engaging fiction texts
- Characteristics to look for in fiction texts
- Lesson ideas that connect to each text

Chapter 3: Decisions About Reading Notebooks: Teach Readers to Develop Thinking About Fiction. OK, you now have all the students’ favorites and Newbery and Caldecott winners since 1975 in book bins. *Check* ☑.

Your students read them. *Check* ☑. Now, we focus on the first step of the intentional decision-making process. The first step is to get reading notebooks up and running in your classroom, because these dog-eared, backpacking, traveling little books contain probably the richest artifacts of your readers’ thinking. We show you how to use reading notebooks as the main “archaeological dig” location for uncovering the findings about readers so you can then make more informed instructional choices. When students maintain their own reading notebooks, they get in the habit of using writing as a tool for thinking more deeply about their fiction texts. We focus on the what, why, and how of using writing to collect, develop, and revisit thinking with others. We include

- Teaching ideas for helping students see the benefits and choose to write about their fiction reading
- Lessons for helping students collect thinking in notebook entries
- Why we can let go of a few common practices that might not be serving us or our students and what we can focus our attention on that does work

Chapter 4: Decisions About Discussion: Teach Readers to Push Their Thinking About Fiction. On to Step 2! In this chapter, we show you the second way to find information for your intentional decision-making process: what students say about their reading and themselves as readers. We show you how to use student conversations about fiction reading as a frequent forum for “listening for the learning.” We share how to teach students to use conversations as a way of deepening their understanding. We include

- Key lessons for teaching students how to develop conversations that stay on topic and help with understanding
- What to look for in student conversations
- How to create classroom environments where students are willing and able to have text-based conversations about their thinking

Notice we don’t have you running in twenty directions trying to assess your readers, just these two places: reading notebooks and reading conversations.

Chapter 5: Decisions About Understanding Characters: Teach Readers to Empathize With Others. In this chapter and the next, we focus on just two facets of teaching fiction and making instructional decisions about how readers are progressing with them—understanding characters and interpreting themes. Yep, two, not two hundred. Because frankly, we get overwhelmed with

hundreds of choices like you do. And more to the point, we believe that virtually every reading skill is naturally embedded in understanding characters and interpreting themes.

Step 3 involves identifying the current types of thinking students are doing, and we've included easy-to-use clipboard notes that show you what to look for. Step 4 occurs when you decide what to teach next from three main options—yes, only three options. We show you how to help students understand characters within and across fiction texts. This section is full of assessment and instructional ideas that will help you get clear on what exactly understanding characters entails so you can teach it to your students. We offer an array of practical tools and resources for quickly looking at students' notebook entries and listening to their conversations so you can thin-slice and name the type of thinking they are using. Then we show you how to quickly decide what to teach next. We teach you how to

- Clearly explain thinking about characters to students with concrete activities and examples
- Show students how to create notebook entries that help them understand characters
- Identify the three types of character thinking in your students' work (Right-Now Thinking, Over-Time Thinking, and Refining Thinking)
- Thin-slice student entries and conversations in order to decide what to teach next
- Recognize the three main teaching choices you can make
- Apply our framework for making quick yet effective instructional decisions

Chapter 6: Decisions About Interpreting Themes: Teach Readers to Discover Life Lessons. This chapter also focuses on Steps 3 and 4 of the intentional decision-making process. We show you how to help students interpret themes. We define what we mean by themes and how our understanding of a book is formed around them. Since this is often a complicated concept to teach students, we offer several key lessons to teach with notebook and conversation examples so you can get started right away with your students. After describing the key lessons, we show you the three most common types of thinking about themes—frames, patterns, and lessons learned—and how to identify what your students are doing. In this chapter, we teach you to

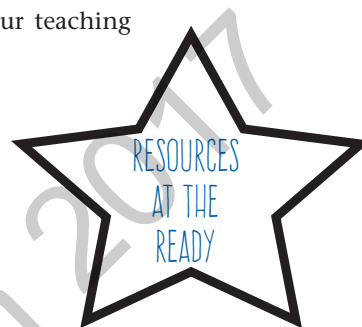
- Define and introduce interpreting themes to students
- Show students notebook entries that can help with interpreting themes

- Identify the three most common ways to think about themes (frames, patterns, and lessons learned) in student entries and conversations
- Apply the thin-slicing and decision-making framework to decide what to teach students next about themes in fiction reading

Chapter 7: Becoming Confident and Intentional Decision Makers. In the final chapter, we offer guidance in becoming confident in your teaching decisions. We help you self-assess what your current decision-making model is and help you choose what to do next.

In the **Appendices**, we offer some of the resources listed throughout the book in an easy-to-reference place. Some of these resources include

- Lists of our favorite fiction texts
- Clipboard notes you can use with your students



We included a few recurring features in this book to help with your decision-making process. These features include:

- **Teacher Tip Boxes:** to get a bit more guidance
- **Intentional Moment and Your Turn Boxes:** to help you reflect on your current practices
- **Self-Reflection Questionnaires:** to help you build on strengths and set goals
- **Clipboard Notes:** assessment tools you can use right away
- **Video Link Boxes:** to step into the classrooms with us and see the lessons in action

While you can absolutely read this book in the order in which we wrote it, you can also focus on one part at a time. If you know right away you want to work on your students' conversations, you can begin with Chapter 4; or if you know your students need more help with characters, you can begin with Chapter 5. No matter where you start, we hope you leave each reading session with an answer to the question "What do I teach tomorrow?" We have so many examples of student notebook entries and conversations, and more lessons that just did not fit in this book, so we invite you to visit our website gravityandrenece.com to find updated and expanded resources.