Now What?

Practical Activities for the Integrated Reading/Writing Classroom

Dr. Leta Deithloff
The University of Texas at Austin
Yes, they really can!

- “My students aren’t there yet”
- Give them a chance
- After 5 years of teaching, my “level of expectation” has changed, not the students.
- Goals move from comprehension (reading) and duplication (writing) to analysis/evaluation (reading) and original thought + support (writing)
To get them there...

- Scaffold, model and repeat
- Group vs. individual work
- Discussion vs. written practice
Progressive Daily Examples

“On the Sidewalk, Bleeding” by Evan Hunter

Pre-Reading Activity:

- What do you know about gangs?
- Why do people join gangs?
- What do members have to do to join?
- What does it mean to be in a gang? How do you think the members might feel?
- How do you know if someone is in a gang?
- How do others tend to feel about gangs and their members?
- How easy is it to leave a gang? What must someone do if they want to leave?
- For those who choose to leave, what do you think makes a difference in whether or not they are successful in their attempts?
“On the Sidewalk…” Activity continued

During Reading Activity:

- Notice any of the words that are printed differently (all capitals and italics). What do they mean?
- Notice the references to time and identify what is happening each time it is mentioned. What do the references mean?
- Who are the main characters? Write down three words to identify each person you “meet”.
- Star each main event or detail that you discover as you read. Consider what might be the consequence(s) of that event. Consider also why you think those events are happening. Write a key word or phrase beside the star that summarizes what has happened and why it’s important.
Prediction Activity for “On the Sidewalk…”

Directions: Answer the following questions after reading Part 1 and predict what you think will happen next.

1. Based on what you have read so far, what do you think will happen next? Sketch out the events that will occur.

2. Specifically, what will the drunk, Laura, the couple, and Andy do? How will their actions affect the story?

3. Now, support your predictions by explaining the details and actions in the text that support your conclusions. What about the characters, their actions, or their words make your prediction seem accurate? What minor details does the author include that may help make your predictions?

4. Read the rest of the story. Were you correct?

   Note: The task is more about how logical and supported your predictions are, not whether you are “right”, so make sure you provide enough detail to illustrate and justify your point(s). This means your answer to question #3 should be well-developed.
Post-Reading Reflection Activity

1. Were your predictions correct? Why or why not? Analyze the result.
2. Andy gets three chances for help: the drunk man, the love-struck couple, and the old lady. How does each one act? Do they know what is happening to him? Why don’t they help him? If you consider these chances to reflect the author’s views on society’s response to gangs, what does their inability to act mean?
3. Who is Andy at the beginning of the story? What does he value in life?
4. Who is Andy at the end of the story? What does he value at that point?
5. When does Andy realize he is dying? What causes this realization?
6. What is the result of his realization?
7. Andy works harder to get the jacket off at the end of the story than he does to save his own life. What does this mean? Are his efforts worthwhile? Why or why not?
8. How do you feel about the cop’s final reaction? Are his actions a reasonable part of his training, a result of bias, or some of both? Defend your answer.
9. How might this story be different if there were no “Laura”?
10. Does Andy have to die to get the author’s point across to his audience? Why or why not?
11. How did the During Reading activities affect your understanding of the story?
12. How did this story affect your views of gangs and gang-related issues?
Ideas to Advance the Activity

Skip the Prediction Activity and...

- Ask for individual responses to the post-reading discussion questions
- Conduct a critical or rhetorical analysis on the piece—did the reading achieve its purpose? (individually or as a group)
- Find other readings about gang-life and compare content
- Add a research component (students find articles that confirm or contradict Hunter’s pts. and/or purpose)
- Require a researched response essay (agree/disagree...WHY?; find research to support your argument)
Another Activity

After reading The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros,

- Read “The Men We Carry in Our Minds” by Scott Russell Sanders.
- Answer the questions:

1. Critics of Cisneros’s House on Mango Street claim that the author portrays Mexican American men in an unfavorable light by reinforcing stereotypes; in particular, she creates a picture of Hispanic men as controlling and abusive. Critiques also accuse her of not placing enough blame on the male characters of her novel. For example, after Eperanza’s assault, she appears to be angrier with her absent friend – and Hispanic women in general – for giving her false visions of love and romance than she is at her attackers.

