Engaging students with college-level texts

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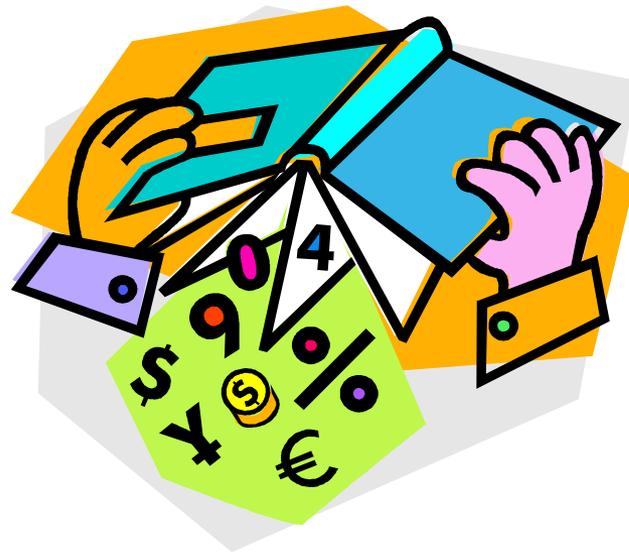
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But, I don't teach reading, or do I?

"If students cannot read close to grade level, the biology textbook, the math problems, the history documents, the novel—all will be beyond them."

-- <u>The Toolbox Revisited</u>
   U.S. Dept. of Education 2006

The condition – what we know

- Only about 50% of our nation's ACT-tested high school students are ready for college level reading (ACT, 2006).
- Low literacy levels often prevent students from mastering other subjects (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2002).
- Eleven (11%) percent of students entering postsecondary school are enrolled in remedial reading coursework (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003).
- Seventy (70%) of those who took one or more remedial reading courses do not attain a college degree or certificate within eight (8) years of enrollment (Adelman, 2004)

- The ACT data show that … the clearest differentiator in reading between students who are college ready and students who are not is the ability to comprehend COMPLEX texts (ACT, 2006).
- A complex text can be described with respect to the following 6 aspects (RSVP): relationships, richness, structure, style, vocabulary, purpose

So what can we do?
Strategies for engaging students to maintain interest in reading

- Provide a variety of challenge in the readings selected for the class
- Take time to introduce students to the type of reading expected in your class
- Discuss strategies and introduce and model "tools" that facilitate effective reading.
- Encourage students to use the "tools" on their own.

Pre-reading Tool #1 Anticipation Guide

An Anticipation Guide activates prior knowledge and set purposes for reading.

Directions:

1) Write 6 to 10 statements regarding the topic or a section of the reading your students will be doing.

2) Students indicate with a check or +/- their level of agreement.

3) Engage in discussion around the statements and ask students to support their rationale for selection or challenge others' selections.

FIGURE 6.9 — Anticipation Guide for Preconceived Notions About Trigonometry

Directions: Put a check under "Likely" if you believe that the statement has any mathematical truth. Put a check under "Unlikely" if you believe that it has no mathematical truth. Be ready to explain your choices.

Likely	Unlikely	
_____	_____	Trigonometry deals with circles.
_____	_____	Angles have little importance in trigonometry.
_____	_____	Sailors use trigonometry in navigation.
_____	_____	Angles can be measured only in degrees.
_____	_____	Calculators are useless in trigonometry.
_____	_____	Trigonometry deals with triangles.
_____	_____	Trigonometry has no application in the real world.
_____	_____	Radians are used in measuring central angles.
_____	_____	Trigonometry has scientific uses.
_____	_____	Radians can be converted to degrees.

FIGURE 6.10 — Anticipation Guide for *Night*

Directions: Read each of the following statements and, in the Before Reading column, place a plus (+) if you agree with the statement and a minus (–) if you disagree. Be prepared to support your responses during our class discussion. Later, after learning about the Holocaust, you'll complete the After Reading column to see if any of your initial responses have changed. You'll be asked to discuss why you confirmed or changed your ideas from your before-reading responses.

Before Reading	Statement	After Reading
	The Holocaust took place only in Germany.	
	The Jews had plenty of time to escape so they could have avoided being sent to a concentration camp.	
	Jews were targeted because of their religion.	
	Other countries did not know what was happening to the Jews.	
	People in concentration camps were only killed if they broke a law.	
	Life in the concentration camps wasn't so bad for those who were too old or too young to work.	
	Survivors of the Holocaust just want to forget about what happened.	
	Jews were the only target of Hitler and the Nazis.	
	The Holocaust took place between WWI and WWII.	
	The term *Holocaust* was developed by the Jewish prisoners while they were at the camps.	

Pre-reading Tool #2 Probable Passage

The teacher selects a set of 8 to 15 key terms from the piece to be read. Working in small groups, students place the terms in categories the teacher has established. Each group creates a "gist statement" which they predict will summarize the reading. Finally, students list ideas or concepts they hope to discover as a result of words they did not understand or questions that were inspired by the process.

SAMPLE

Ways of representing numbers
40
VI
decimal

Types of numbers
Even or odd
Whole numbers
Integers

How they work
hundreds, thousands
place value
addition, substraction
multiplication

How they're used
clocks
age
calendar
counting

Unknown words
rational
exponential
abundant number
deficient

# During Reading
Strategy #1 Coding Text

A quick way for students to become conscious and to record mental responses to other reading is to use a simple coding system.

