

Comprehending and Responding to Texts

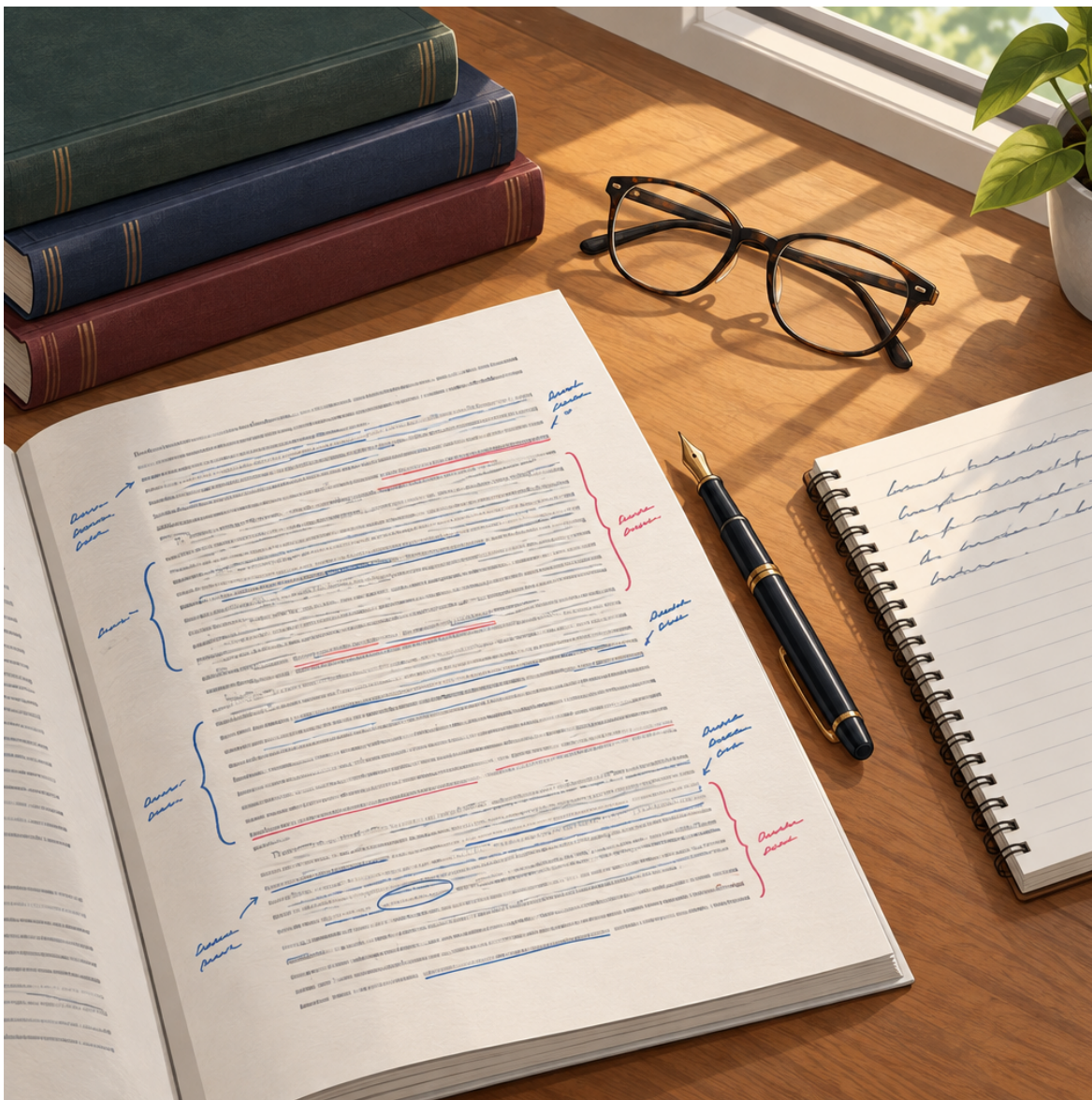
A 60-minute lesson linking close reading, textual craft and evidenced personal response for ELA 30-1

Audience: Grade 12 students enrolled in English Language Arts 30-1, preparing for the diploma examination and post-secondary study.

Grades: 12

Subjects: English Language Arts

Time: about 60 minutes



Overhead view of an annotated text page, pen, glasses and books on a wooden desk.

