

Stephanie Coontz
TE 849 Teaching Log

1/26-28/2015: Kicking off the Book Clubs

Today we finally began our Book Clubs! After a week of waiting for me to finish up groups and planning, my students received their books. They were so excited! I asked each group on Monday to decide how much of the book they wanted to have read before our first meeting on Friday. A few of my strong readers boasted that they could easily read the entire book by Friday and I didn't doubt that they could! I had to explain to them however that this was not the point of our book clubs. I reminded them that each meeting would include a discussion of what was read, so it would be best not to read too much. Most students grasped this right away.

Throughout the week, students read their groups' agreed upon selection independently. Some students like Jalen, who loves working with his best friend whenever possible, seemed confused by the concept of being in a group but not reading the book with his group members. Others, like Analena, rapidly read through her group's selection on Monday. Because our first meeting will be on Thursday, I have not passed out Reader's Notebooks and the assignments they can do in them while reading on their own. I think they will really enjoy this aspect once I explain it. I was able to pass out the Vocabulary Log. Students have been filling in new and intriguing words as they come across them in their reading. It was funny to me that we do assignments with vocabulary every week, but they were so much more engaged in finding words within their novels!

1/30/2015: First Book Club Meeting

Well, so much for planning! Thursday, which I had announced would be our first meeting, was a snow day (not that I'm complaining! ☺) We instead held our first meeting on Friday and I was pleased with how things began. I started our meeting by having the class come to our gathering place where we put together an anchor chart for our discussions. On one half of the chart, we talked about and I recorded ways to have a good discussion. My students agreed on reminders of taking turns talking, agreeing and disagreeing respectfully, and sticking to the topic. On the other half, we wrote own things to talk about. They mentioned discussing a summary of what happened, the character's actions, favorite parts and what they liked and disliked. While I think this was a good list of things to talk about, I know they will come up with more when they are able to put things in their Reader's Notebooks. I will have to wait and do this on Monday!

After our class meeting, students broke off into groups and I made my way around the room only interjecting when I needed to or when they asked me questions. My first stop was with the girls reading *Amber Brown is Not a Crayon*. This group includes three girls who are some of my lower-performing readers. I was glad they were interested in reading this book, as it is the shortest book and I think Amber's friend conflict with Justin will be relatable to them. They seemed a little lost when I arrived, so I prompted them with asking what happened in the chapters they read. This got them going and when I returned a while

later, they were talking about specific things they thought were funny about the section. As I moved to other groups, it seemed like many were talking about what had happened in what they read. I was impressed at how the group reading *Charlotte's Web* was discussing how the opening chapter compared and contrasted from the movie. It was also nice seeing groups flip back to specific parts of the story and talk about them- we have been practicing how to find evidence while reading all year, so it was wonderful seeing this put into practice! Overall, groups appeared to be excited about discussing their books and I only had to resolve one conflict!

As we move into our next week, I'm looking forward to sharing Reader's Notebooks with my students. I think recording their responses as they read more of their novels will help them come up with more to discuss at their next meeting. I think the most encouraging thing about the Book Clubs so far has been seeing 27 enthusiastic students get so excited about literature. That's a win for teachers everywhere!

2/5/2015: Snow Days and Catching Up

Our schedule was again thrown off a bit this week, due to snow days. I had intended to show my students how to use their reader's notebooks and then have them begin to record their ideas and findings right away starting Monday, but we'll have to wait until next week. Our school was closed for both Monday and Tuesday, so my students felt unprepared to meet on Thursday to discuss what they read. This week, I couldn't put off our meeting until Friday because of other schedule conflicts.

