How to Read a Primary Source

Reading Strategies to Understand, Analyze and Interpret Complex Text

Overview

This lesson is designed to teach students a "divide and comprehend" approach to reading technical documents of any kind. The focus of this lesson is on reading The Wilderness Act of 1964, but the same process can be applied to treaties, constitutions, ordinances, and many other primary source historical documents. In addition, these strategies can be applied to tasks as mundane, yet important, as reading a contract or even a credit card agreement. Almost any technical document can be made accessible by nearly any reader if the right combinations of temporary supports are employed. Here, the focus on repeated reading, annotation, purpose setting, prediction, group process and structured analytic tools allow for deep understanding of the text and high levels of student success as readers.

Materials

- Word Cards (to be printed on 6x4 plan index cards) one set per group (terms represent things prohibited and also present in Wilderness as defined by the Act.)
- Wilderness Act on Index Cards (printable chunks on plan 6x4 index cards). There are XX chunks, so each student should get 1 - card
- A clear copy of The Wilderness Act of 1964 (or your selected document of study) one per student, without margin notes.
- Highlighters for each student
- Word Work Form (one per group)
- Analysis of The Wilderness Act Form (s) (one per group)
- Impacts Form (one per group)

Common Core State Standards Addressed as Learning Targets

- I determine the meaning of unfamiliar words in context
- I translate from legal language into common language parts (articles) of the Act.
- I use my own words and language to make sense of the Act
- I write in my own words (paraphrase), to summarize sections and subsections from the Act
- I interpret the intended purpose of each part of the Act from different points of view – conservationists and developers
- I am aware of some of prohibited and included qualities or uses determined by the ACT
- I integrate and evaluate content from a documentary film, looking for patterns, relationships and impacts of events on individuals and groups. (RI7, SL2, SL3)
- I write to reflect and deepen my content knowledge regarding The Wilderness Act, its passage and impacts on life in Montana today. (W2, W4, W7, W8, W10, L as required)

- I participate in discussions, listening to others reflections and sharing my own, to explore issues associated with The Wilderness Act. (CCSS – SL1, SL4)
- I work in a team to develop an anchor chart or graphic depiction of the impact of Wilderness Act capturing key details and impacts. (Optional) (CCSS – SL 5)
- I debrief in a presentation with my team to our class on these findings, using the anchor chart for visual support. (Optional) (CCSS – SL5, SL6)
- I participate in a formal Socratic seminar for the purpose of exploring issues associated with The Wilderness Act. (Optional) (CCSS – SL1, SL4, SL6)
- I develop a short written report or essay on The Wilderness Act (or the impact of the removal era) synthesizing information from this investigation. (Optional) (W2, W4, W5, W6, W7, W8, W10, L as required)

Procedures

Write your way in.

3-5 min

1. Pose the question "What is The Wilderness Act?"
2. Use quick write protocol for 1 to 2 minutes allowing for reflection, activation of schema.
3. Students write a definition based on what they currently understand.
4. Students pair share or group share (option)
5. Take a minute for students to report out (social construction of knowledge.)
6. Teacher skims quick writes (open on tables), listens to pair share and reporting to determine level of students background knowledge (checking for understanding).
7. Have them draw a line under their preliminary definition.

Make a prediction. Introduce target text.

3-5 min

1. Ask, "Of the definitions you came up with, which do you think may be closest to the accurate definition?"
2. Create a composite version from student responses and write it as a class prediction on the board.
3. Introduce the Act to be read. Select purposefully, ideally starting with a shorter document (Sections 1, 2, 4 a-c, 5) file in the appendices) depending on age of students, reading ability, stamina and time allowed.
4. Be sure the document selected does NOT have the interpretive margin comments, as students will be asked to construct these paraphrasing the text.

Independent silent sustained reading and annotation 10 to 15 minutes.

