

Teach Students How to Use Online Sources to Learn

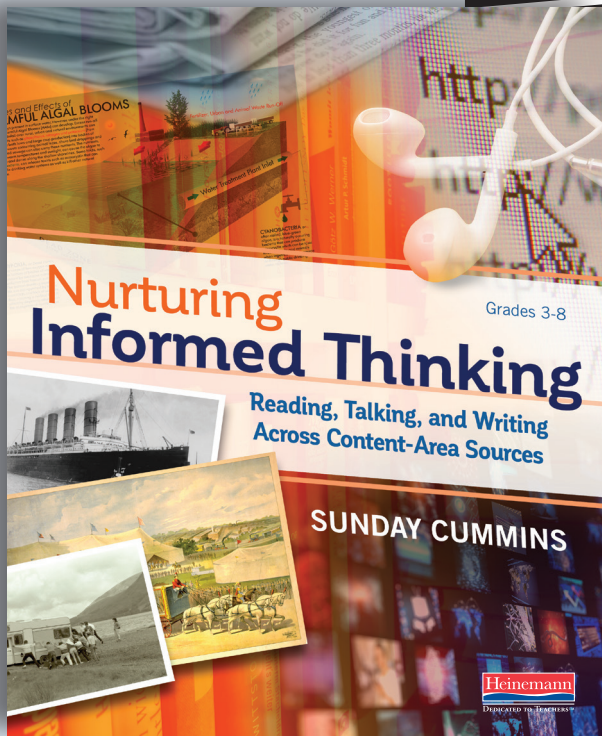


From Sunday Cummins, author of *Nurturing Informed Thinking: Reading, Writing, and Talking Across Content-Area Sources*

A Note from Sunday Cummins

As part of the shift to remote learning, many teachers are sharing online sources—texts, videos, audio, and images. Giving students multiple, high-interest sources around a topic can offer students multiple entry points into a concept, engage them in ways that a textbook can't, and help them gain a fuller understanding of complex concepts. Just assigning students to read or view a set of sources, though, does not mean they will know how to think critically about the information in those sources, or see how to fit together what they've learned from separate sources. What follows is a lesson idea from my book *Nurturing Informed Thinking* (2018) that helps students to do just that. This lesson can be adapted to distance learning in the following ways:

- Select and study two or more sources accessible to students on-line.
- Share your screen to show the text as you think aloud and draw students into conversation.
- Use digital annotation tools to mark directly on the source, jotting notes as you think aloud.
- Invite students to contribute by allowing them to annotate on the shared document as well.
- If needed, coach students on how to flip back and forth between the online sources as they connect and clarify.
- Close by thinking aloud with students about what you all have learned together from these sources, jotting important notes on a digital whiteboard for all students to view.



Lesson 1

Lesson Idea 1

Realize the Value of Reading More Than One Source on a Topic

TYPE OF SOURCE

Two to three sources (infographics, video clips, text excerpts) on a high-interest topic

TIME

Two 40-minute lessons

STRATEGY

Students ask the question, “What did we just add to our learning?” and begin to realize the value of analyzing more than one source on a topic.

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GETTING READY

1. **Select sources:** Choose an appropriate high-interest topic and locate two or three related sources. The sources you read in Chapter 1 (listed below) are on a topic that might easily engage students.
 - *Trapped! A Whale’s Rescue* (Burleigh 2015)
 - SFGate article “Daring Rescue of Whale off Farallones” (Fimrite 2005)
 - Additional sources like a photograph of an entrapped sea turtle or information at www.wildlife.org about the International Smart Gear Competition
2. **Study the sources:**
 - Is there a short section in each text that is worth reading closely to compare details?
 - Does one text include a detail that the other did not? How does that detail add to the reader’s learning about the topic?
 - What question about the topic might you ask that would help the students see the similarities and differences in these sources? For example, for the whale texts, the question might be *What did you learn about the entrapment of sea creatures in fishing nets?*

3. **Prepare materials:** Determine how students will view the sources. You might read a book aloud, give the students hard copies of excerpts or articles, and project photographs or video clips.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Today we are going to think about why it is helpful to read more than one text or source on a topic. We are going to read or look closely at three, asking ourselves after each one, “What did we just add to our learning?”

Introduce the first text. For *Trapped! A Whale’s Rescue*, you might say, *This book is a narrative about one whale who was caught in a fishing net off the coast of California in 2005. The whale became entrapped, which means she was caught and unable to escape on her own. While I’m reading this aloud, think about this question: What are you learning about the entrapment of sea creatures in fishing nets?*

Read the text aloud or ask students to read, and then discuss their responses before moving on to closely reading the excerpt from this text.

