Adolescent Literacy:
Motivation and Comprehension Instruction
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Motivation and Comprehension Instruction

Introduction

When we embarked on this project, our only boundary was the topic of adolescent literacy and as we refined our topic, we began to concentrate on adapting instruction of comprehension strategies to the secondary level and motivating adolescent students. We developed two posters that outline the key points we would like to remember about each of these sub-topics – these posters will serve as reminders of our research when we bring this work into our classrooms. Additionally, they will serve as a way to share our findings with our colleagues. We also produced a series of four mini-lessons that explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies, adapting ideas from *The Café Book* (Boushey & Moser, 2009) to better fit the secondary level. Our lessons can be found below.
ENG2D0 Reading Comprehension Mini-Lesson:

Recognizing Literary Elements

Expected Outcome:

After the teacher models recognizing literary elements during a read-aloud, students will be able to practice this skill in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the text and its construction.

Curriculum Expectations:

Oral Communication: Listening to Understand (1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5); Speaking to Communicate (2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6); Reflecting on Skills and Strategies (3.1, 3.2).

Reading and Literature Studies: Reading for Meaning (1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.6, 1.7); Understanding Form and Style (2.1, 2.3); Reading with Fluency (3.1, 3.2); Reflecting on Skills and Strategies (4.1).

Materials:

- Walker Evans Photo
- Think-aloud script
- Checkbrick
Prior Knowledge:

Students should be familiar with literary elements such as character, plot, theme, setting, and conflict. Students should also have notes on the elements of Southern Gothic genre such as grotesque imagery, conflicted characters, abject poverty, supernatural occurrences, dilapidated buildings, and depiction of the American South. If you wish, you may also include literary composition such as mood and tone and/or poetic devices such as simile and metaphor.

Accommodations:

Students requiring accommodations may be offered the opportunity for more time, priority seating, alternative environment, and a tablet from which to read. If necessary, an alternative text may also be used. Other accommodations as listed on the IEP may be used as well.

Assessment:

Assessment will be based on observations as recorded on the checkbric (attached) filled out during the mini-conference.
MINDS ON 5-7 minutes

- Divide the class into groups of four and provide each group with a copy of the Walker Evans (1936) photograph, “Bud Fields with his Second Wife, Lily Rogers Fields and their Daughter. Hale County, Alabama” – or a similar photograph.
- Give students one minute to brainstorm as many elements of the Southern Gothic genre as they can identify in the photo (they may use their notes if they wish).
- Discuss their findings as a class.

ACTION 5-7 minutes

- Discuss the importance of identifying literary elements as they read. You may mention the reasons cited in The CAFÉ Book (2009), which include making students better writers, allow students to appreciate how literary elements enhance a literary work, and foster a better understanding of the story (Boushey & Moser).
- Explain to students that you will be reading a passage from the book and modelling the identification of literary elements as you read.
- Read the think-aloud script. You may choose to focus on either literary elements and/or Southern Gothic – the script is colour coded as such.
- You may want to follow up with some silent reading during which students highlight and demarcate literary elements as they read.
Think-Aloud Script:

(blue = literary elements, green= Southern Gothic)