10-15 min

1. Distribute highlighters.
2. Instruct students to read this short document, and highlight words, phrases or segments that they don't understand.
3. Tell them to anticipate heavy highlighting and not be concerned for what they don't understand now.
4. It is helpful if the teacher does this too, modeling how they "grapple" with tough texts.
5. Allow enough time for all students to progress through the redacted sections presented (1 to 1.5 pages without printed on 5 to 10 cards)
6. Early finishers may be asked to attempt to paraphrase or write a definition of a "trouble word" or two from the context.
7. Getting them to look closely and effort to interpret is very important and more valuable than pre-teaching a list of technical terms.

Process findings, compare and share.

5-7 min
Repeated

1. Conduct a Tea Party activity asking students to mingle through the classroom and compare their pattern of highlighted elements with each other.
   - 1st, ask them to find the student in class whose highlighted elements are most like their own. Discuss with their partner what made these parts confusing. (Report out by randomly calling on pairs.)
   - 2nd, ask them to find the student in class who highlighting is least like their own. Discuss with their partner differences in understanding.
   - Finally, ask the class to line up based on most to least highlighting. (Note that this may or may not be a true indicator of understanding!)
2. Fold the line, so the student with the most highlighting is now standing in from the student with the least. Invite them to share with the partner
3. During this process, the teacher listens, poses guiding questions (drill down method) clarifies confusion and checks for understanding.
4. After this is done, have them be seated and

Report out and final debrief.

10-15 min

1. Students report out and engage in a discussion on what they noticed was most confusing and how they can learn more to clarify their confusion.
2. Teacher looks for development of understanding of the topic.
3. Teacher continues to expand and clarify in response to student reports.
4. A natural extension is a formal discussion in the form of a Socratic Circle. 🗝
5. Suggested questions for Socratic Circle discussion might include:
   - Should we have designated Wilderness areas?
   - What would Montana be like without Wilderness, National Forests or public lands?
   - The Wilderness Act defines a way that specific lands are managed. What benefits and potential draw backs exist to land management strategies?

Write your way out.

3-5 min

1. Individual reflection.
2. Now what do you know?
3. Students write what they now understand.
4. A natural extension of this lesson allowing students to exercise more skills while deepening content knowledge would be assignment of an informative essay or short research piece. (optional)

Steps

Day One (Approximately 1 hour)

- Bell ringer activity to write their way in, ask students to write their best guess definition of The Wilderness Act, then draw a line under this thinking.
- Have them share with table partners, and see if they can come to consensus on a working definition.
- Have the class craft this working definition and write on the board.
- Have students individually read a section of The Wilderness Act.
- Set a timer and give them up to 15 minutes for the first independent reading.
- During the reading they highlight words or phrases they do not know or points of confusion.
- Whole class, conduct a short discussion about the reading.
    - What does this document do?
    - Was it hard to read?
    - If yes, why?
    - Do you think there is a way to read this so you understand it?
    - Do you think others found the same parts or words to be troublesome or hard to understand?
- Conduct a line up activity with their highlighted papers (or index cards with sections).
- Holding their copies in front of them, facing out, have them mingle in the room looking for patterns in each other's highlighting.
- After checking out each other's areas of confusion and hard words, have students line up from most highlighter to least highlighter facing the teacher.
- Split the line in half.
- Fold the lines by having the individuals at the center lead and walk down the line until they face the person at the end of each line, and the second person faces the next person etc…. creating divergent pairs.
- Ask them to share and briefly discuss their areas of confusion and see if they have any tough terms in common.
- Seat students in groups divergent groups of four. (divergent = high, low and middle highlighting if these differences exist.)
- In groups, have them reread the treaty stopping when they come to an unfamiliar word.
- For each unfamiliar word, the group will develop a group "hunch" or a have-a-go definition and then they will cross check their hunch with a dictionary (online or text) selecting the definition that most closely matches their hunch.
- Have each group use the word work form attached to capture their thinking.

Day Two (Approximately 1 Hour)

- Seat students in groups from the previous day.
- Have groups conduct a third reading of the treaty, but this time, they work as a group to paraphrase section by section into simple, everyday language. The key question for groups to focus on is, "What does this section do, or require?"

