



## Critical Reading Strategies: Layered Reading

Teaching reading comprehension through layered reading and explicit reading strategies helps children create robust mental models during reading. Here are some guiding questions to help teachers think about questioning in each layer. These could be answered orally or using 'stop & jot'.

Layer	Basis	Description	Examples
<b>First Layer</b>  What does it say?	Text based Vocab based	Questions should help guide students to think about the most important elements of the text (the key ideas and details)  Questions should also clarify confusions (in this case, confusions about what the text says)	What was the street like at the beginning of the story? How did everybody feel about that? What did they want? What happened to...? Why did they think that? What did he do and why? When he was asked what he had done, what did he say? What does that mean? Why was the man there? What happened? Why did the man do that? What was the street like at the end of the story? How has it changed? What changed it?
<b>Second Layer</b>  How does it work?	Author choice based	What has the author done? (impression, sensation)  What are the tools? (author choices and effects) literary devices, word choices, structural elements, and author purpose	What was he thinking? How did he say this? (Pick out words i.e. reluctantly) What does this tell us about the character? Has the character changed? Why does the author explain why he painted at night? (Character motivation is important, is he a different kind of man depending on why he is painting at night?) What do you notice here? Why does the author tell you the neighbours' feelings this way? ( discuss repetition) What technique has the author used here? (e.g. by using repetition over and over again with colourful language we get a sense of how strong emotions are)
<b>Third Layer</b>  How does it relate?	Connections based	Allows the reader to evaluate the quality and value of text – connect to other texts, connect to personal experience	How does this relate to something you know in your life? How does this relate to any background knowledge you may already have? Do you know other stories like this? Similar/different – discuss themes What do you think about this text, was the author effective? How?

## Literary Features and Devices

Feature/Device	Explanation	Exemplification
<b>Genre</b>	The classification of fiction by content similarities. Genre is not classification by age category or format (eg. graphic novel).	Main genres: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prose</li> <li>• Drama</li> <li>• Poetry</li> </ul> Main sub-genres: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adventure</li> <li>• Mystery</li> <li>• Science fiction</li> <li>• Fantasy</li> <li>• Historical fiction</li> <li>• Contemporary fiction</li> <li>• Stories with dilemmas</li> <li>• Playscripts</li> <li>• Traditional tales</li> <li>• Fables</li> <li>• Myths &amp; Legends</li> <li>• Fairy Tales</li> </ul>
<b>Themes</b>	The theme is the universal idea or message that stretches through the entire story. There may be a number of themes in any story and, to a certain extent; the theme of a story is open to the interpretation of the reader. Children, however, can identify and discuss the theme that they feel is relevant to them.	For example, The Harry Potter series has multiple themes. For some children the main theme may be friendship; for others it may be ‘good’ versus ‘evil’.
<b>Mood</b>	Mood is the feeling that the author arouses in the reader. Mood can be positive, negative or broadly neutral. It can be as simple as happy or sad but may become more complex – melancholy, calm, jubilant or threatening. Authors use a rich variety of techniques and devices to create mood.	The threatening mood created by Chris Priestly in his ‘Tales of Terror’ books. Use of dark vocab and negative adjectives.
<b>Tone</b>	Tone is the attitude authors have to their readers and their subject matter. This is often more evident in non-fiction writing – ‘You’d be mad not to try this...’ In fiction prose, tone can be created by the narrator.	Paul Jennings’ stories are often narrated by an anti-hero who holds the reader in contempt. In ‘Private Peaceful’ Morpurgo’s attitude to execution for cowardice is evident throughout; as is Foreman’s attitude to trench warfare in ‘The War Game’ (this could be contrasted with an almost nostalgic tone in ‘War Boy’).
<b>Narrative Viewpoint</b>	From the perspective of whom do we see the story?	First-person narrative - from the narrator’s perspective e.g. Cue For Treason.

