



# Show It, Say It

## *Hand Motions and Strategy Starters to Scaffold the Language of Comprehension*

*“Our discussions improved when we used the hand motions”*

—fourth-grade student

Many of our students struggle with using the comprehension strategies on their own as they read. Teachers frequently ask, “How will I know whether my students are internalizing the strategies and using them when they read independently? How can I help students transfer the learning and really use the strategies without my prompting?”

This chapter addresses two unique and active ways to further scaffold and support students in their use of comprehension strategies: hand motions or gestures, and strategy starters to prompt the language of the strategies. The two work together something like this. While I read aloud to fourth graders *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis (1978), students raise their hands and make the gesture for connections any time they wish to indicate they’ve

connected to the book in some way. Jaime makes the gesture, and I pause and ask him to share his connection. He shares that the story reminds him of a game he played with his cousins in their backyard. I ask students to turn and talk to a partner and share a connection by using the hand motion and the starter, “This reminds me of . . .” The room buzzes with discussion. The students continue reading, independently marking the text with sticky notes on the spots where they made connections. The hand motions and strategy starters helped scaffold the use of the strategy for all the students, especially the struggling readers and the many English learners in this classroom.

Down the hall in first grade, Miss Jenson, reads from a nonfiction big book about an octopus and encourages students to make the hand motions for a DVD or remote control to clarify throughout the reading. (See photo, pages 76–77.) When students put their arms up parallel in the air like a pause button, it means they want to stop to clarify something in the text! When they push a pretend rewind button in the air, it means they are rereading to clarify. Throughout the reading, students take turns making the clarify gestures when they wish to clarify a word, point, or illustration. Miss Jenson stops and asks the students what they wish to clarify. Clarissa says she doesn’t understand why the octopus’s mouth is located in the middle of his body. Miss Jenson clarifies by modeling in a think-aloud. She uses the strategy starter, “I don’t get the part where they explain why the octopus’s mouth is located in the middle of its body, so I studied the illustration, reread the text, and thought about it. It makes sense to have your mouth in the middle if you have eight arms; then you can reach your mouth with any arm.” Miss Jenson asks students to turn to partners and fill in the frame, “I didn’t get the part where . . . so I [*reread, read on, studied the illustrations, etc.*].” She assists pairs that need help identifying points to clarify from the text. The students end the lesson by summarizing what they learned. Brandon offers, “Using the DVD remote to clarify helps us stop and think about what makes sense and decide if we need to rewind and reread or not.” Julia raises her hand to say, “This was fun!”

## Kinesthetic Learning Is Effective, Research-Based

When we couple effective scaffolded instruction, complete with modeling and guided practice, with kinesthetic motions, students become more engaged and they retain more (Paivio, 1991). Researchers report that “passive experiences tend to have little lasting impact” (Gardner, 1999). They’ve also found that kinesthetic motions are effective tools for helping students create mental representations for abstract concepts (Collins, 2005). There is also solid evidence to indicate that increasingly numbers of students are becoming kinesthetic learners (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006). Perhaps

you've even seen some of the promising findings on teaching babies sign language before they can talk. One study found that the babies who were taught signals or hand motions as infants had higher IQs at age 8 (Acredolo & Goodwyn, 2000). The use of gestures or hand motions to represent abstract ideas with children of all ages is an exciting area of research.

Teachers have known instinctively that gestures are an effective way to remember vocabulary or even phonics. For many years primary teachers have used various phonics programs that incorporate sign language or gestures for letters or phonemes and sounds (e.g., *Zoo Phonics*). Students might attach an animal and a "noise" and even a hand gesture to each sound they learn. Vocabulary is also easier to recall if students associate a gesture with new words. I've visited



*Girls making "glasses" over their eyes*

many classrooms, both primary and intermediate, where teachers ask students to make up motions to go with vocabulary words. The natural follow-up game is often charades, where students make a motion and others guess the word. When my own children study for their weekly vocabulary tests at home, we make up hand motions for each of the words. Even my eighth grader begs me to help her study by making up motions for challenging middle school words like "ostentatious" to assist her in remembering a long list of words and their definitions. We laugh when she explains that she visualizes herself making the motions during the test while trying to sit still in her seat. In the classroom, we use the same technique, and students remember vocabulary when they attach hand motions to keywords.