- Encourage them to use their word work form from the previous day to aid in comprehension.
- Have groups capture their paraphrased summaries of the articles on the Analysis of The Wilderness Act form attached.
- You may want to limit the number of words they can use in their paraphrased GIST statement to 10 or fewer to force them to be concise.
- You may select to require these statements to be complete sentences, or place other parameters to support strong language use. If not required today, have them do so in a subsequent day. Break the tasks up based on student stamina and frustration, but don't allow the final to be stated as fragments.
- Finally, have groups go back to the Act again, but this time, section by section, discussing the following three questions.
    - What's in it for the public, including residents of the State? + -
    - What's in it for the wildlife? + -
    - What's in it for the Montana and the Nation? + -
- Use the data capture form attached to gather information from these different perspectives.
- When all groups are done, they process this information by reporting back to the entire class.
- Conduct a discussion, pop-up debate, or stage a socratic circle to foster debate over divergent interpretations.
- You may opt to provide points of clarification as you can, or simply collect lingering questions for another day. Consider inviting an expert into the classroom for a discussion of The Wilderness Act. The Montana Conservation Elders hosts a Speakers Bureau for this purpose go to XX Website here.
- Follow up questions and activities include:
    - Who was involved in the framing of the Wilderness Act?
    - Who opposed it at the time and why?
    - Did any opponents change their thinking over time? Why or why not?
    - What might have happened if The Wilderness Act was not passed in 1964?
        - For people?
        - For wildlife?
        - To ecosystems?
- Close this lesson by returning to the definition of The Wilderness Act at the beginning. In their individual note books, have them write about what they now understand The Wilderness Act to be and why it is important and relevant today. Ask them to be specific.

Assessment

- Definition and revised definition (whole class and individual).
- Highlighted individual copies of the Act, showing initial confusion or lack of understanding.
- Word work forms completed from each group with key terms from the Act defined.
- Analysis of the Wilderness Act forms for each group.
- Direct observation of student discussion and equitable group participation.

Teacher Notes and Cautions

- Summarization and the ability to take complex content and translate it so you can more deeply understand it is a critical skill that needs to be practiced often. Use this same lesson format to support further development of this skill with other primary source documents such as constitutions, agreements or contracts.
- Repeated reading of primary source documents on complex and unfamiliar subjects is essential for comprehension. This lesson involves independent reading followed by at least three purpose driven repeated readings in small group settings. Each exposure to a complex text needs to place different cognitive demands on the learner to increase depth of comprehension. When you use primary sources, work to stretch students thinking, shift perspectives or set new purposes for their reading.
- If the text is too difficult for independent reading for your students, consider scaffolding to support their reading comprehension. You might select to read a complex section aloud, then partner read (every other section…) along with the students to build confidence. Move them gradually to ever higher levels of independence while requiring them to engage actively in reading.

Vocabulary

preservation, enduring, wilderness, character, resource, inclusion, appropriation, system, conservation, scenic, scientific, administration, designated, untrammeled, primitive, unconfined, practicable, classification, unimpaired, solitude, dominate, suitability, prohibition, provisions

Extension Activities

1. To adapt this lesson for younger students, begin by providing a whole class demonstration. Using a Smart Board, or overhead projector, take one or two sections and model how to read it part by part and paraphrase into simple, clear and brief language. Fill out one entire analysis form.
2. Extend the learning for 4th- 6th graders by having them take their phrases and rewrite as a group in complete sentences.
3. Extend high school students' abilities to interpret the Act by assigning additional research and advanced reading. Have students do this work in pairs or groups, chart out their findings over a day or two and then report back to the entire class.

Word	We think it means … in this document.	The closest dictionary definition to our hunch is….
untrammeled		

Analysis of The Wilderness Act By (group names here)_____

Directions: Summarize each article in the fewest words possible. Use plan clear language. Do not use more than 10 words.

Section 1	
Section 2	
(a)	
(b)	
(c)	
Section 3	
(a)	
(b)	
(c)	
(d)	

(e)	
Section 4	
(a)	
(b)	
(c)	
(d)	
Section 5	
(a)	
(b)	
(c)	
Section 6	

(a)	
(b)	

Impacted Parties	Positive Impacts +	Negative Impacts -
What's in it for the people?		
What's in it for wildlife?		
What's in it for the Montana and the Nation?		