

# Books

## Mosaic of Thought:

### Teaching Comprehension in a Reader's Workshop

BY ELLIN OLIVER KEENE AND SUSAN ZIMMERMANN

Heinemann, 1997. \$27.50; 255 pages.

REVIEWED BY SHERYL LAIN

"I write," says John Cheever, "to make sense of my life." *Mosaic of Thought* by Ellin Keene and Susan Zimmerman says we read for the same reason — to make sense of our lives. In the book, the authors show us reading workshops with real students where even the littlest ones are taught how to read for the love of it.

Reading research tells us that for students to grow a grade in their reading ability, they need to read something like a million words a year. Well, people large or small will not read that many words unless they figure out how to enjoy it.

*Mosaic* explains how to teach reading that way — so kids can see why it matters. No wonder whole buildings in my district are using the book for focused study.

Keene and Zimmerman studied good readers by first studying themselves. What do their brains do as they read? What are the invisible mental acrobatics that make reading worth the trouble?

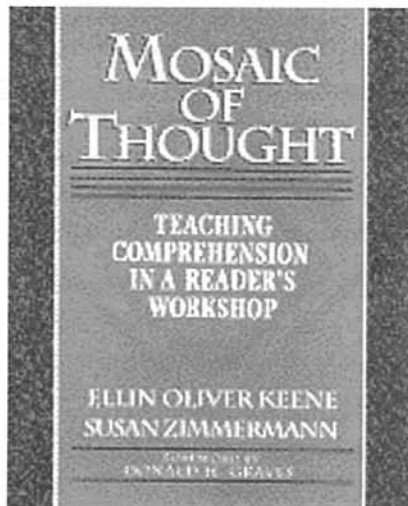
Focusing on one comprehension strategy at a time, each chapter shows us Keene's thoughts as she interacts with words on the page. Each chapter shows us classrooms where all the children read, ponder, remember, reread, and make new stories. The authors welcome us into their book groups where their colleagues talk about reading. They invite us to listen in as they talk about reading with their families. These glimpses into the minds of readers

form a mosaic, each little ceramic tile placed together until readers of *Mosaic* form a meaningful picture of the whole reading process and seven comprehension strategies.

This is a show, don't tell, kind of book. It's also about how reading makes a clearer, richer life. And that's at the very heart of why we readers read anyway. We read to make sense of our experiences. Reading is thinking, and thinking is powerful stuff. I can picture Socrates, tapping his knee for emphasis, when he told his students, "the unexamined life is not worth living." That's how much Socrates valued thinking.

*The bottom line in Mosaic of Thought is that when good readers read, they are anything but passive couch potatoes. Reading is a mind journey.*

This book is about thinking our way through life and books. Besides a list of strategies, *Mosaic* offers the readers a picture of how a reading workshop should look and feel. Homey. Interactive. The air alive with ideas and questions. Taking a closer look between the lines of the text, the reader sees how exemplary teachers at all grade levels set up their rooms. Different places for different activities. A burnt orange chair out of someone's basement, a



Salvation Army floor lamp with the kid-painted lampshade, and a rug. These form a "living room" where students meet to hear the teacher read and reflect, where the whole class sits together and listens with wide-awake imaginations to texts of all kinds.

The teacher reads aloud and offers a short lesson on a comprehension strategy by modeling, showing the students what her mind is doing. Then the students go to their chairs or to the "den" and read. The teacher sits by one student after the other, asking them to show her in their own books how they're practicing the lesson she modeled.

These two structures, the teacher-led, whole-class lesson and the independent reading time, form the heart of the reading workshop. They're not the only structures, though. Students read in pairs, read with a younger child, read to discuss in book clubs, read to write, draw, or act. But the core of the reading workshop is built around

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teacher modeling and students practicing independently in books of their own choice.

What are the teacher-led comprehension lessons? The chapters of *Mosaic* show us one at a time. Each strategy must be taught — or modeled — with “singular focus over a long period of time to students from kindergarten through twelfth . . . with a variety of texts” (p. 21).

The authors invite us to try it ourselves. We need to read, slow down, watch what our mind is doing as we read. Then we'll discover what good readers do.

- We activate prior knowledge, our brain mixing our memories with the words on the page.

- We focus on the essential, the heart of the text. Our eyes even slow down a wee bit when we read the key words holding the main ideas.

- We ask questions constantly — of ourselves, the author, the text — to clarify.

- We create mental pictures, all the senses alive, including our emotions, as we remember.

- We make new interpretations from our inferences; replay what we've read, while shopping for avocados or walking the dog, until what we've read is our own memory.

The authors show us in vignette after vignette how to structure these strategies into classroom lessons.

The bottom line in *Mosaic of Thought* is that when good readers read, they are anything but passive couch potatoes. Reading is a mind journey. The text goes with us along the way, helping us make sense out of the stories of our lives.

*Sheryl Lain is director of the Wyoming Writing Project.*

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## Review: The Mythology of Voice

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rather than depending on some enigmatic wizard behind the screen to conjure up their words.

What's particularly successful is Bowden's own linking of the metaphors of feminism and the fluid, heteroglossic, and stylistic phenomena of technology. She demonstrates the ways in which electronic text subverts still-prevalent insistence on celebrating an individuated self, a voice present within the text. And particularly gratifying is that by moving beyond fashionable deconstruction to offer these alternative metaphors, Bowden gives practitioners new options for talking with students about their work and their experiences and decisions as writers and

readers. Her argument that voice has outlived its usefulness as a metaphor does not foreclose continuing to encourage student writers to cultivate expressivism in their prose, to be attentive to matters of context, audience, and style.

That Bowden is making this case against voice is perhaps at once predictable and surprising. The theories that inform it have held sway in the academy for some time now, and it is good — useful — to see them linked to the language of the writing classroom as well as to Language with a capital L.

But while an ethos of individual expressivism has held sway in the composi-

tion classroom, some dedicated teachers might find Bowden's case unexpected. As Bowden illustrates, however, if we truly prize authenticity, perhaps we might consider again the conceptual framework that informs our celebration of students' "voices" and look beyond it in order to show students fresh ways they might approach the process and product of authorship.

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