

When History Enters the ELA Classroom:

A Literary Approach to
Historical Texts

Introduction

When we bring historical texts into the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom, we are not asking students to read and analyze as historians. We are asking them to read and analyze as literary analysts.

A historian's primary goal is synthesis of multiple pieces of evidence into a defensible interpretation of the past. They treat texts as clues to reconstruct the past. By examining the events and conditions that surrounded the text's creation, a strategy called "contextualization", they use the document's context to piece together why it was created and what world it inhabited. They may investigate the text's impact as an artifact, analyzing how it may have altered the course of human events, or how it helps us understand the past (Nokes, 2011; Wineburg, 2001).



A literary analyst's primary goal is analysis. They treat the text as a crafted message to deconstruct a work of art. In this discipline, students engage in specialized interpretive moves to understand how the author used their background, perspective, and the world they lived in to build a message that moves an audience (National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE], 2022; Reynolds & Rush, 2017; Reynolds et al., 2020). This approach treats the text as a lasting piece of human expression that requires students to generate and weave meaning between the lines (Lehman & Roberts, 2013; Reynolds et al., 2022).

However, these disciplines are not silos. While a historian investigates the context, impact, or usefulness of a text in interpreting the past, an ELA scholar analyzes the internal emotional and logical levers that gave that text the power to influence history and culture in the first place (Utah State Board of Education [USBE], 2025). These levers include the specific word choices and rhetorical moves the author chose to use. A literary analyzer cares deeply about the author and the context, but they use that information as a key to unlock why the message was crafted in a particular way (Burke, 2013). This weaving of text and context is a core ELA disciplinary process that allows students to simulate and understand complex social and cultural experiences (Mar & Oatley, 2008; Reynolds et al., 2022).

While historians and literary scholars both engage with historical texts, they do so with different purposes and methods. The following sections outline key similarities and differences in their approaches.

Comparison of Disciplinary Lenses

Primary Focus

Historian's Lens

When and where was the document created?
How does the context affect its content? What does it suggest about the past?

ELA Scholar's Lens

How do word choices, sentence structures, and imagery create a lasting work of art?

Lenses of Both Disciplines

How does the unique historical moment dictate the author's choice of rhetorical strategy?

Analysis of Author

Historian's Lens

Who wrote this, and what was their purpose and perspective? What unique insights and biases do they bring? Do I trust their account?

ELA Scholar's Lens

How does the author's background and status shape their voice in the text and the persona they build to gain trust?

Lenses of Both Disciplines

How does the author's status and the world they lived in influence the weight and authority of their words?

The Why

Historian's Lens

Who was their intended audience? Why was this written at this exact moment, and how does it fit into the timeline of the era?

ELA Scholar's Lens

Why did the author choose this literary device? How does the author's world influence their artistic and stylistic choices?

Lenses of Both Disciplines

How do style, timing, and historical context work together to compel the audience to act?

Treatment of Meaning

Historian's Lens

Does this text document social, legal, and cultural change or continuity? What is its significance? How can it serve as evidence?

ELA Scholar's Lens

In what ways does this text utilize symbols and themes to communicate universal human experiences?

Lenses of Both Disciplines

How did the original audience interpret this message based on the cultural rules and norms of the world they lived in?

Scope of Analysis

Historian's Lens

What do other documents say, and how does this text agree or disagree with other accounts from the era?

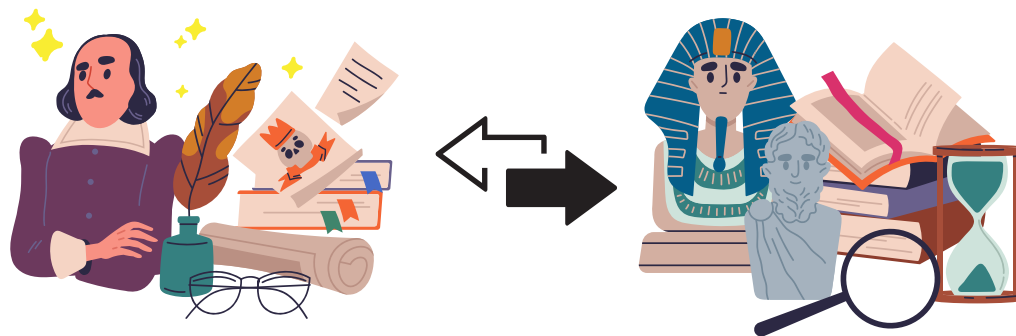
Lenses of Both Disciplines

How did the author's stylistic choices help them push for change or influence the culture of their time?

