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### Exploding the Wor(l)d: Using Challenging Texts to Reveal the Metacognitive Conversation with Pre-service Teachers

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**Abstract:** Based on experiences teaching a middle grades literacy course for pre-service teachers, this *Voices from the Field* article examines how challenging texts provoke adult learners to more closely attend to their reading experiences. By engaging with difficult texts, pre-service teachers experience frustration and confusion while reading. “Frustrational” texts (Ness & Kenny, 2016) are used as a means to remind teachers how young, developing readers often feel when confronted with unfamiliar text. This article describes a teaching and learning think-aloud process with two carefully selected frustrational texts. The overarching goal of my think-aloud instruction is to make visible the invisible metacognitive conversation which occurs during active reading. I also highlight how teacher modeling and student-centered discussions can support pre-service teachers’ reflection on their own ethnocentrism and biases and encourage the development of culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2014). These classroom activities, and the challenging texts around which they are focused, seek to provide opportunities for teachers in training to re-see their own reading strengths and needs so that they are better equipped to use think-alouds in comprehension instruction and more empathetic as teachers of children.

**Keywords:** think-alouds, metacognition, close reading, literacy education, teacher education, comprehension



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*In the middle of an interactive think-aloud demonstration for pre-service teachers, I ask aloud, “Wait! Is this woman, the speaker, a doctor? Is that who is telling this story?” I am reading aloud a personal narrative, written by an emergency room doctor in an urban hospital. I pause to speak my thoughts as I read the passage. I read the following sentences twice, giving weight to the dawning recognition, and discomfort, on my students’ faces. “After the bathroom you do nothing before you go to her. You don’t make a phone call, you do not talk to the medical student, you do not put in an order. You never make her wait. She is his mother.” (Rosenberg, 2016, p. SR9)*

### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

**I**n our classroom, emotionally and intellectually challenging texts serve as tools to learn instructional strategies and to deepen conceptual understanding of metacognition and active reading processes. I teach an undergraduate literacy course aimed at preparing pre-service teachers for literacy instruction in intermediate grades (i.e., grades 4-6). Within our course we spend time practicing think-alouds as an instructional strategy for classroom use, as well as engaging in think-alouds as learners. As Dymock (2007) argues, explicit instruction in comprehension strategies should be taught at all ages, and “students should practice the strategy with guidance using many texts” (p.161). This *Voices from the Field* article describes classroom use of think-aloud practices associated with active reading, metacognitive awareness, and developing empathy for child readers in my teacher education work.

The assemblage that opens this paper is an excerpt from a demonstration think-aloud using the personal narrative, “How to Tell a Mother Her Child is Dead” (Rosenberg, 2016). In selecting the texts used in our class session focused on monitoring for meaning, I consider challenging texts that will spark conversations about meaning making. These texts must also offer the chance to analyze authorial choices and interrogate our own biases and socio-cultural contexts. Although not texts for use with children in middle grades, I use Rosenberg’s essay and the short story “The Flowers” by Alice Walker (1998) with pre-service teachers because these texts serve as rich platforms for evoking confusion, connection, and engagement.

These texts also offer practical experience and induction into the apprenticeship framework that undergirds reading development instruction (Fisher & Frey, 2013; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Swaggerty, 2009). First through the observation of instructor modeling, pre-service teachers are afforded the chance to closely observe and investigate the active reading processes of an experienced reader. This observation is followed by immediate application and guided practice, in which partners think-aloud while reading sections of a shared text with one another. Subsequent guided practice also includes whole class and small group conversations focused on my students’ questions, confusions, and connections. These observations and applications are aligned with Rosenblatt’s (1978) reader response theory that comprehension is an active process. Reader response theory argues that meaningful comprehension creates a “poem.” This “poem”

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<sup>1</sup> I acknowledge that there is a gender spectrum and that myriad pronouns exist that I can use when referring to individuals in my writing. Throughout this article I will use the gender-neutral pronoun “they,” except when

referring to persons who self-identify as “she.” These decisions represent my effort to recognize the fluid nature of identity and to not make assumptions about the ways that individuals identify or refer to themselves.

occupies a third space formed when a reader's sense-making processes fuse with a text's authorial intent and messages.

In addition, I select challenging texts because they offer pre-service teachers the experience of confusion often felt by children confronting unfamiliar texts. Such texts should push teachers to articulate and evaluate active reading through the lens of metacognitive action and provide opportunities to critically engage in the think-aloud technique (Lapp, Fisher, & Grant, 2008; Ness & Kenny, 2016). Using an interactive think-aloud, a teacher's words and actions can illustrate active reading and cognitive flexibility (Lapp, Fisher, & Grant, 2008), as comprehension and the reading act become the co-constructive reader response process described by Rosenblatt (1978).

I have found that, like Ness and Kenny (2016), pre-service teachers become more fully engaged in monitoring their comprehension when confronted with a "frustrational text":

Teachers may also benefit from thinking aloud with frustrational text. As many teachers are avid and proficient readers themselves . . . they may not remember how it feels to struggle during reading and the nature of that struggle . . . As teachers understood how their lack of background knowledge and their limited vocabulary impeded their comprehension . . . they felt what it was like to be a struggling reader. (p. 458)

As highly capable readers, not only do teachers forget what it feels like to struggle in reading, but we

may also forget how emotionally jarring texts can be. Bringing to light how emotional responses can dis/engage us from texts in the reading moment helps teachers to develop empathy for the reading experiences of children and young adults. Beautifully written texts of all kinds can evoke connection to people and situations we might not otherwise consider.