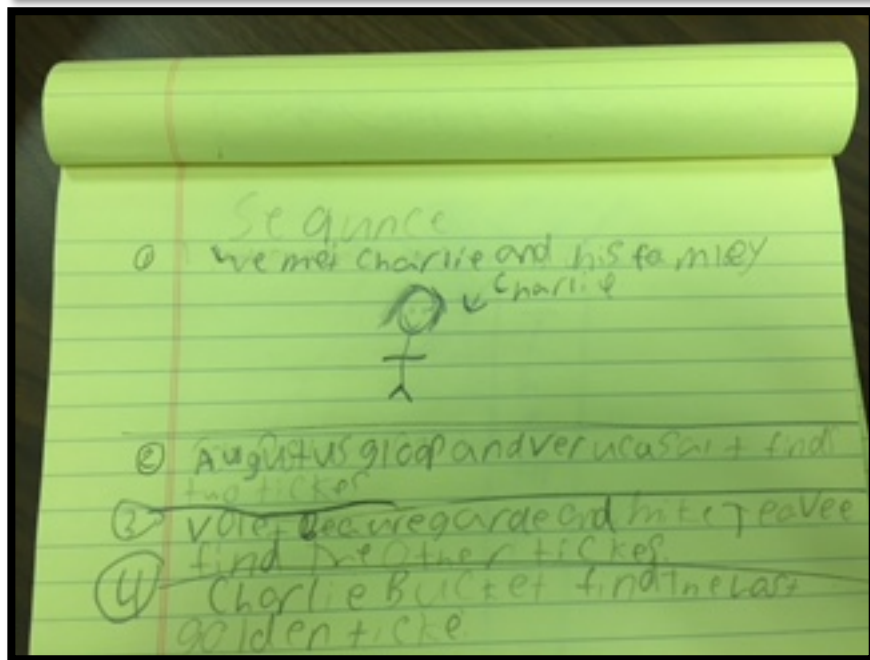
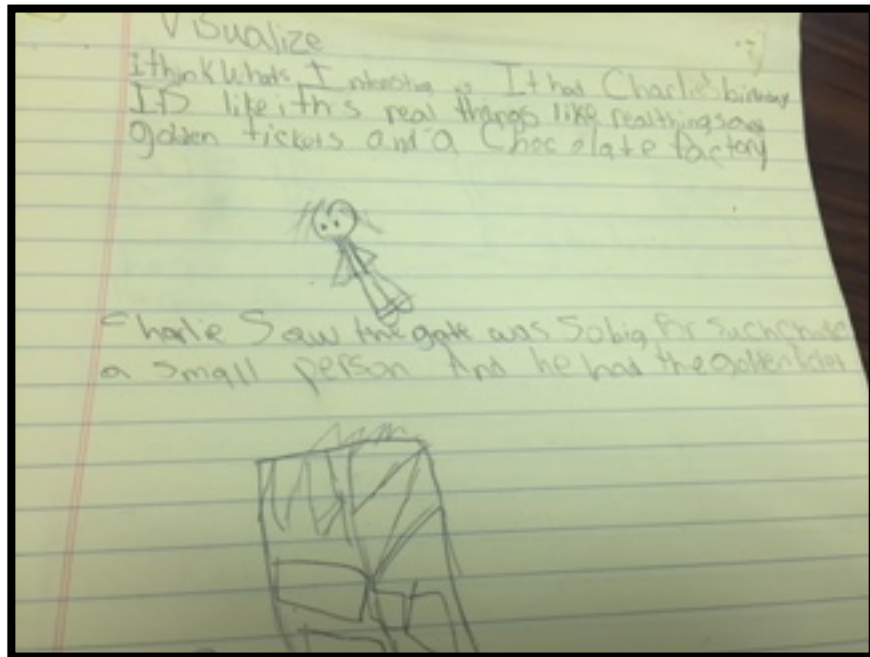
I didn't want to put too much on their plate with trying to catch them up, so the groups still met but we spent the meeting time refreshing our memories about what we had read last week and then reading this week's section with our groups. When I planned book clubs, I really didn't want the time to be used for reading in groups; it was meant to be for discussion only. I reminded my students this would not be a regular thing and they understood. What really impresses me about my group of students is how well they read in groups. Even within reading from our curriculum I feel comfortable letting my students work with partners of choice or partners I assign because they know this time is meant for reading and begin right away. I also have some reluctant readers who don't like to read for the whole class, but I'm able to listen to them read in front of a small group or peer.

2/12/2015: Beginning to Use Reader's Notebooks

Fortunately this week, I was able to show them three different pages for our reader's notebook. The first was visualizing and as I imagined, many students took a liking to this page right away. I explained that this page would be used for drawing and explaining the pictures we have in our heads when the author uses descriptive language. The second page was a character map. Some books include dynamic characters that go through dramatic changes throughout the book. In other stories, the characters do not change at all but remain true to themselves despite others changing around them. I encouraged students to use this page to keep track of the big events the character faces and then use it to consider if and how the main character has changed. The third page was used for sequencing. This

was to help my students with summarizing the story by making a timeline of the major story events. They could also put their reactions to those events on this page.

During our meetings this week, I made my way around to different groups and again, I tried to let my students lead their discussions. I was impressed to hear my group of boys reading *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* referring and flipping back to a particular story event. The boys then discussed their reaction to this part of the story. I prompted here with a suggestion to record this in their notebooks on the sequencing page.



