

Text-Dependent Tasks

Choose postreading assignments that require students to reread the text and use it to support their responses.

Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher

Let's assume that a group of students have read and discussed a piece of text with one another and their teacher. What should come next? Too often, the tasks that teachers assign after reading are unrelated to the reading itself. When students are not required to use information from the text in subsequent tasks, they often forget what they've read. Or worse, they learn that reading isn't important and that they can complete the requirements for a class without really doing the readings.

Now imagine that students in three different classrooms are reading the "Declaration of Conscience," a speech that Senator Margaret Chase Smith (R-ME) delivered to Congress in 1950 asking that the Senate reexamine the tactics used by the House Un-American Activities Committee and (without naming him) Senator Joe McCarthy (R-WI) and criticizing the administration and her fellow legislators for failing to censure him.

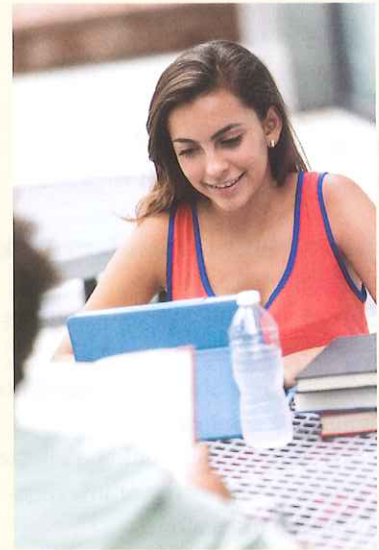
In one classroom, students are asked to provide examples from their lives for each of Smith's "Four Horsemen of Calumny": fear, ignorance, bigotry, and smear. In another classroom, students are asked to apply four "basic principles of Americanism" to specific events in history:

- The right to criticize

- The right to hold unpopular beliefs
- The right to protest
- The right of independent thought.

In the third classroom, students are asked to identify references to the US Constitution in the "Declaration of Conscience" and to find the referenced sections in the Constitution. They are then asked to summarize their findings and determine whether or not they agree with Smith's interpretation.

In thinking about each of those tasks, consider the ways in which students will use the texts that they have read in completing the task. The first task does not require the students to read the text, much less reread it. Students will be able to identify situations in which those words apply without ever looking at the text. The second task requires some understanding of the text under investigation and some thinking about specific events in history. The students will need to read some information to complete the task, but they may not need to reread or produce evidence from Smith's text. The third task requires repeated readings of Smith's text and the use of evidence from it and the Constitution for completion. As such, the third task is more likely to communicate to students that



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Watch the Video

Learn how a teacher uses debate to engage students in text analysis.

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Types of Text-Dependent Tasks

SOCRATIC SEMINAR

A Socratic seminar requires students to read the text and be prepared to discuss it. There are four components of a Socratic seminar:

- The text, which should be selected because it is worthy of investigation and discussion.
- The questions, which should lead participants back to the text as they speculate, evaluate, define, and clarify the issues involved.
- The leader, who is both guide and participant. The leader can be a student or the teacher; this person helps participants clarify their positions, draws in reluctant participants, and restrains overactive members of the group.
- The participants, who come to the seminar having read the text and ready to share their ideas and perspectives with others.

Some of the questions that students might encounter during a Socratic seminar include:

- Could you give me an example or a metaphor to explain that?
- Can you find that in the text?
- Where does the reading support you?
- What are you assuming in that argument?

In each example, students learn that the text is important and they need to read and understand the text to participate.

DEBATE

Similarly, a debate requires students to carefully analyze texts so that



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they can make their cases effectively.

In a debate, students must carefully examine an issue, research both sides, and be prepared to defend a position. Students rely on texts for evidence as part of the debate process. In preparing for a debate, students read and reread several texts, taking notes that they can use later. During the debate, students use their resources to argue in a structured way.

Of course, students must understand the rules of a debate. Typically, a team debate has an ordered sequence, such as:

Pro: Someone presents the *for* position.

Con: Someone presents the *against* position.

Pro: Someone presents evidence related to the *for* position.

Con: Someone presents evidence related to the *against* position.

Pro: Someone refutes the evidence from the *against* position.

Con: Someone refutes the evidence from the *for* position.

Pro: Someone salvages the most-persuasive arguments left and makes a concluding statement.

Con: Someone salvages the most-persuasive arguments left and makes a concluding statement.

At the end of this sequence, a judge typically reviews the proceedings and declares a debate winner. The video that accompanies this article contains a student debate from teacher Heather Anderson's class. (See Figure 1 for Anderson's debate guidelines.)

WRITING PROMPTS

A task also becomes text-dependent when students respond to a specific writing prompt that requires them to use evidence from the text. It's not sufficient for students merely to include quotes from the text. They must explain the quotes and integrate them into their responses in a thoughtful way. As Graff and Birkenstein (2006) noted, "The main problem with quotation arises when writers assume that the quotations speak for themselves" (p. 40). To address that, they provide a series of templates that writers can use to frame quotes and introduce evidence from the text:

- X states, "_____."
- In her book _____, X maintains that "_____."
- X disagrees when he writes, "_____."
- X complicates matters further when she writes, "_____." (p. 43)

Writers also have to explain the quotes that they have selected as evidence, perhaps with the following templates:

Figure 1 Debate Guidelines

Each team of four students will have two people on the affirmative (for) side and two people on the negative (against) side.

Debate Format

1. Affirmative presents case (three minutes max)
2. Negative presents case (three minutes max)
3. Affirmative and negative respond to each other (four minutes)
4. Affirmative summarizes and concludes (one minute max)
5. Negative summarizes and concludes (one minute max)

After the debate, the class votes to determine which side won. This vote will not influence final grades.

Tips

- You are always right: No matter what you really believe, if you want to win then you have to know that whatever you say is correct and your opposition is always wrong.
- Maintain a strong central argument: Every point you make should be linked back to this central argument.
- Rebut: If the other side presents an incorrect fact, rebut it. If they do not link a fact back to their team's case, rebut it. If they give an example that has no relevance, rebut it. Remember, the opposition is always wrong.
- Never insult the opposition: No matter how much you want to, don't! If you want to insult something, criticize their argument. Don't use personal attacks if you want to win.
- Have passion: Believe in what you are saying and you probably will win. Speak from the heart but also use logic and research.

Debate Sentence Frames

I will argue that....	I will show that....	You can see that....
The evidence shows that....	My opponent believes....	All the evidence points toward....
That is simply not true....	It is clear that....	My opponent is wrong because....

Created by Heather Anderson, teacher at Health Sciences High in San Diego, CA.

- Basically, X is saying _____.
- In other words, X believes _____.
- In making this comment, X argues that _____.
- X's point is that _____.
(p. 44)

Moving Beyond the Text

Although it is important that students complete tasks that require them to read and reread the text, there are also appropriate tasks that require students to move away from the text. Typically, those tasks come at the end of a unit of study and give students an opportunity to compare their learning

and thinking across several texts or to make connections between the text and their own experiences and beliefs. Significantly, students are best able to complete those extended tasks when they have deeply investigated a text and have a solid understanding of the information it contains. **PL**

REFERENCES

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- Smith, M. C. (n.d.). *Declaration of conscience*. Retrieved from www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/margarechasesmithconscience.html

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