



Theorizing in the Middle

Presented by:

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8th Grade ELA, Yorkville Middle School

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TOSA, Yorkville CUSD #115

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Who We Are

Jeanne Deichmueller

- Studied Elementary Education at Purdue University at the Calumet Campus
- This is my sixth year teaching 8th grade Language Arts at Yorkville Middle School
- Completed clinicals at various schools in Northwest Indiana and student teaching at Nathan Hale Elementary School
- Endorsed to teach language arts, social studies and math at the middle school level

Meghan Kerr

- Studied English Education at ISU
- Taught 8th grade Language Arts for nine years at Yorkville Middle School
- Completed all clinicals and year-long student teaching at University High School
- Currently - Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) in Yorkville CUSD #115

Background of Advanced LA at YMS

- Started as separate Advanced Reading & Advanced Writing
- Informally blocked the classes with co-teacher
- Morphed into a Language Arts block in 2013-2014 school year
 - 84 minutes, every day
 - 75 students per teacher
- Students are placed based on MAP scores, teacher recommendation, and personal choice.



Why Lit Crit?

- Wanted to add an element of challenge for the 8th graders
- Was a favorite topic of the teachers
- Prepare students for high school and beyond

ACHIEVE THE CORE

Common Core Shifts for English Language Arts/Literacy

1. Regular practice with **complex text** and its **academic language**

Rather than focusing solely on the skills of reading and writing, the Standards highlight the growing complexity of the texts students must read to be ready for the demands of college and careers. The Standards build a staircase of text complexity so that all students are ready for the demands of college- and career-level reading no later than the end of high school. Closely related to text complexity—and inextricably connected to reading comprehension—is a focus on academic vocabulary: words that appear in a variety of content areas (such as *ignite* and *commit*).

2. Reading, writing and speaking grounded in **evidence from text**, both literary and informational

The Standards place a premium on students writing to sources, i.e., using evidence from texts to present careful analyses, well-defended claims, and clear information. Rather than asking students questions they can answer solely from their prior knowledge or experience, the Standards expect students to answer questions that depend on their having read the text or texts with care. The Standards also require the cultivation of narrative writing throughout the grades, and in later grades a command of sequence and detail will be essential for effective argumentative and informational writing.

Likewise, the reading standards focus on students' ability to read carefully and grasp information, arguments, ideas and details based on text evidence. Students should be able to answer a range of *text-dependent* questions, questions in which the answers require inferences based on careful attention to the text.

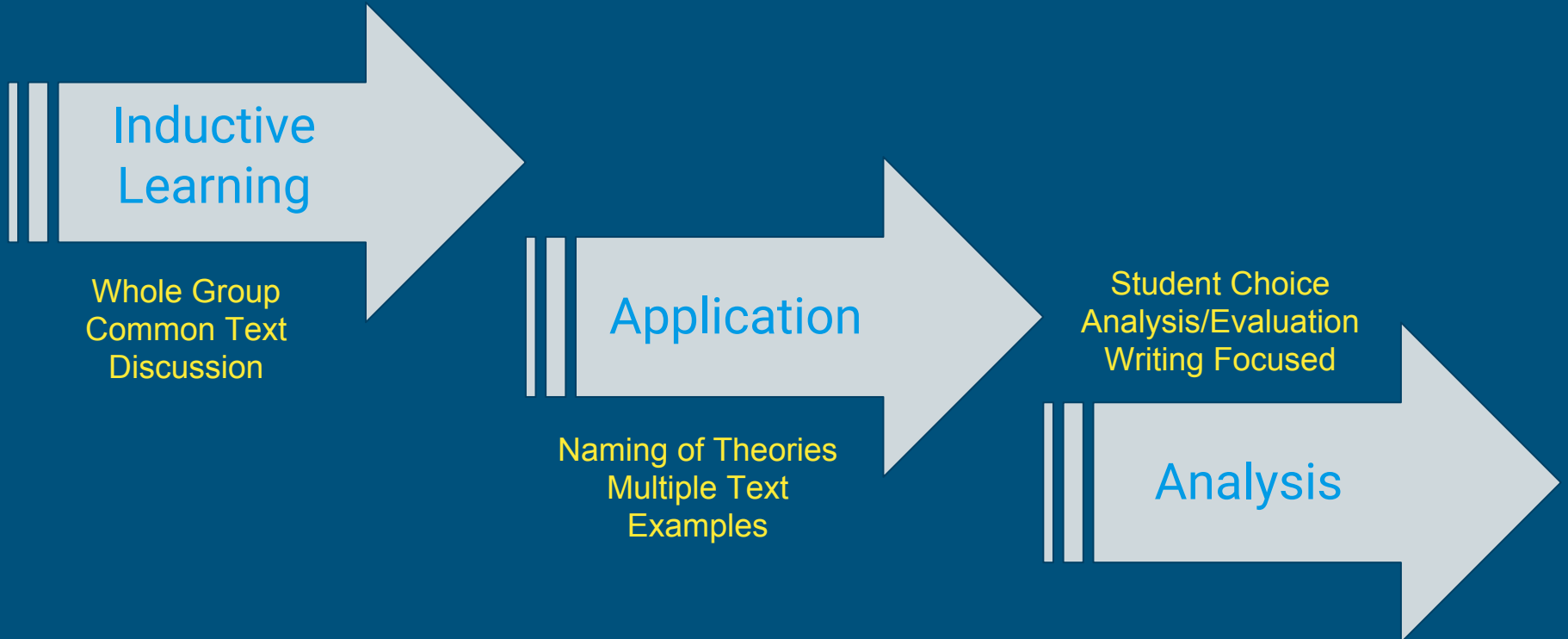
3. **Building knowledge** through **content-rich nonfiction**

