

Instructional Strategies: Unsent Letters

...

Writing to Learn Strategies

Writing to learn strategies encourage students to use writing as means of exploring and understanding what they have read, whether fiction or nonfiction, informational or novel.

These strategies are:

- Short
- Informal

Vacca, R. T., Vacca, J. A. L., & Mraz, M., (2014). *Content Area Reading: Literacy and learning across the curriculum*. Pearson.

Writing to Learn Strategies

Before Reading:

- Allow students to activate their prior knowledge and form connections between what they know and what they will be learning.

After Reading:

- Serve as a means for students to summarize what they have read and further explore and analyze subjects, themes, and characters.

Vacca, R. T., Vacca, J. A. L., & Mraz, M., (2014). *Content Area Reading: Literacy and learning across the curriculum*. Pearson.

Unsent Letters

This strategy encourages students to step into the shoes of one of the characters in the text they are reading. Essentially, the teacher asks students to role play a character and write letters in response to a prompt. This strategy can be used for any grade level and across content areas.

This is a simple, unintimidating means for students to exemplify their understanding of a topic explored in the text. Furthermore, it gives the students an opportunity to write creatively. These letters can then be shared with class and serve to spark class discussion of the text.

Vacca, R. T., Vacca, J. A. L., & Mraz, M., (2014). *Content Area*

Reading: Literacy and learning across the curriculum.
Pearson.



Unsent Letters Implementation

The following procedure is intended for a 10th grade ELA classroom in which the hypothetical students have finished reading Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. However, these steps can be adapted to suit any classroom, text, or grade level.

1. Announce to the students that they will be writing letters today and review the elements of a letter (greeting, body, closing, signature).
 - a. It may be helpful to draw a picture on the board of the sample structure so that the students can refer to it if they need to.
2. Review formal and informal language in letters.
 - a. For instance, explain to the students that the way one writes to an employer is different from the way in which he writes to a friend.

Unsent Letters Implementation

3. Present the following prompt to the students:

Imagine that you are one of the characters from *Pride and Prejudice* and five years have passed since the events at the conclusion of the novel. Write a letter of at least half a page to a family member or friend detailing what has transpired in the last five years (For instance, if you are writing as Lydia Bennett, you could answer questions of whether Lydia reconciled with her family and if she and Wickham's marriage is a happy one.)

4. Review and emphasize the importance of tone in the letter and that it should differ depending on which character the students have chosen to write as (For example, Lady Catherine's manner of speaking is very different from Elizabeth's.). Tell the students that they must have some form of evidence or reasoning to support the events they write about in their letters.

Unsent Letters Implementation

5. Give the students 20-30 minutes to write their letters.
6. Have the students pair up to read their letters to one another and discuss whether each other's letters sound plausible or if there's anything they would change about their partner's letter. This should take about 10 minutes.
7. If time remains, ask if any students would like to read their letters to the class and hold a class discussion about the believability of the account.

As previously stated, this is just one sample of steps that could be taken to implement this strategy into a classroom. These steps can be modified to suit various grade level and texts.

Unsent Letters Implementation

Assessment:

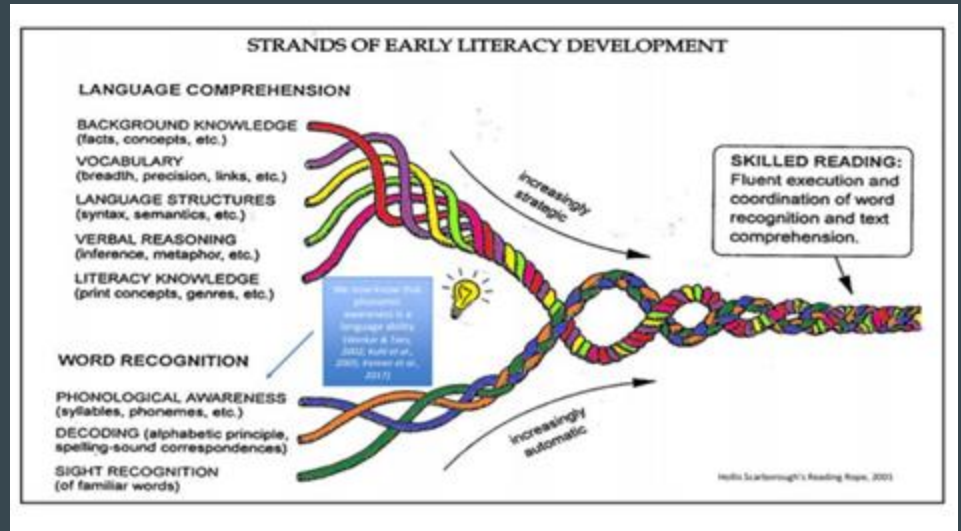
These letters can be assessed in multiple ways. If the focus of the activity is to teach writing in multiple forms (ie. letter writing) one can grade based on students' adherence to the structure of a letter and for grammar and mechanics. However, if assessing students' comprehension of the text and of the characters, one should grade based on the extent to which the fictional account written by the students seems plausible and in line with the character's personality.



Science of Reading

Scarborough's Reading Rope:

Scarborough's rope (pictured on the right) represents literacy development. The top portion concerns the various facets of language comprehension while the lower half centers on word recognition. The two sections intertwine to turn students into fluent readers.



Science of Reading and Unsent Letters

I think that the unsent letters strategy fits into the literacy knowledge strand of Scarborough's reading rope.

In completing the unsent letters activity, students are displaying their knowledge of the text and their ability to analyze, interpret, and predict based off of their comprehension of the reading. Their knowledge of plot and characters help them write plausible letters.

Works Cited

Vacca, R. T., Vacca, J. A. L., & Mraz, M., (2014). *Content Area Reading: Literacy and learning across the curriculum*. Pearson.