

360 DEGREES OF TEXT

*Using Poetry
to Teach Close Reading
and Powerful Writing*

EILEEN MURPHY BUCKLEY

Yusef Komunyakaa, "Facing It" from *Pleasure Dome: New and Collected Poems*
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Manuscript Editor: Jane M. Curran

Production Editor: Bonny Graham

Interior Design: Doug Burnett

Cover Design: Pat Mayer

Cover Image: iStockphoto.com/Raycat

NCTE Stock Number: 60237

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Buckley, Eileen Murphy, 1970–

360 degrees of text : using poetry to teach close reading and powerful writing /

Eileen Murphy Buckley.

p. cm. — (Theory and research into practice (TRIP) series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8141-6023-7 ((pbk))

1. Language arts (Elementary) 2. Language arts (Secondary) 3. Language experience approach in education. 4. Children—Language. I. National Council of Teachers of English. II. Title. III. Title: Three hundred sixty degrees of text. IV. Title: Three hundred and sixty degrees of text.

LB1576.B8825 2011

372.6'044—dc23

2011033374

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I Theory and Research

1 A Research Base for the 360-Degree Approach

And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche

—Geoffrey Chaucer

Why Teach Students to Describe the Meaning of Texts?

Before I explain the 360-degree approach to teaching close reading and powerful writing, I think it is important for me to explain why I think it is our job in the first place. Simply put, as English teachers we have to empower all our students to use texts to construct and represent meaning skillfully, because by every measure, it gives them a better chance at having a better life. In addition to these very practical concerns, good education is and ought to be about thinking, and successful students are engaged in thinking about texts. No matter where one stands in the spectrum of education stakeholders, everyone, from the staunchest conservatives to the most radical progressives, believes that critical literacy is one thing that ought to be nurtured. Even our most high-stakes sorting mechanisms, which sometimes seem to have taken over, reward critical literacy. College and career readiness by many definitions, including the Common Core State Standards, is in large part measured by one's ability to make meaning of complex texts and create fluent, evidence-based arguments about them (Common Core). By engaging students effectively with rich texts that challenge them to do increasingly more complex cognitive work, we help students become more skilled at getting more out of texts. We help them become more astute and autonomous sense makers and more fluent and sophisticated claim makers.

In this book I offer ideas about how students might become more skilled in constructing and representing meaning for personal and academic purposes through effective engagement with rich sample texts (in this case, poems) and fruit-bearing cognitive tasks (performance, creative writing, and traditional academic reading and writing, such as explication and debate.) The 360-degree approach to textual analysis helps teachers instill intellectual values by engaging students with big ideas about which they may already be concerned and showing them the meaningful results of that engagement through close reading and academic writing. I believe that by matching the text to the task we can show students the fruits of their intellectual labors more quickly, thereby encouraging them

to continue practicing these intellectual moves on increasingly diverse and complex texts.

In developing the 360-degree approach to independent textual power, I have focused on developing procedural and metacognitive knowledge—the skills, techniques, and methods for reading challenging texts and moving beyond comprehension to critical analysis. The activities I suggest deliberately attend to the “how to understand or create text” but also one of the trickiest parts (in my experience) of teaching English, awareness of one’s own thinking in response to these tasks (Anderson and Krathwohl).

I have developed this scope and sequence as a result of thinking for years about a few questions: Which skills are most valuable for constructing and representing meaning in all kinds of texts? How can I break that desirable skill or set of skills into engaging moves or strategies students can practice over and over again until they become automatic? When that strategy is employed, which text will yield fruit that kids want to eat? In other words, does this text with this task give me an opportunity to promote textual power, metacognitive awareness, and intellectual values?

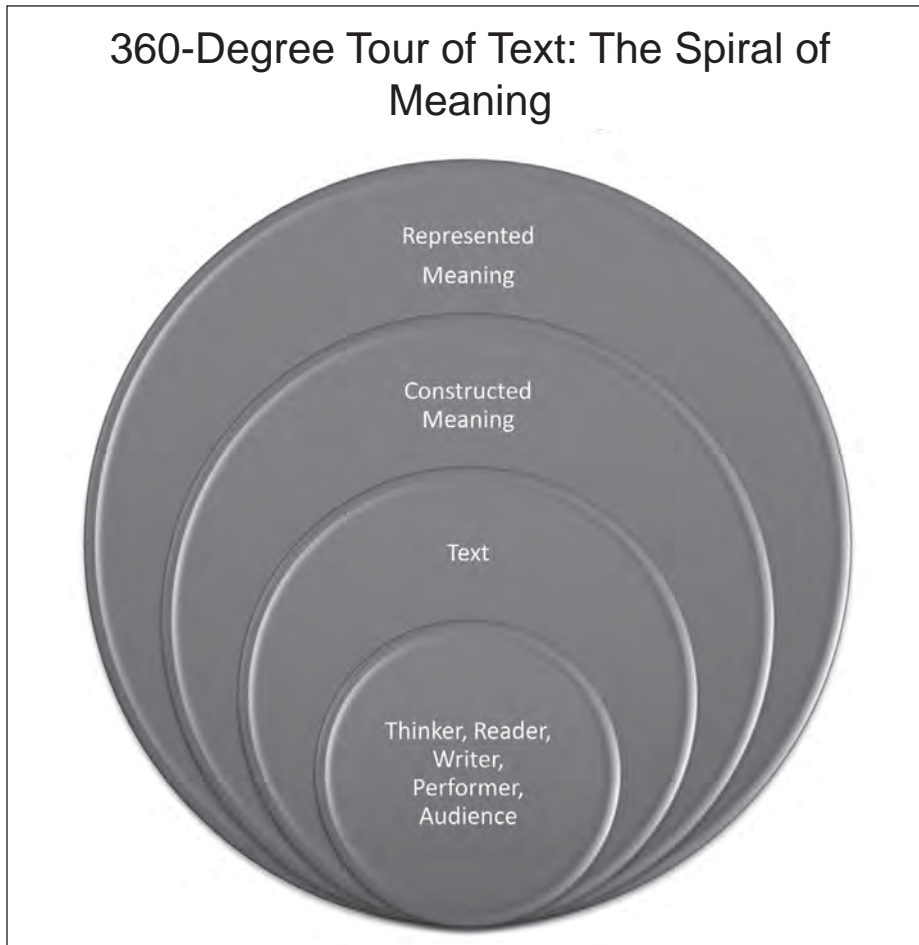
We sometimes aren’t successful at engaging students, no matter how hard we try. But we have to try hard if, ultimately, we want students to get excited about text and their own textual power. I hope to increase the odds of this gamble by offering an engaging and fruitful 360-degree tour.

What Is the 360-Degree Approach?

The 360-degree approach allows students to gain textual power by exploring and creating engaging, complex texts by spiraling back to their own work as meaning makers as they read / view / hear, discuss, perform, and write texts of all kinds. Exploiting heightened student engagement and the unique cognitive fruits of performance, creative writing, and argument / debate activities, the approach carefully scaffolds and supports the exploration of text from the inside out, allowing students to see how the choices of artists and academic authors contribute to meaning.

Independence is what we want our students to achieve, so autonomy is what we need to support. Along the 360-degree tour, students investigate texts through a full spectrum of learning modalities until they find a range of strategies for approaching texts that work well for them. In addition to a variety of learning strategies, I advocate a variety of autonomy-supportive instructional modes: “I do it” to “we do it together” to “you do it together” and, finally, to “you do it alone” (Ivey and Fisher 13).

Strategies, from performance games to templates for thinking aloud to peer workshops, help students practice and understand the cognitive



processes involved in constructing and representing meaning. These strategies ultimately work to take some of the mystery out of analytical reading, thinking, and writing, allowing teachers to gradually release responsibility for textual analysis and claim making to their students.

My ultimate hope is that eventually when your students ask, “How did you get that?” they will be challenging your interpretation, not wondering about the mysterious functions of the English teacher’s mind.

How Templates Support Autonomy

To some, templates and autonomy may sound like contradictory terms. But the templates I advocate in the 360-degree approach support autonomy by scaffolding and supporting the processes (as well as some of the

verbal fluency) involved in constructing and representing textual meaning to others. In order for students to develop a procedural knowledge of how to gather meaning from texts, they need a vocabulary for describing the metacognitive processes that lead to meaning. Furthermore, making evidence-based claims about text requires a special kind of academic fluency that becomes more comfortable with experience.

This template approach works like training wheels. Instead of simultaneously learning all the moves involved in riding a bike, training wheels allow a rider to overcome a fear of falling long enough to enjoy the pleasures of moving forward faster and faster and steering the bike in the direction the rider wants to go. Like training wheels, the templates help students concentrate on automatizing certain meaning-making moves. Each template scaffolds toward the ultimate act of independence, constructing and representing meaning in the mode of their choice and articulating it with confidence to another reader.

Today, unlike our kindergarten selves who concentrated all our efforts on decoding letter sounds, we make meaning of all sorts of texts all day long, without even realizing we are reading text. The step-by-step process that led you from decoder to comprehender to analyst isn't as simple to chart as the steps in acquiring phonemic awareness, yet today when you read a literary text, you visualize to comprehend, make personal connections with the text, connect the text to other texts, and connect the text to the world, often without thinking about it. Frequently, as an experienced reader and analyst, you are unlikely to think much about *how* you were able to make these connections, unless you are challenged by another reader or are reading a more challenging text, in which case you stop yourself and reflect on the text and your thinking until you have validated the evidence to support a certain meaning. Your teachers, your literary apprenticeship, and many years of reading led you to this point. Providing explicit experiences like these is what we must do for our students, since so often young readers don't just pick it up on their own.

This tour provides a sort of charted path for your students, as spiraling as it may be, to help students understand explicitly how to make the smart moves that are often intimidating to novice readers.

Some of our students may still be struggling to decode the meaning of new words or to visualize, and most of our students have not yet reached a level of automaticity in connecting with texts on a variety of levels to make interpretive claims about literary texts. These templates offer students a support that helps them break these processes into smaller steps until each step becomes more or less automatic.

How Templates Scaffold toward Academic Writing

Far from being restrictive, the templates, when used well, can work like idea machines that help students generate thoughts about texts. These templates came from one of the practical realities of teaching English: the teacher's inability to sit with every student long enough, prompting them to explain: "What makes you think that? Why? Tell me more, tell me more."

Think-Aloud Prompts (handouts 1.C and 5.B in the appendix) raise student awareness of how master readers respond to and interact with textual choices, making explicit the process by which readers take text *in* and make meaning. What comes *out* during think-aloud is what happened in the reader's brain, something that sounds like, "This makes me picture . . ." This metacognitive practice supports automaticity by giving students, including English language learners (ELLs), many informal opportunities to talk descriptively and analytically with others about the effect of certain elements of texts and to hash out meaning before being asked to write formally. These templates also reinforce the values of inquiry and evidence that are the heart and soul of academic argument.

In the imitative writing stage, additional Think-Aloud Prompts help students notice more advanced features of the text, such as form and technique, as well as pattern and variation, awareness of which are essential to making larger claims about text. In conjunction with the Key Terms handouts (1.B and 5.A in the appendix), students begin to develop the habits and vocabulary they need to describe texts for formal academic purposes.

In the workshop phase, students take the next step, making descriptive claims about peer-authored works. Using the Workshop Templates (handout 5.E in the appendix), students learn to make claim statements that state the effect of authorial choices. The language of the template is still familiar and informal, but the template itself reflects the constituent parts of formal claims. Students practice speaking of text in terms of authors making choices. In this case, they are using peer authors as live sounding boards. "When you did X, it made me picture X, because when most people think of X, they think X. When you said X, I thought you meant X," and so on.

The final set of templates helps students analyze text for academic writing and compose formal academic claims. The Describing Text Templates (handout 9.E in the appendix) help students formalize the language they use to make claims, prompting them to articulate explicitly, formally, and more elegantly the reasoning behind their claims. Similar

to the underlying format of the claims used in the Workshop Templates, the students' sentences focus on their interpretation of an author's choice. To put it simply, students deepen and formalize their thinking about texts powerfully on paper: "The image suggests X."

The Describing Text Templates also help students prepare to write formal explications by facilitating more critical interactions with samples of the kind of writing we ask them to produce. Having students use the templates as a lens through which they can understand academic writing helps them approach some of the intimidating features of such writing with less anxiety and helps them master the language of the pros more readily. Obviously, repeated practice in describing texts in the language of the pros prepares students to read professional scholarship, while reading professional scholarship, in turn, prepares students to write it more adeptly.

Why Use Poetry to Help Students Develop Textual Power?