Furthermore, I argue that text selections for use in teacher education courses should be informed by theories of critical literacy (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2015) and resource pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2014). Critical literacy opportunities allow readers to analyze their meaning

making and authorial decisions related to power, audience, and voice. Critical literacy strategies also encourage readers to consider multiple perspectives, including those often silenced, omitted, and elided in texts and interpretations. I talk explicitly with pre-service teachers about developing a teaching approach based in seeing students' knowledge and experience as resources in the classroom. A resource pedagogies

approach draws from theories of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2014), culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and "warm demander" pedagogy (Ford & Sassi, 2014; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Ware, 2006). Such an approach uses the teacher's accrued knowledge about students' academic and linguistic strengths and home-community experiences (i.e., children's funds of knowledge as discussed in González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) as assets in making classroom decisions.

This paper focuses on the processes by which challenging texts are used to engage pre-service

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teachers in think-alouds and active reading to highlight the metacognitive conversation. By drawing attention to my instructional decisions, I invite reflection on the ways in which instruction represents beliefs about children’s learning and the assets children bring to the classroom. Towards these ends, in our classroom we collaborate to establish a mutually respectful learning community focused on strengthening pedagogical and content knowledge, while also developing an awareness of the effects of teachers’ implicit biases in the classroom.

### **I do. The Think Aloud Instructional Strategy**

Thinking aloud models can be used by teachers to make one’s invisible thoughts available for others to “see.” The window into the teacher’s mind reveals how a proficient reader actively negotiates meaning before, after, and during the reading act. This negotiation includes: asking and answering questions, visualizing ideas and action in the text, determining importance and inferring, recognizing confusion and working through it, making connections, reacting with emotion, and using background knowledge to successfully navigate a text. In short, think-alouds provide a look into an active reader’s thoughts (Caldwell & Leslie, 2003) and encourage the reader to stop while reading and ask aloud, “Is this making sense?” (Baumann, Jones, & Seifert-Kessel, 1993, p. 189). Thus, when selecting texts for think-alouds focused on monitoring for meaning, I consider the ability of the text to evoke confusion and engage the reader in active reading. As the instructor, I prepare think-alouds for classroom use that include attention to how teachers prepare and model this instructional strategy, thus making my own practice explicit. An apprenticeship framework (Fisher & Frey, 2013; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) serves as the structure for this series of instructional activities (See Figure 1 for a more detailed explanation regarding how the

instructional activities correspond to teacher and student interactions using an apprenticeship framework). Finally, in addition to making textual and pedagogical decisions, I also develop learning objectives aimed at modeling specific comprehension strategies within particular texts and genres.

In preparing to teach with think-alouds, I follow a tripartite process similar to that described by Ness and Kenny (2016, p. 455-456). The process includes multiple readings and careful preparation of think-aloud demonstration scripts. I annotate the text and record written tracks of my thinking at each stage in the process. These annotations support clarity as I demonstrate the instructional strategy and the comprehension focus under study. I often share photocopies of the preparatory steps involved in planning think-alouds. Class discussions consider multiple versions of instructional planning for use with the same text. Discussions help to make clear the necessity of precision in identifying the learning goals, as well as emphasizing the idea that the same text can be used for a variety of purposes. Indeed, we often approach the same text from differing vantage points. This work aims to support pre-service teachers in developing a critical eye for selecting instructional texts.

### **The First Reading: Annotating My Responses**

In my first reading of the text, I identify stopping points along the way as places that emotionally move me. These moments stand out as spaces of connection, question, and confusion. For example, in “How to Tell a Mother Her Child is Dead,” I find myself stopping to catch my breath each time the author speaks directly to the reader. I record my thinking as writing and drawing onto the text, as underlining, circles, swirls, and short responses (See Figures 2 and 3 for examples of my informal, first

reading annotations). Repeatedly my eyes fill with tears when reading this text:

If you were the one to call her and tell her that her son had been shot then you have already done part of it, but you have not done it yet. You are about to do it now. You never make her wait. She is his mother. Now you explode the world. Yes, you have to. You say something like: "Mrs. Booker, I have terrible, terrible news. Ernest died today. Then you wait. (Rosenberg, 2016, p. SR9)

When my eyes refocus and my breathing slows I am able to read again, and my note taking is swift and wild. I halt once more at the passage, "Do not ever say he was lucky that he did not feel pain. He was not lucky. She is not lucky. Don't make that face. The depth of the stupidity of the things you will say sometimes is unimaginable." The last sentence slams me into myself. Text-to-self connections expand as shattering glass, reminding me of the stupid, stupid things I have said in my years of teaching and, no doubt, as mother to my own children. The reverberations of emotional recognition are strong for me while reading Rosenberg's brief essay. Complex texts provide a path showing how text connections, often heralded in elementary grades as key strategies to comprehension, can powerfully engage the reader while sometimes also distracting and derailing a reader's developing understanding (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007).

In class with my pre-service teachers we discuss ways to talk with children about making text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections while reading. We discuss superficial connections to text as surface level, "above the waves" connections that are often made by readers responding to new, unfamiliar, or challenging texts. Above the waves connections do not necessarily deepen our understanding of the text; instead, they are often

distracting, leading our thinking minds away from the text and into our own experience. For example, after discussing my think-aloud of "How to Tell a Mother Her Child is Dead," we interrogate two of my text-to-self connections: first, that my husband is a physician, and second that I am former high school teacher, and some of my students' lives included violence like that implied in Rosenberg's essay. The first connection about my husband floats above the waves. This superficial connection draws my thoughts out of the text. To follow that path of thought would be a distraction. However, the second text-to-self connection is deeper, going below the waves and bringing me closer to the intimacy and pain described in the article. I am immersed, under water, swimming with the ideas in the text. This connection is relevant to the content and mood of the text, and I feel I am in the room with Rosenberg as she speaks with the family. This discussion illustrates the importance of talking about various kinds of connections and the pathways they provide. Teachers need to support children to not simply identify the types of connections made while reading, but to nurture deeper connections to the texts they read. Classroom conversations focused on making connections as a comprehension strategy can support readers to recognize when connections are tangential, and when connections offer a path into deeper understanding. These conversations also highlight how insightful connections may be intertwined with distracting ones.

