

**Focus Project:**

**Clearing Up Confusion While Reading**

In my second grade classroom my students come to me with some wonderful reading strategies already in place, especially with regards to phonics and phonological awareness. As beginning readers, they are very aware of reading accurately. However, what I find in second grade is that they are so focused on reading accurately that they often forget to take time and think about what they are reading and check to see if they even understand the text. I find that my students are not very strong at checking and monitoring their own understanding when they read independently. I found that as a newer teacher I also had some trouble finding ways to address this with students and help them ask themselves questions as they read. Therefore, I will be focusing on the comprehension component of reading, specifically, strategies to clear up confusion. My school district is moving towards a reading workshop model and as it begins I am beginning to understand and become more comfortable with the mini-lesson structure. Therefore, I am combining these two areas for myself; writing focused mini-lessons that focus on teaching students how to self-monitor and help themselves along when they become confused. It is my hope that giving them the skills to really think about the text as they read independently will greatly help in their comprehension of texts. I will be using the following question to help guide my work: Why is it important for students to have strategies in place to help them along when they are reading and become confused and how does a teacher teach those strategies to students through a series of mini-lessons within a reading workshop format?

As an early elementary school teacher, I know the importance and value of explicit and direct teaching, especially in the area of reading comprehension. In order for students in my

classroom to apply the comprehension strategies that we as adults use to make sense of text, I need to be clear and direct and give them ample opportunities to apply these strategies. “Studies cited in the National Reading Panel report...provide substantial evidence that explicit comprehension instruction improves students’ understanding of texts they read in school” (Harvey & Daniels, 2009, p. 25). Further, in an article by Duke, et al, they comment that good readers “monitor their understanding of the text, making adjustments in their reading as necessary” (Duke, et al, 2011, p.4). They go on to explain the importance of monitoring, clarifying, and fixing-up as strategies worth teaching to improve reading comprehension (Duke, et al, 2011, p.8). As a way to teach this they recommend a gradual release of responsibility model, where a teacher would begin with “*an explicit description of the strategy and when and how it should be used, a teacher and/or student modeling of the strategy in action, collaborative use of the strategy in action, guided practice using the strategy with gradual release of responsibility, and independent use of the strategy*” (Duke, et al, 2011, p. 8/9). I find these beliefs and recommendations to be extremely helpful in my planning of mini-lessons in how to teach my second grade students how to clarify while reading, an important comprehension strategy that all good readers use in order to make meaning out of texts. Therefore, I will use the gradual release of responsibility model as a framework for my mini-lessons that follow.

In addition, other various texts show the importance of explicitly teaching the comprehension strategy of making some meaning from text through the use of clarifying questions. Harvey and Daniels make mention in their text *Comprehension and Collaboration: Inquiry Circles in Action*. They explain, “...we deploy a very specific repertoire of thinking strategies that we have developed over years of experiences with reading and texts. We monitor

our comprehension and make adjustments and ask questions...” (Harvey & Daniels, 2009, p.21). If we as adult readers do not just “...randomly flail at text when our comprehension breaks down, hoping to shake out some meaning” then neither should students. I need to give them the tools to clarify text when it is not making sense to them in a clear and direct way, helping them understand how and why it is important to clarify meaning while reading independently. Harvey and Daniels go on further by discussing how proficient learners think as they read and monitor their comprehension. “We notice when the text makes sense and when it doesn’t. When meaning breaks down, we stop and refocus our thinking to repair meaning” (Harvey & Daniels, 2009, p.22). Often I find with my students that as they read more challenging texts where decoding is no longer the primary skill being used, they forget that reading is supposed to make sense. My second graders are too often moving right past pages and chapters without understanding what they are reading. They do not take the time to stop and think about the text and if it makes sense. I need to teach them this skill so that they do not get frustrated with texts and trying to construct meaning from them.