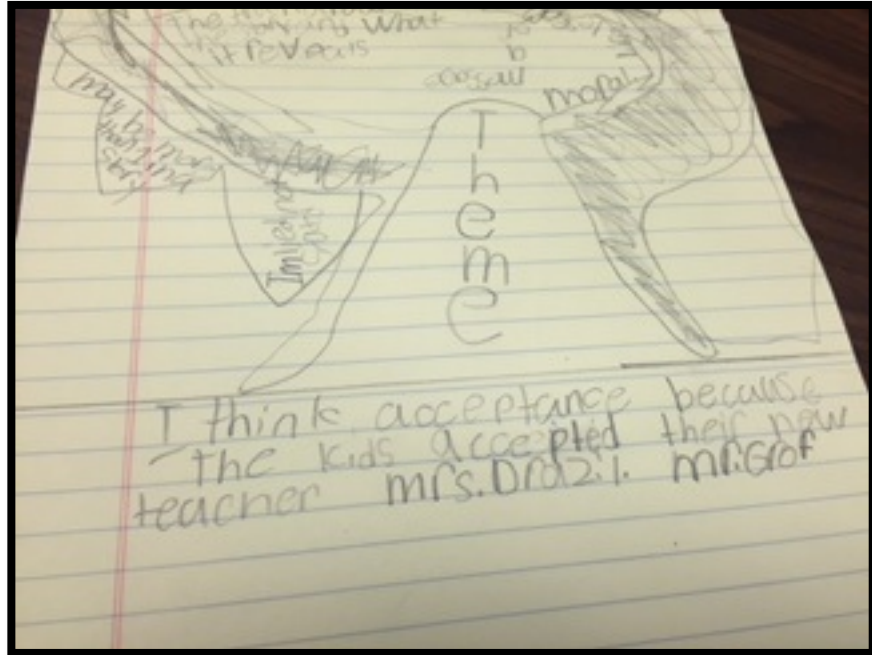
Ideas from Jalen and Aiden from reading *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*

2/19/2015 A Bumpy Road to Finding the Theme

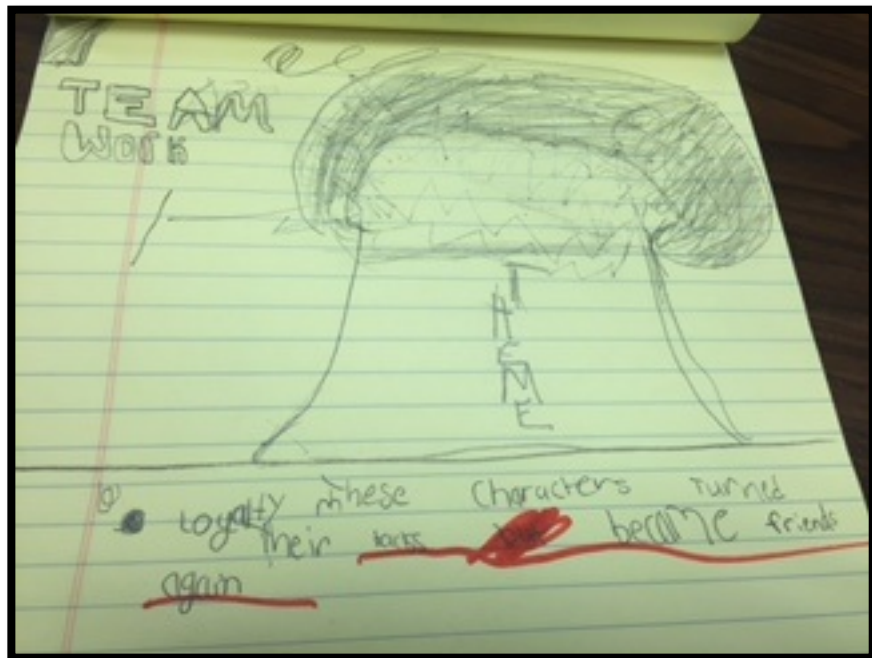
Finding the theme of a story or book has proved to be one of the more challenging concepts for my students to grasp. I think as readers we can understand what is right in front of us in the text, but thinking beyond to broader, overarching messages is more difficult. Prior to our meeting this week, I wanted to revisit theme and have my students begin thinking about possible themes of their books. To begin, I created an anchor chart and I asked them to record the notes into their reader's notebooks so they could refer back to them. I then passed out the page "Common Themes in Books" and we discussed each common theme and then connected the themes to some of the stories we've read from our reading curriculum this year and shared examples of how this theme was found in that particular story.

Common Themes in Books	
You will find that many books include a theme, or lesson, that is revealed as you read the story. Below are common themes you will find in your books.	
Acceptance	These books have characters who respect & accept others' differences and beliefs.
Courage	These books have brave characters who have the strength to overcome a fear or accept a risk.
Perseverance	These books have characters who never give up even when facing difficult times.
Cooperation	These books have characters who work together to solve a problem or achieve a goal.
Compassion	These books have characters who want to make those who are suffering feel better.
Honesty	These books have characters who find that it is best to always tell the truth.
Kindness	These books have friendly characters who are generous and considerate of others.
Loyalty	These books have characters who trust each other and never turn their backs on their friends.

