

# Finding Meaning as We Read

FOR STUDENT'S GRADES 4-5



Game players use strategies to help them win a game. In video games, board games, or puzzles, smart gamers learn and use strategies that help them win.



Smart readers use strategies in the same way a person who plays a game uses them. We recognize when we are in a tight spot where we don't understand and we think of a strategy that might help us. If the one we choose doesn't work, we mentally search through all the strategies we know and we pick another one until we figure out what we need to know.

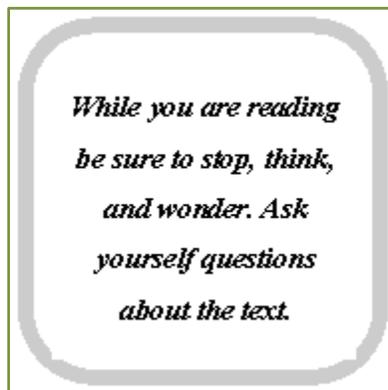
One very helpful strategy that good readers use is that of questioning. When we ask questions in our minds, we help ourselves to understand the meaning of the text we are reading. Questioning also assists us in remembering or explaining to others the information we have read and it allows us to clarify words or ideas that are confusing.

### ***How do good readers use the strategy of questioning?***

**Before reading** a text (a book, poem, letter, or article), a good reader reads the title and glances over the pictures and the captions in the text. S/he asks himself or herself questions like: **“What do I already I know about this topic?”** or **“What does this text remind me of in my own life?”** Our background knowledge gives us lots of good information to

bring with us into our reading. If we think we already know the answers, we notice our answers and we also wonder if we are correct.

**While we are reading** the text, good readers constantly **stop, think, and wonder** about what we read. We might write down the things we wonder, so that we can go back to our ideas and see if we were right. Questions we might ask ourselves while we're reading might begin with, **“Why,” “How come,” “I wonder,” or “What is...”** An excellent way to focus our reading of informational text is to ask ourselves, **“What main question is this text trying to answer?”** That keeps us searching for information and thinking about what we are learning as we read.

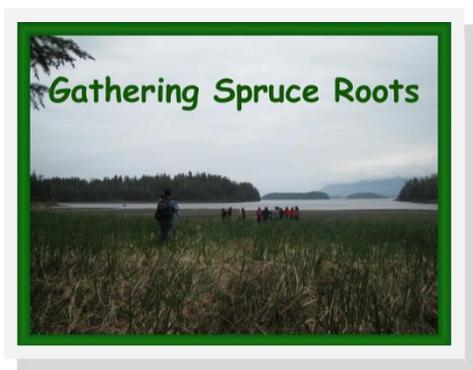


**After we have read**, it's important to think back over the questions we've had about the text and to see which ones we can now answer and which answers we couldn't find. The answers to some questions might be right in the text. We may be able to answer others by putting together what we have read and what we already know – that kind of thinking is called **inference** and it is another important strategy that smart readers use. Some questions may remain unanswered, but we can search in other places to learn what we are wondering.

## READING ACTIVITY Book Needed: *Gathering Spruce Roots*

How can we use the strategy of **QUESTIONING** to help us understand the book, *Gathering Spruce Roots*? To answer this question, I am going to show you what I do when I use the strategy of questioning to better understand a text.

**Before I read the book**, I take a quick look at the cover and the pictures and I ask myself questions about what I see. For example, looking at the cover of *Gathering Spruce Roots*, I ask myself, “**What do I know about spruce roots?**”



Ever since I was a child, I have been out and about in the woods of Southeast Alaska and I've seen something that looks like what I see on page 8 in this book: a long, skinny little vine-looking thing that I think is a spruce root. So I think to myself, “**Why would people want to gather spruce roots?**”

I remember beautiful little baskets I've seen like the one on page 3, woven by Tlingit friends, made of tiny strands of fibers and I think they must use the roots to make these baskets.



My next thought is, “**How do people gather spruce roots?**” As I browse the pictures on pages 7 and 14 in the book, I see some ladies and a young girl digging in the dirt and pulling out a long vine that must be a spruce root. On page 12, I notice that they use a heavy-duty metal tool to help them cut the vine and, for some reason, they coil the vine and put it in a fire. This worries me. I think they’re going to burn it up. I ask myself, “Why would they put the spruce root in the fire?” Why do they need such a heavy-duty tool to cut that skinny vine?”



Now I read the book! But **while I read the book**, I also ask myself questions. I choose the question, “How do people gather spruce roots?” to help me focus my reading and I remember to **stop, think, and wonder**. I follow this guideline while I read page 2. I have several questions. At first I wonder about the meaning of the word **functional**, but, when I reread the sentence where it is found, “Beautiful and **functional** spruce root baskets have long been made...” I think of the word “function,” which means “job” so I decide the word “functional” must mean “useful.” I also read on page 2 that the people prepare the spruce roots for weaving by heating the roots and stripping off the outer bark. That answers my question, “Why do they put the spruce root in the fire?”

On **page 2**, the author says that preparing the roots for weaving is a **ritual** for basket weavers. I'm sure what a **ritual** is, but, when I reread the sentence, I think it might mean something that people do. Then I think of the word **spiritual**," which has to do with religion. "Maybe a ritual is a religious activity," I muse.

The last sentence on **page 2** says that the girl named Wea learned how to show respect for all living things, in this case the spruce tree. I wondered how a person could show respect to a spruce tree.

I continue to read the little book about gathering spruce roots. I stop after every couple of pages **to think and wonder**. On **page 5**, I wonder how the weavers asked Bear for forgiveness and for permission to enter the forest. I decide that they don't actually go up to a bear and talk to him. They must be saying a sort of prayer to a bear, asking for permission to come into the forest.



Before entering the woods, we stopped to acknowledge bear or "Grandfather". We asked his forgiveness and thanked him for letting us enter his forest to gather spruce roots.

5

### Strategy Example

*"I wonder how the weavers asked Bear for forgiveness and for permission to enter the forest."*

When I finish reading **page 9**, I realize that I'm finding the answer to my main question, "How do people gather spruce roots?" This page tells me that the weavers need to remove moss from under the spruce trees and to dig until they find a spruce root. Then they remove more moss so that they can expose and dig the root. Now I wonder, "What do the weavers do next?" "How long do these roots get?"

I learn more about what the weavers do on **page 11**, which tells about continuing to follow the root, being careful not to break it or to disturb other plants along the way. I am finding the answers to some of my questions!

At the end of the book, I ask myself what questions I've been able to answer and what I have learned. I realize that I have found step-by-step information explaining how people gather spruce roots. I have also learned how the weavers respectfully ask permission of the bears and of the forest plants to enter the forest and to harvest the spruce roots. I check the dictionary to see if **ritual** does mean a religious activity, I discover that my thinking wasn't quite correct, as the dictionary defines **ritual** as an "established formal behavior."

I didn't find an answer to my question, "Why do they need such a heavy-duty tool to cut that skinny vine." I think about what I know from my own experience digging up roots in my garden and I remember how tough and difficult to break some of them can be. I decide that a heavy-duty tool would be a lot easier than using one's hands.

As I close the book, I wonder if, using the information from this book, I could gather spruce roots and prepare them for weaving a basket myself!