Reading Better, Reading Smarter
Reading Better, Reading Smarter
Designing Literature Lessons for Adolescents
For John and for Bonnie.

We don’t deserve your patience, but we’re glad we have it.
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“Comprehensive SRE for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” is reprinted by permission of Seward, Inc., Minneapolis, MN. This SRE is a shortened version of an SRE developed by Seward, Inc. with funds from the U.S. Department of Education. The complete SRE and a number of other SREs are available at onlinereadingresources.com.
Ms. Kerr’s fourth-hour tenth-grade English class is on fire. Hers is a typical urban classroom, large and strikingly diverse in every way, including reading ability. The students have just read Abraham Rodriguez, Jr.’s “The Boy Without a Flag,” a contemporary story about a young Puerto Rican boy who disobeys school authorities by refusing to salute the flag. Nearly every hand is raised, as students clamor to join the discussion about whether the protagonist of the story has made the right decision. Ms. Kerr has her students stand and demonstrate their position by forming a “human barometer.” Students are able to participate because they have read, comprehended, and interpreted the story. Although the story is challenging, no student seems left behind during this two-day lesson. Ms. Kerr has provided a Scaffolded Reading Experience (SRE) (Graves and Graves 2003; Graves and Fitzgerald 2009), a framework that allows her to plan a lesson specifically designed for this particular group of readers, this story, and what she wants students to gain from reading it.
Teaching Literature or Teaching Reading?

If you call yourself an English teacher and you’ve purchased this book, you have already conquered the first hurdle in helping all your students read successfully. You are seeking strategies beyond those of literary interpretation to help all your students make meaning of texts. You are looking for specific instructional methods to help your students become better readers. This book discusses precisely those strategies.

Historically, the language arts field has been divided between those who consider ourselves teachers of literature and those who consider ourselves teachers of reading. In fact, one of the authors of this book (Deborah) is primarily a researcher in how literature gets taught; the other (Michael) deals primarily with reading instruction. Our preservice training, our first few years of teaching, and perhaps even our natural predispositions toward reading and literature contribute to this divide. Yet the time has come to merge these two perspectives so that we may better serve all our students and their literacy needs.

From English Teacher to Literacy Teacher

This merging has already begun. Over the last decade or so, these two previously distinct perspectives—teaching reading and teaching literature—have begun to inform each other, both in the classroom and in literacy research. Today’s literacy scholars draw on the theoretical underpinnings of both reading research and research focusing on response to literature to help teachers choose texts, establish learning environments, create lessons, and design methods of assessment that help ensure every student’s reading success (Alvermann 1999; Applebee 1993; Appleman 2009, 2010; Beach and Myers 2001; Graves and Graves 2003; Kamil, Pearson, Moje, and Afflerbach 2011; Langer 1995; Lapp and Fisher 2011; Philippot and Graves 2009; Wilhelm 1997). In addition, literacy researchers have examined various factors that influence and shape students’ literacy learning—from the cognitive processes involved in reading to the particular contextual factors that influence a student’s reading to larger social cultural considerations that affect literacy learning. For example, recent research has explored the relationship of out-of-school contexts and literacies to school-based academic performance in reading and writing (Fisher 2007; Hull and Schultz 2001; Morrell 2004; Vasudevan and Wissman 2011) and focused on the degree to which gender influences students’ reading ability and interests (Newkirk 2002; Pirie 2002; Smith and Wilhelm 2002).

Being a literature teacher now means being well versed in our growing understanding of what it means to help all students learn to read and understand
all kinds of texts—from short stories, novels, and poems to newspapers and magazine articles to web pages and text messages. Being an English teacher means—and at some pragmatic level probably has always meant—helping students make meaning as they read, a goal shared by literature teachers and reading teachers.

**Today’s Language Arts Classroom**

Today’s classrooms reflect many of the demographic changes in our country. Most English classrooms are larger and more diverse than they have ever been. There are many more newcomers than there were even ten years ago. As funding for public schools has shrunk, classrooms are increasingly under-resourced, and money for new materials has become increasingly difficult to come by. More schools have larger populations of high-poverty students. Our classrooms are filled with students whose cultural backgrounds and stances toward mainstream learning practices vary widely (Bean and Harper 2011; Mahiri 2002; Ogbu 2003; Tatum 2005). Our increased ability to assess and monitor students’ progress in reading, and the increased mandated reliance on standardized assessments, has helped us realize what has probably been true for decades—that our English classrooms are filled with students who read considerably below grade level, and that while students may be able to decode the texts we assign, many students may not derive as much meaning or pleasure from texts as they could simply because they are not adequately and specifically prepared to read them.

**The Literacy Crisis**

All of these factors have helped fuel public concern about a literacy crisis. Almost annually, federal reports such as *Adolescent Literacy Fact Sheet* (Alliance for Excellent Education 2010), *The Nation’s Report Card: Reading* (National Council on Education 2009), *To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence* (National Endowment for the Arts 2008), and NCTE’S *Adolescent Literacy* research brief (2008) document the changing demands of literacy in a digital age and our collective fear that our schools are not meeting the basic literacy needs of our adolescents. Even students proficient in digital forms of literacy sometimes have difficulty transferring that proficiency to traditional literacy acts such as reading literary texts or writing essays (Beers 2003; Gee 2003). Additionally, more pressure has been placed on all classroom teachers because of mandated reporting of academic progress in reading (as well as
Given all these factors, today’s English teachers are likely to feel tugged in seemingly opposite directions. We feel a sense of urgency to do everything in our power to foster literacy practices among our students, to make certain they are successful readers and writers. Yet we worry that we will lose the texture, richness, and autonomy of our literature classrooms if our pedagogy is held hostage to standardized tests. We often still labor under the mistaken notion that kids’ reading improves only through very explicit reading instruction and centralized and standardized reading programs.

While there is clearly some justification for a sense of urgency with regard to adolescent literacy, English teachers do not need to succumb to a mistaken conclusion that increased attention to improving students’ reading proficiency will shift the instructional focus from literature to “drill and skill.” Moreover, while the Common Core Standards for sixth- through eleventh-grade students state that “students will be able to read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems . . . with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the [text complexity] range,” they do not discuss what effective scaffolding might look like. The framework offered in this book—the Scaffolded Reading Experience—should therefore be particularly appealing to teachers of literature. Scaffolded Reading Experiences (SREs) are not a comprehensive reading instruction program. Instead, SREs are an important part of a balanced, intentional approach to reading and literature instruction. Rather than replacing the literature content of an English curriculum, SREs enrich, highlight, and revitalize that curriculum. Moreover, SREs can be used to differentiate instruction for the full range of students in today’s English classes.

Scaffolded Reading Experiences

Scaffolded Reading Experiences are based on several decades of research on the importance of instructional scaffolding and the application of that concept to reading texts. Educational researchers have refined the notion of scaffolding, first associated with the development of verbal abilities in very young children, so that it now applies to students of all ages and all abilities. A scaffold is a “temporary and adjustable support that enables the accomplishment of a task
that would be impossible without the scaffold’s support” (Anderson 1989). The SRE framework is solidly grounded on this bedrock concept. SREs help place readers in what Vygotsky (1978) called the zone of proximal development. That is, SREs provide the conceptual and cognitive support that helps students read and interpret texts that are within their developmental reach but would be difficult if attempted without support.

SREs help students read texts successfully, enjoyably, and purposefully. Each SRE is designed for a particular text, a particular instructional context, and a particular purpose or set of purposes. The primary components are prereading, during-reading, and postreading activities. These emphases are familiar to all teachers of literature. Before we read a literary text with our students, we often motivate them, preview the selection, and activate their relevant prior knowledge. While our students are reading a text, we often guide their reading, point out relevant textual features, and encourage them to internalize the heuristic practices that good readers automatically practice (Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, and Hurwitz 1999). After reading, we provide opportunities for students to reflect on the meaning they have made and to connect this particular reading experience to other reading they have done as well as to life experiences. Teachers of literature have long considered these three phases of pre-, during- and postreading in their instruction (Beach and Myers 2001).

SREs Can Transform How You Teach Literature

What do SREs offer that’s new? In typical pre-, during-, and postreading instruction, the same set of activities are used over and over, without regard for the students, the text, and the purpose for which students are reading. SREs, on the other hand, are specifically tailored to our instruction. There are many kinds of pre-, while-, and postreading activities, and we can combine and design each component based on:

- the abilities and characteristics of each particular group of readers,
- the characteristics, content, and difficulty of each literary text, and
- what we expect students to gain from the reading experience.

Students’ reading success depends on many factors, but text selection is of primary importance. SREs inform text selection in several ways:

1. They help us assess the suitability of specific literary texts for your particular students.
2. They offer powerful new ways of making familiar but sometimes difficult and inaccessible literary chestnuts come alive.

3. They show you how you might adapt the teaching of a particular text to different learning contexts.

Using SREs can help you become more intentional about what we are doing to help our students become better readers. After all, we are teaching students, not texts.

**Overview of This Book**

The introduction defines a Scaffolded Reading Experience and briefly explains its components.

Chapter 1, “Prereading Activities”; Chapter 2, “During-Reading Activities”; and Chapter 3, “Postreading Activities,” present numerous examples of specific pre-, while-, and postreading activities appropriate for English classes.

Chapter 4, “Lenses for Approaching Literary Texts,” takes up theoretical concerns specific to teaching literature, including how to incorporate the explicit teaching of contemporary literary theory into the design and implementation of SREs.

Chapter 5, “Comprehensive SREs for English Classes,” presents complete sets of pre-, during-, and postreading activities for four familiar and widely used texts: a short story, a novel, a poem, and an expository piece.