The Radley Place (A new setting) jutted into a sharp curve beyond our house. Walking south, one faced its porch; the sidewalk turned and ran beside the lot. The house was low, was once white with a deep front porch and green shutters, but had long ago darkened to the color of the slate-gray yard around it (A darkened house that used to be white seems to symbolize a negative change). Rain-rotted shingles drooped over the eaves of the veranda; oak trees kept the sun away (This sounds very gothic – rotting and a sun that is not just hidden, but kept away as if even the sun is too scared to show its face). The remains of a picket drunkenly guarded the front yard—a “swept” yard that was never swept—where johnson grass and rabbit-tobacco grew in abundance (Again, this sounds gothic because the house and grounds seem to be very dilapidated). Inside the house lived a malevolent phantom (This sounds very frightening! This sounds like a conflicted character – a popular element of Southern Gothic fiction). People said he existed, but Jem and I had never seen him (Somehow, the fact that they have never seen him lends a mystery to this character that is haunting). People said he went out at night when the moon was down, and peeped in windows (What does this show us about
his character? How about those who are talking about him? How might this be important to the plot?). When people’s azaleas froze in a cold snap (That's a bad sign – an omen perhaps?), it was because he had breathed on them (This sounds supernatural!). Any stealthy small crimes committed in Maycomb were his work. Once the town was terrorized by a series of morbid nocturnal events: people’s chickens and household pets were found mutilated (How grotesque!); although the culprit was Crazy Addie, who eventually drowned himself in Barker’s Eddy, people still looked at the Radley Place, unwilling to discard their initial suspicions (How does this compare to what we already know about the deep South? Does this create any conflict between the characters?). A Negro would not pass the Radley Place at night, he would cut across to the sidewalk opposite and whistle as he walked (This sounds like superstition). The Maycomb school grounds adjoined the back of the Radley lot; from the Radley chickenyard tall pecan trees shook their fruit into the schoolyard, but the nuts lay untouched by the children: Radley pecans would kill you. A baseball hit into the Radley yard was a lost ball and no questions asked (Much time was devoted to a detailed description of the Radley place, which makes me think that it is an important element in the story – so too is this “malevolent phantom,” Boo Radley).
CONSOLIDATION

- Schedule a meeting with each student to observe their identification of literary elements as they read/think aloud.
- Use the checkbric to record their progress.
- Discuss the student’s strengths and needs.
- With the student, create a goal to work on with respect to identifying literary elements as they read.
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<th>Literary Elements Checkbric</th>
<th>Name: ____________________</th>
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<tr>
<td>Identified a variety of literary elements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrates an understanding of Southern Gothic genre</td>
<td>L1 L2 L3 L4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations show some depth (connection to other elements)</td>
<td>L1 L2 L3 L4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made observations that show engagement and interest in the story</td>
<td>L1 L2 L3 L4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made a wealth of observations – indicating engagement with text</td>
<td>L1 L2 L3 L4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations are logical in relation to the text</td>
<td>L1 L2 L3 L4</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Notes: _______________________________________________________

Goal: _______________________________________________________


EAE2D Reading Comprehension Mini-Lesson:

Strategy: Monitor and Fix Up

Expected Outcome:

Students demonstrate the use of the “monitor and fix up” reading comprehension strategy

Curriculum expectations:

*Oral Communication*: Using Active Listening Strategies 1.1;

*Reading and Interpretation*: Demonstrating understanding 1.2; Making Inferences 1.3; Analyzing texts 1.4; Fiction Literature 2.1; Evaluating texts 3.2;

Metacognition and Setting Goals (4)

Materials:

- Strategy handout or summary on a smart board presentation.
- Students each have their own copy of To Kill a Mockingbird
- Conference assessment notes log for each student

Accommodations:

Students requiring accommodations may be offered priority seating, alternative environment, and an audio recording of the novel. They might be offered a written transcript of the read aloud. Other accommodations as listed on the IEP may be used as well.
Assessment:

Students are asked to demonstrate this or another strategy better suited to their needs during an individual conference.

MINDS ON 5 minutes

I introduce the importance of self-monitoring and of pausing the reading when the text does not make sense. Here are a few talking points: (I might have a handout for the students to keep as a reference, a few slides on my smart board or a poster in class)

- Self-monitoring is a crucial habit for you to develop in order to make sure you understand what you are reading.
- If you realize that what you just read does not make sense to you, what do you usually do? (keep going, flip the page, think about something else, answers will vary)
- Try this strategy: “monitor and fix up” where you pause and try one of these strategies to make sense of the text:
  - **Summarize the text** to recall what you were reading up to the point where it stopped making sense
    - Sometimes remembering what you last understood will help you get back on track
  - Go back and **adjust the rate** at which you are reading: faster or slower
    - Reading too fast might mean you miss important details which would help you understand
    - Reading too slow might lead your mind to wander and to lose track
  - **Reread** the text while thinking carefully
    - Reading with questions in mind might help you understand the text by keeping you focused on answering the questions
    - Reading while looking for alternative perspectives might help read between the lines
• **Read on** to see whether the information will become clear
  
  o *Sometimes reading on will explain what you were unsure about. However, you must read with your questions in mind. This is not the same as skipping over what you don’t get and moving on.*

• **Ask for help or research** an allusion
  
  o *If there is a part of the text you don’t understand after trying different strategies, ask for help from a friend or ask me! If there is a word or an allusion you don’t understand, try searching it online and it might help you understand the overall passage.*

ACTION 4-6 minutes

Demonstrate the monitor and fix up strategy with a read aloud:
Think Aloud Script:

In chapter 6, the kids are at the Radley house where Dill and Jem have a plan to take a look through a loose shutter. Scout reluctantly goes with them. Let’s read this passage together which has confused some of us.

