



Fact or Fiction: Analyzing why the Author includes Truth in Fiction and the Influence and Effect on the Audience

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Introduction

I gave my sixth grade class a survey asking them to name their favorite television shows, movies, music, etc. Ninety percent of the students claimed that *Jersey Shore* is their favorite past-time show to watch. In this "reality television show", cameras follow the lives of eight individuals living in Sea Side Heights, New Jersey throughout the summer. The show became an instant phenomenon and millions tuned in every week to see the crazy antics of "Snooki" and "The Situation" after a night of binge drinking. The students assume that since this is a reality television show the events that happen are real and this is how life is while living on the shore. One student voiced the collective understanding of all these students: "It has the word *real* in reality when you name what kind of show it is. So that must mean that what you see on the show has to be real or it can't be considered that kind of show." The majority of my students have come to idolize these individuals and the lifestyle they lead. The class has even created a list naming which student would best portray "Snooki", "the Situation", and the other cast members. The remaining seventeen students created their own 'jersey shore' nicknames. I had a discussion with some of the students about the list. They talk as if they are close friends with the cast, knowing each person's background, picking a side of one of the cast members if they had a brawl with another roommate. The students want to live their lives to be exact replicas of what they see on *Jersey Shore*. What the students don't realize is that the people on the show are getting paid to act in certain ways while the cameras are filming (the actors themselves claim they are completely different when the cameras are not rolling). The students also don't realize that the producers will air certain footage to pull in viewers and ratings. They don't see how the creators of the show are in a way manipulating their thinking. It made me wonder: what is the appeal of this atmosphere in contrast to our daily lives?

The thought occurred to me that the manipulation of minds through the use of television parallels the driving purpose behind writing a work of fiction. Now, I consider myself an intellectual and sensible thinker in that I am able to differentiate between fact and fiction when reading a novel. Two summers ago I read Kathryn Stockett's novel *The Help*. I finished the book in two days. I couldn't put the book down- I was so involved with the story line and the characters that I thought I was a part of the sweltering heat of the deep South. This fictional piece is told through three different women and their points of view of the events involving racial inequality happening in Jackson, Mississippi in 1962. Kathryn Stockett eloquently created a fictional world that I considered myself a part of and for a moment thought this was a true historical event and wanted to share

that historical moment with those three women. I was so involved with the characters' lives and their stories of growth and accomplishment that I allowed it to consume my thoughts and for a second forgot that I wasn't living in Southern Mississippi in 1962. I had to remind myself that these women indeed are fictional and the revolutionary book they worked so hard to create is only present in the pages of Stockett's novel.

Due to the author perfecting her craft, she successfully pulled me in and consumed my thinking as do the cast and creators of the *Jersey Shore* television show for my students. The difference between my students and me is that I realize that the creator had a way with words that manipulated my train of thought. My students have a harder time taking a step back, refocusing and using their own logic to question what they see. They just assume that everything placed in front of them is factual unless it is stated otherwise in the text or media.

Rationale

Young children love the question "why". They have an innocence that makes them inquisitive and curious about how the world operates and have this unquenchable need to seek out the answers. It seems as if my students have lost their curiosity and don't question their surroundings and what they see. They are satisfied with the results that are face-value, remain only on the surface, and don't tread deeper to formulate higher-order conclusions. Everything remains on a very simplistic level. This is why I believe they accept the reality presented to them on television with the show mentioned above and have difficulty differentiating between what is reality and what is fiction.

In English class, I would ask students to identify what they thought the author's purpose was for writing a short story we read in class. They would in return give a very simplistic answer: to entertain, persuade, or inform. They could not give the support for their answer; they were unable to return to the text and provided the necessary text information to support their logic. This was also an area of weakness for my students on the Delaware Comprehensive Assessment System (DCAS). The class as a whole received a weak score in being able to draw conclusions about content. In particular, my special-education students struggled with this concept. These multiple skills seem difficult for both groups of students I teach. This type of thinking requires them to perform a deeper level of questioning and making inferences. As a result of those struggles they have a hard time comprehending and applying these grade-level expectations (GLEs).

In the Story Telling seminar description, Professor Campbell asks, "Does reading about the experiences of non-existent people who are different from ourselves help broaden our knowledge of the world or encourage us to develop sympathy for others?" In addition to this, why do some people have more powerful connections than others? Why are these created realities more effective to the reader? These are the questions that my students should be asking when reading a fictional piece. These are driving questions of my proposed unit. My goal for the unit is to create analytical thinkers who question and create logical conclusions about the author's motives for writing a piece of fiction. I also want them to analyze their reactions and personal connections they make with the fictional piece. Ultimately with this unit, I want my students to inquire why so many people willingly accept and connect to these fictional worlds as well as what 'truth' the author includes to make the connection more powerful, and to analyze the purpose the author has for including some truth in a fictional narrative.