Finally, Chapter 6, “Selecting Texts and Assessing Student Performance,” helps you evaluate and assess the difficulty of texts you are currently teaching and/or may consider teaching in the future. It also describes formal and informal ways of evaluating student performance.

**A Final Word**

The specific and detailed descriptions and examples of SREs in the later chapters are neither blueprints nor prescriptions to be followed exactly. They animate the principles behind SREs and are models you can use to develop similar activities. They are a modest starting point for the imaginative and creative lessons you will design as you apply this flexible framework to some of your favorite texts as well as new ones. As Ms. Kerr and her students have discovered, there is an important place for SREs in English classrooms in which students learn to love and appreciate literature as they become better and smarter readers.
What Is a Scaffolded Reading Experience?

Mr. Slater looked out at his new class of sixth graders and allowed himself a little sigh, whether of contentment or concern he wasn’t sure. His students were fully engaged in an activity he uses at the beginning of the year to get some insight into their writing proficiency, and this was a positive sign. On the other hand, he knew from their records and from the group discussions the class had had thus far that this was going to be a challenging year for many of these students and for him. Mr. Slater was new to the school, having recently moved to the area. The curriculum his sixth-grade colleagues had agreed on was challenging: novels, for example, included Christopher Paul Curtis’ *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*, Lauren Myracle’s *ttyl*, and Adam Rapp’s *Under the Wolf, Under the Dog*. He had taught *The Watsons* before, but never *ttyl* or *Under the Wolf, Under the Dog*, and when he read them just before school began he knew they would require a lot of work, both by him and by his students. Still, armed with the Scaffolded Reading Experience framework, he
was confident his students would be able to read these books successfully. He sighed again. This time it was definitely one of contentment. Helping students meet challenging reading tasks was his thing.

**What Is a Scaffolded Reading Experience?**

A Scaffolded Reading Experience is a set of prereading, during-reading, and postreading activities individually created to assist a particular group of students in successfully reading, understanding, learning from, and enjoying a particular selection. Tierney and Readence (2005) classify the Scaffolded Reading Experience and other such plans as “lesson frameworks,” and this is an appropriate classification. But an SRE differs markedly from most other instructional frameworks in that it is not a preset or largely preset plan for dealing with a text. Instead, an SRE is a flexible plan that you tailor to a specific situation—to your students, the texts you use, and what you want students to glean from their reading.

It has two parts, as shown in the following figure. The first part, the planning phase, takes into consideration the particular group of students doing the reading, the text they are reading, and their purpose or purposes for reading it. The second part, the implementation phase, provides a set of prereading, during-reading, and postreading options for those particular readers, the selection being read, and the purposes of the reading. Different situations call for different SREs.

Two Phases of a Scaffolded Reading Experience

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**An SRE is a flexible plan that you tailor to a specific situation—to your students, the texts you use, and what you want students to glean from their reading.**
As shown, the first phase of the SRE is the planning phase, during which you plan and create the entire experience. The second phase is the implementation phase, the activities you and your students engage in as a result of your planning. This two-phase process is a vital feature of the SRE approach in that the planning phase allows you to tailor each SRE you create to the specific situation you face. Different situations call for different SREs.

Suppose you are working with a typical class of seniors, and you want them to develop some thorough understanding and real appreciation for Yann Martel’s *The Life of Pi*. Or consider a very different situation. Suppose you are working with these same seniors and your purpose is to have them decide whether they would like to read a memoir of growing up in the 1950s, Bill Bryson’s *The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid*, as a class text.

In each of these situations, your planning leads to the creation of the SRE itself and to your implementing it, but the two SREs will differ markedly. As shown in the lower half of the figure on page 4, the components of the implementation phase are prereading, during-reading, and postreading activities. With *The Life of Pi*, we have already suggested that you want students to develop a thorough understanding and appreciation. This means that your SRE for *The Life of Pi* is likely to be a substantial one, with prereading activities that prepare students to understand and appreciate this challenging text, during-reading activities that lead them to interact with the text in ways that help them respond to Pi’s bizarre adventure and view of the world, and postreading activities that give them opportunities to check their understanding of the text and consider the author’s craft. To accomplish all this, the class might spend several weeks reading the novel and completing the learning activities you have assembled.

On the other hand, with the first chapter of Bryson’s memoir and the major goal of students simply deciding whether they would like to read the whole of the book, your SRE is likely to be minimal. Prereading might consist of an introduction to the ’50s, to Bryson, and to memoir as a genre; students might read the chapter silently to themselves; and postreading might consist of discussion of whether this or other memoirs might be a good read for the class. In this case, the class might spend only a period reading and discussing the chapter.

In addition to recognizing that the SRE framework results in very different SREs for different situations, it is important to recognize that the components of each phase of the SRE are interrelated. Consider the three components of the planning phase—the students, the text, and your purposes. If you are faced with a specific text and purposes for reading it, as you may be if your school adheres to a Common Core Standards framework, then you need to make that text accessible to all of your students, as well as create ways that all of them can
Possible Components of a Scaffolded Reading Experience

**PREREADING ACTIVITIES**

1. Motivating
2. Relating the Reading to Students’ Lives
3. Activating and Building Background Knowledge
4. Providing Text-Specific Knowledge
5. Preteaching Vocabulary
6. Preteaching Concepts
7. Prequestioning, Predicting, and Setting Direction
8. Suggesting Strategies
9. Considering Literary Elements
10. Suggesting Literary Lenses

**DURING-READING ACTIVITIES**

11. Silent Reading
12. Reading to Students
13. Supported Reading
14. Traditional Study Activities
15. Student Oral Reading
16. Modifying the Text

**POSTREADING ACTIVITIES**

17. Questioning
18. Discussion
19. Writing
20. Drama
21. Artistic, Graphic, and Nonverbal Activities
22. Application and Outreach Activities
23. Building Connections
24. Reteaching
achieve those purposes. The same sort of interdependency holds with the three components of the implementation phase. For example, if you decide you are going to have some very challenging postreading tasks, you’ll want to include prereading activities and during-reading activities that thoroughly prepare students to accomplish those challenging tasks.

The possible pre-, during-, and postreading components of an SRE are listed in the figure on p. 4. Before continuing, we want to stress two facts about this list. First, although many of the components we list can occur at various points in an SRE (pre, during, and/or post), each is listed only once, either at the position in which it is most likely to occur or in the position at which it is likely to first occur. Second, these are possible components of an SRE. No single SRE would include anything like all of these activities.

**Prereading Activities**

Prereading activities prepare students to read a selection. They can serve a number of functions, including:

- getting students interested in reading the selection,
- reminding students of things they already know that will help them understand and enjoy the selection, and
- preteaching aspects of the selection that may be difficult.

Prereading activities are particularly important because with adequate preparation the experience of reading will be enjoyable, rewarding, and successful. Prereading activities are widely recommended (Alvermann, Phelps, and Gillis 2010; Beach and Myers 2001; Beers 2003; Echevarria, Vogt, and Short 2007; Englert et al. 2007; Goldenberg and Coleman 2010; Graves, Juel, Graves, and Dewitz 2011; Jago 2004; Langer 1995; Olson 2010; Readence, Moore, and Rickelman 2000; Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, and Hurwitz 1999; Smith and Wilhelm 2002; Snow 2001; Wilhelm, Baker, and Dube 2002; Wilhelm 1997), and a number of different types of prereading activities have been suggested. In creating the list of possible prereading activities for SREs, we have attempted to list a relatively small set of categories that suggest a large number of useful activities teachers and students can engage in. As shown in the list of SRE components, we suggest ten types.

1. **Motivating** activities include anything designed to interest students. Although a variety of prereading activities can be motivational as well as accomplish some other purpose, we list motivating activities as a separate category because we believe that it is perfectly appropriate to do something solely for the purpose of motivating students. In fact, we believe that motivating activities should be used frequently.
2. **Relating the reading to students’ lives** is so self-evident an activity that we don’t need to say much about it. We will, though, point out that, because showing students how a selection relates to them is such a powerful motivator and promotes comprehension, it is something we like to do often.

3. **Activating or building background knowledge** ensures that students get the most from what they read. When you activate background knowledge, you prompt students to consciously recall information they already know that will help them understand the text. For example, let’s say a group of eighth graders is researching the plight of migrant workers. Before they read a story from *The Circuit*, Francisco Jiménez’s award-winning collection of stories based on his own experiences as a child migrant worker in California, you might encourage them to discuss what they have already learned about migrant workers from their previous reading.

   In addition to activating background knowledge, it is sometimes necessary to **build** background knowledge, knowledge the author assumes readers already possess. For example, in his stories Jiménez presupposes some specific knowledge of California geography. If you think your eighth graders don’t know this information, supplying it makes good sense.

4. **Providing text-specific knowledge** differs from activating or building background knowledge in that it gives students information that is contained in the reading selection itself. Providing students with advance information on the content of a selection—giving students the seven topics discussed in an article on characterization, for example—may be justified if the selection is difficult or densely packed with information. This of course is likely to be increasingly the case as schools respond to the Common Core State Standards Initiative.

5. **Preteaching vocabulary** refers to preteaching new labels for concepts that students already know. For example, you are teaching vocabulary—introducing a new label—if you teach your tenth graders that the word *jettison* means “to throw something from a ship, aircraft, or other vehicle.” It often makes sense to take a few minutes and preteach a half-dozen new vocabulary words before students read a selection.

6. **Preteaching concepts** is a different matter (Graves 2009). Preteaching concepts refers to preteaching new and potentially challenging ideas, not just new labels for ideas students already understand. For example, the full meaning of *tragedy* is a new concept for eighth graders. Teaching new and difficult concepts takes significant amounts of time and requires powerful instruction. It does not make sense to attempt to preteach a half-dozen new and difficult concepts in a few minutes.
7. *Prequestioning, predicting, and setting direction* are similar activities. With any of them, you are focusing students’ attention and telling them what is important to look for as they read.

