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# The Three Rs

## *Rationale for Reader Response*

December 2008

Dear Mom,

This year we have learned a whole new way of responding by journal entries. It really helps you think about what you're reading, and since it is all on paper you can always go back and think about things you have changed about your reading in the past. What we usually write about is like a little bit of a summary, not too much though, then we talk about some of the strategies we used and what we were thinking while reading. I like it a lot because I get to see what I thought before I read the book and then after.

Hollie

I have always encouraged my students to read. The consensus of the research as well as my experience is that the more students read, the better they read. However, I have found that to a great extent, that conclusion depends on the definition of *better*. I agree that students will read more fluently, but first we have to examine what *reading* is. Many students think they are reading because they can understand the words and then summarize the plot or, in the case of nonfiction, find the facts. But teachers need to recognize if their students really comprehend what they are reading. If not, teachers must distinguish where the breakdown occurs and identify how they can help students take comprehension to a more profound level. Many students do not automatically advance to more challenging material or push themselves to think about their reading on different

**Figure 2.2** Anticipation Response Assignment

### The Anticipation Response

Choose a book and respond to the following:

- Title
- Author
- Cover art
- Genre
- Any synopsis or excerpt on the back cover or inside jacket
- Anything else that grabs your interest (flip through book)—for example, number of pages, length, chapters, pictures, reading level, font, print size, subheadings
- First few pages of text (your 25-minute reading for that day)

Kaitlyn wrote her first anticipation response on the book *Stop Pretending* by Sonya Sones:

#### How I Chose this Book

I chose this because Mrs. Roessing recommended it to the class. It sounded good when she described some of it. So I checked out the book that day.

*Stop Pretending* is a true story; I enjoy reading this kind of genre. Also it is written in the form of poetry, and I love reading, and I like to compose, poetry as well. The writing was somewhat large, and the pages were small. There were not too many pages. It has two of the kinds of genre I like to read in it so I chose it mostly because of that. Also, basing it on who recommended it, since my teacher recommended it, it must be a pretty good book.

#### Anticipation Response

The title *Stop Pretending* made me think that someone is not being the true self that they are or someone knows something but that person just won't tell. The author Sonya Sones I have never heard of before, but I need to expand my varieties of authors so I chose to read something by someone new. The cover of a girl taking a picture, then another picture of the girl doing the same thing, but all messed up made me realize something must be messed up with her life or something has gone seriously wrong. The back shows that it is in a poetic form about a crazy girl; the writing looked well written also.

Page 1. Interesting. It is about this girl who is my age whose older sister goes crazy Christmas Eve. What a surprise this must have been for her parents! This changes everything; it seems the sister doesn't notice what happened to her. This is weird; she doesn't even realize it . . . how? It seems good so far, so let's see!

From this response, I can see that Kaitlyn established criteria on which to base her choice of reading material and that she took her time before making her decision. She also provided herself with a purpose to read, a valuable reading strategy.

at all. *Frog Princess* was amazing, but the sequel could not match it. I usually do think that sequels are not as good as the original. I may pick up *Dragon's Breath* in the summer again . . . I really wanted to find out what happens to Haywood. I think that if the author left out extra words and minor characters and details, then the book would be just as good as the first. It was like every page there is a new character. It was also a little too fantasy for me. I enjoy fantasy but it made the book seem too unreal. *Dragon's Breath* is also below my reading level.

When she originally chose the book, Alyssa wrote quite an extensive anticipation response, where she noted,

I have begun to read *Dragon's Breath* by E. D. Baker. I chose to read this book because it is the sequel to *The Frog Princess*. I really enjoyed *Frog Princess* so hopefully this book will be even better. I like to read books about dragons because I read the *Eragon* series and I really enjoyed them.

She further observed and explained why “the summary on the back was interesting to me. . . .” However, there were hints that she might not be as pleased with this book as she hoped when she read over the first few pages and commented, “After reading the first few pages I started to get annoyed at Aunt Grassina. . . . Otherwise the book is okay.”

