

Jan Richardson: How to Teach Poetry Analysis

“Using poetry during guided reading provides one of the best contexts for teaching the process of comprehension because poems force readers to slow down, reread for meaning, and think deeply. Sensory images help readers visualize. Figurative language requires readers to make inferences and connections.” Jan Richardson, *The Next Step in Guided Reading*, p. 238.

Select a Text at the students’ instructional level. The first read should be slightly challenging.

Identify a Focus Strategy for the Group. Read the poem reflecting on your own comprehension process. What comprehension strategies did you use? Visualizing? Clarifying confusions? Connections? Questions? (green, red, or yellow - p. 214) Now look at the needs of your students. Any comprehension strategy can be taught using poetry. Focus on one strategy at first, but know that poetry almost always requires readers to use several at the same time.

Introduce the Poem. Give background information on the poet, clarify any time-period vocabulary, and discuss unfamiliar words unless context clues are provided.

Read and Respond. Have students write as they read each stanza, capturing the comprehension process as they read.

Literal Comprehension Strategies

Step 1: Clarify

Students identify words/phrases they did not understand and write the strategies they used to clarify the text. *I didn’t understand this part so.....reread the text....thought about an experience I had....visualized the setting.....*

Step 2: Visualize

As students read the poem, they illustrate each stanza with pencils, crayons, or markers.

Step 3: Make Connections

Students make text-to-self and text-to-text connections. Push their thinking by having them write how the connections helped extend their understanding.

Step 4: Ask Literal Questions (green)

Students stop after each stanza and ask Green Questions (Who, What, Where, When, and How) to understand what the author is saying.

Step 5: Summarize

Students always summarize each stanza to paraphrase what the author is saying. Do not expect interpretation of each stanza. Do this after they read the entire poem.

Step 6: Figurative Language

Students circle or highlight examples of similes, metaphors, and/or personification.

Interpretive Comprehension Strategies Now it’s time to make inferences and interpret the poem.

Step 1: Ask Inferential Questions (red)

- Distribute red question cards (p. 215) to scaffold inferences or clarify confusions. *I wonder why....? What does the author mean when he/she says...?*

Step 2: Make Inferences

- Most poems have implied meanings that must be inferred. Encourage risk taking by affirming students who make different inferences than their peers. Advanced readers can underline the words in the poem that triggered their inference.

Step 3: Interpretation

- Have students share their interpretations and support their way of thinking by using the text: *I think the author is telling us....or I think the author means....*

Step 4: Figurative Language

- Students interpret similes, metaphors, and personification by describing comparisons. *The author compares stress to time because they both change....*

Evaluative Comprehension Strategies

- After the students read and analyze the poem, they write about why they think the author wrote it, and they share their thoughts with the other students. Having them write before they share allows you to analyze their thinking and assess areas that need support.

Combine Strategies

- Once students practice individual comprehension strategies, ask them to use several strategies while they analyze the poem.

Example 1

Clarify	Visualize	Summarize
Students list ideas that confused them and what they did to clarify.	Students draw the details of a stanza.	Students summarize the most important ideas of a stanza.

Example 2

Visualize	Question	Summarize
Students illustrate the stanza	Students write questions during reading.	Students summarize most important ideas in stanzas.

Example 3

Visualize	Connect	Summarize
Students illustrate the stanza.	Students write connections as they read the stanza.	Students summarize most important ideas in stanzas

Example 4

Visualize	Literal Analysis	Interpretive Analysis
Students illustrate the stanza.	What did the author say?	What did the author mean?

Individual Prompting: As the group reads and responds silently, work with individual students who need more scaffolding. Prompt with questions such as, “*Was there a tricky part for you? Is there something you don’t understand? What are you thinking? What is the author’s message?*”

Share and Discuss: Students read and write for 10-15 minutes as you coach individuals. Encourage risk taking. Be sure to read every response before they share so that no one is embarrassed by being way off the mark. Share during the final five minutes of the lesson. Remember, evaluative comprehension asks students to identify and understand the author’s bias, assumptions, persuasions, facts, and opinions in order to make a personal judgment.