### **Second Reading: Dancing with Texts**

In the second reading, I reshape the learning goals, reading between the text and my annotations, and move in an intertextual dance. The second reading directs my attention more closely to the author's style and purposefulness. I contemplate the literary effects of Rosenberg's clipped sentences. The essay begins, "First you get your coat." Rosenberg's

directive style repeats throughout the essay. The author's use of second person imperative creates an uncomfortable, amplifying rhythm of urgency in the narrative. I come to understand that Rosenberg uses imperatives to demand that the reader feel along with her, and because of this authorial choice, readers are jolted in and out of understanding. Rosenberg demands our discomfort and confusion, perhaps mirroring her own, as she describes the required task of caring for the living after death in the emergency room. Ness and Kenny (2016) suggest that when preparing a think-aloud, the second reading asks teachers to "examine each stopping spot and critically reflect upon the need for that particular spot" (p. 456). In this second reading, I reread and review my annotations and also analyze and name my thinking.

Because my think-aloud attends to the author's sentence structure and point of view, we are primed to interrogate Rosenberg's use of second person imperative. In post-think-aloud conversations, we discuss our inferential paths of discernment to identify the narrator of the text. Participation in this discussion requires pointing to specific textual evidence in support of assertions. The classroom hums as a chorus of voices asking one another to whom the narrator is speaking at different points in the piece. This discussion clarifies misunderstandings and emphasizes variable interpretations in the dance of meaning making. Some argue that the narrator, Rosenberg, speaks directly to the reader, representing a broader public who needs to consider her important experiences. Others assert that she speaks to novice doctors, learning how to engage in these fraught conversations. Still others contend that Rosenberg has written this piece as catharsis. She speaks to herself, as a kind of courage building.

### Third Reading: Narrowing the Focus

In the third reading, the instructional focus is narrowed further. A winnowing of the stopping places for sharing thoughts occurs as I write the script for what I will say during the think-aloud demonstration. Recognizing that "most definitions of comprehension monitoring during reading specify two kinds of metacognitive . . . knowledge a reader must possess: (a) the awareness of whether or not comprehension is occurring, and (b) the conscious application of one or more strategies to correct comprehension difficulties" (Baumann, Jones, & Seifert-Kessel, 1993, p. 185), I draft my thoughts carefully. I seek to make explicit my (dis)engagement with the text, as well as my strategies for re-engaging and repairing comprehension. For example, when Rosenberg writes, "When you get into the room you will know who the mother is. Yes, I'm very sure," I stop and ask the questions: "How will I know who the mother is? Will I know because the mother will be crying?" I continue preparing the think-aloud, reading Rosenberg's words: "Shake her hand and tell her who you are. If there is time you shake everybody's hand. Yes, you will know if there is time. You never stand. If there are no seats left, the couches have arms on them." I look back to my script and draft a long passage of thoughts aimed to make visible how I have used evidence across the text to answer previously asked questions, while also addressing how the metacognitive act provides a conduit to deeper comprehension:

*I need to reread to make sense. She keeps telling me I will know all of these things. Near the beginning of the text I asked the question, Is she a doctor? In the first sentence the author tells me to get my coat. Now, having read more, I can piece the evidence across this text to answer this question. Yes, the author is talking to me like I am a doctor, just like her.*

*But, why does she tell me not to stand when I talk with this family? Oh. Just asking that question helps me to realize that she is telling me sitting is a sign of compassion and respect for the family. That the doctor shakes your hand, sits beside you -- this is more human. Rosenberg wants me to care. She is not afraid to care. I must not be afraid to care.*

By the end of this process, I have revised and written a script of what I will say during the think-aloud demonstration.

### **We do. Discussing the Demonstration**

Before I begin the think-aloud, I ask my students to create a two-sided table in their interactive literacy notebooks. Throughout the semester-long course, we use these notebooks as active tools for learning. They are places to apply the instructional strategies presented in our class and spaces to record questions for future learning. Today's notebook entry is a table organized with the column headings "What my teacher says and does while reading" on the left, and "what we call that" on the right (See Figures 4 and 5 for examples of these notebook entries). Students take notes during the think-aloud, recording what I say, how I sound, what my face looks like, and what I otherwise do during the reading. The right side of the table is left blank during the think-aloud. Finally, I share that the text I will read may be shocking in its raw emotion. I invite these pre-service teachers to know me differently because I read this text with them.

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During the classroom demonstration, I display the text while reading. My prepared think-aloud script sits side-by-side. As I read the text aloud I stop and share primarily text-to-self connections, confusions, and what I notice about the text's features and structure. My students diligently take notes in their notebooks detailing my facial expressions, my tone of voice, my gestures, and my words. I perform the fix-up strategies specified in the learning objectives, such as rereading, recognizing and activating my knowledge of text features, and asking and answering questions through connecting evidence across the text. I have been brought to tears both

semesters I have used this text. I read the text aloud through cloudy eyes and rough voice. Because of Rosenberg's narrative, I am able to also share with my young colleagues how texts resonate for me personally. The themes within the narrative and Rosenberg's style allow me to reveal to my students more of the whole person that I am. By selecting this challenging text for an instructional think-aloud, an opportunity for empathy and vulnerability occurs. These pre-service teachers, who will soon

join me as teacher colleagues, are given the chance to see me academically, as an unsure and confused reader, and holistically, as a learner contextualizing my text-to-self connections within my teaching experiences. In this way, we begin to dance together through the text, and our classroom community is strengthened.