To help raise these questions, I plan on using the short story "All Summer in a Day" by Ray Bradbury and the

novel *Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis. While reading these two narratives, students will focus on these questions: What is the author's purpose for creating the character, circumstances, setting in this way? What ultimate conclusion does the author want the reader to reach? Why is this "created" reality more effective to us as readers than the world we live in?

The state of Delaware and Red Clay Consolidated School District have mandated that all secondary schools in our district implement the Common Core Standards for the 2012-2013 school year. These unit essential questions are aligned with and allow for a smoother transition of incorporation and implementation the new Common Core Standards. The previous school year, I was still required to implement the state grade-level expectations (GLEs). I feel as if this unit will be the first of many I create to better address the needs of my students according to what the Common Core Standards are requiring.

Demographics

I currently teach sixth grade English/Language Arts at Conrad Schools of Science (CSS) in Red Clay School District located in Wilmington, Delaware; the school hosts sixth through twelfth grades. CSS is considered a magnet school in which our high school programs focus on mathematics and Science pathways. The various pathways offered are in Allied Health, Biotechnology, and the newest pathway of Engineering. The middle school program follows the norms and requirements of a typical middle school setting in the Red Clay School District. We operate on a block schedule; I see my sixth grade students on a daily basis for 88 minutes. The students I have in my class range from high to low academic ability level based on the previous year's test results and classroom created assessments. For example, in the fall of 2011 64% of our students were proficient in reading according to the state standards. By the end of the school year we needed 86% of our students to be proficient and passing the state test.

I also teach special-education students. Red Clay follows the inclusion model. At CSS, students classified with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) are placed in an 'A setting' which is considered to be the least-restrictive educational setting. This means special-education students are mainstreamed and attending classes with students that are considered regular education students. This past year was the first year we followed the team-teaching model. Following this model, I was required to push-in as the special-education teacher into an eighth grade English/Language Arts class and would co-teach a ninth grade English Literature class. However, for my sixth grade English/Language Arts classes I would have both special-education students and regular education students in the same class; I was the only active teacher in that classroom. Due to this I had to differentiate instruction based on the various ranges of academic needs of my students.

The unit was designed to fit into the block schedule and targets all ability levels and various multiple intelligence spectrums so that instruction can be differentiated based on the ranges of student ability level in the classroom.

Why People Make Connections to Fiction

Why is it readers become so involved in the alternate reality that an author creates? Yes, there are very simplistic answers to this question: "Because I was able to connect to it" or "because I liked it" are the most common. However, these statements reflect the simplistic thinking my students perform when reading fiction. I would feel guilty of accusing my students for not questioning their surroundings if I didn't explore the realm of fiction for myself. For this unit, I wanted to seek a scientific approach as to why people connect and are allured to fiction. I also wanted to delve deeper into the writing process and learn what decisions an author makes to create a fictional narrative.

Neuroscience's Approach to Reading and Connecting to Fiction

"Reading great literature enlarges and improves us as human beings. Brain science shows this claim is truer than we imagined," writes Annie Paul Murphy, writer for *The New York Times*.¹ In her article "Your Brain on Fiction" she discusses the latest research on how reading fiction benefits readers and the common links between reading a work of fiction and the activities of everyday life. "What scientists have come to realize in the last few years is that narratives activate many other parts of our brains as well, suggesting why experiences of reading can feel so alive."² There is much overlap between brain networks used to understand stories and the networks used to understand people's interactions, in particular when it comes to understanding others' thoughts and feelings. In the conducted studies where scientists had people read passages while scanning their brain waves, it showed that fiction stimulated the brain in other areas besides the language-processing areas (where scientists assume the most activity would take place.) For instance, when the passage involved reading about motion and the characters moving in some way, the motor cortex of our brain that controls movement was also stimulated. Also, if vibrant language was used in the passage to describe something - like using a metaphor or other forms of figurative language- it roused the sensory cortex that we use to control our senses such as smell or touch. Your brain responds to descriptions of smells, textures, and movements as if they are real, so it understandable that the interactions with fictional characters are treated the same as real-life social interactions.

To further prove this, Professor Keith Oatley of the University of Toronto claims that reading produces vivid simulation of reality. "Fiction—with its redolent details, imaginative metaphors and attentive descriptions of people and their actions—offers an especially rich replica."³ In using Ray Bradbury's science-fiction short story "All Summer in a Day" as a part of the unit, the figurative language used by the main character—she refers to the warmth of the sun being like a blush rising upon your face—will allow for students to be stimulated through the use of language and connect as if it were real.

Researchers found little difference between the brain functions when reading about an event and when encountering it in real life. Additionally, two studies published in 2006 and in 2009 claim that individuals who frequently read fiction seem to be better able to understand other people, empathize with them and see the world from their perspective. Another study released in 2010 performed by Dr. Mar stated that she found a similar result in preschool-age children: the more stories they had read to them, the keener their "theory of mind" or their capacity to evaluate and make sense of other people's intentions and interactions. These scientific findings of the neuroscience realm affirm that the experiences of readers while reading fiction can have an impact on their own behavior and change the way we act in life.

