



## Thinking Aloud About an Article

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Following is a transcript of Nell Duke's Think Aloud, which was based on the article "Put on a Happy Face!" in the "Health Beat" section of *National Geographic for Kids*. (See Figure 3.3.) The article discusses a study suggesting that thinking positive thoughts may help people live longer.

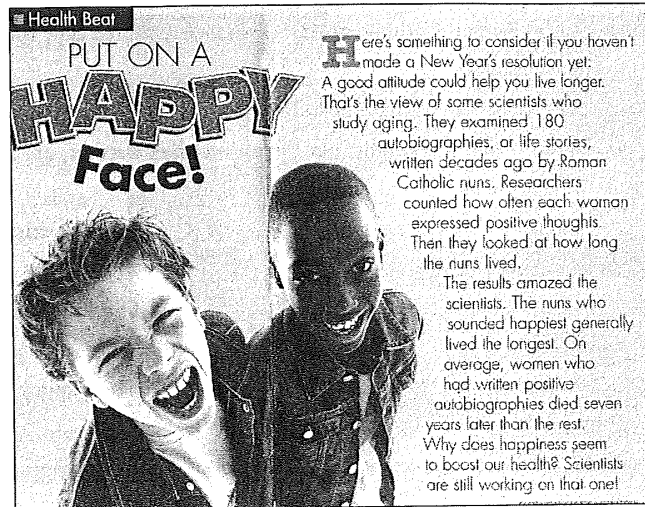


Figure 3.3: The short article Nell used for her Think Aloud.

NELL: [Opens the magazine and shows the article.] I only have a minute.... This piece down here is short and it looks interesting. The title—"Put on a Happy Face!"—and the two smiling kids makes me think that it has something to do with smiling. But the section it's in is called "Health Beat." What does smiling have to do with health? Maybe smiling is good for your health or something like that. [With that, she begins reading the text aloud.]

TEXT: "Here's something to consider if you haven't made a New Year's resolution yet."

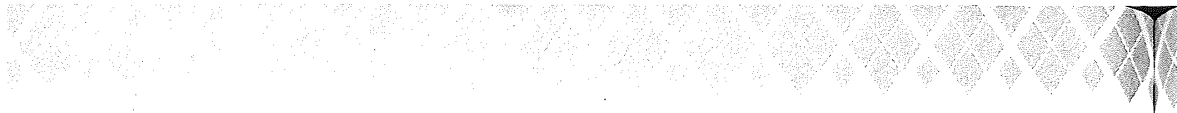
NELL: A resolution... I know that's something you promise yourself you're going to do in the new year, like exercise more or eat less junk food. Actually I really haven't made one this year. I haven't made one for a few years. I guess they're going to suggest one.

TEXT: "A good attitude could help you live longer."

NELL: I wonder what they mean by a good attitude?

TEXT: "That's the view of some scientists who study aging. They examined 180 autobiographies, or life stories, written decades ago..."

NELL: I need to do some quick translating... a decade is ten years so decades ago would be like twenty or thirty or more years ago.



TEXT: "...by Roman Catholic nuns. Researchers counted how often each woman expressed positive thoughts."

NELL: So I guess they think a positive attitude is just having positive thoughts. I think that would probably be thoughts like, "It's a nice day outside" or "I enjoyed that."

TEXT: "Then they looked at how long the nuns lived."

NELL: I figure they were seeing if the ones who had more positive thoughts lived longer than the other ones.

TEXT: "The results amazed the scientists. The nuns who sounded happiest generally lived the longest."

NELL: Being happy is good for your health! I wonder how much longer the more positive nuns lived.

TEXT: "On average, women who had written positive autobiographies died seven years later than the rest."

NELL: This time the text answered my question right away. Seven years—that's a lot! So nuns who had more positive thoughts lived an average of seven years longer than the others!

TEXT: "Why does happiness seem to boost our health? Scientists are still working on that one!"

NELL: Huh, I guess there are scientists whose job is to study why being happy makes you more healthy. That's an unusual job! I have some ideas of my own. Maybe when you are happy your heart doesn't have to work as hard, so it can last longer. I know a lot of people have heart problems. Maybe we need to work on being happier!

Nell didn't focus on only one reading strategy but instead incorporated several strategies and moves into her Think Aloud, such as asking oneself questions as one reads and drawing inferences.

## Thinking Aloud About a Graph

In the next example, Nell's Think Aloud focuses on a somewhat narrower set of strategies, having to do with reading graphs. She bases her Think Aloud on "Pumpkin Powerhouses" in *National Geographic for Kids*.