My students seemed to do well with this, so we broke off into our book club groups next. I asked them to make theme one of their discussion points for today. As I made my way around the room, this appeared to be something many students were wrestling with and some did not know where to begin. The groups reading *American Chillers* and *Amber Brown* were referred back to the page I passed out. Yet, even with this prompt both groups seemed a bit lost. *Geronimo Stilton's* group got off to a good start, citing cooperation and courage as two possible themes. The girls in this group did a nice job of proving rationale behind these theme choices. The two groups reading *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* seemed confused because they didn't feel any of the common themes connected with their book so far. We discussed how maybe the theme would be more revealed in the rest of the book or how it may have a theme not found on this page. I'm interested to see where they land with theme in the coming weeks as they finish the novel.



Avion's working toward a theme in *Wayside School*.



Amari's theme rationale ideas for *Amber Brown*

2/26/2015: More Theme Thinking and Writing Prompts

Meetings were terrific this week! I was pleased with each group as I made my way around the room. The *Amber Brown* group seemed to have made a huge leap in their thinking of the theme. The girls discussed loyalty as a theme for Amber's story as she read through her mended friendship with Justin. I was amazed as the *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* girls

group had a very scholarly discussion about Charlie and his family being happy with what they had, despite being very poor. They went on to talk about how this was different from the other children who received the golden tickets. One girl finally summed up that possibly greed was a theme of the novel, and that we needed to remember to be happy with the things we were given and not want more than we need. Another win for teachers! I think *Charlotte's Web* has a fairly easy theme to point out, so I encouraged the member of this group to think about this theme and consider ways we could remember Charlotte's loyalty and kindness in our own friendships.

At the end of this meeting, I used an exit ticket for each student. I had them either explain how their character has changed in the novel so far or what they thought the theme of the book was and why. Even though I listen in on each group, I thought this would be a good way to have a little more accountability from my students who are more comfortable letting their classmates take the lead in discussions. It also opened my eyes to the difficulties the group reading *Wayside School* is having. This book has short vignettes about many characters, but doesn't tell a linear story the way the other books do. As a result, it is hard to pick out the main character and the theme. This was good feedback for me; I'll need to accommodate or support this group differently because of the nature of their text.

3/5/2015: Due to parent-teacher conferences this week, a half day of school on Thursday and no school Friday, we did not meet for Book Club this week. My students continued read the agreed upon sections of their book and work in their reader's notebooks independently.

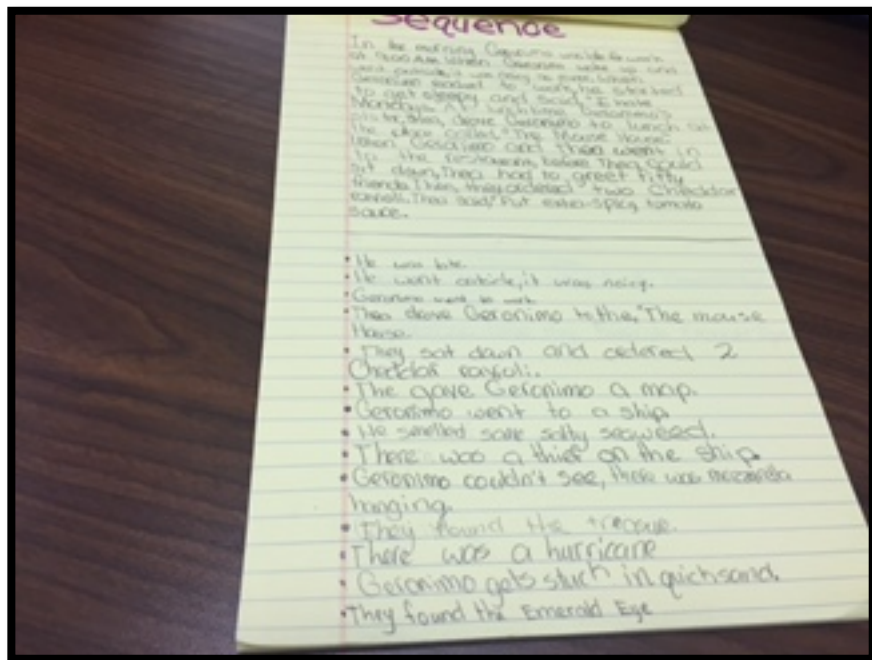
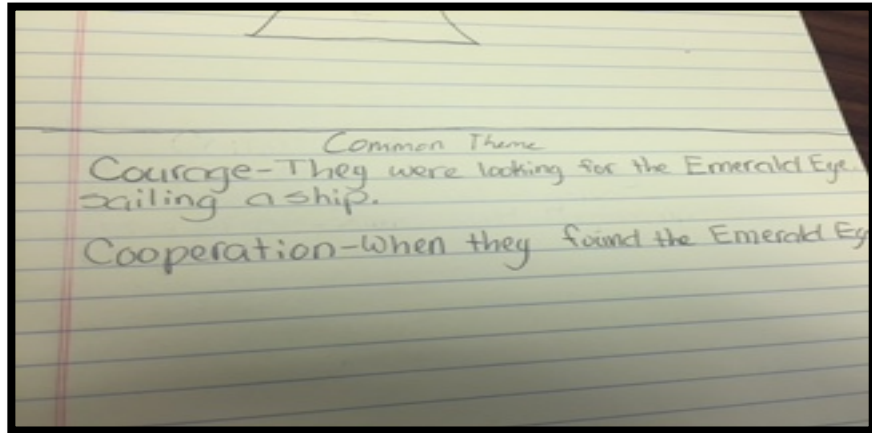
3/12/2015: Progress in Reader's Notebooks

