

## Introduction

Since we published *GED as Project, Language Arts, Reading*, several developments have influenced the field of adult education. First of all, considerable research and findings about adult learners and adult readers have been published. Secondly, interest in and concern about the transitioning student has caused us to look at the work we are doing with the GED®-level students, and to consider the post-GED outcomes they are attaining. Finally, the growing focus on standards for instruction is causing every program and, perhaps, instructor to look at what is being taught and how.

In the past year, we asked several reading specialists who have focused on adult education to review *GED as Project, Language Arts, Reading*. They found that what we set forth has remained sound, although it was suggested that we should look at the mechanics of reading as well as comprehension. In particular, they felt a stronger focus needed to be put on fluency and alphabetics. We thought, too, it would be good to have a clearer understanding of the characteristics of the GED-level reader.

The research on the transitioning student shows us that those who have passed their GED Tests still are at a significant disadvantage compared to high school graduates in their efforts to attain further goals. Some of this is attributable to their not having had significant experience in doing a great deal of individual work—homework. Other problems include a lack in their body of knowledge; not having finished high school means a lack of exposure to some basic cultural icons.

During my classroom observations, I felt a growing concern about how to encourage instructors to carry out the activities presented in *GED as Project* with materials other than those provided by the Official Practice Test. I saw a huge variation in what is offered as reading instruction. We have been told repeatedly that, at the GED level, some instructors felt little need to work on their students' reading development.

As we worked on the development of Virginia's General Educational Development Content Standards, I saw an opportunity to add content discussion to the reading skills development so well covered in *GED as Project, Language Arts, Reading*. I have long considered that lack of a focus on content to be a weakness in this book. It is very important that these advanced adult learners develop approaches to understanding literary forms and increase their capacity to understand more advanced texts.

Marcia Phillips

### **This CD contains:**

- Reading Characteristics of GED-Level Learners, by Bill Muth
- Alphabetics and Fluency: Strengthening the Foundations of Reading Comprehension, by Susan McShane
- The English Teacher: Developing critical reading skills and literary awareness, by Marcia Phillips

- Reading passages from the Official Practice Test A, and others:
  - *Barefoot in the Park* (Learning Project 2)
  - *My Antonia* (Learning Project 3)
  - Employee Handbook (Learning Project 4)
  - “The Vanishing American” (Learning Project 5)
  - Trompe L’oeil exhibit review (Learning Project 6)
  - “Sympathy” (Learning Project 7)
  - “A Visit to Grandmother” (Learning Project 8)

## Reading Characteristics of GED-Level Learners

Bill Muth, Virginia Commonwealth University

In many adult learning systems, learners are assigned to literacy programs according to their scores on group-administered tests such as the TABE, ABLE, or CASAS. Often, learners with reading scores at or above the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level are placed in GED® test-preparation programs (sometimes known as “Fast Track programs”), while those scoring below 8<sup>th</sup> grade are assigned to basic or intermediate literacy programs to build foundational knowledge and skills.

The reality is that many—perhaps most—adult learners do not have time to participate in extended literacy programs (Comings & Soricone, 2007), and thus Fast Track programs fulfill a critical need for GED-level learners. The GED credential alone does not make a large difference in earning power (Tyler, 2005). And the highly competitive global workplace demands increasingly higher skills of its workers (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Stites, 2004). Nevertheless, earning a GED certificate continues to be widely viewed as a legitimate educational milestone—more or less equivalent to a high school diploma. GED earners experience intangible benefits, such as higher self esteem, as well as pragmatic ones, such as access to advanced learning.

Notwithstanding these merits and the recruiting and credentialing successes of GED Fast Track programs, policy makers, practitioners, and literacy learners need to address the long-term literacy needs of GED completers and GED-level learners—needs that typically are *not* addressed in GED test-preparation programs and may *not* be required to pass the test. Unfortunately for learners (and employers), these literacy skills *are* required for sustained success in higher education and in technologically advanced workplaces (Smith, 2003). The remainder of this article hints at the size of this problem by describing gaps in reading proficiency among 47 GED-level learners in prison-based literacy programs.

In 2004, I studied the reading characteristics of 120 literacy learners incarcerated in the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP). A battery of eleven tests was used to assess the learners’ achievement in overall reading comprehension and in component areas of reading such as: phonemic awareness, word recognition (sight word reading), word attack (decoding), reading rate (a proxy for fluency), word meaning (oral receptive and expressive vocabulary), and memory. A full description of the tests, assessment protocols, data analysis methods, and validity concerns are reported elsewhere (Muth, 2004).

In the FBOP study, 47 of 120 learners achieved reading comprehension scores at or above the 8.0 grade equivalent level, which would have made them eligible for placement in the FBOP’s GED-level literacy program.<sup>1</sup> However, an examination of their component-level reading skills revealed that many of these learners had extensive instructional needs in reading, despite their relatively strong performance on tests of reading comprehension. These component-level needs (in areas such as decoding and fluency) went well beyond the scope of GED test-preparation programs that focus on the ability to comprehend content-area (science, history, literature, etc.)

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that nine of the 47 learners were placed in intermediate literacy programs at the time of the testing. However, based on their reading comprehension scores they would have qualified for upper-level (GED-level) test-preparation programs.

passages. In such programs, reading comprehension strategies (such as text look-backs) are often presented as test-taking strategies.

In my study, a third (16 of 47) of the GED-level learners<sup>2</sup> scored *at or below fourth grade* on tests of both sight word recognition *and* word attack. In addition, none of these 16 read above 150 words per minute, and many had much lower rates (as low as 71 words per minute). This may be compared to an optimal reading rate among U.S. adults and college students of about 200-250 words-per-minute (Harris & Sipay, 1990). Further, 14 GED-level learners scored below 4<sup>th</sup> grade on word meaning (vocabulary) tests.

However, we cannot deduce from this that a third of all GED-level learners in the U.S. have need for formal instruction in decoding, fluency, and vocabulary (in addition to comprehension). The sample was not large enough to make generalizations to the larger population of adult literacy learners in the U.S. On the other hand, far more than a third of the FBOP GED-level learners had difficulties with one or more component of reading.

The mean scores for the 47 GED-level learners are presented in Table 1. Note that, as a group, the average score for *every* component area was well below the reading comprehension score typically used to place learners in GED test-preparation programs. Further, these across-the-components low-intermediate needs were found consistently among both native English learners and English language learners (Table 2). As a group, however, the native English speakers achieved higher scores in vocabulary, while the English language learners had slightly faster reading rates.

Table 1.  
Component Scores for FBOP GED-Level Learners.

		Word Rec (GE)	Word Attack (GE)	Word Meaning (GE)	Words per Minute	Silent Reading Comp. (GE)
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )
<b><i>M</i></b> <b>(<i>SD</i>)</b>	47	5.6 (2.5)	4.7 (2.8)	6.4 (2.7)	135 (27.1)	10.1 (1.5)

GE = mean grade equivalent; *M* = Mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation.

<sup>2</sup> For the remainder of the article, the term “GED-level learner” will be used to refer to those who achieved an 8.0 or higher grade equivalent score in reading comprehension. It should not be misconstrued as an endorsement of this convention by the author.

Table 2.  
Component Scores for Native English v. English Language Learners.