8. *Suggesting strategies* is another appropriate prereading activity. The key word here is *suggesting*. SREs are not designed to *teach* strategies—instructing students how to do something they could not previously do almost always requires more time than we allot to SREs. However, it is often appropriate to suggest as part of an SRE that students use strategies they already know. For example, you might suggest to seventh graders reading a selection that presents a complex argument that it would be a good idea to summarize the argument in their own words.

9. *Considering literary elements* is one more possible component of an SRE. This time, the key word is *considering*. SREs are not designed to initially *teach* literary elements. We are assuming that the concepts and procedures involved in recognizing and making use of literary elements have been taught at some previous time. In an SRE you are asking students to work with some ideas they are already familiar with as they read a particular text. Consciously considering the literary elements of a text—genre, setting, characterization, plot structure, point of view, and so on—helps students both comprehend and interpret it. For instance, understanding basic plot structure helps students recognize, anticipate, and predict narrative developments as they read a story. We suggest that, rather than invoking all literary elements with each work, you focus on no more than two or three with each text.

10. *Suggesting literary lenses* is the final prereading activity we suggest here. As with the previous two activities, this one assumes that you are dealing with concepts already taught. Literary lenses are perspectives that show students how different readers might interpret the same text differently. Literary perspectives help us understand what is important to individual readers, and they show us why those readers end up seeing what they see. Students can think of literary perspectives as lenses through which they can examine a text. Frequently used literary perspectives that you might easily incorporate into an SRE include gender, social power, reader response, biographical, historical, and archetypal.

In concluding this section on prereading activities, we would like to again note that although we list each type of activity only once, activities often span several parts of an SRE. For example, while we are likely to ask students to consider certain literary elements before they read a selection, they are going to be considering the elements as they are actually reading, and probably discussing them after they read.
During-Reading Activities

During-reading activities include both things that students themselves do as they are reading and things that you do to assist them as they are reading. Like prereading activities, during-reading activities are frequently recommended (Beach and Myers 2001; Bean, Valerio, and Stevens 1999; Beers 2003; Echevarria, Vogt, and Short 2007; Englert et al. 2007; Goldenberg and Coleman 2010; Graves, Juel, Graves, and Dewitz 2011; Jago 2004; Langer 1995; Olson 2010; Readence, Moore, and Rickelman 2000; Richardson 2000; Roser, Martinez, and Wood 2011; Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, and Huriwitz 1999; Smith and Wilhelm 2002; Snow 2001; Wilhelm, Baker, and Dube 2002; Wilhelm 2008; Wood, Lapp, and Flood 1992). In creating the list of possible during-reading activities for SREs, we have again attempted to list relatively few types that suggest a large number of useful activities. As shown in the list of possible SRE components on p. 4, we suggest six types.

1. **Silent reading** is listed first because it both is and should be the most frequently used during-reading activity. The central long-term goal of literature instruction is to prepare students to become accomplished lifelong readers, and the vast majority of the reading adults do is silent. It is both a basic rule of learning and common sense that one needs to repeatedly practice the skill he or she is attempting to master. If you choose appropriate selections for students to read and have adequately prepared them to read the selections, students will often be able to read the selections silently on their own.

2. **Reading to students** serves a number of functions, even in the middle and secondary grades. Hearing a story or other text read aloud is a very pleasurable experience and is also a model of good oral reading. Reading the first chapter or the first few pages of a piece can ease students into the material and entice them to read the rest of the selection on their own. Reading aloud to students who find certain texts difficult—or having them listen to an audiotape, CD, or MP3 file—can make the material more accessible. Many less-proficient readers and some (but by no means all) English learners find listening easier than reading.

3. **Supported reading** focuses students’ attention on particular aspects of a text as they read it. Supported reading often begins as a prereading activity—perhaps with you setting a direction—and is then carried out while students read. For example, if you find that an expository piece on characterization is actually divided into half a dozen sections but contains no headings or subheadings, you might give students a semantic map that includes titles for the half dozen sections and ask them to complete the map as they are reading. Often, with supported reading activities, students’
goal is to learn something from their reading rather than just read for enjoyment. Thus, supported reading activities are frequently used with expository material. However, it is also possible to guide students in understanding and responding to narratives, for example, to help sixth graders recognize the plot structure of the Newbery award–winning novel, A Single Shard, by Linda Sue Park, or to help twelfth graders understand and appreciate the surreal imagery, flashbacks, dream sequences, and extended poetic passages in Sherman Alexie's interconnected set of thought-provoking stories The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven.

4. **Traditional study activities** include things like taking notes, underlining, and jotting notes in the margin, which have served many students well over the years and still have a place in the classroom. They differ from supported reading in that students generally work independently.

5. **Student oral reading** isn’t done very often in most English classrooms, because the vast majority of reading that secondary students do in school and will do as adults is silent. Nonetheless, oral reading has its place. Poetry is often best appreciated and most effective when read orally. Also, poignant or particularly well-written passages of prose are often best savored when read aloud. Reading orally can help a class or group of students decide between alternate interpretations of a passage or recognize what is and is not explicitly stated. Additionally, students often like to read their own writing orally. And, of course, having individual students read orally provides valuable insights about their reading competence.

6. **Modifying the text** is sometimes necessary to make lengthy or difficult material more accessible. Modifying the text might mean presenting the material on audio- or videotapes, changing the format, simplifying it, or having students read only certain parts. Assuming students can and will read the original, will they get as much out of reading a modified version or listening to it on tape? Almost certainly not! But if they cannot or will not read the original in its entirety, hearing it read or reading part of it successfully is preferable to not reading it at all.

**Postreading Activities**

Postreading activities serve a variety of purposes:

- They provide opportunities for students to synthesize and organize information gleaned from the text so that they can understand and recall important points.

- They provide opportunities for students to evaluate an author’s message, his or her stance in presenting a message, and the quality of the text itself.
They provide opportunities for you and your students to evaluate their understanding of the text.

They provide opportunities for students to respond to a text in a variety of ways—to reflect on the meaning of the text, to compare differing texts and ideas, to imagine themselves as one of the characters in the text, to synthesize information from different sources, to engage in a variety of creative activities, and to apply what they have learned within the classroom walls to the world beyond the classroom.

Not surprisingly, given their many functions, postreading activities are also widely recommended (Alvermann 2000; Beach and Myers 2001; Bean, Valerio, and Stevens 1999; Beers 2003; Echevarria, Vogt, and Short 2007; Englert et al. 2007; Gambrell and Almasi 1996; Goldenberg and Coleman 2010; Graves, Juel, Graves, and Dewitz 2011; Jago 2004; Langer 1995; Olson 2010; Readence, Moore, and Rickelman 2000; Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, and Huriwitz 1999; Smith and Wilhelm 2002; Snow 2001; Wilhelm, Baker, and Dube 2002; Wilhelm 2008; Wood, Lapp, and Flood 1992), and in most classrooms they are very frequently used. In creating the list of possible postreading activities for SREs, we have once again attempted to list a relatively small number of types—eight in this case—that suggest a large number of useful activities:

1. **Questioning**, either orally or in writing, is frequently warranted. Posing questions encourages and promotes higher-order thinking—it nudges students to interpret, analyze, and evaluate what they have read. Questions can also elicit creative and personal responses: *How did you feel when . . . ? What do you think the main character would have done if . . . ?* Sometimes, of course, students need to be able to read something without facing some sort of accountability afterward. However, many times neither you nor your students will be sure they have gained what they needed to gain from the reading without their answering some questions. Of course, teachers shouldn’t be the only ones asking the questions. Students can ask questions of each other, they can ask us questions, and they can ask themselves questions they plan to answer through further reading or by searching the Internet.

2. **Discussion**, whether in pairs, in small groups, or as a class, is a very frequent and often very appropriate activity. If there is a chance that some students did not understand as much of what they read as they need to—and this is often the case—discussion is definitely warranted. Equally important, discussion is a chance for students to offer their personal interpretations and responses and hear those of others. Discussion is also useful for assessing whether reading goals have been achieved and evaluate
what went right with the reading experience, what went wrong, and what might be done differently in the future.

3. **Writing** probably ought to be used more frequently than it is. Over the past thirty years, there has been a good deal of well-warranted emphasis on reading and writing as complementary activities that should often be dealt with together. We certainly agree. However, writing is often challenging, and it is important to be sure that students are adequately prepared. Among other things, this means that if students are expected to write about a selection, you usually need to be sure they have understood it well. We say *usually* because sometimes students can write to discover or deepen what they have understood.

4. **Drama**—any sort of performance involving action and movement—includes a range of opportunities that allow students to respond actively to what they have read. Short plays, skits, pantomimes, and readers’ theatre are some of the many possibilities.

5. **Artistic, graphic, and nonverbal activities** include visual arts, graphic arts, music, dance, and media productions such as videos, slide shows, and audiotapes, as well as construction activities not typically thought of as artistic. They most frequently involve creating graphics of some sort—maps, charts, diagrams, PowerPoint presentations, and the like. Other possibilities include constructing models or bringing in artifacts relevant to the selection read. Artistic and nonverbal activities are fun to do, are breaks from typical school tasks, and allow students of varying talents and abilities to express themselves in ways in which they excel.

6. **Application and outreach activities** include both direct, concrete applications—cooking something after reading a recipe—and less direct, less concrete ones—attempting to change some aspect of student government after reading about something in state or national government that suggests the possibility. Here, we include off-campus activities—conducting a drive to collect used coats and sweaters after reading a news article on people in need of winter clothing, or taking a field trip to a local art museum after reading about one of the artists exhibited there. Obviously, there is a great range of options.