In short: poetry is rich, ornate, and compact. But that's not all.¹

Unfortunately, students have had bad experiences with poetry. Many teachers themselves have had bad experiences with poetry as students. As a result, some say, they avoid poetry, confessing that they don't feel comfortable dealing with poetry. I've never heard any English teacher say such things about novels or any other whole genre, but poetry has often been written about and talked about in ways that make it seem difficult.

I believe poetry is one of the most nourishing ways to nurture the omnivorous young reader. To that end, I have tried to spell out simple, pleasurable ways of approaching poetry while helping students develop skills they can use in any genre.

After all, the signs that students respond well to poetry are all around us. Youth culture, from lyrics scribbled on notebook covers and poems "spit" from the stages of poetry slams, gives ample evidence that adolescents find poetry inspiring and intellectually engaging, perhaps even necessary in their own self-exploration and self-expression. They really are ready to appreciate the beauty of its formal elements and, in my experience, are often delighted when they are challenged to do so.

What Makes Performance an Effective Approach to Teaching Close Reading?

Performance can be a route to genuine engagement and rigor. And to those experiences, every student has a right. Research shows that an oral

interpretation approach to literary texts increases comprehension, reading rates, and literary appreciation. Done frequently enough and well enough, I believe, poetry performance assignments can help increase the overall academic achievement and cultural literacy of the reader / performer and his or her audience. Jeffrey Wilhelm, a leading researcher in the area, argues that because it is action-oriented and participatory, performance-based strategies “begin with and are driven by student interests, by what they already know and find significant and by what is socially relevant” (*Action Strategies* 11). As Wilhelm notes, whether it is a group performance or a recitation, the intrinsic social quality of performance capitalizes on Vygotsky’s idea that all learning is social.

The unique level of engagement in text that performance requires often motivates students to practice the habits of expert readers, effective reading strategies that transfer across the curriculum. “Performing a poem, using the whole body with limbs, facial expression, and voice, requires students to go farther in understanding a poem than does strip-mining poems for technical terms” (Ellis, Ruggles Gere, and Lamberton 46). As they rehearse, students use repeated rereading for comprehension, recall prior knowledge to make personal connections to the text, monitor and test assumptions, and sometimes entertain conflicting interpretations of text. “Dramatic expression is evidence of the internal construction of literary meaning and the reader’s perception of the act of the reading” (Ortleib, Cramer, and Cheek). Repeated practice with these strategies promotes increased confidence in meaning making and a heightened awareness of author’s craft.

“Oral interpretation can serve as a site for thinking about what meanings writers communicate, as well as how interpreters become communicators” (Banks 51). Students begin to connect texts to their personal experiences as they think about how to use their own bodies and voices to make the experience of the speaker visible to others. First, students are genuinely constructing meaning. They are figuring out what the speaker of a poem is saying. Then, they have to perform the closest of readings to determine how the text cues them to represent this meaning by visualizing facial expressions and gestures, as well as imagining the voices of the speakers they will embody.

In “*You Gotta BE the Book*,” Wilhelm cites research that indicates that the “the ability to use imagery is a central difference between good and poor readers” (118). The visualization strategies we teach to poor readers and assume are part of the good readers’ repertoire are authentically prompted by performance. Additionally, students are thinking about how the meaning of this speaker’s words should shape their tone of voice,

facial expressions, volume, and body language, among other things, in performance. Simply put, when students are charged with communicating interpretation, they are motivated to explore and communicate the meaning of text in much deeper, more imaginative ways. This kind of practice at the meaning level of a poem is one of the richest experiences in critical literacy we can provide for our students. More importantly, these activities can be a source of absolute delight, which is truly valuable in promoting academic success for all students.

Just like actors, as students attempt to embody the speaker in a poem, they are motivated to perform authentic rereadings, monitoring and testing their own process of meaning making. "Repeated readings become rehearsals, and those rehearsals before their peers and an eventual performance provide the incentive to practice reading the same passage repeatedly" (Goodson and Goodson 26). Goodson and Goodson's work shows increased test scores among participating students, suggesting that increased levels of engagement with the text, resulting from performance activities, motivated students to find pleasure in literature, read more, and read faster and better than before.

The challenge of preparing for performance results in more serious attention to author's craft as well. Students explore the "elasticity of the words, to appreciate how different readings of the same lines can be supported by the text," as English teacher and NCTE author John S. O'Connor notes (99). He adds, "It is more difficult to discern subtext when reading than when seeing an actor perform, since the actor's facial expressions, gestures, and vocal inflections help draw subtextual material to the surface." For the performer, the process of constructing a performance requires a close examination of subtext and provides genuine motivation for entertaining conflicting interpretations of text (Goodson and Goodson 29). More than an academic essay or even a classroom discussion, performance for an audience or ensemble of peers authentically compels students to hash out various interpretations of texts as they make performance choices. Inviting students to have those debates through performance is a wonderful way to engage students meaningfully in the same cognitive work performed in evidence-based argumentation, the very basis of scholarship across the curriculum.

Performance strategies for teaching poetry can help English teachers do what they do best: everything at once. As English teacher and author Judy Rowe Michaels notes,

When we move on [after performances] to writing a more traditional and analytical essay on a shorter contemporary poem, students have gained confidence in their ability to respond to a poem

personally, with their senses and imagination, to relate individual moments to the whole, to read closely but accept some ambiguities—in short, to make meaning. (53–54)

In addition to becoming authentic meaning-making readers, students have the opportunity, through recitation and other performances, to garner new language—beautiful, meaningful, and empowering language. After all, a great command of language is necessary in the same sense that college has become necessary. In the twenty-first century, everyone must engage in demanding and consequential communication activities within and without the walls of academia. To a certain extent, close reading, close listening, close viewing, and the deliberate articulation of complex ideas in complex situations are basic survival skills today. We need to deepen, expand, and increase the sophistication of our students' personal linguistic resources.

We teachers are responsible for giving our students the most important key to success in their adult lives: the key to literacy in their collegiate, professional, and personal lives. Whether communicating via technology or speaking in public, our students need guided practice in these skills. What better, more pleasurable way than literature out loud? In sharing the pleasures of poems, we give students meaningful experiences with artful language, self-expression, emotional and intellectual insight, and perhaps even the empathy and reassurance poetry can offer in navigating their complex lives. Performances are substantive ways to address reading, writing, listening, and speaking standards that were written in recognition of these facts.

Perhaps the most compelling piece of research I have to offer in favor of a particular kind of performance, recitation, is based on the work of a historian at the University of Rochester. In her book *Songs of Ourselves: The Uses of Poetry in America*, Joan Shelley Rubin includes a study of the legacy of poetry recitation assignments. Her data were the nearly five hundred letters she received in response to a query in the *New York Review of Books*. Her research examined the lasting effects of poetry recitation assignments in schools between 1917 and 1950.

Letters reflected the innumerable and surprising effects of this once commonly assigned school activity. Nearly all of the respondents shared positive stories of how the assignment enriched their lives. Notably, those who shared negative experiences attributed their distaste to the way in which the assignment was presented by their teacher, rather than the assignment itself.

Recitation assignments were common at the time for many reasons. In addition to the academic benefits of practicing memorization or public

speaking, students were encouraged to recite as a means of acquiring appreciation of other technical elements. "Several respondents also testified that they attained the aesthetic benefits that teachers ascribed to the recitation, explicitly mentioning rhythm, sound, and imagery as a source of delight" (Rubin 149).

While I am the greatest advocate of introducing students to the pleasures of these aesthetics, what was more interesting to me was the overwhelming number of respondents who cited the more practical application of poetry in their lives. One woman said "Invictus" helped her "hold her head up when her father, 'a Jew in KKK land,' went to prison for a crime he did not commit" (Rubin 147). Others talked about the identification they felt with poets. One man wrote that he did not feel "alone or unique in my feelings . . . not a bad thing for a twelve year old boy to know" (148). According to these testimonies, the relief of these memorized poems was called upon from operating tables, boardrooms, desolate mining camps, and battlefields.

Some respondents also reported the electrifying effect the assignment and particular texts had upon whole families. One woman recalled her astonishment as a fourth grader struggling to memorize a poem, when her father "began saying the poem. And said it to the end. With feeling. That glimpse of continuity and linkage between my father and me has stayed with me these fifty-six years" (Rubin 153).

These incredible stories remind me of the great responsibility and privilege we have as English teachers. The voices of this research are the voices of our students speaking to us from the future, reminding us how important every minute and every text are, test or no test. As we strive to improve our students' chances of being successful in academia, we also have to remember why poetry and other forms of literature merited a place in academia in the first place. It matters universally. Poetry as an art form is common to every civilization because it matters to all human beings.

What Is the Best Way to Get Students Started with Performance?

I'm neither an actor nor a director; I am an English teacher. Yet, I have found myself modeling performance and asking students to perform ever since I began teaching. I have been lucky enough to attend a number of wonderful workshops presented by Chicago theaters and, through them and scholars such as Jeffrey Wilhelm, have learned that the best way to get started with performance is simply to get everyone performing and

to think of performing as playing. If everyone can commit to having fun and taking risks the way they would in a playground game, students and teachers can do amazing things in just a few minutes in any ad hoc performance space.

The Performance Plans

The sequence of poems in Chapter 2 comes with a step-by-step guide to introducing close reading strategies and performance methods that help students both construct and represent meaning. It helps students practice the fundamental moves of close reading by reading to prepare an embodiment of the imagined speaker. In addition to guidance on the close reading strategies students will need to prepare performances, I have built in a number of very simple trust-building and improvisation activities to equip students with tools that can be used to create both ad hoc and fully staged performances.

Starting with what students already know, their personal stories, students build a supportive environment by listening to each other and risking a moment of public sharing. After reading each of several poems, students have the opportunity to practice with key improvisational tools: silent sculpture, tableau, role-playing, and slide show. With these four tools alone, students have everything they need to begin staging great group performances of even the most complex texts. Recitation activities throughout the rest of the book build on the trust and knowledge of earlier group performances but place the onus of communicating meaning on the individual performer. The sections that follow provide my best general advice on using performance in the English classroom, gathered through nearly two decades of trial and error, along with a list of trusted resources on the subject.

Performance Space

If we want our students to play, we need a playground. If you are lucky enough to have an actual alternative space, great. If not, you just need to move the desks or go out into a hallway or a field. Any open space can be a performance space. For many initial activities, a circle within that open space works just fine. For more formal performances, you may want to set up a more formal space for an audience.

Warm-up

We all carry ourselves in certain ways that help us feel more confident or at least less vulnerable. Day to day, we practice keeping our distance

from each other, crossing our legs, folding our arms around a book, or averting our eyes. This physical armor has to go when we commit to playing. Physical theater games, even the hokey pokey, free the voice and the body from the defensive, nonperformer stance in which most of us live, and having fun together makes students feel safer about taking the risk of performing. Videos of all kinds of theater games are available online, but for quick reference, here are five of my favorite icebreakers:

- Give students one minute to *silently* group themselves by shoe type, then by height, then other categories (e.g., shoe color, shirt type, etc.).
- Have students sit with a partner and share a one-minute story about a gift they really, really wanted as a kid but never got or got and loved.
- Have pairs of students mime each other trying on clothes or washing a window.
- Have students silently stare at each other in the eyes for a full sixty seconds. Keep doing it until the whole class is successful. This is hard, but it goes a long way to breaking down our invisible barriers.
- Have each student enter a circle made by classmates sitting cross-legged on the floor and share a one-minute story of an emotionally intense moment (accompanied by a single, emblematic gesture). After five beats they leave the circle. (See Chapter 2, lesson 1 for further explanation of this technique.)

Ensemble Play

Give the performers time to play with a script as an ensemble. Encouraging play among equals, rather than assigning a director, gets students to engage in interpretation, perhaps even evidence-based argumentation about literary texts. Don't preempt it by giving the interpretive power over to one student director.

Physical Vocabulary

Physical vocabulary is a physical image or motion that represents an idea. For example, a fist is anger, pointing a finger is accusation, praying hands is reverence. Have students develop a physical vocabulary: a group or class agrees upon a few overarching themes or images from a text, creates a physical representation of each key idea, and, from the physical representations, weaves together an ensemble performance by representing the key ideas or themes physically. "Still I Rise" is a poem that plays upon the image of rising up against forces that would keep the speaker down, so the physical vocabulary—that is, the positions and

gestures of the ensemble members—might show highs and lows, rising and falling, force and resistance. Zeroing in on a key image is a great way for students to begin thinking about the coherency of various elements of a work centered on a particular theme. Later on, when you begin talking about claims, you might refer back to earlier physical vocabulary activities, reminding students that just as they were able to identify a major unifying image in performance, they will be learning to describe these unifying themes and images in writing.