		<p>Third-person narrative may be from multiple perspectives or still just one. E.g. Harry Potter</p> <p>Second person narrative – the use of ‘you’ as the narrating pronoun - is more common in foreign literature but is often used in instructional text; guidebooks.</p>
<b>Plot Types</b>	<p>Plot concerns the organisation of the main events of a work of fiction.</p> <p>Plot differs from narrative in that plot is concerned with how events are related, how they are structured, and how they enact change in the major characters.</p> <p>Most plots will trace some process of change in which characters are caught up in a conflict that is eventually resolved. With plot there is cause and effect principle.</p>	<p>The 7 major plot types are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• quest – My Name is David</li> <li>• voyage and return – Jason and the Argonauts</li> <li>• comedy – The Toilet of Doom</li> <li>• tragedy - Romeo and Juliet</li> <li>• rebirth – The Water Babies</li> <li>• overcoming the monster – Theseus and the Minotaur.</li> <li>• rags to riches – Oliver Twist</li> </ul> <p>They are not mutually exclusive, and a number may apply to any story. For example, it could be argued that Harry Potter stories could fall into a number of categories – ‘overcoming the monster’, ‘rebirth’, ‘quest’. The 3 little pigs story may best be categorised as ‘overcoming the monster.’</p>
<b>Narrative Conflict</b>	<p>Where plot refers to the events of a work of fiction, the narrative refers to how the story is told: the manner of the narration.</p> <p>It is often said that narrative is akin to the architecture of the building (the design) whereas plot is the actual building (structure).</p>	<p>Describes the major conflict faced by the main protagonist(s).</p> <p>The main narrative conflicts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Man v Man</li> <li>• Man v Self</li> <li>• Man v Monster</li> <li>• Man v Supernatural</li> <li>• Man v Destiny/Fate</li> <li>• Man v Nature</li> <li>• Man v Society</li> </ul>
<b>Hook</b>	<p>A device at the opening of a story to ensnare the reader’s attention</p>	<p>‘1984’ - It was a bright, cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.</p> <p>‘Bill’s New Frock’ – When Bill Simpson woke on Monday morning, he found he was a girl.</p>
<b>Story Opening</b>	<p>Setting, characterisation, <b>protagonist</b>, <b>antagonist</b></p>	<p>Where a story is set can be vital to the plot (Robinson Crusoe) or it may be irrelevant. The genre can often dictate the setting – science fiction; historical novels; westerns; fairy tales – and can be an integral part of the narrative – Hogwarts in the Harry Potter series. Setting is often linked to the mood that the author is trying to create – the derelict house in a ghost story – but may be unspecific and purposely vague – ‘My Name is David’.</p>

		<p>The main protagonist and antagonist usually create the conflict within a story. Authors create these characters with care, subtlety and usually without expositional passages. Readers prefer to discover what characters are like rather than be told what they are like – ‘show don’t tell’. Characters are created by a combination of sensory descriptions (what they look, sound, feel, smell like), how they move, how they act and what they say. Authors also use symbolism and figurative language to imbue deeper characterisation. Many authors also use the character’s name to imply some inherent characteristic – ‘The Gruffalo’, ‘Ron Weasley’, ‘Scrooge’.</p> <p>Harry Potter Lord Voldemort</p>
<b>Problem</b>	Problem, dilemma	<p>The problem or dilemma is the heart of any story. Without it there is no conflict and thus no story. Without the Big Bad Wolf, the tale of The Three Little Pigs has no story.</p> <p>When the problem is a dilemma, the protagonist will always be left with a deficit. Dilemmas are never win/win.</p>
<b>Resolution</b>	Climax, resolution, ending.	<p>Readers expect a resolution to the problem in a story even if the resolution is not permanent – does the Big Bad Wolf die or merely flee?</p> <p>The resolution usually follows a hectic, suspenseful crescendo building towards the solving of the problem. This is the climax – the wolf climbing onto the roof; the pigs frantically building the fire and boiling the pot of water.</p> <p>Once the problem is resolved the story can end. The ending is often an implication of what awaits: ‘They lived happily ever after’; or can leave a pulse of emotion in the reader.</p>
<b>Mini-Problem</b>	<p>A story is seldom sustained by the main problem alone. Characters, settings and language all help to maintain the reader’s interest and are important to both plot and narrative.</p> <p>Obstacles to the progress of the protagonist towards the resolution are another technique writers employ to keep the reader involved. These obstacles may be physical or emotional. They take the form of <b>mini-problems</b>, which are faced by the protagonist on his/her journey to resolving the main problem.</p>	<p>A mini-problem is an obstacle that the protagonist must overcome on their journey towards the climax and resolution. They must be resolved before the protagonist can continue on the journey.</p> <p>e.g. Harry Potter must pass through three rooms before facing Voldemort in ‘Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone.’</p> <p>James Bond action sequences follow this format and can be an effective way of explaining the technique.</p>
<b>Story Structure</b>	Opening, problem, mini-problem, Climax, resolution, ending.	Three little pigs leave home and build new homes.

