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## Meaning that Includes Personal Significance

**Response to independent reading must value meaning-making that includes emotional response and personal connections as well as thematic meaning and stylistic analysis.**

Reading research has long emphasized the importance of frequent independent reading by students, not only for reading comprehension but also for enrichment of students' lives. For years we have recognized that without encouragement many young people would not voluntarily read longer texts, such as novels. The digital age intensifies the challenge, since online reading is often characterized by skimming, scanning, and shuffling around multiple texts rather than extended reflective reading of longer texts. Despite the challenges, educators must clearly and enthusiastically advocate frequent independent reading. The independent reading habit is a gift that yields lifetime enjoyment and opportunity.

Teachers and parents should remember frequent independent reading leads to writing. Published writers frequently report that their reading led them to their writing and that without their reading habit they never would have become writers. Even if one's writing is never published or even shared with others, it represents a highly significant form of personal exploration and self-understanding.

To encourage students to read frequently and independently, stress the following program features:

- Students enjoy access to a wide collection of reading materials in classroom and school libraries.
- Students have the opportunity to hear books read aloud.
- Students spend class time reading self-selected texts.
- Students talk about and write about their personal and emotional responses.

Critical analysis or personal response—which is more likely to motivate life-long reading? Since book reports are impersonal and analytical, rather than personal and reflective, offer your students response options other than book reports for independent reading.

The meaning readers create when they read extends beyond thematic meaning, and effective response options recognize this. Of course, readers interpret the themes presented in texts. These themes often confirm or challenge beliefs, and usefully do so. However, meaning also includes emotional understandings and reflection on the readers' personal experiences. When a reader reports being unable to stop reading the book, the reader has emotionally connected to the text. Thinking about why a book is so emotionally appealing represents a truly valuable and motivational exploration of meaning.

Finally, when readers connect the experiences presented in text to their own experiences, when they compare fictional characters, conflicts, motivations, and

settings to their own lives or to characters, conflicts, motivations, and settings encountered in other fiction, they engage in a personally meaningful and academically significant exploration. When they compare information, observations, and interpretations presented in nonfiction to their own current understanding, based on personal experience and reading of other texts, once again, readers are engaging in meaningful learning. Response to independent reading must value meaning-making that includes emotional response and personal connections as well as thematic meaning and stylistic analysis.

## Conferences and Surveys

**Boys often prefer practical how-to and informational texts.**

In conferences with students, especially students who claim not to enjoy reading, teachers and librarians can usefully invite students to identify subjects of interest—football, hockey, cars, horses, magazines, movies, and so on. Librarians provide invaluable help in matching reluctant readers with texts linked to their current personal interests. In recommending texts based on current interest, we can encourage students to extend their reading tastes over time. In helping students select texts with an appropriate level of difficulty, we can nudge students toward more challenging and more literary texts as their reading abilities develop. With guidance, a reader can be led by a favorite author, topic, or genre to similar and possibly more challenging books.

Matching students with personally significant and motivational books becomes a major focus as teachers encourage frequent independent reading. When students claim to dislike reading, respond that they just haven't yet discovered the right book and that the right book awaits discovery by every reader. Work from the conviction that there are interesting books for every student, books that motivate personal involvement and lifelong reading, books that lead readers enthusiastically to recommend titles to other students.

Reading profiles or surveys represent one strategy to guide students in their choices of books for independent reading. Consider using surveys like those on pages 15 and 16 in a class discussion about favorite reading. Have students revisit the survey throughout the school year, so they can note changes in their reading preferences.

**See page 15 for a reproducible version of My Current Reading for Pleasure Survey; see page 16 for My Current Reading Profile.**

### My Current Reading for Pleasure Survey

NAME: *Chris Lopez*

DATE: April 25

I like books that are *fictional, romantic and funny*.

I am likely to reread material that is written by *my favorite author or that is fun to read*.

I dislike books that are *always talking about tragic events*.

My favorite place for reading is *in my room*.

I would like to read more about *fictional, romance books*.

I would describe the amount of reading that I do as *a hobby; an enjoyment*.

I am likely to finish a book that *that has a great plot*.

I am unlikely to finish a book that *always talks about bad, depressing stuff*.

For the next month, my personal reading goal is to *re-read the Twilight Series of Stephanie Meyer and try out other books*.

## My Current Reading Profile

NAME: *Ann Shaefer*

DATE: September 12

The first part I look at in a novel is *the front picture*.

I like to read novels that look at *something scary or surprising*.

One thing that “puts me off” reading a novel is *when the author says the same thing over and over again*.

I usually read a novel in about *one day* (days, weeks).

My favorite authors are *Peg Kehret*.

When I describe myself as a reader, I usually use phrases such as *fast, good*.

My good reading habits are *I read fast and can summarize a book*.

Reading habits I would like to change are *to stop reading a book in one day or less*.

My personal reading goals for this term (week/month) are *to read something different than chick-flicks and scary books*.

## School Library Collections

School library collections strongly influence the viability of independent reading effort. Teachers and librarians must constantly monitor and update classroom and school library holdings, paying particular attention to authors, titles, and subjects that appeal to students. Collections should include graphic novels, texts at a range of reading levels, a range of informational texts, fiction and poetry, and audio books.

Recorded reading or audio books allow students to enjoy texts beyond their reading level. It is critical that students follow the print as the text is read so that they learn print forms of oral language. In some independent reading programs, volunteers record readings of texts or serve as reading buddies; i.e., partners who read the book with the students.

See page 106 for titles that can assist you in maintaining current library sources.

# My Current Reading for Pleasure Survey

NAME:

DATE:

I like books that are

I am likely to reread material that is

I dislike books that are

My favorite place for reading is

I would like to read more about

I would describe the amount of reading that I do as

I am likely to finish a book that

I am unlikely to finish a book that



# My Current Reading Profile

NAME:

DATE:

The first part I look at in a novel is

I like to read novels that look at

One thing that "puts me off" reading a novel is

I usually read a novel in about \_\_\_\_\_ (days, weeks)  
My favorite authors are

When I describe myself as a reader, I usually use phrases such as

My good reading habits are

Reading habits I would like to change are

My personal reading goals for this term (week/month) are