As mentioned, to follow will be three mini-lessons, using the gradual release of responsibility framework, to teach students how to clarify texts when they are confused during reading in an attempt to also begin to use reading workshop as a means to teach reading comprehension skills. This method of teaching is suggested in McKenna & Stahl’s *Assessment for Reading Instruction*. “Effective strategy instruction also utilizes a gradual release of responsibility instructional model” (McKenna & Stahl, 2009, p. 174). They also mention the use of think-alouds, where “...the teacher models how to flexibly use cognitive strategies or handle a comprehension problem that may arise during reading” (McKenna & Stahl, 2009, p. 174). The

use of a think-aloud will be found in one of the mini-lessons that follows in order to provide teacher modeling of the strategy in action. It will allow students to watch and hear what it sounds like to use self-questioning to "...appraise their understanding of important ideas in a text" which will hopefully help them "...clarify and resolve challenging texts" (McKenna & Stahl, 2009, p. 175).

It is clear that students need to be explicitly and directly taught the comprehension strategy of clarifying texts in order to be proficient readers. Knowing "how" to best teach this as a teacher is the only way in which students will become successful at understanding texts. Kathy Collins' *Growing Readers* text provides several suggestions on how to teach students about some ways they can tell whether they are understanding something as they read (Collins, 2004, p.183). Her mini-lesson structure has the same basic features of the gradual release of responsibility framework, using a *connection, teaching point and demonstration, active engagement, and link to ongoing work* where independent practice time is provided. This structure has helped me understand how to formulate my mini-lessons clearly and allowed for guidance while writing them. Additionally, I feel that their structure allows for focused lessons that will ultimately promote the application of clarifying text for my students.

**Mini-Lesson #1:**

**The Importance of Understanding**

This is the first of a series of three mini-lessons that aim to emphasize the importance of understanding and to teach students to be proactive about their own reading comprehension. It is important that students have lots of opportunities to read and reread their just-right books (from their individualized book bins at their independent reading level) so they gain experience with what it feels like to understand. That way when they do not understand what they are reading, they will be more likely to notice it. My intention then with this mini-lesson is to create a desire in students to want to comprehend and really understand a story while also helping them understand the importance and reason why they need to have that desire.

<p><b><u>Lesson Title:</u></b> The Importance of Understanding</p> <p><b><u>Materials Needed:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 copy of “Fishes” by Melissa Stewart (See Appendix 1)</li> <li>• 1 copy of “Froggy Plays in the Band” by Jonathon London (See Appendix 2)</li> <li>• 20 copies of “Dog” by Valerie Worth (See Appendix 3)</li> <li>• Carpet Area</li> <li>• Partners</li> <li>• Independent Book Bins (with each students “just right” books)</li> </ul>	<p>The common core standards will be addressed within the three mini-lessons created.</p> <p><b><u>Common Core Standards:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.</i></li> <li>• <i>By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories and poetry, in the grades 2–3 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.</i></li> <li>• <i>Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Connection (Description of Strategy):</b></p>	<p>Teacher says:        “Readers, you’ve become so good at reading the words in your books and at having thoughts as you read. That is so important. But you also have to make sure you understand what you are reading. If you don’t understand the story it’s like you never read it at all! So today I want to teach you the difference between getting only the</p>

