

## Inquiry Learning in Literacy: Using Concepts to Explore Text and Construct Meaning

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## Central Idea

“Education cannot give learners all the information that they need to know; rather, it must provide the tools for continuing to learn.”

--Educational Broadcasting Corporation

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## Traditional or Inquiry-based Classroom?



With a partner, categorize the classroom descriptors into two groups.

What do you notice?

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## Traditional or Inquiry?

- Curriculum begins with the parts of the whole. Emphasizes basic skills.
- Strict adherence to fixed curriculum is highly valued.
- Materials are primarily textbooks and workbooks.
- Learning is based on repetition.
- Teachers disseminate information to students; students are recipients of knowledge.
- Curriculum emphasizes big concepts, beginning with the whole and expanding to include the parts.
- Pursuit of student questions and interests is valued.
- Materials include primary sources of material and manipulative materials.
- Learning is interactive, building on what the student already knows.
- Teachers have a dialogue with students, helping students construct their own knowledge.

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## Traditional or Inquiry?

- Teacher's role is directive, rooted in authority.
- Assessment is through testing, correct answers.
- Knowledge is seen as inert.
- Students work primarily alone.
- Teacher's role is interactive, rooted in negotiation.
- Assessment includes student works, observations, and points of view, as well as tests. Process is as important as product.
- Knowledge is seen as dynamic, ever changing with our experiences.
- Students work primarily in groups.

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## What does inquiry learning look like?

- Students view themselves as learners in the process of learning.
- Students accept an "invitation to learn" and willingly engage in an exploration process.
- Students raise questions, propose explanations, and use observations.
- Students plan and carry out learning activities and ultimately take action.
- Students communicate using a variety of methods.
- Students critique their learning practices.

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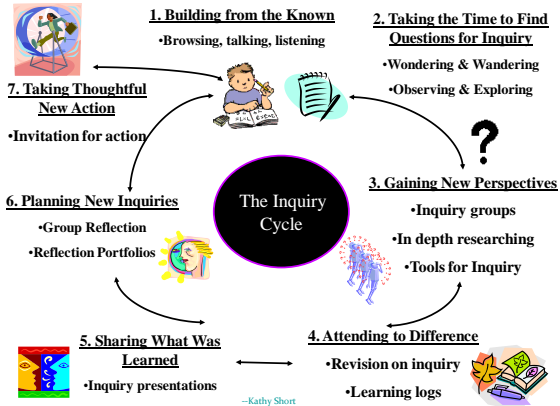
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## What is the teacher's role?

- The teacher reflects on the purpose and makes plans for inquiry learning.
- The teacher facilitates classroom learning.
- The teacher assesses in the context of learning.

From: *Concept to Classroom: 2004. Educational Broadcasting Corporation.* <http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/index.html>



## Concepts

Concepts are important ideas that matter to every person, no matter what age, no matter where in the world they are located.



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## Concept Test

- Broad and abstract
- Represented by one or two words
- Universal in application
- Can be used regardless of time or place
- Can be used across disciplines
- Can be expressed as questions

Ideas from *Stirring the Heart, Head and Soul*, by H. Lynn Erickson

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## Concept "Test"



Using the criteria, which of the following examples are concepts:

Family  
Culture  
Change  
Fitness  
Human Rights  
Bears  
Plants

Power  
Persuasion  
Revolution  
Dinosaurs  
China  
Cooperation  
Ellis Island

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How might we use concepts in our literacy instruction? (Form, function, change, connection, causation, reflection, perspective, responsibility)

Theme Example:  
Character Traits

Conceptual Lens:  
Character change  
Character perspective  
Character reflection  
Character responsibility

Setting

Relationship of setting to character  
Connection of setting to meaning  
Perspective of differing characters  
Function of setting

Plot/Main Events

Sequencing of events  
Connection of events

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## Reading Like a Writer: An Inquiry Stance

- Reciprocal nature of reading and writing is conceptual
  - Combine elements of reading and writing
- Katie Wood Ray: An Inquiry Stance

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## Reading Like a Writer: An Inquiry Stance

You are actually “teaching” on multiple levels and exploring multiple concepts:

- the particular genre or writing issue (Form, Function, Connection, Responsibility, etc.).
- the habit of mind experienced writers use all the time. (Ray, 2006)
  - Purpose, audience, writing processes (Form, Function, Reflection, Causation, Change, Perspective, etc.)

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## Reading Like a Writer: An Inquiry Stance

- Involves students as active participants in leading the learning
- Unlike writing as content, in which there is a series of predetermined lessons on a topic, there is no study (or assessment) without the students. The curriculum is the outcome rather than the starting point.

