

## RESPONDING TO TEXT AND CONTEXT

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As students move to senior high school, the texts they interact with and study—print, oral, visual and multimedia texts—become increasingly complex. Students are expected to be able to make meaning of text not only at a literal level but at increasingly inferential and metaphoric levels as well.

The meaning-making strategies used by proficient readers need to be made “visible” to students. Initially, students must understand that constructing meaning from text is a participatory rather than passive activity. Meaning is something that must be recreated into the understanding of the reader. Meaning emerges as a result of the interaction between what the reader brings to the text and what the text creator has provided.

Secondly, students must recognize that text is embedded in a communication situation—a **context**. A reader attempts to reach an understanding of that context in order for the fullest meaning of the text to emerge. If knowledge about the author’s “world”—the contextual elements that have shaped the text—is not externally provided to assist the reader in making meaning, then the reader must engage his or her own prior knowledge—experiences, feelings, values, beliefs—in exploring and creating a context for understanding the text. This active engagement of prior knowledge is a metacognitive function that calls upon an awareness of one’s strategic reading processes in helping to make meaning.

### Metacognition

The study of language enables students to develop metacognition: it enables them to become more consciously aware of their own thinking and learning processes and to gain greater control of these processes. Essentially, metacognition involves reflection, critical awareness and analysis, monitoring, and reinvention. Students who are engaged in metacognition recognize the requirements of the task at hand, reflect on strategies and skills they may employ, appraise their strengths and weaknesses in the use of these strategies and skills, make modifications, and monitor subsequent strategies.

Metacognitive awareness is equally important when students make meaning of literature and of nonliterary text. In communication situations where text is often more utilitarian than aesthetic, students’ critical consideration of external context elements becomes essential. They must understand that such communication is often directly geared to a particular—usually immediate—audience, in a particular time or place, and for a particular purpose. Accommodating the immediacy of such contexts adds a degree of additional challenge to the meaning making process. Students’ abilities to call forth the resources to assist them with forming accurate personal interpretations will often determine whether and how well they have understood the particular communication.



Providing opportunities for students to reflect on and assess their own learning in any given situation assists them to become more aware of the processes they use and how to modify them, if necessary, or to adopt different strategies. Appendix B contains several self-assessment tools that can be adapted for a variety of situations, including

group work. For example, Exploring Thoughts and Language: Self-assessment Form, pages 436–437, asks students to answer a number of questions about their learning (which could be applied to any activity). It asks them to choose statements that describe their learning as well as to discuss ways in which they might handle the learning differently in the future.

Another valuable tool to develop metacognition is the Learning Log.<sup>9</sup> This one-page sheet requires students to evaluate a number of stages in their learning by responding to the following:

- What I focused on learning.
- Strategies used to accomplish the learning.
- What I did and how I felt when I encountered difficulty or problems.
- How I felt at the end of the learning.
- Ways in which the new learning has impacted my life. (What I can now do or enjoy that I could not before.)
- Goals I have set for myself for continued learning in this area.

This activity can be applied to goals that students set for themselves outside their English language arts class as well as within it. Teachers can encourage students to challenge themselves to learn something they have been reluctant to tackle. As a follow-up to their learning, students could be asked to teach other students what they have learned.

Teachers can determine if students are becoming more aware of their own thinking and learning processes as they:

- describe what they are doing and why
- assess the success of their strategies
- identify the errors and/or difficulties they encountered
- make a conscious effort to adapt their processes
- take more pride in their accomplishments as their decisions increase success.

## Skills and Attitudes

Development of the following skills and attitudes helps students to make meaning and successfully participate in response-based activities:

- A capacity for sustained, focused attention on the text. This might mean that, depending on the students, a teacher may need to begin the term with shorter, somewhat simpler texts in order to engage and hold students' attention. As the year progresses, and as students demonstrate the ability to sustain their focus, texts of increasing length and complexity may be introduced.
- A willingness to postpone closure, perhaps indefinitely. While all readers like to believe that they have found the right interpretation or answer, it is important for them to understand that such a "right" answer is not always clearly defined. One of the frustrations of reading is the feeling of uncertainty over the accuracy of

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9. Adapted with permission from Dom Saliani, "Learning Log," *Much Ado About Teaching and Learning*, <http://www.members.shaw.ca/dsaliani/activities/learninglog.html> (Accessed June 20, 2003).

one's interpretation. Yet a reader's willingness to entertain problems is also a joy of reading—an expectation that as one continues to read and rethink, a deeper understanding will gradually emerge.

- A tolerance for failure and prolonged ambiguity. Students must be prepared to read and perhaps reread a difficult text again and again and to reform and revise and occasionally discard their earlier opinions. They must demonstrate a tolerance for and come to appreciate the challenge in uncertainty, ambiguity and paradox.
- A willingness to take risks. Increasingly, students are required to move away from simpler, more familiar reading contexts to those that are more complex and less familiar—texts are more complicated, thinking is more analytical. At the same time, students are expected to move toward greater independence in their interactions with text. Within this context, the classroom must be a place where students are *encouraged* to respond with honest comments, to offer variant readings of a text, to predict and perhaps be wrong in their predictions—in short, to take risks when engaging publicly with a text.
- Intellectual generosity. Readers bring their own alternative visions to text. It is important that students learn to appreciate what others have to share; they must be willing to listen closely to others' interpretations, find value in others' opinions, be prepared to respond to others' opinions and allow others to influence their opinion.

