

Module: Reading

Lesson Title: Questioning the Author: Helping Students Comprehend Nonfiction Text

Objectives and Standards

Students will:

- Identify the author's purpose
- Recognize what the author expects the reader to know (background knowledge)
- Understand what the author is trying to say to the reader

Florida Adult Basic Education Reading Standards	Level Expectation
Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text. (Apply this standard to texts of appropriate complexity as outlined by Standard 10.) (CCR.RE.ABE.6)	NRS Level 3 - Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.

Materials

- Handout A: Workplace Rules
- Handout B: Sample Workplace Text
- Handout C: QtA Template
- Handout D: Sample Graphics and QtA Answers
- Sample documents from the workplace: letters, memos, emails, handbooks, policies, other nonfiction text

Instructional Plan

Overview

Questioning the Author (QtA) is a series of questions that students make about the text they are reading. The strategy of Questioning the Author focuses on the importance of students' active efforts to build meaning from what they read, and the need for students to grapple with ideas in a text. QtA helps students understand the big and important ideas in nonfiction texts by inviting them to pause after a tough sentence or passage, or at the end of a section or chapter, and use queries (questions) to think through the information.

In this lesson, students will use the QtA strategy with nonfiction texts used in the workplace or community helps students to see how they can use this skill in their lives.

Process

Prior to introducing the strategy to students, select a passage or a short nonfiction text that is written at the students' reading level and that your students will find interesting. After selecting the text to use, decide on the stopping points where you think students need to pause, think, and gain a deeper understanding of the text. Identify the questions/queries that you will use at each stopping point to

assist students in understanding the author's purpose and point-of-view. Sample workplace articles and graphics are provided in this lesson for your use.

Introduce the lesson by sharing with students that you will be demonstrating how a strategy called Questioning the Author works. Share that this reading strategy is important because it uses open-ended queries or questions to help build comprehension when reading. It helps to connect ideas between and among sentences, paragraphs, and even chapters and to link what a person reads to what the author is trying to say.

To use the QtA process, have students read a few sentences, a paragraph, or multiple paragraphs of the text (dependent on the text and the level of the students). Then have students answer the following five standard questions:

1. What is the author trying to tell you?
2. Why is the author telling you that?
3. Does the author say it clearly?
4. How could the author have said things more clearly?
5. What would you say instead?

Model for the students how they should read the passage and think through the queries. Share some immediate thoughts or ideas about the passage you have read and the questions that you have answered. Have students assist you in answering the questions.

Next, have students read a nonfiction passage that you have previously selected. Have students stop at designated points and have them answer each of the five standard questions. Keep in mind that the role of the teacher during this strategy is to facilitate the discussion and keep it moving among the students. If students ask questions that go unanswered, restate the question and encourage students to continue to investigate and work through the reading to determine the answer.

To help students get started with the process, you may wish to use **Handout A: Workplace Rules**. Have the students read the brief text. Working in groups of 3-4, have students answer each of the questions. Have students share their answers and concerns. Compare and contrast the students' responses to the last question.

Explain that this process can be used with any type of text. This process allows students to go beyond a literal to a more inferential meaning. As students work with more complex, technical text, you may wish to model your own thinking through using QtA with the text. Students should understand that everyone struggles to find meaning in text. However, with the right strategies students can make the process less time-consuming and frustrating.

Distribute **Handout B: Sample Workplace Text** and **Handout C: QtA Template**. Have students respond to the QtR questions. When all students have finished, pull the students into groups based on the text they questioned. Have students share their interpretations of the text.

Sample Debriefing Questions

- How does asking questions while you read assist you in better understanding the text?
- What was the easiest question to answer? The most difficult? Why?
- What is one example of a time when you needed to ask questions about what you read in your daily life? What questions did you ask?

Modifications for Different Levels

At a lower complexity level, teach the strategy by having students answer questions regarding graphics or signs, such as the sign on hand washing in **Handout D**. A sample graphic organizer with questions and sample answers are provided. At this level, you may wish to verbally ask students questions and have them answer orally rather than in writing.

At a more complex level of Questioning the Author, you may wish to use more complex types of questions, rather than the basic five questions used in the lesson. Because this strategy works best with nonfiction text, the level or readability of the text should match the student's reading skills. Sample social studies and science texts or excerpts are great readings with which to use this strategy.

