

I have just completed all of this with this year's class. I have REALLY been using inferring MUCH MORE now along the way so that I can actually focus on it after the questioning study with them having heard me doing it and us having done some informal inferring as a class.

When I teach the questioning strategy I start by modeling with several picture books saying, "I wonder.....?" I just stop at crucial points (before, during, and after) and ask "I wonders". I have the students just observe what they see me doing and what they hear me saying. I make it obvious that I am stopping to ponder my "I wonders" by either putting down the book or looking up. I do NOT attempt to answer questions during this modeling (explicit teaching) time. Then after several days of this, I ask the kids to join me in sharing what THEY are wondering about. I read a picture book and stop often and ask if anyone has something they are wondering about. We do it verbally for a few days with different texts.

Then I made up a form that is divided into three sections: Before Reading I Wonders, During Reading I Wonders, and After Reading I Wonders. I read a picture book and then stop periodically and have them write what they are wondering about. I REALLY have to remember FOR MYSELF to have them do I wonders BEFORE I start the book. Then we might share a few of them whole group as we go.

Next I read a text and record ALL of their I wonders on the overhead. We actually can fill 2 overhead transparencies with all of our questions. I SAVE this overhead for later use.

Then I put a short piece on the overhead, often a poem or a "lifting" of a longer book, and we read it together for SHARED. I might have them write or do a pair share for their I wonders with this.

Because third graders often don't write "deep" questions, I introduce THICK and THIN questions ("I wonders"). I tell them if I can CLAP the answer (which would be a very literal short answer like a character's name, or the setting, or the color of something in the text, etc) then that is a THIN question. I talk about while thin questions are important, they do not lend themselves to much discussion and do not deepen the understanding of the story. So we are looking for THICK questions. After explicitly teaching this (think alouds/modeling) I put up 2 pieces of chart paper with THICK at the top on one and THIN at the top on the other. When we move to doing post its for our own text (at first I give them all a copy of the SAME piece to write their "I wonders" on post its) we gather back together whole group and look closely at the "I wonders". THIN ones get put up on the THIN chart paper and THICK ones get put up on the THICK chart paper. At first you will probably have more THIN questions. I actually literally CLAP the answers if they are THIN questions for the kids to see the difference. For THICK "I wonders" I swirl my hand dramatically all around in the air showing how it would probably take me longer to get to the answer and then I hold my hand out

like I am supporting something heavy because our thick questions have to be held up because the "talk" about the question would be more deep. (but at this point we are still NOT answering them yet!!).

I send them off to practice writing "I wonders" for quite a while on their independent reading books. I pull together small groups to fine tune those who might need more instruction. Always checking back on their use of "thick" or "thin" questions. Reteaching or modeling more if needed.

The next step for us was to decide if their "I wonders" were answered in the text or not. Just that simple. I had saved the overheads of "I wonder" questions from a picture book I did with them earlier in our study. I purposely didn't wash off the questions so I could revisit them for this stage of the study. We went back over the "I wonders" and discussed as a class if each one was answered in the text or unanswered. I wrote an A for answered next to the question or an Un for unanswered. I would go back to the text to "prove" where the answer was found. We informally would infer if an unanswered question lent itself to inferring.

What seemed difficult for my students was the difference between a question that was answered NO versus it being unanswered. I had to do a lot of work on that. Explaining that a particular question WAS answered in the book because the answer was NO. For instance, if someone had asked, "I wonder if the dog drowns in the ocean?" Well, as we read on, we learned the dog did NOT drown in the ocean. So THAT question is ANSWERED with NO, the dog was just missing but later was found. It did not drown in the ocean. I think they are getting it more now after many times of clarifying that.

The next day I gave them all a basal anthology book. I read the story aloud while they followed along. At the cover page I had them write before reading "I wonders" on post its and stick them on. Then we turned the page. This story was nice because one side of the open faced book was an illustration and the other side was all text. So before I read the text each time we turned the page, I had them write an "I wonder" post its (or two or three depending on them) for each illustration and stick them on. Then I read just THAT text page. I stopped and had them write a couple "I wonder" post its and stick them on before we turned the page. We continued through this until the story ended. Then at the end, we wrote after reading "I wonders". This took about two days.

After we were finished with the story (finally!!) I tried something new this year. I have round tables in my room with four students at each table. I gave them each a number from 1-4. I gave each table a sheet of paper with a two column table with A and Un at the top divided by a line. I modeled how person number 1 at each table was going to go first and share their before reading "I wonders" one at a time with the table group deciding together if the question was answered in the text or not. If it was, they were to discuss the answer and find the proof back in the text. Then they were to stick the post it ON THE BOTTOM of the appropriate column. (so the next post its would be added above, they stick on that way in more order) In the A column for the questions that were answered/proven, and in the Un column

for the questions that were unanswered. Then person number 2 would do his/her before reading "I wonders" and so on until all four had done just the before reading questions. Then they were to start back with person number 1 doing their "I wonders" from JUST THE NEXT PAGE, then all the others at the table sharing/deciding about their "I wonders" from THAT page. Then on to the next PAGE. In a systematic order. Taking time to process each "I wonder."

What was so exciting to me is that because we had been casually doing inferring as we went through our Unanswered "I wonders" I was hearing my students saying, "Well, that is unanswered, but you can infer that ....." It was naturally evolving. My assistant and I walked around and listened in on their conversations and they were REALLY discussing the story. There was some disputing going on as well. It was REAL talk about the story. We are not finished with this activity and will continue it this week. I liked it better than doing it whole group. More students were actively participating. All were engaged.

For me this naturally evolved into the Inferencing strategy study.

When my kids started writing/sharing their "I wonders" it was AMAZING how insightful and deep their questions were. Eventually I tried to show them that if they just took off the first two words "I wonder", there was a plain old question there. But for some of my kids they never moved there. I LOVE using "I wonder.....?" to get the questioning going! I found it very safe and nonthreatening to my kids. They didn't have to get all caught up in worrying if their question was a "good enough" one or not. It seemed to give them permission to just WONDER!!!

For inferencing I got out the overheads I had saved from above and used for Answered or Unanswered teaching. I made a chart paper for all three now. A for answered in the text, Un for unanswered, and I for inferred. We revisited that story and talk more specifically about inferring. I had a hard time teaching the difference between predicting or inferring at first but in my own simple way (with help from my co teacher, Jan) I found a way to explain it. You make a prediction after reading to a stopping point and thinking about what will come NEXT based on prior reading. You make an inference (and this is in VERY simple terms) after reading to a stopping point and thinking BACK ON WHAT YOU ALREADY READ to determine meaning that is unspoken. What the author is trying to say or meaning to say there. We took our "I wonders" and those that were Un (unanswered) we talked together if we could "infer" an answer. And brought in our collective schemas to make our decisions. The discussions were great.

The book "Charlie Anderson" is a great one for this. From that point on after we had done several picture books together in a shared setting coding our "I wonders" with A, Un, and I I sent them off to practice on a whole group text and then brought them back together to share and stick up their post its on the chart papers. When I thought they were grasping the differences I had them post it on their own self selected texts. Then meet with 2 or 3 peers and share their coded post its.

I love these two strategy studies and I see them melding together into one. I know Debbie Miller teaches inferring BEFORE questioning but this year I started modeling making informal inferences MYSELF from the beginning of the year during my read alouds and I see myself doing these studies in a row. Hand in hand. But taking it slowly. (I'm probably the queen of deep and slow!) Which works against me in my district where we have a local assessment piece that almost requires cramming all the strategy teaching in early and fast.

Ginger  
grade 3