BOX 7.6

Diagram Dialogues

In Ericka Senegar-Mitchell's high school biology courses, she introduces students to the many visuals in their texts with a scaffolding routine for interrogating these complex illustrations. Students work with a partner to Think Aloud or Talk to the Text of a diagram related to a reading assignment and to use a set of questions that she dubs "Diagram Dialogues" to guide their discussion.

1. Location, location, location! Determine the setting of the diagram; where are you? Explain the overall scene in simple terms. What clues did you use?
2. Who are the players? What characters, parts, structures, or components are being represented or depicted? How do you know?
3. Are there special characters, symbols (such as arrows or callouts), or shapes (such as triangles or enlargements)? What do they represent? How do you know?
4. Are colors used intentionally? What do you think the use of color means? (For example, is the color intended to establish a relationship or distinction with components of the diagram?) How do you know?
5. What is the diagram intended to illustrate? Is the diagram showing a process, sequence, structure versus function (organization), categories, classification (such as a list or table), or cause and effect?

read a graph that represents information they have read about in a related article. Their collaborative cross-walk between the graph and article help them clarify their understanding of both.

In addition to visualizing and reading visual information, students benefit from producing their own visual representations, which will vary with the discipline, text, and purpose for reading. The process of visual note making gives readers in any discipline opportunities to access their own schema, to represent the text in a new form using what they know and what they are learning, and to integrate new knowledge (and sometimes confront misunderstandings) with their existing knowledge through the active construction of meaning. Visual note making can be a powerful way for readers to commit new ideas, information, and concepts to memory.

Although students' visual notes primarily serve to help them make meaning as they read, they can also be used after reading to demonstrate understanding through spreadsheets, databases, graphics, illustrations, and other forms of textual support that are common in the discipline in which they are working.

As Dorothea Jordan explained in Classroom Close-Up 7.2, her grade 7 prealgebra students cited visual note making—"drawing"—as the one thing that