		Word Rec (GE)	Word Attack (GE)	Word Meaning (GE)	Words per Minute	Silent Reading Comp. (GE)
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )
<b>NE</b>	37	5.6 (2.6)	4.9 (3.1)	7.1 (2.6)	132 (28.7)	10.2 (1.5)
<b>ELL</b>	10	5.2 (1.9)	4.7 (1.6)	4.0 (1.7)	146 (16.3)	9.7 (1.5)

NE = Native English Speakers. ELL = English Language Learners.

Only eleven of the 47 GED-level learners achieved consistent scores at or above the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level in all component areas. But, compared to adults in the general U.S. population, these learners, on average, were slower readers and scored in the low end of the average range on measures of word recognition, vocabulary, and memory. None of these eleven learners—the strongest readers of the 120-member FBOP sample—were English language learners (ELLs), confirming earlier findings that ELLs present even greater challenges with English-based literacy than native English speaking literacy learners (Collier & Thomas, 2001; Davidson & Bruce, 2003).

Even these eleven “strongest” learners presented histories of learning difficulties as children. Five of the eleven learners repeated one or more grades in school as children, three received special education support in school, and three received Title One or Chapter One help. Seven reported a serious head injury in the past, and eight reported problems with substance abuse.

As a group, the achievement of these eleven strongest literacy learners was still in the low-average/average range when compared to same-age peers in the general adult U.S. population. For example, their aggregate performances on three tests that provided scores standardized among U.S. adults were as follows: Woodcock Johnson-III Word Attack standard scores (mean = 94, *SD* = 5.9) in the low-average/average range; Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test standard scores (mean = 87, *SD* = 7.4) in the moderately low/low average range; and Weschler Adult Intelligence Scales Digit Span scaled scores (mean = 7.7, *SD* = 1.8) in the low average range. Further, these eleven read, on average, 154 words-per-minute (*SD* = 25), compared to the optimal reading rate of U.S. adults and college students of about 200-250 words-per-minute (Harris & Sipay, 1990).

Perhaps in the job market of 100 years ago, literacy gaps such as those described above would not have impeded these GED-level learners from competing for above-entry-level work. However, in the fiercely competitive and increasingly technical world of work today, these gaps matter a great deal. Strucker, Yamamoto, and Kirsch (2007) argued that adult literacy learners who achieve proficiency across all of the component areas of reading experience “dramatic improvements in many aspects of life, including higher income and less unemployment,

increased access to lifelong learning, greater amounts of personal reading for pleasure, and increased civic participation” (p. 3).

The implications for reading assessment and instruction at the component-level is clear. Strucker, Yamamoto, and Kirsch (2007) again argue:

At the present time, many adult literacy teachers in the U.S. tend to offer [adult literacy learners] instruction that is primarily organized around reading comprehension strategies, such as finding the main idea, using inferences, and detecting the sequence, and techniques for learning vocabulary through context. The teachers may be unaware of their students’ underlying needs in [component areas of reading such as decoding, vocabulary, and fluency] or they may believe that these component skills will develop naturally in the course of reading connected texts.

Our findings suggest that a different approach should be explored for these...adults, such as the approach developed by Chall in the Harvard Adult Reading Laboratory (Chall, 1994) and later extended and adapted for adolescent group instruction at Boys and Girls Town in Nebraska by Curtis (Curtis & Longo, 1999). Instead of focusing primarily on comprehension itself, Chall and Curtis’ approach addresses the root causes of poor comprehension: lack of fluent, accurate word recognition and limited knowledge of word meanings. Direct instruction is provided in each of these areas, accompanied by extensive reading and discussion of complete texts at appropriate levels of challenge. (p. 29)

Our Fast Track GED programs should be congratulated for the way they have inspired and encouraged many adult literacy learners to return to school and earn their GED credential. However, U.S. policy makers and literacy practitioners need to find ways to extend this support to literacy learners—including those “at the top” of the class—who continue to have gaps in one or more component areas of reading. Without this support, these learners may not realize the greatest benefit of the GED credential—access to higher learning and meaningful work.

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**Alphabetics and Fluency:  
Strengthening the Foundations of Reading Comprehension**  
Susan McShane, National Center for Family Literacy

In your work with adult learners at the GED®-preparation level, you probably don't focus on all the components of reading. Since this is the most able group in a basic skills program, one tends to assume they don't need reading instruction. The *GED as Project, Language Arts, Reading* materials provide a solid framework for instruction but do not include specifics about all of the reading components. This article focuses on two components in particular, offering a rationale for identifying and addressing learners' needs in these areas and specific suggestions for instruction. The activities suggested should be appropriate for use in the *GED as Project* framework and may be adapted as appropriate for different groups and individuals.

***What are the components of reading?***

**Alphabetics**

This term refers to the skills and abilities used in identifying words: phonemic awareness and decoding skills. In other words, readers use their awareness of individual speech sounds and their knowledge of the English spelling-sound correspondences to identify words on the printed page. Phonics instruction builds readers' decoding skills. The term "decoding" also may refer to the recognition of words by sight. Some words are originally learned as sight words; others become immediately recognizable after several exposures.

**Fluency**

Fluent reading requires (1) accurate decoding/word identification, (2) a reasonably rapid rate, and (3) appropriate phrasing and expression. All three aspects of fluency are vital contributors to reading comprehension.

**Vocabulary**

Vocabulary refers to understanding the meaning of words (and multi-word terms, like "public opinion," "money management," and "child development"). Vocabulary is essential to reading comprehension.

**Comprehension**

Comprehension is obviously "what reading is all about," and there are a number of research-based strategies learners can use to improve their comprehension.

*However*, if a reader has limited abilities in any of the other reading components, comprehension often is affected. All of the components are important!

***What do we know about the reading fluency and word identification skills of adult learners at the GED-preparation level?***

The Adult Reading Components Study (ARCS) (Strucker & Davidson, 2003) was designed to describe readers enrolled in adult education programs. The 955 randomly selected adult learners who participated in the study included 676 native English speakers in ABE classes and 279

learners who were studying English in classes for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Each of the students was given a battery of 11 reading and language assessments to identify their needs in the reading component skills. The researchers also interviewed the students to learn about their educational histories and reading habits.

The ARCS identified three groups of readers: (1) GED / Pre-GED (34%), (2) Intermediate (56%), and (3) Lower Level / Beginners (11%). Although one would expect the beginners to have limited skills in any or all of the components, many educators were no doubt surprised to learn that the intermediate and GED-level learners also had limitations.

For example, the GED / Pre-GED group had scores ranging from 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade equivalent (GE) on a silent reading comprehension test, but this test did not reveal their other needs. In fact, using the results of the specific assessments administered, three clusters within the group were identified: (1) Strong GED, (2) Pre-GED with vocabulary / background information needs, and (3) Pre-GED with vocabulary / spelling / rate (fluency) needs.

The study revealed (among many other findings) that about 40% of this group were in “Cluster 3,” with limitations in oral reading rate (an aspect of fluency) and word recognition. In fact, although their average score on a silent reading comprehension test was 10.9 GE, the average word recognition score for the adults in Cluster 3 was only 6.9 GE.

Of course, one cannot help but be impressed that many people with limited word identification skills and fairly slow reading rates are able to achieve relatively high comprehension-test scores. That’s the good news: they are able to use other abilities to compensate for their limitations. Maybe they worked hard on the test and they’ve developed the ability to make good guesses based on context clues. However, one also wonders if they will be able to *improve* their reading with such weak foundational skills and whether these difficulties will limit their chances of success in postsecondary education or training.