Sample questions to have students ask the author, include:

Initiating Questions/Queries (to get the discussion started)

- What is the author trying to say?
- Does this make sense to you?
- What do you think the author wants us to know?
- What is the author talking about?
- What is the important message in this section?

Follow-Up Questions/Queries

- So what did the author mean right here?
- That's what the author said, but what did the author mean?
- Why do you think the author chose to use this phrase or wording in this specific spot?
- Did the author explain this clearly?
- Did the author tell us why?
- What does the author want me to understand from these details? This information?
- Why do you think the author tells us this now?

Assessments/Extensions

Many employers provide new hires with an employee handbook that outlines benefits, policies, and general company information. However, many new employees never read their company's handbook. Therefore, they don't have a clear understanding of company policy, except for what they learn from co-workers. Have students bring in their employee handbooks and use the QtA to analyze the information and what is expected of them in the workplace.

Provide students with a policy from your school district, community college, or agency. You may wish to select one that deals with sick leave, family leave, employee benefits or whatever you believe will be of most interest to your students. Have them read the policy and complete a QtA. Discuss their findings.

Handout A: Workplace Rules

<p>Each employee of the Sanders Department Store must perform his/her duties in a professional manner. All employees must treat customers in a professional and courteous manner. All employees must speak respectfully and professionally at all times. Employees must never argue with a customer. While it is important that employees be friendly, employees must not cross the line by flirting or making inappropriate advances to a customer. Employees who fail to follow store policy will face possible consequences including termination of employment.</p>	
<p>What is the author trying to tell you?</p>	
<p>Why is the author telling you that?</p>	
<p>Does the author say it clearly?</p>	
<p>How could the author have said things more clearly?</p>	
<p>What would you have said instead?</p>	

Who was the author of this text? _____

Handout B: Safety Alert

Sample 1

Safety Alert

In recent months, more customers are exhibiting extreme behavior toward ticket agents. The airport authority has taken steps to ensure the safety of ticket agents confronted by angry customers, including posting additional security officers. Please cooperate with our efforts by following these instructions:

1. Don't panic when confronted by an angry customer. Maintain a calm voice and non-threatening body language.
2. If the agitated customer persists, tell him/her: "Let me contact my supervisor to help you." Be sure to use a sincere and kind tone. Do not talk down to the customer because the customer is likely to become more agitated.
3. If working at an isolated gate, always keep another employee with you. If no one from your airline is available, contact security for back-up coverage.
4. If a flyer's angry behavior continues to escalate, push the silent alarm. If you suspect a weapon, push the alarm immediately.

Sample 2

Allied Technologies Drug Policy

Workers should be aware that using a controlled substance during off-work hours may affect performance on the job. Drug usage during off-work time may result in disciplinary action, including termination. Use of any controlled substance in the workplace and/or during work hours will not be tolerated. Any worker found to be using a controlled substance in the workplace and/or during work hours will be terminated.

If job performance or behavior indicates drug abuse, Allied will immediately initiate a drug test. This is required by the Department of Defense and by Allied. Such drug test is mandatory for all workers. Refusal to submit to a drug test is cause for disciplinary action, including termination.

Disciplinary actions include temporary suspensions, probation, or termination. Participation in a treatment plan may be required. Non-completion of a mandatory rehabilitation program will result in termination. If a worker violates Allied's drug policy more than once, that worker will be terminated immediately.

Handout C: QtA Template

What is the author trying to tell you?	
Why is the author telling you that?	
Does the author say it clearly?	
How could the author have said things more clearly?	
What would you have said instead?	

Who was the author of this text? _____

Handout D: Signs



Signs: QtA and Sample Answers

Questioning the Author	Sample Answers from Students
What is the author trying to tell you?	The author is telling me that I must be clean before I can work at my job; in particular, I have to wash my hands whether I'm just starting work or if I've just been to the bathroom.
Why is the author telling you that?	I think it has to do with who the author is. Maybe it's the Health Department who makes the rules for restaurants. Maybe it's the owner of the restaurant who doesn't want people to get sick because employees should have clean hands before they handle food or dishes.
Is it said (shown) clearly?	It seems pretty clear except it doesn't say why I should wash my hands.
How could the author have said things more clearly?	Maybe the author should have said that a person needs to wash their hands with hot water and why it is important to always wash your hands.
What would you have said instead?	"Please don't make me eat your germs. Wash your hands before touching my food!"