7. **Building connections** overlaps somewhat with application and outreach activities. Nevertheless, we list it as its own category because building connections is so important. Only by helping students build connections between the ideas they encounter in literature and other parts of their lives can we ensure that they come to really value literature, see the relevance of literature, remember and apply important things they’ve learned from the literature they read, and make literature a vital part of their adult lives. Several sorts of connections are important:
First, we want students to connect the wealth of out-of-school experiences they bring to school with their reading—for example, to relate the pride they felt in learning to drive a stick shift with the pride a story character feels when she meets a difficult challenge.

Second, we want students to connect what they learn in one subject with what they learn in others. For example, they might use the narrator’s dilemma in deciding whether to report for induction or flee to Canada during the Vietnam War in Tim O’Brien’s “On the Rainy River” to better understand resistance to the Vietnam War as discussed in their history text.

Third, we want them to realize that concepts they learn from literature can apply well beyond the classroom—for example, that just as a fictional character’s perseverance brought her success, so their perseverance at the real-life tasks they face can bring them success.

8. **Reteaching** is the final postreading activity we discuss. When it becomes apparent that students have not achieved their reading goals or the level of understanding you deem necessary, reteaching is often in order, and the best time is usually as soon as possible after students first encounter the material. In some cases, reteaching may consist simply of asking students to reread parts of a selection. In other cases, you may want to present a minilesson on a problematic part of the text. And in still other cases, students who have understood a particular aspect of the text may help other students reach a similar understanding.
Variability in Scaffolded Reading Experiences

We’ve already noted that our list of pre-, during-, and postreading activities is a set of options, that no single SRE will include all these options, and that SREs will vary considerably. Here’s a concrete example.

Consider first a very sturdy SRE for a challenging text. Suppose you are working with a class of talented seniors. The class is reading Margaret Atwood’s “Significant Moments in the Life of My Mother.” The SRE in the next figure was designed by Martha Cosgrove, a teacher at Edina High School, in Minnesota. Clearly, this brief outline reveals only the broad form of the SRE, but five characteristics are clear:

1. It spans five days.
2. It includes fifteen separate activities.
3. The activities have been selected based on Martha’s assessment of a particular group of students.
4. The activities have been chosen based on the story the students are reading.
5. This combination of prereading, during-reading, and postreading activities is only one of a number of combinations Martha could have selected.

DAY 1

PREREADING ACTIVITIES

1. Relating the reading to students’ lives: Think about the people who have most influenced you. List them rapidly in no particular order. (10 minutes)
2. Impromptu writing practice: Pick one of the people who you listed above and write about his or her sphere of influence on you. (25 minutes)
3. Building background knowledge: Focus on the words significant and moments and consider why Atwood might have chosen those words for her title. (15 minutes)

DURING-READING ACTIVITY (HOMEWORK)

4. Read the story and the record the events that occur.
DAY 2
POSTREADING ACTIVITIES

5. Discussion in pairs: What is revealed about the characters thus far? (15 minutes)
6. Whole-class discussion: What did you learn about the characters from the paired discussion? What “things” linked to gender are used to identify them? (35 minutes)
7. Homework: Record “men things” and “women things” brought up in the discussion.

DAY 3
POSTREADING ACTIVITIES (CONT’D)

8. Check homework. (10 minutes)
9. Whole-class discussion: How do we come to assign gender to particular objects? (30 minutes)
10. Investigate author background: In what ways is Margaret Atwood a feminist writer? (15 minutes)

DAY 4
POSTREADING ACTIVITIES (CONT’D)

11. Discussion of literary techniques: Discuss characterization and theme, focusing specifically on how to distinguish statements of theme from statements of subject. (30 minutes)
12. Prewriting activity: Brainstorm three or four incidents that involve a significant other in your life. (25 minutes)
13. Homework: Write a draft narrative about a significant other in your life and how the incident reveals character.

DAY 5
POSTREADING ACTIVITIES (CONT’D)

14. Peer-edit student essays: Have students read each other’s essays and use 6+1 traits to offer specific feedback. (25 minutes)
15. Oral presentation (optional): Volunteers present their essays orally. (30 minutes)
Now consider a very different SRE for a very different text. Suppose a similar class is reading a simple and straightforward narrative, something like Bret Harte’s “The Outcast of Poker Flats (Harte, 1960).” Suppose further that your goals for having students read the story are simply to appreciate and enjoy this entertaining tale and briefly review the literary elements of setting, characterization, conflict, and theme. In this case, the SRE outlined in the following figure, which spans only two days and includes only six activities, would be appropriate, because the students, the story itself, and the purpose for reading the story do not require a longer and more supportive SRE.

SRE Supporting Bret Harte’s “The Outcast of Poker Flats”

**DAY 1**

**PREREADING ACTIVITIES**

1. *Motivating:* Discuss which figures in literature students have previously read might considered “improper persons” worthy of banishment. *(10 minutes)*

2. *Building background knowledge:* Provide brief information on Harte and the setting of the story. *(5 minutes)*

**DURING-READING ACTIVITY (HOMEWORK)**

3. Have students read the story, making notes on its setting, characterization, climax and theme.

**DAY 2**

**POSTREADING ACTIVITIES**

4. *Small-group discussion:* Form small groups to focus on each of the four literary elements being reviewed. *(15 minutes)*

5. *Whole-class discussion:* Consider all four of the literary elements the small groups dealt with. *(15 minutes)*

6. *Writing:* Outline a somewhat similar story but with a different setting, main character, climax, and theme. *(20 minutes)*
Critical Constructs Underlying Scaffolded Reading Experiences

A substantial body of theory and research, described thoroughly in Graves and Graves (2003) and Fitzgerald and Graves (2004), underlies the SRE approach. Below we highlight four of the most important underlying constructs. (We have already introduced two of these concepts—scaffolding and the zone of proximal development, but we want to say a bit more about each of them.)

**Scaffolding**

Scaffolding (Clark and Graves 2005; Wood, Bruner, and Ross 1976) is at the heart of this approach. In the preface we defined a scaffold as a temporary supportive structure that enables a child to successfully complete a task he or she could not complete without the aid of the scaffold. Here, we modify that definition in an important way by adding that scaffolding can also help students better complete a task, complete a task with less stress or in less time, or learn more fully. An SRE maximizes the chances that students will understand the reading, learn from it, and generally enjoy and profit from both what they read and the experience of reading it.

**The Zone of Proximal Development**

The zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978) is a concept very closely related to that of scaffolding. The notion calls attention to the social nature of learning and emphasizes that at any particular time, students have a circumscribed zone of development, a range within which they can learn. At one end of this range are learning tasks they can complete independently; at the other end are learning tasks they cannot complete, even with assistance. In between these two extremes is the zone most productive for learning, the range of tasks at which students can succeed if they are assisted by some more knowledgeable or more competent other. This, of course, is the zone in which we want students to be working, and one major purpose of SREs is to put learners in this zone.

**The Gradual Release of Responsibility**

The gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson and Gallagher 1983) is another important concept behind SREs. As shown in the next figure, the model depicts a progression in which students gradually move from situations...
in which the teacher takes the majority of the responsibility for their successfully completing a task (in other words, does most of the work for them) to situations in which students assume increasing responsibility for the task and finally to situations in which students take total or nearly total responsibility for the task.

Unfortunately, in practice the “gradual” feature of the model is frequently truncated. We all too frequently introduce a topic or concept and then proceed as though students have mastered it immediately. Immediate mastery is rare. Learning takes time, time during which students need our continued support. As students move beyond the elementary grades, our continued support tends to get even less frequent. The thinking is that older students are nearing maturity and therefore ought to become increasingly independent, and that is certainly the case as far as it goes. However, middle school and high school students are asked to do increasingly complex tasks with increasingly challenging texts. They need continued support with these more challenging texts and tasks at the same time that we gradually withdraw support from less challenging texts and tasks.

The Gradual Release of Responsibility Model

![Diagram showing the gradual release of responsibility model]
Experiencing Success

The final construct we discuss here is that of success. A dominant thought motivating the SRE approach is the overwhelming importance of success. As the professional judgments of both teachers and research have repeatedly verified (Guthrie and Wigfield 2000; Malloy, Marinak, and Gambrell 2010; Pressley 2006), if students are going to learn to read effectively, they need to succeed at the vast majority of reading tasks they undertake. Moreover, if students are going to become not only proficient readers but also avid readers—students, and later adults, who voluntarily read for information, enjoyment, and personal fulfillment—then successful reading experiences are even more important. There are several ways in which reading experiences can be successful:

1. Most important, reading is successful when the reader understands what he or she has read.

2. Reading is successful when the reader finds it enjoyable, entertaining, informative, or thought-provoking. Not every reading experience will yield all these benefits, but every experience should yield at least one of them.

3. Reading is successful when it prepares the reader to complete whatever task follows the reading.

To a great extent, children’s success in reading is directly under your control as a teacher. You can select (and allow your students to select) materials they can read. To the extent the material they read presents challenges, you can provide support before, during, and after they read that will enable them to meet those challenges. Additionally, you can select and help them select postreading activities they can complete successfully.