Last week, three groups informed me their group was planning to read the concluding section of their book and would have it finished for today's meeting. The other three groups appear to be getting close as well. I thought today would be a good time to revisit the grading rubric I showed them when we began our book clubs. As I explained when we began, I would be grading them on their reading of the book, their meeting participation, reader's notebook, and their final group project. After reading Stephanie Harvey and Harvey Daniel's book *Inquiry Circles in Action* for a course last semester, I felt that I needed components for this project that were group grades and also individual grades. This would allow me to examine the collaboration of each group but also each student's efforts in the clubs.

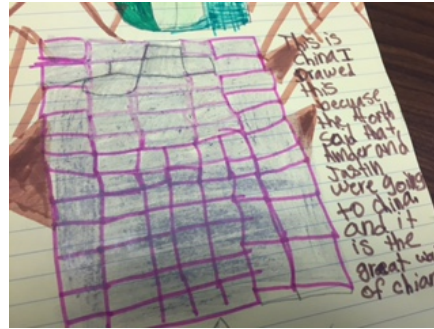
The reader's notebook serves as a great exhibit of students' individual efforts. Some students have filled their notebooks with observations, illustrations, and responses. Their learning is evident and their comprehension of the story is clear. For other students, their notebooks have not progressed much. I noticed this was the case for the students reading *Wayside School*, but after their exit tickets, I at least knew why. I was able to meet with them and we compromised on some alternative topics and ideas for their notebooks.

I was particularly impressed with a few reader's notebooks and shared pages as examples of what outstanding work looks like, hoping to give a good visual for those who seem to be

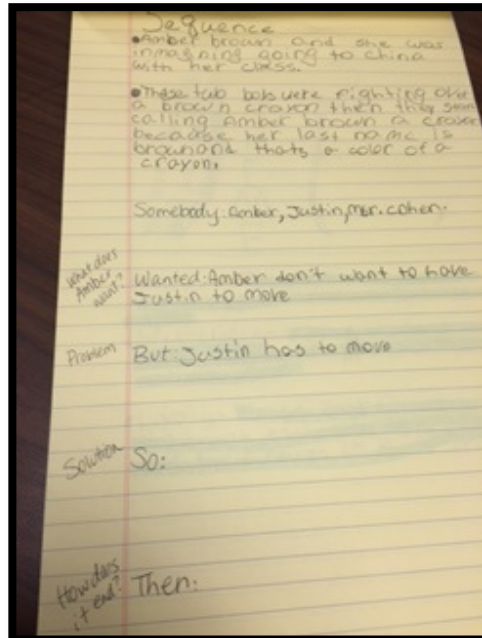
lagging behind. One of my favorite success stories for this book club has been with my student, Nini. Nini is an ELL student and while she reads very well, she is on the lower end of our Honors class. For this project, she is in a group with Joya and Tianna, two of my best readers. Nini's reader's notebook is bursting with evidence that she's comprehended *Geronimo Stilton*. For her, the discussions have been beneficial because they have allowed her to hear what they other girls have picked out. Nini is shy in large group settings, but has been able to have rich conversations with Tianna and Joya. Here's some of the progress Nini has made in her notebook.