It does seem clear that a silent reading comprehension test, like the TABE or CASAS, does not give teachers enough information about learners’ reading strengths and needs. You can’t assume that pre-GED and GED-level students are competent readers, although they may think they are.

### ***How can we learn about readers’ strengths and needs?***

Formal testing in the component areas is an option, but if this is not realistic right now, you can learn a lot about learners’ alphabetic skills and fluency by listening to them read aloud. You can intentionally provide opportunities for reading aloud.

For example, as you work with a group on literature, science, or social studies texts, you might add reading-aloud activities to your regular routine as you discuss features of the text, needed background knowledge, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies. You may find that not everyone volunteers to read aloud, but after it becomes a part of your regular practice, more of the learners may be willing to do so.

Afterward, be sure to make notes for yourself about the kinds of texts and words that learners have trouble with and the specific fluency problems that individuals demonstrate. You may discover that some people misread words and don't notice it, and that others read in a word-by-word fashion, without proper phrasing and expression. This kind of informal assessment will suggest who needs to work on specific aspects of decoding skills or fluency.

***If you learn that some or all of the adults need work on alphabetic skills or fluency, how do you get them to “buy in” to this kind of instruction?***

Adults who are studying for the GED Tests may want to focus on math and / or writing skills. They may not see reading as one of their primary needs. But because reading comprehension is so important, you must help them to understand their needs and work to improve their skills.

You might begin by introducing the components of reading. Ask learners to consider why and how each component is vital to comprehension. You might use the following examples:

- If you don't read the words correctly, you might miss the point or get the wrong idea. Even one or two mistakes—if they're important words—can have a big effect on your comprehension.
- If you read too slowly, you might not remember the beginning of a long sentence or paragraph by the time you get to the end.
- If you don't group words into phrases correctly, you might find a sentence hard to understand. The same thing can happen if you don't emphasize the right words or recognize the feelings being expressed. (Explain that this happens to everybody once in a while. You can demonstrate how you then re-read the sentence with attention to punctuation and different phrasing, emphasis, or tone. These aspects of fluency are especially important when reading literature.)
- It's also important to understand the words. Although you don't have to be able to define every word, you should have a reasonably accurate sense of the meaning of most of them.
- Paying attention to meaning—monitoring comprehension—makes it less likely that you'll get to the end of the story or article and realize you missed the point or you don't know what happened.

You also might present a brief overview of the ARCS project to assure the learners that lots of people need to work on specific reading skills and strategies. Then offer opportunities for them to experience the difference that repeated reading practice can make.

- Have learners read a poem with a partner and then share with each other and the group any improvements they noticed after the second or third reading.
- They also might do the same thing with a selection from a play. Everyone knows you have to rehearse, so repeated reading only makes sense.

After they have considered the components and become aware of their own and others' strengths and needs through various opportunities to read aloud, you might next ask the learners to develop or revise their Reading Action Plans to include specific decoding skills or fluency development, as appropriate.

You could add a few open-ended questions about specific reading components to the Reading Action Plan activity (Inquiry Activity #2), perhaps in the first step, identifying the problem.

Examples:

- What would improve my comprehension of difficult material?
- Would I like to read more quickly?
- Do I need to read more smoothly?
- Do I need strategies for identifying unfamiliar words?

### ***How can we strengthen learners' alphabetic skills?***

Based on informal assessments (oral reading) and learners' individual plans, you will have some idea of learners' specific needs. Some may need practice with three-letter consonant blends, for example. But (even more likely) you will discover that many of your students could use some work with multisyllabic words. You might try teaching these decoding strategies:

- Teach or review prefixes and suffixes. Some words can be easily divided by removing these affixes.
- Teach rules for dividing words into syllables, and then have learners practice "sounding out" the syllables and blending them together.<sup>1</sup> *Remind them that guessing is only the last resort.* Lots of people just look at the first few letters and then guess. They should try to sound out the whole word.
- Remind them that an important step in the decoding process is to be sure that the word they have identified makes sense in the context. They should be monitoring their comprehension. If it doesn't make sense, have they identified it correctly? Could they try a different vowel sound in one or more syllables or perhaps stress a different syllable? If the word still doesn't make sense, it's possible they have run into a word that is not in their vocabulary. Maybe at that point it would help to ask someone or check the dictionary.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Reading Teacher's Book of Lists* (Fry & Kress, 2006) is one place you can find the phonics rules, including those related to dividing words into syllables.

Be sure to demonstrate the decoding process explicitly with several examples for each of the strategies as you introduce them. Then have learners practice the process with a partner, reading a text with a few difficult words and applying what they've learned to identify them.

### ***How can learners improve their reading fluency?***

Based on informal assessments and learners' individual plans, you will know the appropriate focus areas for individuals. The research says that *guided repeated oral reading* may lead to improvement in all three aspects of fluency: rate, accuracy, and phrasing and expression. Following are a few ways for learners to get this kind of guided practice:

- Individuals may practice with a book on tape: listening, reading aloud, and timing themselves. If they keep track of the time, after two or three repetitions they should see clear evidence of increasing speed. This is, of course, only one aspect of fluency, but it's concrete and easily documented. An excellent, free resource for this kind of practice is *Reading Skills for Today's Adults*, on the website of the Marshall, Minnesota, Adult Basic Education program ([www.marshalladulthoodeducation.org](http://www.marshalladulthoodeducation.org)). The site allows learners to hear each selection being read aloud and to download a timer for their use as they read the passages. Unfortunately, the most difficult passages are only written at the eighth-grade level and you might think they are too simple. However, because the passages are very interesting, you may find this resource useful for many of your students.
- Learners also might work in pairs, reading to each other and modeling phrasing and expression for each other.
- Another possibility, mentioned previously, is to have learners practice and then present a poem or drama selection (or perhaps a humorous article or opinion piece) to the class. Let them choose selections they find somewhat challenging. They can share their experiences in identifying or defining words and making decisions about phrasing and expression.

Some GED-level learners may benefit from instruction in specific components of reading. Even adults who believe they are good readers may discover that learning specific strategies improves their comprehension. By helping them to understand the reading process and identify their own needs, you will have taken an important first step toward strengthening their reading. Teaching them specific strategies to address their needs may increase the likelihood that they will earn higher scores on the GED Tests and perhaps be more successful in their "next steps"—on the job or in further education and training.

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**The English Teacher:  
Developing Critical Reading Skills and Literary Awareness**  
Marcia Phillips, Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center

When we began developing the *GED as Project* series, our focus was on the new approach the testing service was taking to the General Educational Development Tests. In each subject area, we worked closely with content area experts, many of whom also were very familiar with the adult education learner. These experts widely applauded the metacognitive approach focusing on developing critical thinking skills that we took with the different content areas. The inquiry activities in the entire series show how, using the five-step model, any lesson any instructor has used with a class can be cast into an inquiry process, critical thinking exercise. Activities for all the content areas use test questions from the Official Practice Test A to display both the content area and the level at which the tests are based.