Classrooms that maintain an environment in which the above skills and attitudes are fostered provide an ideal setting for a *culture of response* to flourish. Students reflect upon their reading, are provided with an opportunity to generate a response, share their response and receive feedback, hear others' responses, respond themselves to others' responses, and perhaps see the need to revise their own response.

## Responding to Text

Response at its most basic engages students in discussion *with themselves* in answer to a progression of questions about text—a progression in the style of Bloom's taxonomy:<sup>10</sup>

- What does the text say?
- What does the text mean? What does the text mean to me, the reader?
- How does the text say what it means?
- How well does the text say what it says?
- How universally significant is the text?

Teaching can help students come to make sense of text by designing specific reading and responding activities for students to engage in at various stages of the reading process. The types of activities would be determined by the kinds and genres of texts being studied and by the contexts in which the study may occur.

### Pre-reading

Pre-reading typically includes those activities, often teacher-generated, that prepare students for their reading of the text. Such activities help create a receptive context for the student in which to construct meaning.

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10. Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals*, 1956.

When students are reading literature, they should be encouraged to pay attention to the ideas, feelings, attitudes and associations that the words, images and allusions evoke. Activities that encourage this kind of engagement, where the students live in the world they have created by their reading, are appropriate for pre-reading, while requests for summaries and deeper analysis of the experienced text should be kept for after reading. Activities such as the following increase the likelihood of students engaging more actively in the text:

- exploratory questions or personal or creative writing activities that lead students to think about issues raised by the text
- dictionary or Internet searches of information connected variously to the themes to be met in the text
- provision of historical/biographical information about the author or reference to other works by the author.

Many English language arts teachers structure their programs around *themed* units of study. This approach serves many purposes, one of which is to provide an ongoing and developing context for extended literature study. A new understanding about one piece of literature lays a foundation for studying the next piece. As students then engage with additional texts within the theme, they continue to construct for themselves an ever-expanding context for their understanding of each subsequent text. Every new text, once internalized, becomes part of their prior knowledge. In this way, students' need for external, teacher-generated pre-reading activities becomes lessened. Independence is fostered.

## **Reading**

The context for students' reading of texts depends upon the students' and/or teacher's purpose for studying the particular texts. Consideration is given to the nature of the students in the class, the numbers and kinds of texts being read, the complexity of the texts, the availability of individual access to the texts, the level of interest demonstrated by the students, the desire for variety in approaches to text study, and other factors of pedagogy. Students may read orally or silently, individually or in groups, at home or in school, in one sitting or over several sittings, once only or repeatedly. The particular approach to experiencing a text will be determined in relation to the purpose for text study.

## **Responding Personally, Critically and Creatively**

Throughout senior high school, students are developing their ability to construct meaning, independently, from increasingly complex texts. To reach the required level of competence, students need to sharpen their skills in a constructive and reassuring environment: they must be encouraged to engage in their own exploratory response activity, and they must be provided with ongoing opportunities to see and hear many and varied models of good response.

- Personal response is the using of one's own lived experience and prior knowledge to provide a bridge into the new experience of the text—forging connections between one's own world and the text's imagined or created world. Personal response activities help students “live” the text and make it their own; therefore, students need to be able to respond in a variety of ways, individually and in

groups, in writing and orally and visually, including such “creative” activities as drama and art. Once students have experienced the text through reading and personal response, it is what Louise Rosenblatt refers to as the “experienced” work that is analyzed and criticized.<sup>11</sup>

- Analytical/critical response is an examination of the validity of the content of the text and of the ways in which the language, imagery, form and organizational structure of that text serve the content and context. This larger examination is linked to students’ personal response to extend understanding.
- Creative response is used here to mean a transference of the meanings and concepts that lie at the heart of the text into extended or different contexts—different characters, different settings, different genres, different forms of text, and so on. It is often desirable to permit students to bring their aesthetic selves to their exploration of their understanding of text and to have the students move beyond the bounds of the text *as is* to the text *as it might be*. Based upon their demonstrated comprehension and analysis of the text, students would be invited to create an extension of the text, engaging their understanding at a synthetic level. This might include activities such as presenting a readers’ theatre, creating a poster or collage, interviewing or writing to (or as) a character or an author, adding a chapter to the end of a novel, dramatizing a story or poem, preparing a music sound track, or filming. Most student textbooks and teacher guides suggest many such creative response activities appropriate to particular texts and contexts of study.

## Responding to Context

Responding to context includes analyzing the context in which the text was created, the context in which the characters exist and the context in which the reader exists. Students can ask questions such as the following while reading and responding:

- Who created this? In what context? With what values? In whose interests? To what effect?
- How do the setting and relationships with other characters affect a character’s way of acting and responding?
- What do I bring to the text that causes me to respond as I do?
- How am I influenced by language and society to respond as I do?
- How am I being positioned by the author and my culture to respond as I do?<sup>12</sup>

Responding to context can also include activities where the student responds to the situation in which the text was created or for which the text was created, such as writing in role to consider the different contexts in which various people respond to issues raised by texts. For example, students could write or create a scene about poverty from the point of view of labour leaders, business leaders and people who are homeless.