## Using Gestures Throughout Lessons to Build Metacognition and Independence

Researchers have found that using hand motions to represent comprehension processes such as finding the main idea, clarifying, inferring, and making predictions yielded especially strong results in grades K–3 (Block, Parris, Whiteley, 2008). I have discovered that hand motions provide a way to make learning more concrete for all elementary students, but especially English learners. Many of the Title I schools I work with use the hand motions as a way of also reaching struggling readers. When I

teach hand motions to go with the strategies, I notice that the struggling readers are the first to catch on and use them effectively. When we play “Guess My Strategy,” I think aloud and ask students to show me which strategy I am using. I might say, “I am rereading to figure out the important points so I can tell what this is about.” The students then show with hand signals their guess for the strategy I am using (in this case, the signal for summarizing). Almost without fail the struggling readers “win” and are the first ones to demonstrate the correct hand motion. Incorporating hand gestures into effective think-aloud lessons is a great way to make comprehension more concrete for all of your students. In this chapter, you’ll find a set of hand motions for each strategy and a list of handy sentence frames or strategy starters.

## Introducing Your Students to the Hand Motions or Gestures

The purpose of using the hand motions is to cue the strategies; that is, when students see the hand motion, they will recall what the strategy is, why and when we employ it, and how to use it when reading. Be sure to tell students up front that the purpose of the hand motion is to remind them of the strategy and how it helps them understand what they read. The following chart suggests ways you might use the hand motions during think-aloud lessons.

### *Hand Motions for Each Strategy*

Notice that each hand motion is based on a prop from the characters in Chapter 3, pages 68–69. Even if you don’t use the characters, you can teach students the hand motions. You will need to explain why that motion fits the strategy. For example, during a lesson on questioning, tell students that their fist can become a pretend microphone as they ask questions while reading. Also, if for some reason you don’t wish to use these exact gestures to represent the strategies, feel free to come up with your own associations.



#### **Connect**

Make two joining “rings” by forming a circle with the thumb and index finger of each hand and then hooking them together. One ring represents you and the other your connection to your own life, another book, or the world.

## Using Hand Motions During Interactive Think-Aloud Lessons

### Share the objective

Tell students which strategy you are teaching and how it helps them when they read. Show them the hand motion that accompanies the strategy and tell them why that motion goes with the strategy: "Today we are going to learn about [name of strategy] and how it helps us [give purpose of the strategy] when we read. The hand motion we are using today for [name of strategy] is [show the hand motion for that strategy]." Tell students how the strategy relates to the hand motion; for example, explain why you are forming a microphone with your hand for questioning.

### Interactive think-aloud

While conducting your think-aloud example using the text, demonstrate the hand motion. Invite students to join you in the hand motion as a nonverbal interactive response during the lesson. For example, "Watch me as I show you how to [use a particular strategy]. Here are the steps for using the strategy as I read. First I [demonstrate steps using examples from the text]."

### Supported interactive guided practice

As students hunt for examples in the text and employ the strategy under study, encourage them to use the hand motion with their partners and table groups. When groups share their findings from the text, they demonstrate using the hand motion.

### Independent practice

During independent reading as you confer with students, invite them to make the hand motions to signal when they are using the strategies. During a read-aloud in class, or when the class is reading something together, allow students to raise their hands and show the motions for the strategies. Stop the lesson to discuss. For example, a student makes the sign for clarify, so you stop the lesson and ask that student to explain what he needs to clarify. During literature circle discussions, students can share their thoughts about the reading by using the hand signals.

### Wrap up

Select volunteers to lead the class in the hand motion under study and to summarize how to use it and how it helps us as we read.

### Predict

For a fortune-teller, move one hand around a pretend crystal ball and then the other. As you move your hands over the ball, talk about your personal clues and the text clues and how those help you make predictions.





*(Predict)* For a weightlifter, form a fist with one hand and pretend to lift a weight as you bend your arm. Then do the same with your other hand and arm. Talk about both text clues and personal clues as you lift each arm.

### Question

Make a fist to use as a pretend microphone as you make up questions to go with the text.



### Monitor and Clarify

For monitor and clarify, it is helpful to use multiple hand signals to assist students in understanding this essential strategy that is the hallmark of a good reader (Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991).

Form circles with your index fingers and thumbs and then place over your eyes for “glasses” that help you clarify ideas and words and visualize as you read.

Bend your arms at the elbows and hold them up to form two parallel lines like that of a DVD pause button. Tell students that when they clarify, it is like pushing a pause button for a moment to think and problem-solve before reading on.

Point to the DVD rewind to indicate rereading a text and to the fast-forward button to show that you are skimming and scanning and reading ahead.



