Informational Text Strategies: Close Reading

Rationale:

The geosciences offer many interesting explanations about the world in which we all live. Informational text sources such as EARTH magazine and articles from NASA, the US Geological Survey, and others offer compelling content that many students will find engaging, which can motivate them as they learn strategies to comprehend the science discussed in the text.   One approach to helping students get the most out of informational text is known as "close reading", a version of which is outlined in this activity.

Learning Goal

The goal of this activity is for students to develop strategies that will help them understand complex informational texts. Individually, students read a text and annotate key words and phrases that strike them as important, surprising, unclear, and so on. After students have read and annotated the text they participate in a collaborative conversation about the text with a group. Then, they create a poster that highlights the main idea and supporting evidence of the text. Finally the students share their poster and what they learned with the class.

Materials

Enough printed copies of the text passage for each student to have her or his own copy. Links to suggested texts are:

- EARTH Magazine: Are slow-slip earthquakes under Tokyo stressing faults? http://www.earthmagazine.org/article/are-slow-slip-earthquakes-under-tokyo-stressing-faults
- EARTH Magazine: Slab tear explains perplexing Colombian earthquake activity: http://www.earthmagazine.org/article/slab-tear-explains-perplexing-colombian-earthquake-activity
- USGS: The Science of Earthquakes: http://earthquake.usgs.gov/learn/kids/eqscience.php

Students should have their own pen or pencil for annotating the text.

Close Reading Annotation Symbols document (2nd to last page of this document) displayed for all students to see.

For each group:

- Paper
- Pencil
- Poster paper
- Colored markers or colored pencils
- Copy of the *Collaborative Poster Rubric* (last page of this document)

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Procedure:

1. (5-10 minutes) Instruct students to read the text quickly the first time, just to get a sense of the ideas expressed. This is sometimes called "reading for gist".

2. (5-10 minutes) Ask students to read the text a second time, much more slowly and focusing on specific details. As they read the text they should underline and highlight key words and phrases in the text. Encourage students to make notes in the margins of the text to enhance the annotations. Share the *Close Reading Annotation Symbols* table with the class. Using the *Close Reading Annotation Symbols* table as a guide, students can respond to the following questions as they annotate their texts:

   - What did you find confusing? Identify key words, phrases, or ideas that you don't understand with question marks. Make a note in the margin about what was confusing. What ideas did you find surprising? Use exclamation marks to identify these and note what caught your attention.
   - What ideas did you find important? Underline these points and note why you found each one important.
   - What terms are new to you, and what do they mean? Circle them. Use a dictionary to define words unfamiliar to you and write their definitions in the margin.
   - What questions do you have about the text? Write your questions in the margin.
   - Are you able to make a connection to something in the text? Draw an arrow and note the connecting idea or experience in the margin.

3. (15-20 minutes) After students have read and annotated the text, break them into groups for discussion.

   Explain to them that they will be working with their groups cooperatively to create a poster that identifies the main ideas of the text. Pass out the *Collaborative Poster Rubric*. Have students read the rubric and consider how they can best achieve the "Outstanding" criteria in each row.   Below is some guidance you may want to provide students on how they should carry out their work collaboratively on the poster.

   - Decide through consensus on an image that represents the main idea of the text.
   - Decide on a quote from the text that is important to understanding the text.
   - Decide on an original phrase that highlights or summarizes the main idea of the text.
   - Consider the main idea that you found for the text. How is that idea supported? Is there evidence given? Is that evidence sound? Is the reasoning clear? How can you add the main idea and one or two key pieces of evidence to your poster?
   - Everyone in the group should sign their poster.

4. (About 2 minutes per group) Bring the class together and have each group share their poster. Presentations can address such questions as: What did you learn from the text? What was the main idea of the text? Share the image that represents the main idea. What quotes from the text did you decide were necessary to understanding the text?

5.   (About 5 minutes) After all of the groups have presented, have the class consider how the posters are alike, and how they are different. What might be some reasons for those similarities and differences? The discussion can focus on the priorities, interests, and prior knowledge that different readers bring to their interpretation of informational text.

Assessment:

Use the attached rubric to assess group work on the collaborative poster.

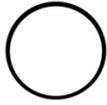| Performance Indicators	Outstanding	Passing	Needs Revision
Contents	• Poster includes one evocative image and one evocative quote from the reading. • As a whole, the poster successfully communicates the spirit of the story. • Identifies evidence for main idea accurately. • Assesses evidence and reasoning effectively.	• Poster includes one relevant image and one relevant quote from the reading. • As a whole, the poster communicates something about the spirit of the story. • Identifies evidence related to the main idea but may leave some out or include unrelated ideas. • Assesses evidence and reasoning effectively for the most part.	• Poster lacks either a relevant image or quote from the reading. • As a whole, the poster fails to communicate the spirit of the story. • Identifies evidence related to the main idea but may leave some out or include unrelated ideas. • Assesses evidence and reasoning effectively for the most part.
Presentation	• Poster uses creative design to amplify the meaning of the image and quote. • Poster effectively uses color or shading. • Product is neat.	• Poster design does not detract from the meaning of the image and quote. • Poster uses color and shading. • Product is neat.	• Poster design detracts from the meaning of the image and quote. • Poster does not use color or shading. • Product is sloppy.
Collaboration with Peers	• During planning of the poster, each student is actively involved and contributes ideas for both the image and quote. • All group members encourage peers; participation and work to incorporate their ideas into the poster.	• During planning, each group member pays attention and contributes. • All group members respond to each other's ideas.	• During planning, one or more group members fails to pay attention or contribute. • One or more group members does not contribute to the poster.

(Adapted from Provencher, n.d.)

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References:

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Close Reading Annotation Symbols

Symbol	Meaning
◯	Unfamiliar word or phrase
☆	Main idea
?	I don't understand/I am confused
+	I agree
-	I disagree
!	I'm surprised
✔	I understand
⟶	Connections
♡	Favorite part
<u>**underline**</u>	Important

Remember: Make notes and comments in the margins about those things that you annotate.

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Collaborative Poster Rubric

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