

## TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR RESPONSE TO LITERATURE

If students are to become literate members of our society, we must create situations where the development of literacy can occur. Teachers throughout Connecticut have shared examples of rich, literate environments. The following strategies are taken from those examples and may be incorporated into any literature unit to help students develop the ability to think deeply about literature. These examples use the following stances that students take in responding to literature:

- **Describing the text** requires the reader to give an initial reaction to the text and describe its general content and purpose;
- **Interpreting the text** requires the reader to construct an interpretation and/or explanation of the text and connect the text to personal knowledge; and
- **Moving beyond the text** requires the reader to reflect on the text and make personal judgments about its quality and meaning.

The selection of appropriate literature is a crucial initial step. It is essential that selections:

- are authentic pieces of literature; complete, unedited and unexpurgated;
- reflect a kaleidoscope of cultures and experiences;
- are developmentally appropriate; and
- are rich in literary qualities and have multiple levels of meaning.

Involve students in shared and independent reading so that they have a wide variety of literature from which to draw when discussing, interpreting and comparing works.

Use interest and attitude surveys. Get to know your students through surveys, interviews and observations so you can select works that will be of interest to all members of the class. Surveys can be used at the end of a unit or session and can be designed to find out how students react to various literature or activities and how their knowledge has changed. Pre and post surveys often increase students' awareness of genres and authors, and help to enrich their experiences as they reflect upon their preferences and attitudes toward the text.

The following series of strategies will enable students to construct meaning from their interactions with text.

## STRATEGY 1

Encourage students **to develop their own questions about the text** (including print, audio and visual texts such as film, videotape, artwork and music). You might share some of the following questions with students to model some of the questions teachers and students sometimes ask about texts.

- Do I like this work? Why or why not?
- What memories, feelings or ideas are surfacing?
- What characters and situations in the story remind me of people and situations in my own life? How are they similar and how are they different?
- What issues in this story are similar to real-life issues I have thought about or experienced?
- How has the story clarified, changed or challenged my views on any of these issues?
- When I think about this work, what comes first to my mind?
- Is there an image, character or situation that I start to think about?
- What is my initial reaction as I begin to read the text?
- Was my initial reaction confirmed?
- How much do I agree or disagree with the way the characters think and act and the kinds of beliefs and values they hold? Where do I differ and why?
- Does anyone in this work remind me of anyone I know?
- As I think ahead to tomorrow's reading, what direction might the story take?
- As I read today, were my predictions of yesterday confirmed?
- What character was my favorite and why?
- Does a character portray a quality I wish to develop? Why?
- How does the character demonstrate this quality?
- Do any incidents, ideas or actions in this work remind me of my own life or something that has happened to me?
- What kind of person do I think the author is? What makes me think this way?
- How do the characters in this work remind me of characters or events in other books I have read or movies or television shows I have seen? Do I prefer one of these to the others? If so, why?
- How much did I agree or disagree with the characters, the way they behaved or the kinds of values or beliefs they displayed?
- If I were a teacher, would I want to share this work with my students?
- What startling, unusual and effective words, phrases and images did I come across in my reading today? Which ones would I like to use in my own writing?

- What do I feel is the most important word, phrase or passage in this work? Explain why this is important.
- Would I like to read something else by this author? Why or why not?
- What questions do I hope to have answered tomorrow as I read more of the story?
- Did this work leave me with the feeling there is more to be told?
- What do I think might happen?
- Am I like any of the characters in the work?
- Would I change the ending of the story? Why? How?
- What do I think the title means? If I could change the title, how would I change it and why?
- Are there parts of this work that are confusing to me? Which parts? Why?
- If the setting were changed to reflect my neighborhood, how would the events of the story have to change and why?
- Do I wish my life or the lives of my friends were more like the lives of the characters in the story?

(**Note:** It is of great importance that students create their own questions. Inviting students to ask and respond to their own and other questions is important to the development of critical thinking in the exploration of literature.)

## **STRATEGY 2**

**Model the processes** you expect of your students. Periodically read a work for the first time in the presence of your students. Read the work aloud and think aloud as you are reading. Tell the students where you are confused, where you reread a section, where you read quickly to bypass a description to get to an understanding, where you pause to savor the author's language. As you read, tell the students the thoughts that pass through your mind. Eventually, have students engage in the process of thinking aloud.

Take on the same assignments that you give to your students. For example, if you ask students to write an initial reaction to a piece of literature, write your own initial reaction. Let them see that you, too, pause to think or search for a comparison to another work. Share your response with those of the students. You might write on the overhead or chalkboard so students can see your responses.

