

FOR-PD's Reading Strategy of the Month

(Developed by Smith, L. & Zygouris-Coe, V., 2007)

To: Paul Zindel
From: Cliff
Date: 2/13/07
Re: Pigman

Dear Mr. Zindel,

When I found out that we were going to read your book, *The Pigman & Me*, I wasn't sure if I was going to like it or not. You see, I thought it was going to be about a real *pigman*, like a man that was half man and half pig. I thought that might be interesting, but I felt better when I read some of it and found out it was just about you and your life.

You grew up in Travis, NJ and I know right where that is because I lived in NJ too before I moved to Florida. I didn't live with another family like you, but my mom was all by herself just like yours but not as crazy. She makes me think of this woman that lives downstairs and stares out the window. I wish I had a friend like Nonno Frankie. I had what you called a "mentor" come to the school and read with me and make puzzles. It was sort-of like Nonno. I will say that sometimes I thought you might be lying. This is because Nonno sounds too good to be true. Was he really like this?

I hope to read another one of your books. You write good stuff and I'd like to maybe write some of my own too. Would you read it and let me know if it's any good? You might not even get this email but I'm going to print it out and turn it in anyways to my teacher.

TFN (this stands for Ta-Ta For Now, if you don't know)

Cliff
7th Grader

Rationale:

Reader Response

One may wonder exactly what a “reader response” can be. Is it just what a reader writes after they read a piece of text? Does it have to be written, or can it be in a different format? Would an email sent by a student to an author, like the example above, constitute a reader response?

Reader response may sound simple enough, but there are many elements to consider. The reader response theory of reading is formed from Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading. Rosenblatt suggests that a reader can approach a piece of text with two different motivations. If a reader focuses their attention on information to remember facts from a text they are in an efferent stance. If the reader draws from past experiences and feels emotions when reading, they are in an aesthetic stance (Rosenblatt, 1982). Having students approach text from both stances will invigorate critical thinking and increase the potential for a thoughtful response.

While the spotlight has been on reading for over the past twenty-years, writing has been both in the shadow and light. Recently, writing and the reading-writing connection have come into focus as an area of need. Seventy percent of students in grades 4–12 are low-achieving writers (Persky, Daane, & Jin, 2003) and nearly one third of high school graduates are not ready for college-level English composition courses (ACT, 2005).

Taking a fresh look at ways to integrate reading and writing together can benefit both areas exponentially as they are reciprocal processes. Making the time to scaffold instruction can increase critical thinking, engagement, and motivation toward reading and writing. Of course, we cannot forget the role of technology in these areas. Blogs, emails, and even website design can act as a fine vehicle to drive students through a reader response experience they won't easily forget.

How to Use the Strategy:

Asking students to respond to a piece of text by writing a summary is nothing new. In fact, although there is a time and place for summarizing, it can become a bit boring if all assignments hold this requirement. Using the theory/strategy of reader response can provide students with new ways to channel their thoughts and creativity.

Cultivating Reader Response for Fiction

When considering how to cultivate strong reader responses, you may want to think about the following suggestions from Larry Lewin (2006), author of *Reading Response That Really Matters to Middle Schoolers*.

- **Begin talk-back assignments with short readings.**
Starting simple will allow time for students to get used to responding. Use short stories and poems. You may even consider using picture books.
- **Tap into students' oral language strengths during pre-writing.**
Group students in pairs or trios so that they can talk about their thoughts and feelings regarding the given text. Guide them by discussing specific procedures you would like them to follow as they discuss text.
- **Teach students to use reading-response tools.**
Use strategies like sticky notes, **columned-note strategies**, or double-entry diaries to assist students with what they think is important. This will also increase their comprehension during reading.
- **Review how to support an opinion.**
Describe how it is fine for them to state their opinion, but that they must be able to provide support or evidence from the text.
- **Explain the difference between a basic and an elaborate response.**
Writers make choices. Help your students understand that basic writing can be brief and general, as well as detailed and specific.

