

Learning Project **8** Reading Stories

Inquiry Activity 8-1: Passage Reading Strategy – Determining the Important from the Interesting

Determining what is important from what is interesting is a reading strategy that engages learners in the text based on the purpose for reading that text and their own interest in the material. Interest is relative and must be taken into consideration when reading passages that may not be of the reader's choosing, such as test passages.

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

1. Identifying the Problem

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?

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

Jot down your thoughts or share them with your partner.

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 brothers."

So instead of going north, they had gone farther south, had just entered her house. And Chig had 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 to see you, and brung little Charles with him.

The old lady stared up at them. “Charles? Rose, 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.

Excerpted from “A Visit to Grandmother” by William Melvin Kelley, © 1964.

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: *What is it about stories describing families and their problems that makes you interested?*

As in the other fiction excerpts, the excerpt gives only a small look, but it is rich in details. We can find that the trip home was added to the reunion without earlier discussion, the facts that the father left home to continue his education, rarely speaks of his family, and has not made a trip home before. We see that the aged mother does not recognize her son, partly perhaps because of poor eyesight, but recognizes the physical resemblance of the young boy to his mother (how?), and embraces her son tightly when she identifies him.

Set a Purpose: *The purpose is to read the passage and determine important character details of Chig’s father and grandmother.*

3. Planning, Assigning, and Performing Tasks

The task that you will complete is to read the passage. The following strategies can be helpful.

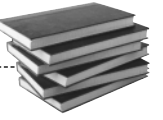
Planning: *Determine if you want to work individually, with a partner, or in a small group. If this is the first time you are determining important character details, it is best to work with a partner or a small group. Once you are familiar with this strategy, try to use it on your own.*

For determining importance, you will need a piece of paper divided into two columns. When working in a group, decide if all group members will have their own papers, or if you will have one paper with just one recorder.

Much can be learned from details, so readers should get in the habit of reading all details carefully. This is even more important when reading an excerpt because these passages are rich in detail. That is why they are chosen for test-taking purposes.

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 characters of the story. In the left column of your divided paper write down the details of Chig's father's character and Chig's grandmother's character that you think are **important** and in the right column those things you don't think are **important**.

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

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 about both characters with the others in the group. Discuss as a group whether keeping in mind the purpose for reading the passage – **determining important details of character** – helped you to read and understand the passage better.

In a short story, all details are important and establish our understanding of what will transpire.

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 did?

How did **determining important character details** about Chig's father and grandmother help you understand the passage better?

Have you ever thought about **determining important character 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.

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

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 that deals with different characters and **determine the details** that you think are important.



Each of you complete a chart where you write in the left column what you consider **important details**, and in the right column the details that 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?