Psychological Approach to Reading and Connecting to Fiction

In Suzanne Keen's book *Empathy and the Novel*, she quotes the work of psychologist Victor Nell. In *Lost in a Book: Psychology of Reading for Pleasure* he writes that "novels do more than entertain, inform, soothe and excite their readers. For immersed readers, entertaining fictional worlds allows for a refreshing escape from ordinary, everyday pressures and preoccupations." From the psychology viewpoint, one of the big mysteries of the mind is reading and its power to absorb the thoughts of the reader completely and without any effort; it also has this remarkable ability to change a person's state of mind. For years, studies have been looking at various comparisons to help us better understand this connection we have with fiction books. A number of studies have been comparing the reading of books to dreams. Dreams, as Victor Nell claims, should also be considered a narrative device (means of storytelling): "Like dreaming, reading performs the prodigious task of carrying us off to other worlds." ⁴ Both dreams and fictional books share the similarities: both have the power to create new worlds and the effortless absorption that allows for these alternate realities to linger in our memories. Both have the power to affect our emotions and states of minds. For instance, I become both anxious and nervous after reading a horror book. I feel exactly the same way after having a nightmare. The experience and feelings linger for a while, which I think is a part of being enveloped into the world I created with my mind. The defining difference between the two narrative activities is that we have no control over what we dream about. We do have a choice in what we read. We dream, day dream, tell friends stories, listen to stories, read, and watch television. These are all various narrative activities that function within our minds, mimicking the process of reading for pleasure.

Victor Nell remarks "The special kind of absorbed attention that a narrative can command because of the heavy consciousness demands it makes, and the ease with which such absorption maintains reality awareness while allowing what appears to be complete involvement in the fantasy experience." ⁵ In the psychological world, storytelling has often been described as a hypnotic process in that it consumes the thought of the readers or those listening to an oral story telling. There are the common characteristics of someone reading fiction: he or she sits quietly in silence, her eyes glaze over, and her body is completely relaxed. This is all due to being in this hypnotic mental state where someone's consciousness of her brain is so absorbed in the content that the reality around the reader disappears for a moment and she is enveloped into the world the author created for them. Author Richard Wright beautifully describes the reaction he had when he first listened to a work of fiction:

She whispered to me the story of *Bluebeard and His Seven Wives* and I ceased to see the porch, the sunshine, her face, everything. As her words fell upon my ears, I endowed them with a reality that welled up from somewhere within me... As she spoke, reality changed, the look of things altered, and the world became peopled with magical presences. My sense of life deepened and the feel of things was different, somehow. Enchanted and enthralled, I stopped her constantly to ask questions. My imagination blazed. The sensations the story aroused in me were never to leave me. ⁶

As we see with Wright's experience, an author has the ability to sway our thoughts and minds through his or her craft. This power that the author holds strongly parallels the induction of hypnotic trance. I found myself in a hypnotic trance when I was reading *The Help*. Kathryn Stockett successfully created a piece of fiction that I was lost in due to the characters and situations I connected with.

Why Authors Write Fiction

How and why does the author magically create this world of fiction? Primo Levi stated: "Fiction helps state the 'truthfulness' of the author's extreme experience." Writers often times will create a story based on what they already know about society; others offer a world they completely imagined in their mind and were able to transfer into print. But what steps might an author take or process do they follow in order to create this new world for readers?

Authors must keep in mind while creating their work that they must include the elements that define it as a narrative. Authors must decide which angle they are taking when shaping the plot and characters. The events that happen may be something the author has witnessed personally or has on excellent authority to know what happened in order to create the world within the story. Just as J.K. Rowling did with her Harry Potter Series, the story could be events the author knows will never happen because they are making them up as they go along. Depending on if they are focusing on a particular genre with their story, such as historical fiction, they have to be committed to incidental details, criteria such as time intervals, actions of the characters—if they are a real person and known by the audience—have to be authentic. The more accurate and believable your narrative, the more force and power your story gains within the real world amongst the people. You want the audience to ask, "Did this really happen?"

Writing What They Know and Understand

In essence, it is the author who dictates how much "reality" to include. However, when writers create based upon their own experiences, the narrative may seem more realistic and appealing to the audience. Carole Boyton, another fellow from New Haven, shared with us that author Stephen King was a teacher at her high school. After she read his first book *Carrie*, Carol was able to identify which classmates King modeled the various characters after in the book. King employed his background knowledge, experiences, and observations of that school setting to create a realistic, enchanting horror story. Zora Neale Hurston is another example of an author who wrote about what she knew. "She wrote about rural Southern black people because it was the world she knew best," exclaims Robert Hemenway in the introduction of her book *Mules and Men*.⁷ Hurston was born and raised in Eatonville, Florida: the same location she used as one of the settings in her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Hurston used to hang around the town's general store to observe people's interactions, listen for local gossip and the folktales men would share. Much like Hurston, Janie Crawford—our main character—would mimic these same actions revolving around the town's general store owned by her husband.