Here is the excerpt starting a few pages in (p.58 in my version):

*Well I just read this passage and I am not sure what happened. I mean why did someone “shoot a negro?” I am confused. So I am going to stop since I don’t understand and back up a bit and read it slower (adjust the rate).*

...Dill stopped and let Jem go ahead. When Jem put his foot on the bottom step, the step squeaked. He stood still, then tried his weight by degrees. The step was silent. Jem skipped two steps, put his foot on the porch, heaved himself to it, and teetered a long moment. He regained his balance and dropped to his knees. He crawled to the window, raised his head and looked in.

Then I saw the shadow. It was the shadow of a man with a hat on. At first I thought it was a tree, but there was no wind blowing, and tree-trunks never walked. The back porch was bathed in moonlight, and the shadow, crisp as toast, moved across the porch toward Jem.
Dill saw it next. He put his hands to his face.

When it crossed Jem, Jem saw it. He put his arms over his head and went rigid.

The shadow stopped about a foot beyond Jem. Its arm came out from its side, dropped, and was still. Then it turned and moved back across Jem, walked along the porch and off the side of the house, returning as it had come. **Hum so what happened here? The shadow must have been Mr. Radley and he was on the porch so close to Jem. Wow. The kids must be so scared.** *(summarizing text)*

Jem leaped off the porch and galloped toward us. He flung open the gate, danced Dill and me through, and shooed us between two rows of swishing collards. **Mom what are collards? – you mean collard greens? It’s a type of vegetable kind of like spinach. – k thanks (ask for help)*

Halfway through the collards I tripped; as I tripped the roar of a shotgun shattered the neighborhood. **Oh I get it now, Mr. Radley was shooting at the kids. But I still don’t understand so I will read on.**

Dill and Jem dived beside me. Jem’s breath came in sobs: “Fence by the schoolyard!--hurry, Scout!” **OK the kids are meeting at the schoolyard** *(summarizing the text)*
Jem held the bottom wire; Dill and I rolled through and were halfway to the shelter of the schoolyard’s solitary oak when we sensed that Jem was not with us. We ran back and found him struggling in the fence, kicking his pants off to get loose. He ran to the oak tree in his shorts. **OK, I guess the pants got caught in the wire fence. (summarizing the text)**

Safely behind it, we gave way to numbness, but Jem’s mind was racing:

“We gotta get home, they'll miss us.”

We ran across the schoolyard, crawled under the fence to Deer’s Pasture behind our house, climbed our back fence and were at the back steps before Jem would let us pause to rest.

Respiration normal, the three of us strolled as casually as we could to the front yard. We looked down the street and saw a circle of neighbors at the Radley front gate.

“We better go down there,” said Jem. “They'll think it’s funny if we don’t show up.”

Mr. Nathan Radley was standing inside his gate, a shotgun broken across his arm. Atticus was standing beside Miss Maudie and Miss Stephanie Crawford. Miss Rachel and Mr. Avery were near by. None of them saw us come up.
We eased in beside Miss Maudie, who looked around. “Where were you all, didn’t you hear the commotion?”

“What happened?” asked Jem. “Mr. Radley shot at a Negro in his collard patch.” Oh I get it, I thought they had shot a negro, but what happened was that they assumed it was a negro in the garden, but it was Scout who tripped and made the noise. Hum, I guess they assumed it was an African-American because their racial prejudice leads them to accuse them of any kind of crime in Maycomb. I wonder if Jem will get caught since his pants are still on the Radley fence.

At this point I will end the mini lesson with an invitation for the students to try this monitor and fix up strategy during SSR or during their reading assignment of the novel.