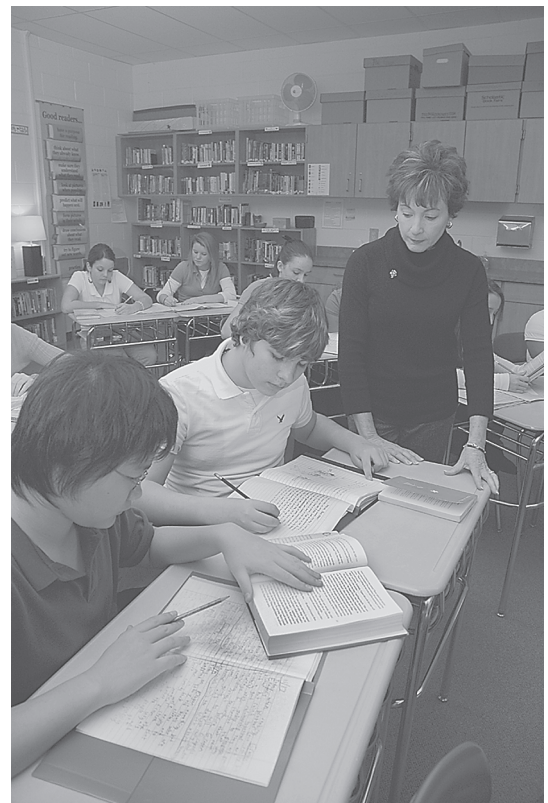
Three days later, within her daily response, Alyssa wrote,

The crab is the same one that Eadric and Emma were chasing during the storm. I thought that was unnecessary because we do not need all of these extra characters. There is too much going on right now in the book. . . . *The Frog Princess* really grabbed my attention and this book is not. . . . I am just starting out so hopefully it will get better over time.

Eight days after, having read to page 142, Alyssa abandoned the novel and analyzed the reasons in her abandonment response. I cannot say she didn't give the book a fighting chance. In fact, I responded to her comment that she “failed,” writing, “The book may have failed you.”

## ADAPTATIONS

A variety of adaptations can be made for struggling or reluctant readers and writers when journaling. Even though the more time adolescents spend reading, the better readers they become, we must be realistic and realize that at the beginning, our goal is to hook the embryonic reader. I use in-class independent reading time as “extra,” nonresponse time in addition to their half-hour homework reading so that students can have almost a full hour of reading a day whenever possible. However, as an



**Photo 3.1** Author Lesley Roessing confers with students Andrew and Hei

These associations were not limited to the girls of the class; the boys, to their surprise in some cases, also discovered resemblances between Anne and themselves.

After the presentations, I asked students to reflect and comment on the experience. Mary wrote,

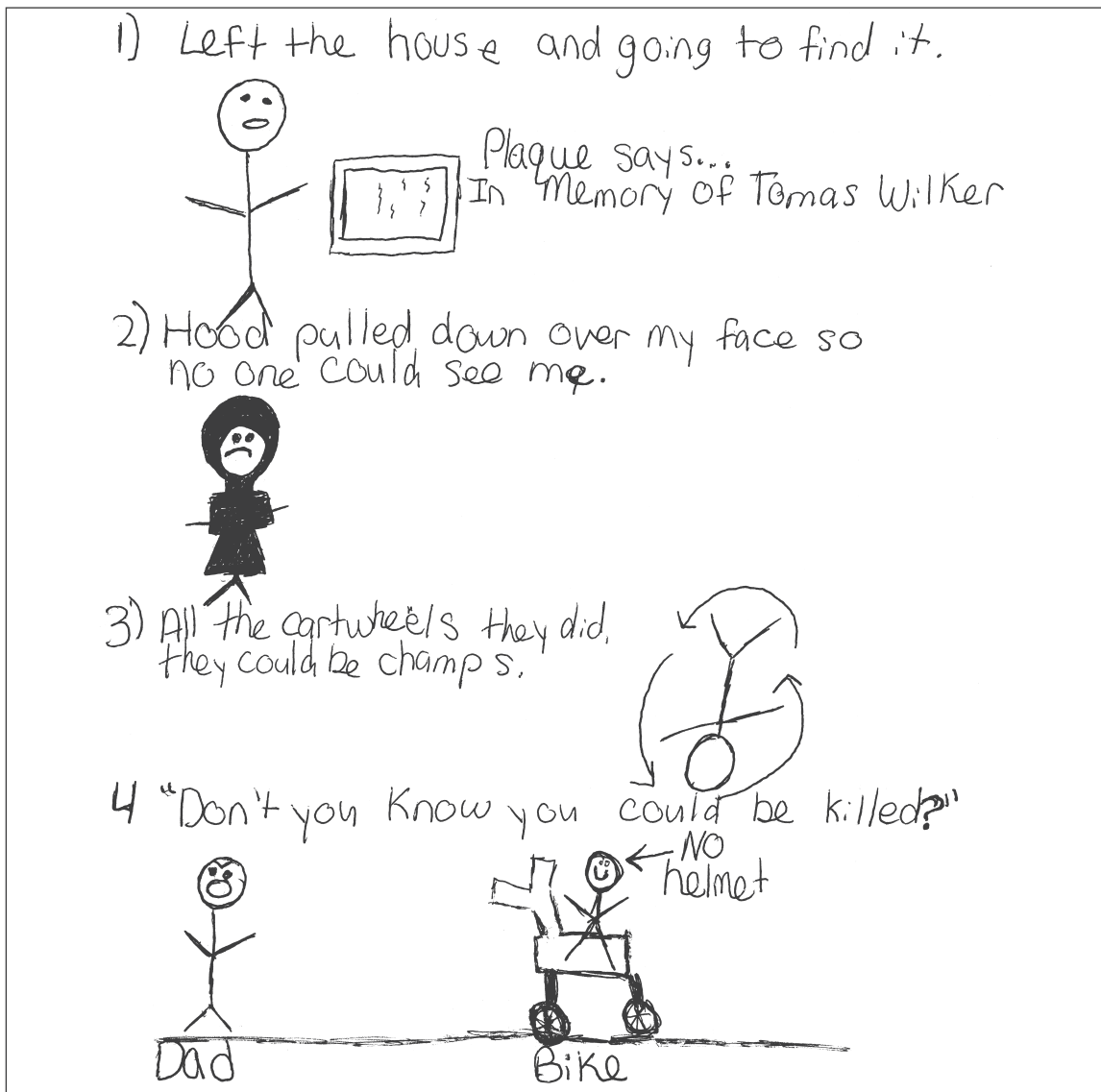
Despite differences in time or appearance, people can be similar to each other. We may be different in many ways, but we are similar too. We all have emotions and personalities and, despite color and creed, we all connect in different ways. Sometimes prejudice gets in the way of that.