Using Stereotypes

When creating fiction, authors will often use the societal and cultural stereotypes. Stereotypes give the narrative more force because you are pulling in reality and "truth". Characters are drawn or created through stereotypes and freshened by unexpected combinations so that the stereotypic aspect of the character heightens audience response through recognition that comes from previous encounters with these characters and situations. Events in "All Summer in a Day" revolve around bullying—there is a victim and a bully present which are stereotypical characters in our own reality.

Role of Suspense

Similar to the usage of stereotypes, authors use the element of suspense within the plot to help create and maintain anticipation amongst their readers. Suspense is the state or condition of mental uncertainty or excitement due to the awaiting of a decision or outcome. Readers enjoy when the development of a storyline is unpredictable rather than following the same type of action sequence. For instance, Kathryn Stockett introduced in the beginning chapters and kept you in the dark about an incident Minny referred to as an 'unspeakable evil' that she performed as revenge against Mrs. Hilly for firing her. Throughout the remainder of the book, I eagerly wanted to find out what this unfathomable thing was. Stockett waited to reveal the incident until the last couple chapters of the book to keep her readers guessing. Believe me, I was in complete shock after finding out what Minny did (and wasn't planning on eating pie anytime soon).

Writers will outline and strategically place events in a specific order to keep the reader's attention and focus. Break points created by the author are subtly placed to maximize the reader's experience and audience anticipation. In conclusion, we know the writer has created a successful sequence of events within the fictional narrative if the reader continues to move forward with the book because a level of excitement and eagerness has been achieved. This excitement creates an anxiety and absorbs their thoughts until readers have managed to find the answers to their questions.

Manipulation of the Mind: Creating Empathy

I reflect upon what Sue Monk Kidd, the writer of *The Secret Life of Bees*, wrote: "While, as a writer, I want to affect the reader's mind—to educate and enlighten—what I wish for even more is to jolt the reader's heart. I want my words to open a portal through which the reader may leave the self, migrate to some other human sky and returned disposed of otherness." ⁸ Many authors hope for their readers to have an epic experience while reading their work of fiction. They want their audience to reach a state of empathy: the intellectual identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another.

To achieve empathy, they present empathic connections between the characters or use thematic empathy to create a link to the reader. Most often, empathy will appear in the novel as a character trait or as a feature of relationships. Christopher Paul Curtis creates the empathetic connection using both character connection and theme in his novel *The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963*. The story is told through ten-year old Kenny. According to Kenny, life is tough with a big brother who picks on you all the time and being known as the school egghead. We enjoy Kenny's humor when he discusses the sibling rivalry but can connect with him for being picked on at school for being the smart kid. This novel is also a historical fiction book; in later chapters, Kenny witnesses the bombing of the church that happened while he was visiting his grandmother. This book was meant to teach young children about the bombing of the church and the murder of four girls in Birmingham-1963. Using Kenny as his vehicle, Curtis is able to reach his audience to and educate about this tragedy that happened during the Civil Rights Movement.

Is it possible for everyone to achieve empathy? In reading the autobiography *What is the What*—written by Dave Eggers to help depict the life of Valentino Achak Deng—Deng shares his life experiences of being a Lost Boy in the current genocide happening in Sudan and Darfur; he is one of the young boys who were marched from his home in Sudan to Ethiopia. He describes the horrific conditions he had to endure in order to survive the march. Deng was one of the fortunate few to be resettled in the United States. Is it possible for everyone to empathize, especially when the circumstances are beyond what we can fathom since we have no experience with those types of conditions? Suzanne Keen performed a survey with collection of random

people; she asked if a work of fiction has caused them to change their character or conduct. Keen presented Charles Dickens *Oliver Twist* as the example. Many people responded yes; they remember the strong feelings that developed, even if they acknowledged differences in the character's situation from their own. Readers remember having strong feelings for Oliver; even though they were not orphaned personally, they empathized with him when he longed for a place to belong. This proves a reader doesn't have to directly identify with the character or situation to experience a strong, empathetic reaction. She presented this question: can you think of any time where a novel made you do something specific in the world something you might not have done or thought of if you hadn't read the novel?