	words and getting both the words and the story. This will help you make sure you really understand what you're reading."
<b>Teaching Point (Teacher Modeling of the Strategy)</b>	<p>Teacher says: "Watch me as I read this piece of the story 'Fishes'. Notice that I get the words, but watch and see if I am able to understand what I am reading." Teacher begins reading 'Fishes'. She reads the words fine but looks confused after reading. Then teacher says: "Hmmm...I was able to read all of those words, but I'm not really sure what they were about. Thumbs up if you think I did my job as a reader." Pause and wait for students to give you a thumbs up or to hopefully NOT give you a thumbs up! Then continue saying, "Oh, I'm so happy I don't see any thumbs up. I did not do my job as a reader. Even though I could read the words, I didn't really understand the story. That means that I have to do some extra work to figure it out before I move on. Now listen to me as I read 'Froggy Plays in the Band'. Watch and look for signs that I understand what I have read." Teacher reads 'Froggy Plays in the Band' with a smooth and confident reading voice. She laughs at the funny part of the story. Then continues saying, "Wow! This is a really interesting book! I understood what was going on the whole time. I could even picture it in my mind. I got the words and I got the story. Did you guys notice that? I didn't just read the words, but I laughed at the funny part, and I knew what was going on the whole time."</p>
<b>Collaboration of the strategy in use (Active Engagement)</b>	<p>Teacher says: "Now I want to give you a chance to try it out. I'm going to give you and your reading buddy a poem by Valerie Worth called 'Dogs,' and I want you to read it together. See if it feels like you understand the poem. I want you to make sure that you're not just getting the words but that you're also getting the meaning." Teacher then passes out copies of the poem to each student and gives them about 5 minutes to read the poem with their partner. As students read the poem, walk around and listen in. Ask students questions as they are reading to see if they understand. Then she brings students back together to discuss what they read. Teacher says: "You know, as I listened in, you were getting the words in the poem, but when I asked you what it was about, you looked a little confused. What you would have to do if you were reading this poem during reading time would be to work hard to figure out the meaning. Just reading the words is not the only thing you have to do as a reader."</p>

<b>Guided / Independent Practice of the strategy (Link to Ongoing Work)</b>	Teacher says: “Today, I want you to really pay attention to your reading, to be the kind of reader who tries hard to understand the book. I want you to do all your jobs as a reader. That means you need to figure out the words, have thoughts as you read, and understand what you are reading. Happy Reading!” At this point students get up from the carpet area and return to their seats where they have their independent book bins. As they read the teacher walk around and stops at various student’s desks, asking them questions about their understanding of their book. The teacher may have a mid-workshop stopping point where she expresses her findings with a particular student who worked hard to understand the story they were reading. The teacher will guide students as she walks around, while the rest of the class will engage in independent practice with their “just right” books.
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### Mini-Lesson #2:

#### Readers Go Back and Reread to Understand

The first mini-lesson allowed students to begin understanding the importance of making sense of the texts they read. The purpose of this second mini-lesson is to give students a strategy while they are reading to help them make meaning from the texts they read. Students will understand that when meaning breaks down, going back and rereading again can help them make meaning of the text. My hope is that when students back up and reread they will read it more slowly, with more intention, and that it will allow them to absorb the meaning of what they are reading. My intension for this lesson is for students to gain the tool to go back and reread a section of their text in order to gain comprehension and self-monitor comprehension while reading independently.

<b>Lesson Title:</b> Readers Go Back and Reread to Understand	The common core standards will be addressed within the three mini-lessons created.
<b>Materials Needed:</b>	<b>Common Core Standards:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when,</i></li></ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 copy of “Erandi’s Braids” by Tomie Depaola (See Appendix 4)</li> <li>• 20 copies of “Ice Cream Mania” part of the <i>Making Meaning Series Articles</i> (See Appendix 5)</li> <li>• Carpet Area</li> <li>• Partners</li> <li>• Independent Book Bins (with each students “just right” books)</li> </ul>	<p><i>why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories and poetry, in the grades 2–3 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.</i></li> <li>• <i>Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Connection (Description of Strategy):</b></p>	<p>Teacher says: “Readers, yesterday we focused on understanding what we are reading. We want to make sure we have some tools in our reading toolboxes that will help us understand what we read. So today I want to teach you how to go back and reread a section of a story so you can understand it.”</p>
<p><b>Teaching Point (Teacher Modeling of the Strategy)</b></p>	<p>Teacher says: “I’m going to read you a piece of ‘Erandi’s Braids.’ You are familiar with this story but this time I want you to watch me as I read this part of the story.” Teacher begins reading ‘Erandi’s Braids.’ She reads it fairly quickly and reads a bit through punctuation. Teacher also looks a little confused about what the text said. She then continues by thinking aloud for students, “Did that make sense? I’m not quite sure what I just read. Maybe I should go back a page and reread this section since I’m feeling a little confused.” Teacher then asks students, “Thumbs up if you think I’m making a good decision as a reader to back up and reread this section.” Teacher waits for students to put their thumbs up, and then continues by rereading in a clear and a little slower manner. While the teacher rereads she nods a bit and seems more aware of what is going on. When she finishes she says aloud, “Now I understand what is going on” and then retells the section that she just read. “Did you all notice how when I slowed down and reread that part I understood it better and I could tell you exactly what was going on? That is really important for readers to do because it helps them make sense of what they are reading.”</p>
<p><b>Collaboration of the strategy in use (Active Engagement)</b></p>	<p>Teacher says: “Now I want to give you a chance to try it out. I’m going to give you and your reading buddy an article called ‘Ice Cream Mania’. I</p>



