

# THE READER'S

# CORNER



ESSAYS FOR  
DEVELOPING  
READERS

CAROL KANAR

# *The Reader's Corner*

ESSAYS FOR DEVELOPING READERS



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# PREFACE



The essays and apparatus that make up *The Reader's Corner* are based on the following premises. First, reading is an essential skill vital to success in college, work, and life. Reading is the foundation of most courses, a source for ideas, and a springboard to critical thought and action. Being able to read efficiently and critically will help students stay current in their chosen careers or professions, navigate the Internet, and update their knowledge and skills in a world that is exploding with rapidly changing information and new technology. On a personal level, reading is the vehicle that propels students into inner space, challenging their opinions, arousing new interests, and facilitating their intellectual growth. Most importantly, reading gives students ideas to think about, write about, and talk about, so that they can assume their rightful places in any discourse community.

*The Reader's Corner* can help students build and sustain their reading skills in several ways:

- *The Reader's Corner* is a collection of fifty reading selections thematically organized into five parts that promote critical thinking and self-examination.
- Reading selections are written by a culturally diverse group of writers on a variety of thought-provoking topics that entertain, inform, and challenge students.
- *The Reader's Corner* favors a holistic approach to reading that encourages both the discovery of the reading process and the development of literal and critical reading skills.

- A carefully constructed apparatus following every selection leads students through the stages of the reading process from prereading, through careful reading, to postreading and review.
- A combination of both objective and open-ended questioning encourages students to read and think both analytically and critically.
- Questions for discussion and writing invite students to examine their ideas and share what they have learned, making knowledge their own.

## SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE TEXT

Each reading selection is framed by a six-part apparatus that includes prereading and postreading activities designed to lead students logically through the processes of analytical reading and critical thinking. The following six features form the apparatus of *The Reader's Corner*:

- **Thinking First** consists of three questions that help students preview the selection and access their prior knowledge on the author's topic.
- The **headnote** that precedes each selection contains information about the author or the selection and is designed to provoke interest and provide a background for the reading.
- **Word Alert** is a boxed vocabulary feature that lists, defines, and locates by paragraph number words that may be unfamiliar to students or that may have special meanings essential to their understanding of the reading selection.
- **Comprehension Check** consists of ten multiple-choice questions that help students build and practice skill in finding the author's topic, purpose, and main idea; identifying stated details; and making inferences. These thought-provoking questions focus students' attention on what is both stated and unstated, leading them to read analytically and think critically.
- **Working with Words** is an exercise in deriving meaning from context. Students are given a group of sentences to complete, using words from the Word Alert box. This exercise tests students' understanding of a word's meaning and their ability to recognize it in a different context.
- **Thinking Deeper** consists of four open-ended questions that encourage students to determine a reading's significance. The

first two questions are designed to help students think critically either about the author's ideas or about the way a selection is structured. The third question relates the selection to the unit theme. The fourth question is a writing prompt, although any one of the questions could be used either for writing or for discussion.

These features frame the reading selections with prereading and postreading activities that encourage students to prepare for reading, to engage actively in the process of reading, and to reflect on what they have learned after reading.

## ANCILLARY

An Instructor's Resource Manual that contains an answer key, additional readings, tests, and teaching suggestions is available.

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Robert Scattergood, Professor Emeritus, *Belmont Technical College*

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# STARTING POINTS



**W**OULDn'T IT BE WONDERFUL if you could open a book or turn to the first page of an article with the confidence that not only would you understand what you read but you would be able to remember the essential information? Wouldn't it be great if you could prepare yourself for the reading so you could dive right in, without procrastinating?

You can.

Two facts about reading will serve as starting points. First of all, reading requires at least two people: you and the author. Think of reading as a conversation with another person. When you have a conversation, you listen to someone else's ideas, you think about them, and you offer your own opinion. Sometimes you agree, sometimes you disagree. When you do not understand some part of the conversation, you ask questions. Throughout the conversation, in the back of your mind, you may be relating what you are hearing to what you already know about the topic. Reading is like that. Although you cannot see or hear the author, you have his or her words on the page in front of you. The conversation takes place in your mind, as you read. For example, you may find yourself thinking "What does this word mean?" or "Why does the author have this opinion?" In the back of your mind, you may also be thinking about your own experiences that are similar to those you are reading about.

Second, reading is a process. When you read, your brain takes in information and either discards it or stores it for later use. What you

may not realize is that *you can control this process*. You can improve your understanding and your memory by doing certain things before, during, and after reading.

Remember that reading is a conversation between you and the author. To control the reading process, become actively involved in the conversation. We call this *active reading*, and it can make all the difference in your ability to understand, remember, and enjoy reading.

The next three sections tell you more about the readings in this book and how to read them actively.

## THE READINGS

This book takes you on a journey through the contemporary human mind. The authors are from different cultural, national, and ethnic backgrounds, and they write on a variety of topics and issues that are of general interest. The readings come from books, magazines, newspapers, and other sources. They range in length from short pieces to longer selections. The readings are arranged in five units: *Americans in Transition*, *Rumblings in the Culture*, *Against All Odds*, *Hard Questions*, and *Grab Bag*. The third discussion question following each selection addresses one of the five themes.

The purpose of this collection is to provide you with a varied reading experience and a chance to develop your own reading process. Reading, like any other skill, takes time and practice. The readings in this collection and the exercises that accompany the readings will help you hone your existing skills and perhaps develop some new ones as well.