ELA Scholar's Lens

How does deconstructing the sentence structure and tracing literary traditions reveal the author's message?

Given the distinct differences in how and why historians and literary analysts interact with text, it is important that if students read and analyze historical texts in ELA classes, they also do historical readings and analyses of these same texts in their social studies classes. This cross-curricular approach illustrates to students that significant texts are rarely finished after one reading.



By encountering a significant historical text in both classes, students learn that:

- Texts are Multidimensional: A text can be a physical clue to a past world and a work of art that remains relevant to our own.
- Different Lenses Reveal New Meanings: When students change their analytical lens, the text itself seems to change, revealing new layers of meaning that were invisible during a previous reading.
- Close Reading is Iterative: Mastering a text requires visiting it more than once. This process allows students to move beyond a basic summary and begin the more rewarding work of deeper-level analysis (Nokes, 2022). This iterative approach is essential because students often struggle to transfer analytical skills across disciplines without explicit instruction in the unique ways different experts—like historians and literary critics—approach a text (Nokes, 2011; USBE, 2025).

Common Rhetorical Moves in Historical Texts and Documents

To read as an ELA scholar or literary analyzer is to identify and deconstruct rhetorical moves, which are the strategic choices in language, structure, or logic that an author uses to achieve a specific effect on an audience. These moves may be used to build authority, bridge power gaps, create logical traps, establish emotional common ground, or shift how a reader perceives a complex issue. Students move beyond summarizing what an author said to analyzing how the author engineered their message to influence their audience.

The following section identifies common rhetorical moves found in historical documents. It provides the disciplinary vocabulary necessary to deconstruct the internal mechanics of a text.

Allegory

How it Works:

Using a symbolic story where characters and events represent hidden political or moral meanings.

Effect on the Reader

By stripping away specific names and dates, it makes a complex issue feel timeless and universal. It invites the reader to see a “small story” as a mirror for a “big reality,” allowing them to reach a conclusion through logic and empathy rather than just following an author’s direct instructions.

Calculated Omission

How it Works:

Deliberately leaving out specific facts, hardships, or counterarguments that would complicate the author’s goal.

Effect on the Reader

By hiding the complications or downsides of a plan, the author makes a dangerous or controversial choice seem like the only logical option. It leaves the reader with a one-sided picture that feels complete, making it harder for them to imagine why anyone would disagree.

Deflection

How it Works:

Ignoring the specific argument and listing all the “bad things” that might happen if the argument is won.

Effect on the Reader

Shifts the focus away from the moral question (Is this right?) to a fear-based question (Will this cause chaos?).

Diction Shift

How it Works:

Abruptly moving between different types of language, such as shifting from emotional or religious words to cold, scientific ones.

Effect on the Reader

Allows the author to calm down a heated moral argument or make a boring legal document feel suddenly urgent. It signals to the reader exactly how to view the facts, such as through the eyes of a neutral scientist versus the eyes of a passionate patriot.

Diminishment

How it Works:

Using humor, laughter, or minimizing language to address an opponent.

Effect on the Reader

Protects the speaker's authority by making the opponent's serious argument look childish or irrelevant.

Irony / Satire

How it Works:

Highlighting the gap between a person's stated values and their actual behavior.

Effect on the Reader

Forces the reader to confront their own hypocrisy. It makes the reader feel uncomfortable enough to consider a change in heart.

Parallelism

How it Works:

Repeating the same grammatical structure at the start of several sentences (e.g., "He has refused... He has forbidden... He has called...").

Effect on the Reader

Creates an overwhelming cumulative effect that makes a list of grievances feel like an undeniable mountain of evidence.

Periodic Sentence

How it Works:

Starting with a long list of "Ifs" or "Althoughs" to delay the main point or punchline until the end.

Effect on the Reader

Builds tension and forces the reader to acknowledge the reasons before hearing the result.

