

Sample Lesson: How to Use a Reflective Journal to Make Connections in Literature

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ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

How can reflection guide our learning?

What is the value of reflection on our history?

What is intuition?

How do great thinkers influence historical events?

How can we understand essays that appear very complicated?

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- a. Effectively use their reflection journals to clarify and reinforce their thinking and learning
- b. Understand the major ideas of the Transcendentalist thinkers Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau
- c. Employ text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections when evaluating literature

MATERIALS

Reflection Journals

Overhead projector

Extracts of essays from Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson

Overhead (in appendices)

IMPLEMENTATION

Day 1: Unguided Reflection

Warmup: Have students define the word reflection for two or three minutes.

After they have offered their explanations, let them know that the word comes from the Latin roots *re* (meaning back) and *flexere* (meaning to bend).

Ask the students what kinds of reflection they have done in the past (keep diaries, write in reflection journals in school, blog on websites). What did they get out of it, if anything?

To give students some early experience in reflection, place small posters containing quotes on reflection around the room. Possible quotes are shown in Appendix A. Tell the students to look at the posters, and find one that they like. In their journals, they should write the quote and, directly after the quote, write what they think it means and if they agree with it.

After students reflect on their journals, on poster board begin to make a student generated list of 1) benefits of reflection, and 2) criteria for a good reflection on the board or on poster board. It is important that you make this on poster board, not the chalkboard, because you will be using it on Day 3. An example of one class's criteria is included in Appendix B.

Day 2: Guided Reflection, Teaching Text-to-text, Text-to-self, and Text-to-world connections

Warmup: Give students 3-5 minutes to free write in their reflection journals on the following quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson: “To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius.”: (see Appendix C).

After students free write, ask them to share if they ever felt a time when they had to trust their intuition instead of their friends or parents (they are making a text-to-self connection). Students can share these experiences in small groups or in a whole-class discussion. After discussing, students should journal about this experience.

Then ask students if they know of any other texts that share the theme of Emerson’s quote (there is much literature which emphasize the theme of self-reliance, and some examples are Stargirl by Jerry Spinelli, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain, any books in the Harry Potter series, etc). On an overhead, model for students how to write a reflection that makes a text-to-text connection from Emerson’s quote to a piece of literature mentioned. Have students write about how Emerson’s quote relates to the other piece of literature which they’ve identified.

Finally, ask students if they can think of an event or person in the larger world or in history who had to trust his own intuition. Examples might be Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass or any other individual who had to struggle against society. Discuss how events in history or the world have been influenced by those who have relied upon their own intuition (students are making a text-to-world connection) and then have students journal.

After you have modeled the thinking around the text connections, show students the overhead that summarizes the connections, which are

TEXT-TO-TEXT - Relates the text on which you are reflecting to another relevant work.

TEXT-TO-SELF – Makes a personal connection between the text and you.

TEXT-TO-WORLD – Connects the text to events in history, the news, or anything in the larger world.

Day 3: Guided Reflection

Warm-up: Have students recall and write the type of text connections that were introduced the previous day.

Then, have students write a quote from literature (see Appendix E for quotes used in a unit on Transcendentalist thinkers) in their journal. All students should write the same quote in order that a class discussion can occur after journaling. Independently, students should journal on that quote, making as many text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections as possible. Class discussion should follow.

Finally, revisit your class poster of 1) benefits of reflection, and 2) criteria for a good reflection on the board or on poster board. Are there any additions or changes?

ASSESSMENT: Using the student-generated criteria for what makes a good reflection, students should self assess their own journal entries. Then, teachers can provide feedback, in dialogue form, directly into the students' journals.

Appendix A: Quotes on Reflection

The unexamined life is not worth living. Socrates

Force yourself to reflect on what you read, paragraph by paragraph. Samuel Taylor Coleridge

To read without reflecting is like eating without digesting. Edmund Burke

The real man smiles in trouble, gathers strength from distress, and grows brave by reflection.

Thomas Paine (1737 - 1809)

By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest. Confucius (551 BC - 479 BC)

Without reflection, we go blindly on our way, creating more unintended consequences, and failing to achieve anything useful. Margaret J. Wheatley

Appendix B: Student Generated Criteria for Reflection

HOW REFLECTION HELPS

Helps us relax and write.

Helps us be ourselves by helping us understand our own thinking and realize who we really are.

Helps deep thinking, makes a connection to our own lives and how we can improve our lives.

Helps us concentrate on our own opinions because reflections are usually done privately.

Helps us clear our mind. Might be fuzzy to begin with, but helps us clarify our thoughts.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD REFLECTION?

Is real.

It is on topic.

Is honest.

Is written in first person.

Shows thinking.

Is not hurried.

Appendix C: Overhead for Warmup, Day 2

REFLECT: WHAT DO YOU THINK THIS MEANS?

To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, —that is genius.

Appendix D:

CONNECTIONS YOU CAN MAKE WHEN READING

TEXT-TO-TEXT - Relates the text on which you are reflecting to another relevant work.

TEXT-TO-SELF – Makes a personal connection between the text and you.

TEXT-TO-WORLD – Connects the text to events in history, the news, or anything in the larger world.

Appendix E: Ralph Waldo Emerson
SELF-RELIANCE, 1841
Excerpts

To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts: they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty.

Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you . . . Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age.

Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater . . . Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs.

Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist. . . Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. . . . If you maintain a dead church, contribute to a dead Bible-society, vote with a great party either for the government or against it, spread your table like base housekeepers,—under all these screens I have difficulty to detect the precise man you are. And, of course, so much force is withdrawn from your proper life. But do your work, and I shall know you. Do your work, and you shall reinforce yourself. . .

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said to-day.—‘Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood.’—Is it so bad, then, to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood. . . .

Name:

Self-assessment of my reflection journal entries

My reflection: Could it be better? Comment here.

Is real.	
It is on topic	
Is honest.	
Is written in first person.	
Shows thinking.	
Is not hurried.	
Has a text-to-self connection	
Has a text-to-world connection	
Has a text-to-text connection	