	<p>want you to read it one time through and talk to your buddy for a minute about if you caught it all the first time. Then I want you and your buddy to read it again, a little slower, and see if it makes more sense to you that time. Go ahead readers!” Teacher waits for students to begin reading and then walks around to listen in on their reading and conversations for the next 5 minutes or so. Then the teacher brings students back together and says, “Readers, I have to share with you what student 1 and student 2 did while I was listening to them.” (Share an example of a partnership feeling a little confused but after they backed up to reread a little slower they felt a little better about the meaning).</p>
<b>Guided / Independent Practice of the strategy (Link to Ongoing Work)</b>	<p>Teacher says: “Today, I want you to really pay attention to your reading. When you don’t understand something in your book, try backing up and rereading it a little slower to clear up your confusion. Happy Reading!” At this point students get up from the carpet area and return to their seats where they have their independent book bins. As they read the teacher walk around and stops at various student’s desks, asking them questions about their understanding of their book. The teacher may have a mid-workshop stopping point where she expresses her findings with a particular student who backed up and reread for clarification. The teacher will guide students as she walks around, while the rest of the class will engage in independent practice with their “just right” books.</p>

### **Mini-Lesson #3:**

#### **Monitoring and Fixing up**

In this third mini-lesson, students will be familiar with reasons why it is important to monitor their comprehension of a passage or text while reading and have been introduced and had some practice with going back and rereading to clarify meaning. Therefore, in this third lesson my goal is to help students gain multiple strategies that will help them make sense of text when meaning breaks down. Students need to see that good readers are always thinking while they read and asking themselves if what they are reading makes sense. If they do not know if the

text makes sense, they fix up their reading by using specific strategies discussed in this third mini-lesson.

<p><b><u>Lesson Title:</u></b> Monitoring and Fixing up</p> <p><b><u>Materials Needed:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 copy of “Snails” by Monica Hughes (See Appendix 6)</li> <li>• Carpet Area</li> <li>• Chart Paper and colored markers</li> <li>• Independent Book Bins (with each students “just right” books)</li> </ul>	<p>The common core standards will be addressed within the three mini-lessons created.</p> <p><b><u>Common Core Standards:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.</i></li> <li>• <i>By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories and poetry, in the grades 2–3 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.</i></li> <li>• <i>Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Connection (Description of Strategy):</u></b></p>	<p>Teacher says: “Readers, we have been focusing on understanding what we are reading. We know that good readers back up and reread in order to help them make sense of what they are reading. Today I want to teach you how to stop and think if what you are reading makes sense and how to fix up your reading if you don’t understand it.”</p>
<p><b><u>Teaching Point (Teacher Modeling of the Strategy)</u></b></p>	<p>Teacher says: “I’m going to read you a piece of ‘Snails’. I want you to watch me as I read this part of the story.” Teacher begins reading ‘Snails’. Teacher says, “Part of what I just read doesn’t make sense. I am going to stop and ask myself some questions to see if I can figure it out. Hmm...who is this story about? What is happening in this story? What is the author trying to tell me?” Asking these questions helps me stop and think about what I am reading. If after I have monitored or thought hard about what I was reading and I am still lost or can’t figure it out, I can try a fix-up strategy. I’m going to write on our chart paper what some fix-up strategies good readers use are: summarizing text, going back and adjusting the rate we read it at, reread the text while thinking carefully, reading on to see if the information becomes clear in a little bit, look at other things on the page like pictures and captions, and finally ask for help.”</p>
<p><b><u>Collaboration of the strategy in use (Active Engagement)</u></b></p>	<p>Teacher says: “Now I need your help. I bet some of you have already used some of these strategies in order to help you fix-up what you didn’t</p>