*Boy making DVD pause sign*

*(Monitor and Clarify) Student making DVD rewind and fast forward signs*



### **Infer**

First make a “book” with your hands by holding them palms up and together. You can refer to one hand as the picture clues and the other the text clues. Then move your hands to your heart for “feeling” clues to indicate that inferring involves “the book clues plus me [my own experience and knowledge].”



### **Summarize**

Pretend to twirl a lasso above your head as you sum up the main ideas in a text and put them in order for a super summary.





### **Synthesize**

Pretend to be a chef cooking up a synthesis. Use one hand to hold a spoon and “stir” and the other hand to shake into the pot your connections, opinions, and feelings about a text.

### **Evaluate**

Make a fist and use it as a pretend judge’s gavel as you judge the text and share your “because” list of reasons.



## *Improving Comprehension With Student-Generated Hand Motions/Gestures*

Besides the gestures you see here for each strategy, you can also use nonverbal cues in many other creative ways. Allow the students to help you be creative and come up with their own unique hand motions.

### **Graphic Organizers in the Air**

When students skim and scan a text and preview the illustrations, I like to have them think about how a text is organized. Then the students “sketch” the possible graphic organizer that might go with that text. See the lesson “What’s My Organizer?” on page 102. We air-sketch the organizers from the bookmark.

### **Student-Generated Hand Motions for Vocabulary**

Encourage teams of students to come up with hand motions for vocabulary and even spelling words. String together a series of hand motions to represent the words in a summary. (See lesson on using hand motions in a summary, page 123.)



# Strategy Starters to Cue the Strategies

Strategy starters provide your students with just the right amount of support for prompting rich discussions about reading. When you make them available to your students in the form of either classroom posters (see page 80) or a personal reference tool, such as a bookmark (see page 82), students learn to internalize the language of the strategies. I find that when we use these starters students are rarely at a loss for comments to offer in the discussion. These “thinking stems” (McGregor, 2007) help our students mine their ideas, express them articulately, and promote richer dialogue among children. If we first model the strategy starters in our think-alouds, then we can encourage students to rely on them in literature discussions with peers. Our English learners and struggling readers especially appreciate the structure these stems offer. Notice how students internalize the strategies and use them on their own in the two examples that follow.

Miss Sanchez’s first graders work in pairs and pause to summarize and predict their way through this week’s story, *Stone Soup* (Brown, 2005). Each time the pairs stop reading to discuss the story, they refer to their bookmarks (see page 82) or the classroom posters with the strategy starters listed (see sample posters, page 80). Marcos and Julianna take turns using the frames. “So far . . .” and “Next, I think [prediction] will happen because [evidence from text].” Miss Sanchez uses these strategy starters in her think-alouds and in whole-group and guided-reading lessons, so the students are comfortable sharing their thinking using the familiar prompts.

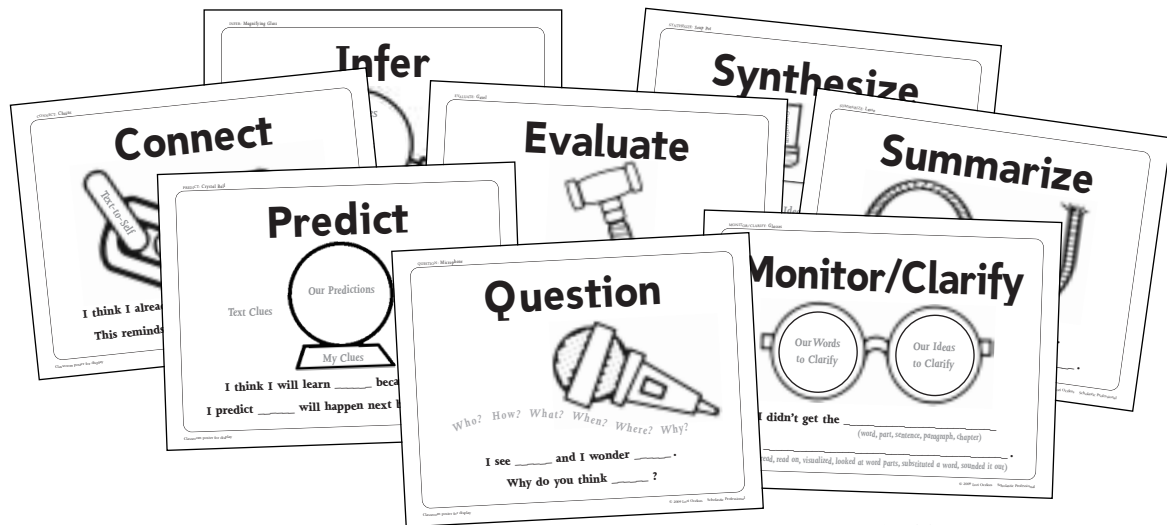
We use the same strategy starters in intermediate grades. As sixth-grade students make their way through the chapters of *The Hundred Dresses* (Estes, 2004) in their literature circles, they refer often to their bookmarks to guide their discussions. Today they are focusing on using the starters for inferring character traits and feelings and have marked their texts with sticky notes so they will have examples to share. Shindra says, “I think Maddie felt really uncomfortable teasing Wanda because the text said she wished everything could be the way it was before they’d started making fun of her. Any time I’ve been around a kid who was bullying someone else, I’ve felt awful, too.” Her group discusses times when they’ve felt bad about not being kind to others but also feeling peer pressure to not stand up for the child being bullied. They try discussing the book using another strategy starter on the inferring chart, “I can tell that . . . because . . .” The strategy starters ensure that the students stay engaged and the discussion keeps moving along.