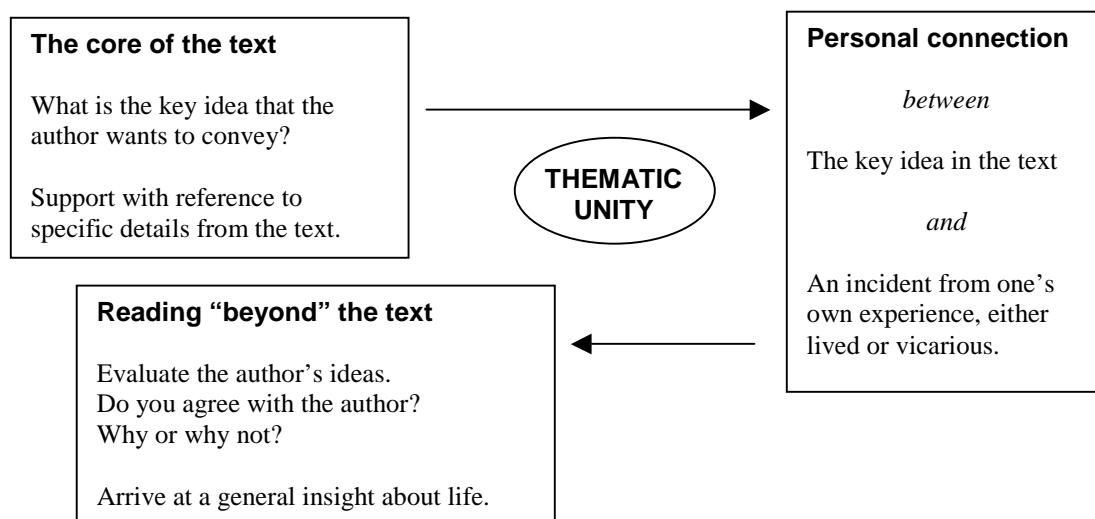
See Appendix A, page 412, for a sample of a student response to text and context.

11. Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, 1995.

12. Thomson 1993, cited in Pirie, *Reshaping High School English*, 1997.

## One Approach to Response-based Study

This approach provides response activities designed to help students interpret and extend their understanding, after they have initially experienced the text. The diagram below provides an overview of this approach.



Through this approach, students are encouraged to practise increasing *independence* in generating personal and critical/analytical responses rather than expecting a teacher to initiate, through questioning, all student response activity.

The approach encourages students to explore their understanding of text while they read. Students reflect on what they have read, then record their thoughts and begin to shape those thoughts; they learn as they write their response. Putting pen to paper allows them to “hold” thoughts, to give them some form of permanence so that they can be revisited, reflected upon further, and perhaps revised.

Because exploratory thinking is recursive rather than linear, the *sense* of what students write may not be initially coherent. This is due in part to the fact that responses change, even as they are being written. New thinking emerges, and occasionally it contradicts earlier thinking.

This spontaneity in writing as students explore their thinking needs to be accepted by the teacher for what it is: *exploratory* writing. For this reason, it should not have the same expectations placed upon it as does revised and polished writing, especially in terms of matters of correctness. Response should be understood as a receptive rather than expressive activity, as *reading* rather than *writing*. The context of any response process is rather limited—the purpose of response is to make meaning, and its primary audience is the meaning-maker, the student.

This process might best be applied initially as a *written* response process. A written response allows student responders the opportunity to hold their thoughts on paper initially, and then to revisit them and to either firm them up or to modify or even reject them. At the same time, a written response provides teachers with the opportunity to actually see their students' thinking as it has evolved and to comment on the direction

and strength of the thinking. Finally, written responses offer classmates a variety of models of others' thinking and meaning-making strategies from which they can take direction for themselves.

### **The Core of the Text**

Students identify what they believe to be **the key idea(s) that the author develops**. They **do not** simply retell what is already written. Instead, they ask themselves questions about why the text unfolds as it does: what has been the author's intent in creating the text? Students then attempt to suggest likely answers. They do so by identifying any number of textual details—specific passages that deal with elements of character or setting or plot, key images or symbols, ironies, the speaker's perspective, or any other elements thought to be of significance. Students examine the details to discover how they contribute to the expression of the author's main idea.

There are several ways that students can begin to explore the text. They might ask themselves and attempt to answer questions regarding what “strikes” them about the text—what attracts their attention. Is it:

- the author's point of view or tone?
- a description of a particular incident or event?
- a conflict? an irony?
- a character?
- the character's motivation or reaction?
- an epiphany the character experiences, or a resolution the character realizes?
- a mood that the text creates? a powerful image?
- a feeling or emotion that the text evokes in the reader? And might that emotion, or the cause of that emotion, point to the idea that the author develops?

Students should refer to actual passages in the text—to lines, phrases and even words that have attracted their attention. In what ways do these passages affect or direct their understanding of the whole text?

### **Personal Connection**

Here, the students make **a connection between their lived experience and the author's idea** as identified in the first part of the response. What does the text say to them personally?

Students identify a specific incident in **their own life** that helps them interpret the experience of **the text**. How does the one experience help them to interpret, or to better understand, or to more fully appreciate the significance of the other?

The students are not expected to have experienced an **event** similar to the event described in the story. For example, the story may be set during the second world war; within that context, the ideas the author develops may be related to the courage shown by a character in a difficult situation. Relatively few Canadian students will have experienced war directly, but all will have been witness to acts of courage; the situation or degree may differ, but the concept of courage is the same.

