

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.