

## Background of Reader Response Theory

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Louise Rosenblatt, in *Literature as Exploration* (1938), argued that it is important for the teacher to avoid imposing any "preconceived notions about the proper way to react to any work." When using the Reader Response Journals the students are given many options how to response to a text.

The Reader-response Theory holds that, to understand the literary experience or the meaning of a text, one must look to the processes readers use to create that meaning and experience. (Metacognition = thinking about your *own* thinking)

This theory rests on psychological principles, which readily connects to other mediums of expression such as artwork, music, and literature circles. Because all readers bring their own emotions, concerns, life experiences, and knowledge to their reading, each interpretation is subjective and unique.

Rosenblatt offered the notion of "efferent" and "aesthetic" psychological viewpoints that readers assume when reading a text. She derives the term "efferent" from the Latin "effere" meaning, "to carry away" and explains that this is what happens when you read a text primarily to extract information from it. This connects to many genres including non-fiction, which is also a goal on the Neary School Improvement Plan.

"Aesthetic" reading, on the other hand, is concerned with the "lived through" experience of the text, with what happens "during the actual reading event." It is possible that different aesthetic transactions can occur with the same text and different readers – depending on the "nature, state of mind, or past experience of the reader." Through explicit reading instruction students will be learning to use strategies that will enhance their comprehension and enable them to interact more with the text.

These strategies include:

- Making Connections (activating and building Schema/background knowledge)
- Asking good questions
- Making Inferences
- Determining Important Ideas
- Summarizing and Sythesizing
- Visualizing and mental imagery
- Self-montioring of comprehension (knowing which strategy to use when comprehension breaks down)

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## **What are the benefits of my child keeping a Reader Response Journal (RRJ)?**

1. Reading is believed to be dynamic and interactive.
2. Meaning emerges from a transaction between readers and texts.
3. Students get the chance to respond to the text themselves.
4. Students *create* their own meaning through a "transaction" with the text based on personal experience.
5. Research has shown that students in reader-response-based classrooms read more and make richer personal connections with texts than students using more traditional methods. (Reading for meaning).
6. Reader-response stresses the activity of the reader (i.e. taking part in the process itself versus just reading to find answers).
7. Students tend to be more tolerant of multiple interpretations, and because they learn techniques that help them recognize the ways in which their *own* arguments are formed, they are better equipped to examine the arguments of others.
8. RRJs help students to become better critical readers.
9. No longer is the reader the passive recipient of those ideas that an author has planted in a text.
10. Using RRJs is a way to track their own processes of meaning making. The entire procedure is known as metacognition in which participants are assisted in gaining an awareness of *their own thought processes* as meanings grow *and* are shaped both personally and socially.

## **What are the challenges of using a reader-response approach?**

While these techniques encourage a broad range of textual interpretations and reactions, students must learn, however, that not *every one* of their responses is equally valid or appropriate.

The meaning of a text is not an entirely subjective matter, of course, and it is crucial that responses be grounded in the text itself (aka "evidence from the text"). One way of guarding against your student "running wild" is to make sure that their responses are supported by examples/quotes from the text and/or background knowledge (schema) on that topic.

## **Does this meet the academic needs of my child on his/her level?**

Each individual student is challenged to go *beyond* his or her first response. As students progress, the level of their responses should show deeper understanding of texts or how they use the strategies (see pg. 1). It gives

students private time to reflect and interact with the text, and to make meaning of what they're reading, without having to do so at someone else's pace.

### **Why is reading for thirty minutes nightly homework?**

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) at home and school gives students a chance to spend time reading independently. This gives them chance to use and apply the strategies they have learned in the classroom.

Students can then discuss what they've read with others in the class, sharing their reactions and ideas. This creates an open dialogue between the student and teacher about what the student is reading. This mode of thinking is woven through their reading instruction all year. During class discussions we will be posing general questions about students' readings (e.g., What are the qualities of a hero or heroine? How does the author let you know when something happens?) in order to prompt further discussion and enhance understanding. With continued use, SSR builds the kind of self-motivated reading habits that are necessary for their RRJ.

### **How can I support my child at home?**

- Setting aside a regular reading time that works for your family's schedule
- Participating in dialogues about their reading
- Explaining higher level concepts/vocabulary
- Helping choose appropriate texts

### **Your child's future**

It has been shown that students who engage in SSR regularly read more, enjoy reading more, and read a greater variety of texts, both in and out of school. Allowing time for reading as part of the daily homework highlights the importance of silent engagement with texts, and it encourages students to see this as a natural and even pleasurable process. In general, SSR attempts to build the habits of a lifelong learner by modeling reading behavior.