For authors of fiction, it is not simply for the pay check they receive for completing and turning in their manuscript; seeing that enlightening sparkle within their readers' eyes and knowing they have touched and impacted their minds, even if for a short while, brings a higher form of self-satisfaction. The manipulation of the mind and the thoughts of the reader evokes emotions about the content that allure the reader; in return there is self-gratification in seeing the readers' eyes sparkle. You have the best of both worlds: as the author you can connect with readers, shape their minds and expand their intellects, and yet satisfy their desire for a connection

Why Readers Read Fiction

Psychologist Victor Nell claims, "We willingly enter the world of fiction because of the skepticism to which our adult sophistication condemns us: we long for safe places-or love we can entirely trust, a truth we can entirely believe. Fiction meets that need precisely because we know it to be false so that we can willingly suspend our reality." ⁹ Novels allow for people to enter into someone else's mind and share their thoughts and feelings, which is something that cannot be offered in real life. By human nature, we long to connect with people and the world around us.

Also due to our nature, we hope and long for happiness to be present in our lives. It's as if we are in search of our happily ever after; we hope for the characters in our books to find peace by the end of the story to justify that a happy ending can exist in the world.

Character Identification

Character identification is something that happens within the reader, based solely on his or her reaction to the character or situations presented in the text by the author. Character identification often invites empathy, where the reader in some way connects to one of the above aspects, even when the character and reader differ from each other in all sorts of practical ways. "Keith Oatley believes that readers' personal experiences of patterns of emotional response provoke sympathy for characters, especially as readers identify with characters' goals and plans." ¹⁰ J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* are both examples of narratives that I was able to identify with. Both books in separate ways have evoked emotional responses while I was their audience. I cried when Sirius died in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, understanding what it meant to lose a loved one. I laughed out loud when Minny's unmentionable incident was revealed, rooting for her in the battle against Hilly. Hilly reminded of a girl from high school who acted as if she was entitled to everything. Minny acted out the revenge I secretly wanted to get against my own Mrs. Hilly.

Just as film served this purpose in the 1930s, fictional books are a means of escape for readers. Books allow for us to switch off one world and turn on another. It takes one's mind away from the problems and pressures of life, shuts one's mind to the tensions and worries of the day, forgets everything and allows us to escape to this make-believe world of a different life, place and time. Books can also serve as companions; we can become emotionally connected to a narrative because there is something present we can identify with. The two genres that I chose for this unit—historical fiction and science fiction—are good examples of these revelations in that they each allow for us to be absorbed in the characters story but we walk away feeling connected to that character and his or her story. Science fiction is the least restrained by reality and allows more creative freedom. Ray Bradbury uses his creativity to his advantage and lets the human race find a way to live on another planet. However, even though this is a fictional story, we can relate to Margot and the other students because bullying is a real-life issue prevalent in schools today. Christopher Paul Curtis creates a beautiful historical fiction novel where we see life through ten-year old Kenny's eyes.

Strategies

Teacher Modeling: Teacher Talk

Teacher modeling is when you demonstrate the activity you want your students to perform. They complete the example along with you to understand how the activity should be performed independently. This is a good strategy when introducing new activities, especially for special education students. This acts as guided practice for those students who need a visual example on how to complete various activities. Teacher talk is a form of modeling; this is where you speak out loud the thoughts going in your head when approaching an activity. For the unit, I will model asking questions aloud about the author's intentions for writing "All Summer in a Day." I will also speak aloud what I think the answer is and what personal connection I made to help the students understand what they are required to do.

Annotating: Talking to the Text

For many students, it is valuable to mark up the text. It's meant to act as a conversation they are having with the text; students write notes and highlight on the pages of the text. Students write in their personal connections, questions they have about the text, and underline and define unknown words right in their text. This shows them their progress as they read the narrative and helps them refer back to the text fast if need to state information from the text to address a question. We will be using the "Talking to Text" strategy when reading the novel *Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963*. This will act as a partner activity to their journal writing.

Journal Writing

Journal writing is an incredibly flexible instructional tool. It allows for students to have to opportunity to speculate and reflect on paper. I am the only one who will read their entries so students can be confident that their ideas, observations, emotions, and writing will be accepted without criticism. They will be graded based on participation and effort based on a student-generated rubric. Students will also be given examples of quality journal entries. I want to incorporate the use of a journal while reading the novel *Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963*. As we navigate through the novel, I want students to record their reactions to the text and describe any personal connections they make as we read. I will also present writing prompts that they will also need to reflect upon in their journal.

Collaborative Learning/Group Work and *Think Pair Share*

Working together with peers is a life skill that students need to practice and accomplish. With collaborative learning, it allows students to learn to work together towards a common goal. Each member of the group is accountable to each other and required to participate in order to achieve the final outcome. Students need to learn how to work respectfully with others and learn how to consider each other's points of views and opinions. Collaboration also benefits students in that by listening to their peers they can develop better understanding of the task or content; it also extends their thinking by hearing other perspectives that they may not have considered or thought of. Individual and group evaluations are essential to monitor the group's work and their progress working as a team.

