

Different Perspectives for Reading

“That’s not what I got out of that article!” A frequent occurrence, two individuals sparring over a piece of text that both have read. Look at the potential for spirited discussion that arrives each day in the morning newspaper—an editorial about the glass ceiling for women executives, an exposé on the flaws of capital punishment, a movie review of the most recent action blockbuster, an article about substituting holistic health practices for drug treatments, a discussion of the mayor’s comments about raising bus fares, a travel column recommending must-see spots in Europe, a feature article on the need for higher standards in schools, a report about a group of teenagers who are lobbying the city for a skateboard park, an analysis of the role of “soft” money in politics—the list goes on.

What might your impressions be in each of these reading situations? Chances are, you automatically would read using a variety of personal “lenses,” which would create a personal perspective made up of your experiences, values, and attitudes to aid in comprehension and making meaning of the text. Socioeconomic status, gender, political persuasion, age, ethnic identity, marital status, career history, educational background, specific life experiences—all factor into your perspective as you read. Thus, two people can read the same article and come away with different but equally valid interpretations of what the text means.

Because students, too, are individuals with different background experiences, beliefs, and understandings about the world, no two students will read and comprehend a passage in the same way. A student whose grandfather is a dairy farmer will understand a passage about Holsteins in a decidedly different way than a student whose only connection to cows may be a cartoon. Likewise, a student who has been to Arizona will comprehend a story about the desert with a different appreciation than a student who has never left New York City. Strategies that broaden perspective about a topic will help students to read with a greater depth of comprehension and appreciation.

Using the Strategy

Different Perspectives for Reading (McNeil, 1984) is a teaching strategy that guides students through mul-

iple readings of material in a way that makes them consider ways of thinking other than their own. Using this strategy involves the following steps:

1 Have students read through a story, article, or selection for the first time.

2 Identify perspectives to use with students that could be connected to the important ideas or concepts of the passage. For example, different perspectives in a history textbook passage about the building of the Transcontinental Railroad in the United States might include those of a Native American, a fur trapper, a homesteader, and perhaps a buffalo. For fictional material, assign students the perspective of characters other than the narrator in a story. For example, in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, the perspective is that of the young girl, Scout; however, other perspectives to consider are her brother, Jem; the family cook, Calpurnia; the elderly neighbor, Mrs. Dubose; the lawyer, Atticus Finch; the wronged man, Tom Robinson; or the phantom neighbor, Boo Radley.

3 Divide the class into cooperative groups of three or four and assign each group a different perspective. Ask students to identify the issues, feelings, effects, or concerns surrounding a particular perspective. For students studying the Transcontinental Railroad, use a Different Perspectives Graphic Outline to provide structure for this activity (see Appendix, page 155). Have students fill in answers to the following questions: Why would the railroads be a concern to a Native American? A fur trapper? How would the railroads affect the needs of the buffalo? A homesteader? Students might decide that Native

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Source:

Buehl, D. (2001). *Classroom Strategies for Interactive Learning*, 2nd ed. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES GRAPHIC OUTLINE

Your Perspective on Transcontinental Railroad

Role Buffalo

Needs

Concerns

Grazing land

Water

Safety from predators

Lots of space to roam

Being killed

Losing food

Prairie not enough space to live in

Read and React

Text Statements

Your Reactions

*—RR got 20 sq. mi. for each mile
of track.*

*—Buffalo Bill & hunters shot thousands of
buffalo & left them to rot.*

*—Farmers followed the RR &
plowed the prairie.*

*"I won't have any space left
to run."*

*"This is murder! What kind of
beasts are these humans?"*

"There goes my food supply."

Summary Position Statement

"The railroad destroyed our way of life on the prairies. It took up lots of land and brought people out who plowed up the grasses we eat. It also brought out hunters who murdered us by the thousands, not like the Native Americans who only killed a few of us for food. There are hardly any of us left!"

(Buehl, 1995)

Americans would need their land, their food supply (the buffalo), and peace. Native Americans would be concerned about too many settlers arriving on the railroads, the loss of the buffalo, and increasing conflicts. Settlers would need supplies, markets for their products, and protection from the Native Americans. They would be concerned about railroad monopolies and high prices.

4 Have students re-read the material to look for specific statements or information that would be of special interest to their perspective. Have them write this information on the graphic outline, along with comments about their assigned perspective. For example, students re-reading the history passage from a buffalo's perspective might react as follows: With the railroad obtaining 20 square miles of land for every mile of track, the buffalo would soon run out of grazing land. The slaughter of their species by Bill Cody and other hunters might elicit reactions about genocide.

5 Discuss with students new insights gained through looking at material from a variety of viewpoints. To bring their thoughts together, ask students to write a position statement summarizing the feelings of an individual with a particular perspective. Include this statement on the bottom portion of the graphic outline (see Different Perspectives Graphic Outline).

Advantages

- The strategy reinforces that a number of legitimate conclusions and generalizations may be drawn from a specific text.
- Students read with more emotional attachment while using this strategy and develop empathy for points of view other than their own.
- Students are given a structure to re-read materials and to pick out ideas and information that they may have overlooked in the first reading.
- Students are given practice in selecting specific information that relates to alternative ways of looking at a text.

This strategy can be tailored to students from elementary to high school levels and can be applied across many content areas.

References and Suggested Reading

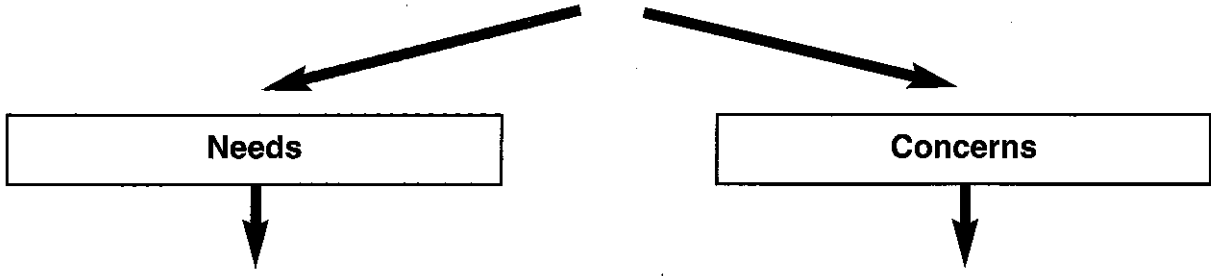
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- Cook, D. (Ed.). (1989). *Strategic learning in the content areas*. Madison, WI: Department of Public Instruction.
- McNeil, J. (1984). *Reading comprehension: New directions for classroom practice*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.

Other Work Cited

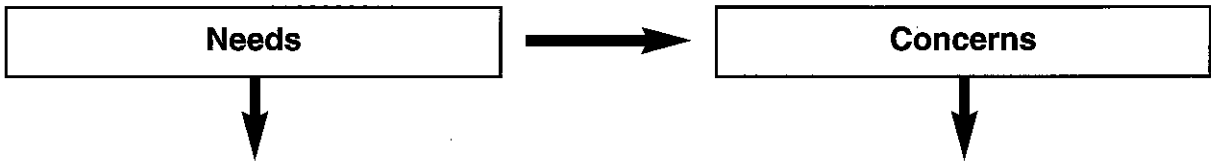
- Lee, H. (1960). *To kill a mockingbird*. Philadelphia and New York: Lippincott.

Different Perspectives Graphic Outline

Your Perspective on _____
Role _____



Read and React



Summary Position Statement

(Buehl, 1995)