In later discussions, we talk about this revealing of self as a way of deepening our understanding of what it means to build a classroom of mutual trust

and relational authority (Ford & Sassi, 2014; Ware, 2006). Both of these ideas are important tenets of resource pedagogy classrooms in which children, especially children of color from diverse backgrounds, must be met with acceptance and warmth coupled with relentless expectations for their academic achievement (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). These expectations center on supporting learners to develop confidence in their abilities to contribute positively to their communities and the world (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2014).

We remind ourselves that as teachers we must make manifest holistic, caring relationships with children and their families, and one way to do this is to reveal

our own vulnerabilities.

### Deconstructing Practice and Experience

After the think-aloud is complete, I take a moment to pause. I ask my students to draw in response to having read this text together. I also invite them to write a single word that represents their understanding of the theme or tone of the text (See Figures 6 and 7 for examples of students' drawings). Next, our whole class discussion begins. They begin to call out and share their observations. On the whiteboard, I record exactly the words they have heard me say, and the descriptions they give of my voice and actions. Next, we talk in small groups, naming the ways of thinking indicated by what I said and did. Once students have talked with one another, we complete the right side of the table. The "what we call that" column is filled with labels that name the thinking moves as types of connections, questions, confusions, and fix ups. We talk together about naming my responses as comprehension strategies aimed at identifying and clarifying confusions. In preparation for the think-aloud, I refer to Caldwell and Leslie's (2003) description of eleven categories of think-aloud statements, and use these as a rubric against which to compare my instructional goals and prepared think-aloud comments. For example, Caldwell and Leslie discern between "asking questions that indicate understanding," and "asking questions that indicate lack of understanding" (p. 328). I am careful to include both kinds of questions in my think-aloud so that we may identify and disentangle them in our discussion. I also direct my students to track their question asking and that of their partner's in the next phase of instruction, guided practice using paired partner reading.



Figure 6. Drawings made by pre-service teachers after reading together "How to Tell a Mother Her Child is Dead."

**You do. Using Paired Partner Reading as Think-Aloud Platform**

During this final portion of our activity, my students read a short story with partners as a vehicle for sharing their thinking aloud while reading. The text I have selected for this activity, Alice Walker’s “The Flowers” (1998), crystallizes the character Myop’s loss of childhood innocence at the discovery of a dead man’s body. This text is centered around a young girl’s realizations of death as the tangible end of life and the death of her childhood innocence that accompanies her knowledge of the ill wishes, violence, and complexities of living in a racist South. Walker’s text is deceptively simple: at first easy to read, yet throughout filled with rich, layered imagery. Her word choice is precise and exceedingly powerful at conveying the tonal shifts within the story. I have found that these shifts often generate confusion in the reader. The story begins:

It seemed to Myop as she skipped lightly from hen house to pigpen to smokehouse that the days had never been as beautiful as these. The air held a keenness that made her nose twitch. The harvesting of the corn and cotton, peanuts and squash made each day a golden surprise that caused excited little tremors to run up her jaws. (Walker, 1998, p. 404)

My adult learners share confusions about the time and place of the setting, the historical context, and the actions of the sole character, Myop. This text provides the “frustrational” threshold (Ness & Kenny, 2016) needed for my students to feel like striving readers, and they are forced to slow down and attend to the metacognitive conversation happening in their heads. Many students identify the need for more background information and for clarity around unknown vocabulary. Importantly, students also react with strong emotion when they

read this text with one another. Many of them mirror Myop’s loss as they shift from comfortable, effective readers to confused, at times repulsed, and then often sadly revelatory readers.

Working with a partner provides a scaffold for practicing the think-aloud strategy and more successful comprehension of this difficult text (Rasinski & Young, 2014). This activity helps make clear for my students that reading is a socio-constructivist process (Fisher & Frey, 2013; Lapp, Fisher, & Grant, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978) that often hinges on talk in support of understanding. The interactive turn taking of reading, listening, speaking, and note-taking affirms our attempts at slowing down to think about our thinking. We work together to share confusions and background knowledge in sense-making. Partner reading provides more talk time than work in small groups, and such “assisted reading” is advocated by Rasinski and Young (2014) as occupying “the middle ground

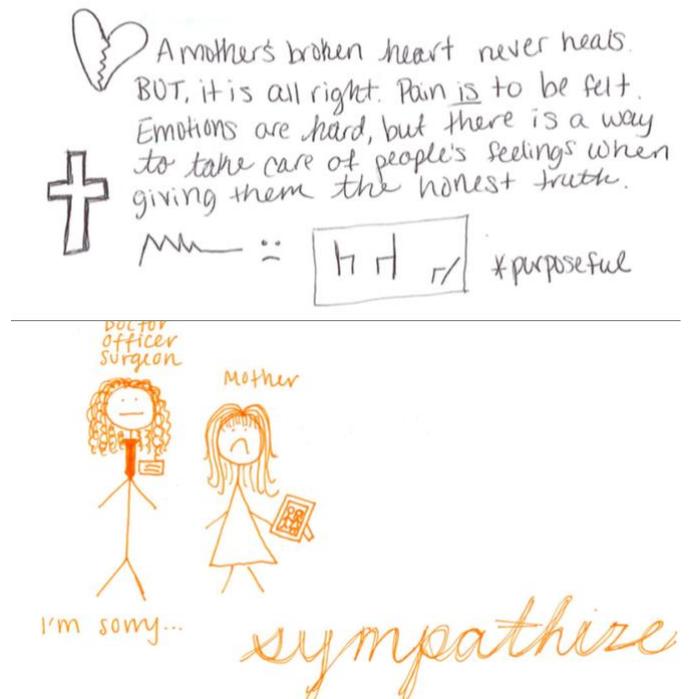


Figure 7. Drawings made by pre-service teachers after reading together “How to Tell a Mother Her Child is Dead.”

between modeled reading and independent reading” (p. 2). Paired partner reading also serves as a means for me to better observe my learners and to understand how they navigate confusion in the reading moment (Swaggerty, 2009). In later conversations, I share my own close reading, annotation, and think-aloud preparation of “The Flowers” (For an example of this kind of preparatory notetaking, see Figure 8).