However, there is an extremely important qualification. Saying students should succeed at the reading tasks you ask them to complete and that you should do everything possible to ensure success does not mean spoon-feeding them. Unless readers undertake some challenging tasks, unless they are willing to take some risks and make some attempts they are not certain of and get feedback on their efforts, there is little room for learning to take place. Moreover, as Csikszentmihalyi (1990) discovered in more than four decades of research, facing significant challenges and meeting them is one of the most fulfilling and rewarding experiences a person can have. In order to develop as readers, children need challenges. However, it is vital that teachers arrange and scaffold reading activities so that students can meet these challenges.
Differentiating Instruction

Helping all students be successful in their reading while at the same time challenging them sufficiently are excellent maxims for teaching. However, not all students are equally skilled. Sometimes you need to provide readers with different support and different reading tasks. At the same time, this differentiation cannot take a huge amount of your time, should not stigmatize an individual or group, and must produce results. One way to do this is to provide a basic set of SRE experiences to all students, provide additional scaffolding for students who need it, and provide additional reading or writing activities for students who don’t.

Suppose a class of thirty-five seniors is going to read *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee’s 1972 play drawing a parallel between Thoreau’s refusing to pay taxes to support the Mexican-American War and protests over the Vietnam War. Thirty students are able readers and can handle the play and some additional reading. Five students, however, will need help with the play. In this situation we might create a set of SRE activities that all students will complete, prepare some additional SRE activities to support the less skilled readers, assign some additional reading to the more skilled readers while we are working with the less skilled readers, and offer options for postreading activities to accommodate both groups.

Here is a list of the prereading and during-reading activities for all students, additional prereading and during-reading activities to support your less skilled readers in small caps, additional reading for your more skilled readers to do while you are working with the less skilled readers, and options for postreading activities.

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**SRE SUPPORTING JEROME LAWRENCE AND ROBERT E. LEE’S *THE NIGHT THOREAU SPENT IN JAIL***

**PREREADING ACTIVITIES**

1. *Building Background Knowledge*: About Thoreau, the Mexican-American War, and the Vietnam War.

2. *PreTeaching Vocabulary and Concepts*: There are several concepts and some challenging vocabulary that some readers will need help with.

3. *Building Text-Specific Knowledge*: Explaining the time and setting shifts that may confuse some readers.

*(continues)*
This of course is only one way in which SREs can be used to differentiate activities, but it does illustrate an attempt to give some students additional support, not separate students any more than necessary, not differentiate any more than necessary, and provide additional activities for the larger group while working with the smaller one.

A Final Word

In this chapter, we have explained just what an SRE is. In doing so, we have discussed the purpose of SREs, described the SRE framework, listed the components of SREs, briefly described each of them, emphasized that individual SREs will vary markedly, described some important constructs underlying the SRE approach, and discussed differentiating SREs. The next chapter discusses and gives examples of prereading activities.
Mr. Johnson is preparing his tenth-grade American literature students to read Alice Walker’s “Everyday Use,” a story in which an heirloom quilt becomes the focus of a struggle between cultural identity and family harmony for a mother and her two very different daughters. Mr. Johnson knows how important it is, as he says, “to prime my students when they read a story. They often don’t do their best when they jump in cold.”

The students in Mr. Johnson’s second-hour class have assembled in pairs. As requested, they have each brought from home an everyday object, something that has some significance to them and to at least one other family member. The array of objects is astonishing, as varied as the members of the class. Jenny has brought her grandmother’s locket; Jeff, his uncle’s dented trumpet. Margo has brought an armless doll, and Bob has a Grateful Dead T-shirt. Much to Mr. Johnson’s secret delight, Annie has dragged in a homemade quilt. Mr. Johnson asks the pairs of students to talk about the significance of the object, why they chose it, and what it might mean to other members of the family. At the end of an animated twenty minutes of explaining and sharing,
Mr. Johnson says, “We’ve seen how everyday objects can mean different things to different family members. Let’s see how this plays out in the story we’ll read for tomorrow, ‘Everyday Use,’ by Alice Walker.”

That students should succeed in all the reading experiences they undertake is one of the central principles motivating the SRE approach. And the first opportunity you have to start students on the road to a successful reading experience is at the beginning. Prereading activities, the initial set of activities in an SRE, prepare students to read, making sure they get off to a good start. Taking time to prepare students before they read will pay big dividends in terms of their understanding what they read, learning from what they read, and finding the reading an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

The ten categories of prereading activities serve five different purposes:

1. **Motivating and relating the reading to students’ lives** activities get students interested and enthusiastic about reading the selection.

2. **Building or activating background knowledge, providing text-specific knowledge, preteaching vocabulary, and preteaching concepts** activities give them information they need to understand the text.

3. **Prequestioning, predicting, and setting direction** activities alert students about what they should attend to as they read.

4. **Suggesting strategies** activities remind students of strategies they already know that will be particularly useful in reading the selection.

5. **Considering literary elements and suggesting literary lenses** activities deal directly with literary concerns.

As you choose and design activities, you’ll find that many of them overlap. That’s fine. We created the categories to suggest the range of options available, not because you need to classify each activity you create as this or that. What’s important is that the activities you choose assist your students in achieving the purposes you and they have for reading a particular selection.

In planning an SRE you first consider three factors—the students, the selection, and the purpose(s) for which students are reading. After either you or your students have selected the text to read and after you have read through it and identified topics, themes, potential difficulties, and other relevant features of the material, you map out the entire SRE. The following questions inform the activity categories from which you select:

- **What is your students’ overall goal for reading**—is it primarily for an aesthetic experience, or is it to gain information or insights?

- **Will getting the gist of the material be sufficient, or do students need to gain a deep and thorough understanding?**
As you continue planning an effective SRE, ask:

- How can I get these students really interested in this selection?
- What background knowledge do they have on this topic?
- What might they need to know to profit most from their reading?
- Is there anything in the material that I can relate to their lives?
- Are there any concepts or vocabulary in the selection that students might benefit from working with beforehand?
- Could they use any of their repertoire of reading strategies to help them better understand the material?
- What literary elements is this selection best suited to showcase?
- Does a particular literary lens (a topic we discuss in Chapter 4) shed light on understanding and responding to this selection?

The sample activities in this book all follow the same format. Each begins with a heading identifying the type of activity and naming it. Underneath there may be a sentence or two describing the activity. Next come sections on the selection, the students for whom the activity was written, the reading purpose(s), the goal(s) of the activity, the procedure to follow, and other selections with which you might use the activity. In the final section, reflections, we (as informally as one can in a printed book) expand on ideas and issues related to the activity. Most of the time, we comment on the activity itself—what it did, what it did not do, how it might be changed, and the like. Less frequently, we comment on a general principle the activity brings to mind. We hope these informal reflections encourage your own reflections.

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Motivating

A big part of preparing students to read is motivating them. Whatever the task, it is always more interesting, exciting, and meaningful if we have a good reason for wanting to do it. Think about yourself and your own reading. Why do you pick up the evening newspaper, seek out an article in the *English Journal*, or read a mystery novel? Is there a particular purpose you have in mind? Do you read to be informed, enlightened, inspired, entertained? We all read for a combination of reasons, but they usually stem from our expectation that the text will give us something we need or want—information, inspiration, entertainment, whatever. In order to ensure a successful reading experience, we need to make certain students have this sort of motivation.

Motivational activities are just that—activities that incite enthusiasm, an eagerness to delve into the material. Some activities are solely motivational. However, motivational activities frequently overlap with other kinds of prereading activities—particularly activating background knowledge and relating reading to students’ lives. In general, motivational activities draw on the interests and concerns of the particular group doing the reading. A rap might be part of a motivating activity for younger adolescents, while a contemporary issue might pique the interest of high school students. You know what kinds of things interest and excite your students. Use these to help motivate their reading.

Motivational activities often feature “hands-on” experiences, active student participation, dramatization, and questions that intrigue. For example:

- Have you ever had a really disappointing birthday even though you were looking forward to it?
- Why do people who seem so different become fast friends? Are you and your best friend more different than alike?
- What kind of stuff do you carry around in your backpack? What do those things say about you?
- Think about a time when you did something you knew you weren’t supposed to. How did you feel afterward? What lesson did you learn?

Once students’ interest is piqued, the next step is to transfer that interest to the reading material. Consider these follow-ups to the questions above:

- In the story “Eleven,” by Sandra Cisneros (1991), a teacher ruins a young girl’s special day.
- The two protagonists of *Of Mice and Men*, George and Lenny, are about as different as night and day.
Prereading Activities

MOTIVATING—Words to Ponder

Words to Ponder motivates students, guides them, and gives them opportunities to interact as they consider a challenging and disturbing proposition.

Selection: “House Taken Over,” by Julio Cortazar. As is typical of Cortazar’s short stories, this one begins in the real world, then moves toward fantasy, inviting students to connect the familiar—a brother, a sister, and an ancestral home—before delving into the ambiguous and uncertain. The themes—the necessity of thinking and the fear of encountering the unknown—are ones many adolescent face. This story casts these personal issues into the public sphere.

Students: High school students of various abilities.

Reading Purposes: To deeply understand a complex story and to relate some of its themes to one’s own life.

Goal of the Activity: To get students deeply involved in one of the central issues of the story.

Procedure:

- Project this quotation on an overhead, LCD, or interactive whiteboard: “. . . and little by little we stopped thinking. You can live without thinking” (Cortazar 1944).
- Ask students to explain three things in a journal entry. First, do you agree or disagree with this statement? Second, what do you think the statement means? Finally, give a real-world example: how does it support your position? Their response should be at least a full page.
- Ask students who agreed with the statement to move to one side of the classroom, those who disagreed to the other side. Give each group five minutes to clarify with one another what they think the statement means. They should be ready to share with the class one carefully crafted explanation of what the statement means, as well as three or four examples.
- Have a spokesperson for each group present that group’s explanation. Then have several students present their examples. Lead a lively discussion of the value of thinking and how essential students think it is. Some students may have read 1984, Brave New World, The Giver, or other dystopian novels. They may want to discuss the connections between those texts (the repression of an individual’s freedom to think) and this quote.