Students, in this case, would then be asked to describe a situation in which they witnessed or experienced a demonstration of courage. They would be expected to discuss how their experience helps them to understand better the author's idea in the text.

There may be occasions when the idea the author writes about has **not** been a part of the student's personal lived or remembered experience. In such instances, students would be encouraged to go beyond just their own experience to that of people close to them—their siblings, parents or grandparents, or more distant relatives, or even beyond their family to their neighbours or friends. Perhaps they might relate to vicarious rather than lived experience—to a book they have read or a film they have seen, or to art, music or other human expression.

Taking a different perspective, it may be that the experiences they select to write about demonstrate the antithesis of the author's idea. They may choose to relate a time when someone did *not* act courageously, and they may connect to the author's idea through inverse example. Either way, the purpose of their personal connection is to have them offer another perspective, another way to interpret and to attempt to understand the ideas at the heart of the text and the impact the ideas can have on their lives.

### **Reading “Beyond” the Text**

Finally, students are asked to **generalize beyond the text**.

After attempting to personalize the ideas of the author, they are now asked to move outside themselves—to address the ideas at a universal level. In what way do the author's ideas reflect on the world today? Are the issues identified as being at the core of the text important, not only to the author and to the student who has responded but to all people? And if so, in what way are they important? What makes the issues universal? How do the author's ideas shed light on the human condition? Do students accept that view? Can direction be taken from the author's ideas?

Never is it suggested that students must accept the author's perspective. In this section of the response, students identify their own points of view regarding the issues; and if they disagree with the ideas of the author, they are free to challenge what he or she has said.

### **Revisiting the Text**

On occasion, students are requested, or they may themselves choose, to complete a **second look response**. The purpose of the second look is for them to take themselves deeper into the text than they did in their first response.

Following classroom discussion, students may feel that their responses are either incomplete or inadequate. Perhaps they have missed a key idea that, following discussion, they have come to appreciate as significant. Or it may be that while their “reading” of the text has been basically sound, they have omitted identifying a key detail from the text that would more strongly support their contention.

Always, students are encouraged to return to the text, to reread and to *add* to what they have already written in their response. They are not to restate what they have already said but to *go beyond* their initial response.

It is understood that students' second look responses are a product of the interaction of their own thinking and that of others in the response community.

## Sharing Responses

Once students have taken time to reflect upon the implications of the text they have read, to pull their thoughts together and to shape them into a relatively coherent whole, they will be ready to share the product of their reflection.

The sharing of responses can be conducted in whatever manner the teacher deems best.

- The teacher might ask students to volunteer to read their written responses aloud to the class.
- Students might share with a partner by reading their responses orally to one another or by exchanging journals.
- The teacher might ask to have students share in small groups. From each small group, one entry might be selected to be shared with the class as a whole.
- A small group might be asked to identify two responses that offer different or even conflicting viewpoints, and these two views could be shared with the class.
- Following the collecting and marking of responses, the teacher may select a small number of stronger models to share orally with the rest of the class.

Early in the school year, or with classes of particularly reticent students, the teacher may prefer to select a smaller number of responses and to read them aloud on behalf of the students. Over time, as these students become more used to hearing one another's shared work, and as their own responses become validated, they can be expected to volunteer to share responses openly with the rest of the class. As students respond with increasing candour, there may be occasions when they request that the second part of their response—the personal connection—not be shared in the open classroom.

### Purpose of Sharing

Having students share written responses orally serves many purposes. As already mentioned, it provides an effective starting point for discussion, and it does so without the teacher unnecessarily determining the direction of that discussion. This is significant. When students come to expect the teacher to always ask the questions—even open-ended questions—as a starting point for response, there is a danger that those students who may initially struggle in their understanding of the text will perceive the teacher's questions as an indication of where the right answer must be found. By **not** being given such direction, students will need to adapt their reading patterns to help them search out their own direction. While they may flounder early on, they will increasingly come to the text *looking* to make meaning for themselves rather than relying upon the teacher's help. Confidence in themselves as effective readers will emerge.

## Role of the Teacher

When students initiate discussion by responding to what *they* see to be the author's main idea, the teacher is quickly able to ascertain the levels of students' reading comprehension. If the text has been poorly read, the teacher should then identify the cause of the problem and, as necessary, teach to the issues that were missed. **The teacher may at this point need to use diagnostic tools, such as the *Basic Reading Inventory: Pre-Primer through Grade Twelve and Early Literacy Assessments* (available for purchase from the Learning Resources Centre), to provide further information.** Where the text has been better understood, the teacher may need only to supplement understandings with bits of information or explanation. In ideal circumstances, the teacher's role will be simply to monitor the discussion, perhaps participating only as one of the group. For students, the obvious benefit of self-directed response is that they can speak in an original voice about their own observations and understandings. When they arrive at the discussion table, they have already done their own thinking and are prepared with insights to share.

## Benefits of Sharing

A benefit of the oral sharing process is that students engage in meaningful collaboration.

As well, students develop an awareness that not everyone need come away from the same text with an identical reading. Different readers bring different prior knowledge to the text and may leave with somewhat differing interpretations. While core meaning remains the same, one reader may see one aspect of the author's idea as important while another reader may perceive an alternative emphasis.