## Ways to Share Strategy Starters

Below I’ve included a bookmark with icons and strategy starters as well as some sample posters to make for your classroom. I have the students illustrate the posters

for our class with the graphic organizers found on pages 59–60, and I add the starters we are using. This list of starters is just that—a start. As you and your students work through the strategies, you may discover starters of your own. Enjoy the rich discussions that go hand in hand with using these.

As you use the strategy starters in your lessons, begin by introducing them one at a time during a think-aloud. Then invite students to repeat the starter, then turn to a partner and try it on their own. Also use the starters in small-group lessons. Students may use the starters to write responses in their reading journals as well.



Reproducible posters

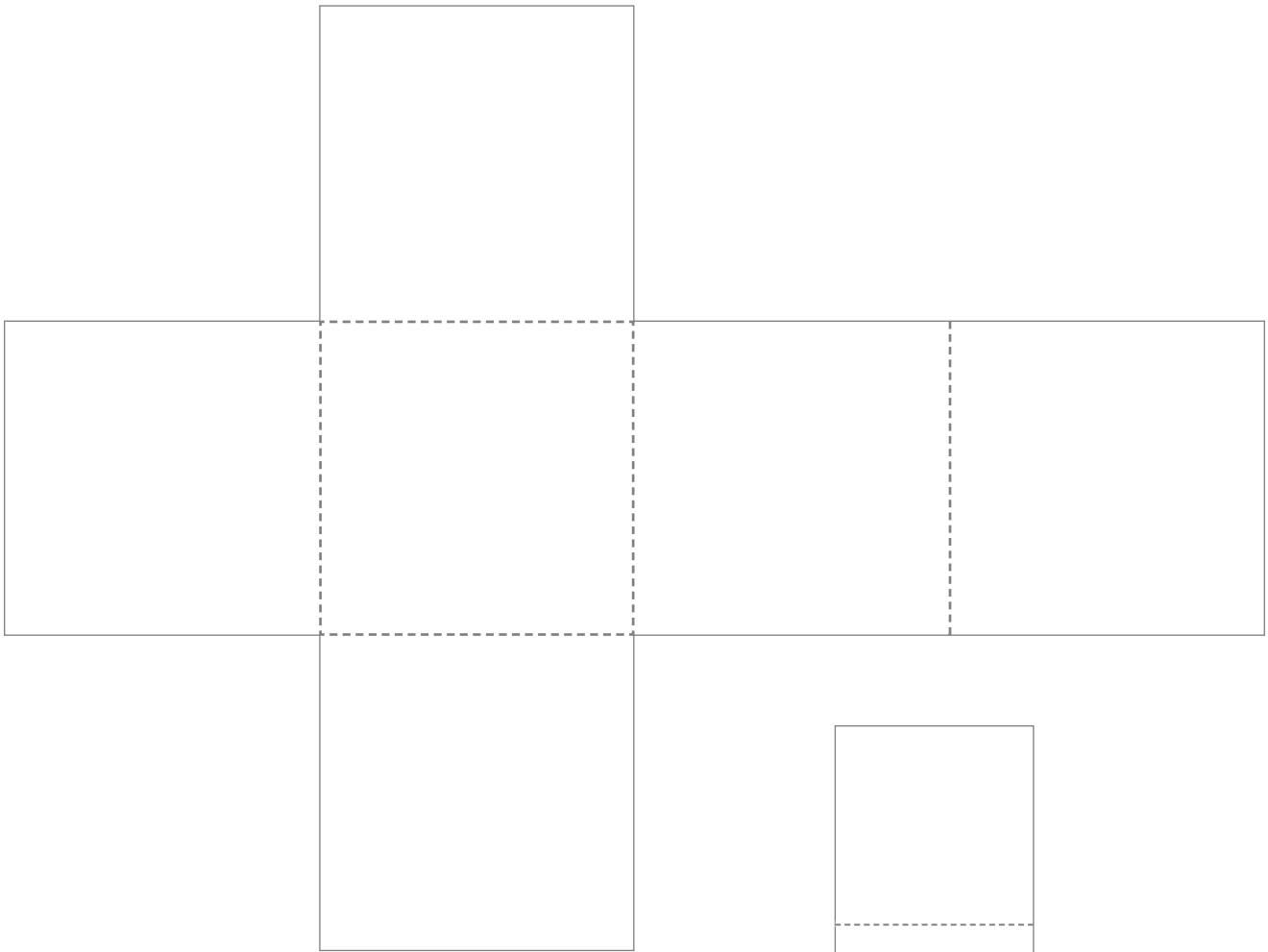
## Cube It!