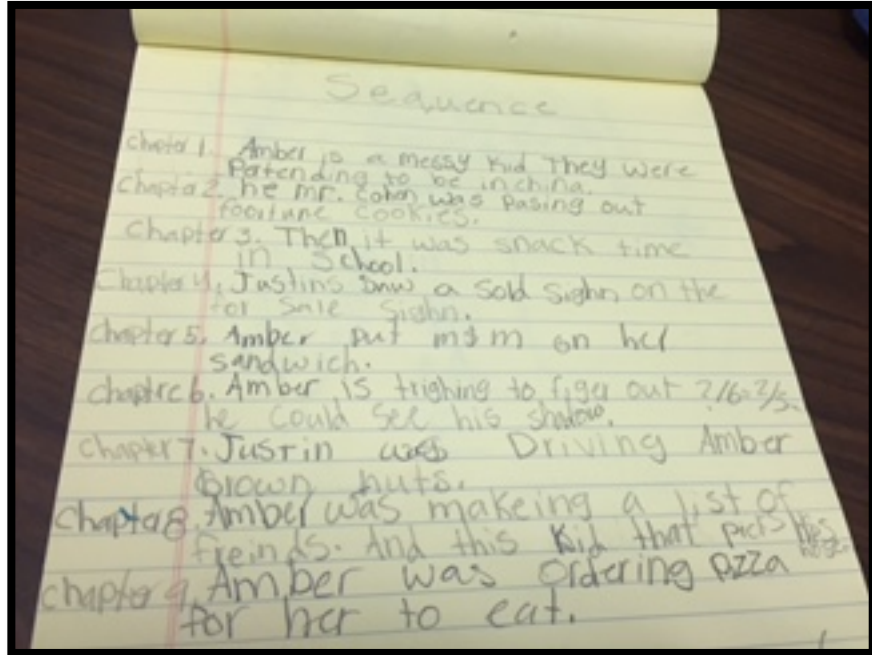
Here are a few other notable pages from my students:



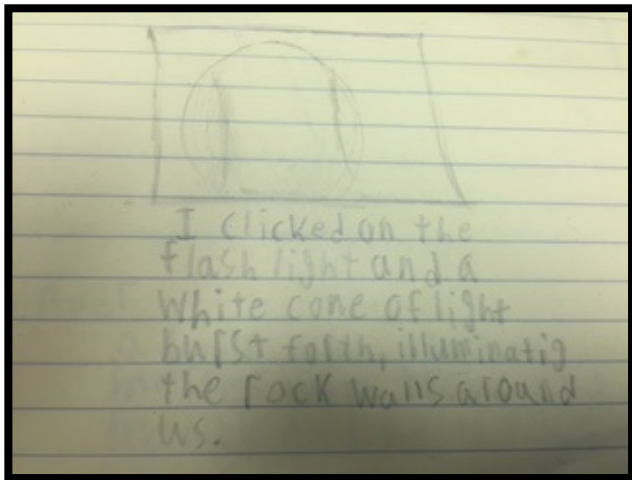
Visuals from Tianna's reader's notebook. Trinity's visualizing of a part of *Amber Brown*



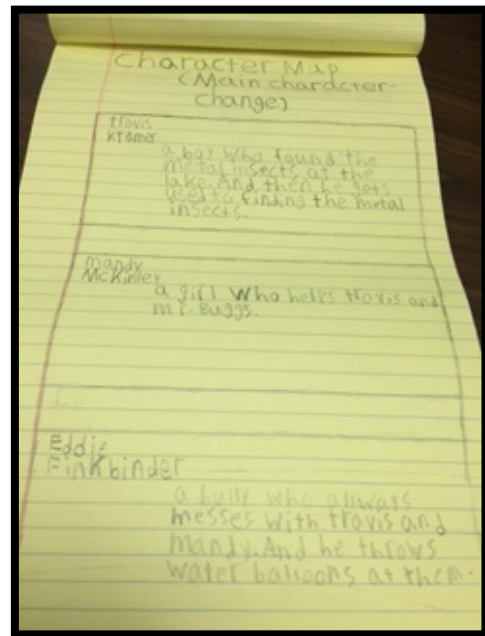
Alegha had some trouble recalling *Amber Brown*, so I prompted with some ideas we use for summarizing.



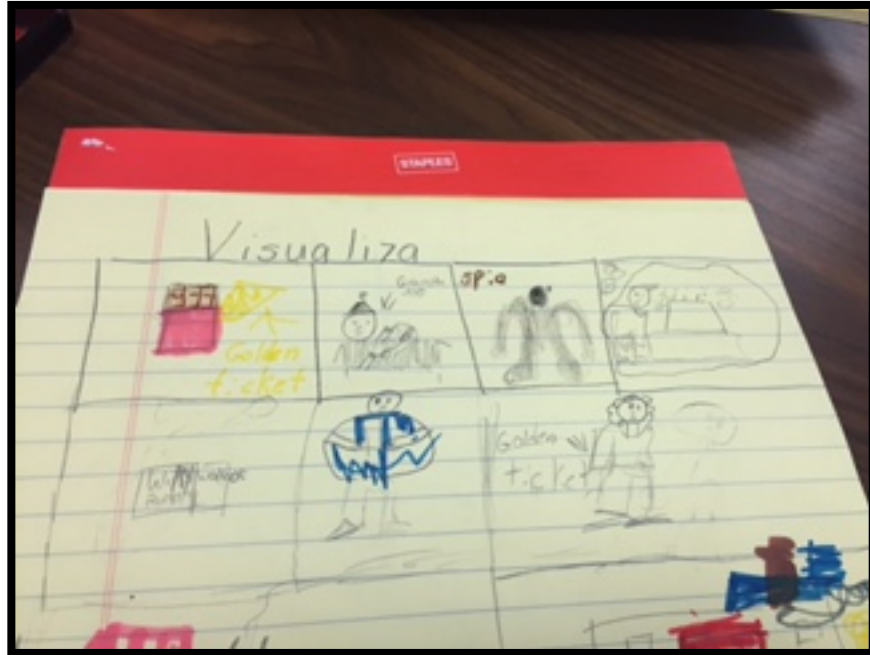
Trinity's summary of *Amber Brown is Not a Crayon*.