**CONSOLIDATION**

Choose a passage in the subsequent chapters and have students model this or another strategy during a conference. Fill out the conference assessment form.
EAE2D Reading Comprehension Mini-Lesson:

Strategy: Connect Prior Knowledge to Text

Expected Outcome:

Students demonstrate the use of the “Connect Prior Knowledge to Text” reading comprehension strategy

Curriculum Expectations:

Oral Communication: Using Active Listening Strategies 1.1;

Reading and Interpretation: Demonstrating understanding 1.2; Making Inferences 1.3; Analyzing texts 1.4; Fiction Literature 2.1; Evaluating texts 3.2;

Metacognition and Setting Goals (4)

Materials:

- Strategy handout or summary on a smart board presentation
- Background context notes about the segregated south during the Great Depression
- Students each have their own copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- Conference assessment notes log for each student
Prior Knowledge:

The students were introduced to the historical background of the publishing of the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* during the Civil Rights Movement by watching and discussing excerpts of the movie *Mississippi Burning*. Then we discussed a brief history of slavery, the American Civil War, Reconstruction and Segregation so that students understand the setting of the novel as well as the context in which it was published.

Accommodations:

Students requiring accommodations may be offered priority seating, alternative environment, and an audio recording of the novel. They might be offered a written transcript of the read aloud. Other accommodations as listed on the IEP may be used as well.

Assessment:

Students are asked to demonstrate this or another strategy better suited to their needs during an individual conference.
MINDS ON 2 minutes

I introduce the importance of making connections between your own experiences or your background knowledge about the world to what you are reading. Here are a few talking points: (I might have a handout for the students to keep as a reference, a few slides on my smart board or a poster in class)

- Connecting the text to what you know will help you understand the deeper meaning of texts.
- As you read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, keep in mind what you know about being part of a family, school and community. Also keep in mind the context in which the book was set (The Segregated South) and that in which it was published (The Civil Rights Movement).
- Try this strategy: during your reading, when you get the instinct to do so, pause and make connections to the text. When you do, reflecting on why the author is hoping you will make this connection

ACTION 10 minutes

Demonstrate the “connect the text to background knowledge” comprehension strategy:
Think Aloud Script:

In chapter 2, Scout experiences her first day of school, a day she has been excited about for as long as she can remember. Harper Lee creates the character of her teacher Miss Caroline to tell us more about what it was like to be part of Scout’s community in Maycomb. Let’s read this passage together to see how to connect prior knowledge to the text in order to gain a deeper comprehension of the author's intent. Here is the excerpt starting a few paragraphs into chapter 2 (p.18 in my version):

Miss Caroline printed her name on the blackboard and said, “This says I am Miss Caroline Fisher. I am from North Alabama, from Winston County.” The class **murmured apprehensively**, should she prove to harbor her share of the peculiarities indigenous to that region. (When Alabama seceded from the Union on January 11, 1861, Winston County seceded from Alabama, and every child in Maycomb County knew it.) **OK** This means something…wait let’s see, Alabama was part of the south which seceded from the northern states during the civil war so if that county seceded from Alabama, that means she was on a different side of the Civil War. North Alabama was full of Liquor Interests, Big Mules, steel companies, Republicans *(Abraham Lincoln’s party who led the civil war*
against the south and who wanted to end slavery), professors, and other persons of no background. Harper Lee must mean here that this teacher is not from the same kind of community as Maycomb and that is why the class *murmured apprehensively* when Miss Caroline said she was from Winston County.

At this point I will end the read aloud and ask the students to turn to the person next to them for 1 minute and discuss a time when they were judge because of the place they were from. Then we will discuss as a class what Harper Lee is saying about the people of Maycomb in this scene. Here I will end the mini lesson by reinforcing how making connections between the text and background knowledge about history and our own experiences is so important to understanding the novel on a deeper level. I will invite the students to try this making connections strategy during SSR or during their reading assignment of the novel.

**CONSOLIDATION**

5 minutes

Choose a passage in the subsequent chapters and have students model this or another strategy during a conference. Fill out the conference assessment form.
ENG2D0 Comprehension Mini-Lesson:

Asking Questions Throughout the Reading Process

Expected Outcome:

After the teacher models effective questioning, students will be able to practice their questioning throughout the reading process in order to better understand the text.

