

Learning Project 7 Reading Poetry

Inquiry Activity 7-1: Passage Reading Strategy – Asking Questions

Asking questions as you are reading is a strategy learners can use to better understand and engage with what they read. It is a metacognitive skill that can be used with any type of material. It is introduced here with poetry, as poetry presents the kind of reading experience where asking questions of the text is a natural way to try to clarify the meaning of words and phrases.

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

1. Identifying the Problem (Reading Passage only for Practice Test Items #s 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 PA)

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? (Don't read word for word.)

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

Got down your thoughts or share them with your partner.

HOW DOES THE SPEAKER 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;
 When the wind stirs through the springing grass,
 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.

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? How is the passage organized? What do you notice about the organization of the passage? Describe it. Does the organization help you understand it?*

The poem consists of three groups of seven lines, each arranged around a different reaction from the bird.

Activate/Build from Prior Knowledge: *What do you know about the topic of the poem? Have you ever read poetry before?*

Paul Laurence Dunbar was an African-American poet who was one of the founders of the Harlem Renaissance, a flowering of artistic expression that peaked in the 1920s.

Consider/Build Interest: *How can you become interested in a poem about a bird? How do you like reading poems?*

Set a Purpose: *The purpose is to read the passage and ask questions as you read.*

3. Planning, Assigning, and Performing Tasks

Planning: *Determine if you want to work individually, with a partner, or in a small group.*

Assigning: *Read aloud in pairs or in groups. Determine who will start reading and where you will stop to ask questions. You might want to stop after each stanza or group of lines.*

Doing the Work: *As you read the passage, here are some strategies you can consider:*

Clarify:

Note that at least one word is defined within the poem. Many words in this poem might need to be **clarified**, including: springing, opes, chalice, keener, and carol.

*Scan the passage. Find and mark any words you might 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 that you did not understand what was going on?

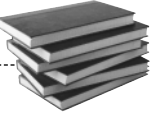
Write down questions as you read:

*As you read the poem, stop occasionally and **write questions** that have occurred to you. These could be **questions** like the following:*

I wonder why the author uses the word _____?

What does the bird have to do with the poem?

I am confused by the word _____.



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 questions with the others in the group. Explain how you went about **asking the questions**, and discuss any differences in the **questions asked** by different group members.

Discuss how **asking questions** while reading the poem helped you understand it.

Discuss as a group whether keeping in mind the purpose for reading the passage (**asking questions**) helped you to read and understand the passage better. Agree on some ways you would read a passage if you know you have to **ask questions**.

Whole Class: Report to the class the questions asked and the similarities in kinds of **questions asked**. Discuss the group's suggestions for the plan to read a poetry passage.

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.

This passage was a poem; how do you feel about poems? How do these feelings affect how well you read a poem?

*Poems use words in different ways from stories. Why does reading a poem make **clarifying** words so important?*

*Has **questioning** helped you better understand the passage? Explain.*

What other kinds of reading strategies could you use when reading poetry?

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

Extending: Extend what you learned to new situations.

In extending, you are being asked to transfer the information presented in this activity to other information or situations.

Do you read any poetry? If yes, what kind?

Name your favorite song. Do you remember the words? Write them down. Are they a poem? Why?

Is a greeting card a poem? Write a greeting card for a loved one. Use the dictionary and choose to use a new word in your greeting card poem.

Read another kind of passage like a song or a business document. Use the "I wonder, I'm confused" strategy on that 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?