

VIA: Reading Literature like a Journalist

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AIM:

- Why is it important to read well?
- Don't students read well enough once they learn to decode words?
- Isn't the rest just practice?
- The aim of this lesson is to have students examine their reading of fiction for passivity. Once students have identified passivity in their reading they can then begin to use strategies such as VIA to begin reading more critically.

Objective:

Student will use the reading strategy of VIA (Verification, Independence, Accountability) to judge whether the narrator of a story is a reliable source of information.

New Literacy Skill to be Incorporated

- VIA (Verification, Independence, Accountability)
- Reliability
- Fairness
- Balance
- Objectivity vs. Bias

Introducing and Motivating the Lesson

Assign John Updike's short story "A&P" for reading prior to class. Instruct the students to identify important quotes in a double entry journal and explain their significance.

ASK

- Do you believe what you read in the newspapers? Why or why not?
- Do you believe what you see on television? Why or why not?
- Do you believe what you read or see on the internet? Why or why not?

DISCUSS the three areas from which people receive their knowledge of the world

- Logic (Rationalism)
- Experience/Experimentation (Empiricism)
- Authority

- Ask the students how they know what went on in the A & P grocery store the day Sammy quit. Was it through logic? (No.) Was it through Experience or Experimentation? (No.) Was it through Authority? (Yes, Sammy tells us. Eyewitness account)

LESSON DEVELOPMENT/PIVOTAL QUESTIONS:

- Do you know what happened in the A & P based on Sammy's version of events?
- What is the difference between an excuse and a reason?
- What is Sammy's attitude toward his job? Could this attitude have affected his version of events?
- Are the Lengel's comments to the girls a reason to quit or an excuse?
- What do you know about what happened in the A & P? List the facts.
- How do you know it?
- What don't you know?
- Are there any other sources of fact?
 - Lengel, the store manager?
 - Stoksie, Sammy's friend and fellow cashier?
 - Queenie and the girls?
 - Customers at the A & P?
 - Sammy's parents?
- Even though Sammy's account of the event reaches you first, is his account the most reliable? How is his account like the internet?
- Does Sammy have an interest in having you, the reader, hear his account of his quitting before you heard it from Lengel or his parents?
- How might Lengel's or Sammy's parents' accounts differed from Sammy's?
- Would Sammy's account conflict with any of the other accounts?

Discuss key quotes from the story:

"Now here comes the sad part of the story, at least my family says it's sad but I don't think it's sad myself."

"But it seems to me that once you begin a gesture it's fatal not to go through with it."

- Discuss the definitions of "Self –Interest", "Bias", "Objectivity", "Fairness", "Balance"
- How these terms apply to Sammy?
- So, how do you get to the truth?
- Introduce the acronym VIA (Verification, Independence, Accountability)

SUMMARIZING THE LESSON:

- Why might it be important to verify Sammy's version of events?
- Is Sammy's account Independent or Self-Interested?
- Is Sammy's accountable for his version of events?
- So, is Sammy a reliable source? Why or why not?
- What type of source is Sammy? Are self-interested sources always biased?
- Are all self-interested sources unreliable? Explain.
- Are there situations when self-interested sources may be reliable and even of value?
- Is Sammy's version of events a source of facts or an assertion of opinion? Is it possible to verify Sammy's assertions? Which? Explain.

LESSON EXTENTIONS AND CONNECTIONS:

After the lesson student should apply what they have learned about VIA and Reliability to the exercise VIA: First Lines from books.

STANDARDS MET:

NYS English Standards I, II, II, IV

First Lines Analysis
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Using what you have learned about VIA (Verification, Independence, Accountability) Read the first lines from famous books below and explain what evidence would be needed to make the assertions reliable statements.

“Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”
Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*

“Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much.”
J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and The Philosopher’s Stone*

“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.”
Jane Austin, *Pride and Prejudice*

“Intelligent life on a planet comes of age when it first works out the reason for its own existence. If superior creatures from space ever visit earth, the first question they will ask, in order to assess the level of our civilization, is: "Have they discovered evolution yet?"
Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*

“I am a citizen of the United States of America. Our government has been overthrown. Our elected President has been exiled. Old white men wielding martinis and wearing dickies have occupied our nation's capital.”
Michael Moore, *Stupid White Men*