A final benefit to students is similarly metacognitive, in that they are provided with varied *models* of comprehension strategies. They see and hear how other readers arrive at understanding, and they come to realize that ways to make meaning of text do vary. Often, students will experiment with others' reading strategies and in doing so will expand their own repertoires. As personal responses are shared, the response process becomes more collaborative.

## Response-based Learning Activities

While students often use print text, such as journals, to respond to other print text, they may also use visual or oral means, or they may use print to respond to oral or visual text. Often, the text the students are reading dictates the form and the composition of the students' response. **Note:** The information in parentheses for each of the following response-based learning activities indicates the specific outcomes from the program of studies for which the activity is appropriate.

### **Writing Poetry as Response** (2.3.1 10-1a, b, c; 10-2a, b, c; 20-1a, b, c; 20-2a, b; 30-1a, b, c; 30-2a, b)

When students respond to literature that strongly engages their emotions, it might be appropriate to give them the opportunity to make a personal connection through writing poetic text rather than prose. Responding in verse can remove from students some of the usual constraints they expressively expect in other forms, and it enables them to focus their memory of an incident on their feelings and their emotions at the time.

**Mind Maps as Visual Response** (2.3.1 10-1a, b, c; 10-2a, b, c; 20-1a, b, c; 20-2a, b; 30-1a, b, c, d; 30-2a, b, c)

A mind map is a visual text constructed as a response to another, usually print, text. A mind map conveys a student's understanding of the author's controlling idea through a thoughtful selection and careful placement of visual representations onto a page. Each visual element in the mind map should show a supporting detail from the text that points to the author's idea.

Students might begin by imagining a collage, a scattered collection of images about a single theme in the text. What images come to mind? The title? Characters? Incidents? Settings? Dominant symbols? Significant literary or rhetorical devices? Students then arrange these images on the page in a way that most strongly conveys their understanding of the author's idea.



Students might provide a brief written accompaniment explaining content and organization—why they selected the images they did and why they were placed on the page as they were. As well, students might be asked to explain their mind maps orally to their classmates. Their explanations would ensure that the teacher has not missed what the students were attempting to say in their response.

