The Purposes of Reading

Accomplished English language arts teachers realize that students engage in reading and viewing for many reasons. Purposes may include, but are not limited to, gathering information, challenging one’s perspective, stretching one’s imagination, understanding the human condition and the world, and simply reading for pleasure. Ideally, the goal of accomplished teachers is to inspire a love of reading and skill in reading, ultimately creating lifelong learners.

Accomplished English language arts teachers help students understand that one’s purpose for reading should influence the way one chooses and approaches a text. For example, a student in search of a specific item of information might skim quickly or, in the case of digital text, perform a keyword search. A student with a different purpose, such as analyzing the viewpoint in a controversial documentary, would need to carefully follow the logic of the premise and evaluate the facts used to support it. Teachers help students realize that one’s purpose can change as one engages with a text, and that new strategies may flow from a revised purpose. For example, a student who starts out by skimming a text for a fact may encounter an engrossing argument and decide to slow down, read more carefully, and then reread. Accomplished teachers help students set purposes for reading and viewing, leading them to develop and articulate their own purposes and strategies. Ultimately, students will employ these skills in disciplines other than English language arts. For example, when solving a mathematical equation, students understand the necessity of going slowly, taking things apart, and checking understanding. In social studies and science, students learn to pay close attention to features such as headings and subheadings to identify main ideas and chunks of information.

Genres

Accomplished English language arts teachers recognize that students need experience recognizing various genres, including, but not limited to, poetry, drama, novels, biographies, speeches, journal articles, essays, video games, and documentaries; students also need exposure to both canonical and contemporary texts. Accomplished teachers help students appreciate each genre’s unique characteristics. Teachers instruct students about the purposes and features of various genres to prepare students to become more sophisticated thinkers and communicators.

Accomplished English language arts teachers help students understand the features of texts. For example, teachers explain the structures of novels, short stories, plays, and poetry. They help students analyze plot, including flashbacks and foreshadowing. They teach poetic forms such as haiku and sonnets. They help students analyze organizational patterns, rhetorical devices, graphic elements, and other features that help convey meaning to the reader. For example, a teacher might model how to analyze a political cartoon or persuasive essay for propaganda techniques and fallacious reasoning. Accomplished teachers explain how to assess the currency, reliability, and bias of sources and data. They help students become aware of how the careful interpretation of themes, viewpoints, archetypes,
stereotypes, symbolism, figurative language, allusions, motifs, and other conventions can lead to deeper understanding of a text. Accomplished teachers instruct students about the ways in which commercial, social, cultural, and political messages are embedded in texts.

**Instructional Strategies**

Accomplished English language arts teachers have the pedagogical skills necessary to help all students improve the way they navigate through text. Teachers understand that the meaning-making process is influenced by a multitude of factors, including the purpose for reading; the evolving knowledge, interest, and skills that the student brings to the task; and the nature of the text. Accomplished teachers are sensitive to the ways in which these factors interact, and they adjust and implement strategies in light of the particular context rather than following a prescriptive or formulaic approach. Teachers motivate students to find personal meaning in texts through a variety of best-practice, research-based instructional techniques.

Accomplished English language arts teachers are able to select appropriate texts based on student needs because they are aware of students’ comprehension levels and individual interests. Teachers can identify and access materials that have a wide range of readability; they also know how to provide texts with similar subject matter in different formats and at different levels of difficulty, such as a Shakespeare play and a high-quality graphic novel or film version of that story. Accomplished teachers introduce students to the richness of literary traditions within and across cultures, both to reflect the diversity of students in the learning environment and to increase students’ global awareness of traditions they have never directly encountered. Teachers select texts that evoke profound questions around issues such as coming of age or justice. Accomplished English language arts teachers view their school media center and their library media specialist as important resources for their students and themselves. Teachers present challenging, high-quality texts to all students, and they provide the strategies necessary for students to improve their skills in reading and viewing. (See Standard XI—Collaboration.)

Accomplished English language arts teachers use a variety of appropriate instructional activities to help students plan, engage with, and respond to ideas and topics in their reading and viewing. Teachers show students how to monitor their understanding of texts in order to make decisions about how to adjust their reading pace and how to determine what to read carefully, what to read quickly, what to skip, and what to reread. In the case of digital resources such as websites, digital databases, video, and other media, teachers instruct students in specialized strategies such as analyzing the camera angles, voiceovers, and music that a director used in a filmed short story to add subtleties to the narrative. (See Standard IV—Instructional Design and Implementation.)

Accomplished English language arts teachers use scaffolding to help students learn how to interpret more complex texts over time. When students experience challenges, accomplished teachers help them work through the ensuing frustration