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## Reading Like a Writer: An Inquiry Stance

- "First, we believe that the best way to learn to write anything is to read the kind of thing you are learning to write. ... We believe that everything we need to know about how our written language works is focused in actual written texts. We believe that good authors are people who know a lot about how our language works and who know how to use it well for all kinds of purposes. And for this reason, we believe good authors make the best teachers of writing." (Ray, 2006)

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## Reading Like a Writer: An Inquiry Stance

- Website
- Donorschoose.org grant

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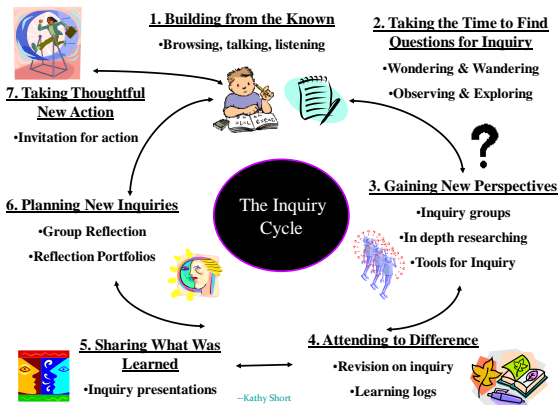
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### How might this play out in class?

- The nature of inquiry belies a day-by-day guide, but here's how it might look in writing using a genre study.

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### Katie Wood Ray's: "The Predictable Rhythm of Product Study in the Writing Workshop"

- Gather a short stack of texts that are good examples of what we want to study (students can help us gather texts).
- Make sure students know what it is we're studying and that they'll be expected to write under the influence of the study. This can be formalized as a handout of expectations for the study or simply announced.
- {Curriculum resources: Short texts found in picture books, magazines, newspapers, collections of writing, internet websites, and excerpts from chapter books.}

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### Katie Wood Ray's: "The Predictable Rhythm of Product Study in the Writing Workshop"

- Immerse ourselves in reading and talking about the texts we've gathered and what we notice about how they're written.
- Study a few of them closely until we've become articulate (and can chart) about how people write this kind of text.
- Write something that could go in the stack of texts we've been studying and be articulate about how it fits in the stack. (Ray, 2006)

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## Katie Wood Ray's: "The Predictable Rhythm of Product Study in the Writing Workshop"

- It's more about depth than coverage.

"If teachers do all of the noticing, kids won't have any reason to notice for themselves."  
(Ray, 2006)

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## Kinds of things we might examine in a product study:

- **Genre:** short fiction, feature articles (all types), memoir, commentary, essay, reviews (all types), profile, poetry, etc.
- **Specific craft studies** (which are also a part of any genre study):
  - How writers use punctuation in interesting ways to craft their texts.
  - How illustrations and graphics are used to enhance the meaning in texts.
  - Rich language work and the knowledge about language that makes it possible.
  - How writers make paragraphing decisions.
  - Text structure and organization.
  - Etc.

*From Study Driven: A Framework for Planning Units of Study in the Writing Workshop.* Katie Wood Ray, 2006, Heinemann.

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## Not Just Reading for Enjoyment: Reading With a Purpose

For most any genre study, the same three questions generally guide the thinking:

**1. What kinds of topics/themes do writers address with this genre, and what kinds of things do they do with these topics?** This question helps students understand the human intentions this kind of writing serves in the world of writing.

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## Guiding Questions, cont'd.

**2. What kinds of work (research, gathering, reflecting, observing, etc.) does it seem like writers of this genre must do in order to produce this kind of writing?** This question helps students understand the preparation and process writers use to write in the genre.

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## Guiding Questions, cont'd.

**3. How do writers craft this genre so it is compelling for readers?** This question helps students understand how writers do this kind of writing well.

*From Study Driven: A Framework for Planning Units of Study in the Writing Workshop. Katie Wood Ray. 2006, Heinemann.*

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## To start with...

- Students spend 2-3 days of *reading* gathered text during writing workshop
- They begin looking at the texts “with an eye toward writing that kind of thing.” They must have *vision* before they can have *revision*.

(Ray, 2006)

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## Then, move on to a close study.

The class either:

1. works from a whole-class list of student noticings
2. returns to individual texts for a close study
3. or works with other specific questions in mind

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## 1. Working From a List of Noticings

- Katie Wood Ray (2006) suggests having groups come up with 4-5 noticings (rather than individual students calling reporting out) and add them to a class list. You can then choose what to study from the noticings.
  - Look for what is genre-specific and which seem to be about the craft of writing in general.
  - **In a genre study, “you’ll want to spend most of your time on those things that seem specific to the genre, for example, how the factual information is presented in a feature article, where the main idea comes in a commentary or essay, how a memoir is focused, etc.”**
  - Look to make connections to other types of writing.
  - Look for fresh and new ideas that could raise the level of everyone’s thinking about writing.
  - Look for any noticings that address areas of student need

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## 2. Examine an Individual Text

- You could return to an individual text and examine it closely.
- Compare and contrast language of the text with other similar texts.
- Basically asking again, “What do you notice this writer doing that you think is interesting and makes this good writing?”

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### 3a. Or, you could work with other questions in mind... (see Selected Texts/Resources)

#### Questions to ask of a *stack of texts* representing a genre:

- What kind of writing is this? How is it different from other kinds of writing in the world?
- What *work* does this kind of writing do in the world (topics, audiences, purposes)?
- What do people have to do to get ready to write this kind of thing?
- What different approaches do people take to writing this kind of thing?
- How long, generally, is this kind of writing? Is it different lengths in different containers?