If we want deeper thinking, we need to provide mechanisms for doing it.

√ confirms what you thought

X contradicts what you thought

? Puzzles you

?? Confuses you

* Strikes you as very important

⟶ Is new or interesting to you

During Reading Strategy #2 Double-Entry Journals

Also called the Cornell system, students take notes in two columns with a vertical line down the middle of each page – one column is for summarizing important ideas and the other is to write down their own thoughts and responses – questions, confusions, reflections, etc.
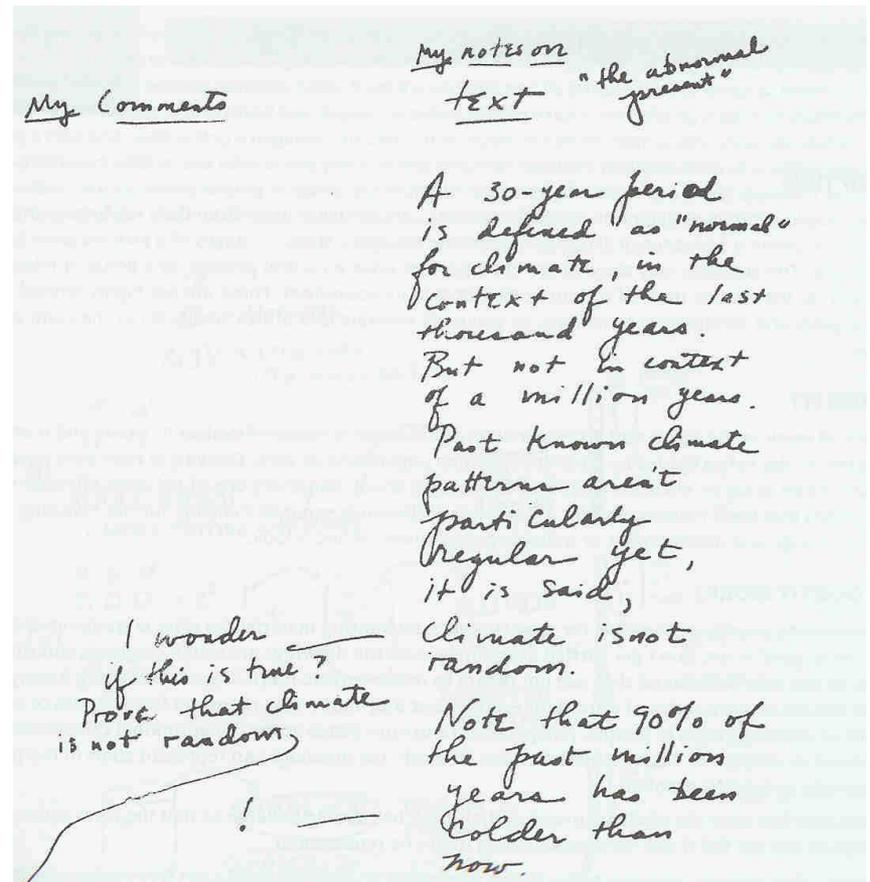
Post Reading
Strategy #1 Three level Comprehension Guides

A three-level guide provides the framework in which students can interact with different texts at different levels on comprehension.

3 levels:

1) literal -reading the lines,

2) interpretive - reading between the lines,

3) applied - reading beyond the lines

I. *Directions:* Check the statements that you believe say what the author says. Sometimes, the exact words are used; at other times, other words may be used.

_____ 1. The Germans discovered the fossilized remnants of the Neanderthal man and the Heidelberg man.

_____ 2. Charles Dawson found a human skull in a gravel pit in Piltdown Common, Sussex.

_____ 3. Charles Dawson was a professional archaeologist.

_____ 4. The fossil, labeled *Eoanthropus dawsoni,* became known as the Piltdown man.

_____ 5. The discovery of the Piltdown man was acclaimed as an important archaeological find.

_____ 6. Dental evidence regarding the Piltdown man was ignored.

II. *Directions:* Check the statements that you believe represent the author's *intended* meaning.

_____ 1. The English scientific community felt left out because important fossils had been found in other countries.

_____ 2. Good scientific practices were ignored by the people working with the Piltdown fossils.

_____ 3. Many scientists said that Piltdown was important because they wanted England to be important.

_____ 4. Dawson wanted to make himself famous, so he constructed a hoax.

III. *Directions:* Check the statements you agree with, and be ready to support your choices with ideas from the text and your own knowledge and beliefs.

_____ 1. Competition in scientific research may be dangerous.

_____ 2. Scientists, even good ones, can be fooled by poorly constructed hoaxes.

_____ 3. People often see only what they want to see.

_____ 4. A scientific "fact" is not always correct simply because many scientists believe strongly in it; theories are always open to question.

Post reading
Strategy #2 Post-it Response Notes

Do students look back after a half hour of reading to realize they have no idea what they just read?

Tracking and returning to important spots in our reading is something that all competent readers do...

How does it work?

- Give directions about what students should watch for as they read, and what to write in the notes:

  For example ,say: *"Place sticky notes at any spots where you were confused and write a few words or phrases on them to explain your confusion or question? Also place notes at points where the information surprised you and explain how your thinking was changed."*

- To assess: ask students to place the page # on each note and then to transfer the notes to a separate sheet of paper with their name on it.

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