

2011

## Book Reviews

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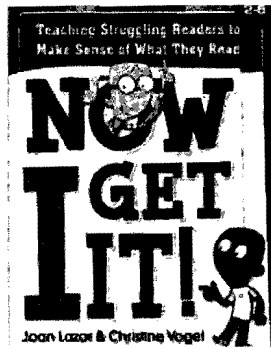
### Recommended Citation

Schuck, Tina; Fahrenbruck, Mary; and Vronko, Kay L. (2011) "Book Reviews," *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*: Vol. 26: Iss. 2, Article 16.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.9707/2168-149X.1804>

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## Book Reviews



*Now I Get It: Teaching Struggling Readers to Make Sense of What They Read*

By Joan Lazar and Christine Vogel  
Reviewer: Tina Schuck  
Scholastic, Inc.  
2010, 128 pp  
ISBN-13: 9780545105835

Joan Lazar and Christine Vogel prove that they “get it” in their book *Now I Get It: Teaching Struggling Readers to Make Sense of What They Read*. Lazar and Vogel, both professionals in the field of literacy and literacy instruction, base their book around the psycholinguistic belief that every person knows a certain amount about any given topic and has a specific level of development in the use and appreciation of language. From that perspective, they share eight invaluable reading strategies to equip “word callers” with the appropriate tools to become successful readers. Kerneling and Nicknaming are two examples. Kerneling teaches the reader to eliminate all but the key elements such as the subject, verb, and direct object when trying to understand challenging material while Nicknaming teaches the reader to rename each unfamiliar proper noun using its first letter as they figure out the proper noun’s function within the text. The strategies are tangible and teach the reader not to get bogged down with what they don’t know but rather use what they do know. The real-life scenarios at the beginning of each lesson allow a teacher to quickly “diagnose” their own struggling reader and then choose the appropriate strategy lesson. While the lessons are somewhat lengthy (6-8 pages a piece), they provide the user with examples, answers to frequently asked questions, and teaching points to allow just about anyone to implement them successfully. The Appendices in the back include all the reproducibles referenced in the lessons. *Now I Get It: Teaching Struggling Readers to Make Sense of What They Read* is an invaluable tool geared for all upper elementary and middle school teachers who want their students to be confident, successful readers.

**Tina Schuck** graduated with her Master’s degree in Reading from Grand Valley State University in December of 2010 and currently teaches first grade at Excel Charter Academy in Grand Rapids, MI.



*Classroom Reading Assessments: More Efficient Ways to View and Evaluate Your Readers*

By Frank Serafini  
Reviewer: Mary Fahrenbruck  
Heinmann Publishers  
2010, 157 pp  
ISBN-13: 978-0-325-02712-8

“Assessment is often discussed as a technical act rather than a process of getting to know actual students” (p. 14).

Frank Serafini reminds us that assessments must “help children learn more effectively, help teachers teach more effectively, help teachers articulate their understandings of their students to external audiences, and be efficient so they interrupt teaching and learning as little as possible” (p. XIV). It is clear that Serafini is not writing about standardized tests. He is writing about classroom reading assessments.

In a vignette about a fictitious student in Serafini’s fifth grade classroom, we are introduced to the assessment tools Serafini uses to frame assessment and evaluation as inquiry. He invites us to move away from “Assessment as Fact/Measurement” and “Assessment as Activity/Procedure” which he clearly describes in his book. Instead, Serafini encourages us to move towards “Assessment as Inquiry/Understanding” so that we can more fully “gain a deeper understanding of the behaviors, attitudes and conceptual frameworks of each individual learner” (p. 7).

In Chapters 2 and 3, Serafini unpacks his vignette and focuses on each of the assessments he introduces to us. The format is straight-forward and consistent. First, he identifies each assessment from the vignette and explains his purpose for its use. Next, he guides us through the process of organizing and using each assessment with students by describing the ways in which he used the assessments in his own classroom. Then he provides us with authentic examples that show how each assessment looks when it’s used with students in a classroom setting. For example, we can glimpse Serafini’s thinking about a student’s miscue analysis as we read his handwritten notes on the Reading Analysis Form he shares with us. Serafini also acknowledges the difficulties we might encounter when we implement the assessments. His honesty reflects his experiences as a classroom teacher and adds credibility to the suggestions in the book.

In the remaining chapters of *Classroom Reading Assessments*, Serafini makes it clear that evaluation and grading are part of teachers’ responsibilities. In Chapter 4, Serafini tells how he evaluates the assessments he uses in his classroom. He shares with us the need to make our evaluations transparent, equitable, comprehensive and responsive so that we

can better know our students' as readers and writers. Serafini presents examples of checklists and evaluation criteria for us to consider when we evaluate our own students. In the final pages of this chapter, Serafini tackles grading. He offers us realistic suggestions and guiding principles to use in our grading process.