In addition to practicing image analysis, students will also be more capable of recognizing and describing the impact of authorial choices when they see the impact of choice in performance. For example, the tempo of a performer's entrance to a stage has meaning, as does the tempo of a spoken line of text; the image of an actor in relation to a setting has meaning, as does the image conjured by words on a page. Connecting parts to the whole is the key.

Guidelines

Guidelines help students play better by challenging them to use a wider range of performance tools than they might have chosen on their own. Here are a few examples of guidelines I use, sometimes one or several at a time, sometimes all at once:

- Use individual, dual, and choral voices at least once each during the performance.
- Use the entire performance space (all four “corners” of the “stage” area).
- Use all levels of the performance space (sitting/lying down, kneeling, and standing levels).
- Start or end with a tableau (an arrangement of performers' bodies that is like a painting).
- Use at least one or two images of physical vocabulary to underscore a theme.
- Silently move the focus—the viewer's attention—from one performer to another with a recurring cue such as a bow, freezing motion, or a quick turning away or repeated emblematic action, such as a gesture that has thematic significance. The focus technique indicates a performer has been turned off and another is on.

Celebrating Performance

Whether students are performing original or published poems, as a group or as individuals, attention must be paid. Making a special occasion of

a performance is not very difficult. A simple change in lighting, time, or location can make a performance more special. After all, if students have really invested in a performance, they ought to get a stage, an audience, and perhaps some refreshments or awards when possible. Any one or all of these variations from the day-to-day routine will help students celebrate textual power and share their enthusiasm with others.

As you and your students organize your production, remember that performing poems through recitation or dramatization is doubly good. For every valuable moment students spend on the preparation of performances, from selecting the poem to preparing an interpretation, they are engaged in critical reading. In the most engaged stance a reader can take, students then become the speakers of the poems, offering an accessible presentation of a text for their audience. Rather than simply waiting for their turn to speak, you will see students engage with the performance, so the classroom audience walks away with an effortless, often wonderful, experience of literature. I can't think of a more fun and exciting way to develop cultural literacy, to invite students to make connections to texts and between other texts and their worlds.

Transforming a Performance Space into a Writer's Studio

One of the added benefits of playing with performance is that it lays all the important foundations for the creative writing leg of the 360-degree tour. Whether students are practicing to be more astute readers, better performers, poets, or more artful academic writers, the playground for performance is a nurturing place where smart people are engaged in the exchange of important ideas. This sets a wonderful stage for a writer's workshop as well.

What Is Think-Aloud, and Why Does It Work?

Supporting the development of critical reading skills and fluency in the language of textual analysis along the way, each lesson in Chapter 2 provides opportunities for teachers to model and encourage our tribal talk through the use of think-alouds and key literary terms. "Think-alouds are a reader's verbalization in reaction to reading a selection" (Caldwell 191). First developed by a product usability expert at IBM, think-alouds help students make visible to others their responses to text and the "normally covert mental processes" they use to comprehend text (as quoted in Caldwell 191). The tool allows teachers to assess readers while simultaneously offering instruction in independent approaches to text. In large and small groups, this approach to discussion creates rich collaborative

opportunities for students who read and write about literature together.

As part of the social and participatory “out loud” approach to poetry that I advocate, think-aloud helps students develop the meta-cognitive habits of expert readers. Visualization and other interpretive skills essential to poetry reading are not always automatic, as expert readers sometimes assume. In some cases, students need instruction to develop this automaticity. “Teachers need to explain how to think to their students; that is, we need to model, describe, explain, and scaffold appropriate reading strategies” (Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris). Think-aloud, an independence-promoting alternative to traditional, predetermined discussion questions, illuminates the impact of approaching texts with deliberate strategies. “Now imagine that the strategy works and the student continues to use it throughout the school year. With months of practice, the strategy requires less deliberate attention, and the student uses it more quickly and more efficiently. When it becomes effortless and automatic (i.e., the student is in the habit of asking ‘Does that make sense?’ automatically), the reading strategy has become a reading skill” (Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris). The goal of think-aloud and of all the lessons in this book is to help students interact with texts independently and feel confident that they have the skill to make meaning of poetry, or any other kind of text, no matter how complex. Without the confidence and know-how that these prompts stimulate, students can’t legitimately be expected to write and support formal academic claims about text.

Structured and monitored oral practice with academic discourse using this common vocabulary is empowering for students, especially for ELLs. One by one, through the use of Think-Aloud Prompts and Key Literary Terms, students discover that the words expert readers use are actually gateways to comprehension, not just fancy descriptors designed to keep others at a distance. As students practice the cognitive processes of generating more sophisticated statements about texts, they have richer conversations with peers and become more capable participants in the intellectual communities they enter.

Think-aloud also enhances particular aspects of creative and academic writing instruction. *English Journal* contributor and English teacher Nelson Graff advocates using think-aloud on published texts as practice for peer workshops. These think-aloud-oriented workshops then focus on helping young authors understand the impact of their choices. Graff argues, “If students are to respond to each other’s drafts as they would to published texts, they need practice responding to published texts as they would each other’s drafts” (81). “[When] students practice thinking aloud with published texts before they do so with each other’s texts, they

build the habit of thinking aloud to understand rather than to 'fix'; and, because students return during peer review to explicit reading strategies, they become more strategic readers" (81). Through repeated teacher modeling and the use of think-aloud sentence starters that prompt the deliberate use of these cognitive moves, students become fluent in the moves and the language of analyzing text, the tricks of the trade that have made literature teachers the successful readers they are.

In the practical chapters, I have provided models of thinking aloud that I have used to make my thought process visible to my students. These are not teacher scripts, but examples to show the ways in which we can scaffold the reading and interpretation of poetry for students through modeling. The prompts that are provided in the second chapter focus on developing habits such as visualizing, monitoring comprehension, summarizing, and considering the rhetorical scenario of a poem. They also help students begin considering some elements of author's craft. The second set of think-aloud prompts focuses more heavily on author's craft, particularly as it relates to form and technique. The Workshop Templates then capitalize on the habits of thinking and speaking about text that the Think-Aloud Prompts encouraged, while laying the foundation for more formal claims in explications. The template builds upon Think-Aloud Prompts such as "This makes me picture . . ." by placing it into the context of describing the effect of a peer author's choice. The Describing Text Templates take it one step further, prompting students to talk about author choices more formally.

Does Creative Writing Really Make Our Students Better Academic Readers and Writers?

As the Mathematics Department chair mounted yet another plaque for our school's award-winning math team, he gibed that the department I chaired had fairly bare walls in comparison. Though our students had won many accolades in creative writing and performance, I feebly defended, "Most of our contests don't award plaques." He quipped, "Hmm. You'd think people in your field would know something about PR." Aside from the fact that the moment felt like a small defeat in our friendly interdepartmental competition, the comment also struck me because he was right. The creative writing people did have a PR problem. And I am ashamed to say it was bigger than he thought.

Even if we were to have more shiny plaques, we creative writing types would still have trouble convincing others, even colleagues in our own department, that these were signs of success for our discipline. In the English departments of several schools where I have taught, and often

in the national English education conversation, these achievements are not recognized as *academic* achievements. Interestingly, in *Textual Power*, Robert Scholes comments on the terms *art* and *artist* as well as the missing counterpart of *literature* and *literaturist*. He contends, "The prestige of literature is so great that we have a taboo against naming the one who creates it. In our culture literature has been positioned in much the same place as scripture" (12). If this is indeed the case, perhaps the idea of a mere student creating something worthy of being called literature is just too ludicrous to be taken seriously. How difficult it must have been for poor Keats.

To be sure, everyone duly acknowledges creative writing's importance in offering students opportunities for self-expression; I need not argue for that here. However, instruction of that sort is rarely touted as a strategy for traditional academic success. At some extremes, it is even perceived as a break from real work, a frivolous unit for feel-good purposes. In fact, for every teacher I know who uses it enthusiastically, it seems I have met five more whose attitudes toward creative writing approaches to literary education and writing instruction range from condescension to downright loathing or horror.

Incriminatingly, teachers are not required to learn strategies for teaching creative writing as they are required to learn the pedagogy of composition or reading comprehension, and creative writing is never tested. While this *not required, not tested* condition is a blessing in many ways, it also indicates that creative writing instruction does not have a real academic status, leaving us with less research and less discussion about how to do it and why. As Christian Knoeller points out, "researchers such as James Moffett and James Britton have repeatedly suggested, [school-sponsored writing] has too often gravitated toward an unnecessarily narrow subset of the many possible purposes, audiences, and, importantly, textual types" (43). Knoeller argues "against the double-standard prevalent in our schools that assigns reading fiction and poetry as 'literature,' yet requires students to write primarily exposition" (43). Prompted by my students' success and the compelling arguments researchers like these make for the use of creative writing in every English classroom, I share these lessons to give practical examples of how this type of instruction can provide unique supports, not only for young authors but also for the equally important academic purpose of increasing the skill of literature and composition students.

I encourage the use of imitation as a springboard for creative and analytical writing instruction throughout the 360-degree approach. Imitation is useful as a tool for understanding the effect of techniques or meaning, or as Helen Vendler puts it, the relation between matter and manner

(114). It is also a route to understanding the language of literature, which can make literary scholarship, the kind that students are often asked to read and produce, appear impenetrable. Finally, it offers a valuable assessment tool that might appeal to students in ways that traditional academic writing does not. In *English Journal*, Alfie Kohn recently suggested that one sure way to kill student motivation is by limiting choice in terms of how their understanding is assessed (18). If he's right, excluding imaginative writing from the range of valid assessment choices is a shame.

I close my case on this point with an important but rarely argued point for creative writing in every English classroom. Researcher, professor, and former high school English teacher Christian Knoeller asserts that imaginative responses are also an effective alternative to academic writing for assessing literary understanding. Like others of us who have used these strategies, he argues that creative writing assignments have academic value beyond helping students understand literary technique or engaging training modules for analytical prose imitation assignments. When students create original imaginative works in response to literature, they sometimes become engaged in better reading and connect more authentically with their writing about literature. He argues, "allowing students to express original responses in a wide variety of genres ultimately gives more of them, not only those adept at analytic prose, a personally meaningful way to engage with literature" (43). The large body of work by researchers such as Jeffrey Wilhelm provides indisputable evidence that creative writing, like performance, can be used as a learning and assessment tool to increase achievement in English. As Knoeller so eloquently puts it, "rather than supplanting conventional literary criticism in the classroom, such writing—what I term imaginative response—can readily complement and ultimately enrich formal analysis" (42). Responding imaginatively to a literary text often motivates students with an authentic need to do the work of reading for meaning and to construct more deliberately their own thoughtful texts for both academic and artistic purposes. Commenting on the work of educational reformer Mike Schmoker in his 2008 "Research Matters" column, Rick VanDeWeghe says, "close reading is not mysterious, not something that only certain kinds of advanced readers can do. Rather, 'such reading starts with good questions and prompts' . . . , and such reading is done for meaning" (106). Imaginative responses engage students with text in ways other assignments cannot, raising good questions that are not always brought out by traditional written assessments.

The long-standing pedagogical tradition of imitation is based on the idea of paying attention to detail, from the overall structure of a text,

right down to the level of word choice. Simply put, advocates for the imitative approach, even ancient ones, believe that the more exposure students have to good models (both imaginative and academic), the more freedom of choice they have in their own work. In his article "The Art of Imitation," *English Journal* contributor J. Scott Shields cites the work of researcher James Murphy, who finds that Roman rhetorical pedagogy provided students with instruction through imitation, equipping them with the freedom to select and strategically deploy the tools of great writers, poets, and politicians alike (Shields).

Like performance, imitative writing demands that students explore a text closely to see technique at work in the creation of meaning. One *Voices from the Middle* contributor likens the act of reading for imitative purposes to mining for gems. In her article about using journals to record favorite words and phrases, Pat Thomas sees her middle school students "searching for those [gems], which will help create the ideal text they have in mind" (235). Guided practice in this mining work and experience in deploying the tools they discover deepens our students' reserve of linguistic resources and challenges students to develop a command over these tools. With this textual power, students can engage in more deliberate choice making in their own writing for all occasions.