Do you think Cisneros is guilty of stereotyping? Do you think she fails to hold the men in her book accountable for their actions? Use your text to defend your statements.

2. Compare the portrayal of men in House on Mango Street to those in “The Men We Carry in Our Minds.” Who are the men on Mango Street? Who are the “real life” men in the essay? Do either of these portrayals better represent men? If so, which one? Prove your statement.

3. In “The Men We Carry in our Minds,” who does Sanders say has benefitted from the “good” life? What are his perceptions of the women from his childhood? What about those he meets in college? Are these perceptions accurate? For all women?
Leading Up To...

- Short Essay Response for several different readings
- This example examines:
  - “On Dumpster Diving” by Lars Eighner
  - Chapter 1 of the memoir “The Glass Castle” by Jeanette Walls
  - Framed through the lens of “On Compassion” by Barbara Ascher
Background Prep for “On Compassion” (1986)

Throughout her essay, Barbara Ascher questions why certain New York citizens offer compassionate donations to the homeless they encounter: “Was it fear or compassion that motivated the gift” (36). She later offers pity and care as possibilities.

- What is your answer to that question? Why do people act compassionate?
- What “conditions” does Ascher suggest “finally give birth to empathy” (37)?
- Does Ascher feel that compassion can be learned? Prove this.
- Do you feel people can learn compassion? Why or why not?
- What role does description play in this essay? What is its effect?
- Look at how and where she includes story-like elements. Then look at where she places her opinions and questions about the content. What does Ascher’s strategy seem to be?
The first chapter of Jeanette Walls memoir begins with a contrast: “I was sitting in a taxi, wondering if I had overdressed for the evening, when I looked out the window and saw Mom rooting through a Dumpster” (1).

- What is the intent of this contrast?

- Wall’s descriptions of her mother in paragraph 2 are also a contrast. Explain how. Based on this description, how do you think she feels about her mother? How do you know?

- Walls herself is an emotional contrast. What feelings is she torn between?

- Besides the fact that she roots through dumpsters, what do we know about Wall’s mother? Describe her traits and personality.

- This reading excerpt acts as an introduction to the rest of the book. Considering the goals of an introduction, is it effective? Why or why not?

- What do you think the main struggle will be in the memoir? How do you know?
Lars Eighner describes not just the act of Dumpster Diving, but rather a culture, one with its own standards, rules, and common practices. The reaction created a movement of Dumpster Diving, celebrating the lifestyle in books, movies and even youtube videos.

- What is your reaction to this essay?
- Is Eighner intelligent? How do you know?
- Why is Dumpster capitalized (both here and in “The Glass Castle”)?
- Why does Eighner prefer the word scavenging to the word scrounging?
- In Eighner’s world, there are the good guys and the bad guys. Which group of people represents each label?
- Is the author’s characterization of college students accurate? Why or why not?
- What hardships does Eighner face? Which trials does he gloss over? (For starters, look at the third to last paragraph.)
- Is Eighner content with his life? How do you know?
- What is Eighner’s purpose for writing this essay? Use the text to support your answer.
- Do you agree with how he wrote it? Why or why not?
1. How do Eighner and Walls’s mother fit into Ascher’s essay?
2. Would Ascher believe we should feel compassion for them? Why or why not?
3. Do you think Eighner wants compassion? If so, what kind of compassion would he want? What kind of compassion does he NOT want? Defend your answer with evidence from the text.
4. Do you think Wall’s mother wants compassion? If so, what kind of compassion would she want? What kind of compassion does she NOT want? Defend your answer with evidence from the text.
5. What is similar between Wall’s mother and Eighner? What is different?
6. Do these two “characters” represent a typical portrayal of homelessness? Why or why not?
7. How do you think these characters would answer Ascher’s questions about why people act compassionately? Do you think they feel compassion is genuine? Why or why not? Make sure you address each person’s perspective.
8. How do these three readings address, advance or question the idea of homelessness?
These activities illustrate that:

