

Comprehending and Responding to Texts through Close Reading and Critical Analysis

Students will develop strategies to comprehend literature and other texts, analyze how textual elements create meaning, and respond critically to ideas and themes.

Learning intentions

We are learning to:

- use comprehension strategies to understand literature and other texts
- analyze how textual elements contribute to meaning and theme
- respond critically to texts by connecting personal, cultural and ethical perspectives
- evaluate the effectiveness of textual choices and their impact on audience

Success criteria

I can:

- apply multiple reading strategies to comprehend a text and understand its subtext ([Outcome](#), [Outcome](#))
- analyze how setting, character, plot and atmosphere develop theme in a narrative ([Outcome](#))
- explain how a text creator's tone and register communicate moral and ethical stance ([Outcome](#))
- identify the text creator's purpose and assess whether it was achieved ([Outcome](#))
- form and justify positions on issues that arise from text study ([Outcome](#))
- assess the plausibility and consistency of character motivation and behaviour ([Outcome](#))
- use appropriate terminology to discuss textual effectiveness and craft ([Outcome](#))

Curriculum alignment

- Specific Outcome 2.1.1: Discern and analyze context ([Outcome](#))
- Specific Outcome 2.1.2: Understand and interpret content ([Outcome](#), [Outcome](#))
- Specific Outcome 2.3.1: Connect self, text, culture and milieu ([Outcome](#))
- Specific Outcome 2.3.2: Evaluate the verisimilitude, appropriateness and significance of texts ([Outcome](#))
- Specific Outcome 2.3.3: Appreciate the effectiveness and artistry of texts ([Outcome](#))

Materials

- A short story or novel excerpt (800 to 1200 words) suitable for Grade 12 study. Example: a contemporary short story with clear character development and thematic depth, or an excerpt from a canonical text.
- Printed copies of the text with space for annotations
- Graphic organizer template (one per student): a three-column chart with headings "Textual Evidence," "Literary Element" and "Effect on Meaning"
- Whiteboard or chart paper for recording class observations
- Optional: highlighters or coloured pencils for annotation

Lesson sequence

Stage 1: Hook and activate prior knowledge (5 minutes)

Display this question on the board: "How do the choices a writer makes, about which details to include, how to describe a character, what tone to use, change the way we understand a story?"

Ask students to turn to a partner and discuss a recent text they have read (in any form: novel, film, article, advertisement). Have them identify one choice the creator made that shaped their response. Collect two or three examples aloud. Record them on the board without comment.

Transition: "Today we are going to develop strategies to notice these choices deliberately and understand how they work."

Stage 2: Direct instruction, Comprehension strategies and close reading (10 minutes)

Explain that comprehension of literature requires multiple strategies, not just reading passively ([Outcome](#), [Outcome](#)). Name four strategies students will use today:

1. **Read aloud.** Reading passages aloud engages the ear and helps you notice rhythm, repetition and emphasis; subvocalizing (silently mouthing or hearing the words in your head while reading silently) is a separate strategy that can help with pacing and focus.
2. **Form questions.** Pause at key moments and ask: "Why did the character do that?" "What does this detail tell me?" "What is the writer implying here?"
3. **Make predictions.** Before reading the next section, predict what will happen or what the character will do. Check your prediction against the text.
4. **Annotate and identify subtext.** Mark words or phrases that reveal character motivation, tone or theme. Write brief notes in the margin about what is said explicitly and what is suggested beneath the surface ([Outcome](#)).

Display the first paragraph of your chosen text. Read it aloud slowly. Then model the process:

"Listen to the rhythm of this sentence. Notice the short, sharp clauses here, they create tension. When I read this part, I hear urgency. That tells me something about the character's state of mind.

Now I'll form a question: Why does the writer describe the room this way? What mood is being created? Looking at the details, the cold light, the empty chairs, I predict the character feels isolated or anxious.

As I annotate, I notice the word 'hollow' appears twice in this passage. That repetition is deliberate. It suggests emptiness is central to understanding this moment."

Write your observations on the board so students see the process modelled.

Stage 3: Guided practice, Analyzing textual elements and meaning (12 minutes)

Distribute the full text and graphic organizer. Read the text aloud together, pausing every 2 to 3 paragraphs. At each pause, guide students through analysis:

"Stop here. What detail caught your attention? Turn to your partner and discuss what you noticed."

Ask two or three pairs to share their understanding of the text. Record their observations on the board, then ask: "What literary element is at work here? Is it character, setting, tone, imagery, symbol?" Name the element aloud.

Then ask: "How does this element affect your understanding of the story? What does it make you feel or think?"