Gary Soto has a unique take on what it feels like to do something wrong in his short story “The Pie.”

Here, we present a sample motivating activity for an intriguing short story.
Relating the Reading to Students’ Lives

Relating the reading to their lives is a powerful way to get students to commit themselves to a text, to own it. When we see how something relates to our lives, we make a personal connection—we have a vested interest.

Suppose your class of tenth graders includes a number of Somali students. You also have copies of “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine,” one of the short stories in Jhumpa Lahiri’s Pulitzer Prize–winning collection, Interpreter of Maladies. Helping your Somali students relate to the story is easy. Like the young protagonist, they are far from their homeland, which has been torn by war, and they are trying to adjust in a new world. But what about your non-Somali students, students born and raised in the United States, most of them in fact born and raised in the city where you teach? A discussion topic that may help them to relate: what could they do to help students new to the United States feel more comfortable in their new setting? If you choose to push the matter a bit, you might ask them to write about some things they could have done to help new immigrants but did not.

Relating the reading to students’ lives includes any activities that help students understand how what they read has meaning for the world they live in, just one of which is exemplified here.
RELATING THE READING TO STUDENTS’ LIVES—Ownership

Ownership helps bridge the gap between themes or other aspects of a story and students’ experiences by asking them to explore a concept central to the story and central to their own lives or things they care about.

Selection: “Independence,” by Ruth Sasaki. The story opens in 1964, when two Japanese American sisters, Cathy and Sharon, get a summer job at a Lake Tahoe cabin in order to experience life without constant parental supervision. Cathy and Sharon begin the job with high expectations but struggle in their new position for just three weeks and then ask to return home. The story is a relatively easy read but addresses numerous themes that can trigger great discussion, like the price of becoming independent and the ramifications of being Japanese American. Sasaki’s skillful narration includes subtle details and has a distinctive tone. It’s a wonderful story about growing up, looking back, and taking responsibility.

Students: Middle school students of mixed abilities.

Reading Purpose: To enjoy an interesting and informative work of fiction that deals with a theme important to many teens.

Goal of the Activity: To bridge the gap between readers’ lives and those of the story’s main characters by exploring a theme central to both the story and their lives—Independence.

Procedure:

■ Write the word independence on the board and ask students to define it. Have them provide examples of independence; encourage them to consider both personal independence and the independence nations have.

■ Have students take out their reading journals or notebooks, set up a page with two columns—the advantages of independence and the disadvantages of independence—and enter as many of each as they can. Then, underneath the columns, ask them to write about a time they felt independent.

■ After they have finished writing, have them, in pairs, discuss (for about five minutes) their lists, and select the strongest three or four advantages of independence and the strongest three or four disadvantages of independence.

■ Reconvene the class and ask for volunteers to write their answers on the board. Then lead a discussion about the advantages and disadvantageous of independence.

Others Selections: This activity can be used with any novel, story, or biography that has a central theme students can relate to. A few include Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird (prejudice), Sherman Alexie’s short stories (the importance of humor when one grows up as a member of a marginalized community), and The Diary of Anne Frank (the triumph of optimism over despair).
Building or Activating Background Knowledge

No text contains all the information necessary to understand it; readers need to fill in what’s missing. This requires a huge store of background knowledge. Students come to school knowing a great number of concepts, but they don’t all know the same things. Some students have been read to from an early age, read widely on their own, travel to or have lived in other places, take trips to museums, go on nature outings, and belong to groups such as boys’ and girls’ clubs; they’ve had a wide variety of experiences. Students from other countries and cultures may have had equally rich experiences but these experiences are not as relevant to those they encounter in much of what they read in school. Still other students have not had the benefit of these kinds of rich experience.

You need to be certain that all students have the background knowledge necessary to fully understand, respond to, and enjoy the texts they work with in your classes. This means carefully evaluating the texts and the knowledge they assume, carefully evaluating your students and the knowledge they have, and being sure that those who do not have that knowledge get it.

Sometimes that means providing background knowledge, a very different thing from merely activating their existing knowledge (Hirsch 2010–11). For example, if your seventh graders are going to read an article on poverty in Appalachia that assumes readers already know quite a bit about Appalachia—where it’s located, how populated the area is, what sorts of people live there—you are going to have to teach that information before they read the article.

At other times, students have the relevant information they need but don’t realize they have it or don’t think about it in a way that brings it to the surface. In these cases, you need to activate this prior knowledge with prereading experiences that prompt them to be conscious of it. Students might write about what they know, then talk about it with their classmates. Everyone can then connect this shared information with similar ideas they encounter in the text.
Here, we describe an activity for building background knowledge. Activating background knowledge is of course less time consuming.

**BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE**—Places, Events, and Times

This activity builds background knowledge. (Activating it usually takes less time.)

**Selection:** Number the Stars, by Lois Lowry. In this story, ten-year-old AnnMarie and her family help their neighbors, the Rosens, flee to Sweden in order to escape Nazi persecution.

**Students:** Sixth and seventh graders of mixed abilities.

**Reading Purpose:** To understand, enjoy, and appreciate a well-written historical novel.

**Goal of the Activity:** To explain the geographic and historical setting of the novel so that students can better understand and appreciate the situation faced by the main characters.

**Procedure:**

- Write 1943; Copenhagen, Denmark; and Germany on the board.
- Tell students that something very tragic was happening in Germany in 1943. If students are familiar with the Nazis, Hitler, and the Holocaust, let them discuss what they know.
- If not, briefly explain the situation to them. Tell them that during this time German troops began to “relocate” all the Jews of Denmark—to take them to concentration camps.
- Locate Germany, Denmark, and Copenhagen on a map.
- Tell students that this story takes place in Copenhagen, Denmark, during this period in history. Explain that the main character AnnMarie isn’t Jewish, but her best friend Ellen is. You also may want to give some background information on the Jews and the Jewish religion. Explain that because of where and when the Jewish people in the novel lived they faced situations calling for personal sacrifice, daring, and courage.

**Other Selections:** Giving information on places, events, and time periods before students read a selection is appropriate any time these elements play key roles in a piece and are therefore important to understanding and appreciating the ideas presented. Many selections, fiction as well as nonfiction, revolve around important historical events and figures. A few that require some explanation of context are The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963, The Diary of Anne Frank, and The Red Badge of Courage.

**Reflections:** Although this activity is simple and straightforward, the information will be quite helpful to some students and crucial to others. Sometimes students have little or no knowledge—or may have misconceptions—about the places, events, and time periods in the material they are asked to read. Even those students who do have fairly well developed, accurate views benefit from more information or new insights. Accurate information about places and events can bolster students’ enjoyment of historical-based texts, allow them to connect their reading to their knowledge of geography and history, and give them valuable information about the world they live in.
Providing Text-Specific Knowledge

Students sometimes need information specific to a text. Tenth graders asked to read *All Quiet on the Western Front* will probably have some general knowledge about World War I but will need specific information about what combat was like then. In order to understand and enjoy *The Great Gatsby* fully, students need to know something about the Jazz Age and the American Dream. This kind of information is easily conveyed in a brief prereading discussion of interesting supporting material.

Another way to provide text-specific knowledge is to give students a preview (similar to previews of movies and TV shows) of the material (Chen and Graves 1998; Graves, Prenn, and Cooke 1985). A preview of an article, chapter, or informational book could include the topics, events, people, or places dealt with and unusual or difficult vocabulary. A preview of a novel or short story might introduce the setting, characters, and something about the plot.

The following example presents a fairly substantial preview.

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**PROVIDING TEXT-SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE—The Coming Attraction**

*The Coming Attraction* gives students a substantial preview of a book they are about to read.

**Selection:** *Fahrenheit 451*, by Ray Bradbury. This classic dystopian novel of a future America in which critical thought is outlawed and books are burned to prevent the spread of “dangerous” ideas continues to be all too relevant today.

**Students:** High school seniors taking a required English course to graduate.

**Reading Purposes:** To help understand the rich characters and themes in *Fahrenheit 451*, identify the techniques Ray Bradbury used to create these characters and themes, analyze aspects of the American character depicted in the book’s futuristic society, and recognize those same aspects in contemporary American society.

**Goal of the Activity:** To give students a substantial amount of information about the story in order to make their reading more successful and enjoyable.

**Procedure:** Read the following preview to students before they read the story:

Can you imagine a world in which no one is allowed to read? Can you picture a country that outlaws education in an attempt to keep you ignorant and misinformed? Can you envision a society in which you have no individual rights or freedoms? How do you think you would react to an environment of this sort?
This very environment is depicted in Ray Bradbury’s novel *Fahrenheit 451*. Set in America during the not-too-distant future, *Fahrenheit 451* follows the adventures of Guy Montag, a firefighter whose job is not to put out fires but to start them. Specifically, Montag and his fellow firefighters burn books, which have been outlawed by the government. If you are caught reading books in this future America, they are burned, perhaps along with more of your possessions; you may even be put to death. Despite this threat, Montag becomes interested in finding out what is so powerful about books and reading, which puts him on a collision course with his overseer, Captain Beatty, and the society in which he lives.

Will Montag’s interest in books lead to his death? Will Montag be able to change himself and his society? Is there any hope for this America of tomorrow? These questions will be answered as we read *Fahrenheit 451*.

**Other Selections:** The major concern when providing a preview is the amount of detail to include; you want to be sure students get just enough but not too much information. That said, previews can be used with virtually any fiction or nonfiction text that you determine your students will find challenging.