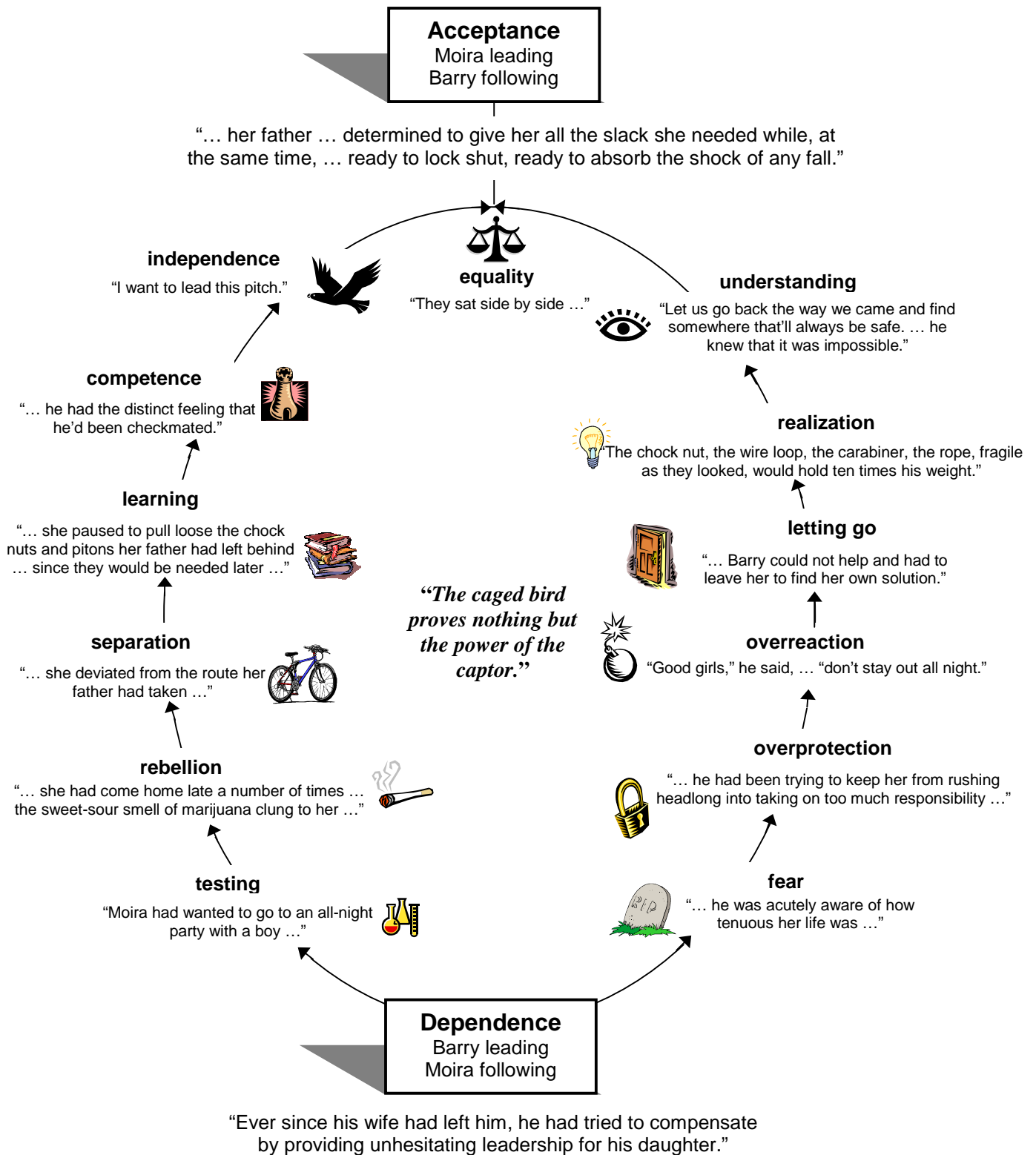


**Note:** The first two assessment outcome criteria of the response assessment rubric on page 471 are appropriate for evaluating students' work.



The following sample mind map is based on the short story "Saturday Climbing," by W. D. Valgardson, which can be found in *Imprints 11: Short Stories, Poetry, Essays and Media*. See pages 208–209 for more information on mind maps.

# SATURDAY CLIMBING





### **Oral Interpretation as Response to Poetry** (2.3.1 10-1a, b, c, d; 10-2a, b, c, d; 20-1a, b, c, d; 20-2a, b, c, d; 30-1a, b, c, d; 30-2a, b, c, d)

For this activity, students are placed into collaborative groups of four. Each group is given a poem that they will “teach” to the class. The teaching of the poem will take a specific four-part presentational approach. The members of the group must collaborate closely, as all four parts of the presentation are closely interconnected. Two group members are readers, one is the responder and one is the explainer.

The response takes the following approach:

1. **First reading:** The first group member performs an opening reading of the poem for the class. The performance of this reading has been determined by the group. The group must consider the following performance aspects: volume, intonation and pacing; points of emphasis; body language and eye contact with the audience; mood setting in the classroom environment; additional performance aids, such as music or smoke; and any other effects that help listeners in reaching a more complete understanding of the content of the poem.
2. **Critical/Analytical response:** This group member follows the initial reading of the poem with a prepared response to the content of the poem. The response would contain only Part 1 of a usual response (the core of the text). All group members have discussed the poem and have agreed on the interpretation that is to be shared with the class. The preceding reading has been constructed based upon the group members’ agreed-upon understanding of the poem. While an accepted tenet of response is that not all people arrive at the same understanding of a given text, in this instance *some* consensus must be reached.
3. **Explanation:** This member provides a detailed description of and rationale for the interpretive reading of the poem. In essence, this person breaks down the oral interpretation, explaining not only the *what* of the reading—line by line if necessary—but also the *why*. The reading is regarded as an artifact; the explainer describes the way that the reading has been constructed to aid the listener in reaching the understanding described in the earlier response.
4. **Second reading:** This member closes the performance by replicating the earlier reading. The two readings should sound virtually identical. The audience’s understanding of the poem should be deepened by the response that was shared. The audience should also hear in this performance the explanation provided by the previous group member.



Oral interpretations can be presented periodically throughout the term. The assessment rubric on page 471 can provide formative direction, leading students toward increasingly proficient demonstrations. Because a group’s complete performance is the response, the oral interpretation activity as a whole can be assessed using just the second assessment outcome of the response rubric. When a summative breakdown of the four parts is preferred, a performance scoring guide can be designed to accommodate the readings, the explanation of the readings and the response element.

**Found Poem–Collage: Intertextuality as Response** (2.3.1 10-1a, b, c; 10-2a, b, c; 20-1a, b, c; 20-2a, b; 30-1a, b, c; 30-2a, b, c)

This response activity is particularly appropriate following the reading of a narrative text that is highly emotive and/or where descriptive passages are sensuous and vivid. It is best suited to print text. Aural text would serve only if students were able to revisit it, e.g., audiocassette. Visual response to visual text would not be recommended.

The activity is designed to be completed in two steps. While it can end at the conclusion of only the first step, the full effect is achieved when students move to the second. Students are not informed of Step 2 until they have completed Step 1.

**Step 1:** Students capture the thematic and emotional experience of the original narrative in the reconstructed form of a found poem. The intent is to extract the essence of the original text using details of language and imagery that most strongly convey that essence. It is not a concern if the narrative details of the original become secondary, or even lost, to its ideas. It is the basic theme and the emotive quality of the literature that must survive.

In writing their found poem, students must use the author’s own language. They begin by extracting specific passages—words, phrases, lines—of the original and restructuring them into the form of a free verse poem. The language of the extracted passages must remain verbatim—students may use only the author’s words and are not permitted to add any of their own. However, the extractions may be reconfigured into an order that deviates from the original text. Students may even repeat certain passages if doing so helps them to retain the core meaning. Essentially, the poem must develop the author’s controlling idea through its effective sequencing and emphatic highlighting of original words and images.

The found poem that follows is based on “Harrison Bergeron,” by Kurt Vonnegut Jr., which can be found in *Inside Stories II*, 2nd Edition.

The Dark Ages  
Everybody competing  
Taking unfair advantage of their brains

Finally equal  
Nobody stronger  
Nobody quicker  
Nobody smarter  
Perfectly average intelligence  
Couldn’t think about anything  
The Dark Ages

**Step 2:** Upon completion of their found poem, students construct a collage of visual images that will visually recreate the text of the found poem. Students must translate print into visual form. The visual representation must complement, perhaps even parallel, the text of the poem in as many ways as possible.

