

Entirely missing from this question set is anything related to craft and structure (Standards 4–6) and integration of knowledge and ideas (Standards 7–9)—areas that are so often neglected, as the developers of the standards acknowledge. I would probe 3rd graders' thinking with questions like these:

- In these chapters, the author repeats a few phrases, like, "My daddy was a rich man, a very rich man." Why does the author do this? Find more repeated phrases. What effect do these have on the meaning of the story? (Standard 4: the use of language)
- In Chapter 7, Miss Franny Block tells Opal the story of the bear from long ago. Why do you think the author stops the action of the story to go back in time like this? What might not have happened if Franny Block hadn't told this story? (Standard 5: text structure)
- What is Franny Block's point of view about Winn-Dixie by the end of Chapter 7? What is the evidence? Where does her point of view change? (Standard 6: point of view)

Questions related to the integration of knowledge and ideas might be better posed later in the book, after students have digested more of the text's content. But the craft and structure questions I've suggested could be asked at any time—and they get much closer to the range of rigor to which the Common Core standards aspire.

The final, most compelling reason I don't care for the Student Achievement Partners questions is that although they teach the reading—the content of the text—there's no attempt to teach the reader strategies by which that reader can pursue meaning independently, yes independently (notice my repetition for emphasis modeled after *Because of Winn-Dixie*).

Teach Students to Ask the Questions

Teaching is about transfer. The goal is for students to take what they learn from the study of one text and apply it to the next text they read. If all we're doing is asking questions about *Winn-Dixie*, readers will probably have a solid understanding of that book by the last page—certainly an important goal. But those questions, even the ones I posed, don't inform the study of subsequent books.

How can we ensure that students both reap the requisite knowledge from each text they read and acquire skills to pursue the meaning of other texts independently? I suggest we coach students to ask themselves four basic questions as they reflect on a specific portion of any text, even the shortest:

- What is the author *telling* me here?
- Are there any hard or important *words*?
- What does the author want me to *understand*?
- How does the author play with *language* to add to meaning?

If students take time to ask themselves these questions while reading and become skillful at answering them, there'll be less need for the teacher to do all the asking. For this to happen, we must develop students' capacity to observe and analyze.

Focus on Observing and Analyzing

First things first: See whether students have noticed the details of a passage and can recount those details in their own words. Note that the challenge here isn't to be brief (as in a summary); it's to be accurate, precise, and clear.

The recent focus on finding evidence in a text has sent students (even in primary grades) scurrying back to their books to retrieve a quote that validates their opinion. But to paraphrase what that quote means in a student's own language, rather than the author's, is more difficult than you might think. Try it with any paragraph. Expressing the same meaning with different words often requires going back to that text a few times to get the details just right.

Paraphrasing is pretty low on Bloom's continuum of lower- to higher-order thinking, yet many students stumble even here. This is the first stop along the journey to close reading. If students can't paraphrase the basic content of a passage, how can they dig for its deeper meaning? The second basic question about hard or important words encourages students to zoom in on precise meaning.

When students are satisfied that they have a basic grasp of what the author is telling them, they're ready to move on to analyzing the fine points of content. If students begin their analysis by asking themselves the third question—What does the author want me to understand in this passage?—they'll be on their way to making appropriate inferences, determining what the author is trying to show without stating it directly. We might encourage students to ask themselves questions like these:

- Who is speaking in the passage?
- Who seems to be the main audience? (To whom is the narrator speaking?)
- What is the first thing that jumps out at me? Why?
- What's the next thing I notice? Are these two things connected? How? Do they seem to be saying *different* things?
- What seems important here? Why?
- What does the author mean by _____? What exact words lead me to this meaning?
- Is the author trying to convince me of something? What? How do I know?
- Is there something missing from this passage that I expected to find? Why might the author have left this out?
- Is there anything that could have been explained more thoroughly for greater clarity?