Reading to Analyze Text for Author’s Craft

Promoting initial comprehension through summary is the main focus of the first reading of a complex text. A second close reading of the same text for a different purpose allows readers to mine or probe the text for the craft and structural decisions that affect comprehension. Students analyze the choices that an author makes to convey meaning through genre, organization, text features, point of view, mood, tone, figures of speech, writing techniques, etc.

Elaine: Providing a sample summary or a description of author’s craft that meets the rubric’s expectations is another form of scaffolding. I call this the Martha Stewart approach, because she always begins with the completed project and works backwards to show how it was created.

The ability to discern the intentionality of author’s craft is an important component of discovering meaning in text. It influences the quality of written response as well. Students who are unable to recognize intentional craft decisions lose out on the opportunity to practice reading from a writer’s point of view.

The prompts awaken students to choices that might otherwise remain unnoticed. At the end of the GHR for author’s craft, students should be able to answer the question “How does the author say it?” By literally making the author’s craft visible, GHR maximizes the reciprocal value of writing to the reading experience.

It is important to note that author’s craft exists in both informational and narrative texts. Too often, teachers consider author’s craft to lie solely in the realm of fiction and poetry. In contrast, ELA Appendix B of the Common Core State Standards beautifully illustrates the wealth of craft that all well-written complex texts incorporate. Because the Common Core State Standards hold teachers of all subjects responsible for the reading of craft, guided highlighted reading for this purpose provides an easy and effective technique for non-ELA teachers, too. See Reproducible 5a-b for two charts that will scaffold students as they mine informational or narrative text for examples of author’s craft. The charts can also be used to develop GHR prompts for craft.

Barbara: In a recent working session with high school teachers preparing GHR experiences for the new school year, I observed teachers making good use of the charts as they created model GHR experiences for craft. One teacher who had had more experience as a history teacher found the charts particularly helpful.
Directions for Using GHR to Analyze Text for Author’s Craft

Follow the general directions for GHR previously noted. Because author’s craft comprises many different elements, you will save time in the long run if you create a teacher model that serves as a frame to compose your prompts. A sample text (the Preamble of the United States Constitution) with suggested grade levels, prompts, and the appropriate standards is provided below. You will also find this text in the Appendix prepared for student handout and use for all four reading purposes (see Reproducibles 6a-f).

ELA Standards, Reading: Informational Text (Grades 6-8)*

3. Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories).
4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.
5. Analyze in detail the structure of a specific paragraph in a text, including the role of particular sentences in developing and refining a key concept.
6. Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.
10. By the end of the year, read and comprehend literary nonfiction at the high end of the grades 6–8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

*8th Grade Standards are cited above

Model Text for Author’s Craft

The following model text is the Preamble of the United States Constitution. See ELA Appendix B of the Common Core State Standards, p. 93, and see Reproducible 6a-f for the student-prepared text of this passage with prompts for vocabulary, summary, author’s craft, and multiple-choice questions & answers.

1 We, the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice,
2 insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare,
3 and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish
4 this Constitution for the United States of America.

Read the following prompts while students highlight as directed:

• In the title, find and highlight the word in the heading that is a more formal word for introduction. (Answer: Preamble)
• In the title, find and highlight the word that means a legal document. (Answer: Constitution)

• In line #1, find and highlight the thesis or purpose of this document. (Answer: “...to form a more perfect Union...”)

• In line #1, find and highlight the phrase that identifies “We.” (Answer: “…the People of the United States...”)

• In line #2, find and highlight an archaic word for harmony. (Answer: Tranquility)

• In lines #1-4, find and highlight the punctuation mark that ends the first sentence. (Answer: after the last word, America)

• When an author gives human characteristics to inanimate objects, it is called personification. In line #3, find and highlight an example of personification that tells what Liberty bestows or gives. (Answer: blessings)

• In lines #1-4, find and highlight the various strong verbs in present tense the authors used to indicate the benefits of the constitution. (Answer: “form,” “establish,” “insure,” “provide,” “promote,” “secure,” “ordain,” “establish”)

• The text structure of the Preamble is cause and effect, so find and highlight the effect or result. (Answer: “...a more perfect union”)

Sample analysis of author’s craft: The text is a legal document that states the purpose for its existence in the Preamble, or introduction. The text structure is cause and effect; the cause is the need to create a Union, and the effect is the creation of a constitution. The authors’ language is academic and archaic e.g., ‘posterity’ and ‘ordain.’ The authors use repetition to emphasize key points, for example, the phrase, ‘United States.’ Consequently, the reader is left with the impression that the United States is important enough that it bears repeating. The authors also use capitalization to emphasize key reasons for the existence of the Constitution, e.g. ‘Tranquility.’ The point of view is ‘We the People.’ It is difficult to know who is left out except one can assume anyone who is not considered ‘People of the United States.’ It is interesting to note that it is one sentence in length. The authors use numerous commas, but only one period, as all thoughts are interrelated. In addition, the authors use powerful action verbs such as ‘ordain’ and ‘establish.’ The document is written in present tense, which makes the reader engage in the document as if it were now. The Preamble uses persuasive tactics; it promises that the establishment of a constitution will yield a ‘more perfect Union.’