Overview

This lesson develops students' capacity to comprehend a text closely and then respond to it with an evidenced personal position, the two halves of General Outcome 2 ([Topic](#)). Students move from annotation practice that isolates controlling ideas, supporting details and connotative language ([Outcome](#), [Outcome](#)), through small group analysis of tone, figurative language and rhetorical technique ([Outcome](#), [Outcome](#)), to a paired writing task that asks them to form and defend a position while

naming the personal or cultural context shaping their reading ([Outcome](#), [Outcome](#)).

The sequence models the reading-then-responding structure that diploma exam text sets demand: read for meaning, analyze craft and context, then write a response grounded in both. Discussion protocols are built in so students hear multiple defensible readings of the same excerpt before finalizing an individual position, reinforcing that interpretation is evidenced rather than arbitrary ([Outcome](#), [Outcome](#)).

Outcomes covered

- Use a variety of strategies to comprehend literature and other texts, and develop strategies for close reading of literature in order to understand contextual elements. ([Outcome](#), [Outcome](#))
Text sets require students to apply close reading and annotation strategies to comprehend literature and other texts.
- Analyze the relationships among controlling ideas, supporting ideas and supporting details in a variety of texts. ([Outcome](#), [Outcome](#))
Distinguishing a controlling idea from its supporting evidence is the foundation of both critical reading and essay construction.
- Relate a text creator's tone and register to the moral and ethical stance explicitly or implicitly communicated by a text, and assess the contributions of figurative language, symbol, imagery and allusion to meaning. ([Outcome](#), [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#))
Recognizing how craft choices carry ethical and emotional weight lets students write more precise literary analysis.
- Explain the text creator's purpose, describe whether the purpose was achieved, and identify the impact that personal context has on constructing meaning from a text. ([Outcome](#), [Outcome](#))
Response questions often ask students to relate a text creator's tone and register to the moral and ethical stance communicated by a text.
- Form positions on issues that arise from text study, and assess ideas, values and beliefs expressed in texts in light of issues that are personally meaningful and culturally significant. ([Outcome](#))
A response section requires students to assess the contributions of figurative language, symbol, imagery and allusion to the meaning and significance of texts.

Materials

- One short excerpt (150-200 words) from a previously studied text, for the warm-up
- One unseen excerpt (300-400 words: poem, editorial or prose passage) for close reading, printed one per student
- Chart paper or a shared digital document for small group recording
- Pens, pencils and highlighters for annotation
- Terminology reference sheet (tone, imagery, allusion, symbol, rhetorical device) for support students
- Exit slip template (paper or digital form)

Sequence of activities

1. Warm-Up: Context Before Content (8 min, whole class)

1. Display a short excerpt (150-200 words) from a text students have studied this term, such as an excerpt from Hamlet, The Great Gatsby, or a contemporary short story on your reading list. Students use a variety of strategies to comprehend literature and other texts, such as reading passages out loud, forming questions, and making predictions.

2. Ask students to jot a quick answer: What can you infer about the time period, audience or purpose from diction and sentence structure alone?
3. Students develop strategies for close reading of literature in order to understand contextual elements, such as understanding subtext. Ask: Did knowing the context change or confirm your first reading? Take two or three verbal responses.
4. State the learning intention for the lesson: Today we practise separating what a text says from why and how it says it, then use both to build an informed personal response.
5. State success criteria on the board: I can identify a controlling idea and its supporting details; I can explain how context shapes meaning; I can form and support a personal position using textual evidence.

This activates prior knowledge and previews the context/content distinction central to 2.1.1 and 2.1.2. Choose an excerpt with clear period markers (diction, syntax, allusion) so the inference task is not a guessing game. If students have not yet met a shared text this term, substitute a excerpt from a text used earlier in the course.

Sources: [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#), [Topic](#)

2. Close Reading and Annotation: Controlling Idea to Detail (15 min, individual)

1. Distribute a one-page excerpt (a poem, editorial, or prose passage of 300-400 words) not previously seen by students.
2. Model the first paragraph aloud: read it once for overall sense, then reread while annotating in the margin, underline the controlling idea, bracket two supporting ideas, circle one word with strong connotative weight and note its likely denotative alternative.
3. Students complete annotation independently for the remaining excerpt, using the same four annotation moves (controlling idea, supporting ideas, supporting details, connotative word choice).
4. Students write a two-sentence summary: sentence one states the controlling idea; sentence two names one supporting detail and explains how it reinforces that idea.
5. Students share their annotations and summaries to demonstrate comprehension of the text. Note any disagreement about the controlling idea and discuss briefly, multiple defensible readings are acceptable if supported by the text.