Whether your goal is to empower writers with tools or to help students really appreciate the art of literary texts, as Robert Scholes argues in *The Crafty Reader*, or even to help students read with an expert kind of appreciation, as Robert Pinsky suggests, connecting an accessible model with sophisticated imitative reading and writing prompts is good pedagogy. In *With Rigor for All*, past NCTE president Carol Jago supports such pedagogy, stating that teachers "need to take the time in class to show students how to examine a text in minute detail: word by word, sentence by sentence" (54). "Only then," Jago asserts, "will [students] develop the skills they need to be powerful readers" (55). Both modeling close reading in this way and asking students to mine these models for material and forms they might use in their own original writing are essential steps in empowering our students with the levels of literacy that higher education and the twenty-first century demand.

In terms of the academic value of this sort of practice, those of us who have regularly used it know that imitating imaginative works is a wonderful stepping-stone to imitation in analytical prose. The processes, routines, and strategies for close reading that students establish in creative writing workshops can transform their approach to writing traditional academic texts as well. In fact, I would argue that these two ventures—teaching students to write poems and teaching students to

write essays—are part of the same enterprise. After all, tempering a sentence for either poetic or argumentative effect requires engaging with the same set of skills.

Actively exploring the effect of a particular technique from the vantage point of a writer also enhances a student's ability to understand and respond to the often jargonistic analytical prose found in poetry scholarship, as well as other disciplines in the humanities. As in learning to write a poem, the step in critical discourse that comes after saying something meaningful is revising, bringing the most effective and precise language to bear in service of meaning. The value of understanding form, genre, and other technical aspects of literature and being able to use the language in precise and sophisticated ways cannot be overstated in relation to its impact on understanding scholarship about the texts.

Finally, and it should go without saying, don't we owe it to the next Shakespeare, Dante, García Márquez, or Morrison, who may be sitting in front of us today, to teach creative writing, just as we owe it to the next Einstein to teach math?

How Can We Facilitate Writers Workshops with Artistic and Academic Benefits?

Many of us would agree that great literature helps us explore enduring questions about being human. For all of us, but especially adolescents who may be exploring some of these questions for the first time, this is powerful stuff, and when we engage with it deeply, our responses tend to be powerful also. Anyone who has taught adolescents knows that an invitation to share ideas about important issues can also be an opportunity for students to share difficult experiences or uncomfortable points of view. Therefore, writers workshops require safe places and appropriate models of how to respond to each other both as learners and evolving human beings.

The first step in facilitating a writers workshop is creating a contract with students defining the ethics and obligations involved in being members of such a creative writing community. The imitative exercises and the suggested creative writing activities that follow each lesson in Chapter 2 invite students to explore and respond to issues of identity, struggle, memory, triumph, family, and other experiences that prompt students to engage with text in powerful ways. Teachers who take on this (legal and ethical) responsibility develop some of the richest relationships teachers and students can share. Below are the two most important pieces of advice I can give to creating this nurturing place:

- *Change the physical setting or set-up.* If possible, change the location or at least the arrangement of students. I am a fan of the circle, as the ideal of equality is important to me. Also, in my teaching I have found that the room setup has to allow swift transitions from individual work to small groups to large groups. Perhaps that is one reason why I also like to move to the floor for workshops. Fun drills can help train your students to arrange the desks quickly, and the floor somehow moves the whole enterprise of learning together into another realm for students, making it more a part of our real lives than other desk-based activities. Students sometimes reject this, and in some cases it is more than a miniskirt that makes it downright impossible for a student to sit on the floor. I respect these individual situations and make appropriate adjustments.
- *Engage and celebrate every student's contribution.* Everyone must participate in every step, though not every single time. Be very conscious that every student shares multiple experiences of drafting, gathering feedback, and providing feedback. Don't let the quiet ones, the shy ones, and the ones that say they "hate writing" miss out on the knowledge they can construct only by articulating their ideas in the workshop. I discuss this further when I talk about revision.

Honoring the Drafting Process with Class Time

An important step in facilitating writers workshop is honoring student writing (creative and academic) with class time for initial drafting. This might seem like a no-brainer to some, but given the everything-at-once responsibility of teaching English, time limitations do force us to make some tough choices. Many teachers feel that initial drafting is something that students can do on their own. One may even argue, as students often do, that home is the best place to get initial ideas onto paper. I advocate spending some time on initial drafting in class by giving students what I call Sacred Silent Writing Time (SSWT). This is one way I show my students that no assignment I give is the kind one might scribble on the bus, just so I have something to record in my grade book when I am bored at home. If it is worth doing at all, I tell them, it is important enough for us to do in class, free from distraction.

When the process is new to students, this is also the time to clarify procedural questions, allay fears in person, and set the stage for treating the physical space of the classroom as a working writer's studio. Here are three more words to the wise:

- *Protect SSWT at all costs.* Don't let anything disrupt it. Especially at the beginning, it is essential to protect this like a hawk until the routine is set and respect for that time is gained. Change the lighting. Allow students to write wherever they want, even if that
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means lying on the floor. Do whatever it takes to demarcate this time from other classroom activities.

- *Don't accept no for an answer, and don't over-explain.* Every student has to write something—even if it is a grocery list. I'm not kidding. Have a student with a blank page write a grocery list, then rewrite the same list for an alien who will do the shopping. (What a great lesson on the impact of audience on writing choices!) Whatever you do, just don't let any student leave with a blank page. Circulate, and don't let them burn up their SSWT with what-do-you-want questions. This is a student's piece; try not to fall into the trap of explaining your ideal text. Write good prompts and stick to them; then allow students to spring from prompts to writing what they feel they need to write. You need only create the demand for self-expression.
- *Once SSWT is established, write with your fellow writers.* Setting up the routines and expectations of this time takes a great deal of circulation at first. After the routine gets rolling, though, use the time to write. But don't write emails, lesson plans, or comments on student papers; as often as possible, write your own responses to the prompts. Remember, as the cliché goes, you are unique, just like everyone else. Your work is valued by your students not only because it is intriguing to hear about the adults in their lives, and not only because they are honored by your willingness to collapse the teacher-student hierarchy in that way, but also because they get to see that even a more experienced, more authoritative writer can use the prompts to write things worth writing.

Workshop Routines for Artistic and Academic Writing

First, let there be praise.

A whatever-you-do-is-wonderful approach to creative writing undermines a student's confidence as much as harsh criticism does, because students are smart. Empty praise for their writing leaves even the most confident students with a sneaking suspicion that their work has a face only their supportive English teacher could love. In initial drafts, journals, and other beginning places, uninhibited freedom and self-satisfaction is indispensable. But for the purposes of helping our students become better readers and writers, revision and public scrutiny by real readers is essential. So at some point, the timely, specific, and substantive praise must be accompanied by suggestions for improvement. Aside from being a great motivator, genuine praise lets students know what they are doing well, so they continue to get better at recognizing good writing when they see it and consciously making these good writerly moves.

Part of our work as writers workshop facilitators is modeling the feedback process in the same way we model discussions about professional works, using the precise and sophisticated language taught through

Key Terms and Think-Aloud Prompts. Additionally, modeling feedback is one of the most powerful ways in which creative writing instruction becomes a means of improving academic writing. A Think-Aloud Prompt such as, “This makes me picture . . .” becomes part of a Workshop Template sentence like “When you said X, it made me picture X, because when most people think of X, they think of X, because . . .” The Workshop Templates describe the effect of a writer’s choice, and this is exactly the kind of interpretive sentence students will learn to write when they begin formal explications where the sentence begins to sound like “The image suggests . . .”

Now, about the resistance to creative writing revision, which comes naturally to writers, no matter their age. To that I say, workshop it. Hearts and souls are sometimes poured out in first drafts. And if this is the first time students have experimented with poetic devices or have used templates to help generate some pretty poetic-sounding text, it can be hard for them (as for all of us) to, as Faulkner puts it, kill their darlings. After all, what may seem cliché to us may not seem so to the first-time user. Despite these other quite legitimate reasons for resistance, students supported by a culture of smart, critical friends will listen to well-trained peers speaking articulately about what can and might be revised. I have found that this is the best way to sell the idea that revision can make a good piece of writing better. Indeed, I always appreciated my wonderful poetry teacher who often summed up a common thread of feedback with his tenderly ironic, signature comment: “well . . . we’re all pretty smart here and we don’t get it, so you might want to tinker with it.”

Workshops for All

Every significant writing assignment deserves a small group writers workshop, and every student deserves a whole-class writing workshop at least once. Here are the guidelines I use when facilitating workshops in my classroom:

- *Students must use the Workshop Templates.* The templates—handout 5.E in the appendix—help students to make precise and sophisticated comments about each other’s work so that students very deliberately support and nurture each other with both praise and critical feedback. Require a specific number (one to three statements) of each kind. Finally, have students write their comments, legibly, in complete sentences, and on the text itself, so the writers who are likely to do the revision much later can remember feedback clearly and see exactly where each comment applies to the original text. This will also allow them to see repeated suggestions from more than one reader, and patterns can be quite persuasive.
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- *First, everyone but the writer must speak.* Have a volunteer or two start each group session with a descriptive summary of what they have read. Then have several people share their feedback, before calling on others who are less forthcoming. Over the course of a given period of time, it is imperative students have multiple opportunities to practice speaking as a reviewer, as the reviewer gains as much from the process of feedback as the writer. Reading critically, devising constructive criticism and praise, and articulating one's critical work is irreplaceable in helping our students become confident in their textual power. Don't let students' shyness deny them the opportunity for this growth. Even if they only offer a description of the piece they read or recount what someone else has offered, this is a chance to practice critical literacy. After all, asserting descriptive and evaluative claims about texts is what we reward in academia. Students, including ELLs, need practice doing it.
- *The writer must listen.* Since writers won't sit next to every reader explaining what they meant, they need to know what real readers are and aren't getting. Don't let writers burn up this opportunity for feedback with defenses and explanations. They must be silent until the workshop is complete, except perhaps to get clarification on a piece of feedback. Afterward, they should reiterate key points of feedback and get confirmation from their reviewers. If time allows, they can share ideas about what they intended and gather feedback from peers who may have helpful suggestions about realizing original goals more effectively.
- *Writers must take "no thank you bites."* Before I let them officially dislike a food, my own children must at least take a "no thank you bite." Very often, they concede that the risk was well worth taking. In this spirit, I have students choose a suggested revision and try it. They can, of course, choose not to keep the revision, but only after they have actually seen the outcome. This doesn't mean they must take every suggestion or try out a whole text revision every time, but usually the comments echo one another enough to indicate one suggestion worth trying. Again, don't allow students to miss out on a learning opportunity by rejecting the suggestions they received out of hand.

The Culmination of Workshops: Publishing and Sharing

- *Every poet must submit.* This is a great opportunity for young writers to consider their growth, their strengths, and so forth. The selection and presentation of their best work is part of the process of submitting. It also offers teachers a good reason to teach a cover letter, so ask students to submit a formal cover letter with their best work. (Examples are widely available online.)
 - *Every poet must publish.* Everyone can publish in a school or online venue, so everyone should. (Consider the NCTE National
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Gallery of Writing.) Some students feign shyness or genuinely resist publishing, but anyone can at least type out a fresh copy of a single poem or a few poems, mount them in a homemade book with an introduction, and hand it in, making it a little more special than other pieces they have submitted.

- *Every poet must perform.* Every young writer should also learn to read in public. Even if your students don't plan to pursue a serious writing career, it is essential that they build their public speaking confidence and listen to their own voice sounding the piece they have written. The rehearsal process alone leads to some of the best revisions of all. Whether it is a more formal classroom reading or a full-blown slam, don't let anyone off the hook on this learning experience.

How Can We Prepare Students to Write Academic Essays with Collegiate Levels of Fluency?

Robert Scholes argues, "Our job is not to intimidate students with our own superior textual production; it is to show them the codes upon which all textual production depends, and to encourage their own textual practice" (*Textual Power* 24–25). Throughout Chapters 2 and 3, the first two practical chapters, I suggest ways in which we can develop our students' capacity to produce the meaning from text. In the last chapter, I focus on the academic benefits of critical engagement with literature.

As students explore a speaker's experience or savor a writer's choice, they are engaging in the most fundamental work of academic scholarship, interpretive close reading. As I have argued throughout the previous essays and shown through the suggested scope and sequence of the practical lessons, performing and writing creatively are not separate from but are, in my view, fundamental to the making of a truly excellent academic reader and writer. While these "creative" routes to textual power seem circuitous to some, the unique cognitive experiences and strategies students use along the way have immediate, transferable applications in traditional academic literacy across disciplines because they help students figure out how to make claims about text and support them.