The integrated approach to learning, so strongly advocated throughout *GED as Project*, is central to the reading volume. Reading is fundamental to all of the other content areas of the GED® Tests. In addition, we feel it is important for learners to become aware of the reading process. Often in GED preparation, little actual reading instruction takes place; readers are assumed to be good-enough readers. This may not be the case. The process of developing strategies and being an active reader is usually not much discussed with adult learners. With *GED as Project*, we give learners the opportunity to think about how to develop reading strategies that not only will help them pass the GED Tests, but will be of use to them in their jobs and daily lives. A third reason for this broad emphasis on the reading process is that reading is a thinking skill. Developing thinking skills is paramount for success not only on the GED Tests, but also in the world of tomorrow.

As good readers develop, they improve at the complex group of skills that make up reading comprehension. They both find and build meaning from the words on the page. Good readers know to bring what they already know about a topic into reading about that topic, filling in the gaps in the content to make inferences and determine the relationships of various parts of the passage to the whole. They use decoding skills to recognize the words on the page. They have an established purpose for their reading, which colors the process. But many adult learners lack these basic reading skills because they left school early. They are much more likely not to be readers for pleasure or for learning. While their reading assessment scores may be in the passing range, they are likely to have significant weaknesses in building comprehension from the printed text. In particular, they can exhibit troubles with fluency and vocabulary, as well as having little understanding of the strategies they use to make sense out of the text. Even good readers can be unaware of the steps they follow to build their comprehension. Building the awareness of these readers will strengthen their skills as well.

Since the time we began our work on a metacognitive approach to developing reading strategies, much research has been carried out in the under-educated adult population that we serve. And while our recommended inquiry approach still seems very strong to a new set of consulting content area experts, we have felt that certain areas of the Language Arts, Reading volume could use some strengthening.

## The Reading Template

1. Identifying the Problem
2. Becoming Familiar with the Problem
  - Preview the Passage or Question
  - Activate Prior Knowledge
  - Consider/Build Interest
  - Set a Purpose
3. Planning, Assigning, and Performing Tasks  
(individually, in pairs, or in small groups)
  - Clarify Words/Sentences/Paragraphs
  - Use a Reading Comprehension Strategy
    - Analyzing
    - Predicting
    - Questioning
    - Defining unfamiliar words through context
    - Imaging
    - Determining – important, unimportant, and/or interesting
  - Determine the Kind of Question
  - Answer Questions
  - Find Support for the Answer
4. Sharing with Others  
(with pairs, small groups, and/or the whole class)
5. Reflecting, Extending and Evaluating

The publication of Susan McShane's study, *Applying Research in Reading Instruction for Adults*, the growing concerns over the transitioning adult student, and the development of content standards, as well as the impending new GED Tests, make this a propitious time to make some additions to the *GED as Project, Language Arts, Reading* volume.

In the other books, we provided considerable assistance in classroom instruction, extension activities, and lesson ideas. In *GED as Project, Language Arts, Reading*, we focused attention on pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading skills development. However, we did not pay sufficient attention to one very real problem area for the adult learner. By and large, this student has not been a good reader, nor has this student enjoyed reading. Even if your GED preparatory students are the best of your readers, they are still reading at a low- to mid-secondary range. So, they still need to develop strong alphabetic, fluency, and vocabulary building skills, in addition to the comprehension skills. Even for the most advanced adult learner, you will want to continue to develop their phonemic awareness and increase their recognition of the sounds of consonants and vowels in the words with which they are unfamiliar. A lack of fluency means that the reader is looking at the words but not recognizing the meaning contained in the text (McShane, 2005), and non-readers have significantly smaller vocabularies than readers. These lacks translate into significant comprehension difficulties for the student.

People who don't read well don't read much, and therefore don't learn new words the way good readers do, through reading. In addition, adults who don't finish high school probably don't have content knowledge typically acquired in science, literature, and social studies classes (Snow and Strucker, 2000). Reading requires inferences, and inferences are based on prior knowledge (Hirsch, 2003). Adults may know a great deal about their work and special interest areas, but much of what they read in class may require experience with "book learning." (McShane, 2005, p.74)

The GED Tests focus on the skills of reading and writing, but these are not separate subjects in secondary schools. The English class, where students do their reading and writing, stresses the content of the materials and strives to develop some understanding of the structure and conventions of different genres. This is why the GED Language Arts, Reading Test uses the different categories of prose, poetry, drama, and nonfiction. Prose fiction requires different thinking and approaches from nonfiction. Different types of nonfiction require different skills from each other; a popular biography would be read very differently from an owner's manual or employee handbook. Poetry requires an understanding of the function of rhythm and use of figurative language. Drama is a combination of two very different texts. All of these genres present very different, but very real, challenges to the learner with limited vocabulary and understanding.

### **Reading Fiction**

A piece of fiction tells a story. It involves characters and their reactions and interactions brought about by conflict or other elements of the plot. Most young people take the stories they read to be true, even if not entirely true to life. It is through the careful study of the stories that they read in middle and high school that students begin to understand that the writer creates the whole from his or her own ideas.

Most readers, even the poorest, can go through a plot outline chronologically. This, however, may not show any understanding of why things happened or give any insight into the theme the author is exploring. Reading comprehension takes a deeper understanding, not only of the plot and its unwinding, but of the characters, the backdrop against which the story takes place, and the cause and effect of the occurrences.

The questions on the GED Language Arts, Reading Test consider character analysis, particularly as seen in reactions to the situations in which the character finds him- or herself. To understand these personal traits, the reader must infer a great deal from the actions of the characters as well as their thoughts and conversations. Inference is a higher skill than recall, and its development requires knowledge and understanding that may be in short supply in your learners.

One of the best things instructors can do is to begin to develop a body of knowledge within the students in their classes. The GED Language Arts, Reading Test studies early fiction,

fiction of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and contemporary fiction. The test, of course, takes several detail-rich paragraphs of a short story or novel and asks a number of questions based upon that section. To learn about the different fiction genres, your students should read not excerpts, but complete stories, in order to build up the knowledge they lack.

In the class or group discussion of the stories, learners should analyze character development, recognize cause and effect in the plot development and character reactions, and be able to identify the elements of the plot. In addition, they should be able to discuss the stated or implied themes of the story and understand the narrator's point of view. From there, the readers can begin to interpret tone, mood, and style, and understand the use of symbols, other figurative language, and imagery. These are increasingly difficult challenges for poorer readers to understand, first, because such readers tend to be focusing on the individual words on the page, without gathering any of the richness behind those words, and second, because they are reading at the literal level, not at the subjective level.

One way to encourage an understanding of point of view is to ask the readers if things would be shown differently if another character were telling it. How would it differ if the father were telling the story instead of the child? Or the wife, instead of the husband? That will provide a glimmer of understanding.

Tone and mood are also subtle and complex. A good story to assign for point of view and tone is "Haircut" by Ring Lardner. Considered one of the greatest 20<sup>th</sup> Century American short stories, it is often anthologized. Its single character is the narrator, a small-town barber who tells his story to a new customer, the reader. As he unfolds the story of the town's practical jokester, the reader gets a very different impression of the now-dead character about whom the barber is reminiscing. It is a good way for uncertain readers to begin to read into the words on the page. Irony and satire are also exceptionally difficult for the literal reader. Even though most people can recognize sarcasm when they hear it, those who do not read a lot do not expect to find that attitude on the printed page.