There are many factors to be considered if the collage is to capture the content of the poem effectively:

- How does the placement of images on the page complement the sequence of images in the poem?
- Where will the viewer's eyes travel first? What will be the dominant image on the page? How will that dominance be expressed?
- What is the intended progression that the viewer's eyes should follow? How will such a movement be suggested?
- Are certain images purposely juxtaposed? Is the juxtaposition intended to convey similarity or congruence, or is it for purposes of contrast? How will that similarity or contrast be indicated?
- Are images coloured or black and white? Which convey the emotional setting—the mood—of the poem more strongly? Might a combination of both black and white and colour be effective?
- If colour is to be used, which colours? Would certain colours carry symbolic importance? Might changes in colours convey a shift in meaning or in mood?

In the same way that the found poem captures the essence of the original narrative without simply retelling the story, the collage should capture the essence of the poem. The three pieces—original narrative, poem and collage—use different forms of text to convey similar meanings, impressions or understandings.

### **Character Mapping as Response** (2.3.1 10-1a, b, c; 10-2a, b, c; 20-1a, b, c; 20-2a, b; 30-1a, b, c; 30-2a, b, c)

This activity is particularly useful after students' initial reading of texts that involve a number of characters, such as Shakespearean plays. It serves as an effective starting point for discussion about character—motivation, development, conflict, contrast.

The purpose of a character map is to have students provide a knowledgeable interpretation of the play through their sense of the relationships between and among characters. Characters are juxtaposed, paralleled, opposed, grouped or separated depending upon the influence their words and actions have upon one another, either directly or indirectly. While it is recognized that relationships may change over the course of the story, it is at the play's completion that readers finally see the big picture. It is with this complete information that a character map is created.

Students do the following:

1. Incorporate all the major characters. Include any minor characters who influence the thoughts or actions of one or more of the major characters.
2. Place each character's name on the page only once.
3. Relative proximity should suggest closeness or distance of relationship. Colour may also be used for this purpose.
4. As required, lines, either solid or dotted or both, and arrows may be used to stress relationships or conflicts. Lines may also be meaningfully coloured.

5. Included with each character's name is a line from the text that best exemplifies that character's personality, motivation or impact. Students should be prepared to justify their selection of text.

While the map should speak for itself, students might also be asked to include with the map a statement of their reasons for placing the characters as they have. This statement would be shared as they are presenting their maps to the class.

**Criticism as Response: Critique the Critic** (2.3.1 10-1a, b, c, d; 10-2a, b, c, d; 20-1a, b, c, d; 20-2a, b, c, d; 30-1a, b, c, d; 30-2a, b, c, d)

This activity is better suited to students who have become familiar and comfortable with the requirements of response. For this reason, it might be better undertaken later in the school term.

Following the reading of a relatively major piece of literature—novel, film, play, Shakespearean play—students are either given a prepared criticism of one thematic or stylistic element of that piece or they are asked to conduct a search for published criticism about the piece. If students are searching out their own, the critical text they select should be shorter rather than longer—a maximum of perhaps two pages—and relatively self-contained. It may be excerpted from a longer piece of criticism or it may be complete. The text may be photocopied from a book or it may be downloaded from an Internet source. Either way, it should be appropriately referenced.

Students are required to complete two tasks:

- First, they are asked to précis the text. They objectively retell in summary form the ideas that the critical text communicates. They demonstrate a literal comprehension of the critic's text.
- Following the retelling, they respond to the criticism—they critique the critic. As they have already communicated their understanding of the critic's ideas, their response moves now to an evaluative level. Do they agree with the critic's interpretation of the literature? Do they agree with his or her views regarding the author's intent. Do they agree with the critic that the author has or has not been successful in achieving that intent? In responding to the critic, students are asked to demonstrate their understanding of not only the criticism but also the original literature. In essence, they are being asked to respond to two texts simultaneously. Their own understanding of the literature will precipitate either agreement or disagreement with the critic. Their reaction to the ideas of the critic will have been formed, and will need to be justified, by their understanding of the literature.



### **Small-group Discussion as Response** (2.3.1 10-1a, b, c, d; 10-2a, b, c, d; 20-1a, b, c, d; 20-2a, b, c, d; 30-1a, b, c, d; 30-2a, b, c, d)

The following activity, adapted from Patrick Dias, offers an approach that is particularly useful when dealing with the study of poems that students find ambiguous or perplexing. This highly structured activity is completed in three stages, moving from individual reading to multiple small groups and finally to the full class setting. The teacher begins as a facilitator of the process but then during the second stage becomes a participant of one of the small groups in the classroom. By becoming a real participant, the teacher demonstrates the genuineness of the meaning-making process:

Having to admit that poems cannot always be pinned down or “solved,” even by us, may be disconcerting for us and for our students. It can also be a releasing discovery, a means of showing that teachers have as much right to be puzzled by a poem as any other human being and that poems have rights of ambiguity and inexhaustibility like any other artistic venture.<sup>13</sup>

**Responding-aloud Protocol:**<sup>14</sup> The time allotment for the complete activity is approximately 45–60 minutes. For purposes of the “jotting around” activity, it is necessary that individual copies of the poem to be read are reproduced and distributed. Students should gather in small groups of four to six.