This activity targets close reading strategies, annotation and the controlling idea/supporting idea/supporting detail relationship. Circulate during independent annotation to check that students distinguish supporting ideas (claims) from supporting details (evidence, examples, images). A student who circles only isolated words without linking them to connotation has not yet met the criterion; prompt with 'what feeling does that word carry that a more neutral synonym would not?'

Sources: [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#)

3. Small Group Analysis: Tone, Craft and Effect (15 min, small group)

1. Students work together to analyze the relationships among controlling ideas, supporting ideas and supporting details in the text. Each group analyzes the same excerpt to assess the contributions of setting, plot, character and atmosphere to the development of theme.
2. Assign each group one of the following analytical lenses, rotating lenses across groups if class size allows a second round: (a) tone and register in relation to moral or ethical stance; (b) figurative language, imagery or allusion and its contribution to meaning; (c) rhetorical devices or stylistic techniques and their effect on clarity and emphasis.
3. Groups discuss their assigned lens for six minutes, recording on chart paper or a shared document: one specific textual example, a precise term for the device or feature, and one sentence explaining its effect on meaning or reader response.

4. Groups rotate or report out: each group presents their finding in under ninety seconds, using accurate terminology.
5. As a class, briefly connect the three lenses: ask how tone, imagery and rhetorical technique work together to serve the text's larger purpose, referring back to the controlling idea identified earlier.

This activity addresses figurative language and craft appreciation, tone and moral/ethical stance, and rhetorical devices. Push groups toward precise terminology (e.g., 'anaphora' rather than 'repetition,' 'pathos' rather than 'emotional part') to build the vocabulary demanded at the diploma level. Listen for groups who identify a device but cannot articulate its effect; that gap is the formative checkpoint for this segment.

Sources: [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#)

4. Personal and Critical Response: Taking a Position (15 min, pairs)

1. Pose a response prompt tied to the excerpt's controlling idea, for example: 'Does the text creator's stance on [the issue raised in the excerpt] still hold validity today? Why or why not?'
2. Individually, students spend three minutes freewriting a first-draft position, drawing on the annotations and group findings from the previous activities.
3. In pairs, students exchange freewrites and identify one place where their partner's position is well supported by textual evidence and one place where more evidence or a sharper claim is needed.
4. Pairs discuss: how does your own experience or prior knowledge affect which parts of this text you find convincing or unconvincing? Each partner names one personal or cultural factor shaping their reading.
5. Each student revises their position statement into a polished paragraph (four to six sentences): a clear position, at least one piece of textual evidence, and one sentence naming a personal, moral or cultural perspective that shaped the response.
6. Collect paragraphs or have students submit digitally as an exit artifact.

This activity operationalizes 2.3.1 (connecting self, text, culture and milieu) and reinforces 2.1.1(d), the impact of personal context on meaning. Encourage genuine disagreement between partners; the goal is not consensus but sharpened, evidenced positions. Watch for paragraphs that state an opinion without textual evidence, that is the key gap to flag before students leave.

Sources: [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#)

5. Consolidation: Criteria Check and Exit Reflection (7 min, whole class)

1. Return to the success criteria posted at the start of class. Ask students to give a silent thumbs signal (thumbs up, sideways, down) for each of the three criteria.
2. Address any criterion showing widespread sideways or down signals with a thirty-second clarifying example.
3. Students complete a three-line exit slip: one controlling idea or theme they analyzed today; one term or device they can now use accurately; one way their own perspective shaped their interpretation.
4. Collect exit slips as they leave, or have students submit digitally.

This is the summative formative checkpoint for the lesson. Exit slips let you triage which students need reteaching of the controlling idea/detail relationship versus which need support forming an evidenced personal position, informing grouping for the next class.