Themes of fiction tend to reflect social concerns set against a backdrop of change or conflict. In American literature, stories can be set in war: the American Revolution, the Civil War, two World Wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, or the Viet Nam or Korean conflicts. Other great eras of social change are the westward expansion, the great wave of immigration of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, or the industrial changes of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Others might show the changing mores of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries in a microcosm: the women's movement, civil rights, immigration, the Depression, or Prohibition. In English literature, much of the fiction of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries examines the class structure and how it has shifted and changed under the combined influences of the Industrial Revolution and the forces of family, war, and empire.

For students to understand the themes and the forces of times upon the characters, they must have a good knowledge of the times about which the author is writing and the changes that are occurring. That is why one of the first steps in pre-reading is to consider prior knowledge. But under-educated adults are often completely unaware of the world about which they are reading. Mark Twain wrote of the quintessential boyhood, and the freedom of escape on the river, and, incidentally, was among the first authors to show the difficulties of racism that have troubled the United States from its inception. Not knowing his

background, or the role of Missouri in the Civil War, or his use of biting satire amid the romantic view of nature and the river as the great American character will keep the reader from understanding Clemens' themes and purpose. Jane Austen wrote about the difficulties a woman with limited means faced in marrying in an England beginning to experience a change in its rigidly classed society, brought about by the coming of international trade and manufacturing. If the reader does not know that the Industrial Revolution did more to England than allow for factories to be built and goods to be made, or does not understand that what the English of that time called "gentlemen" meant far more than being polite, then Austen's heroines merely look shallow and mercenary. F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote of the provincial who came to the Big City to find his fortune, or the outsider looking in; Ernest Hemingway wrote of the effects of war and violence on sensitive young men and the need for them to live up to the code. William Faulkner wrote of the Old South and the power of the family, and further down that continuum Flannery O'Connor shows how the pretensions of gentility can cause characters' downfall. Without an understanding of the background and times of the writer, the reader/learner is seriously disadvantaged.

It is even more important for the students who plan on continuing their education to have this kind of literature experience. They probably did not read or pay much attention to the English classes they had in their early secondary years, and since they did not complete their high school education, they do not have the experience of having read authors who make up the established body of our literary heritage. Allusions to a Dickensian life, or a Hemingway hero, or a Gatsby-type character will have no meaning to most adult education students. It will be up to the language arts instructor to develop that understanding by building the knowledge.

In reading fiction, it is important for the reader to be able to make inferences and draw conclusions from the reading material, so that the plot and story line make sense and the reader is comfortable that he has understood the resolution. Learning Projects 3, 5 and 8 in *GED as Project, Language Arts, Reading* all cover reading fiction. In addition to those activities on inferences, drawing conclusions, making predictions, and discerning the important from the unimportant, Inquiry Activity 3-1, which discusses monitoring, is particularly helpful for poorer readers to begin to develop a deeper understanding of what they have read. Inquiry Activity 3-3 addresses using inference to understand the characters, particularly helpful to developing that higher-level skill.

### **Suggested Reading for Fiction**

Mark Twain: *Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Life on the Mississippi*

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, "Bernice Bobs her Hair", "Girls in their Summer Dresses"

William Faulkner, "The Bear", "A Rose for Miss Emily", *The Reivers*

Ernest Hemingway, the Nick Adams stories, *The Sun Also Rises*, *The Old Man and The Sea*

Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Richard Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* (short story collection), *Black Boy*, *Native Son*

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*

Henry James, *Daisy Miller*

Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, *Custom of the Country*

Katherine Mansfield, *The Garden Party* (short story collection)  
Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*  
Dashiell Hammett, *The Thin Man*  
Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol, A Tale of Two Cities, Oliver Twist*  
George Orwell, *1984, Animal Farm*  
Saki (H H Munro), short stories  
O. Henry (Sidney Porter), short stories  
Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (short story collection)  
John Cheever, short stories  
J. D. Salinger, short stories, *The Catcher in the Rye*  
Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice, Persuasion*  
Emily Brontë, *Jane Eyre*  
Charlotte Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*  
Flannery O'Connor, short stories  
Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye, Song of Solomon, Beloved*  
Eudora Welty, short stories  
Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*  
Carson McCullers, *A Member of the Wedding*, short stories  
John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men, The Pearl*, short stories  
Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*  
Bobbie Ann Mason, short stories  
John Okada, *No-No Boy*  
Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*  
Wendell Berry, *Jayber Crowe*  
Julia Alvarez, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*

## Reading Poetry

At least, reading fiction is fairly straightforward. Poetry is filled with figurative language, and individual word choices are fraught with emotional content that means little to the literal reader. Lines and verses have intrinsic meaning that even able readers can struggle to comprehend. You will have to bring your literal readers along, line by line.

One really good vehicle for that, surprisingly, could be to use Shakespeare's sonnets. First of all, sonnets are developed with a clearly defined pattern. The first eight lines pose a question or a problem. The last six – the sonnet is always 14 lines – give the answer. Take the very well known "Shall I Compare Thee to a summer's day?" Sonnet XVIII.

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.  
Sometimes too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance or nature's changing course, untrimm'd;  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade

Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,  
Nor shall Death brag thou wand'rest in his shade  
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.  
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

The first line asks the question. Ask students what they see in their minds when they hear the words “a summer’s day”? You will get a variety of answers, but blue sky, pretty sunshine, green, flowers, birds, etc. will be a common theme. And, generally, the expectation is that the poet will compare his love to the day and talk of the beauty. Instead, the next line says that his subject is lovelier, and more temperate, a word you will have to discuss a little. (But, Virginia is known for its temperate climate, so it’s not too hard.) Then the poet goes through a series of unpleasant weather examples: “rough winds,” summer is “all too short,” too hot, weather gets rainy (“Fair from fair declines”). Now that the summer’s day no longer seems so lovely, the comparison does not work out to be flattering. As Shakespeare develops the response section, the poet says that his love’s “eternal summer shall not fade”; in other words, she will stay beautiful. And, he goes on, Death will not claim her; she shall be known for her beauty because of the poem he has written in her praise. It will be far longer lasting than the passing of a pretty day. “So long,” says the poet, “as men can breathe and eyes can see/ So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.” And here, in the final two lines, he has turned the poem on its head; he is no longer speaking of her loveliness, but of his poem in praise of her. So your group discussion can focus on his switch of topic from her loveliness to his poetical gift; is the theme of the poem natural beauty, or the love the poet has for this person, or is it instead a statement of his own worth, his artistic creation in response to that beauty? It is an interesting question and one that can spark some lively discussion, even from people who don’t like to read poetry

In poetry, the individual words, the line lengths, line endings whether rhyming or not, stanzas, and even appearance on the page are important. In this sonnet, considerable imagery is used: “the eye of heaven” and his golden complexion define the sun. Death is personified and “cannot brag.” The wind is rough, not harsh or strong. The words will give insight into the poet’s point of view and will allow the students to draw inferences on the meaning of the poem.

Another similarly familiar sonnet is John Donne’s well-known “Death Be Not Proud.” This too is frequently anthologized in high school literature books, as well as others.

Most poor readers will continue to struggle over poetry. Anthologies or literature books are not necessarily helpful in your developing an interesting poetry unit or lesson, because their selections do not often arouse the interest of the readers. Scholastic Book Services publishes a wide range of high-interest, easily understood poetry that works very well for secondary level learners.