Think-Pair-Share is a specific type of responding to questions strategy. It allows for collaborative learning in that students think and generate their own conclusions about a prompt or question. They then have to paired up with their assigned partner (or a peer of their choice depending on circumstances) and share the conclusions they each came up with. The Think-Pair- Share strategy will be implemented into the unit in allowing the students to collaborate and share their ideas on the author's intentions and persuasive techniques used. I normally pair students based on ability level where I will have a higher-achieving student work with a student who made need more assistance.

Proficient Reading Strategies

The proficient reading strategies are techniques student use to break-down and analyze a story or text to gain better comprehension of what was written. I teach my students these strategies at the beginning of the school year to teach them how to break-down and analyze text. I like linking the proficient reading strategies with analyzing the author's intentions because going through the steps as proficient readers, they are able to further analyze the text, determine the point the author is making and the strategy they use to influence the reader. Students are asked to generate predictions before they read, make connections to the text as they read, write down questions the author leaves them with, make inferences, visualize, determine the main idea, particularly what they author is trying to tell their audience, and summarize what the author is saying and how they are accomplishing their goal. I will use these strategies in reading the short-story "All Summer in a Day" and it will tie into the teacher modeling strategy.

Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers are a visual tool that helps display the relationship amongst facts and ideas. It allows the content to become easier to break down because you are able to categorize related information and it becomes more visually organized and comprehensible. For the unit, we will use graphic organizers to help with planning our final writing piece that corresponds with the novel.

Classroom Activities

I designed the curriculum unit to have two collaborative activities that introduce and teach my students the skill I want to address. Overall, the goals of the unit are to teach my students to be analytical thinkers of texts and draw conclusions about the author's motives in creating the text in specific ways. We will be practicing these skills using the science-fiction short story "All Summer in a Day". The activities used will lead into the

activities for our novel unit of study where the class will read the historical fiction novel *The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis.

Unit Enduring Understanding: Define and explain what the author's purpose is for writing a text and their reasoning for using alternate realities to make their point

Unit Essential Question: Why is the created "reality" more effective for the audience?

Activity One: Fictional vs. the real Venus

Objective:

1. Students will cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

Do Now/Introduction: Give each student a copy of the KWL Chart (Appendix B). Have students complete the 'K' and the 'W' sections about what they know/questions they have about the planet Venus. For now, instruct students to leave the 'L' section blank. After each student has written down their individual thoughts, have students Think-Pair-Share where they will share their ideas they wrote with a partner and compare. If their partner addressed new issues they need to include this on their chart.

Activity: Each student will be given their own paper-copy of Ray Bradbury's "All Summer in a Day". As a group, we will listen to the audio of the story "All Summer in a Day". The story is twenty-one minutes in length. As the story is being read aloud, students are to "talk to the text" or annotate. As the students listen to the story, they need to highlight details the author includes about the setting. Once we have finished listening to the story, students will need to complete the left side of the chart on Appendix C by writing down the descriptions they highlighted into the left side of the chart. Allow students 10 to 15 minutes to complete activity and then share answers as a class. Second, students will be required to read a short reading excerpt entitled "Venus" by Sharon Fabian. Fabian writes a weather broadcast highlighting the conditions of Venus, sharing the facts about the planet's uninhabitable atmosphere and conditions. Using this reading, students will complete the right side of the chart on Appendix C.

Summative Assessment: Students will need to address these questions using the RARE format text-based response model. Following the rubric shown in Appendix D, these questions will be graded as a two point response and a four-point response. Students are required to cite textual information as their support for their answers:

- Why do you think Bradbury changed the facts or reality of the setting of Venus to tell his story?
- Was this route more effective or interesting to you as the reader? Explain your thoughts citing evidence from the text.

Activity Two: Ray Bradbury vs. S Murdock Donaldson and Ed Kaplan's interpretation of the story

Objectives:

1. Compare and contrast the experience of reading a story, drama, or poem to listening or viewing an audio, video, or live version of the text, including contrasting what they "see" and "hear" when reading the text to what they perceive when they listen or watch.

Introduction/Do Now: Have students address the following questions in their journal:

- What is the lesson Bradbury wanted us to learn through his story?
- What aspects are realistic that makes the purpose more meaningful?
- Why do you think Ray Bradbury chose this setting to tell his story/relay the message about bullying?

Allow 5 to 10 minutes for students to reflect upon their answers. Ask for volunteers to share their answers.

Activity: Students will watch the film interpretation of "All Summer in a Day". The film is thirty-minutes in length. While watching the film, students will complete a Venn diagram comparing the film version to the written version of the story. They will need to list both similarities and the differences between the two interpretations.

Summative Assessment: Students will need to address this question using the RARE format text-based response model:

- Which author was more effective in telling the story: writer Ray Bradbury or director Ed Kaplan? State your opinion using two different examples and comparisons. You need to cite specific evidence from either the text or film seen in class.

Students have will receive a copy of these primary trait rubrics that I use to grade their responses. This question is considered to be a four-point response.