### STRATEGY 3

Use the following **journals** as often as possible to facilitate students' thinking about literature.

- **Double-Entry/Dialectical Journal:** A double-entry journal is one in which the student takes notes and reflects. Students are encouraged to explore ideas, responses and to take risks in their writing. A sheet of paper is divided in half; on the left side the reader notes something from the text and on the right side the reader makes an individual connection.
- **Metacognitive Journal:** Using a double-entry journal format, the reader notes on the left side what was learned and on the right how it was learned.
- **Learning Log:** Using a double-entry journal format, the student takes traditional notes on the left side and on the right records new connections, applications or evaluations. This assists the reader in regularly rereading content.
- **Problem-Solution Journal:** Using a double-entry journal format, the student notes a problem in the right-hand column and on the left brainstorms alternatives for solutions, anticipates stumbling blocks and proposes arguments for a proposed solution.
- **Reflective Journal:** Divide each paper into three columns and entitle them "What Happened," "How I Felt" and "What I Learned." This encourages students to make connections to personal life and the human condition.
- **Synthesis Journal:** Divide each paper into three columns and entitle them "What I Did," "What I Learned" and "How I Can Use It." This encourages students to review past experiences and plan for future applications. In addition, it reinforces the concepts learned.
- **Effects Journal:** Using a double-entry journal format, entitle the left side "What Happened," and the right side "What Might/Should Happen as a Result of This." This encourages students to anticipate changes that might occur based on the events experienced.

Additional journal activities include the following:

- connecting experiences to reading;
- answering specific questions;
- writing questions about puzzling passages;
- noting repetition, contradiction and oppositions in reading;
- predicting outcomes;
- writing new endings or additional lines to stories;
- voicing opinions about characters and action;
- giving and defining points of view;

- copying and responding to passages;
- retelling events;
- imitating sentences;
- paraphrasing difficult sentences and passages;
- identifying values of characters;
- commenting on structure, setting, plot and theme;
- speculating about characters' motives;
- relating a particular work to others;
- summarizing class discussions;
- reflecting upon learning;
- shadowing a character through a story; and
- drawing a picture of something described in a story.

#### **STRATEGY 4**

Help students **create a strong response** to questions about literature that require interpretation and reflection. Have students work individually, in pairs and in both small and large groups to create responses. A word processor often facilitates the work, as all students can see the response take shape on the screen.

Have students select their best responses to share — orally, on an overhead or through duplicated copies. Have the students explain why they selected these responses as their best, what thinking processes led them to create the responses and what they might now add or change. Invite classmates to share where they agree or disagree and where they might have added to or clarified an idea.

For example, have students score their own responses and those of fellow classmates according to class-created and CAPT rubrics. Collect student responses to a particular work of literature. Remove all names. Photocopy 10 to 12 of the responses. Collate the copies and create individual packets for students to read. As the students read, have them list one strong or weak quality of a response. When the students have completed this task, the teacher facilitates a discussion in which the responses are listed according to their respective qualities.

On a chart, all of the qualities the students have identified are combined and synthesized. Have the students turn negative qualities into positive ones. For example, if a student has written "No reasons or examples," the student turns that comment into a positive statement, "Uses examples and gives reasons." Use the students' own language in compiling your class list of "Good Qualities of Responses." Create a class rubric for reader response.

After the class rubric is created, introduce the CAPT rubric by distributing copies and by creating a class chart that distinguishes among the 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 responses. Invite students to compare the way their class-created rubric does and does not fit the CAPT rubric. Show students where their rubric is similar to the CAPT rubric. Show them where the language of their original

list (for example, "doesn't have a clue,") means the same as the more formal language used on the CAPT rubric (for example, "displays limited understanding of the text").

### **STRATEGY 5**

Use reading interaction questions in **response journals** before, during and after reading a work. Use the questions as you progress through the book. These questions are meant to encourage students to think further about the text. Each builds upon the other. They may be answered in any order. Both teachers and students can generate other types of questions.

### **STRATEGY 6**

Involve students in discussing what makes **good literature**. Each text might lead students to consider a different quality. While there may be many qualities that constitute good literature, it is important that each student "invents" those qualities and incorporates the qualities offered by classmates, teachers and scholars. This type of activity will enable students develop a critical stance about what they read.