Reading critically requires developing fluency in what Gerald Graff has dubbed *arguespeak*, not to mention the seemingly obscure language of literature and other disciplines in academia. Writing about one's own critical reading also requires deliberately choosing effective strategies for summarizing and communicating interpreted meaning, and supporting claims with evidence in a fluent and eloquent manner. These are the tools of the successful academic. These are the tools with which we, as English teachers, must ultimately equip our students.

But how, explicitly, do we help students do this in the 360-degree tour? Building on the thinking, discussing, and claiming that has been going on through performance and creative writing workshop activities, you can prompt students to start formalizing their claims and developing formal academic arguments. The Describing Text Templates then help students to make and support claims that make up the bulk of critical writing in the humanities. From there, plenty of practice, feedback, and reading will help students develop the sophisticated fluency that marks the college-ready student.

In the last chapter of this book, I suggest ways in which students can channel the strategies they've learned for close reading and powerful writing into academic debate and explication. Again using engaging, social, and participatory strategies for close reading and peer workshop, students will learn to write explications.

Please note, the lessons in *360 Degrees of Text* are targeted to address a subset of skills within academic composition; they are not intended to represent a plan for teaching paragraphing per se or academic composition, just claim making and textual analysis. Building upon the close reading skills established in the performance and creative writing chapters, the templates for formulating summaries, claims, and artful supporting paragraphs are tools teachers can use to move students more quickly and deliberately toward college levels of textual power, which means, as Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein argue, "We need to be as explicit as possible about the key moves of academic and public-sphere literacy and helping as many students as we can to master them" ("Progressive" 16). Their bestselling book *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* also uses templates to help high school and college students master academic argument and was written for the explicit purpose of helping teachers help those of us who didn't just pick it up on our own.

True college readiness requires that students feel confident in their reading, their writing, and their ability to make claims. Carol Jago argues that "composing an analytical essay forces students to reread with a purpose and to scrutinize the text, as well as to analyze the author's craft. It also demands that they do this work for themselves" (3–4). Whether students are reciting or debating a poem, or composing an argument about it, the final aim of this book is procedural and metacognitive knowledge, to help all students get better at doing the work for themselves, not just answering questions generated by teachers and textbooks.

We shouldn't save the pleasures of sophisticated textual appreciation for those students willing to apprentice themselves to English teachers like me, but we should give every student the opportunity to engage

in critical and authentic ways with discourse about literature and other intellectually challenging texts. Ideas about how to do this is what the 360-degree approach offers, particularly this last set of lessons.

How Can Instruction Be Differentiated within This 360-Degree Approach?

We have to work on constructing and representing meaning from the premise that both struggling and advanced students can make and support sophisticated claims about literature and that all students deserve a chance to learn how to demonstrate their ambitious exploration of texts in a variety of ways. Therefore, the scaffolding of the entire sequence and the activities built into each lesson provide many opportunities for students of all readiness levels to construct and represent meaning in various modes.

The whole sequence of sample lessons is infinitely expandable; more practice with more texts at the same or increasingly challenging levels of complexity allow for all sorts of differentiating in terms of depth and breadth for students at many access points along the way. *The text, the pace, and the modality* the student or teacher chooses for formative or summative assessment are also variables for differentiating instruction. Over the course of the entire sequence and within each lesson there are many ways to adjust the content (supplemental text suggestions are labeled *Widely Accessible* to most high school students, *More Difficult, Challenging*), process (select from strategies on the tour), and product (select from products on the tour). The evidence you will collect over time to assess the objective you set for students at varying levels of readiness will shape the product selection and your use of associated rubrics. The overarching sequence each student follows may be essentially the same, but the time each student takes to make the journey to explicative writing or a major performance project could vary enormously, depending on each student's level of readiness in terms of task complexity and the level of complexity in texts with which you expect students to engage.

The sample lessons are examples of how these differentiation variables can be arranged in relation to a common learning goal in order to support growth over time for every student. I believe that all the activity types are valuable to all students, and all students ought to be able to try them, though all may not be expected to achieve the same result on the same day or with the same amount of scaffolding and practice. The structured academic conversations and rich oral experiences support ELLs effectively when accessible texts are selected.

Please note, the formative assessment tasks at the end of each lesson allow teachers to check for understanding and provide feedback to students, but the lessons in the 360-degree tour are focused on practicing discrete textual analysis strategies and reflecting metacognitively upon the fruits of those strategies. Again, the 360-degree approach to text should not be treated as an approach to teaching formal academic composition in literature, only certain aspects of it. Even the suggested culminating activities need to be carefully supplemented if they are to be used as culminating or summative assessments. What tolerable evidence can you collect over time to make the claim that a student in grade 7 can “Analyze how a drama’s or poem’s form or structure (e.g., soliloquy, sonnet) contributes to its meaning” (Common Core)? What markers will represent progress toward those goals? These are the kinds of questions we need to be asking if we are really thinking about how to make any set of standards useful.

Note

1. Portions of this section are excerpted from my article “Nurturing the Omnivore: Approaches to Teaching Poetry,” originally published by *Poetry Foundation: Learning Lab*, 13 Oct. 2009, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/article/237898>. Web.

II Practice

2 Teaching Close Reading through Performance and Recitation

Poems as Scripts

I have come to believe that in order to give students a real taste for poetry, we actually have to put poems into their mouths. We can't leave poetic texts hanging aloft, as lifeless totems, understood and worshipped only by leaders of some literary tribe. Instead, through performance strategies, we can offer students a chance to sample the fruits of poetic texts, bringing all sorts of readers at all levels of readiness to the table.

Speaking poetry out loud, "with feeling," to use the old cliché, helps students cultivate an expert kind of appreciation. By adopting a performance stance, readers explore the voices and images invoked by text as they endeavor to embody the speakers, inhabit their worlds, and ultimately represent the text's meaning to an audience. As a result, they become authentic meaning makers, considering aspects of language that might have gone unnoticed in silent reading or textbook questioning. This intimate exploration of text can make visible the painstaking work of the artist and raise questions about multiple possible meanings that change as the text is intoned in various ways by diverse readers

Rather than acting as experts who can assure students who have never tasted it that a poem is delicious, we can challenge students to use performance as a strategy for understanding. When we do this, we recast their epistemological roles, inviting them into our tribe of meaning makers who can savor poems for themselves.

This set of lessons is intended to license teachers to help students develop sophisticated close reading skills through genuinely engaging, imagination-driven strategies. Given the impetus of group performance and ultimately individual recitation, students will learn to visualize, think aloud, and engage in other imaginative acts to perform more skilled close readings. They will learn to identify the key components of a rhetorical situation—context, speaker, occasion, audience, purpose, genre, subject, and tone—approach texts in search of an antecedent scenario, divide texts into smaller parts for more skilled structural analysis, and, of course, paraphrase texts faithfully. Each of these strategies can be deployed in

any reading situation, helping students gain a confidence of control over even the most complex texts. Performing poems is a learning strategy. The processes required to prepare a performance promote the development of skills that effective readers employ in close reading and analytical writing later.

The culminating lesson challenges students to practice all of these strategies introduced and to explore the emotional structure of a poem from the inside out. After all of the earlier modeling and practice in large and small groups, the final recitation assignment provides opportunities for students to engage independently and critically with a text of their choice. Recitation itself is added to their repertoire of strategies!

A special note about “close reading” extension activities: Every lesson on the 360-degree tour prepares students to make written claims about text. At the end of each lesson, where ideas for extending the work are provided, I have shared a close-reading writing prompt in the form of a fill-in-the-blank paragraph-starting claim about the poem highlighting the particular focus of the lesson. In the final chapter, those training wheels will be removed, and students are challenged to make independent claims about any aspect of any poem; but throughout these initial lessons, it is important for students to practice this focused critical reading, writing, and thinking.

Lesson 1: Visualizing and Thinking about Persona

Teacher-to-Teacher Note. Playing with language and sharing important personal experiences are necessary steps in establishing a culture that allows for optimal collaboration in learning. On the first day, invite students to sit in a circle on the floor. Tell students they will return to this circle throughout their study of poetry, as they collaborate as readers, writers, and performers. Establish this as a special place and, to the extent it is possible, help students overcome aversions to sitting on the floor. Help students understand that this circle is a place where everyone is equal and everyone can play, make mistakes, and enjoy language. This lesson also serves as a trust-building exercise, which is a critical component of performing, discussing, and writing about poetry.

The first exercise was adapted from an exercise I learned at DePaul University in an NEH-sponsored seminar called “Saying Something Wonderful: Teaching the Pleasures of Poetry.” I have used it with great success with diverse populations of students for years. In the exercise, students become familiar with the concept of persona by carefully selecting and arranging images to prepare ad hoc stories about themselves. Later you

will point out that poets and other writers create personas for their speakers through a similar process of selecting and presenting details.

The subject of this storytelling activity also lays the thematic groundwork for the poem in the sample lesson. However, because the subject has to do with overcoming an obstacle, be prepared for a range of responses from the mundane to the dramatic. Given the nature of youth and their personal lives, it is also important to contract with them in the same way you would when you assign journal entries, reminding them of your professional obligations and their own obligations as members of a supportive learning community.

Lesson Step 1.1: Sharing a Moment of Overcoming

1. Before students enter class for this first lesson, create a display for the term *rhetorical situation* with this working definition: a context in which there is an act of communication. Helpful graphics of the rhetorical triangle are readily available online. Also create a display of the words that make up the acronym SOAPSTone. (For each rhetorical situation, there is a context as well as a Speaker/author/communicator, an Occasion for speaking, an Audience, a Purpose, and a Subject that shape the speaker's Tone.) You can also distribute the SOAPSTone student handout (handout 1.A found in the appendix) and have students keep it in their in-class notebooks. Make these displays permanent for student reference.
 2. Tell students they will be sharing a one-minute story of a time when they overcame an obstacle. Think, for example, of an accomplishment, facing a fear, finding the right outfit, a spill in aisle four, or the like. The stories can be funny, thought-provoking, surprising—anything students feel comfortable sharing.
 3. Rather than simply explaining, demonstrate how each person will enter the circle with a physical gesture that evokes an image from the story (for example, throwing a baseball, striking a disco pose, etc.). Explain that once in the center of the circle, the person must wait five beats before speaking. Raise your hand and count five fingers silently. The person in the circle will then tell their story as vividly as possible. When finished, the speaker will wait while you again count five silent beats with your fingers before leaving the circle. As a supportive leader and co-learner, you should demonstrate a telling of your own story as you explain the exercises. Your subject choice and your commitment to full participation in the activity will go a long way toward establishing your credibility as a learning leader.
 4. After one or two minutes of silent, individual brainstorming, ask for a volunteer to begin. When volunteers stop raising their hands, assure the bashful that there is no right or wrong, worthy or unworthy story, simply a recounting of a time of overcoming
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an obstacle. Then proceed by going clockwise from the last volunteer until everyone has shared. This is a “mandatory volunteer” process I like. In my experience, even the toughest, most reserved participants cave in eventually.

5. After everyone has shared a story, ask students to pair up and share the experience of this storytelling activity using the following questions: How was your selection of your subject and its details shaped by concerns about how your audience of peers would perceive you, the speaker? How did the gesture focus our attention?
6. In a large group debrief, ask a few pairs to share some of the factors that shaped the storytelling experience. Segue to the idea of the rhetorical situation. After explaining that the students created texts (that is, the stories they shared) in a particular context that shaped what story was selected and which details were shared in which order, let them know that as they explore the rhetorical situation in each of the poems they’ll read, they will learn to begin determining the gist of texts, any text, by identifying key elements of the rhetorical situation, such as audience, purpose or genre, and context. Refer again to your display of the rhetorical triangle and SOAPStone questions. Highlight the ways in which student stories were selected and shaped based on the context of their peer audience, and emphasize that one of the key concerns that storytellers had was how the story would shape their audience’s perception of the storyteller’s persona, as a person who is funny, smart, and so on. After all, no one is more conscious of their audience’s perception of their persona than an adolescent.

Lesson Step 1.2: Discovering Persona through Visualizing Images

In this lesson step, students will practice the habit of visualizing—one by one—the concrete images the speaker of a poem selects and arranges. Students will practice getting the gist of a poem by *seeing* imagery in written texts the same way they *see* images in a visual text. Throughout this process, they will become familiar with the speaker, in this case the persona Maya Angelou has created in the poem “Still I Rise.” They will share their findings through a theatrical technique of sculpting a portrait of the speaker, where a student performer becomes the clay to be sculpted. For reliable editions of the text, see “Additional Resources for Chapter 2” at the end of the chapter.