Work through the text systematically. For example:

First pause (after character introduction):

- Question: "What does the writer tell us about this character in the first few lines?"
- Observation: The character notices small, specific details about the room.
- Element: Characterization through selective detail.
- Effect: We understand the character as observant, perhaps anxious or analytical.

Second pause (after a key action or dialogue):

- Question: "What tone does the writer use here? Is it serious, ironic, gentle, harsh?"
- Observation: The dialogue is clipped and formal, despite the characters being close friends.
- Element: Tone and register.
- Effect: We sense distance or tension between them, even though they are together.

Third pause (after a turning point or revelation):

- Question: "What does this moment suggest about the character's motivation or values?"
- Observation: The character chooses to leave rather than explain themselves.
- Element: Character motivation and action.
- Effect: We question whether the character is protecting themselves or avoiding responsibility.

As you work through the text, fill in the graphic organizer on the board so students see how evidence, element and effect connect.

Stage 4: Independent practice, Close reading and critical response (10 minutes)

Assign students a section of the text they have not yet analyzed deeply (or a new, shorter passage if time is limited). Ask them to complete the graphic organizer independently:

- Column 1: Identify a specific quotation or detail from the text.
- Column 2: Name the literary element at work (character, setting, tone, imagery, symbol, figurative language, etc.).
- Column 3: Explain how this element contributes to meaning. What does it reveal about theme, character motivation, or the writer's purpose?

Circulate and ask guiding questions:

- "What is the writer showing us here, and why might that matter?"
- "How does this choice affect your understanding of the character or the story?"
- "What would be different if the writer had made a different choice?"

Collect one completed entry per student as a formative checkpoint (see Assessment below).

Stage 5: Consolidation and critical response (3 minutes)

Bring the class together. Ask: "What is one thing you now understand about this text that you did not understand when you started reading it?"

Invite 2 to 3 students to share. Affirm responses that show evidence of close reading and connection between textual choice and meaning.

Close with a brief statement: "When you read critically, you are not just following the story. You are paying attention to how the writer constructs meaning through every detail, through the words they choose, the information they reveal, the tone they create. That skill applies to every text you encounter, in school and beyond."

Differentiation

Extension

- Ask students to analyze how the text creator's implicit purpose differs from the explicit plot. For example: "What is the surface story, and what deeper message about human nature or society is the writer exploring?" ([Outcome](#))
- Invite students to assess the effectiveness of the writer's choices. Did the tone, setting and characterization work together to achieve the intended effect? What would they change? ([Outcome](#))
- Have students connect the text to broader cultural or historical context. How do societal forces or the time period in which the text is set shape the writer's choices? ([Outcome](#), [Outcome](#))
- Ask students to respond personally and critically: "What moral or ethical perspective does this text present? Do you agree or disagree? Why?" ([Outcome](#))

Support

- Provide a list of comprehension questions before reading, so students know what to listen for: "Who is the main character? What do they want? What is stopping them? What is the mood of this passage?"
- Offer a partially completed graphic organizer with one or two examples filled in, so students understand the task before beginning independently.
- Pair students for the independent practice section. Have them discuss their observations aloud before writing.
- Provide a word bank of literary terms (character, setting, tone, imagery, symbol, foreshadowing, irony) so students can name elements with confidence.
- Simplify the text selection to a shorter passage (300 to 400 words) with clearer narrative structure and less ambiguous language.

Assessment

Formative checkpoint: Review the graphic organizer entry collected during independent practice.

Look for:

- A specific, relevant quotation or detail from the text (not a paraphrase or summary)
- Accurate identification of a literary element
- A clear explanation of how that element contributes to meaning, not just a restatement of the plot, but an insight into how the writer's choice shapes understanding of character, theme, tone or purpose

What to look for, Proficient response:

Evidence: "She did not look at him when she spoke."

Element: Characterization through action / body language.

Effect: This detail suggests the character is avoiding connection or hiding emotion. It creates tension because we do not know why she will not meet his eyes. It makes us question the relationship between them.

What to look for, Developing response:

Evidence: "She did not look at him."

Element: Character.

Effect: It shows she is upset.

(The element is identified but vaguely; the effect is stated but not explained. The student has noticed the detail but has not yet analyzed how it creates meaning.)

What to look for, Emerging response:

Evidence: They have an argument.

Element: Plot.

Effect: It is important to the story.

(The student has summarized the plot rather than analyzing a specific textual choice. Provide feedback: "Find one exact sentence or phrase that shows the conflict. What does the writer's word choice or description tell us about how the character feels?")

Use this checkpoint to identify which students need additional support with close reading and which are ready for extension tasks in the next lesson.