

Critical Literacy: Teaching Strategies

Teaching Strategies:

Use the following teaching strategies to facilitate higher-order, critical thinking about content across all areas – or critical literacy.

1. **Debates** over what a text is trying to do, what ideologies are driving it, and how students can apply those ideologies in multiple interest and subject areas.
 - Create classroom climates in which both you and your students collaborate to discover how texts construct your students' worlds, cultures, and identities in powerful and ideological ways.
2. **Teach** how texts work and “re-mediate what they attempt to do in the world and to people by moving students toward active position-taking with them through critique and reconstruction of the social fields in which they live and work” (Luke, 2000, p. 453).
3. **Problem-posing Strategy:** Use **Important Questions:**
 - Focus on text coding: How does the text work? How is it designed? What are its important and less important features?
 - Focus on text meaning: How are ideas related to each (compare, contrast, connect)? What cultural resources help make sense of it? What cultural readings and interpretations can be constructed from it?
 - Why did the author write this? Choices: to inform, explain, illustrate, entertain, explore, persuade, or a combination.
 - Focus on the practical: What do we do as readers with the text? How does its function shape its form?
 - Focus on critical practices: What is the text attempting to do to us individually; how is it attempting to change or alter our perspective? Whose interests are served through this text? Whose voices and interests are expressed? What positions are conveyed? Who is being left out, or what voices are not being heard?

Other questions Taken from: McLaughlin & DeVogd (2004) IN: Molden, K. (2007).

What is this text about? How do we know?	How is the reader or viewer positioned in relation to the composer of the text?
Who would be most likely to read and/or view this text and why?	How does the text depict age, gender and/or cultural groups?
Why are we reading and/or viewing this text?	How does the text construct a version of reality?
What does the composer of the text want us to know?	Whose views are excluded or privileged in the text?
What are the structures and features of the text?	Who is allowed to speak? Who is quoted?
What sort of genre does the text belong	Why is the text written the way it is?
	Whose view; whose reality?

to? What do the images suggest? What do the words suggest? • What kind of language is used in the text? • How are children, teenagers or young adults constructed in this text? • Why has the composer of the text represented the characters in a particular way? • Are there “gaps” and “silences” in the text? • Who is missing from the text? • What has been left out of the text? • What questions about itself does the text not raise? • In whose interest is the text? • Who benefits from the text? • Is the text fair? • What knowledge does the reader/viewer need to bring to this text in order to understand it? • Which positions, voices and interests are at play in the text?	What view of the world is the text presenting? • What kinds of social realities does the text portray? • What is real in the text? • How would the text be different if it were told in another time, place or culture? • What kind of person, and with what interests and values, composed the text? • What view of the world and values does the composer of the text assume that the reader/viewer holds? How do we know? • What different interpretations of the text are possible? • How do contextual factors influence how the text is interpreted? • How else could the text have been written? • How does the text rely on inter-textuality to create its meaning?
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- Assign text questions and use response journals to respond to particular text or text passages and do think/pair/share strategies, or read/write/talk.
- Assign sets of questions to groups to research and answer using a particular text. Jigsaw the groups to rotate questions and/or text (use text ideally across multiple content areas).

5. Missing Pieces Strategy: Use background knowledge, review of prior information taught:

- Have students “ponder what is missing” from a text, such as history text about World War II for example, students might find that information on the Japanese-American Internment Camps were not included.

6. Bookmark Technique:

- Students create four bookmarks by folding and cutting 8.5 x 11 pieces of paper into four equal parts. As they read they make and record decisions about specific and assigned information.
- Bookmark 1: Write about and/or sketch the part of the text that was most interesting.

- Bookmark 2: Write about and/or sketch something that was confusing.
- Bookmark 3: Write one to five words that you or the class might need to discuss.
- Bookmark 4: Choose an illustration, graph, or map that helped them to understand what they read.
- Use the bookmarks as a basis for discussion. Students can pick their favorite, or discuss them in groups and jigsaw them around with one at a time responsible for initiating discussion.

7. Connection Stems – activates prior knowledge and facilitates personal connections to text:

- Students use these “stems” to make connections as they read, completing them orally, in writing, or through sketches. Students must use text support when sharing them to explain the personal experiences they support.
- That reminds me of...
- I remember when...
- I have a connection...
- I have a friend that...
- An experience I have had like that...
- I would like to do that...
- I felt like that character when...
- If I were that character, I would...
- I remember another book about this...

8. Switching Strategy – shows text bias and aids reader awareness of author intention:

- Gender switch – students change the sex of the main characters and write it out.
- Theme switch – students make up a different story with the opposite theme, for example changing “peace is good” to “force is good.”
- Setting switch – students tell orally or write the story from a different time, place, or social class.
- Body-Style switch – students change the main character body from fat to thin or tall to short.
- Clothing switch – students change the main character’s clothing, for example from preppy to gang or to formal or hip-hop.
- Emotion switch – students imagine and write about a story in which the characters have different emotional tone, such as calm and thoughtful or cracking jokes constantly.
- Ethnic/race switch – students change characters’ race/ethnic characteristics
- Relationship/organization switch – students write about the main characters with changed relationships, such as making friends family members, or friends to enemies.

9. **Alternative Texts** – teaches students to view text from multiple perspectives:

- Character Substitution: Have students write about a portion of what they read with a character substitution, replacing an existing character with a new character of a different personality. Have them write out the events as they would be with the new character, if even a different outcome.
- Character Perspective: Students re-write a story or portion of a story or book using another character's perspective, reorienting the facts and events to fit the desires of the new character.

10. **Juxtapositioning** (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004) – students look at contrasting viewpoints.

- Present students with two contrasting text or two pictures next to each other that make the contrast more obvious. Lead a discussion based on this contrast.
- Fill out a Venn Diagram to depict the contrasts.
- Use a cloze exercise to depict point of view. Take an article from popular press like a newspaper or magazine. Remove all words that show a bias toward a particular point of view. Have students fill in the words they think are missing. Discuss the words they chose and discuss why.
- EXAMPLE:
 - To a sold out crowd last night, Britney showed up on stage wearing a skin-tight black leather miniskirt with matching tank top and it was _____. After she sang for several hours, her _____ performance left the crowd speechless.



References:

- Enrau, N. (2008). *Content Area Reading and Writing: Fostering Literacies in Middle and High School Cultures*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Molden, K. (2007). CRITICAL LITERACY, THE RIGHT ANSWER FOR THE READING CLASSROOM: STRATEGIES TO MOVE BEYOND COMPREHENSION FOR READING IMPROVEMENT. *Reading Improvement*, 44(1), 50-56. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.