Generally it works best to ask questions of the group as you discuss the meaning of the poem. Start with the title, if there is one. Why did the poet choose that? What does it have to do with the poem? What is the effect of the versification? Does the poet use repetition? Why? Why are the comparisons or images used? What effect do they have on the reader? In *GED as Project, Language Arts, Reading, Learning Project 7* covers poetry. In the first inquiry

activity (7-1), questioning and clarifying words are covered. The poem being discussed is “Sympathy,” by Paul Lawrence Dunbar. It is included in the Reading Passages folder on this CD.

It often works well to start a poetry unit or discussion with songs. These days, compact discs often come with lyrics written out for the listener. Song lyrics are a very accessible form of poetry, which English teachers have taken advantage of for years in preparing their poetry units. Students can bring favorite recordings in to class and analyze the figures of speech, identify the stated or implied themes, and recognize the structural elements of verse and refrain.

Because poetry is written in such an intensely personal manner, it is also responded to intensely and personally. Different class members will have different responses to the poems that are discussed. That in itself is a very effective way of showing the personal response we have. You can also have students write poetry as a group. One person can say a single word. Others will come up with a phrase that describes that word, three or four in all. Then the original word is repeated. Another intriguing poetry-writing idea is to explain the mechanics of haiku to your students and have them write the three lines – five syllables in the first line, seven in the second, and five in the final line – that make up the poem. The title is optional and, when it is given, will generally be a single word, which will be the subject of the three lines. These can be written about a pet, or child, or dinner, or the weather. Learners like these very short stylized approaches because they understand the rules and won’t have to agonize to come up with something to fill the page. They will amaze themselves, if not you, with what they create. Their writing their own poems will make the poetry of others more accessible.

Don’t give up on this process. It might be helpful to look at the Official Practice Tests that your program no longer uses for pre- and post-testing and use the poems found there for your class discussions. The questions given can help you structure your discussion. They focus on the figurative language, understanding the poet’s feelings, and taking that understanding into a further or different situation. Another interesting point is that over each reading section, the developers of the test have superimposed a question, the answer to which will help the learner to understand the poem.

### **Some Suggested Poets**

Robert Frost

Langston Hughes

Richard Wilbur

Elizabeth Bishop

Elizabeth Coatsworth

Emily Dickinson

Edgar Allen Poe

Lucille Clifton

Nikki Giovanni

Sylvia Plath

Story poems: “The Cremation of Sam McGee” (Service) “Paul Revere’s Ride” (Longfellow) “The Highwayman” (Noyes) “Casey at the Bat” (Thayer) “Ballad of Birmingham” (Randall)

e.e.cummings  
Wilfred Owens  
Robert Graves  
Siegfried Sassoon  
C. Day Lewis  
William Butler Yeats  
Robert Browning  
W. H. Auden

### **Texts for Teacher Reference**

The following two texts are excellent references for teachers. Chapters address different elements of poetry and include exemplary poems. Both books feature extensive anthologies containing classic poems as well as a diverse selection from leading contemporary poets. Both texts are updated regularly, but any edition will be a valuable addition to your bookshelf.

*Western Wind: An Introduction to Poetry* by John Frederick Nims and David Mason  
*An Introduction to Poetry* by X.J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia

### **Reading Drama**

The makers of the GED Tests include a drama selection on the test because considerable drama is taught in secondary English. In high school literature classes, students are primarily exposed to the works of William Shakespeare, typically, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*. A general knowledge of and familiarity with the lines of these tragedies is a part of the basic knowledge that high school graduates have, even if they do not understand much, if anything, about the plays.

The interesting aspect of reading a play is that the reader is actually dealing with two separate texts. The texts are differentiated by the typeface used. The first text provides the stage directions and dialogue prompts, presented in italics. That is read in a different manner than the actual dialogue, set in roman type. Readers will have to understand the action of the play by fusing the two texts. Through the dialogue, readers will see the development of the plot and recognize character traits and interactions. In plays, the audience watches the self-exploration of the main characters and their interactions with one another. In earlier times, plays tended to depict large themes and heroic figures; more currently, they show families or small communities. We see these people, heroic or familiar, in times of crisis.

Generally speaking, adult learners will be far more familiar with plays than with poetry. Instructors can build on their learners' prior knowledge from watching television shows and movies to have their class understand what they are reading. You can use a familiar movie or television program to discuss plot effects, the ideas of conflict and resolution, character revelation, and dramatic necessity – the reason certain things to happen or characters die or suddenly appear. On the GED Tests, the excerpts are usually taken from plays with which many of the students will be familiar, since the movies have been on television frequently. The play in OPT A is *Barefoot in the Park*, an early Neil Simon comedy; the movie starred

Robert Redford and Jane Fonda and appears on movie channels with regularity. In Learning Project 2, the reading strategy predicting is highlighted. You may wish to refer to that project for some ideas to use with other reading lessons as well.

Plays are meant to be performed. That means they should be read aloud in class. This gives multiple class members the opportunity to read and everyone the need to pay attention. Most reading experts encourage more reading aloud than typically occurs in classrooms, so this is an opportunity to build oral fluency in your students in a manner that they will find more interesting than reading aloud one or two paragraphs at a time.

### **Suggested Dramatists and Some Works**

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*  
Neil Simon, *Barefoot in the Park*, *The Odd Couple*, *Brighton Beach Memoirs*  
Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*  
Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Streetcar Named Desire*  
Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Crucible*  
Edward Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *A Delicate Balance*  
Harold Pinter, *The Homecoming*, *The Caretaker*  
Thornton Wilder, *Our Town*, *The Matchmaker*  
William Saroyan, *The Time of Your Life*  
George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber, *Dinner at Eight*  
Agatha Christie, *The Mousetrap*

### **Reading Nonfiction**

If poor or disinterested readers read anything at all, it is likely to be nonfiction. This category includes a wide range of material, from the daily or weekly newspaper, magazines, owners' manuals, and how-to guides; to insurance policies, buyers' agreements, guarantees, and legal documents; to employees' manuals, job procedures, and repair or user guides. For the majority of GED hopefuls, this is the reading that they do now and will need to strengthen for their future success. If students expect to continue into post-secondary education, they will need to be able to read critically and effectively, whether reading an editorial or an operations manual for a new piece of equipment to be used on the job.

In fact, workplace materials are a serious challenge for many lower-educated adults. They are written at a very high readability level. This is because, by and large, they are written by professionals in the field, not reading experts. Some colleagues and I have often, during workplace interventions, assessed the readability levels of the employee handbook. This book contains material about responsibilities, termination, benefits, and the rights of the employer and the employee. The general reading level, based on word and sentence length, is always post-secondary. This is not advantageous to the employee, who may find himself in a workplace difficulty, without redress, because he has not been able to understand what was written. Learning Project 4 in the *GED as Project, Language Arts, Reading* volume shows techniques for summarizing, determining the purpose, and applying the material (IAs 4-1, 4-2, and 4-4) using a workplace document.

The same highly technical people who create the machines or processes often write the operations manuals for them. They often write on a plane far above the general population. If you have ever attempted to add a new piece of software to your existing computer system or tried to network several home computers into a single system, you will understand first hand the problem your learners face at work almost daily. And if they are in your class so that they will be able to enroll in technical classes or a certification program, their need to understand what they read is even greater.