Sources: [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#)

Differentiation

Extension

- Ask students who finish early to locate a second text (visual, media or print) that presents a contrasting stance on the same issue and to draft a one-paragraph comparison of tone and rhetorical approach between the two.
- Invite advanced students to research the historical or biographical context of the excerpt's author and to write a short paragraph explaining how that context might account for a specific stylistic choice in the passage.

Support

- Provide a pre-highlighted copy of the excerpt in which the controlling idea sentence is already marked, so students focus their annotation practice on identifying supporting ideas and details.
- Offer a terminology reference sheet with definitions and one example each for tone, imagery, allusion, symbol and rhetorical device, for students to consult during small group work.
- Reduce the response paragraph requirement to three sentences (position, one piece of evidence, one personal connection) for students who need a shorter written task.

Inclusive supports

- Provide the excerpt in a larger font or as an audio recording for students with visual or reading processing needs.
- Allow students to dictate their exit slip or position paragraph orally to a peer scribe or recording device if handwriting or typing is a barrier.
- Permit small group discussion in a student's first language before producing the final English-language written response, where a bilingual peer or resource is available.

Assessment

Formative. Circulate during independent annotation and small group work to check that students correctly distinguish controlling ideas from supporting ideas and supporting details, and that they can name at least one rhetorical or figurative device with precise terminology.

Look for: Annotated excerpts show a clearly marked controlling idea with linked supporting ideas and details; group chart notes name a specific device using accurate terminology and describe its effect rather than merely labelling it. ([Outcome](#), [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#))

Formative. Review paired freewrites and revised position paragraphs for evidence of a defensible position supported by textual reference and an articulated personal or cultural perspective.

Look for: The paragraph states a clear position, cites at least one specific textual detail as support, and names a personal, moral or cultural factor that shaped the student's reading of the text. ([Outcome](#), [Outcome](#))

Self. Students self-assess against the three posted success criteria using a thumbs signal, then complete a written exit slip naming a controlling idea, a term or device learned, and a personal factor affecting their interpretation.

Look for: Exit slip responses are specific to the day's excerpt (not generic) and show accurate use of at least one new or reinforced term. ([Outcome](#), [Outcome](#))

Vocabulary

- **controlling idea:** The central claim or main point that a paragraph, passage or whole text develops; supporting ideas and details exist to reinforce it.

- **connotation:** The emotional or cultural association a word carries beyond its literal, dictionary meaning (denotation); writers choose words with particular connotations to shape reader response.
- **register:** The level of formality or informality in a text's language, chosen to suit audience, purpose and context.
- **verisimilitude:** The quality of a text that makes its setting, characters or events feel authentic or plausible to a reader, regardless of whether the events are factual.
- **rhetorical device:** A deliberate technique of language, such as anaphora, juxtaposition or antithesis, used to create emphasis, clarity or a particular effect on an audience.

Sources

- [Outcome](#): "assess the contributions of figurative language, symbol, imagery and allusion to the meaning and significance of texts; and appreciate the text creator's craft"
- [Outcome](#): "explain the text creator's purpose, including implicit purpose when applicable"
- [Outcome](#): "analyze the relationships among controlling ideas, supporting ideas and supporting details in a variety of texts"
- [Outcome](#): "form positions on issues that arise from text study; and assess the ideas, information, arguments, emotions, experiences, values and beliefs expressed in works of literature"
- [Outcome](#): "identify the impact that personal context, experience, prior knowledge, has on constructing meaning from a text"
- [Outcome](#): "use terminology appropriate to the forms studied for discussing and appreciating the effectiveness and artistry of a variety of text forms"
- [Outcome](#): "identify criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of texts, monitor the effectiveness of the criteria, and modify the criteria as needed"
- [Outcome](#): "reflect on and describe strategies used to engage prior knowledge as a means of assisting comprehension of new texts"
- [Outcome](#): "assess the contributions of rhetorical devices and stylistic techniques to the clarity and coherence of print and nonprint texts"
- [Topic](#): "Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to comprehend literature and other texts in oral, print, visual and multimedia forms, and respond personally, critically and creatively."
- [Outcome](#): "analyze a variety of text forms, explain the relationships of form to purpose and content, and assess the effects of these relationships on audience"
- [Outcome](#): "support generalizations and conclusions sufficiently with relevant and consistent detail"

All excerpts, discussion prompts and images are appropriate for a Grade 12 academic classroom and involve no unsafe, violent or culturally disrespectful content.