NELL: I'm going to take a look at this month's "Geo Graph". (See Figure 3.4.) I love the "Geo Graph" section of the magazine. I try never to miss it. I see it's a pumpkin. That's neat, it fits with Halloween.



NELL: [Points to the graph's title.] Let's see, the title is "Pumpkin Powerhouses/Which states grow the most pumpkins?" That tells me the graph is going to show which states grow the most pumpkins. So the names of the states listed on the graph must be the ones that grow the most pumpkins: Illinois, California, New York, Pennsylvania, Michigan. I notice they're mostly northern states. I'm surprised I don't see Florida, Georgia, and other warmer states. I guess pumpkins need it to be cold part of the year.

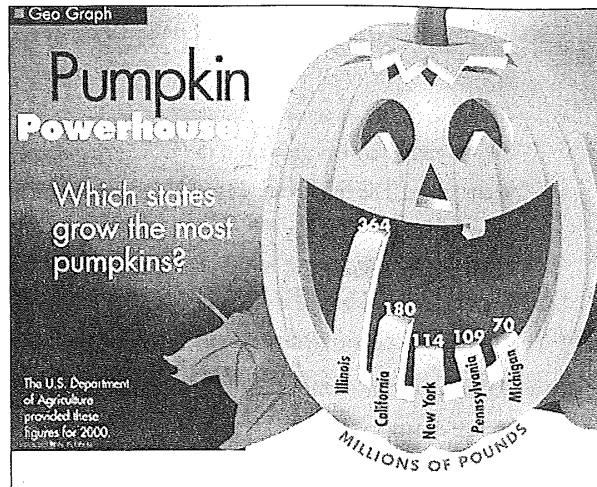


Figure 3.4: The graph Nell used for her Think Aloud.

NELL: Okay, now how many pumpkins do these states grow?... Well, I can tell that this is a bar graph, even though instead of regular bars it has pumpkin teeth for bars! Each state name goes with one tooth or bar and there's a number on each tooth. The number must tell how many pumpkins. So Illinois has 364 pumpkins, California has 180 pumpkins.... Wait a minute! That doesn't really make sense. I'm sure they would grow more than 180 pumpkins in the whole state of California! Plus, even all together this isn't that many pumpkins when we would need millions of pumpkins for all the families that want one to have one!...

NELL: [Pauses and scans the graph.] Oh, look at the bottom of the graph, the label is "millions of pounds" so it's not just 364 pumpkins, it's 364 million pumpkins... no, 364 million *pounds* of pumpkins. But I don't know how many pounds most pumpkins weigh. So to really understand how many pumpkins, I'd have to find that out and then do the math to figure out how many pumpkins that comes out to. I don't think that's worth it. This graph isn't telling me exactly what I wanted to know.

NELL: [Pauses and studies each bar.] I guess the graph does tell me who has the most pumpkins anyway... Illinois: It has the highest bar and of course the highest number too. Illinois could be called The Pumpkin State!



NELL: [Points to the source.] Before I finish I'd better check my source since I'm always telling you to check your sources! It says, "The U.S. Department of Agriculture provided these figures for 2000." That makes sense... Agriculture has to do with things that farmers grow and pumpkins are one thing farmers grow, and the U.S. government can collect information from all the different states. The figures are from 2000, already one year old, but I guess they wouldn't have them for 2001 yet. Okay, I checked my source, now I'm done.

Ultimately, the number and range of strategies and other components of your Think Aloud will depend on your goals for teaching comprehension and comprehension strategies—what you want to communicate and reinforce. Although Think Alouds are certainly not a replacement for explicit teaching of comprehension strategies, they are a good complement to that. (See Chapter 4 for a discussion of explicit teaching of comprehension strategies.) You can be confident that Think Aloud is part of the repertoire of many successful comprehension teachers.

## Some Prompts for Think Aloud

### Monitoring and adjusting comprehension

- That does/doesn't make sense to me because...
- I didn't understand that last part, I'd better go back...
- I still don't understand what that means, I'm going to try...

### Activating relevant prior knowledge

- I know some things about...
- That reminds me of...
- That's fits/doesn't fit with what I know about...

### Generating questions and responses

- I wonder...
- I notice...
- It's interesting/frustrating/exciting/etc. that...

### Attending to and uncovering text structure

- I think this is organized by...
- This section talked all about... so I think this next section will talk about...
- Looking at these headings/titles/graphics/etc., I see that...

### Summarizing

- So far I've read that...
- I think the main points of this are...
- This was about...