### **STRATEGY 7**

Have students **collaborate** to answer questions. Put the four CAPT questions on the board. Have students work as a group to answer each question. Before asking, "What is good literature?" answer the question, "What is literature?" As a collaborative group, have students come up with a definition. First, they develop criteria for defining good literature. Then students identify an example of good literature according to the criteria they have created. Students often will use for discussion and debate the books they are reading. If students have been involved in reading a wide variety of rich literature, the debates will be rich and instructive. Discussions will include universal themes and qualities of literature that are common to multiple texts.

A variation involves assigning a particular work to groups of students. Ask each group to find quotes that are significant to the text, select their favorite, and then write a group answer about the significance of the quote. The groups then present the quote to others. Ask them to respond to the quote and compare the responses.

### **STRATEGY 8**

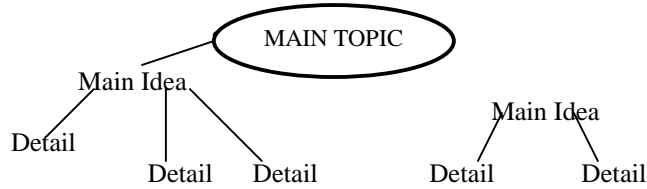
Encourage students to use **graphic organizers** to make their thinking visible. Graphic organizers promote synthesizing, comparing and contrasting, evaluating information, and selecting and using relevant information. Students should be free to select from and use a variety of graphic organizers. Students should be given frequent opportunities to create their own graphic organizers.

## SAMPLE GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS

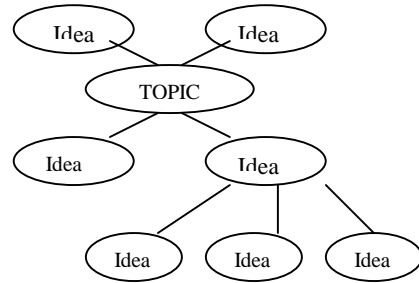
Readers use numerous strategies that assist them in processing information before, during and after reading. Graphic organizers are visual aids to comprehending and organizing written material. Various graphic organizers are used to predict, explore and expand learning concepts. The graphic organizer is a tool utilized as a means to an end, not an end itself.

### 1. Descriptive

#### a. Hierarchical

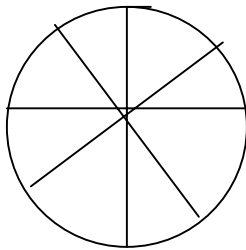


#### b. Non-Hierarchical

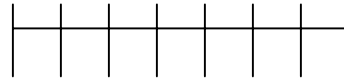


### 2. Time/Order

#### a. Circle Chart

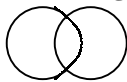


#### b. Time Line



### 3. Compare/Contrast

#### a. Venn Diagram



#### b. Matrix

	1	2	3	4
A				
B				
C				

#### c. Charts

Problem	Solution
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Cause	Effect
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## STRATEGY 9

Involve students in **sustained silent reading**. It is most important for students to be given time to read independently during the school day. Reading periodically should be preceded by, and sometimes interrupted by, journal writing, peer and teacher conferences, and mini lessons or class discussions.

## STRATEGY 10

An effective strategy to use with students as a response to literature activity is **peer response**. This strategy presents students with an opportunity to collaborate in a small-group setting or with a partner. Students who may be reluctant to share information in a larger setting may feel much more comfortable in this type of activity and, as a result, gain insight into how another student responds to a shared piece of literature.

Students respond to a selection either in groups or as partners. Once students have completed a shared reading, they write a response to the literature using a question from the CAPT reading framework. Students then pass their responses to other students, who carefully read and write replies. The responses can be in question form or can be constructive, positive criticisms to the original responses. These are returned to the original students who then must write reactions to the questions or comments of their peers. This strategy allows students to listen to the interpretations of others as they construct their own meaning.

## STRATEGY 11

**Instructional activities** can elicit or extend an initial response when students interpret literature. Having students review, summarize or retell a story often can discourage reading rather than support it. If students perceive the purpose of reading a novel to be one of these exercises, there is little room for the joy and satisfaction of reading just for the sake of becoming involved in another world. A response to a text must include sustained contact with the book, ownership of the process of making meaning from the text, and sharing the experience and reactions to literature. Teachers need to keep these three elements in mind and encourage readers to make an initial response of their own choice. Not all readers will choose an initial formal response because the experience can be too confusing to share.