	<p>understand. Which strategy did we use yesterday together?”</p> <p>Teacher waits for a student to recall that yesterday we used the strategy of going back and adjusting the rate we read at. Teacher says, “Right! Yesterday we focused on rereading a little slower in order to help us understand. Has anyone ever tried one of the other fix-up strategies?” Teacher waits for students to begin giving some examples of summarizing, looking at pictures, or asking for help. She records them on the chart paper next to the strategy. She continues, “Wow readers, look at all the ways you think while you are reading in order to help you understand books!”</p>
<b>Guided / Independent Practice of the strategy (Link to Ongoing Work)</b>	<p>Teacher says: “Today, I want you to use this chart to help you when you don’t understand something in your book. If you use one of the strategies today during your workshop time I want you to write down which strategy helped you make meaning of what you were reading on a sticky note. That way you can share your success with us at the end of our reading time. Happy Reading!” At this point students get up from the carpet area and return to their seats where they have their independent book bins. As they read the teacher walk around and stops at various student’s desks, asking them questions about their understanding of their book. The teacher may have a mid-workshop stopping point where she expresses her findings with a particular student who wrote down or used a strategy from the chart. The teacher will guide students as she walks around, while the rest of the class will engage in independent practice with their “just right” books.</p>

Research shows that clear, direct mini-lessons that follow a similar framework as the gradual release of responsibility allow students to grow as readers and build their comprehension skills. I believe that my students would greatly benefit from these three mini-lessons. It will help them be aware of their monitoring and thinking while reading. These lessons provide me with a base to begin looking for students who are thinking while they read and are able to clarify text when meaning breaks down and know which students will need additional guidance in a small group or individually with self-monitoring. In second grade students are feeling more

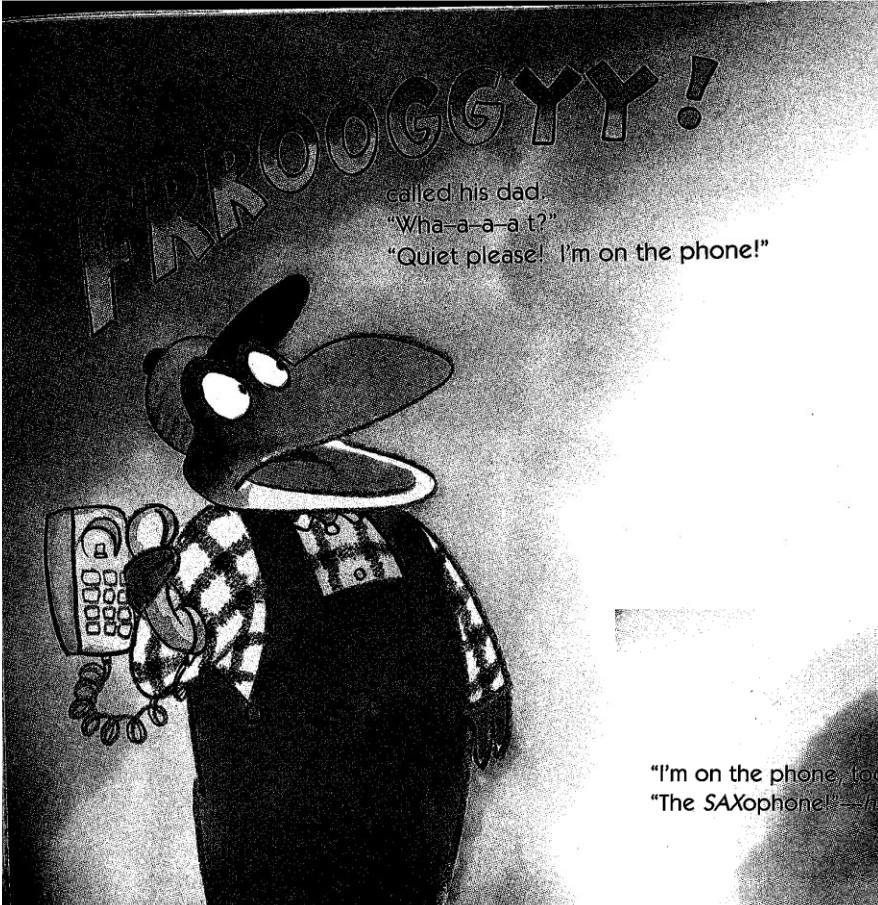
confident as readers because they are reading the words more easily, therefore, it is so important for them to also feel confident that they understand what they are reading. This will provoke feelings when they read, reactions, and excitement. Additionally, as a professional this mini-lesson framework that I have followed in these three lessons will be essential to continue with in order to provide explicit and direct instruction. It gives me a focus when planning future lessons in comprehension but also in any of the five pillars of reading. I believe I have answered why is it important for students to have strategies in place to help them along when they are reading and become confused and have found a framework allowing me to teach these strategies through a workshop format.