We also engage in creating a conversation on chart paper in which class members mark places of confusions and questions in an enlarged copy of the text. Once questions are posed, we seek to identify answers and inferences we find in the text (Figure 9 illustrates this collaborative student work process). This chart is kept for use in future classes so that we may discuss the importance of questioning as a comprehension strategy, specifically, the use of question-answer relationships illustrating differing kinds of questions asked during active reading.

In our recent read of this text, a few students pieced together a historical context within the story through close attention to word choice and reading detective work. One partnership explained that they co-constructed meaning by first using the prior knowledge that Alice Walker might also be the famous African-American author of *The Color Purple*, thus inferring that Myop might be a Black child. Another pair of readers supplied more text evidence to support this assertion with comments pointing the class back to the phrase “in her dark brown hand” in paragraph 2. These partners eventually shared their conclusions that this story described “southern life in the past,” and that the dead man Myop discovers was lynched. They talked through their question and asking process, including how they used Walker’s sentence, “His head lay beside him,” and her use of the words, “cracked or broken” to describe the man’s teeth, and the key

phrase, “rotted remains of a noose” to ultimately infer a lynching had occurred (p. 405).

Upon sharing this knowledge, other students began to rearrange their understanding. Suddenly, new connections sparked as students shared their experiences with racism and discrimination, as well their knowledge and lack thereof about historical and present racialized violence in America. These connections made clearer gaps in their knowledge of institutional racism, vigilantism, police brutality, civil rights, and American history, as well as local knowledge about salient events in our Oklahoma context. This discussion is important for a number of reasons. First, many of these teacher candidates will teach in self-contained middle grade classrooms, and thus will be charged with infusing literacy instruction across the curriculum. They need to be equipped to integrate comprehension strategies within disciplinary texts. Second, self-contained classrooms offer time and structure for deep learning and interrogation of cross-disciplinary topics generated by students’ interests alongside curricular materials. By using texts that elicit uncomfortable conversations about race now, in our pre-service course, my students practice the kinds of talk about texts and life that I want them to have with their students. Walker’s text allows us to be vulnerable with one another, to reveal our connections and confusions, as well as our emotional responses centered in gender, race, power, violence, and geography.

Both of these texts serve to bring critical literacy conversations that examine issues of race, power, and gender to the forefront in our classroom. Although issues we recursively address and discuss, I am acutely aware that the texts I choose may be influential models. Because of this potential, my choices are informed by pre-service teachers’ needs to grapple with their own ethnocentrism, implicit bias, and discomfort at discussions of difference.

Equally important, my text selections purposefully contribute to a classroom rich in diverse texts and loud with otherwise omitted or marginalized voices.

### Conclusion

These two texts engage adult readers suddenly and radically. As we give voice to the metacognitive conversations in our heads, comprehension breaks down in unexpected ways. Rosenberg's (2016) personal narrative is arresting in its pace and intimacy. The narrative drums an increasingly urgent and painful rhythm; her use of repetition and imperative sentences command and confound the reader. Likewise, Walker's (1998) story jolts the reader into attention as a "day of golden surprise" turns "gloomy" with a "silence close and deep" (p. 404-405). Because of our shared reading of these texts, we are able to discuss the provision of textual supports that might deepen or extend our individual understandings. It is my hope that these novice teacher candidates will remember their own confusion as readers engaged with challenging texts and bring that recognition as compassion to the children they will teach. In making our classroom

work public I hope, too, that other university teachers will similarly use think-aloud techniques in carefully constructed ways to support their learners in gaining confidence in this important literacy practice. Think-aloud techniques inspire diverse application, such as content area studies (Lapp, Fisher, & Grant, 2008) and literacy work with English language learners (McKeown & Gentilucci, 2007). In my teacher education classroom, think-alouds couple with beautifully written, challenging texts to evoke un-choreographed intertextual and interpersonal dances between pre-service teachers and their instructor. These dances strengthen our classroom community and invite new ways of knowing and understanding one another, texts, and the reading act.

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Instructional activity	Teacher and student interactions
I do: Teacher modeling and demonstration	<p>Instructor performs a think aloud, speaking her thoughts aloud while reading aloud the text, “How to Tell a Mother her Child is Dead.”</p> <p>Students take notes on what they hear the teacher say, and what they see her do.</p>
We do: Whole class and small group conversations	Teacher invites to student to share their notes with one another. Students work together to name the words and actions they observed during the think aloud.
You do: Partner paired reading and Interactive Read Aloud/Think Aloud	Teacher shares a new text and asks students to work with a partner to read the text to one another and state their thoughts while reading aloud to one another. They are asked to take notes on what they observe their partner saying and doing while reading the text “The Flowers” aloud.

*Figure 1.* An apprenticeship framework for my think-aloud instructional sequence. This figure illustrates the correspondence between instructional activities and teacher/student interactions during the think-aloud activities. This sequence aims for students to gradually take on more responsibility and active participation in the learning experience (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Fisher & Frey, 2013).

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SundayReview | OPINION Think Aloud who is telling where?