Teacher-to-Teacher Note. Reading Maya Angelou’s “Still I Rise” as a portrait of a speaker will reveal Angelou’s process of selecting and arranging images to convey a particular persona. In my experience, students really love this poem and enjoy the way in which Angelou uses imagery to develop the persona of an individual person who has overcome struggle

in order to comment on the collective experience of Africans and African Americans.

1. *Frontloading Knowledge Option:* Have students develop expert groups to research Maya Angelou's biography, the transatlantic slave trade, and timelines of African American migration history to learn about possible sources for her imagery.
 2. Remind students that they selected and arranged images for their own stories for the purpose of presenting a certain image of themselves, a persona, to the classroom audience. Likewise, the author of a poem creates a particular persona through the careful selection and arrangement of images, and in order to really see this portrait, we have to visualize the images she selected. In discussing poetry, remember that the speaker is not always the author, though in some cases the author's speaker can bear a resemblance.
 3. Many images of Maya Angelou are available on the Internet illustrating her multifaceted identity as an African American thinker, artist, leader, dancer, educator and poet; share two or three of these with students. The portraits show a range of personas that Angelou adopts for various occasions. Give students a moment to assign key adjectives one might use to describe the persona she projects in each image; ask them to indicate orally or in writing which detail or aspect of the image caused them to make that judgment. Highlight the fact that your questioning helped them examine their own thinking, and that this metacognitive thinking is what strong, critical readers do.
 4. Distribute Key Literary Terms for Discussing Imagery and Think-Aloud Prompts (see student handouts 1.B and 1.C in the appendix). Explain to students that just as they were able to describe the persona in these visual images, they will learn to visualize images in text and make claims about how a poet creates a persona by selecting and arranging certain details in a particular way. Point out that just as they were able to identify key parts of the visual images, which are simply visual texts, they will need to learn how to "see" key parts of verbal texts and describe them in a common language so others can understand what prompted a particular interpretation. To do this more effectively, explain that as a community of learners, they need a common language for describing text. Let them know that the language you are asking them to use in these discussions is also good practice for the advanced reading and writing they will do later, since texts about texts employ these terms. If this is your students' first encounter with either of these concepts, assure them that you will model this kind of speaking before asking them to use it. This is essential for ELLs.
 5. Segue into modeling a think-aloud by explaining that you will be asking students to think out loud with peers as a way of
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developing awareness about the impact of personal experience, context, and an author's choices on a reader's interpretation of a text. Let them know that the think-aloud prompts will remind them to perform expert reader moves on the text, and that if they practice them enough, they will see the fruits of those metacognitive moves and adopt them as habits for life.

6. Model a think-aloud using Maya Angelou's poem, "Still I Rise." Read the poem out loud. Then prompt students to practice visualizing images in the first stanza, creating pictures of the speaker in their mind. Tell them that they will have a chance to visualize each image in the poem carefully with their peers, but that they will need to talk about their thinking each step of the way. Below is a sample of how I think aloud about the first stanza with my students after reading the entire poem aloud once:

Well, based on her diction, a.k.a. her word choice, I am guessing that she must be pretty annoyed with the person who wrote her down with "bitter," "twisted lies." Listen to those adjectives! I know how it makes me feel when someone lies about me.

I am puzzled by the fact that she would compare herself to dust in the simile in the last line. Dust makes me picture something dirty. That doesn't seem like a flattering comparison.

But, when I think about the gist of the poem and read things later like "up from the past rooted in pain / I rise," it makes me think this person sounds powerful and resilient. It makes me wonder, what about dust would be good for showing her resilience or power?

For a visual demonstration of this simile, I grab any number of dusty or chalky things in my room and clap them together. I hope I'm not the only one with these classroom resources on hand! After a mental visualization or a demonstration, the students should note how powerful and ubiquitous dust can be, how the act of stamping dust down makes it rise more and more. Wrap up this model think-aloud by highlighting the importance of careful visualization, and ask students to reflect upon the effectiveness of the dust visual in understanding the simile.

7. Arrange students in eight small groups, assigning one stanza per group. Have them read through the whole poem and practice thinking aloud about how they visualize images. Have them select only one Think-Aloud Prompt to try if necessary, but make sure they use it. Encourage students to practice the suggested Think-Aloud Prompts with the first few stanzas. Have them zero in on their assigned stanza, and have everyone sketch what they see before sharing findings with their group. Tell them to note the words and phrases that are evoked by the images. Use

Key Literary Terms for Discussing Imagery (handout 1.B in the appendix) as you circulate, asking questions such as the following: What are the details in this stanza? What do those images make you picture? What was it about her diction—the words she chooses—that was striking to you? Why do you think she chose that metaphor/simile? Which qualities of . . . would be shared by . . . in this metaphor or simile?

8. Ask each group to share what they visualized, noting the words and phrases evoked by the visual image. Praise students for their precise use of Key Literary Terms for Discussing Imagery as they share their findings. Then ask the whole group to consider what claims can be made about the identity of the speaker and her purpose for speaking. To close this larger group discussion, ask a few students to share the gist of the poem as they see it, just a quick summary that answers the SOAPSTone questions. A formal written response to the SOAPSTone questions could also be collected for assessment purposes, but the important thing here is that students get used to seeing text through this rhetorical situation lens.

Lesson Step 1.3: Sculpting a Silent Portrait

1. Tell students that their next job is to select a group member to act as a piece of sculpting clay. In groups, using their stanza, have students sculpt a portrait of the speaker that is a fitting portrayal of the persona Angelou creates. Remind them to balance the specificity of the image with the general portrayal of this speaker, so the audience can see the underlying coherence of the poem, while savoring the details that help make the portrayal of this persona richer. (Allow students to determine the role of group members in speaking, sculpting, and acting as clay. Equality among ensemble members leads to wonderful critical debates in more elaborate performances of poems, so it is a great time to lay the groundwork for ensemble by avoiding such roles as director, actor, etc.)
 2. After a few minutes of theatrical play and the eventual distribution of roles, have students return to the circle, strike their poses, and share their impromptu performances.
 3. After enjoying the performances, discuss new revelations about the poem, the speaker, and the process of reading this way to remind students to be aware that they are acquiring new and valid strategies (visualization, think-aloud, and annotation), and theatrical improvisation. They will use these tools independently in performances later.
 4. For homework, give students a piece of construction paper and ask them to compose a single vivid image (one line) and illustrate it for a whole class poem called “Still I Rise.” Using as a starting
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point the artful form of a simile (Like _____, I rise) or a metaphor (I am _____, I rise), ask students to use concrete words to create a *vivid visual* image, something we can picture in our minds, to complete the phrase. They may choose to use an image from the story they shared during their first day in the circle or an entirely new one—perhaps one inspired by Angelou’s work. Encourage students to draft on another sheet of paper, revise, and record their final version on the construction paper you provide.

If time allows, students may listen to a masterful performance by one of my former students on Chicago Public Radio’s *Eight Forty-Eight*, available at <http://www.wbez.org/episode-segments/speak#>. After listening, students should discuss their take on the performer’s perception of the speaker.

Lesson Step 1.4: Arranging Images

1. Have students join the circle, bringing their vivid images printed clearly on construction paper. As students share their contributions to the whole class poem, have them discuss their images and reasons for choosing them. Highlight the relationship between the ideas the images evoke and how the details of the text shape those images in particular ways.
2. Next, have everyone stand up and hold their piece of construction paper in front of them. Have students read their piece aloud in a round robin of the whole poem, allowing nervous students the option of exchanging with another writer for the read-aloud. After reading, give students one minute to silently group themselves in the circle according to their images; for example, the students who used a nature image might all see a connection to each other. Debrief the reasons for these arrangements and decide on the final one. In the closing discussion, have students consider how the arrangement of an image within the larger text impacts its meaning. Post the poem inside the classroom for future reference—good examples of vivid imagery, similes, and metaphors!
3. Wrap up this discussion by reminding students that through visualization strategies they can begin to get the gist of even terribly difficult poems. Add that taking the time to visualize images and to think about their own thinking is essential for close reading and good writing. Assure students that they will grow more comfortable with the use of the language of literature as they practice using it and that the language itself will become a key to understanding text, not just a vocabulary for describing it.

More Poems for Practice

For more practice with visualizing details to explore persona, use “Hook” by James Wright (widely accessible), “Bilingual/Bilingue” by Rhina P.

Espallat (more difficult), or “Mirror” by Sylvia Plath (challenging). To assess students at lower levels of readiness, collect illustrations of one poem or a part of a poem in which students include a sentence completion based on a think-aloud prompt, such as “This makes me picture . . . because when I think of . . . I think of. . .” On-level students can complete evidence-supported SOAPSTones, while students who are advanced may use the notes in their SOAPSTones to write paragraphs in which they describe the persona of the speaker, using Think-Aloud Prompts as sentence starters and making specific references to the text to support answers.

More Close Reading, Performance, and Powerful Writing Ideas

Close Reading

Have students read at least three other poems by Maya Angelou. Then have them complete and support the following claim sentence in a paragraph that is supported by evidence from the text: “Maya Angelou often uses images of _____ to depict speakers who _____.” (For example, “Maya Angelou often uses images of triumph to depict speakers who have overcome great obstacles.”)

Performance

Have students perform an Angelou poem as a group. Help students prepare by considering the following questions: What images are dominant in the poem? What are the variations on these dominant images? To whom does the speaker speak and why? What gestures would she use? What tone of voice does she use and how does it change, image to image?

Artful Writing

Students may use the “Still I Rise” homework assignment as a basis for an entire poem or use the title and write a brief vignette about a moment of struggle or overcoming.

Lesson 2: Dividing Poems into Parts and Determining Antecedent Scenarios

Teacher-to-Teacher Note. Students have gained some valuable insights into the creation of a poem—especially how a poet creates a persona through the selection and arrangement of vivid images. Using the visualization and think-aloud techniques they learned in the first lesson and a new technique, dividing poems into smaller parts, students will explore the ways in which a poet also uses concrete images to create narratives.

Students will also use Key Literary Terms for Discussing Imagery to practice asking questions about the antecedent scenario; that is, what happened before the poem that made this speaker speak in this way at this time. Through the technique of role-playing, students will then present a performance of Sharon Olds's "I Go Back to May 1937," showing how the images of the poem reveal an intense family history. For reliable sources of the text, see "Additional Resources for Chapter 2" at the end of the chapter. Before the lesson, have students bring in an old family photo.

Lesson Step 2.1: Introducing "I Go Back to May 1937" with Old Photos

1. *Frontloading Knowledge Option:* Like visual art, narrative poems often tell a story without using the traditional markers found in prose that allow us to identify exact chronology or explicit events. Ask students to determine possible antecedent scenarios and probable outcomes in the narrative captured in the details of an image, using a photo like the movie poster for the film *Life Begins at College* found at <http://cinema.americanfootballitalia.com/myPictures/1937LIFEBEGINSATCOLLEGE2.jpg>. After students generate ideas and defend their answers with references to the images, ask them to consider what outside information they have used to make these judgments. Challenge them to consider how their readings were influenced by love story narratives that are constantly reinforced in our culture. Use this example to highlight how, in addition to knowledge that the author provides, readers connect their own experiences or experiences with certain storylines that are familiar to us all, such as a love story, childbirth, or tales of unhappy marriages to make meaning. Segue into their family photos with the closing discussion about how we might bring knowledge of these kinds of stories to our own lives as well, often viewing our lives through the lens of these archetypal stories.
2. Have students perform a quick-write describing the thoughts, feelings, and conclusions about the people in the picture that were evoked by the family photo that they selected, and then ask students to share with a partner. In a large group debrief, have students share the ways in which family stories or more general culturally significant stories about human experience influenced their experience of the photo. You might ask, for example, how do you use stories that are familiar to all of us (archetypal stories) to fill in the blanks about the people inside and outside the photo when you were not there?
3. Distribute the poem "I Go Back to May 1937" by Sharon Olds and have students visualize the images as you read the text aloud. Read it aloud again. As you read the second time, students should play back the movie already created by the mind's eye, adding more detail this time to each mental image (Wilhelm, *Reading* 42).

4. After a third read-aloud, do what I call an “I’ll do it first, then we’ll do it together” think-aloud with the first five lines. Here is a sample:

Based on a couple of readings of the poem, the speaker seems to be looking at pictures. The first couple of lines are making me picture the photograph of the father. I am picturing an old-fashioned sort of college because of the stone arch. The details make me think the picture is in color, because she says the tiles are red. I am puzzled by the simile “like bent / plates of blood.”

Stop and, if possible, have several students use the metaphor/simile prompt to think aloud with you. Allow time to think about the diction, prompting students with questions about the realm of discourse in which they have heard the words “plates of blood.”