**Reflections:** *The main question with previews is how often to use them. The answer is: just enough but not too much.* We all like a little information about something we’re about to read but not too much; we don’t want to know the punch line of a joke, who committed the murder, or the climax and denouement of a story line. Too much is too much. Still, with challenging texts—novels like *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry, for a sixth grader, *A Lesson Before Dying*, by Ernest J. Gaines, for a ninth grader, and *Beloved*, by Toni Morrison, for a twelfth grader—previews are extremely useful.

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**Preteaching Vocabulary**

Preteaching vocabulary provides students with the meanings of challenging words before they read a selection so that they can focus on the ideas the author is presenting rather than on unknown words. For example, before sixth graders read the classic short story “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi,” by Rudyard Kipling, they need to be familiar with words like *valiant, sluice, providence, cowered, and consolation*. When asked to read Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*, many tenth or eleventh graders benefit from being pretaught (among other words) *eviscerate, acquiescence, platitude, reticence, rectitude, salvage*, and *denotation*.

There are any number of vocabulary activities you can engage students in prior to their reading a selection. Here is just one of them.
**PRETEACHING VOCABULARY—Word Clues**

*Word Clues* introduces potentially difficult vocabulary using context-rich sentences in teacher-created worksheets.

**Selection:** “Thomas Nast: Political Cartoonist Extraordinaire,” by Lynn Evans. Bavarian-born Thomas Nast is responsible for creating some of our most notable and enduring political symbols—the Republican elephant, the Democratic donkey, and Uncle Sam. The piece chronicles his life from his experiences as a poor student good only at art to his thirty-year partnership with *Harper’s Weekly* and his powerful political influence as a cartoonist.

**Students:** Seventh, eighth, and ninth graders of average to low ability.

**Reading Purpose:** To understand and recall some of the important highlights of Thomas Nast’s life and work.

**Goals of the Activity:** To introduce potentially difficult vocabulary; let students practice using context clues to unlock word meaning.

**Procedure:**

1. **Before the lesson,** select five to ten words that are important to understanding this piece and that you suspect some of your students may have trouble reading (like *draftsman*, *emigrated*, *reform*, *endorsed*, *symbol*, *corruption*, and *critical*)

2. **Present each word in a context-rich sentence or paragraph that provides clues to word’s meaning.** Following this sentence or paragraph, create two questions that will help students use context clues to unlock the word’s meaning. Here is an example for the word *emigrated*:

   Thomas Nast emigrated to the United States in 1840 when he was just six years old. He and his mother and sister settled in New York City.

   1. Based on the sentences above, Thomas Nast probably left his home country and came to live in the United States. True or false?

   2. *Emigrated* probably means:
      a. took clothes and food to poor people
      b. left one country to settle in another
      c. ran a very difficult uphill race
      d. borrowed enough money to buy a house

3. **Tell students that the selection contains some challenging vocabulary. Pass out the worksheet, guide students through the first item, and let them complete the rest of the items individually or in pairs.**
As we noted in the Introduction, what distinguishes preteaching vocabulary from preteaching concepts is that vocabulary instruction teaches new labels for known concepts, while concept instruction focuses on words that represent new and potentially difficult ideas (Graves 2009). Subliminal message, for example, is probably a new concept for eighth graders, and archetype might be a new concept for eleventh graders.

Ideally, students will be reading material that contains concepts they can handle comfortably but at the same time provides opportunities to deepen their current knowledge of concepts or learn new ones. For example, most of the concepts in The Giver, by Lois Lowry, are familiar to competent eighth or ninth graders, but they might need help with transgression, independence, anguish, and resistance. The vocabulary of Toni Morrison’s Beloved is probably within reach of most high school seniors yet offers opportunities to deepen their knowledge of concepts such as rememory, abolition, and stream of consciousness.

How you introduce concepts to students depends on how familiar they already are with them and how well they need to know them in order to achieve their reading goals. Graves (2006) and Stahl and Nagy (2006) provide additional information on teaching concepts. Here, we describe one way to do so.

**Preteaching Concepts**

- After students have completed the worksheet, briefly discuss their answers.
- In place of individual worksheets, you could present the material to the whole class using an LCD or interactive white board. Also, you might sometimes let students pick the words to study. After students have completed a number of these worksheets, let them create their own to exchange with a classmate.

**Other Selections:** This activity can be used with any text that includes challenging vocabulary able to be decoded in context, texts like “A Rose for Emily,” by William Faulkner; “The Masque of the Red Death,” by Edgar Allan Poe; or “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings,” by Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

**Reflections:** This activity takes quite a bit of preparation, and you will probably want to use it primarily with students who need practice using context clues. Then again, using context clues to unlock word meanings is a very useful skill, and many students will profit from becoming more adept at it; you may therefore use it fairly often. Remember, students can create instructional items like these themselves. (And middle and high school students can create vocabulary items of this sort for elementary students.)
PRETEACHING CONCEPTS—Stalwart Instruction

Stalwart Instruction uses a very powerful approach to concept instruction to give students a solid understanding of an important concept.

Selection: “The Man to Send Rain Clouds,” by Leslie Marmon Silko. This is the first published work of an accomplished and widely heralded contemporary writer who has Laguna Pueblo, Mexican, and white ancestors. Silko wrote this story while an English major at the University of New Mexico. It earned her a National Endowment for the Humanities Discovery Grant and clearly indicates both her strength as an author and her understanding of cultural symbiosis, a concept this activity explores. She later taught creative writing and a course in oral tradition for the English department at UNM.

Students: High school students in a multicultural literature class.

Reading Purposes: To appreciate and understand the elements of a well-crafted short story; become familiar with the work of a major multicultural author; recognize the synthesis of cultures, traditions, and actions that sometimes mark modern United States society; celebrate both one’s own and Native American culture.

Goal of the Activity: To help students understand cultural symbiosis and the importance of such symbiosis in contemporary American life.

Procedure: Use the five steps of the Frayer method (Frayer, Frederick, and Klausmeier 1969):

- Define the concept. Cultural symbiosis is the intermingling of two or more cultural features or practices, the amalgamation of two cultures.

- Distinguish the concept from other concepts with which it might be mistaken. The term symbiosis normally refers to the physical world. It describes a relationship between two organisms that are interdependent; each gaining benefit from the other. Here, the meaning is psychological.

- Provide examples and nonexamples. Examples: Somali high school girls in the United States who wear a hijab along with American clothes such as Levis and tennis shoes. The Ben Israelites, a small community of people in India, who generally follow local customs but follow Jewish dietary laws, practice circumcision, and observe the Sabbath. Nonexamples: Sea anemone who live on hermit crabs, to the benefit of both organisms (physical symbiosis, not cultural symbiosis). A person who likes Italian food and French food (there is no amalgamation).

- Have students distinguish between examples and nonexamples you present.
  - A Japanese-French fusion restaurant (example). Irish stew (nonexample).
  - A Protestant family that routinely eats fish on Friday (example). An Italian gentleman who enjoys playing bocce ball (nonexample).

- Have students produce their own examples and nonexamples.
Prereading Activities

Prereading Activities

Other Selections: The Frayer method can be used with any selection containing new and difficult concepts, from an excerpt from *Into Thin Air*, by John Krakauer, to the Declaration of Independence, to a poem like “The Naming of Parts,” by Henry Reed.

Reflections: The Frayer method has several noteworthy features. First, it begins with a clear definition of the concept. Second, it takes into account that knowing what something involves is knowing what it is not. Finally, it progresses from the teacher doing all the work (steps 1–3), to the teacher and the students sharing the work (step 4), to the students doing all the work (step 5).

Prequestioning, Predicting, and Setting Direction

While all of the prereading activities we describe in this chapter are designed to be implemented before a student reads a text, the three that we focus on here are specifically designed to point students toward certain aspects of the text. Such prereading activities encourage students to think analytically, critically, and creatively. Because these three activities are so closely related, we will consider them together and suggest a single activity that includes all three of them.

Posing questions before students read a selection gives them something to look for as they read. The questions both direct their attention and prompt them to be active, inquisitive learners.

Predicting activities encourage students to speculate about the text based on various prompts—illustrations, titles or subtitles, key words, character names or descriptions, and short excerpts. After students make their predictions, one of their reading purposes will be to see whether their predictions are accurate. Encouraging students to make predictions not only focuses their attention and gives them a purpose for reading but also models a useful reading strategy, one they can employ on their own with a variety of texts. Of course, the goal is to encourage reasoned predictions based on the information available, not wild guessing. Thus, predicting should often be accompanied by thoughtful discussion of what prompted the predictions and how certain or speculative the predictions are.

Typically you’ll set a direction at the end of your prereading activities—offer your final instruction and encouragement—by telling students what to attend to while they read. Sometimes you’ll use oral instructions: “Read the story to find out if your predictions are correct.” At other times, you’ll write on the board, create a chart, or provide a handout that students can reflect on or refer to. As the following example illustrates, direction-setting activities are typically brief and to the point.
PREQUESTIONING, PREDICTING, AND SETTING DIRECTION—Learning to Look Forward

Learning to Look Forward includes prequestioning, predicting, and setting direction with a classic tale that lends itself particularly well to these activities.

Selection: “The Tell-Tale Heart,” by Edgar Allan Poe. More than 150 years after its creation, Poe’s chilling tale continues to capture the interest of today’s students.

Students: Ninth and tenth graders of mixed ability.

Reading Purposes: To become familiar with one of the great masters of the short story, Edgar Allan Poe, and to predict the end of a suspenseful story.

Goals of the Activity: To improve students' ability to predict the ending of the story based on careful reading and to get students to practice focused reading by training their attention on specific elements of the text.