# How to Tell a Mother Her Child Is Dead

By NAOMI ROSENBERG SEPT. 3, 2016 recent Oh God

Philadelphia — First you get your coat. I don't care if you don't remember where you left it, you find it. If there was a lot of blood you ask someone to go quickly to the basement to get you a new set of scrubs. You put on your coat and you go into the bathroom. You look in the mirror and you say it. You use the mother's name and you use her child's name. You may not adjust this part in any way. May not

big city when I went there it was best & worse the strength of the voice direct commands

I will show you: If it were my mother you would say, "Mrs. Rosenberg. I have terrible, terrible news. Naomi died today." You say it out loud until you can say it clearly and loudly. How loudly? Loudly enough. If it takes you fewer than five tries you are rushing it and you will not do it right. You take your time. at least 5 times

After the bathroom you do nothing before you go to her. You don't make a phone call, you do not talk to the medical student, you do not put in an order. You never make her wait. She is his mother. MOTHER

60 0000 conflict she places herself there

When you get inside the room you will know who the mother is. Yes, I'm very sure. Shake her hand and tell her who you are. If there is time you shake everyone's hand. Yes, you will know if there is time. You never stand. If there are no seats left, the couches have arms on them. you be a real person not a freak doctor

she is talking to me Be a human she loved him

You will have to make a decision about whether you will ask what she already knows. If you were the one to call her and tell her that her son had been shot then you have already done part of it, but you have not done it yet. You are about to do it now. You never make her wait. She is his mother. Now you explode the world. Yes, you have to. You say something like: "Mrs. Booker. I have terrible, terrible news. Ernest died today."

Repetition

Then you wait.

You will not stand up. You may leave yourself in the heaviness of your breath or the racing of your pulse or the sight of your shoelaces on your shoe, but you will not stand up. You are here for her. She is his mother.

Here Be real right now

Figure 2. Example of my annotation of text from the first reading.

The image shows a screenshot of a New York Times article with extensive handwritten annotations in red ink. The annotations include:

- Source:** "The New York Times" is circled, with "Publisher source" written above it and an arrow pointing to the URL.
- Section:** "Sunday Review" is underlined, and "OPINION" is circled.
- Title:** "How to Tell a Mother Her Child Is Dead" is underlined.
- Author:** "By NAOMI ROSENBERG" is underlined, with "naomi" written above "NAOMI" and "rosenberg" written above "ROSENBERG".
- Date:** "SEPT. 3, 2016" is underlined, with "when?" written above it.
- Text Annotations:**
  - "Philadelphia" is underlined.
  - "I don't care if you don't remember where you left it, you find it." is underlined, with "name?" written above "find it".
  - "If there was a lot of blood you ask someone to go quickly to the basement to get you a new set of scrubs." is underlined.
  - "You put on your coat and you go into the bathroom. You look in the mirror and you say it. You use the mother's name and you use her child's name. You may not adjust this part in any way." is underlined, with "EK? Nurse? doctor? ambulance?" written to the left.
  - "I will show you: If it were my mother you would say, 'Mrs. Rosenberg. I have terrible, terrible news. Naomi died today.'" is underlined, with "practice, strong tone" written below it.
  - "You say it out loud until you can say it clearly and loudly. How loudly? Loudly enough. If it takes you fewer than five tries you are rushing it and you will not do it right. You take your time." is underlined.
  - "After the bathroom you do nothing before you go to her. You don't make a phone call, you do not talk to the medical student, you do not put in an order. You never make her wait. She is his mother." is underlined, with "Doctor" written below it.
  - "When you get inside the room you will know who the mother is. Yes, I'm very sure. Shake her hand and tell her who you are. If there is time you shake everyone's hand. Yes, you will know if there is time. You never stand. If there are no seats left, the couches have arms on them." is underlined, with "Steps of telling" written to the right and "important" written below it.
  - "You will have to make a decision about whether you will ask what she already knows. If you were the one to call her and tell her that her son had been shot then you have already done part of it, but you have not done it yet. You are about to do it now. You never make her wait. She is his mother. Now you explode the world. Yes, you have" is underlined, with "She is his mother" circled.

Figure 3. A second example of my annotation from a first reading.

<b>What My Teacher Says and Does While Reading</b>	<b>What We Call That</b>
<i>Observers are asked to record these notes while watching the think-aloud.</i>	<i>After the think-aloud demonstration is complete, all participants share their observations and together attempt to name what the teacher has said and done using the language of reading development and comprehension studies.</i>  <i>We usually hold these conversations first in small groups, then move to a whole class discussion.</i>

Figure 4. Example of interactive notebook entry for observing a think-aloud demonstration.