That simile makes me associate something about the picture with biology because when most people think about plates of blood, they picture . . .

Together, students can help unpack the idea of imperfection (bent), hemorrhaging (blood), and bloodline/heredity and disease (plates of blood as studied under a microscope). It is a great time to highlight that writers often borrow terms from other realms of discourse in order to help readers draw on their experience and knowledge of other things to make multiple associations. Encourage students to pay special attention to this Think-Aloud Prompt: This metaphor/simile/image makes me associate _____ with _____ because when most people think of _____, they think of _____.

5. Have students work in small groups to imagine the speaker’s persona, applying the strategies they have already learned (visualization, think-aloud, illustration, and annotation/note-taking). This time, however, tell them the purpose of their reading is to figure out what might have happened before the poem began. What situation prompted this speaker to speak at this moment? In Helen Vendler’s words, what is the antecedent scenario (*Poems, Poets, Poetry*)?
 6. After students have carefully investigated the text, share a projection of the entire text for the class. Have several groups share their take on the *antecedent scenario*. Ask what happened that might have made this speaker utter these words. Prompt students to reference specific lines and phrases from the text to support their claims by asking, “What words or phrases made you think that?”
 7. Explain that in order to get deeper into the poem, they will now add another trick to their repertoire of close reading techniques—dividing the poem into parts. Ask students, “If I were to break this poem into parts to make my close reading of each part a little
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easier to handle, where would the breaks come?" Individually or in small groups, have students draw lines between main sections of the poem. On the master copy, have a few students share where to place a line to indicate each division. Have them explain why they believe there was a change from one major part to the next (changes might be indicated by a change in image, time, action, idea, or emotion). Praise students for their use of key terms and specific references to the text and for effective summarizing and putting things into their own words faithfully (that is, paraphrasing).

Lesson Step 2.2: Creating Talking Sculptures

1. Have small groups dramatize the text to portray the antecedent scenario as it is depicted in the text using these techniques: *Silent sculpture* (see lesson step 1.3, "Sculpting a Silent Portrait"), *tableau vivant* (an arrangement of silent sculptures in a living mural) and *talking sculptures* (the sculptures come alive at different points in the performance of the text, when various characters have something to say). Each group will use the images and words of the text to develop an ad hoc performance that takes the audience on a journey through the family's story, stopping at different points in time to hear from each character.
2. Here are some questions students may consider while preparing roles for talking sculptures:
 - What would the father and mother in the photo say about themselves, their futures, and their relationship at the moment these pictures were taken?
 - What scenes in their later lives does the text conjure?
 - What images of the speaker's experience with these characters are embedded in the text (the speaker's younger selves, her self at the moment of the text)? How are younger and older images of this speaker the same or different?

Students may need more or less direction, depending on their willingness to play with these improvisational techniques.

More Improvisational Ideas: Groups may use mime in the background or have various characters vocalize their imagined scenarios in concert with the poem. They may have characters tap in/tap out to show changes in the character. (For example, an actor walks up to a character and taps that person, indicating the actor should freeze, while the new actor assumes the predecessor's pose and carries on with the part.)

3. After performances, have the students discuss how the poet selected and arranged images to tell the complicated story of this embattled family in this brief poem.

More Poems for Practice

Have students practice visualizing, looking for antecedent scenarios, dividing poems into parts, and annotating with other narrative poems, including “Jenny Kiss’d Me” by Leigh Hunt (widely accessible), “Theme for English B” by Langston Hughes (more difficult), and “My Last Duchess” by Robert Browning (challenging).

For a quick assessment of students at lower levels of readiness, have students practice visualizing the story of one of these poems and then describing the events of the story in a couple of sentences. Have them use key transition words (such as *first*, *second*, *third*) to indicate the sequence of events. On-level students should first visualize a poem, making notes in the right margin, and then read to discover the antecedent scenario, making notes on the left side. Using lines on their annotated copies of the poem, students should also divide the poem into parts and indicate their dividing principle (images changed, time changed, etc.). Advanced students may be further challenged metacognitively by writing a reflection on the differences each approach to the reading made. They should use evidence from their own notations to support their claims about how reading to visualize versus reading to discover the antecedent scenario approach produced different results.

More Close Reading, Performance, and Powerful Writing Ideas*Close Reading Sharon Olds*

Using titles suggested in *More Poems for Practice*, have students complete and support the following claim sentence: “_____, the author of _____, reveals the story of a speaker who _____ by using images that suggest he or she was _____.” (Sample: Sharon Olds, the author of “I Go Back to May 1937,” reveals the story of a speaker who struggles with her parents’ failed marriage by using images that suggest she was a victim of their unhappiness.)

Performance

Using the close reading techniques they have learned so far, students can submit a visual montage in a media of their choice of a narrative poem of their choice.

Artful Writing

Using a family photo as a prompt, have students write a poem in which they speak to the photo or the photo speaks to them. Using artful word choice (diction) and the careful selection and arrangement of details

(figurative language, metaphor/simile), ask students to convey the images they see as well as the emotions the photo conjures.

Lesson 3: Paraphrasing and Analyzing Arguments

Teacher-to-Teacher Note. This lesson allows students to practice all of the skills they have learned so far, especially those developed through practice with the strategies of visualizing images, determining the antecedent scenario, and dividing the poem into parts. Students will review the concept of the rhetorical situation, noting how authors draw on the context of larger cultural narratives—about slavery in “Still I Rise,” marriage in “I Go Back to May 1937,” and now romance in “To His Coy Mistress”—in shaping a reader’s experience. At the end of this lesson, groups will present a “slide show” of significant images of one stanza using tableau, a group of carefully posed silent sculptures (Wilhelm, *Action Strategies* 127). Students will be introduced to argumentative appeals. I have used the vocabulary *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* in the lesson description. However, if this vocabulary is unfamiliar, students can discuss these concepts as appeals that strengthen one’s own credibility, appeals to emotions, and appeals to logic. (For more on ethos, pathos, and logos, see OWL at Purdue: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/588/04/>.)

For reliable sources of the text, see “Additional Resources for Chapter 2” at the end of the chapter.

Lesson Step 3.1: Introducing Claims and Arguments through “To His Coy Mistress” by Andrew Marvel

Depending upon the amount of available time and the proficiency of students, steps 3.1 and 3.2 can be completed individually at home. Also, while the poem can be read and enjoyed without knowledge of words like *Ganges* and *Humber*, words like these throughout the poem offer wonderful opportunities for study: “What does *Ganges* mean?” “Why did he select the image of this river rather than another?” “What on earth does he mean by ‘vegetable’ love?” With time and Internet access or a glossary, students can incorporate research on the British Empire in India, etymology, and allusion in their close readings.

1. *Frontloading Knowledge Option:* Before reading, review various persuasive appeals and then have students share the lyrics to their favorite love song with a small group. Using a five-column grid in which students can list each group, the speaker, his or her goal, his or her audience, and his or her appeals, ask students to analyze the features of typical love songs. What does the speaker hope to get or achieve by singing this song? What kind of persona does the speaker typically create for himself or herself? What

claims does the speaker usually make about himself or herself? What kinds of appeals? Have students write a line or two from the song to support each claim.

Using a graphic image of the rhetorical triangle, have students deepen their understanding in a large group debrief of typical characteristics defining each aspect of the rhetorical triangle in love songs. For example, the author/speaker is usually in love, the audience is usually the beloved, and so on. The purpose is often to woo the beloved or to reconcile with him or her.

Point out that readers bring genre knowledge to readings, whether they are grocery lists or love poems, and that this kind of knowledge can be really helpful in tackling tough texts. Guessing that a tough poem fits into a familiar genre can help them navigate texts because even though sometimes the language can appear to be so old as to seem foreign, genre knowledge, such as the typical features of a love poem, can help them get the gist of a text, even before they can decode it to the point of being able to visualize, guess at the antecedent scenario, and ultimately divide it into parts for deeper analysis.

2. Tell students that in addition to the close reading techniques they have practiced, they will add another to their repertoire of strategies: paraphrasing, or putting the poem into their own words faithfully. Students will try reading “To His Coy Mistress” on their own to determine the gist of it. After sharing an example of paraphrasing, have them work in groups to paraphrase the entire poem. Have them take turns simply reading it aloud, making sense of what they can, and generating questions. Here is what I share as an example of paraphrase. I have also inserted my think-aloud commentary in parentheses for the first few lines of the poem.

Original	Paraphrase
Had we but world enough, and time, This coyness, lady, were no crime.	If we had all the time in the world Acting shy would not be a bad thing to do to me (Think aloud: <i>Crime? That’s an interesting word choice! Is it against the law to resist his advances?</i>)
We would sit down and think which way To walk, and pass our long love’s day;	We would sit around thinking about what to do with our time together
Thou by the Indian Ganges’ side Shouldst rubies find;	You could be by that big river in India finding rubies (Think aloud: <i>I had to look up what the Indian Ganges was. I found out...</i>)
I by the tide Of Humber would complain.	I could be here by the shore in England com- plaining that you are gone (<i>I am picturing a drama king here . . . is he really overwhelmed with grief as he imagines being away from her? I’m not sure if I trust him yet. I’ll give him the benefit of the doubt until I read on.</i>)

3. After students complete their paraphrasing, bring the whole group back together and refer to the SOAPSTone display in the classroom. After identifying the poem's SOAPSTone as a class, have a few groups share their paraphrases.

Lesson Step 3.2: Creating a Slide Show

1. Divide the class into three groups. Have students prepare a performance of a single stanza of the poem, *using every member of the group and every group member's voice*. Tell them the goal of this ad hoc performance is to highlight the speaker's intentions and his strategic use of appeals to ethos (the speaker's own credibility,) logos (the mistress's logic or reason), and pathos (the mistress's emotions), as well as the mistress's possible response to each image in the speaker's argument. To that end, they will choose two or three images that best capture their take on the stanza. They will create a silent physicalization, a "Slide Show" using these images (Wilhelm, *Action Strategies* 127). Performances should take place in the circle, moving fluently from one stanza (group) to the next.
2. Debrief the performances, asking groups to discuss the speaker's appeals and the mistress's possible responses. Ask how this poem is similar and different from the typical love songs we hear today.
3. Have students return to their groups for deeper analysis of their parts, labeling what they think the speaker is doing in each movement of his persuasive argument (flattering, impressing, pressuring, convincing, etc.). Write the following sentence stem on the board as a speaking prompt: "When the speaker chooses to say _____, it seems as though he is appealing to (ethos, logos, or pathos) because he uses the image of _____, which he feels will cause the mistress to _____." Have students use this lens to guide their analyses. As always, be sure to model Key Literary Terms for Discussing Imagery.
4. In a large group debrief, ask students to share claims about the speaker's tactics in developing the argument, using the sentence stem to prompt fluent and precise claims about the text.
5. After sharing these claims about the speaker's argument, let students know that they too have made an argument by making claims about the speaker's choices and that these interpretive claims are the basis of arguments about literature.

More Poems for Practice

Other poems that may be used to complete all of the activities outlined here include "The Bait" by John Donne, "The Passionate Shepherd to

His Love” by Christopher Marlowe, and “The Nymph’s Reply to the Shepherd” by Sir Walter Raleigh. These poems are all fairly challenging. Students at lower levels of readiness may need a great deal of scaffolding to paraphrase them. This activity can be extended by asking students to describe what might have happened prior to this moment to make this speaker say these things at this time as well as how the speaker attempts to make himself or herself appealing to his or her audience. On-level students can paraphrase one of the suggested poems in this lesson and look at the argument through the lens of ethos, pathos, and logos, making written claims about the poem. Advanced students may read “Coy Mistress” by Annie Finch (found at <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poem.html?id=175353>), paraphrase the poem to determine the gist of Finch’s counterargument, and write a brief analysis of how Finch responds to various aspects of Marvel’s choices in her response poem.

More Close Reading, Performance, and Powerful Writing Ideas

Close Reading

Have students complete this claim and support it with evidence from the text: “The image that might have been most/least effective in the speaker’s persuasive argument to his mistress was the image of _____, which is captured in the line _____ because it suggests that _____.” This prompt may also be applied to any of the titles in *More Poems for Practice*. (Sample: The image that might have been least effective in the speaker’s persuasive argument to his mistress was the image of her beauty being destroyed by death, which is captured in the line “thy beauty shall no more be found” because it suggests that, in his view, her beauty is only external and will pass.)

Performance

Have students record music-video style performances of one of the poems discussed in this lesson.

Artful Writing

Students can rewrite the Marvel poem or the coy mistress’s response using a modern speaker and modern words.