#### **Stage 1**

1. Each group selects a reporter who will act as chairperson for the group’s discussion during that block.
2. The teacher reads the poem aloud to the entire class. One student in each small group then reads the poem to his or her group.
3. Following the second reading, students are provided 10 minutes to independently “jot around the poem.” They underline, circle, connect, write in, and briefly note observations, questions and gut reactions, anything and everything about the poem that attracts their attention.
4. During this time, the teacher invites inquiries about meanings of unfamiliar words or obscure allusions—references that the writer of the poem would expect the knowledgeable reader to understand. The teacher will answer questions but without suggesting an interpretation of the poem. Where possible, the teacher will invite other students to answer.

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13. Hayhoe, “Sharing the Headstart: An Exploratory Approach to Teaching Poetry,” 1984, p. 43.

14. Adapted from Patrick X. Dias, *Reading and Responding to Poetry: Patterns in the Process*, Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1995, pp. 19, 20, 21. Adapted with permission from Heinemann—Boynton/Cook.

## Stage 2

1. Once again, one student in each group—different from the first—reads the poem aloud to his or her group.
2. After the poem is read, each student in turn responds with an initial reaction—an observation, insight, question, confusion, speculation, emotional reaction or any other such comment. These are expressed without others in the group remarking until all have shared. It is important that the group initially accept all possibilities of interpretation.
3. Free discussion follows. Students may respond to one another’s comments as well as share additional insights in their endeavour to arrive at meaning. While discussion continues, students add to their “jottings” around their poem.

This stage should continue for approximately 20 minutes. If it appears that discussion has bogged down, students should be directed to return to the text and to read a line at a time, commenting as they go along. This requires them to examine more closely what is and is not there in the text.

4. This stage ends with yet another student in each group reading the poem aloud, in light of new understandings as they have emerged from discussion.

## Stage 3

1. The reporters from all the groups gather as a new group in the middle of the classroom, with the rest of the class around them.
2. Each reporter in turn shares a brief summary of his or her group’s discussion. Rather than each repeating what others have already said, they are asked to build upon previous comments, adding insights not previously stated. They may even disagree with previous comments or interpretations.
3. Once again, as before, free discussion follows. Reporters may turn to their groups for assistance. The teacher, while not a member of the reporters’ group, may interject with questions that he or she feels still need to be raised.

At the conclusion of the activity, students should be left with the feeling that they have within themselves the resources to arrive at the sense of the poem.


## Suggestions for Assessment


The purpose of assessment is to heighten students’ awareness of their own learning. Often, the teacher provides students with feedback regarding their demonstrations of learning, relative to their own growth in their abilities as readers, listeners and viewers as well as to the outcome standards that are expected of senior high school students. In order to satisfy both requirements, teacher assessment of student response should be formative as well as summative.

At other times, classmates will provide assessment feedback. Increasingly, the students themselves will come to assess the nature and quality of their responses. It is then that students can be prompted to turn to the second look response as a vehicle for revision.

Teachers reply to students' personal and critical/analytical responses either orally during class discussion or in writing when students' journals are collected for evaluation. Teachers engage students in an authentic dialogue about the text, whereby teachers share their own ideas and responses as well as react to those of the students.

Teachers might consider the following:

- Respond to students' questions or to their revelations of confusion by providing information or direction as necessary. Assist the students to make sense of the text by modelling the process of extracting information from text, e.g., inferring, backward referencing.
  - Develop students' awareness of reading strategies by explaining those strategies, e.g., prediction, where appropriate. Encourage students to apply such strategies in the future.
  - Develop students' awareness of literary techniques and how knowledge of those techniques could serve in helping students make meaning of text. What is it that makes a text effective? What should students be expecting of text in their reading? Which techniques might students transfer to their own writing?
  - Model a process of elaborating on initial thinking by building upon students' own thoughts. Extend students' thinking through questioning; e.g., What seemed to be motivating the character to say that? Why might the author have chosen that particular image?
  - Challenge students to think in new ways. While honouring their stated responses, broaden and deepen their understandings of text by providing them with new or additional perspectives on issues they themselves have raised but not developed.
-  • Encourage students to evaluate their own growth through developing rubrics. (See Grade 12 Growth Rubric, Appendix B, pages 438–439.)

 The assessment guide in Appendix B, page 471, should prove useful in providing students with feedback about the quality of their responses. The guide incorporates four assessment criteria. The four may be used independently of one another or they may be combined, depending upon the teacher's instructional objectives at the time.

While the scoring guide serves the teacher in a summative capacity, it can also serve both students and teachers more formatively, in a direction-giving capacity. For this to take effect, the scoring guide should be shared with students at the time of the first response assignment; and it could remain in place for the entire term, used either in whole or in part for most response assignments. It is anticipated that over time the assessment criteria and standards will become internalized by the students. Ideally, the external criteria of the scoring guide will help students establish personal standards that will direct their commitment to and ability in response. They will cultivate the tools to assess their own work as they engage in it.

The assessment criteria can serve students through all levels of senior high school. Differences in standards applied to students' responses among English language arts courses over the three grades would be determined largely by the differences in the complexity of the texts studied and in students' developing abilities to demonstrate their understanding of increasingly complex text.