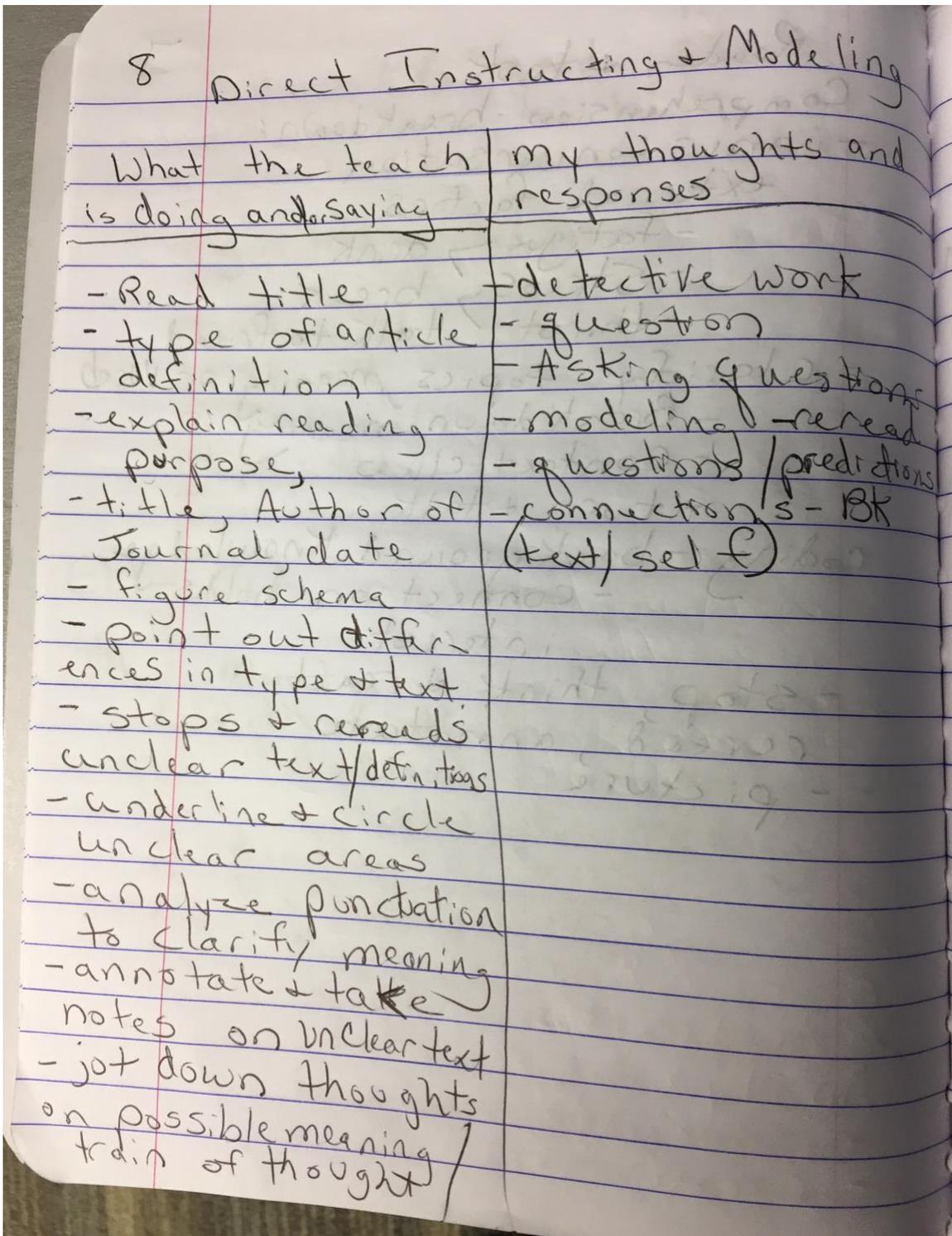


Figure 5. Example of student notebook entry from a think-loud demonstration.

Share with you the inner conversation in my head when I read this text out loud. Thinking aloud is like opening a window into someone else's brain - so you get to look inside and see and hear what they are thinking. Usually in a think aloud I'm very strategic because I am modeling and teaching a particular reading or writing strategy. But for this 1st TA/RA I have a bigger, broader purpose - I want you to (1) observe the act so you can learn how to do it and (2) I want you to see all kinds of thinking and responding to a text. I'm going to read this text out loud and share my thoughts at the same time. I'll probably be a little weird - but that's ok. Stay with me! It will go fast. Your job is to take notes on your double-sided journal - write down exactly what you see me do + hear me say - feel free to quote me! Write all that in the left-hand side column. On the right I want you to write any questions, connections, comments, or any other responses you have while listening. Try to connect your responses to my actions/jourals. - So you've created a script of my TA/RA. OK?! Here goes!

*The Flowers* - those quotes mean this is a young girl. She wrote *The Color Purple*. My mom loves that book.

by Alice Walker - Oh, I know her. She wrote *The Color Purple*. My mom loves that book.

the character a young girl. Her name is unusual.

She is African American? Alice Walker an African American author.

OK, here's clue. Maybe it is early 1900s or before 1940. Sharecropper's big clue. It is not her farm.

1 It seemed to Myop as she skipped lightly from her house to piggan to smokehouse that the days had never been as beautiful as these. The air held a keenness that made her nose twitch. The harvesting of the corn and cotton, peanuts and squash made each day a golden surprise that caused excited little tremors to run up her jaws. That word is important. She grows? Does she live on a farm? They used to like figuring things out. Is she growing?

2 Myop carried a short, knobby stick. She struck out at random at chickens she liked, and worked out the beat of a song on the fence around the piggan. She felt light and good in the warm sun. She was ten, and nothing existed for her but her song, the stick clutched in her dark brown hand, and the tat-de-ta-ta of accompaniment, an onomatopoeia. That's cool.

3 Turning her back on the rusty boards of her family's sharecropper cabin, Myop walked along the fence till it ran into the stream made by the spring. Around the spring, where the family got drinking water, silver ferns and wildflowers grew. Along the shallow banks pigs rooted. Myop watched the tiny white bubbles disrupt the thin black scale of soil and the water that silently rose and slid away down the stream. The description makes me picture a beautiful place. I sense the farm. It sounds nice. Very calm place.

4 She had explored the woods behind the house many times. Often, in fall or autumn, her mother took her to gather nuts among the fallen leaves. Today she made her own path, bouncing this way and that way, vaguely keeping an eye out for snakes. She found, in addition to various common but pretty ferns and leaves, an amful of strange blue flowers with velvety ridges and a sweet suds bush full of the brown, fragrant buds. I wonder are there lots of snakes? I wonder I wonder what this is? I'm a little confused. I think this means she picked some of the flowers.

5 By twelve o'clock, her arms laden with sprigs of her findings, she was a mile or more from home. She had often been as far before, but the strangeness of the land made it not as pleasant as her usual haunts. It seemed gloomy in the little cove in which she found herself. The air was damp, the silence close and deep.

6 Myop began to circle back to the house, back to the peacefulness of the morning. It was then she stepped smack into his eyes. Her heel became lodged in the broken ridge between brow and nose and she reached down quickly, unafraid, to free herself. It was only when she saw his naked grin that she gave a little yell of surprise.