## THE READING PROCESS

Reading is the process of taking in, sorting, and storing information. If you are reading passively—not paying attention, allowing yourself to become distracted, letting your mind wander—you are not in control of the process. As a result, you will not remember what you read. If you are reading actively—concentrating, ignoring distractions, thinking about the author’s ideas—you are in control. As a result, you are more likely to understand and remember what you read. This section explains how the reading process works and what actions you can take before, during, and after reading that will put you in control.

## Before Reading

At any given time, you are bombarded with all kinds of information: *It's hot. I'm tired. The phone is ringing. I have to be at work at 3:00 P.M. What was I supposed to study for the test?* These thoughts and others like them are going through your mind when you sit down to read. Therefore, unless you focus attention on the reading, your other thoughts will dominate and have a negative effect on your comprehension.

To focus your attention, find out what you can about the author. Then preview the selection by doing the following: First, read the title to determine the author's topic, and take a few minutes to explore what you already know about it. Your prior knowledge may serve as a context for the author's ideas and expand your understanding. If you have no prior knowledge on the topic, then ask questions such as these to help you build context:

What can I find out about the topic?

How does the topic relate to what we are studying in class?

Have I read or heard anything related to the topic?

Next, read the first and last paragraph. One of these may contain a stated purpose, a main idea, or a strong clue to one or the other. Finally, read any other information that may be available such as questions before or after the reading, or a list of vocabulary words and definitions. If the selection is divided into sections with headings, read them. Headings tell you the major divisions of the author's topic and may provide a strong clue to the author's main idea or purpose.

As you can see, the reading process actually begins *before* you read. Take an active step to clear your mind and set the stage for reading.

## During Reading

Reading rarely proceeds smoothly from first word to last. College reading especially introduces new ideas, unfamiliar words or terms, and different styles of writing and methods of organization. Thus you may get off to a good start, then find yourself backtracking, stopping to look up the meaning of a word, or taking a few moments to think about what you have read. This is as it should be.

What happens during the reading process is that your brain is sorting the incoming information—separating the important from the nonessential, relating what is new to what is already known, and searching for the meanings of difficult words and sentences. If you are

not paying attention, not actively engaging yourself in a conversation with the author, you are interrupting this natural process.

Active reading strategies to use during reading include the following: Read one paragraph at a time. Jot down in the margin or in a notebook thoughts or questions that occur to you as you read. Pay attention to the author's choice of words. What do they tell you about the author's attitude or feeling toward the topic? If you did not identify a purpose or main idea before reading, try to identify it during reading. Pay attention to how the ideas are organized. Is the author making comparisons, explaining steps in a process, narrating a series of events, describing a place or a person? If you are able to identify a main idea, find and mark the details that support or expand it. Ask yourself which of these details are the most significant. Think about the ideas and how they relate to what you already know or need to find out about the author's topic.

As you can see, the key to reading actively is to read for ideas and to discover which ideas are more important than others. When all else fails, keep going back to the title and first paragraph. Often these are your strongest clues to the author's overall topic or main idea.

### After Reading

As soon as you finish reading, you begin to forget. The more time passes, the less you remember—unless you take active steps to prevent forgetting. Like a computer, your brain can only store what you tell it to save. This is why review is so important.

Review is the key to remembering. Review immediately after reading while the ideas are still fresh in your mind. If you know you will be tested on the information, review frequently thereafter to refresh your memory. This will prevent you from spending the night before a test cramming, or from drawing a blank during class discussions.

A good way to review is to try this three-step strategy: **think, write, discuss**. First, *think* deeply about what you have learned and how you can use the information or apply it in your everyday life. Second, *write* a summary of the information. (A summary is a few sentences, in your own words, that express an author's *main idea and significant details*.) Third, *discuss* the reading with a study partner or group. By sharing your thoughts with others, you may get new insights or fill in gaps in your understanding. In addition, writing and discussing create new sensory pathways into your memory.

Table 1 summarizes the reading process and active reading strategies explained in this section.



**TABLE 1** The Reading Process and Strategies for Active Reading

Stages of the Process	Active-Reading Strategies to Use Anytime
BEFORE READING	Read title and first and last paragraphs. Determine topic, main idea, purpose, and pattern. Access prior knowledge about topic. Read any headings for clues. Ask questions to guide thinking.
DURING READING	Read one paragraph at a time. Jot notes in margin. Ask questions to guide reading. Affirm or rethink author's topic, main idea, purpose, and pattern. Mark significant details. Think about the author's ideas and relate them to what you know.
AFTER READING	Review immediately after reading, then frequently thereafter. Think about what you have learned and how you can use the information. Summarize what you have read in writing, or talk about it with a study group.

## PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR THE READINGS

The exercises and information that accompany each reading are designed to help you apply active reading strategies before, during, and after reading. Through consistent use of these strategies, you will develop a reading process that will lead to successful outcomes in all your reading.

For a brief overview, Table 2 breaks down the reading process as applied to the readings in this book and lists the exercises to do or information to read at each stage.

### Before You Read

*First Thoughts* is an exercise that helps you build a context for the reading. By answering the questions you will find out what you already know about the author's topic. Your first thoughts should raise questions in your mind that enable you to enter into a mental conversation with the author.

The headnote at the beginning of each reading may provide information about the author, the reading, or both. This information along with the definitions in *Word Alert*, a vocabulary feature, provides additional ideas for you to think about before reading.