Use the blank cube reproducible on page 81 and have students select their own strategy starters to write on the cube. After assembling it, they roll the cube and use the starters to discuss the reading with partners and cooperative groups.

## Reflection Questions for Staff Development or Self-Study

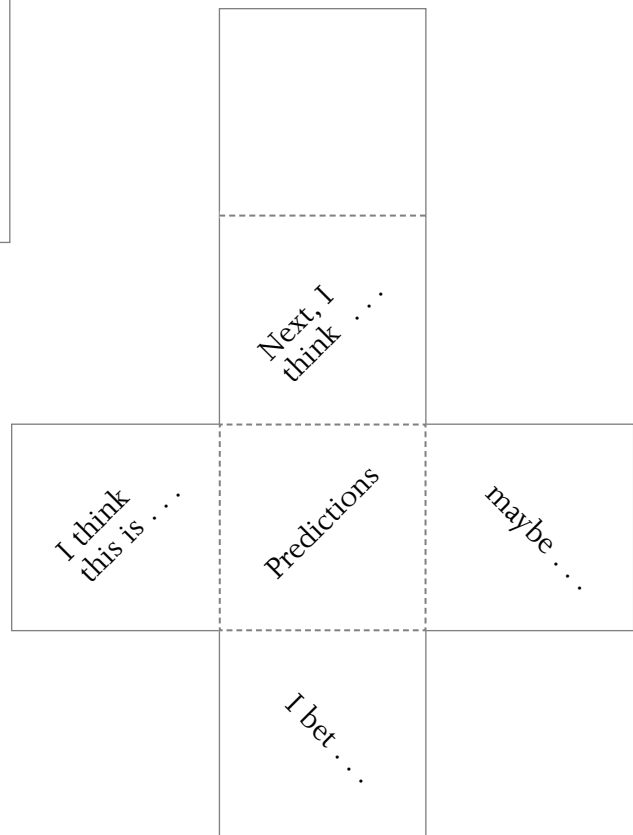
1. Discuss why kinesthetic learning experiences are effective.
2. Review the hand motions for each strategy. How can you use these to promote metacognition and independence when your students read?
3. How can you use the strategy starters to promote deeper comprehension? Which ones are your favorites, and why?
4. Post the strategies and strategy starters in your classroom and encourage students to use them in discussions and partner work. Share your experience with students.

# Strategy Starter Cube



## Instructions for blank strategy cube:

1. Either the teacher or students select strategy starters to write on the cube.
2. Use strategy starters suggested in Chapter 4. Select one strategy for all sides of the box or write a different strategy on each side (as pictured at right).
3. Students roll cubes with partners as they read to guide strategy.







# Live Action

## *Using Drama and Music to Support the Strategies*

*“Just reading a book doesn’t always make things stay in your head, but when you do a skit or make up a song verse, you remember the book.”*

—Rebecca, fourth grader

Drama and music provide hands-on experiences that make learning memorable and enjoyable. Perhaps you recall a class from your childhood or even high school or college that you enjoyed because the instructor assigned some sort of creative response using drama or music to demonstrate your understanding of the content. Maybe you acted out parts of Shakespearean plays, conducted a silly fashion show in Spanish or French class, sang songs in science, or made up skits to go with your history lessons. Although I’ve enrolled in many graduate courses in my tenure as a teacher, one class stands out as a fond memory even though I took it many years ago. The professors required us to work in groups to make up skits, songs, and poems to perform at the end of the course. Luckily one of the teachers in my group brought his