Teaching with Source 1

Let's closely read an excerpt or section of this text and think about what we are learning about this topic. (Pause to give the students time to read the excerpt.) What are important words or phrases that we want to remember or that help us answer our question?

Model underlining a phrase and jotting your thinking in the margins of the text. With the excerpt from *Trapped!* in Figure 3.2, you might say, *When I saw the words "spider lines tighten around her," I realized that the lines are getting tighter, and they are not going to be easy to get out of. This helps me answer the question, "What did I learn about the sea creature's entrapment?" I'm going to underline this phrase and jot down what I'm thinking.*

Encourage the students to continue annotating the text with a partner or on their own. Lean in to partner conversations and prompt them to share their thinking.

Figure 3.2 Excerpt from *Trapped! A Whale's Rescue* (Burleigh 2015, 8–12) with example of an annotation

But wait—danger haunts these waters.

Unseen nets, left by crab fishermen, drift through the dark sea.

The whale feels the tickle of thin threads. She plunges on. She tosses. She spirals sideways as spider lines tighten around her.

The struggle begins. The web of ropes cuts into her skin.

She flails, starts to sink, fights for air.

With each thrust of her tail, she tires.

Her sides heave. She flops. She flounders.

At last the great whale shudders and lies still.

The lines are getting tighter, which might make it harder to escape!

SOURCE 1

Teaching with Source 2

Briefly introduce the second text. Ask the students to read the whole text before engaging in closely reading the excerpt. When they begin to closely read the excerpt of the second text or source, ask them to consider the question, “What are you adding to your learning?” Post this question for all students to see, and pose this question as you confer with individuals or small groups.

Also be prepared to think aloud again about what you might underline and write in the margins. For example, with the second source on the whale being trapped in Figure 3.3, you might say, *In this first sentence—“About 20 crab-pot ropes, which are 240 feet long with weights every 60 feet, were wrapped around the animal”—the author tells me how many ropes there were—20—and how long they were—240 feet. That is a lot of rope and they were heavy, too! I’m going to underline those details and jot my thinking in the margins. This adds to my learning about the whale’s entrapment, but it also really helps me better understand the gravity of this situation for the whale. What other details jump out at you and add to your learning?*

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Figure 3.3 Excerpt from “Daring Rescue of Whale off Farallones” (SFGate, Fimrite 2005) with example of an annotation

About 20 crab-pot ropes, which are 240 feet long with weights every 60 feet, were wrapped around the animal. Rope was wrapped at least four times around the tail, the back and the left front flipper, and there was a line in the whale’s mouth. . . . At least 12 crab traps, weighing 90 pounds each, hung off the whale, the divers said. The combined weight was pulling the whale downward.

Knowing how many and how long helps me picture in my mind how dangerous this was for the whale. That is a lot of rope to escape from!

SOURCE 2

Teaching with Additional Sources on This Topic

Implement a similar routine of briefly introducing sources and then asking students to consider the question, “What are you adding to your learning?” as they mark the texts or view or listen to other sources and jot their thinking. Be prepared to think aloud for the group or as you meet with individuals.

With the sources about trapped sea creatures, the third source might be a photograph of a sea turtle or other creature trapped in a net. For me, this broadens our understanding of the first two sources. If I thought aloud for students, I might say, *This source makes me realize that it's not just whales in trouble. There are other sea creatures affected by fishing nets.* I might prompt the students to look closely at the photo, drawing conclusions about the turtle's entrapment and about the young man's intentions as he holds the knife to the net.

Provide time for the students to talk in small groups about the similarities and differences between the sources. Lean in to listen and confer. Close with questions like

- *Why was it important to read more than one source on this topic?*
- *How did you add to or change your understanding each time you read a new source?*

Questions to Push Kids' Thinking

- *What information did you add to your learning when you read this other text?*
- *What does that make you think? How can you jot that in a few words in the margin of the text?*
- *What would you have missed learning from this text if you had only read the first text?*
- If applicable, you might refer back to the essential question posed for students to consider as they read and ask, *How does this help you answer our question?*

Finding the Right Sources

- When looking for hot topics, you might search on news sites like www.usatoday.com. Once you find an article, search on the internet for additional sources on that topic.
- You might think about hot topics related to sports or high-profile figures. Given the recent national anthem protests by NFL teams, students might find engaging a lesson comparing the details in articles about these protests to those about protests by athletes in the more distant past.
- Keep in mind the creator or developer of the sources you choose and their purpose. Sometimes “hot topic” websites like BuzzFeed are meant more for entertainment than for learning facts and as a result are not as reliable. In later lessons, you can explore this issue further. For this lesson, though, you can help students consider sources by casually posing questions during the lesson to initiate students' awareness like “What do you think the author's purpose was in writing this text?”