Skyler recalled a part of *American Chillers* with this visual.



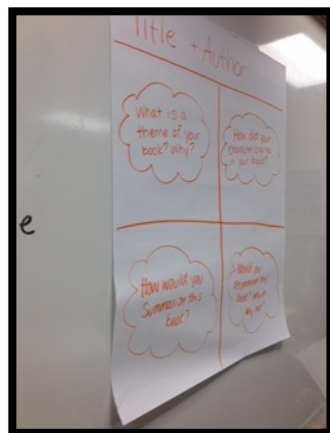
Skyler's character map from *American Chillers*



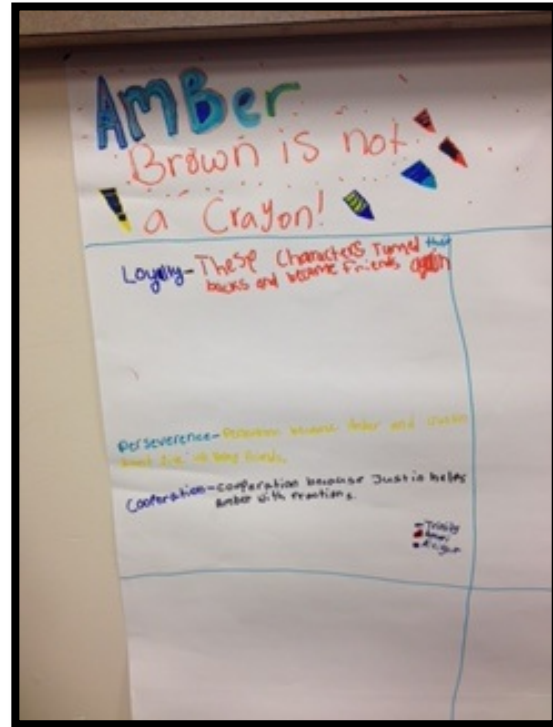
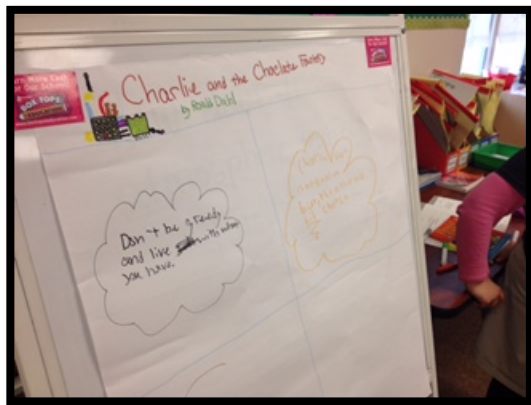
Yamna visualized *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* as a comic. Each panel tells a new part of the story!