Debbie commented, "Writing and reading this poem aloud really gave me the feeling that she [Anne Frank] was a living, breathing person and not just a character in a book." Bridget made an interesting observation: "Writing this [poem] made me look deeper into, not only Anne's personality, but my own." Martin credited the power of the comparison to "the form . . . the two voices." In these reflections, students were analyzing and evaluating their poetic responses, taking response to a metacognitive level. The class undeniably had a compelling experience through this writing format.

I decided to revisit the two-voice poetry format when one class read *Waiting for the Rain* by Sheila Gordon, a historical fiction novel that depicts the lives of two boys, one white and the other black, growing up in South Africa under apartheid. I asked my students to compare Tengo and Frikkie. Doing so would allow, or even force, them to look at both sides of the issues. They would have to explore the conflicting points of view of two boys who were raised under this system, a system of separateness—of *us* and *them*. I invited my students to examine thoroughly the characters, their backgrounds, their experiences, their educations, and their hopes and dreams to ascertain how it might be possible for the two boys and, with the fall of apartheid, the two races to work together. Again, students rose to the occasion, as shown in Amanda's poem:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <i>Frikkie:</i>                              | <i>Tengo:</i>                                |
| <b>I am growing up in South Africa . . .</b> | <b>I am growing up in South Africa . . .</b> |
| <b>My family owns a farm.</b>                | <b>My family works on a farm.</b>            |
| I live in a house;                           |  |
|  | A hut;                                       |
| I am the "kleinbaas."                        |  |
|  | I, just a servant.                           |
| <b>I get an education</b>                    | <b>I get an education</b>                    |
| <b>because I have to.</b>                    | <b>because I want to.</b>                    |
| I want to work.                              |  |
|  | I want to learn.                             |
| <b>I wish I could</b> stay on the farm.      | <b>I wish I could</b> get away.              |
|  | I fear the army.                             |

Figure 8.2 Sample: Sarah's Visualization



Drawing can be more than visualization. I noticed that when I ask students to draw what they see, the pictures can differ dramatically. And if I ask them to draw what they read, some draw symbolically. When my students read Daniel Keyes's short story "Flowers for Algernon," I asked them to represent Charlie Gordon and his world before and after the operation that increased his IQ by 300 percent. One student used a picture of a plain square to symbolize Charlie's uncomplicated thinking at an IQ of 68 and an intricate geometric shape of many colors to demonstrate the complexity of his cognition at 208. Other readers drew more literal representations. Readers' pictorial responses are as varied as their verbal reflections and give me more information about my students as readers.