Traffic Light Reading

Proficient readers intentionally use strategies to support comprehension, especially when reading challenging text (Pressley, 2000). The following strategy, traffic light reading (Marcell, 2007), helps students monitor their strategy use and comprehension. Traffic light reading focuses students' attention *and* intention to use four common comprehension strategies—
(1) predicting, (2) visualizing, (3) connecting, and (4) questioning (Pressley, 2000)—as they read challenging text. The traffic light image helps students think metacognitively about appropriate before-, during-, and after-reading strategies. Independent metacognitive behaviors are an important element of comprehension strategy instruction, including knowing *when* and *why* to use specific strategies with specific text types (Baker, 2002; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000).

Monitoring comprehension before, during, and after reading is an important skill for students to learn. Traffic light reading serves as a visible and interactive way to focus students' attention on predicting, visualizing, connecting, and questioning as they read challenging text (Pressley, 2000).

Strategy: Traffic Light Reading
Pillar: Comprehension

Grade Level:

☐ K
☐ 1
☑ 2
☑ 3
☑ 4
☑ 5
☑ 6

Instructional Grouping:

☑ Whole Group
☐ Small Group
☐ Individual

Materials:
- Baseball hat, visor, hard hat, map
- Traffic light visual (drawing or photo)

Consider This:
- As with many strategies, traffic light reading is something you will reinforce over time, modeling during-reading strategies in a variety of texts along the way.

What is it? Traffic light reading is an interactive tool that helps students determine comprehension strategies they can use before, during, and after reading text, especially challenging text.

Why is it important? Imagery and visual connections help make learning *sticky*, in the words of Robert J. Marzano (2009). The traffic light reading strategy provides imagery and analogies to connect during-reading strategies to navigating before, during, and after "road trips" (reading).

What works in the classroom?

Sometimes fluent readers continue to have poor comprehension skills. In other words, they're good decoders but poor comprehenders. This strategy focuses their attention on during-reading strategies to slow down their reading when necessary and focus on meaning.

- **Reading varied texts:** Begin by having a conversation with students about all the reasons we read and how we navigate reading different types of material. Use the hats analogy to talk about the tasks required for reading varied text types. Use this as the initial lesson, along with modeling comprehension strategies and reinforcing them consistently.
  - **Hats analogy:** Have on hand a baseball cap labeled "Read for Fun," a plastic hard hat labeled "Read to Learn," and a visor labeled "Read for Information."
  - **Reading materials:** Display reading materials of varied types, such as maps, trade books, magazines, and so on. Put on one of the hats and then have students make predictions about the type of reading you will be doing and the strategies you will use, such as skimming, slowing down, noting vocabulary, and so on. Repeat with each of the hats.

- **Reading strategies:** Have a conversation about how reading is like driving. We plan by setting a purpose for the trip and following a road map or navigation system. This corresponds to before reading, where we set a purpose for reading. Then, as we drive, we follow the signals and signs along the way that help us navigate driving. This corresponds to during reading. After we arrive, sometimes we think about whether there was a better route we could have followed. This corresponds to after reading. Use the traffic light analogy for highlighting reading strategies.

- **Traffic light analogy:** Use a traffic light visual to highlight the comprehension strategies used for varied reading purposes and different text types. I've listed a few examples below. You'll add more to them.

  - **Before reading—red light:** STOP to think about what you know about the topic (background knowledge). STOP to set a purpose for reading.

  - **During reading—yellow light:** SLOW DOWN when you read a word you don't know. SLOW DOWN when you read a sentence or paragraph that doesn't make sense.

  - **After reading—green light:** GO and think about what you just read. What did you learn? Can you write or talk about the main ideas? Could you have used different reading strategies while you read?
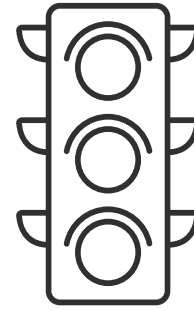
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