Persona or Masking

How it Works:

Adopting a specific identity or character that may be different from their actual social or professional status.

Effect on the Reader

Lowers the barrier between the author and the audience. It makes a complex or elite argument feel like common sense advice from a peer or a reliable neighbor, making the reader more likely to listen without feeling judged.

Rule of Three

How it Works:

Grouping three ideas, adjectives, or grievances in a rhythmic row (e.g., "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness").

Effect on the Reader

Creates a sense of rhythmic finality, making the statement feel like an absolute truth.

Slippery Slope

How it Works:

Arguing that one small action will trigger a chain reaction of unavoidable disasters.

Effect on the Reader

To use fear to stop an audience from taking a risk or making a change.

Strategic Metaphor

How it Works:

Borrowing language from a familiar world (like home, nature, or the body) to describe a complex political or social situation.

Effect on the Reader

It takes a huge, messy idea and turns it into a small, familiar picture. This triggers an automatic emotional response (like the safety of a house or the fear of a monster) making a complicated problem feel easy to understand and hard to argue with.

Syllogism / If-Then Logic

How it Works:

Setting up a premise that the reader agrees with, then forcing a conclusion they didn't see coming.

Effect on the Reader

Makes the final point feel like a mathematical certainty. It leaves the reader with no logical or common-sense way to disagree.

Scaffolding Complex Historical Texts for Students

To analyze a historical text through a literary lens, students must first navigate the significant language barrier of the past. Without intentional support, students can become overwhelmed by the effort of decoding these mechanics and lose an author's message entirely. The following scaffolds are designed to bridge this gap, providing the content-area literacy support necessary for students to eventually perform high-level disciplinary analysis (Fagella-Luby et al., 2012; Fisher & Frey, 2012; USBE, 2025).

Challenge | Overwhelming Text

Scaffold | Chunk & Gist

How to Use It:

Break the text into small chunks (by paragraph, section, or clause). Have students write a ~10-word "gist" in modern language for each section before moving on.

Challenge | Archaic Vocabulary

Scaffold | Glossary in Context

How to Use It:

Provide student-friendly definitions in the margins. Focus on words that have changed meaning over time (e.g., prudence or object).

Challenge | Connotation Barrier**Scaffold | Semantic Mapping****How to Use It:**

Create webs for emotionally charged words (like “liberty” or “patriot”) to show how their meanings have changed from the past to today.

Challenge | Dense Syntax**Scaffold | Sentence Mapping****How to Use It:**

Have students strip the sentence down to its core: [Subject] + [Verb] + [Object]. Use parentheses to “hide” extra clauses. Stripping a sentence to its core helps students identify the primary action and meaning before they must process the additional descriptive details.

Challenge | Abstract Ideas**Scaffold | Visual or Contextual Analogies****How to Use It:**

By comparing abstract concepts to modern ones (e.g., the “Social Contract” to a modern “Terms of Service” agreement), educators provide students with a concrete, familiar frame of reference that makes complex historical ideas immediately relatable and easier to analyze.

Challenge | Hidden Tone**Scaffold | Audio Versions****How to Use It:**

Play a professional reading. Hearing the cadence helps students identify where the author is being sarcastic, urgent, or calm.

Challenge | Complex Perspective**Scaffold | Perspective Role-Play****How to Use It:**

Assign students “Reader Personas” (e.g., a Loyalist vs. a Patriot). Ask: “How does the author’s crafted message try to win you over?” This supports students in actively analyzing how a text’s specific rhetorical levers are strategically engineered to influence, threaten, or persuade different audiences.

Challenge | High Stakes Detail**Scaffold | Highlighter Hierarchy****How to Use It:**

Color-code for rhetorical appeals: one color for logic (logos), one for emotion (pathos), and one for authority (ethos). Students can immediately visualize the balance of power within a text.

Challenge | Archaic Punctuation

Scaffold | Explicit Teaching of Punctuation Effects

How to Use It:

By teaching students to recognize semicolons as links between inseparable ideas, dashes as bursts of emotional urgency, and the capitalization of common nouns as a spotlight on key concepts, educators empower them to navigate complex historical grammar and identify exactly which subjects the author intended to prioritize.

