Teaching Inference Using the Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DRTA)

adapted from a presentation by Terilyn J. Moore
Directed Reading-Thinking Activity

R.G. Stauffer (1969)

- DRTA is not a new strategy
  - Original focus was more on logically predicting events
    - what may or may not happen next

  - Today’s focus is inferring meaning
    - Explaining or interpreting information
Directed Reading-Thinking Activity

- Engages processes for inferring information and justifying responses

- Students use prior knowledge and text to create meaning
  - monitor and adjust thinking

- Requires students to infer reasonable meaning based on reading successive increments of text

- Whole-class participation required
  - engages curiosity
  - curiosity is a great motivator
Preparing for the Activity

● Choose a text
  ○ Poetry is especially useful.
  ○ “Flash Fiction” or “Micro-Fiction” works, too.
  ○ Can even utilize opening lines or paragraphs from longer works.

● Identify the content and concepts you want students to engage with
  ○ Stay flexible.
  ○ Be willing to go where students lead, as long as direction is reasonable.
Preparing for the Activity

- Tell students you’re going to show them some writing line-by-line.
  - They will play detective and try to figure out what the text means.
  - There are no wrong answers.

- Guide students’ thinking from concrete to abstract, from specific to universal.
  - Ask what objects mean beyond being simply what they are.
  - Ask how these meanings might apply
    - to stories they’ve heard.
    - to people they know.
    - to their own life experiences.
We are about to read a poem. What will this poem be about?
Traveling through the Dark

Traveling through the dark I found a deer
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.
It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:
that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead
By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car
and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;
she had stiffened already, almost cold.
I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.
My fingers touching her side brought me to reason -
her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting,
alive, still, never to be born.

Beside that mountain road I hesitated.
The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;
under the hood purred the steady engine.
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.
I thought hard for us all -- my only swerving --, then pushed her over the edge into the river.

- William Stafford -
Historical Fiction

We are about to read an intro paragraph from a historical fiction book. What will this historical fiction paragraph be about?
I, Dred Scott:
A fictional slave narrative based on the life and legal precedent of Dred Scott
by Sheila P. Moses

I was born in Southampton, Virginia, somewhere 'bout 1799.

I ain’t got no ways of knowing my right age, ‘cause I was born a slave.

No mamma, no pappa, and I don’t know if I have a sista or brother on God’s earth.

If I do, I would reckon they live right down the road from Blows’ plantation, where I lived long time ago.

Or maybe they was taken away and ain’t no telling where they is now.
We are about to read an intro paragraph from a nonfiction/informational book. What will this nonfiction/informational book be about?
Tell All the Children Our Story:  
Memories and Momentos of Being Young and Black in America  
By Tonya Bolden

Part 1  
Out of Africa

Only the Ocean knows how many children or adults perished during the Middle Passage: that horrendous thirty-to-ninety-day journey to the Americas.

And there’s no accounting of how many died before they left Africa– as they wept, bled, and grieved in long whip-, cudgel-, and gun-managed marches to the coast where the slave ships waited.

So it is that some say ten million, some say twenty million, some say upwards of sixty million African children, women, and men were snatched up for slavery.
Use DRTA as a starting point for...

- Extended Analysis
  - Ask students to work in pairs or groups and to read the poem again.
  - Assign each pair or group a different reading focus

- speaker
- literal meaning
- theme/message
- setting
- character
- conflict
- symbolism

- audience
- figurative meaning
- diction
- tone
- mood
- irony
Use DRTA as a starting point for...

Students writing reflectively using related quotes:

“There’s no real road map to life. Everyone’s journey is different.” (Christopher Egan).

Reflect on why this might be so, and respond in writing.
Use DRTA as a starting point for...

Students write a personal narrative using related quotes:

“Life is not about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what’s going to happen next.” (Gilda Radner).

Write about a time when you found yourself “traveling through the dark” - either not knowing what was happening, what was going to happen, what you should do, or what people would think. What did you finally decide, and what lesson did the experience teach you?
Use DRTA as a starting point for...

Students write an **expository essay** using related quotes:

“The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown.” (H.P. Lovecraft).

Write an essay explaining why fear of the unknown is such a strong human emotion.
At Tea

The kettle descants in a cozy drone,
And the young wife looks in her husband’s face,
And then at her guest’s, and shows in her own
Her sense that she fills an envied place;
And the visiting lady is all abloom,
And says there was never so sweet a room.
And the happy young housewife does not know
That the woman beside her was his first choice,
    Til the Fates ordained it could not be so...
    Betraying nothing in look or voice
The guest sits smiling and sips her tea,
    And he throws her a stray glance yearningly.

-  Thomas Hardy  -
Use DRTA as a starting point for...

- **Extended Analysis**
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  - **conflict**
  - **symbolism**

  - **audience**
  - **figurative meaning**
  - **diction**
  - **tone**
  - **mood**
  - **irony**
Use DRTA as a starting point for...

Students write an argument using related quotes:

“There is an old saying that goes like this: “What people don’t know can’t hurt them.”

After reading Hardy’s “At Tea,” agree or disagree with this old idea.
Here is a seriously injured man on a frightened horse. They are high in the Rocky Mountains at the junction of the Roosevelt Trail and Spider Creek.

Tom has tried to coax the horse into the freezing water twice before. Both times the horse started to cross then lost its nerve, swung around violently, and lunged back up the bank.

The pivot and surge of power had been nearly too much for Tom. Both times he almost lost his grip on the saddle-horn and fell into the boulders of the creek bank.

Both times, when it seemed his hold would fail, he had thought of his wife, Carol. He will try the crossing once more. It will take all the strength he has left.
"It is truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."

- from *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen

“If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you’ll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don’t feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth.”

- from *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger
FIRST WITCH:

When shall we three meet again?
In thunder, lightening, or in rain?

- from *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare

ELVIRA:

You’ve absolutely ruined that border by the sundial -- it looks like a mixed salad.

- from *Blithe Spirit* by Noel Coward
Directed Reading-Thinking Activity

- DRTA provides a way to spark students’ natural curiosity.
  - Authentic approach to teaching inference
    - Bridges students’ experience to any text, any genre
    - Lays the foundation for extended analysis
    - Increases students’ willingness to read and reread text
      - Interest
      - connection
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