Curriculum Expectations:

Oral Communication: Listening to Understand (1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5); Speaking to Communicate (2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6); Reflecting on Skills and Strategies (3.1). Reading and Literature Studies: Reading for Meaning (1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.6, 1.7); Reading with Fluency (3.1, 3.2); Reflecting on Skills and Strategies (4.1).

Materials:

- Script
- Checkbric – copies for each student
- Q Chart poster in classroom

Prior Knowledge:

It would be beneficial for students to be familiar with the Q Chart.
Accommodations:

Students requiring accommodations may be offered the opportunity for more time, priority seating, alternative environment, and a tablet from which to read. If necessary, an alternative text may also be used. Other accommodations as listed on the IEP may be used as well.

Assessment:

Assessment will be based on observations as recorded on the checkbric (attached) filled out during the mini-conference.

MINDS ON 5-7 minutes

- Ask students to turn to the first page in their novel, To Kill a Mockingbird and read the first paragraph. Ask students to write down at least two questions that come to mind as they read. Once students have had a couple of minutes to do this, ask them to share their questions with a partner or group.
ACTION

- Discuss the importance of asking questions as they read. You may mention the reasons cited in The CAFÉ Book (2009), which include more focus, better recall of events, and using questions is a way to monitor comprehension (Boushey & Moser).
- Explain to students that you will be reading a passage from the book and modelling effective questioning as you read. Read the think-aloud script.
- Ask students to discuss with their partner or group how their questions were similar or different to the ones modelled and how they can make changes to ask more effective questions.
- Ask a few students to share their comments with the class.
- You may want to follow up with some silent reading during which students jot down more questions as they read.

CONSOLIDATION

- Schedule a meeting with each student to observe their questioning as they read/think aloud.
- Use the checkbric to record their progress.
- Discuss the student’s strengths and needs.
- With the student, create a goal to work on with respect to asking effective questions as they read.
Think-Aloud Script:

When he was nearly thirteen, my brother Jem got his arm badly broken at the elbow. *(How did he break his arm?)* When it healed, and Jem’s fears of never being able to play football were assuaged *(What does this word mean?)*, he was seldom self-conscious about his injury *(Why would he be self-conscious about an injury?)*. His left arm was somewhat shorter than his right; when he stood or walked, the back of his hand was at right angles to his body, his thumb parallel to his thigh. He couldn’t have cared less, so long as he could pass and punt. When enough years had gone by to enable us to look back on them *(How might the passage of time be important to the story?)*, we sometimes discussed the events leading to his accident *(How does the story connect with his accident? Will we find out later how it happened?)*. I maintain that the Ewells started it all *(What did they start? Was it something bad?)*, but Jem, who was four years my senior, said it started long before that. He said it began the summer Dill *(Who is Dill?)* came to us, when Dill first gave us the idea of making Boo Radley come out *(Who is Boo Radley? What kind of name is Boo? Come out of where?)*. I said if he wanted to take a broad view of the thing, it really began with Andrew Jackson. If General Jackson hadn’t run the Creeks up the creek, Simon Finch would never have paddled up the Alabama, and
where would we be if he hadn’t (What does this mean? Is this important to the story? Do I need to read this again to understand it?)? We were far too old to settle an argument with a fist-fight, so we consulted Atticus (Why is Atticus so important? Is he very smart?). Our father said we were both right (Why do they call their father by his first name? How can they both be right?).
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Adapted by Deborah O’Keefe at the Peel District School Board, originally from Read it…Understand it… Communicate It by Jan McLellan.
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<tr>
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<td>L1 L2 L3 L4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks predictive questions that might be answered as the story progresses</td>
<td>L1 L2 L3 L4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks questions that foster engagement and interest in the story</td>
<td>L1 L2 L3 L4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks a variety of questions (factual, predictive, analytical, and synthesis)</td>
<td>L1 L2 L3 L4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks a wealth of questions – indicating engagement with the text</td>
<td>L1 L2 L3 L4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions are logical in relation to the text</td>
<td>L1 L2 L3 L4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Notes:

Goal:
References