Activity 3: Analyzing the author's decisions and our reactions and personal connections

Novel Unit Enduring Understanding: What was the author's purpose for writing this story?

Objectives:

1. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research
2. Identify aspects of the text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose

Introduction: Together as a group we will read a biography and an interview held with the author Christopher Paul Curtis. As we read, students need to write down any questions they have for the author on their copy of the interview. I'll ask students to share what questions they have and ask for them to keep them close at hand. We will refer back to this interview/biography once we have concluded the novel. Students will use the interview to address the conclusions questions listed on Appendix E.

Activities:

Part A: Journal Entries and Reflections: As we read the novel, students will be required to keep a journal. In the journal, students are asked to write a reflection based on each chapter; there are fifteen chapters total. These are the journal requirements that will be presented to students:

- A journal response is complete if you write more than half of one page.
- You may hand a journal in late only the next school day after it is due.

- Late journal responses count only for half credit.

- If you handed in your journal on time and a topic comes back to you with an "incomplete" written on it, you can add to or re-write that topic. If you write more than half a page, it will be given a check that counts for half credit.

Students will be given questions asking them to critique the author's decisions and their reactions to the characters and events. Appendix E lists all the journal questions students will reflect on while reading the text. Along with the proposed questions, students need to write their connections to the text. These connections are to be text-to-self, text-to-text and text-to world types of connections.

Part B: *Four Little Girls* Documentary

After finishing the novel, we will watch Spike Lee's documentary entitled *Four Little Girls*. The students will watch and listen to first-hand accounts about the bombing of the church in Birmingham. Director Spike Lee interviews family members, friends, and news reporters that witnessed the event and knew the victims. After watching the documentary, students will then critique Curtis on his approach to writing about the bombing. Students will address the following questions:

- Why do you think Curtis created the event in this way?

- Why use Kenny as the narrator?

- What circumstances did Curtis change to incorporate into his story? Why do you think he made these changes?

Summative Assessment: Students will be required to write a five-paragraph essay using their reflections written in their journals about the questions and personal connections they made. Students will need to cite specific evidence in the essay as a part of their answer.

Directions to students: You will be required to write a letter to author Christopher Paul Curtis following the format of a five-paragraph essay. You will need to address the following points in the letter:

Paragraph One:

- Introduce yourself to the author and why you have read the novel

Paragraph Two:

- Explain the personal connections you had to the novel.

Paragraph Three:

- Your critique of the novel in which you share your likes and dislikes of the story

1. Which character—Byron or Kenny—did you find more relatable?

2. Which events of the story did you find more interesting or do you think could have turned out differently?

Paragraph Four:

- Critique Curtis on his choices that shaped the novel.

1. Was the story more effective being told from Kenny's point of view?
2. Did Curtis perform well in writing about an event of the past?

Paragraph Five:

- Final conclusions and lessons you are walking away with after reading the novel

Teacher Resources

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Zunshine, Lisa. "Conclusion: Authors Meet Their Readers." In *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006. 159-162

Appendices

Appendix A: Common Core Standards

CC6RL1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CC6RL2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

CC6RL7: Compare and contrast the experience of reading a story, drama, or poem to listening or viewing an audio, video, or live version of the text, including contrasting what they "see" and "hear" when reading the text to what they perceive when they listen or watch.

CC6RL9: Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres (e.g. stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories) in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics

CC6I6: Identify aspects of the text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose

Appendix B: KWL Chart

Topic: Venus

K- What I Already Know

W-What I Want to Know

L-What I Learned- Were my questions answered?

| K | W | L |
|----------|----------|----------|
| | | |

Appendix C: Worksheet to compare the setting of story to the real Venus

| Venus according to story | Venus according to factual scientific evidence |
|---------------------------------|---|
| | |

Appendix D: RARE format text-based response rubric (both 4pt and 2pt)

RARE Format- Extended Response Question (4pts.)

| |
|---|
| 4 EXCEPTIONAL ACHIEVEMENT |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restates the question as a part of their first sentence; sentence does not start with a pronoun • Gives a clear answer to the question as a part of the first sentence • Their reason uses specific information from the textbook such as a quote or paraphrases a statement as a part of the support for their answer • Their support is appropriate, relevant to their answer • Have a conclusion sentence tying information together • Good use of transitions and organization |
| 3 GOOD ACHIEVEMENT |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restates the question as a part of their first sentence; does not start with a pronoun • Gives an answer to the question • Reasons given paraphrase information from the text • Support is appropriate but not thoroughly explained or unclear • Attempts to use transitions and but answer is still organized • No conclusion present or answer just ends |
| 2 LIMITED ACHIEVEMENT |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not restate question; sentence starts with a pronoun • Gives an answer to the question • Gives a reason but does not have evidence from the text to support their answer • Doesn't uses transitions and answer is not organized (doesn't flow properly) • No conclusion present or answer just ends |
| 1 MINIMAL ACHIEVEMENT |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not restate the question; sentence begins with a pronoun • Support is irrelevant, not appropriate or not present as a part in addressing the question • No conclusion present or answer just ends • No attempt at organization or use of transitions |