		<p>The wolf appears.</p> <p>The wolf blows down the house of straw.</p> <p>The wolf blows down the house of sticks.</p> <p>The wolf attempts to destroy the brick house but unable to climb onto the roof to enter through the chimney. The pigs realise this and put a pot of boiling water on the fire.</p> <p>The wolf descends through the chimney and ends up in the pot.</p> <p>The wolf runs away, never to be seen again.</p>
<b>Sentence Structure</b>	Authors select sentence structure for a reason.	<p>Paul Jennings never uses complex sentences because he feels they hinder the narrative.</p> <p>Chris Priestly uses many long and formally constructed complex sentences to give his stories a feeling of Victorian Gothic.</p> <p>Michael Foreman uses short sentences to reflect the social class and age of his protagonists.</p>
<b>Text Structure</b>	Authors often employ a standard text structure with which readers feel comfortable, with stories divided into chapters and paragraphs within the chapters.	<p>David Almond employs very short chapters in 'Skellig' to move the narrative rapidly.</p> <p>The poet E.E. Cummings famously spreads the words across the page in place of punctuation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paragraphs to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Introduce or reintroduce a character</li> <li>○ To move the setting</li> <li>○ To signify the passing of time</li> <li>○ For dramatic effect</li> <li>○ When using dialogue</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Plot Point</b>	Plot, a <b>plot point</b> is the point ( <b>the cause</b> ) at which the story must move forward ( <b>the effect</b> ). There is no turning back.	<p>In Sleeping Beauty, <b>the princess pricks her finger (the cause)</b> so <b>the kingdom falls asleep (the effect)</b>.</p> <p>For example, in the story of the 3 little pigs the plot points are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Little pigs must leave home and find shelter.</b></li> <li>2. <b>Pig 1 builds house of straw. Pig 2 builds house of sticks. Pig 3 builds house of bricks.</b></li> <li>3. <b>Big bad wolf arrives on the scene.</b></li> <li>4. <b>Pig 1's house destroyed by the wolf.</b></li> <li>5. <b>Pig 2's house destroyed by the wolf. All pigs assemble in house of bricks.</b></li> <li>6. <b>Wolf attempts to destroy the house but is unable to.</b></li> <li>7. <b>Wolf attempts to enter house through chimney.</b></li> <li>8. <b>Pigs build fire.</b></li> <li>9. <b>Wolf killed.</b></li> <li>10. <b>Pigs live happily ever after.</b></li> </ol>