If the stakes are lower for readers of opinion pieces, they still have ramifications for the long run. Reading without understanding the point of view and bias of the piece means that the reader's understanding is not complete. Readers must also be able to recognize the author's purpose.

Test questions on the nonfiction pieces focus on being able to apply the information the reader has gathered. That is the purpose of any user's guide or how-to manual. Reading the directions carefully and following them correctly is the ultimate test of that type of reading material.

Another reading skill that is tested in nonfiction reading is recognizing the supporting details and being able to determine which details are important to know and understand and which may be interesting or helpful, but not so important, details. Tone and voice of the author can be useful to understanding as well, particularly in opinion pieces.

Newspapers are, of course, one of your easiest and best resources for working on factual and opinion pieces. Read the front page articles and look at the editorials that opine on the news of the day. For some learners, the sports pages will be a real boon. Have learners read the accounts of a game, or a race, that they have watched. Then have them read an analysis of that contest. Particularly if they have a strong favorite, or if they had watched the event, their agreements and disagreements will make a lot of what you say about point of view, tone, and bias very clear indeed.

### **Suggested Nonfiction Writers or Essayists**

E.B. White

James Thurber (also wrote short stories)

Brent Tarter

Maya Angelou

Bill Bryson

Elizabeth Gilbert

David Sedaris

The reading selections that are featured in the *GED as Project, Language Arts, Reading* volume, most from Official Practice Test A, are provided in the Reading Passages folder on this CD.

## References

McShane, S. (2005). *Applying Research in Reading Instruction for Adults*. National Institute for Literacy: Washington, DC.

Workforce Improvement Network (2003). *GED as Project, Language Arts, Reading*. Virginia Department of Education: Richmond, VA.

## Does Corie's Mother Like This Apartment?

[Corie's mother, Mrs. Banks, staggers in the door, bouncing off it and coming to rest paralyzed against the railing. While she is regaining her breath, Corie brings her a glass of water and leads her to a suitcase so that she can sit.]

**MOTHER:** I really had no intention of coming up, but I had a luncheon in Westchester and I thought, since it's on my way home, I might as well drop in for a few minutes...

**CORIE:** On your way to New Jersey?

**MOTHER:** Yes. I came over the Whitestone Bridge and down the Major Deegan Highway and now I'll cut across town and onto the Henry Hudson Parkway and up to the George Washington Bridge. It's no extra trouble.

[Corie tells her they want her to come visit them on Friday after the furniture is there. Mrs. Banks makes light of the lack of furniture and stands up with the intention of praising the apartment. However, its bleakness stops her cold and all she can do is force out a lie through gritted teeth.]

**MOTHER:** (*Stunned*) Oh, Corie...it's...beautiful.

**CORIE:** You hate it...

**MOTHER:** (*Moves up toward windows*) No, no...It's a charming apartment. (*Trips over platform*) I love it.

**CORIE:** (*Rushes to her*) You can't really tell like this.

**MOTHER:** I'm crazy about it. I love it...

**CORIE:** Do you really, Mother? I mean, are you absolutely crazy in love with it?

**MOTHER:** Oh, yes. It's very cute...(*Choking on her words*) And there is so much you can do with it.

**CORIE:** I told you she hated it.

**MOTHER:** (*Moves toward the bedroom landing*) Corie, you don't give a person a chance. At least let me see the whole apartment.

**PAUL:** This is the whole apartment

[Mrs. Banks asks to see the bedroom, and Corie shows her a tiny room at one side of the apartment. Her mother's spirit fails, but she tried to keep a smile on her face as Corie explains how she is going to use it.]

**MOTHER:** (*At bedroom door*) That's a wonderful idea. And you can just put a bed in there.

**CORIE:** That's right.

**MOTHER:** How?

[Corie explains that an oversize single will fit in the room, and Mrs. Banks is appalled at the thought of Paul and Corie sleeping in such cramped conditions. Still she tries not to show her despair.]

**MOTHER:** It's a wonderful idea. Very clever...

**CORIE:** Thank you.

**MOTHER:** Except you can't get to the closet.

**CORIE:** Yes you can

**MOTHER:** Without climbing over the bed?

**CORIE:** No, you have to climb over the bed.

**MOTHER:** That's a good idea.

**CORIE:** (*Leaves the bedroom, crosses to ladder and climbs up*) Everything is just temporary. As they say in *McCall's*, it won't really take shape until the bride's own personality becomes more clearly defined.

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*GED as Project, Volume 3, Language Arts, Reading Inquiry Project 2*

## What is the Relationship between Jim and Antonia?

She turned her bright, believing eyes to me, and the tears came up in them slowly, “How can it be like that, when you know so many people and when I’ve disappointed you so? Ain’t it wonderful, Jim, how much people can mean to each other? I’m so glad we had each other when we were little. I can’t wait until my little girl’s old enough to tell her about all the things we used to do. You’ll always remember me when you think about the old times, won’t you? And I guess everybody thinks about the old times, even the happiest people.”

As we walked homeward across the fields, the sun dropped and lay like a great golden globe in the low west. While it hung there, the moon rose in the east, as big as a cart-wheel, pale silver and streaked with rose colour, thin as a bubble or a ghost-moon. For five perhaps ten minutes, the two luminaries confronted each other across the level land, resting on opposite edges of the world.

In that singular light every little tree and stick of wheat, every sunflower stalk and clump of snow-on-the-mountain, drew itself up high and pointed; the very clods and furrows of the fields seemed to stand up sharply. I felt the old pull of the earth, the solemn magic that comes out of those fields at nightfall. I wished I could be a little boy again, and that my way could end there.

We reached the edge of the field, where our ways parted. I took her hands and held them against my breast, feeling once more how strong and warm and good they were, those brown hands, and remembering how many kind things they had done for me. I held them a long while, over my heart. About us, it was growing darker and darker, and I had to look hard to see her face, which I meant always to carry with me; the closest, realest face, under all the shadows of women’s faces, at the very bottom of my memory.

“I’ll come back,” I said earnestly, through the soft, intrusive darkness.

“Perhaps you will.” I felt rather than saw her smile. “But even if you don’t, you’re here. Like my father. So I won’t be lonesome.”

As I went back alone over that familiar road, I could almost believe that a boy and girl ran along beside me, as our shadows used to do, laughing and whispering to each other in the grass.

Willa Cather, *My Antonia*, 1918.

**GED as Project, Volume 3, Language Arts, Reading Learning Project 3**

## HOW MUST EMPLOYEES BEHAVE?

### Strathmore College Employee Handbook

#### Employee Performance: Discipline and Dismissal

The College recognizes the importance of establishing and maintaining good working relationships with its personnel. However, problems of job performance and misconduct may arise and will be addressed with disciplinary actions. These actions include a process of verbal warnings, written warnings, and dismissal, when a situation warrants.

#### Just Cause

The College will not normally discipline or dismiss an employee without just cause. Just cause includes but is not limited to

- a. failure to perform one's duties satisfactorily;
- b. insubordination, which is defined as willful failure to follow a legitimate order;
- c. consumption of intoxicants or use, possession, or sale of legally prohibited or controlled substances on College property or attendance at work under the influence of intoxicants or legally prohibited controlled substances;
- d. absence from work without authorization or appropriate excuse, or habitual tardiness;
- e. excessive absenteeism, which is defined as repeated absences from work that are not included in an approved formal leave of absence;
- f. willful falsification or alteration of a College record (including employment applications or resumés);
- g. conviction of a felony or other crime, the nature of which is such that continued employment may be disruptive to College operations;
- h. presenting a possible or potential danger to the safety of other employees, the public, or College property;
- i. unlawful sexual harassment as defined by Federal and/or state law; and
- j. any other action detrimental to the College while on College property or while engaged in College work.