RARE Format- Short Answer Question (2pt.)

| |
|--|
| 2 EXCEPTIONAL ACHIEVEMENT |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restates the question as a part of their first sentence; sentence does not start with a pronoun • Gives a clear answer to the question as a part of the first sentence • Their reason uses specific information from the textbook such as a quote or paraphrases a statement as a part of the support for their answer • Their support is appropriate, relevant to their answer • Good use of transitions and organization |
| 1 GOOD ACHIEVEMENT |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restates the question as a part of their first sentence; gives an answer • Support is appropriate but not thoroughly explained or unclear • Attempts to use transitions and but answer is still organized • No conclusion present or answer just ends |
| 0 MINIMAL ACHIEVEMENT |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not restate the question; sentence begins with a pronoun • Support is irrelevant, not appropriate or not present as a part in addressing the question • No conclusion present or answer just ends • No attempt at organization or use of transitions |

Appendix E: Journal Questions for the novel *Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963*

Ch.1: And You Wonder Why We Get Called the Weird Watsons

- How does the author establish an immediate connection to the characters?
- Why do you think Curtis chose this setting? What interesting language does he use to describe the setting; does this make it more believable?

Ch 2: Give My Regards to Clark, Point Dexter

- How does Curtis establish a connection to reality through the dynamics of the various students Kenny goes to school with?
- What kind of relationship does Kenny have with his brother Byron?

Ch3: The World's Greatest Dinosaur War Ever

- Why is Kenny hesitant to hang out with Rufus?
- Does Curtis use any 'truth' in this chapter? Why do you think he adds this event to the story?

Ch 4: Froze-up Southern Folks

- How does the author make you sympathize for Larry Dunn? What lesson can we take away from this?

Ch 5: Nazi Parachutes Attack America and Get Shot Down Over Flint River by Captain Byron Watson and his Flamethrower of Death

- Do you think Momma was too harsh with her punishment towards Byron?

- Have you ever been punished by your parents? What happened?

Ch 6: Swedish Crèmes and Welfare Cheese

- Why do you think Curtis included this incident with Byron? It goes against what we believe about him as a character.

Ch7: Every Chihuahua in America Lines Up to Take a Bite Out of Byron

- A 'conk' was a fashion trend prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s. What fashion trends do you see people following today?

- Why do you think Curtis included this chapter?

Ch8: The Ultra Glide

- How does the author demonstrate the relationship Kenny has with his father?

- Why do you think Kenny is so eager to grow a mustache?

Ch9: The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963

- Have you ever been on a long trip that requires planning? Explain your trip if so.

Ch10: Tangled Up in God's Beard

- Why do you think Curtis chose to describe the mountains in this way?

Ch11: Bobo Brazil Meets the Shiek

- Have you traveled far to meet relatives? Can you relate to Kenny's feelings?

- Were you surprised by Byron's behavior when he met Grandma Sands?

Ch12: The Dog that Won't Hunt No More

- Why do you think Curtis included this chapter?

Ch13: I Meet Winnie's Evil Twin Brother: the Wool Pooh

- Does Curtis leave you with any questions after you have finished reading the chapter?

Ch14: Every Bird and Bug in Birmingham Stops and Wonders

- Summarize the events that happened according to Kenny

Ch15: The World Famous Watson Pet Hospital

- What is the reasoning Byron gives to Kenny to what happened in Birmingham?

- Can we take what Byron says and apply it to our own lives?

Conclusions:

- Many novels do not have titles for each chapter. How was this fitting for Curtis to do? Would you change any of the titles?
- Does Curtis do an effective job teaching you about an incident of the past, especially one that happened over forty years ago?
- Referring back to the interview and biography of the author, why do you think Curtis incorporated his background information into the novel (setting details, traveling down South)?

Endnotes

1. Annie Murphy Paul, *New York Times*, Your Brain on Fiction.
2. Annie Murphy Paul, *New York Times*, Your Brain on Fiction.
3. Annie Murphy Paul, *New York Times*, Your Brain on Fiction.
4. Victor Nell, Introduction, *Lost in a Book: The Psychology of Reading for Pleasure*, 2.
5. Victor Nell, Ch. 3, *Lost in a Book: The Psychology of Reading a Book for Pleasure*, 56.
6. Richard Wright, Part I, *Black Boy*, 35.
7. Robert Hemingway, Introduction, *Mules and Men*, xii.
8. Suzanne Keen, Ch. 6, *Empathy and the Novel*, 124.
9. Victor Nell, Ch. 4, *Lost in a Book: The Psychology of Reading for Pleasure*, 57.
10. Suzanne Keen, Ch. 3, *Empathy and the Novel*, 93-94.

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