

Lesson on Setting Purpose and Nonfiction Conventions (headings) and some further thoughts from Brad at the mosaicteachers group on Yahoogroups.com

I am reminded of a lesson I did with a book, "Police Officers," with my second's before I left. The key strategies I wanted to teach that week were "setting purpose" and Nonfiction Convention (headings, in particular) The first day we did the book, I made up a story about Ayesha, Beyonce, and Crystal who were going to the library. Ayesha wanted to read a book about fighting fires. Beyonce wanted to read a funny story about police officers like the cartoon she was watching on TV the night before. Crystal saw the same show on TV and decided she wanted to be one when she grew up and wanted information on how to become a police officer. I then showed the students the cover of the book and had them determine whose purpose was best served by this book. We discussed why they thought the way they did. THEN, I passed out copies of the story to the class and we looked through it and refined our decision further on whom this book was best for. (Some still thought it might be okay for Beyonce because the cover was a "cartoonish" drawing and not an actual photograph.) Like putty in my hands of course, because I had set up the story to carefully consider all the reasons why this book would appeal to these girls, and the lesson went just as planned.

Although the above sounds lengthy in this post, we still had time to do a KWL on police officers "just as Crystal might do before she started reading." We then read the book and finished the L portion of the KWL.

The next day, I reviewed the KWL with them and put the headings from the book in the pocket chart. I then went through each question in the W column and asked, "Would we find the answer to this question in this heading, this one, or this one?" (Many of their questions had been unanswered by this particular text, but could have possibly been under the headings). I then made up fictitious questions and asked what heading they would have been under. I then had some actual sentences lifted from text and asked what heading it might be under and we read to confirm.

I wanted to show that the three girls may all pick up Police Officers but would all get something different out of it (and I think I conveyed this better in my lesson than here on the board). I also wanted to show that reading nonfiction nonlinearly is fine to get "your purpose" out of it. The boy who wanted to know on the KWL what the badge is for did not get it answered in this text, but we agreed that he would probably pick up the text and go straight to the portion under the heading, "Police Uniforms." (His question was answered later in the week with another text I read on police officers for a different lesson)

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I think we all see this in nonfiction. In fiction, it's a bit harder to see purpose. What will I get out of this, when I pick up a book for pleasure reading. Some books (Dive from Clausen's Pier) I read because I heard good things about it. (Perhaps that's the wrong reason, as I only found the book so-so) Some I'm interested in the author's style (the "Lullaby" book was written by the author of "Fight Club," which I thought was a thought-provoking movie, so I was interested in his novels). Some I read based on friends'

recommendation (Crimson Petal). It's interesting; I suppose I have little personal purpose when I read fiction (Is that why we all say we're "reading to escape?") Nevertheless, I could see getting different purpose out of it. Maybe I can relate to Scarlett's steadfast determination in the face of adversity and that's what I get out of it, but maybe you simply detract the customs and social manners of antebellum South. Maybe Sharon takes away "the horrors of the plantation system on slaves" and Margaret sees the "victimization of 'good' women" (as played so beautifully by Olivia de Havilland) but we've all read the same book.

Now, how do we do this? The 64,000 Question. By trusting our students and letting them lead the way a little more. By enriching their lives with literature that matches their interests as much as possible (balancing the mirrors with the windows, of course). When we "have" to study insects according to state curriculum, at least letting them decide if they want to learn about bees or ants. And, better yet, what they WANT to know about bees and ants. By conferencing with them on their personal reading and asking daily, "What were you hoping to achieve by selecting this book?" (Have you ever asked that? You'd be amazed at the answers you first get, usually dealing with 'harder' books cause they think that's what you want them to say). And then holding them accountable by asking if they achieved their purpose.