## Appendix 1

All fishes have two things in common—a backbone and gills. Your backbone supports your body and helps you move. A fish's backbone does the same jobs.

A fish's gills are like your lungs. When you breathe in air, your lungs help move oxygen into your blood. When water moves over a fish's gills, the gills remove oxygen from the water and move it into the fish's blood.

Appendix 2



### Appendix 3

#### Dog

By: Valerie Worth

Under a maple tree  
The dog lies down,  
Lolls his limp  
Tongue, yawns,  
Rests his long chin  
Carefully between  
Front paws,  
Looks up, alert;  
Chops, with heavy  
Jaws, at a slow fly,  
Blinks, rolls  
On his side,  
Sighs, closes  
His eyes: sleeps  
All afternoon  
In his loose skin.



## Appendix 4

### Excerpt

from *Erandi's Braids* by Antonio Hernández Madrigal (pages 26–29)

Out in the street, the air was cold on the back of her neck. How strange it felt without her hair. Mamá walked beside her, not saying a word. Only the hollow clapping of their *huaraches* broke the silence of the cobblestone streets.

Why didn't Mamá speak? Was she angry with her for cutting her hair? OR maybe the haircutter had not paid enough for her braids?

Finally Erandi peeked at her mamá's face and saw that she was crying. "Forgive me, Erandi, I shouldn't have let you sell your hair," Mamá sobbed, wiping her face with an old handkerchief.

Now Erandi understood that her mamá was not angry with her. She had only been thinking of Erandi's hair. "Don't worry, Mamá. My braids will grow back as long and pretty as before."

*continues*



## Appendix 5



# Ice Cream Mania!

**Ice cream is one of the world's favorite foods. Why? There are three big reasons.**

1. There are many different flavors of ice cream.
2. Ice cream can be eaten in many different ways. You can have it in a cone, a dish, an ice cream cake, and even a sandwich.
3. Ice cream tastes good! After a healthy meal that includes plenty of veggies, ice cream is a real treat. It is often on the menu at birthday celebrations and other special times.



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Unit 8 ▶ Week 3 ▶ Day 1

### How Ice Cream Is Made

Ice cream is a simple food. The main ingredients are milk, sugar, and water. It also has other ingredients to make it smooth and creamy.

But making ice cream in a factory is not a simple process. Here's how it is done:

1. The ingredients are mixed together.
2. The mixture is heated to kill bacteria and churned to make it smooth.
3. The mixture is moved into a cold storage tank. It stays there until it is firm.
4. Colors and flavors are added.
5. The ice cream is placed in a freezer. Inside the freezer it is whipped up to force air into the ice cream to make it soft.
6. For some flavors, nuts or candy are then added.
7. Finally, the ice cream is packaged.



Ice cream is packaged in containers.