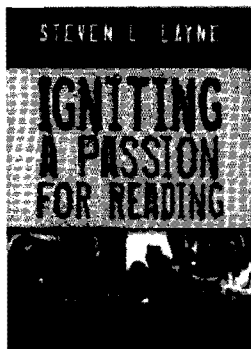
In Chapter 5, Serafini challenges us to think about how we report our students' literacy growth beyond traditional report cards. He suggests that teachers incorporate narrative report cards, student-led conferences, and grade negotiated report cards. In keeping with the format of the previous chapters, Serafini describes these reporting methods and then provides us with guiding principles to reflect on as we begin to implement each new method.

Throughout the book, Serafini introduces and defines assessment terminology that might be new to many readers of his book. One new phrase I encountered was "assessment windows" or "observational frames" (p. 21). His clever analogy of looking through windows into a vacant house one might like to buy helps us understand that we look through assessment windows to find out what our students have learned. And like the view through the window of a house that shows only one room, assessment windows show us only a portion of what our students have learned. His analogy helps us understand the need for multiple classroom assessments.

Even though Serafini provides examples of his classroom assessments throughout the book, he states that he "is reticent to share the rubrics" for fear that educators will simply photocopy the assessments and use them without thinking through their own needs (p. 94). Serafini explains that the process of reflecting on our classroom practices and then writing our own rubrics is "more important" than the actual rubrics (p. 94). He wants educators to go through the steps of "considering for themselves what is important in their classrooms, school and community as they create rubrics to use with their students." (p. 94)

The examples from Classroom Reading Assessments come from Serafini's own experience as a 5th grade teacher. The assessments he shares with us are easily implemented and maintained because Serafini has honed them already. Classroom teachers seeking authentic and informative assessments will find Serafini's book a valuable and useful resource.

**Mary Fahrenbruck** is an assistant professor in the College of Education at Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids, MI.



**Igniting a Passion for Reading: Successful Strategies for Building Lifetime Readers**

By Steven L. Layne  
Reviewer: Kay Vronko  
Stenhouse Publishers  
2009, 188 pp  
ISBN-13: 9781571103857

Steven Layne had me at the chapter title "I Didn't Know They Still Wrote Books for Adults..." As I glanced over chapters in previewing his book, *Igniting a Passion for Reading: Successful Strategies for Building Lifetime Readers*, that title caused me to turn immediately to chapter three. There Layne not only validated my guilty secret—a steady diet of children's and young adult books—he turned it into a virtue. When a teacher has a working knowledge of books for students, that teacher is in a position to match the right student with the right book. Chapter 3 is on the value of giving book chats to expose students to books. Layne's classroom tested how-to's are specific and realistic. They'll leave the reader inspired to try them out.

Layne begins his book by laying out his argument for more attention to the affective side of reading in our schools. He points to research that shows our illiteracy rate is greater than our illiteracy rate; there are more Americans without the will to read than without the ability to read. Layne wants to put our futures in the hands of those who are passionate about reading. Although it's not on the state tests (attitude and motivation are difficult to measure), we must teach students to value books. The remaining chapters provide an abundance of ways to support the goal of turning students into lifetime readers.

Reading Layne's book feels like having a conversation with a savvy teacher. In discussing the value of knowing one's students he states, "I'll tell you the four most important words that our students need to hear, 'I thought of you.' Those words, supported with tangible evidence, can work miracles in the life of a disengaged reader" (p. 15).

Chapters on familiar topics, such as knowing one's students, are worth careful reading for the refinements that Layne brings to known instructional techniques and tools, such as interest inventories, student self-assessments, and goal setting. The same is true for his chapters on reading aloud, modeling reading, and book discussions. Readers will find a variety of useful practices to implement in their classrooms. For instance, Layne suggests that students be taught to hold their current independent reading book out, give the title, author, page number, and a one-to five-star rating to take a quick status of the class. Layne details exactly how he would do this and his reasoning. There is great value in knowing both the how and the why.

Just when the reader has gathered an abundance of insightful ideas to try, the really bold ideas appear: open a school reading lounge, conduct a monthly reading café, institute poetry breaks, and increase the number of author visits.

At the end, Layne is thorough as always. He provides a suggested nine-week schedule for implementing his ideas. It is not a prescription as much as a clear picture of what's possible. This is a book a teacher can go back to again and again, each time finding more fuel to light those reading fires. The reader will come away sharing Layne's urgency and vision.

**Kay L. Vronko** is a fourth grade teacher at Byron Center Charter School in Byron Center, MI.