



Literacy Connects

A Content Literacy Newsletter from Regional Professional Development Program-Issue XLIX



How to Analyze Non-fiction

The Common Core State Standards places a heavy emphasis on reading and analyzing non-fiction text in all content areas. Analysis requires more than understanding the point or the content of a text. It requires that we go beyond what the text says explicitly and look at such factors as implied meaning, intended purpose and audience, the context in which the text was written, and how the author presents his/her argument. Before students can analyze, however, they must first comprehend the text and be able to provide an objective summary (see *Literacy Connects I, XXIII, XXV and XXVII* for reading comprehension strategies). When working with complex text, it is best to start with short excerpts, encourage several reads of the piece, and model how good readers move from basic comprehension on the first read, to deeper, more complex understandings with each subsequent reading (see Close Reading strategy in *Literacy Connects XLVIII*).

SOAPStone is an effective strategy consisting of a series of questions that provides a basis for analysis. Answers may vary; however, students must always provide evidence taken directly from the text to prove their point.

Subject: What is the subject? This is the general topic, content, and ideas contained in the text. Students should state the subject in only a few words or a short phrase.

Occasion: What is the occasion? It is the time and place of the piece; the context that encouraged the writing to happen. This can be a large occasion (an environment of ideas and emotions that swirl around a broad issue) or an immediate occasion or specific event.

Audience: Who is the audience? The audience is the group of readers to whom the piece is directed. The audience may be an individual, a small group, or a large group of people. It may be specific or more general.

Purpose: What is the purpose? It is the reason behind the text. What does the author want the audience to think or do as a result of this text? Does the author call for some specific action or is the purpose to convince the reader to think, feel or believe in a certain way? Too often students do not consider this question. Until they do, they will not be able to critically analyze the text.

Speaker: Who is the speaker? This is the voice that tells the story. What is their background? Is there a bias? Does that impact how the text is written and the points being made? Typically in non-fiction, the speaker and the author are the same; however, when students approach fiction, they must realize that the speaker and the author are often NOT the same. They fail to realize that in fiction the author may choose to tell the story from any number of different points of view. In fact, the method of narration and the character of the speaker may be a crucial piece in understanding the work, particularly in satire.

Tone: What is the tone? This is the attitude a writer takes towards the subject or character: It can be serious, humorous, sarcastic, or even objective. Examine the author's choice of words, sentence structure, and imagery. Consider providing students with a list of tone words to help them find the exact word. Often in informational text, the tone is objective because the author is simply relaying information and is not trying to sway the audience; however, in literary non-fiction as with fiction, the author may want his/her audience to feel a certain way about the situation, characters, etc.

Go to Literacy Connect Resources for a template for SOAPStone and a list of tone words.

Visit the RPDP website (www.rpdp.net) for a complete selection of *Literacy Connects*.