Challenge | Invisible or Unclear Audience

Scaffold | Audience Annotation

How to Use It:

Have students label sections based on who the author is addressing (e.g., “The King,” “The Colonists,” or “The World”). This helps students recognize that a text is not a monologue but a strategic multi-way conversation, allowing them to decode how an author switches their tone and evidence to manipulate the specific fears or values of different groups.

The Need for Close Reading

Students also need a structured way to interact with the text. Rather than attempting to analyze everything at once, students should move through the historical document in layers. While many close reading protocols exist across disciplines, the following multi-read approach is designed specifically for an ELA classroom to focus on the rhetorical construction of a text.

A multi-read approach may initially seem time-intensive; however, it is a strategic allocation of instructional minutes designed to move students from basic decoding to high-level evaluation and synthesis.

Manages Cognitive Load Through Repeated Exposure

A single reading of a complex historical text often leaves students occupied with decoding archaic vocabulary and establishing situational context. By returning to the same text across several reads, the primary language barrier is lowered. This ensures that instructional time is eventually spent on the deep evaluation of the text’s rhetoric rather than on repeated attempts at basic comprehension.

Narrows the Scope Through Segmented Reading

The following close reading protocol does not necessitate multiple full-length readings of a complete document. Instructional efficiency is achieved by narrowing the focus of each subsequent encounter. After the initial read establishes the “gist,” students might focus exclusively on a single paragraph to analyze tone or two pivotal sentences for syntactic analysis. By drilling down into these rhetorically dense portions, students gain a deeper understanding of the author’s mechanics than they would from a surface-level survey of the entire document.

Connects Literary Analysis to Student Writing

To produce sophisticated argumentative writing, students must first understand the structural engineering of successful rhetorical models. Utilizing historical documents as mentor texts

allows students to see how historical authors navigated complex social and political landscapes. By deconstructing how an author builds a claim or uses a specific sentence structure for emphasis, students gain a clear template they can apply to their own writing, directly strengthening the connection between analytical reading and purposeful composition.

An ELA Close Reading Protocol

The following ELA close reading protocol provides a roadmap that moves students systematically from basic comprehension to deep rhetorical analysis. To support all learners, the scaffold tools shared previously can be incorporated into each layer of the protocol to ensure every student can access at a high-level of inquiry and analysis.



First Read (Gist & Context)

Students read the text once to get the gist.

They are looking for the basic architecture of the message and identifying the genre and audience. As an additional scaffold, you can provide the original text side-by-side with a “modern gist” version.

- **The Focus:** What is the genre of the document? How does the genre influence its structure? What is being said? Who is the audience? How does the audience influence its content?
- **Example Reading Task:** Summarize the author’s argument and identify the relationship between the writer and the audience. Note one specific way the author adjusts their voice because of who is receiving the message (e.g., using a personal greeting or referring to shared memories).
- **Example Question:** Based on the genre and the intended audience, what is this text about, and how would it change, for example, if it were a public speech instead of a private document?
- **Example Speaking/Listening Task:** Turn and talk to a partner. Compare your summaries. Do you agree with the “gist”? If your partner found a main idea you missed, adjust your summary.

Second Read (Rhetoric & Style)

Now, students zoom in on the rhetoric & style.

- **The Focus:** How is the message crafted to influence the specific audience? How do the rhetorical moves fit the genre?
- **Example Reading Task:** Circle high-impact word choice and underline metaphors or imagery.
- **Example Questions:** Why did the author choose a specific metaphor (like “chains” or “vassals”)? Is this a metaphor that would specifically resonate with this audience? Does the author use long, complex sentences that build tension? How does that tension serve the author’s specific goal with the reader?
- **Example Speaking/Listening Task:** Share one specific tool (metaphor, word choice, or

punctuation) you identified. Discuss: Why did the author use this specific tool instead of a simpler one? Given what we know about the audience from Read 1, why was this choice more effective than a literal statement?

Third Read (Voice)

Students consider the author's perspective, background, and the world or time period.

