

ACTIVITY 3: MEANING MAP

This concept-mapping activity encourages students to dig a little deeper than just identifying *what* they see in the text and asks them to articulate *why* they have made that judgement. It can be a simple activity or one that extends into a very complex and detailed concept map at the end of a text study. This activity relies on the students knowing enough about the text to make several inferences, meaning that it is best suited for the end of a unit, or after a significant portion of the text has been read.

Instructions for teachers

- ☑ A text that has been studied in class
 - ☑ A3 paper or butcher's paper and pens, or a digital canvas such as a slide or doc
1. Discuss the purpose of the Meaning Map with students; they will be making a concept map (mind map, brainstorm) of all of the deeper meanings in the text. These might be phrased as questions ('what is the meaning of life?', 'is it important to be kind?') or statements ('good will triumph over evil', 'rights must be protected') or themes and values ('justice', 'equality', 'truth').
 2. Working in pairs, students should place all of the different meanings of the text around the central part of the map, leaving enough space around each element. Most complex texts will have multiple layers of meaning.
 3. Meanings can be expanded further by breaking them down, for example, if one 'meaning' of the text is 'rights must be protected', the next level might break these down into different rights, such as 'freedom of speech', 'human rights', 'the right to life' and so on.
 4. The final level of the Meaning Map should be evidence from the text. This could include direct quotes or paraphrases. Encourage students to include page numbers for longer texts.

Instructions for students

This mind-mapping activity encourages you to explore all of the layers of meaning in a text. Working in pairs, write down the different meanings or messages from the text.

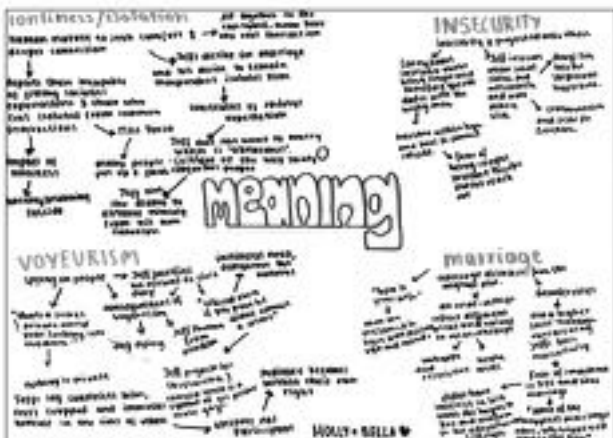
For example, these might be phrased as questions ('what is the meaning of life?', 'is it important to be kind?') or statements ('good will triumph over evil', 'rights must be protected') or themes and values ('justice', 'equality', 'truth').

In the next level of the map, break down those meanings further. For example, if one 'meaning' of the text is 'rights must be protected', the next level might break these down into different rights, such as 'freedom of speech', 'human rights', 'the right to life' and so on.

The final level of the Meaning Map should be evidence from the text. This could include direct quotes or paraphrases. Encourage students to include page numbers for longer texts.

Example

Student mind-mapping activity



Reflect

Encouraging students to look more closely at the themes, issues and values in a text is an important skill for analysis. The senior English curriculum devotes a lot of time to writing analytical responses to texts, but frequently the skills of inference required to produce these essays are skimmed over in the rush to 'finish the book'. In my experience, it is far better to allow students more time to explore the ideas in the text than aiming directly for the final essay and trying to 'fill the gaps' in their knowledge by providing them with a list of key quotes and themes.

- What are the barriers to students inferring their own meanings from texts, rather than being led to them by the teacher?
- What can be done to overcome those barriers, other than explicitly telling the students what the key issues, themes and values are? For example, through class discussion, wider reading, support materials.
- Why is it important that students make their own meaning from texts?

Extend

This is another task that lends itself directly to the analytical essay. Concept mapping of any sort is a great way of encouraging students to clarify and expand on their ideas before writing. You could also extend this task in the following ways:

- Ask students to write their own examination-style questions based on the separate areas of their maps.
- Use those student-generated questions as the actual assessment questions, rather than assigning them yourself.
- Collate the Meaning Maps of all of the students and produce a class map of the text as a reference material.

Practical Reading Strategies introduces teachers to six highly effective strategies that every reader can use when grappling with texts. Using a range of engaging classroom activities, teachers can guide students through the strategies of Making Connections, Visualising, Questioning, Inferring, Summarising and Synthesising. These will ultimately help students grasp meaning and gain understanding in what they read.

The variety of activities focus on close reading, working in pairs, group work and class discussions. Each contains instructions for teachers and students, along with clear examples and the underlying theory behind them.

Practical Reading Strategies is a valuable tool for all teachers to develop confidence in building their students' ability and enthusiasm to read and understand.

Leon Furze is an experienced educator, consultant and educational writer. Author of numerous English textbooks and study guides, *Practical Reading Strategies* is his first solo publication. Leon provides professional learning and strategic planning for the English curriculum, leads teams and manages change in schools.

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