

Analyzing Writing Craft in Independent Reading

This is called 'rhetorical reading' and it means to break the text down into the sum of its parts... to determine what the writer was trying to achieve and which writing strategies he/she used to try to achieve it. A rhetorical analysis is always looking at the why and the how of the writing.

1. Read one whole chapter of your book today. When finished, go back and skim read to map out what happens in this chapter in your notebook. Write about how the author put the chapter together. Consider what we've studied that writers do to move the action: flashback, zoom in, zoom past, narrator aside, etc.
 - a. **Day 2:** consider the development of the chapter above and explain why you think the author wrote this chapter at this point in the story in this way.
2. Find several interesting sentences and copy them into your notebook. Annotate them to show what makes them interesting to you. This is an author's craft question, so I am looking for observations you can make about a writer's choices in this section that you find interesting.
3. Focus on one of the lenses for reading that we have focused on so far in second and third readings of poetry: word choice, voice, sensory details, tone, or pace. Now apply that to a section from your independent reading book. Write about what you noticed when you reread the section with this lens.
4. Make observations about punctuation today. Does your author favor short or long sentences? What moves in writing craft would you say are common for this particular writer?
5. Take one section of dialogue from your reading today. Analyze what is said (what you learn about plot or character) and then what is NOT said. What are these characters withholding?
6. Style is tricky... sometimes we love the way a writer writes and sometimes we get irritated by too many narrators or moments when we lose our way (yes, I'm talking about that second narrator in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* again)... how was the reading of this book for you? Explain what you loved/grew frustrated with/etc. What would you say to the author (if you could) about how this was written?

Analyzing Text Structures in Independent Reading

1. How important are time and place (setting) in your book? Would anything be lost if your novel were set in a different period of time or in a very different location?
 - a. If you are currently reading non-fiction, consider the date of publication of the book. If the book is more than two years old, search online for how the field studied in this book has changed in the last two years.

- b. If you are currently reading non-fiction that is place-specific (memoir, war stories, etc.) consider how the setting impacts your understanding of the book. Did you come to the book with strong background knowledge in the area? If not, how did you overcome your ignorance?
2. Consider the narrator of your story. What do you know about him/her? Do you trust him/her? Explain what makes the narrator reliable or not. What do you question about what the narrator says at this point in the narrative? How does the narrator affect your sympathies for other characters?
 - a. If the narrator is the author (often true in non-fiction), do you trust this author? Why or why not? What do you think this author does not see clearly or should research more thoroughly?
3. Consider the title of your book. Explain why you think it was chosen. How does the title give meaning to the work?
4. How does the writer arrange ideas in this text? Is there any pattern to this arrangement?
5. Consider the arrangement of ideas in this text. Is it chronological? Alternating between a forward chronology and flashbacks? (If so, why so?)

Analyzing Literary Elements in Writing

1. Skim reread sections of your book. Look for repeating images, motifs, or repetitions and consider their implications on the larger body of work here. What can you find? What might you continue to pay attention to as you read?
2. Literature often uses a specific story to explain something larger about humankind. Can you see connections between the story you are reading and the characters' conflicts, revelations, or insights that might also be true for all people?
3. Conflicts in literature can be internal, external, or both. Which do you see in your book at this point? Explain how they contribute to your overall engagement with the text.
 - a. Writers are skillful with weaving in sub-conflicts and multiple story lines. If you see this in your story, explain how this has impacted your understanding and engagement with the story. (*Game of Thrones* readers—I don't mean ALL of them!)
 - b. Writers create conflicts on three levels in literature: conflicts within the character, conflicts between characters, and conflicts with something outside the character: the world or God, perhaps. What do you see happening in your book?
 - c. Have you ever noticed how authors put obstacles in the way of characters resolving conflicts? Find them in your book.
4. Language is central to writing and it is chosen with care. How does this writer use language? Is it formal? Informal? Technical? Slang? Does the language change throughout this piece?

5. Some writers use humor to identify one character or to present ideas in a text. Do you see evidence of humor? Puns? Irony? Sarcasm? Why might the author have used them in this book?
6. There are several comparison devices available to writers: similes, metaphors, personification, hyperbole, etc. Can you find examples of any of these in your text? If not, why not?

Vocabulary

You know I believe that the single best way to increase your vocabulary is through wide reading. Now I want you to show me how...

1. Find a word that you didn't know before you read, but feel you understand after reading it in this book. Write the passage where the word occurred and then explain how the words around the word you didn't know helped you understand it.
2. Collect at least four words a week from your writing. Keep them in your vocabulary section of your notebook. Look up the definitions and then determine how it was used in the book you're reading. Here's the big challenge: start using them! See if you can slip them into conversation. (I suggest you pay attention to pronunciation keys in the dictionary or ask me for help. Many words sound differently than they look.)