



Learning Project 5 Reading Stories

Inquiry Activity 5-1: Passage Reading Strategy - Determining Importance

Determining importance is a reading strategy learners can use to distinguish important from unimportant information. Determining importance is a metacognitive skill that can be used with any type of reading material. It is introduced here as many reading excerpts are filled with information that is more important to understanding than other information. Learning how to determine the important from the unimportant when reading will increase comprehension and understanding.

(Note: Italicized portions should be directed to students.)

1. Identifying the Problem (Reading Passage only for Practice Items #s 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 26, 27)

Look over the passage and the title. From the title, what do you think the passage is about and what are you being asked to do?

What are you being asked to read? What will you have to do to be successful on this Activity?

Have you seen passages like this before? Where? When?

How does it look to you? Think about what you see, and what you think you will see.

Jot down your thoughts, or share them with your partner.

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."

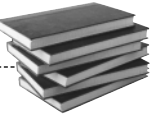
Mr. Minchell suddenly wheeled and clicked the lock. He rushed out of the steam-filled bathroom, across the room, down the stairs, into the street, into the cool night.

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 bullfighting. 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.

2. Becoming Familiar with the Problem

Scan the passage and ask yourself questions like the following as the first step to understanding the passage.

Preview the Passage: *What do you see? What do you notice about the passage? Describe it. What does this tell you about how the passage might be organized? Does it help you understand it?*

Activate/Build from Prior Knowledge: *From reading the title and the first paragraph, what do you already know about the topic of the passage?*

Do you know anything about this topic from previous experiences or reading?

Consider/Build Interest: *Are you interested in what it might be like to become invisible? How do you like reading stories?*

Set a Purpose: *The purpose is to read the passage and determine important details of the character, Mr. Minchell.*

The title of the passage can help readers focus their understanding of what the passage says about Mr. Minchell's character.

All details are either important or unimportant only in context of the question being asked. The importance cannot be ascertained without a question or a purpose. In this case, the question at the top of the passage, "Why can't other people see Mr. Minchell?" establishes what will be important and not important.

3. Planning, Assigning, and Performing Tasks

The task that you will complete is to read the passage.

Planning: *Determine if you want to work individually, with a partner, or in a small group. If this is the first time you are using the **determining importance** strategy, it is best to work with a partner or a small group. Once you are familiar with the **determining importance** strategy, try to use it on your own.*

*For **determining importance**, you will need a piece of paper divided into two columns. When working in a group, decide if each person will have his/her own paper or if you will have one paper with just one recorder.*



Concrete or visual techniques are often helpful for learners when they are beginning to work with strategies such as **determining importance** or **making inferences**.

Assigning: If you are reading the passage aloud in pairs or in groups, determine who will start reading.

Doing the work: As you read the passage, do the following:

Clarify:

Scan the passage. Find and mark any words you do not know. See if the passage gives you enough information to **clarify** the meaning of those words. If not, find the meaning by asking somebody or looking it up.

Were there any places in the passage where you did not understand what was going on?

Determining Importance:

After reading the passage, put it away or turn it over and think about the details that describe the character in the story, Mr. Minchell. In the left column of your divided paper write down the details of Mr. Minchell's character that you think are important and in the right column those things you think are not important.

Now, exchange your paper with a partner and discuss the common details about character that you both listed as important, those details you both thought were unimportant, and any differences between your lists. Be prepared to support your decision whether a character **detail is important or unimportant**.

Knowing Mr. Minchell's character will be helpful in answering the questions in the Inquiry Activity that follows.

4. Sharing with Others

Telling other people what you know helps you to understand the material better. So take this opportunity not only to share the knowledge, but also to learn it more completely.

Small Groups: Compare your important detail list with the others in the group. Discuss as a group whether keeping in mind the purpose, **determining important details** of character, helped you read and understand the passage better.

Whole Class: Share what you considered to be the **important and unimportant details** about character. Were your items similar or different from other groups?

5. Reflecting, Extending, and Evaluating

Reflecting: Think about how well you understood what you have done. Here are some questions to start you thinking about the experience you just had. Thinking about what you have experienced is part of the learning process. When the focus is only on the answer, you don't get much time to think about what you learned.

Look back at Doing the Work. If you were telling someone else how you **determined important character details** as you read, what words would you use to describe what you do?

How did **determining important details** about Mr. Minchell's character help you understand the passage better?

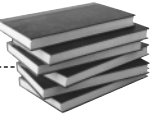
Have you ever thought about **determining important details** as you read before? Explain.

How did becoming familiar and then doing the work help you understand the passage better when you read it? Explain.

Extending: Extend what you learned to new situations.

In extending, you are being asked to transfer the information presented in the Practice Test question to other information or situations.

How is **determining important details** like watching a television show closely?



Where else have you seen or read about or experienced some of the ideas you found in this passage?

This story is very similar to the sort of episodes in *The Twilight Zone*, a television program from the late 1950s, the era when the story was written. Since *The Twilight Zone* appears on cable television, some of your learners may have seen some these. Other stories about invisible characters include the classic science fiction movie *The Invisible Man*, the recent remake, *The Hollow Man*, or a romantic favorite, *Ghost*.

*Do you read any stories? If yes, what kind? When might you **determine important details** about character in your reading?*

*With a friend, read another passage and determine the **details** that you think are important. Each of you complete a chart, writing in the left column what you consider **important details**, and in the right column the details you consider not important.*

Compare your charts. How does this help you understand the passage?

Evaluating: *Assess what you learned and how you learned it.*

In this last step, you get a chance to review the methods used to learn. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions; it is your chance to look more closely at your learning style and the opportunity to state how you benefited or didn't benefit from the content and/or the methods presented in this IA.

What did you learn from this Inquiry Activity?

What parts of the activity worked best for you? Explain.

What parts did not work well for you? Explain.

What parts of this Inquiry Activity will you use when taking the GED test? Why?

How did reading this way make you feel?