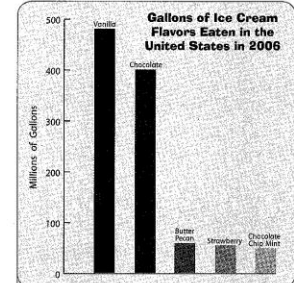
Most people who eat ice cream buy it from a supermarket. Others make their own ice cream at home. With an electric ice cream maker, the mixture is quickly churned and frozen. Ice cream can also be made the old-fashioned way, using a bowl, a whisk or an electric beater, and a freezer. This takes about four hours and a lot of muscle power.

### Who Ate All the Ice Cream?

Americans eat more ice cream than any other people in the world. In fact, Americans eat about 1.6 billion gallons of ice cream each year.

New Zealanders are the second biggest ice cream eaters. People in Denmark come in third.

The experts say that ice cream is a "sometimes" food. This means that it's better to eat ice cream sometimes rather than all the time. You'll enjoy it more, too!



In 2006, almost 500 million gallons of vanilla ice cream was eaten in the United States. The bar graph above shows some other favorite flavors.

### Sorbet, Soy, or Rice?

Ice cream isn't the only frozen dessert people love to eat. Another kind is sorbet, which is made from fruit and sugar. Soy ice cream is made from soymilk. Rice ice cream (or rice cream) is made from rice milk. Rice milk is made from brown rice and sugar.

None of these desserts contain milk. This means that people who can't have milk can still have a frozen dessert. Sorbet, soy, and rice ice creams don't taste quite the same as ice cream. But they're just as delicious.

So what's your favorite frozen dessert?

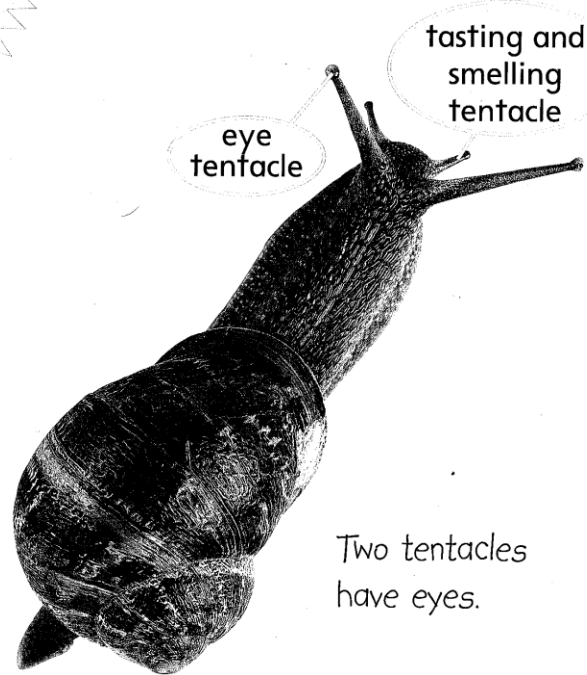
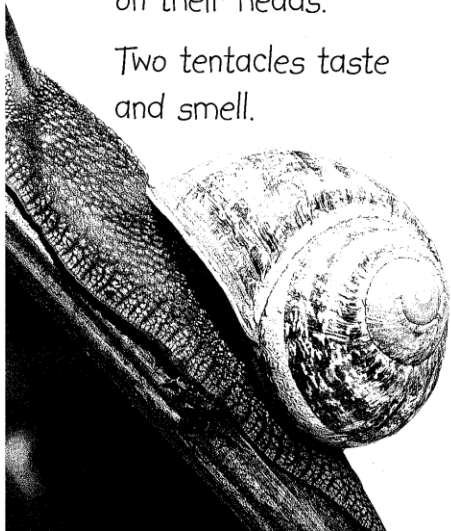
Making Meaning® 11

## Appendix 6

### Snail Tentacles

Snails have four **tentacles** on their heads.

Two tentacles taste and smell.



Two tentacles have eyes.

11

### Glossary

**foot** soft, slimy body of a snail  
**hatch** to come out of an egg  
**hibernate** to sleep all winter  
**mucus** slimy liquid a snail makes to help it move

**predator** an animal that eats other animals for food

**tentacle** (You say TEN-tuh-cul.) type of feeler on an animal's head that help it see, smell, hear, or taste

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