- **The Focus:** Who is speaking, and how does their identity shape the authority or tone they use to reach their audience? How does the author navigate the power gap between themselves and the reader?
- **Example Reading Task:** Identify the tone. Draw a "star" next to words that show the author's perspective or social position (e.g., words that reveal they are a wife, a subject of the King, or a revolutionary).
- **Example Questions:** How does the author's background influence the way they build trust with their audience? How would this crafted message change if it were written by someone with a different background or during a different time period? Given the genre and audience that we identified in Read 1, why is this specific tone the most effective choice? Would a different tone have caused the audience to stop reading or listening?
- **Example Speaking/Listening Task:** Discuss with your group: "If this were written by (different persona/time period), how would the tone and the rhetorical moves change?" Use the sentence starter: "If the author was [X] instead of [Y], I think they would have used _____ language because..."

Fourth Read (Impact & Synthesis)

Students synthesize their second and third reads to view the document as a tool of influence.

- **The Focus:** Why does this text matter? How do the author's rhetorical choices (Read 2) and their unique perspective (Read 3) combine to create a lasting historical or universal impact?
- **Example Task:** Connect a specific literary choice to its historical or cultural impact. Highlight the part of the text you think was most likely to change the reader or listener's mind or the course of history and explain your choice.
- **Example Questions:** How did the logic or the emotional appeal of this text make a specific historical impact possible? Did the author's use of the genre (identified in Read 1) help or hinder this impact? Does the artistry of this text make its message universal? Is it still powerful to us today, even though the audience and time period have changed?
- **Example Speaking/Listening Task:** In groups of four, debate: "Is the power of this text found more in its logic (the argument) or its artistry (the style and voice)?" Each person must provide one piece of evidence from their previous annotations (Reads 1-3) to support their stance.

Culminating Activity: Moving from Analyst to Creator

After the Fourth Read, students move from identifying rhetorical moves to applying them in their own work. The goal is not to necessarily produce a full-length essay, but to provide students an opportunity to practice these specific rhetorical moves to increase the effectiveness of their own communication.

Fifth Read: The Cross-Curricular Transfer

Students prepare their rhetorical findings to be investigated through a historical lens in their social studies class.

- **The Focus:** Does the historical evidence support the author’s claims?
- **The Action:** Students hand off their analysis of the author’s words to be tested against the reality of the historical record.
- **Corroboration:** What are other sources saying about this issue? Do they contradict, repeat, or complement this author’s account?

Example Explanation/Task

“In your ELA class, you found that the author used a powerful argument for _____. Now, here in social studies, we are going to look at the laws from that time to see if the world worked the way the author described it.

If students do not have the same teachers for ELA and social studies or the classes are not synchronized, the protocol remains highly effective as a four-read literary analysis in the ELA classroom.

An Example of the ELA Close Reading Protocol

Historical Text: Florence Kelley’s Speech on Child Labor (1905; 2017)

In 1905, Florence Kelley stood before the National American Woman Suffrage Association to expose the “pitiless” reality of child labor. As a woman who could not yet vote, Kelley used specific rhetorical moves to turn the comfort of her audience into a tool of social change. By deconstructing this speech, students move beyond a historical summary to analyze how specific choices transformed cold census data into a universal call for human rights.

First Read: Gist & Context

- Provide students with a glossary in context:
 - » Enfranchised: Having the right to vote.
 - » Pitiless: Showing no concern for the suffering of others.
 - » Stint: A fixed or limited period of work.
 - » Legislature: The group of people with the power to make laws.
 - » Earning their own living: A phrase used here to describe children working in factories rather than attending school.

- Step 1: Break the text into the following four sections. Have students translate each section into an approximately 10-word modern “gist.”
 - » Section 1: “We have, in this country, two million children under the age of sixteen years who are earning their own living in among the various occupations.”
 - ◇ Possible Gist: Two million American children are working instead of being in school.
 - » Section 2: “Tonight while we sleep, several thousand little girls will be working in textile mills, all the night through, in the deafening noise of the spindles.”
 - ◇ Possible Gist: While we rest, little girls are working all night in factories.
 - » Section 3: “The children are not yet enfranchised. They cannot vote, but we can. We are responsible for this.”
 - ◇ Possible Gist: Children can’t vote for change, so we must act for them.
 - » Section 4: “No one has a right to be happy of the goods we use while the little ones are being robbed of their childhood.”
 - ◇ Possible Gist: We shouldn’t enjoy products made by children who are suffering.
- Step 2: Identify the genre and audience.
 - » Inquiry Question: Does the fact that this is a public speech (genre) change how she structures her call to action compared to a private letter?
 - » Inquiry Question: Kelley is speaking to a room of women suffragists. How does this specific audience influence her choice to focus on “little girls” and “textile mills” rather than boys in coal mines?
 - » Turn-and-Talk Option: Compare your gists with a partner. If you had to summarize the entire purpose of this speech using only 3 non-negotiable words from the text, what would they be?