Cultivating Reader Response for Non-Fiction

Although reader response is often used for literature and fiction, it can also be integrated into assignments in content area classrooms. Lewin (2006) proposes the following suggestions for cultivating strong responses from students when dealing with informational texts or textbooks.

- **Provide structured reading support to aid comprehension.**
Provide students with strategies and graphic organizers to assist them in getting the most of their reading.
- **Introduce the audience and purpose of the reading assignment.**
Explain to your students the goals of your assignments. In a content-area class it may seem strange to write about their textbook. Provide examples of constructive criticism.
- **Provide organizational structures.**
Offer specific examples of structures you would like them to use, if you want the response specifically organized.
- **Show students what you expect from their writing.**
Offer examples, and allow students the opportunities to critique those examples and discuss their feelings and opinions. Remind students to provide evidence from the text.
- **Plan time for students to produce several drafts of their writing.**

Rome wasn't built in a day and your students need to have many opportunities to review and revamp their own writing. Provide activities and time for them to do this and also to get used to doing this, as revision is often misunderstood.

Specific Assignments

Postcards

This is a very basic form or response allowing students to get used to writing, and it should not intimidate those who may feel overwhelmed. Although short, students should still analyze the text and provide quality feedback to the author.

- First have students orally point out the positives of the story.
- Next, have students orally describe any negatives.
- Then, remind students to consider their *tone* as they discuss the text.
- Finally, introduce a postcard example. Have students analyze it and begin their own.

Dear Mr. Poe,

When you wrote the Tell-Tale Heart, I couldn't believe how scary it was to read. I loved every, frightening moment. I will say that part of the eye kinda made me sick. I would have preferred that you skipped that part or talked about how you heard him whispering or something. The nervousness of this man reminded me of my Dad before my sister was born...

Sample Postcard

Letter to the (Textbook) Editor

Students will benefit by writing about the content and format of their textbooks. In order to write a response, the student will need to understand the material quite well. The teacher or student will need to decide if they are going to write a letter rating the textbook, critiquing the textbook, or improving the textbook. There could of course be a combination of all three. You could also use the three different choices to differentiate and level out the instruction.

Student Authored Study Guides

As students go through a textbook they may find it useful to take notes to read through later. Working with students to complete a study guide that could enhance their own learning and the learning of others is a great motivator.

Students will need to have the following skills (Lewin, 2006):

- read the text carefully to understand the information
- prioritize the information and key ideas
- translate the author's words into student language
- decide on layout and visual
- develop review questions
- provide teaching tips

Textbook Chapter Rewrites

Are the textbooks in your classroom putting your students to sleep? Perhaps your students could shed a new light on the content by putting it in their own words. Note that this is a very large assignment and something you may want to do toward the end of the year for the next year's use. Either way, the student writers will have to have a great mastery of the material.

Below are some tips for rewriting a textbook (Lewin, 2006):

ERASER Short Essay Response Strategy

<http://teachers.net/lessons/posts/2975.html>

ERASER is a mnemonic device that serves as a short essay response strategy.

Reader Response Essays

<http://www.sci.edu/classes/ellertsen/rosenblatt.html>

Reader response originates from an educator named Louise Rosenblatt. The best way to do reader response is to ask yourself three questions: What about this story, poem, or play stands out in my mind? What in my background, values, needs, and interests makes me react that way? What specific passages in the work trigger that reaction?

Transactional Reading Journal

<http://www.greece.k12.ny.us/instruction/ela/6-12/Reading/Reading%20Strategies/transactionalreadingjournal.htm>

This strategy can be adapted for any grade level, and students can be provided with the flexibility to develop their own journal prompts, which they can also share with the class.

The Significance of Louise Rosenblatt on the Field of Teaching Literature

<http://www.vccaedu.org/inquiry/inquiry-spring97/i11chur.html>

An overview of the Reader-Response theory and Louise Rosenblatt is presented which remains a dominant teaching approach and is also present in contemporary research.

References:

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