3/19/2015: Final Book Club Projects

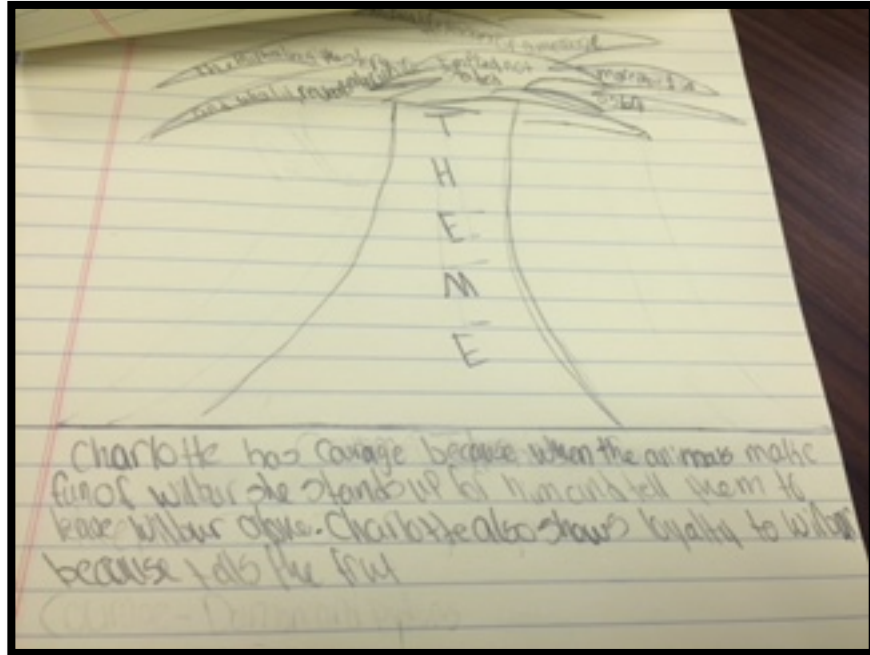
This week, five of the six book club groups had completed their books. Before breaking off into groups, we discussed their final project as their culminating activity for the book clubs. On chart paper, I made a very quick (and sloppy :/) example of how to set up their project posters. Each group that was ready received a poster paper and split it into four sections. In each section, they would combine their ideas and summarize a piece of their reader's notebook as it related to their story. One section is for reader recommendations. I wanted students to think critically about their book choice and decide if they were happy with the book they selected. Here is my sloppy example:



Groups set off on their posters and I was happy to see they were talking with each other first and deciding what to write on their poster. In addition, they were referring back to their notebooks, knowing they had already recorded their ideas on these questions.



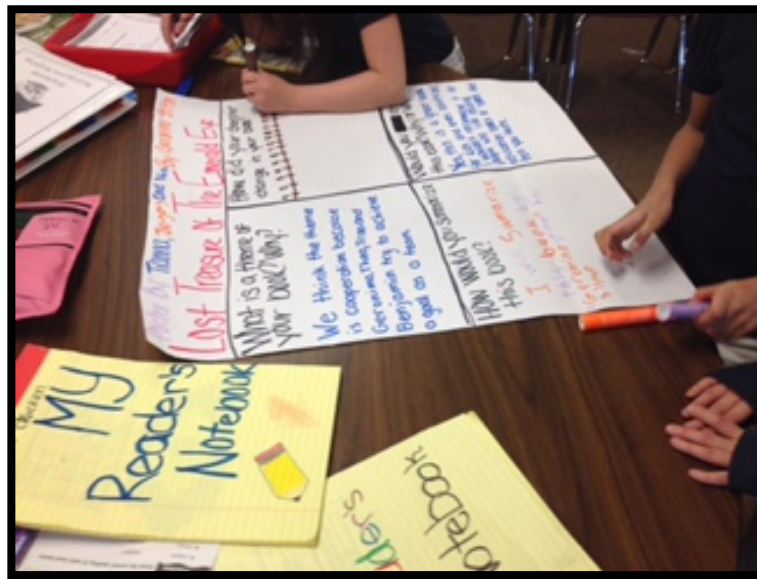
I spent some time with the *Charlotte's Web* group, since they were still working on reading the book. I listened in on their discussion of their reactions to Charlotte's death and their predictions about what that would mean for Wilbur and the other animals in the barn. Again, they brought up the movie and wondered whether the book would conclude the same way.



Tye's theme notes from *Charlotte's Web*

3/23-27/2015: Continuing Our Projects

With the *Charlotte's Web* group finishing their books up, all groups were now working on their final project posters. I gave my students plenty of opportunities to work with their groups as a "May Do" assignment during our reading workshop throughout the week. Students did not need much support from me when working on their posters and could go and join their group when they finished up their independent work. This also gave me time to pull students or small groups to review concepts they missed or needed help with from the week.



Overall, the posters and the writers my students are becoming impress me. Their posters show me how well they can articulate their thoughts and argue points they are making using clear language and complete ideas. I also encouraged students to take Accelerated Reader tests over their books during this time. Students were excited to share passing and full credit scores with me on their tests!

3/30-4/3/2015: Project Presentations

Next week is Spring Break and we've reached the finish line! My students are very excited for break next week but were also happy to showcase their hard work and commitment to their books. This week, each group had the chance to make a short presentation about their book and to talk about their project for their classmates.

Thinking back over the course of this project, I'm glad I finally got the chance to try out book clubs and had a place to document and reflect on the process. My two overall goals and driving forces behind this project were to have students select a book that would interest them and then have the chance to delve deeper into it with their classmates. I feel like I've been able to accomplish both of these goals in the last few weeks. As I listened to their presentations and browsed through their reader's notebooks, it was clear that many students were pushed think more critically about the main characters and the theme of the story. Yet, because this was my first attempt at book clubs, I know there were many things I could improve upon for future endeavors. I am glad to know that this is something that helped my students in their reading skills *and* something they truly seemed to enjoy!