Second Read: Rhetoric & Style

Once students understand what is being said, help them discover how it is being said.

- Step 1: Have students map the skeleton of the periodic sentence: “While we sleep... while we dine... while we are at the theater... the children are toiling.”
- Step 2: Ask students to put parentheses around the “comfort” phrases (sleeping, dining, theater).
 - » Inquiry Question: If you skip everything in parentheses, what is the core sentence left? Ask why Kelley makes the reader wait through a list of their own comforts before reaching the “toiling” children.
- Step 3: Identify the Syllogism (If-Then Logic) in Section 4.
 - » Inquiry Question: Kelley argues: If you use these goods, and if those goods are made by robbed children, then you are responsible. How does this logical structure make the audience feel trapped? Can they logically argue they are innocent?
- Speaking/Listening Task: Read the periodic sentence aloud to your partner but stop right before the final phrase. Discuss: How does the musicality and length of the sentence make the final point feel?

Third Read: Voice

Students use three colors to identify the rhetorical strategy used to build a relationship with the reader and navigate the power gap.

- Step 1 (Ethos - Blue): Highlight where Kelley acts as an expert or witness (e.g., citing the census or state laws).
- Step 2 (Pathos - Red): Highlight “charged words” that aim for the heart (e.g., robbed, pitiless, little girls).
- Step 3 (Logos - Green): Highlight the logical “If-Then” connections regarding the law and the lack of voting rights.
 - » Inquiry Questions: Kelley was a woman who could not yet vote. How does her lack of legal standing force her to rely more on “moral pathos” to move her audience?
 - » How does she build a persona of authority even though she lacks political power?
- Speaking/Listening Task: Discuss: If Kelley had used 90% emotion and 10% logic, would her audience have taken her seriously? Why did this specific author need this specific rhetorical strategy (or color balance) to be heard?

Fourth Read: Impact & Synthesis

Students synthesize the artistry and the logic to view the text as a tool of influence.

- Step 1 (Calculated Omission): Kelley focuses almost entirely on “little girls.” She rarely mentions boys in coal mines.
 - » Inquiry Question: How did this specific artistic choice make her audience more likely to act? Would they have felt as much “shame” for boys as they did for “little girls”?
- Step 2 (Universal Appeal): Look back at the “While we sleep...” sentence structure.
 - » Inquiry Question: Does the artistry of this text make its message universal? Is it still powerful today even though child labor laws have changed? Why?
- Speaking/Listening Task: In groups of four, debate: “Is the power of this text found more in its logic (the argument) or its artistry (the style)?” Each person must provide one piece of evidence from their previous annotations to support their stance.

Culminating Activity in ELA

Option 1: New Short Writing Task

Students identify a current social issue and write a one-paragraph “call to action” that purposefully uses the rhetorical moves used by Kelley.

Option 2: Integration into Existing Writing

If students are already working on an argumentative essay or a persuasive letter, they select one paragraph to revise using at least one of Kelley’s rhetorical moves.

Fifth Read: Cross-Curricular Transfer

Students prepare their rhetorical findings to be investigated through a historical lens in their social studies class.

- The Focus: Does the historical evidence support Florence Kelley’s claims about child labor?

- The Action: Students use their analysis of rhetorical moves to be tested against the reality of the historical record, such as 1905 census data and factory inspection reports.
- Corroboration: What are other sources saying about this issue? Do they contradict, repeat, or complement Kelley’s account?
- Example Explanation/Task: “In your ELA class, you found that Florence Kelley used a powerful logical trap and vivid imagery to argue that voters are responsible for child labor. Now, here in social studies, we are going to look at the laws and social shifts that followed this speech to see if her rhetorical strategy had the impact she intended. We will investigate if her rhetoric moved the public record in a way that dry statistics alone could not.”