<b>Closure</b>	Closure is the sense of ending that is invested in the text through artistic, rhetorical and ideological means.	Once upon a time...They all lived happily ever after. A murder at the beginning of a whodunit...the detective reveals the killer. The inherent understanding that a bad deed requires sanction...that a bad character will receive comeuppance. The inherent understanding that a tragedy will have a tragic ending.
<b>Metaphors &amp; Similes</b>	A simile is a figure of speech that compares two otherwise dissimilar things, often introduced by the words like or as. A metaphor is when a word is used in place of another to suggest a likeness.	You are like a summer's day.  You are a summer's day.
<b>Personification</b>	Writers use the attribution of human traits and feelings to inanimate objects to enrich the understanding of the reader Personification is a type of metaphor.	The dancing trees; the chattering birds.
<b>Pathetic Fallacy</b>	Writers often use natural phenomena to reflect and symbolise human emotion and mood within the narrative.	Stormy weather often suggests a stormy ride for the protagonist – Bram Stoker's 'Dracula'. – Morpurgo utilises pathetic fallacy extensively within 'The Giant's Necklace.'
<b>Symbolism</b>	Authors use symbolism to reveal character.	Cruella Deville's fur coat; the ugly sisters ugliness is a symbol of their unpleasantness; the rose in Beauty and the Beast is a symbol of love; they can be used as a narrative device – Harry Potter's scar.
<b>Anthropomorphism</b>	Children's literature (and cinema) is heavily reliant on giving animals human traits – including speech. It is thus worth discussing this with children and bringing to their attention. There can be great symbolism behind the choice of the animal both literally and metaphorically: the fox is sly, the wolf evil, the lion brave, the owl wise. There can also be considerable cultural significance - Anansi and Brere Rabbit are small, clever and often overcome bigger, stronger and more powerful authority figure animals through outwitting them – not always using 'fair' means. Both originate in West Africa and the stories travelled through enslaved Africans taking on a special significance in American and Jamaican slave communities where authority figures being undermined was an important part of narrative.  Note that anthropomorphism references not only animals but also inanimate objects – 'my computer hates me!' is a form of anthropomorphism.	The Three Little Pigs Anansi stories. Chicken Licken The Gruffalo Babe Pinocchio Watership Down Animal Farm

<p><b>Repetition</b></p>	<p>We usually encourage young writers to look for alternative words in the same or adjacent sentences. However, writers often intentionally use a word, phrase or sound for effect two or more times. For repetition to be effective the repeated word or phrase must be repeated in close proximity.</p>	<p><b>Alliteration</b> Alliteration is the rhetorical device of repeating the sound of the first consonant in a series of multiple words.</p> <p><b>Assonance</b> This device consists of the repetition of a vowel sound.</p> <p><b>Anaphora</b> Starting each sentence with the same words. 'We shall fight on the beaches. We will fight on the landing grounds. We shall fight in the fields...'</p>
<p><b>Foreshadowing</b></p>	<p>A device that hints at something that may appear later – may be through pathetic fallacy</p>	<p>Eg. The crow of a raven in Shakespeare to foreshadow death. A storm brewing indicating turbulence for the character. 'He had a strange feeling he was being watched.'</p>
<p><b>Flashbacks</b></p>	<p>A literary device wherein the author depicts the occurrence of specific events to the reader, which have taken place before the present time the narration is following, or events that have happened before the events that are currently unfolding in the story.</p> <p>It is often a plotting device to explain characters' motivations in the present narrative by what happened in the past.</p>	<p>Harry Potter – death of his parents.</p>
<p><b>Irony</b></p>	<p>A contrast between reality and appearance</p>	<p><b>Verbal</b> – a trope where the intended meaning of a statement differs from the words expressed eg as clear as mud.</p> <p><b>Dramatic</b> – where the reader knows more than the character -eg Othello's faith in Iago.</p> <p><b>Situational</b> - a contrast between the actual and intended result of a situation – the fire brigade start the fire.</p>
<p><b>Vocabulary Choices</b></p>	<p>The words writers select are vital to affecting and influencing the reader. It is not merely a case that the more advanced the reader, the more complex the vocabulary used. The vocabulary must be in keeping with the narrative voice.</p>	<p>If the narrator is a child then the vocabulary will be in keeping with that of a child as in "The Boy in the Striped Pajamas" – despite the complex and adult themes.</p> <p>The vocabulary in Michael Foreman's 'War Game' is simple to reflect the background of the narrating character.</p>
<p><b>Hyperbole</b></p>	<p>Exaggeration with the implicit understanding that it is not to be taken literally.</p>	<p>A brain the size of a pea.</p>