7 This is making me think. Did she bump into someone? Who is he? Where did he come from? He had been a tall man. From feet to neck covered a long space. His head lay beside him. When she pushed back the leaves and layers of earth and debris Myop saw that he'd had large white teeth, all of them cracked or broken, long fingers, and very big bones. All his clothes had rotted away except some threads of blue denim from his overalls. The buckles of the overall had turned green. Myop gazed around the spot with interest. Very near where she'd stepped into the head was a wild pink rose. As she picked it to add to her bundle she noticed a raised mound, a ring, around the rose's root. It was the rotted remains of a nose, a bit of shredding plowline, now blending benignly into the soil. Around an overhanging limb of a great spreading oak hung another piece. Frayed, rotted, bleached, and frizzled - barely there - but spinning restlessly in the breeze. Myop laid down her flowers. → like at his grave. She is witness. She found a hoose. He was murdered. It was a lynching. I connect to now.

8 And the summer was over. her innocence has been picked. What? I was wrong about the theme, but now I understand. And I want to think about the title more now. free herself from what? I am so surprised! what is happening in this story? The piece came together. Myop sharecropper South noose. It is in a tree. So horrible.

DMG! His head is not connected to his body. So hold on. This makes me want to go back again. She stepped on bones. Holy smokes. She stepped on bones. down in the leaves and dirt.

Handwritten notes on the left side of the page:

- abeautiful day!
- a golden surprise.
- eyes. She lives on a farm. I know b/c of chickens + piggan. I have chickens.
- They get water from a spring. Where do they live? In the South?
- She is usually with her mother. Is she supposed to be alone?
- is that lunch time? I predict she will go home for lunch.
- The tone has changed. It was a beautiful day. Now I feel like it is getting a little creepy. Maybe she is not going to go home for lunch after all. Is something going to happen?
- That doesn't make sense to me. I need to reread this sentence. OK she bumped into someone and then she did it again? She stepped on him? Hold on!

Figure 8. A copy of my first and second reading annotations for Walker's "The Flowers."

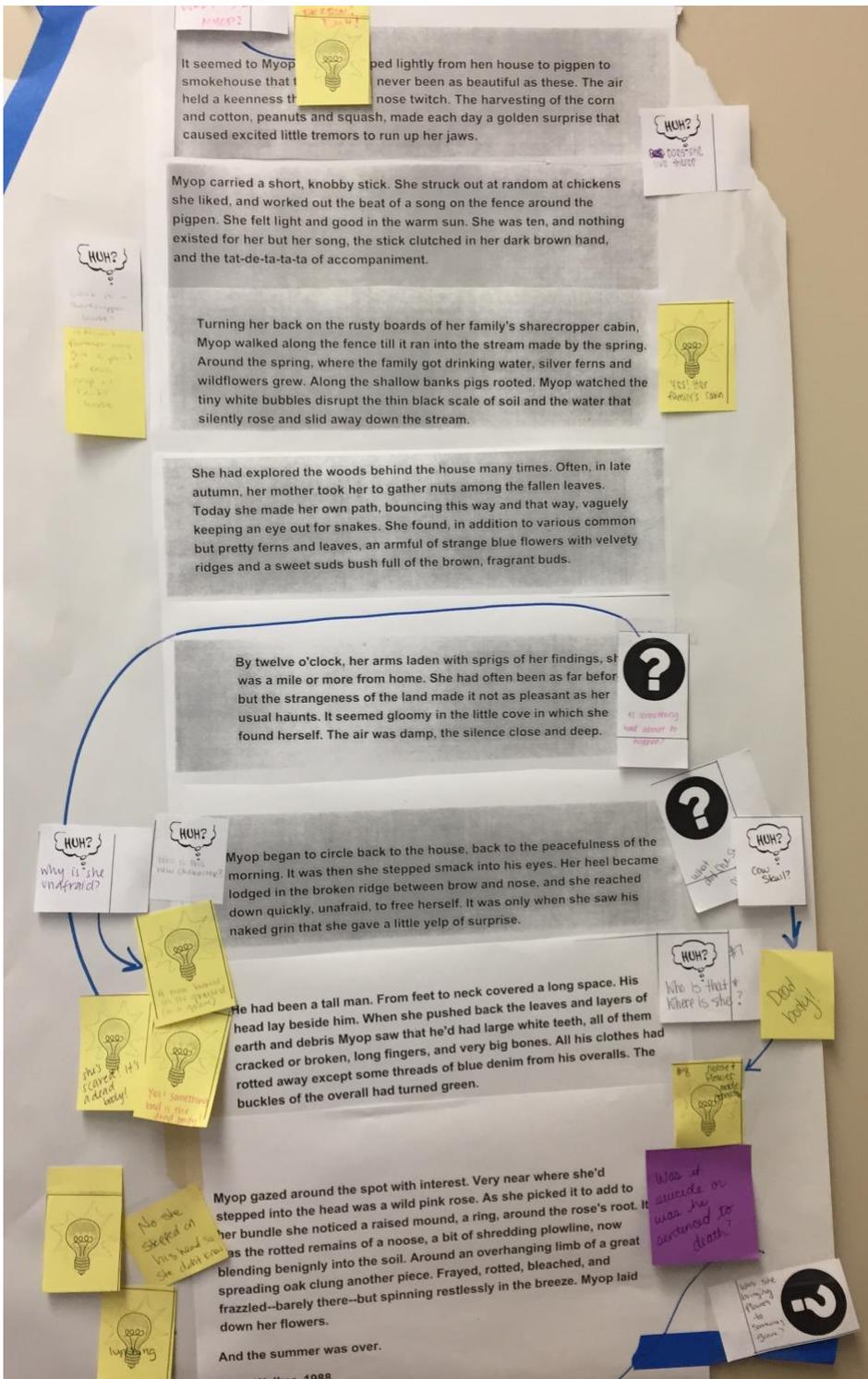


Figure 9. A photo of the chart paper conversation of question and answer seeking in “The Flowers.” Questions are identified with question mark notes, and answers and inferences are tagged with lightbulbs.