## Why Can't Other People See Mr. Minchell?

Mr. Minchell stared at the glass (mirror), put out his hand, drew it back hastily.

He squinted. Inches away. There was a form now: vague, indistinct, featureless: but a form.

Now he understood why the elevator girl hadn't seen him, and why F.J. (Minchell's employer F. J. Diemel) hadn't answered him, and why the clerk at the drugstore and the bartender and Madge...

*"I'm not dead."*

*"Of course, you're not dead – not that way."*

" – tan your hide Jimmy Minchell, when he gets home."

Mr. Minchell suddenly wheeled and clicked the lock. He rushed out of the steam-filled bathroom, across the room, down the stairs, into the street, into the cool night.

A block from home, he slowed to a walk.

Invisible! He said the word over and over, in a half-voice. He said it and tried to control the panic that pulled at his legs, and at his brain, and filled him.

*Why?*

He walked on. As he did, forgotten things returned; they came and they left, too fast. He couldn't hold onto them.

He could only watch and remember. Himself, as a youngster, reading: the Oz books, and Tarzan, and Mr. Wells. Himself, going to the University, wanting to teach, and meeting Madge; then not planning anymore, and Madge changing, and all the dreams put away. For later. For the right time. And then Jimmy – little strange Jimmy, who ate filth and picked his nose and watched television, who never read books, never; Jimmy, his son, whom he would never understand...

He walked by the edge of the park now. Then on past the park, through a maze of familiar and unfamiliar neighborhoods. Walking, remembering, looking at the people and feeling pain because he knew that they could not see him, not now or ever again, because he had vanished. He walked and remembered and felt pain.

All the stagnant dreams came back. Fully. The trip to Italy he'd planned. The open sports car. The first-hand knowledge that would tell him whether he did or did not approve of bull-fighting. The book...

Then something occurred to him. It occurred to Mr. Minchell that he had not just suddenly vanished, like that, after all. No; he had been vanishing gradually for a long while. Every time he said good morning to that Diemel, he got a little harder to see. Every time he put on this

horrible suit he faded. The process of disappearing was set in action every time he brought his paycheck home and turned it over to Madge, every time he kissed her, or listened to her vicious unending complaints, or decided against buying that novel, or punched the adding machine (calculator) he hated so, or...

Excerpted from "The Vanishing American" by Charles Beaumont, 1957.  
*GED as Project, Volume 3, Language Arts, Reading Learning Project 5*

## What Technique is Used by the Artist?

Once artists figured out how to construct these standard views, however, it wasn't long before they figured out that certain minor tweaks might take things one step further: these few tweaks could make a viewer read the distant or imaginary as here and now; could turn a normal picture into trompe l'oeil.<sup>1</sup>

You could tweak the imaginary space within your picture to look like it extends the real space that your viewer is standing in. Portray your picture's space as a glimpse through an actual window in the wall, for instance, or as giving access to a niche carved out in it, and viewers will understand that they should take the painted for the real. Five centuries ago any rich Italian could ask a painter to fresco a ceiling so that it looked domed, or a flat wall so that it looked ornately carved away, or that they registered as such, even if a guest could tell at once that they were seeing paint, not masonry.

It is an almost fatal flaw that this exhibition doesn't even hint at any of this crucial wall painting, the earliest and most important trompe l'oeil of post-Roman Western art. Even a full-scale photographic reproduction mounted on a temporary ceiling would have done the trick, given that most of the originals are permanently stuck in their palazzo.

In 18<sup>th</sup> Century America, Charles Willson Peale of Philadelphia played a similar trick in his hometown's Independence Hall. In 1795, he mounted a canvas inside the door frame of a closet, and painted it – fairly badly – to look as though the doorway were in fact open, with his two sons stepping through it and up a stairway leading back beyond the wall. He even put a real wooden step on our side of the painting, as an extension of the painted steps that lead away inside it. (In one of their typically delightful grace notes, designers at the National Gallery have reproduced that wooden step to go along with their installation of the picture.)

<sup>1</sup> trompe l'oeil: French expression for art that “fools the eye”

## How Does the Artist Relate to the Life of a Caged Bird?

### Sympathy

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!  
When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;  
And the river flows like a stream of glass;  
(5) When the first bird sings and the first bud opes [opens]  
And the faint perfume from its chalice steals –  
I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wings  
Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;  
(10) For he must fly back to his perch and cling  
When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;  
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars  
And they pulse again with a keener sting –  
I know why he beats his wing!

(15) I know why the caged bird sings, ah, me,  
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,  
When he beats his bars and he would be free;  
It is not a carol of joy or glee,  
But a prayer that he sends from the heart's deep core,  
(20) But a plea that upward to Heaven he flings –  
I know why the caged bird sings!

Paul Laurence Dunbar, "Sympathy," 1899.

*GED as Project, Volume 3, Language Arts, Reading Learning Project 7*

## Why Does Chig's Father Return to his Childhood Home?

The reunion had lasted a week. As they packed for home, his father, in a far too offhand way, had suggested they visit Chig's grandmother. "We this close. We might as well drop in on her and my brother."

So instead of going north, they had gone further south, had just entered her house. And Chig has a suspicion now that the reunion had been only an excuse to drive south, that his father had been heading to this house all the time.

His father had never talked much about his family, with the exception of his brother GL, who seemed part con man, part practical joker and part Don Juan; he had spoken of GL with the kind of indulgence he would have shown a cute, but ill-behaved and potentially dangerous five-year-old.

Chig's father had left home when he was fifteen. When asked why, he would answer: "I wanted to go to high school. They didn't have a Negro high school at home, so I went up to Knoxville and lived with a cousin and went to school."

They had been met at the door by Aunt Rose, GL's wife, and ushered into the living room. The old lady had looked up from her seat by the window. Aunt Rose stood between the visitors.

The old lady eyed his father. "Rose, who that? Rose?" She squinted. She looked like a doll, made of black straw, the wrinkles in her face running in one direction like a broom. Her hair was white and coarse and grew out straight from her head. Her eyes were brown – the whites too seemed light brown – and were hidden behind thick glasses, which remained somehow on a tiny nose. "That Hiram?" That was another of his father's brothers. "No, it ain't Hiram, too big for Hiram." She turned then to Chig. "Now that man, he look like Eleanor, Charles's wife, but Charles wouldn't never send my grandson to see me. I never even hear from Charles." She stopped again.

"It Charles, Mama. That who it is." Aunt Rose, between them, led them closer. "It Charles, come all the way from New York, and brung little Charles with him."

The old lady stared up at them. "Charles? Rose, is that really Charles?" She turned away and reached for a handkerchief in the pocket of her clean, ironed, flowered housecoat, and wiped her eyes. "God have mercy. Charles." She spread her arms up to him, and he bent down and kissed her cheek. That was when Chig saw his face, grimacing. She hugged him; Chig watched the muscles in her arms as they tightened around his father's neck. She half rose from her chair. "How are you, son?"

Chig could not hear his father's answer.