

# CHAPTER 1

## Why Is the North Pole Always Cold?

Each year is a new beginning for me. I spend hours arranging my room so that it will be a fun, comfortable, inviting place for my students. This particular year posed an additional challenge: a combination classroom of second and third graders. My classroom consists of an art corner, a reading center, a writing area, a library complete with books and large pillows, a science center, and the children's desks, which are grouped via larger tables. From day one onward, an environment of mutual respect is carefully cultivated and developed in my classroom. The children know that I think they are intelligent, important, and that they can manage their lives. We are on a journey together, to learn how to learn and to learn how to think. The children feel safe, take risks, and are engaged in learning. They are encouraged to ask questions, share with one another, and care about one another. We are a community of learners.

### WHAT IS READING ENGAGEMENT?

Reading engagement is the dynamic, recurrent process of combining motivation, strategies for reading and learning, social interaction, and knowledge about a topic (Guthrie & Anderson, 1999; Wigfield, 1997). When students in a classroom are engaged, they are learning just for the sake of learning. Their goal is to gain knowledge about something they are interested in. Engaged readers have interests and questions about the world. They are socially interactive: they want to *talk* about what they read. Sometimes, through discussion, more questions emerge; this questioning then leads to more reading, which in turn leads to more discussion. Engaged readers:

- Are active learners.
- Set goals for learning.
- Ask questions.
- Read for more information.