Teachers might consider the following options for their students:

- **Create a cartoon strip** with captions to convey the main idea of a chapter or incident in the story. The strip should be at least 8 to 12 frames in length. This calls on the creative and interpretive skills of the reader in isolating an incident and maintaining continuity with a limited medium.
- **Write a short play** from a story selection to be enacted by a small group. The effort put into the writing must be made worthwhile through an opportunity for a final production before an audience.
- **Poetry writing** is another option. Models will give students the confidence and information necessary for success with this type of structure.



- Students can keep a **character diary** where they record connections, comments or questions they have as they read. The character diary is written as if the student is a character in the story. This helps a reader to see the point of view of one character in the book. It also helps students to understand the character's relationships with other people in the book and the time and sequence in the book. If the novel is episodic and the story jumps from one setting to another, a diary of one of the characters helps to maintain the flow of the story. Illustrations of the characters or an interesting section of the plot all require a student to recall, select and decide what will be depicted.
- Students can **write a response** to enhance their understanding of text. Such writing should not be seen as an imposed task, but as an extension of the pleasure of reading. Students might extend the story, change an ending, make the antagonist win, write a newspaper report, compare the story or character with another, change the setting of the story or relate the story to personal experiences. The options become more accessible after each has been tried. The teacher needs to serve as an active participant.
- Students can **customize text** by developing a project of personal interest. This often can be a spontaneous development in which students can create such projects as wall charts that develop one aspect of a selection. They might choose to interview someone they know who can share information on the topic or an aspect of the text.

This list is by no means exhaustive, but represents the main activities undertaken by the students. Time is provided in class for these responses to be developed. Students also can work on these responses outside of class. Teachers can help students remain focused and directed, however, by supporting and monitoring their progress through the activities.

## STRATEGY 12

**Read short stories aloud.** Reading surveys reveal that students like being read to in class. Students are enthralled by a good "read-aloud." More importantly, "read-alouds" lead many students to read the books, look for other works by the same author and go beyond listening to a more active and personal involvement with the texts. Hearing good literature brings the text to life, fills the classroom with the author's words and provides students with one more avenue for loving books. "Read-alouds" provide excellent opportunities for engagement with text. During the "read-alouds" teachers should encourage students to raise personal questions, make predictions and offer thoughts on quality.

Reading aloud takes practice. Both teachers and students need opportunities to learn. The following tips should help with "read-alouds."

- Read the selection at least once to yourself before presenting. Decide how you will read it. You might divide a work that is too long to read in the amount of time you have. Separate the reading by stopping at strategically planned places in the story.
- Read to the students, not at them. Make eye contact as often as possible.

- Keep your reading rate slower than conversation. Avoid a tendency to speed up.
- Pause frequently, before and after parts you want to stress, to facilitate understanding.
- Change your voice for the story's characters.
- Change your voice for the story's different words.
- Change volume as appropriate.
- Use facial expressions.
- Encourage listeners to make predictions, connections and evaluations about the text.
- Select stories that you yourself enjoy.
- Be enthusiastic.

### STRATEGY 13

In **Literature Circles**, (Harvey Daniels, *Literature Circles*) small groups of students read the same book. After reading a chapter or two, each student completes a different task. After completing the tasks, the group gets together and discusses what was read and shares what they did.

Some of these tasks that students are responsible for are:

- **The Discussion Director** develops a list of four or five questions that the group might want to discuss about this part of the book. The questions should be about major details of the reading. The purpose of the task is to help people talk over the big ideas in the reading and share their reactions.
- **The Literary Luminary** locates a few special sections of the text that the group would like to hear read aloud. The idea is to help people remember passages of the text that may be significant, interesting, confusing or well written. List the page number and the paragraph number of the text that will be read. Also, write a sentence or two stating why the paragraph was chosen.
- **The Illustrator** draws some kind of picture related to the reading. This task should take time and the illustrator should take care to produce a quality picture. As the drawing is presented, other members of the group comment.
- **The Connector** finds connections between the book the group is reading and the world outside. This means connecting the reading to one's life, to happenings at school or in the community, to similar events at other times and places, to other places, to other people or problems.
- **The Vocabulary Enricher** finds five to eight especially important words in the day's reading. List the page number and paragraph, the word and the definition.

- **The Summarizer** prepares a brief summary of the day's reading which should include the key points, the main highlights, the essence of the selection.

### **Role of the Teacher — Facilitator of the Group**

Teachers should:

- collect sets of good books;
- help groups to form;
- visit and observe group meetings;
- confer with students or groups who struggle;
- orchestrate sharing sessions;
- keep records; and
- make assessment notes.