“Students learn to read, and then they read to learn” A frequent phrase, but probably wrong on all counts. “Getting meaning—comprehension—is always the goal of reading.” Also frequently heard, but also probably misleading.

The text – structure and substance – along with the reader’s purpose – comprise a braid of understanding, which take shape as scraps of mismatched string, a tangled snarl, or a brilliant and multicolored tress. In U. S. schools, the transition from elementary to middle schools marks a critical point where texts and reading strategies undergo enormous changes. The transition is chaotic for many reasons, and the abrupt transformations in language and literacy demands are understandably overlooked. These students certainly face new challenges, but the greatest of these may be that it suddenly matters what they read and how they read it.

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