An Example Explanation/Task

“In your ELA class, you found that Florence Kelley used a powerful logical trap and vivid imagery to argue that voters are responsible for child labor. Now, here in social studies, we are going to look at the laws and social shifts that followed this speech to see if her rhetorical strategy had the impact she intended. We will investigate if her rhetoric moved the public record in a way that dry statistics alone could not.”

Differentiating the Protocol: Middle School vs. High School

While this ELA Close Reading Protocol provides a consistent structure, the depth of inquiry evolves as students develop. In the middle grades, the focus centers on identification and intent, where students recognize specific rhetorical moves and their immediate emotional or logical effects. In high school, the focus shifts to nuance and strategy, where students analyze how those rhetorical moves are used as tools to navigate complex social or political landscapes.

This progression represents a shift from analyzing the bricks of a text (the individual word choices and metaphors) to analyzing the architecture (the structural engineering and strategic manipulation of the message). The section below outlines this progression, incorporating the Utah State ELA and Social Studies Standards to illustrate how each phase of this ELA Close Reading Protocol meets grade-level requirements for academic rigor.

Middle School Focus

Identification & Intent

1.

Genre & Gist

What is the author’s main message, and how does the genre help reach the audience?

ELA 7-8.R.6: Determine a theme or main idea... and provide an objective summary that includes textual evidence.

High School Focus

Nuance & Strategy

Strategic Intent

How does the author utilize the genre and audience expectations to achieve a specific purpose?

ELA 9-10.R.10: Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structures an author uses... including whether the structure makes points or events clear, effective, convincing, or engaging.

Middle School Focus

Identification & Intent

2.

Rhetorical Moves

Identify specific words or phrases (like metaphors, imagery, or semicolons) and describe their immediate effect.

ELA 7-8.R.8: Determine the meaning of words and phrases. Analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning, tone, and mood.

3.

Perspective and Tone

How does the author's life experience show us what they value and how they feel about their topic or argument?

ELA 7-8.R.11: Analyze how the author distinguishes their position from that of others and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

4.

Audience Impact

How did the author's style make the intended audience want to act or change their view?

ELA 7-8.R.8: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.

High School Focus

Nuance & Strategy

Rhetorical Strategy

Evaluate how the author arranges logic periodic sentences to control the reader's focus.

ELA 11-12.R.8: Examine how the author uses and refines the meaning of domain-specific vocabulary and how language differs across historical time periods, cultures, regions, and genres.

Persona and Power

How does the author navigate power gaps? How do they build a persona to gain authority with a specific audience?

ELA 9-10.R.11: Analyze how an author's geographic location, identity or background, culture, and time period affect the perspective, point of view, purpose, and implicit/explicit messages.

Legacy and Universal Appeal

How do the author's choices combine to make this message remain relevant to modern audiences?

ELA 11-12.R.14: Analyze and evaluate works of cultural significance for the way they treat similar themes and maintain relevance for current audiences.

Middle School Focus

Identification & Intent

5.

Direct Inquiry

What is a specific claim the author made that we should verify in social studies? What statements were the author's opinions and which were facts?

SS 7-8.1.1: Compare and contrast primary and secondary sources as historical evidence and evaluate their relative merits.

High School Focus

Nuance & Strategy

Critical Interrogation

Did the author's rhetorical skill make a specific perspective feel like a certainty? How accurate was the evidence?

SS U.S. II.1.2: Evaluate how and why perspectives of people and groups change over time and explain the impact of these changes on the nation.

GC.1.2: Examine and evaluate primary source documents to explain the essential ideas and philosophies of the United States government

Conclusion

When we shift our focus from viewing historical documents as static artifacts to treating them as crafted works of literature, students gain the tools to deconstruct how language is used to influence others. This close reading protocol moves students beyond passive reading and teaches them to investigate how a text is structured and why it has the power to persuade. By analyzing the intent and logic of these documents, students learn to critically evaluate the arguments of others while developing the skill to craft their own purposeful messages.

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