- A “new” course means a new way of thinking
- Goals ≠ reading focus + writing focus
- Goals = combined reading/writing focus + the knowledge of how, when and why to transfer strategies/foundation
- Teaching and activities are a process
- Metacognition should be included to guide student understanding
  - Read about the reading and writing process
  - Write about individual reading and writing strategies
Metacognition and Process Awareness

Guiding questions for reading:

- What is the author’s purpose?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What strategies or techniques does he/she employ?
- Was the goal met? Why or why not?
More Process Awareness

Guiding Questions for Writing:

- What is your goal?
- Who will you reach?
- How can you effectively convince, persuade, influence your reader to consider your viewpoint?
- How will the conventions of the task and the genre influence your text construction?
The Foundation

- Opinion + evidence with supporting analysis
  - How does the evidence justify the statement?
  - Did the author answer “so what”?
- Analyze how well writers follow this technique
- Practice the technique in your writing
Integration then becomes a *METHOD* of teaching
Course Specifics
Texts

- Become the basis of analysis
- Challenge = break away from textbooks!
- Increased Proficiency and Disciplinary Literacy
- Current texts
  - Selected readings ("On Compassion", etc.)
Assignments

- Become ways to practice
- Provide smaller daily assignments to build confidence (Elbow’s, 1997, “low stakes” writing)
- Larger assignments assess progress and current ability (“high stakes” writing)
- Current curriculum, based on 100 point scale (pts.)

**Assignment 1**: Personal Narrative
   (5 pts. prewrite activity, 5 pts. outline, 5 pts. final draft; **15 total pts.**)

**Assignment 2**: Comparative Theme Essay
   (5 pts. Topic Proposal, zero draft [for feedback], 10 Final; **15 total pts.**)

**Assignment 3**: Short Essay Reading Responses (**10 pts.**)

**Assignment 4**: Researched Essay Response
   (5 pts. Topic Proposal, 5 pts. Research Analysis, 5 pts. Rough Draft, 10 pts. Final; **25 total pts.**)

**Reflection Journal** (**10 pts.**); **Homework and in-class Activities** (**25 pts.**
Daily Activities

- Focus on reading stages and the strategies/purpose for each
  - Pre (anticipation guides, discussion, reflection)
  - During (outlining, graphic organizers, annotation, questioning)
  - Post (theme tracker, directed or student-led questions, metaphor activities)

- Focus on the writing stages with strategies/purpose for each
  - Pre (outline, zero draft, rough draft, graphic organizers)
  - During (quote integration, revising with purpose, as needed skill-building, research strategies)
  - Post (self and peer evaluations, genre/task reflection, application to other writing tasks)
Grading & Assessment

- Task determines assessment method
- Writing is a natural means, even without integrated requirement
- No need for multiple choice unless discipline/genre dictates it
- Grading as authentic grammar “intervention”
- To rubric or not to rubric?
- Class discussion as a means of assessment
All of this leads to…

- **CHANGE**
  - Population = 1 semester, 1 level (meets MWF for 50 minutes, 3 credit hours, for credit)
  - Some need more (paired courses, tutoring, other interventions)
  - But most, end college ready
  - Performance in the next credit-bearing course is comparable or better
  - Trust yourselves and your students

**Final note:** the best ideas come from each other; keep sharing and growing!
Examples we didn’t get to…email me:

- Sample rubrics
- Whole-skill activities (assumptions, understanding genre, etc.)
- Sample essay prompts

Questions?

For more information, contact: leta.deithloff@gmail.com