Procedure:

- **Prequestioning:** Ask whether students have heard of Edgar Allan Poe. Ask them if they have ever seen The Simpsons episode that featured “The Raven.” Read “The Raven” and discuss how it exemplifies Poe’s themes of darkness, dread, and loss. Read the first few lines of the story, and ask who the narrator seems to be and to whom he might be speaking. Then begin reading or playing a recording of someone reading the story (there are some excellent recorded readings of this and other Poe stories).

- **Prediction:** Stop reading (or listening) to the story at the sixth paragraph and ask, Whose heart is the narrator hearing?

- **Setting direction:** Tell students to keep track of all the noises mentioned in the story and to pay close attention to how the narrator reveals his feelings. What clues do you have about how the author wants you to feel about the narrator? When were you sure what was going to happen in the story?

Other Selections: This activity can be used with other Poe stories such as “The Cask of Amontillado” and many suspense stories by other authors. O. Henry stories sometimes work well too, although they are difficult to predict and may frustrate inexperienced readers if prediction is the sole focus of the activity.

Reflections: These three interrelated strategies help students become active and engaged readers. They also help students become close readers as they search the story for specific textual cues to support their prediction.
Suggesting Strategies

Over the past two decades, a number of reading comprehension strategies have been identified as valuable for understanding, learning from, and enjoying text (for example, see Graves, Juel, Graves, and Dewitz 2011; National Reading Panel 2000; Pearson, Roehler, Dole, and Duffy 1992; and Pressley 2006). The most frequently recommended strategies are using prior knowledge, asking and answering questions, making inferences, determining what is important, summarizing, imaging, dealing with graphic information, and monitoring comprehension. Teaching students to use reading strategies is an important part of reading instruction and something that is usually taught during the elementary years. Teaching strategies is not a topic we discuss in this book; however, suggesting opportunities for students to use strategies they have already been taught is.

For instance, you might suggest that students use imaging as they read, consciously creating pictures in their heads of the people and events in the story. Or, if students are reading material they need to remember, you might ask them to summarize each paragraph or subtopic. You might also tell them to look for the most important point in each section of an article or the key words in a poem. Because suggesting strategies is such a straightforward activity, the following sample activity is brief.

SUGGESTING STRATEGIES—And the Answer Is?

And the Answer Is? invites students to ask questions of themselves and of their classmates as they read one of the world's greatest plays.

Selection: Hamlet, by William Shakespeare. Considered one of Shakespeare’s most demanding plays, Hamlet continues to intrigue and challenge both students and literary scholars.

Students: Seniors in an AP class in which they study great literature in considerable depth.

Reading Purpose: To comment critically on the play, focusing on what Shakespeare is doing artistically and what literary techniques he is using to create the desired effects.

Goal of the Activity: To remind students that asking questions as they are reading is a very useful strategy and that asking appropriate questions is just as important, perhaps even more important, than answering them.

(continues)
Procedure:

- Point out that Shakespeare is one of the most challenging authors, Hamlet is one of his more challenging plays, and part of what makes reading Shakespeare challenging is the language he uses, which is both poetic and representative of the language spoken in England some 400 years ago.

- Tell students that when they come across a word, phrase, or sentence they do not fully understand, they should jot it down and pose a question about it. A general question like “What does felicity mean?” is okay, but a more specific question—“When Hamlet says, ‘Nothing is either good or bad, but thinking makes it so,’ does he really mean it? Are we, the audience, expected to trust Hamlet at this point? Does Shakespeare expect us to agree with this relativistic position?”—is better.

- After students have read an act of the play, give them time to share their questions with their study group. Tell them to save questions their group can’t answer for a whole-class discussion.

Other Selections. You can remind students to use any already learned strategy with any text that merits using the strategy: considering characterization in Of Mice and Men; identifying point of view in The House on Mango Street; analyzing the tone of the poem “My Papa’s Waltz,” by Theodore Roethke; and so on.

Reflections: All too often students’ learning is ephemeral; it lasts a few weeks, a few days, even a few minutes. Suggesting that students use strategies they already know greatly increases the chances that these strategies will be internalized and serve students over time.

Considering Literary Elements

Literary elements are the basic building blocks of literary understanding and interpretation. Point of view, metaphor, simile, foreshadowing, setting, genre, and all the rest are tools adolescent readers use to understand literature. They are part of what Bruner (1977) once called the spiral curriculum—concepts that reappear in greater complexity as students progress through school. Considering literary elements in a prereading activity lets students see that these are not decontextualized terms to be memorized but rather a natural and necessary dimension of literary understanding. Here is an example with a contemporary poem.
CONSIDERING LITERARY ELEMENTS—Ways to Tell a Story

Ways to Tell a Story gives students an opportunity to some important literary elements and to see how a skilled author uses these elements.

Selection: “The Gift,” by Li-Young Lee. Li-Young Lee is a wonderfully accessible contemporary poet. In this poignant narrative poem, he tells how his father gave him the gift of tenderness by removing a splinter from his finger. Even as a young child, he realizes, through his father’s actions, that small acts of kindness are invaluable gifts.

Students: Ninth through twelfth graders of mixed abilities.

Reading Purpose: To apply one’s knowledge of literary elements to a contemporary poem in order to deepen one’s understanding.

Goals of the Activity: To demonstrate the accessibility of much contemporary poetry and show that literary elements can be applied to better understand a text.

Procedure:
- Have students quickwrite about a time when someone did something nice for them.
- Review the literary terms free verse, metaphor, and image.
- Read the poem aloud, paying particular attention to the rhythm and the lack of rhyme.
- Have students underline specific examples of figurative language.
- Have small groups of students retell the story of the poem in no more than four sentences.
- Reconvene the class and compare the prose and poem versions of the story. Focus on how literary elements enhance the poem’s narrative.


Reflections: The powerful narrative in this poem is an excellent basis for contrasting poetry and prose. Its free verse form, strong figurative language, and vivid imagery reinforce students’ understanding of these important literary concepts.
Suggesting Literary Lenses

One of the primary purposes of this book is to bring together what we know about helping kids read texts with what we know about helping kids interpret texts. As we asserted in the introduction, we believe that classroom teachers should merge these two ways of thinking about approaching literary texts with secondary students. The following strategy, Suggesting Literary Lenses, is one of the clearest examples of this kind of merging.

This strategy is based on Deborah’s previous work (Appleman 2010, 2000), which suggests that contemporary literary theories can be offered to secondary students as ways to make meanings from texts. Each theory provides a different lens through which the meaning can be read and interpreted. To use another metaphor, each lens is a different tool that is part of an interpretive toolkit (see Literary Toolkit in Chapter 4, pp. 77–80). In our experience, in diverse classrooms across the country, students of all ability levels have been able to apply these lenses to a variety of texts.

By suggesting literary lenses, we believe your students will become better, smarter readers. The following introductory activity introduces the notion of literary lenses with a familiar fairy tale.

SUGGESTING LITERARY LENSES—Mirror, Mirror On The Wall

Selection: “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” (Any print version will do; we used http://www.literaturecollection.com/a/grimm-brothers/549/)

Students: Students of mixed abilities in grades 9–12.

Reading Purpose: To introduce the idea of literary lenses with a familiar text.

Goals of the Activity: Demonstrate that even simple, familiar texts can be enriched through the use of literary lenses; to increase students’ basic understanding of some literary lenses and to practice applying them.

Procedure:

- First, have students retell the familiar story of “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.” Remind them that the story did not originate with Disney Studios but with the Brothers Grimm.
- Have students read a thumbnail description of the social class lens, the gender lens, and the reader response lens. (See Literary Toolkit in Chapter 4, pp. 77–80)
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Divide students into three groups, assign them each a lens, and have them paraphrase the primary significance of their lenses.

Have students read a text version of “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” and then consider it from the point of view of their assigned lens. What themes, words, characters, or ideas are brought into sharper relief as one considers the story from that perspective?

Have students jigsaw into different groups, so that each theory is represented in the new groups. Ask them to share their interpretations with each other.

Reconvene as a whole class, rereading the story aloud, if time permits, and discuss how each lens reframed the story.

Other Selections: Many other traditional fairy tales lend themselves to a theoried reading, including “Little Red Riding Hood,” “Cinderella,” “Sleeping Beauty,” and “Goldilocks and the Three Bears.” Contemporary animated films such as Shrek or Hoodwinked can also be used as examples of how contemporary theory can be applied to classic children’s tales.

Reflections: It is difficult to move students away from their Disneyized conception of “Snow White,” but it is possible to do so, especially with older students. While some students are initially wary of considering something as “babyish” as literary lenses in English class, the pairing with theory works well. Because students do not have to decipher a difficult literary text as part of the exercise, it allows them to focus fully on the application of the literary lenses. Teachers might also be able to introduce the concept of “archetype” as they discuss the classic components and characters that comprise most traditional fairy tales. The “three little pigs” exercise described in Chapter 4 can also serve as an effective introduction to this activity.

A Final Word

What you do with students before they read a selection is perhaps more important to their comprehension than what you do after they read it. Mr. Johnson demonstrated his understanding of this maxim in preparing his students to read “Everyday Use,” and we believe that his is an example we can all follow.

As we said at the beginning of the chapter, prereading activities motivate and prepare students to read. Sometimes, just one brief prereading activity ensures a successful reading experience. Other times, you may want to provide several. As is always the case with SREs, your approach depends on the selection, the overall purpose for reading it (information, enjoyment), your students’ strengths and needs, and the activities students will do while and after they read it.
We are often wary of complicated activities; they seem to overshadow the text. The prereading activities described here will not eclipse or replace the text. Prereading activities that have been carefully selected and modified on the basis of text, context, and student ability set the stage for your students to fully understand, interpret, and appreciate the literary texts that are the heart of the language arts classroom.
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