Lesson 4: Determining the Emotional Moves

Teacher-to-Teacher Note. The culminating lesson challenges students to recite a poem of their own choosing. This recitation assignment can be used as the basis for future recitation assignments. Using “Facing It” by Yusef Komunyakaa, students will explore how one might determine the emotional moves of a poem in the course of preparing a performance. For reliable copies of the poem, see “Additional Resources for Chapter 2” at the end of the chapter.

Lesson Step 4.1: Introducing “Facing It” by Yusef Komunyakaa

1. *Frontloading Knowledge Option:* Provide or have students find or develop brief (no more than a paragraph) encyclopedic entries about Andrew Johnson, the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and Maya Lin.

Introduce the phrase *associated meanings*, saying that as individual readers, we make unique connections between the text and knowledge and experiences we carry in our minds. We associate images with certain feelings or previous experience with common symbolic uses of particular images, just as we associate our ideas about typical kinds of stories with stories within the same genre. For example, we associate images of warmth with good feelings and images of physical coldness with discomfort.

In this poem, students will find that the poet may be playing with references to specific historical events, famous people, and even phrases that we, as part of the English language community or American culture, agree have a few distinct meanings. Give the students an example of this last category by projecting the following sentence stem: When most people think of the phrase *face it*, they think _____ or they think _____. After filling in the blanks individually, have students share possible associations with the phrase. Explain that they will use the poem “Facing It” to learn how to prepare a formal recitation, using the same careful attention to language that they have been practicing throughout group performance work and close reading activities.

2. Display a visual of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial prior to the lesson (see “Additional Resources for Chapter 2” for image sources). As you display the image, share the following background with students: Maya Lin, a young architecture student at Yale University, designed the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. The memorial, which was constructed in 1982 on the Washington Mall between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument, invites visitors to step inside a 109-foot wall, which expands laterally, several hundred feet from its vertex. It sinks six feet below the horizon. The two black granite wings open like a book, inside of which the name of every fallen soldier is engraved. (I typically

then invite students to share personal encounters with the monument before introducing the poem.) Yusef Komunyakaa, himself a Vietnam veteran, explores the impact of this sacred place upon its visitors in his poem “Facing It.” (I also have a black granite cheese plate that I pass around before reading. Though it isn’t essential, seeing the reflective quality of polished granite really helps students visualize the scene more vividly. Small samples of polished granite are sometimes available at hardware and tile stores.)

3. Share the poem, and start students off by doing a think-aloud, again using the “I’ll do it first, then we’ll do it together” model. You do the first two lines, and then have students help you do the next two. Here is how I think aloud about the first section.

I have this picture of the speaker facing the memorial. I am picturing an African American speaker, because he says “my black face fades,” but then he says his face is “hiding inside the black granite,” so maybe his reflection just looks shadowy, or maybe he means “black” more figuratively, as in sad. See, that is another example of associated meanings. Look how many things I thought about when I saw that word repeated. I don’t know; I’ll have to come back to that. I think I’ll circle the word black, since it is used twice, and I’ll jot down the question, “why does he repeat black?” I always note repetitions and variations because those patterns usually tell me something.

I wonder why he is using the word “hiding.” It is an interesting word choice, because it makes it seem like his reflection has a mind of its own, like it is another live version of himself. I am going to circle that too.

Ask students to help with a think-aloud about the next two lines. Ask: “What questions run through your mind as you read the next two lines?” Have several students share. They will probably point out that he seems to be upset; some students may even note that the speaker seems to have predicted that he would be upset with the line, “I said I wouldn’t.” After allowing several students to share their contributions you may jump back in, building on student responses.

He seems to be upset, almost uncontrollably, because he says, “dammit. No tears,” as if he is trying to keep from crying. I wonder why he wants to avoid crying. I wonder what he is “facing.”

Once you have moved to this larger question, segue to the close reading activity, which involves thinking-aloud about the poet’s choices and drawing pictures of the images in the text.

4. Project a model or provide an actual handout for sketching illustrations. The handout can be very simple: three large boxes, laid out horizontally with space beneath each box for students to
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record captions or quotes from the poem pertaining to the sketch. Tell them that they will sketch key images from the text, almost like snapshots from a movie of the poem. Have students begin a close reading by asking what the speaker literally sees as he stands before the wall. Encourage them to visualize and describe every image in a think-aloud, noting especially those images that are repeated. Have them sketch what they see in sequence. Assure students that they need not create works of art, just some way to represent what they see in their mind's eye.

5. Circulate around the room, modeling Key Literary Terms for Discussing Imagery, and encourage students to use the Think-Aloud Prompts. Encourage students to walk through the physical experience to imagine the speaker's vantage point at any given moment in the poem, and ask them to draw what they see. As students are finishing up, make another round, asking, "What do you make of the way he arranges these images sequentially in the living mural he creates? Consider the location of images in relation to other images. For example, how do images of himself relate sequentially to images of others at the memorial, the outside world, and so forth?" Students may begin to literally see in their sketches how the memorial has prompted the speaker first to reflect on himself—his personal experience—and then to move outward from the experiences of other visitors to the universal experience of war, death, loss, and the like.
6. Display this question on the board: "Based on his selection and arrangement of images, what does the author suggest this speaker is 'facing' when he visits this place?" Ask students to write a brief response and then to share their answers in a large group debrief. Try to have as many students respond as possible, even if they only use brief phrases. As they share their findings, they may also refer to their illustrations and research into key terms, and so on. Have them take additional notes on the margins of the text.

Lesson Step 4.2: Creating a Tableau

1. Divide the class in two and have each half of the class arrange themselves in a "tableau" (a living mural made up of silent sculptures of multiple figures) that represents the poem. Have students focus on the goal of communicating their take on Komunyakaa's selection and arrangement of images. Ask, "How does he use these images to reveal the monument's personal, political, and cultural meaning and the effect it has on visitors?"
 2. Have students present their tableau in the circle. Then, after all the performances, have students share their reasons for each of their performance choices in a large group debrief. You should begin using the word *claim* in your discussions with students if
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you haven't already. Also, model claim making as you respond to student contributions, saying, "so you claim that when Komunyakaa chose this image, he was suggesting that . . . because you associated . . . with. . . ." As always, as students present their work verbally to the larger group, encourage them to use the Key Literary Terms for Discussing Imagery through modeling and praise. Finally, be sure to encourage accountable talk by asking students to cite evidence in the text for each claim. This is especially useful for ELLs.

Lesson Step 4.3: Preparing a Recitation

1. In this culminating performance activity, students select a poem from the Poetry Out Loud website or another reputable source and prepare a recitation of it. To help them make the transition from group performance activities to individual recitations, provide students with the handout *Getting Ready to Recite* (handout 4.A in the appendix) and review it with them.
2. Have students view a model recitation of "Facing It" and a few other poems and discuss the features of a recitation.
3. After students select a poem, provide time for students to practice their close reading strategies and submit illustrations or written work as they prepare performances.
4. As they begin memorizing, have students rewrite the poem on their own sheet of paper as a series of sentences, and again as a series of lines. Not only is it helpful in the memorization process, but the process helps readers notice aspects of language that would otherwise go unnoticed. It is also a great preview of the lessons on line breaks and sentence features in the other chapters. Finally, have students try to label the tone of the speaker's voice as it changes from one line or phrase to the next. For more information on this process, see the "Tone Map" assignment on the Poetry Out Loud website.
5. Build in a small group performance workshop, so students have the opportunity to practice and receive feedback from a small group of trusted peers before the final performance, which you might evaluate using the rubric available on the Poetry Out Loud website or another performance rubric.
6. Make performances something of an event. Whether it is a class competition or a showcase, this is the culmination of a lot of improvisational training, trust building, and good reading, so it is something to celebrate. Create or move to a special performance space and invite an audience (other teachers, classes, parents, community members, etc.). Students may even videotape performances to share with a larger audience using websites like www.schooltube.com.

More Poems for Practice

Using the same close reading techniques they have learned in previous lessons, students can explore other poems to determine the emotional curve of a poem of place. “Where I’m From” by George Ella Lyon (widely accessible), “Chicago” by Carl Sandburg (more challenging), and “London” by William Blake (difficult) lend themselves easily to these explorations. Students of all levels can be assessed using the recitation technique, though the preparation process, written pre-recitation products, and evaluation of these students may vary.

More Close Reading, Performance, and Powerful Writing Ideas*Close Reading*

Have students complete the following claim statement and support it using evidence from the text: “In his or her poem “____,” the poet _____ uses images of _____ in his or her exploration of _____, which, as the images suggest, is/was a _____ topic/experience.” (Sample: In his poem “Facing It” the poet Yusef Komunyakaa uses images of nature, monuments, and other mourners to represent his memories of the Vietnam War, which is a haunting experience for him.)

Performance

Students can create video montages with voiceovers of “Facing It.”

Artful Writing

Students may write a brief vignette (not necessarily a poem) about a visit to a memorial or monument or another place that is a sacred reminder of someone who has passed on.

Additional Resources for Chapter 2**Poems, Poets, Poetry**

“Still I Rise” by Maya Angelou

- Video made with images and Angelou’s own reading <http://www.redroom.com/video/still-i-rise>
- Video of Angelou reading the poem <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqOqo50LSZ0&feature=related>

“Facing It” by Yusef Komunyakaa

- An audio clip of the poem. <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/journal/audioitem.html?id=594>
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- *Pleasure Dome: New and Collected Poems* by Yusef Komunyakaa (Middleton: Wesleyan UP, 2001).

“To His Coy Mistress” by Andrew Marvel

- Eleven audio recordings of the poem http://www.archive.org/details/To_His_Coy_Mistress
- Another reading of the poem <http://ecaudio.umwblogs.org/marvell-to-his-coy-mistress-read-by-meredith-nowlin/>

“I Go Back to May 1937” by Sharon Olds

- A video of the poem read by the poet <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/journal/videoitem.html?id=26>

Other Reliable Sources of Texts

- www.poetryfoundation.org
- www.poets.org
- www.bartleby.com

Definitions/Words/Etymology

- www.poetryfoundation.org (Literary Glossary)
- www.etymonline.com (Etymology)
- www.askoxford.com (Dictionary)

Audiovisual Resources

- Vietnam Memorial: http://www.greatbuildings.com/cgi-bin/gbi.cgi/Vietnam_Veterans_Memorial.html/cid_2877635.jpg.
- Google Images has just about everything from portraits of poets to images of details from the poems, and even examples of tableau vivant.
- The Poet Speaks of Art (Poems inspired by famous paintings): <http://www.english.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poems/titlepage.html>
- YouTube has some great resources for theater games and examples of tableau vivant as it is woven into theatrical performances, including those of Lookingglass Theatre, which develops many of its productions through its work with physicalizing longer canonical texts, a process similar to the one I advocate throughout lessons with brief lyrics. Along with Jeff Wilhelm, Lookingglass Theatre has been my greatest resource.

Other Resources

- “The Rhetorical Situation,” *Purdue OWL*, Purdue University Online Writing Lab, <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/625/01/>. A number of wonderful resources for students and teachers are available at www.ReadWriteThink.org, including rubrics for evaluating everything from small group discussions to academic essays, comic books, and performances. The comic creator, digital scrapbook, timeline, and other interactive tools for students can help teachers facilitate visualization activities.

Professional Development Resources

- As I have developed a repertoire of theater techniques, I have relied heavily on the workshops facilitated by members of the Lookingglass Theatre Company and the scholar/author Jeffery D. Wilhelm, especially his books *Action Strategies for Deepening Comprehension* and *Reading Is Seeing*.
 - To build professional fluency in talking about imagery and figurative language, see Helen Vendler’s *Poems, Poets, Poetry* anthology (especially her “Describing Poems” chapter) and Edward Hirsch’s article “The Poet Is a Nightingale,” available online at the Poetry Foundation website, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/>.
 - For literary terms, I have relied heavily on M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. It has great examples and nuanced explanations.
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360 DEGREES OF TEXT

Youth culture is rich with poetry, from song lyrics that teens read, listen to, and write, to poetry they perform through slams and open mics. The rich, compact language of poetry both inside and outside the classroom plays a valuable role in bridging the divide between youth culture and academic culture.

Whether we call it “critical literacy” or just “making meaning,” being able to read and analyze with precision and judgment empowers all students, not just in their academic courses but in everyday situations that require thoughtful evaluation and response. Through Eileen Murphy Buckley’s 360-degree approach to teaching critical literacy, students investigate texts through a full spectrum of learning modalities, harnessing the excitement of performance, imitation, creative writing, and argument/debate activities to become more powerful thinkers, readers, and writers.



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