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### 3b. Questions to Frame Our Close Look at Texts (see Selected Texts/Resources)

#### Questions to ask of *individual texts* in the stack:

- Which parts are particularly good? What's happening with the writing in these parts?
  - How is the piece organized? What are the "chunks" of it? How does the piece move from one chunk to the next? Does it move through time or through a list of ideas?
  - Look closely at the lead and the ending—how does the writer manage these two critical chunks of the piece?
  - How has the writer focused the piece? What's included, and what has likely been left out?
  - What different modes of writing operate in the piece (description, exposition, narration, etc.)?
  - Is there any interesting punctuation work in the piece?
  - Any insights about how to page-break (in picture books) or paragraph-break decisions were made?
  - How do graphics, illustrations, layout, font, etc. add to the meaning and appeal of the piece?
  - How does the title of the piece relate to the meaning? How was it likely chosen?
- Note: In inquiry, these are the kinds of things writers think and talk about as they study texts. The point is not to go down the line with the questions. The point is to talk "around" these kind of noticings.

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### Let's try examining a text

- Please find the excerpt of Little by Little, by Jean Little in your Selected Texts/Resources packet.
- Jean Little Background
- While I'm reading, pay attention to how this is written. Let's use the guiding questions on your response paper.

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## Guiding Questions

1. What kinds of topics/themes does the author address with this piece?
2. What kinds of work (research, gathering, reflecting, observing, etc.) does it seem like writers of this genre must do in order to produce this kind of writing? In other words, how do writers of memoir develop their topics?
3. How did the author craft this piece so it is compelling for readers?

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## What did you discover?

- Noticings?
- Wonderings?

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## Memoir

- Kids are experts on themselves!
- Read the two versions of “Lessons From Laurel” in your Selected Texts/Resources packet.
- Compare and contrast them using the Venn Diagram, or make a list on a separate sheet of paper.

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## What did you notice?

- Share out with a partner, share out with the class.
- At this point in the classroom: You could give kids the stack of books or a selected texts packet for them to work on in a small group. Students would develop a list of noticings. Groups would share out.

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## Memoir: A step further

- Struggles teaching memoir...

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## A “memoir”

We were going ice skating at Dieners' Pond.  
"Will you wait for me?" Mom said.  
"How come?" we asked.  
"I want to go skating with you."  
"But you never go skating," we replied.  
"I have borrowed Rose's skates," she said.  
Then we walked down to Dieners' Pond. When we got there, we changed into our skates. When Mom skated, she was really good. She did figure eights backwards. We had never seen our mother skate before. It was a big surprise. After about two hours we went home and had hot chocolate. It was a great day.  
(Atwell, 1998)

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## Not exactly...

- This is a personal experience narrative, and not a good one, either.
- In a personal narrative, you write about something that happened in your life, a description of it, and even how you feel about it.
- You could also write about yourself and experiences that you have encountered, read, or heard about.

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## Memoir, unpacked

- In a memoir: You have had time and reflection, some distance. There is *meaning*.
- It must have some importance to it, not just be a topic off your idea list. It's not just, "I did this, I did that, it was so much fun."
- At the end, the author should be able to say, "So what?" The reader should be able to say, "So what?" and there should be a point, discovery, or significance.

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## Memoir, unpacked

- Recognizes and explores moments on the way to growing up and becoming oneself, the good moments and the bad ones.
- Distills the essence of an experience through what a writer includes and, more importantly, through what a writer excludes.
- Celebrates people and places no one else has ever heard of.
- Allows us to discover and tell our own truths as writers.

(Atwell, 1998)

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## Memoir...

- Nancie Atwell says, “Memoir is how writers look for the past and make sense of it. We figure out who we are, who we have become, and what it means to us and to the lives of others: a memoir puts the events of life in perspective for the writer and for those who read it. It is a way to validate to others the events of our lives—our choices, perspectives, decisions, responses.”

(Atwell, 1998)

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## Dig Up Buried Stories

- JoAnn Portalupi & Ralph Fletcher writing inquiry tool/idea generator

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<http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/index.html>

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## Additional Resources

- *The Art of Inquiry*, by Nancy Cecil
- *Why Are School Buses Always Yellow?* by Barell
- *Understanding by Design*, by Wiggins & McTiche
- *Children's Inquiry*, by Judith Wells Lindfors
- *Developing Curious Minds*, by Barell
- *Taking the PYP Forward*, ed. Davidson & Carber
- *Curriculum Instruction and Thinking*, by H. Lynn Erickson
- *Comprehension and Collaboration: Inquiry Circles in Action*, Harvey & Daniels
- *Learning Together Through Inquiry*, by Short, et. al.
- *Integrating Inquiry Across the Curriculum*, by Audet & Jordan
- *Children's Inquiry Using Language to Make Sense of the World*, by Lindfors
- *Engaging Readers and Writers with Inquiry*, by Wilhelm
- *Kagan Cooperative Learning*, by Kagan & Kagan

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