

COMPLEX TEXT? SOMETIMES IT'S THE VOCABULARY!

By Dr. Elaine M. Weber

Often text that is considered to be complex by the ACT or the Common Core Standards is created from text having an excessive number of difficult vocabulary words. An effective pre-reading activity to pre-teach vocabulary is called Guided Highlighted Reading. First, analyze the text for vocabulary that will inhibit students from comprehending the text. Next, identify the words that are not already defined within the context of the passage or story. Then figure out the best way to clarify the meaning of the word, such as with a synonym, antonym, or brief definition. The passage or story is GPSed by numbering the paragraph or the lines, depending on how dense or complex the text is.

The identified vocabulary words are clarified with a Guided Highlighted Reading prompt (not a question). The prompt gives the students the location of the word by indicating the paragraph or line and the synonym, antonym, or definition. Each student has a copy of the text and a highlighter pen. The teacher reads the prompt and the student highlights the word. The prompt can be repeated. The pace is determined by the teacher as he/she watches the students respond.

The vocabulary words are within the following excerpt from *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau.

1 I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see
2 if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did
3 not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was
4 quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-
5 like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner,
6 and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine
7 meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience,
8 and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. For most men, it appears to me, are in a
9 strange uncertainty about it, whether it is of the devil or of God, and have somewhat hastily concluded
10 that it is the chief end of man here to "glorify God and enjoy him forever."

Guided Highlighted Reading for Vocabulary

In line # 1, find and highlight the word that means carefully thought out and formed, or done on purpose; premeditated. (deliberately)

In line # 3, find and highlight the word that means acceptance. (resignation)

In line # 4, find and highlight the word that means the opposite of surface. (marrow)

In line # 4, find and highlight the word that means plain. (Spartan)

In line # 5, find and highlight the word that means beat back. (rout)

In line # 5, find and highlight the word that means band or strip. (swath)

In line # 7, find and highlight the word that means the opposite of ridiculous. (sublime)

The major benefit of this strategy is that it keeps the vocabulary words in the context of the passage. If this works for you for vocabulary, there are more ways to use this strategy in *Guided Highlighted Reading* by Elaine Weber, Barbara, Nelson and Cynthia Schofield from Capstone Professional, 2012.

Dr. Elaine Weber is co-author of:

Reading to the Core: Learning to Read Closely, Critically, and Generatively to Meet Performance Tasks, 2014, Capstone Professional

Guided Highlighted Reading: A Close-Reading Strategy for Navigating Complex Text, 2012, Capstone Professional

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