Building knowledge through content rich nonfiction plays an essential role in literacy and in the Standards. In K–5, fulfilling the standards requires a 50–50 balance between informational and literary reading. Informational reading primarily includes content rich nonfiction in history/social studies, science and the arts; the K–5 Standards strongly recommend that students build coherent general knowledge both within each year and across years. In 6–12, ELA classes place much greater attention to a specific category of informational text—literary nonfiction—than has been traditional. In grades 6–12, the Standards for literacy in history/social studies, science and technical subjects ensure that students can independently build knowledge in these disciplines through reading and writing.

The Common Core Shifts at a Glance, achievethecore.org

The process

Unit Timeline - Roughly four weeks



- Whole class watches a common text
- Uses guided notes to “annotate” while watching

Step 1

Inductive Learning

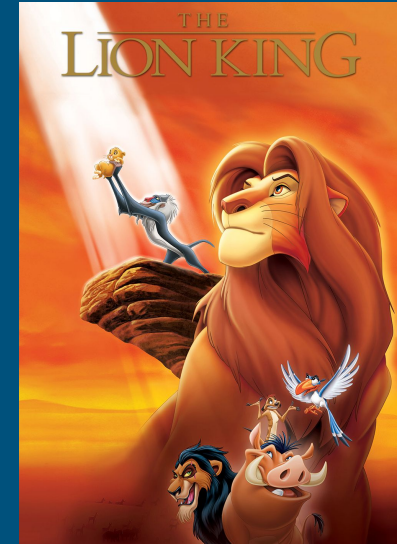
Rank the following characters according to social class/status. (1=High → 10=Low)

Hyenas Timon Scar
 Simba Nala Pumbaa
 Zazu Rafiki
 Mufasa Sarabi (Simba's Mother)

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HIGH CLASS	CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LOW CLASS

Question the Text: Think about what is happening below the surface of a cute-cartoon movie. As you look over your notes, pose two discussion questions about the characters, plot or producers etc. (Refer to the 'creating good questions' notes based on Webb's Depth of Knowledge.)

[Scar & Mufasa](#) Video Clip



Step 1

Inductive Learning

“What did you notice?”

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Students then discuss the patterns, themes, or ideas that they notice across the notes and movie.

These observations are put around the room to validate and show commonalities.

### Common Observations<sup>J</sup>

1. Where Scar lives is always dark.
2. The female lions don't seem to do much..
3. The hyenas are helping Scar only because they are always at the bottom and want to be in a better place.
4. Simba is really concerned about how he looks to his dad.

## Introduction of Literary Theory

- Give background info
- Examples all tie back to *The Lion King*
- Always go back to guided notes and previous class discussion

## Theories Covered

Deconstruction

Archetypal

Psychoanalysis

Marxist

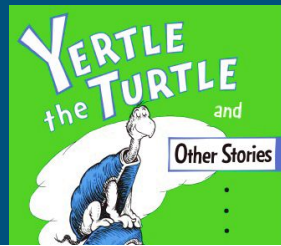
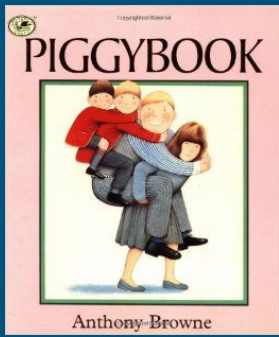
Gender

Moral

## Step 2

Application





**The Right to Read**

At your station, you have a copy of a book that was on the 2012-2013 Most Challenged Books list. What does it mean when a book is on this list? According to the American Library Association, "A challenge is an attempt to remove or restrict materials, based upon the objections of a person or group. A banning is the removal of those materials. Challenges do not simply involve a person expressing a point of view; rather, they are an attempt to remove material from the curriculum or library, thereby restricting the access of others."

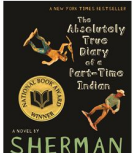

To continue, the American Library Association also says, "Often challenges are motivated by a desire to protect children from 'inappropriate' sexual content or 'offensive' language. The following were the top three reasons cited for challenging materials as reported to the Office of Intellectual Freedom:

1. the material was considered to be "sexually explicit"
2. the material contained "offensive language"
3. the materials was "unsuited to any age group!"

Look at the book at your station, and the rationale for its challenge, and discuss the main reasons your group believes this book was challenged. Once your group has discussed the reasons for the book's inclusion on the list, summarize, in list format, on your chart paper the rationale for challenging this book and be prepared to share this with the class.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian, Sherman Alexie

Challenged as required reading in at least three freshmen English classes at Westfield, N.J. High School (2012) because of "some very sensitive material in the book including excerpts on masturbation amongst other explicit sexual references, encouraging pornography, racism, religious references, and strong language (including the F- and n-words)." Challenged at the West Valley School District in Indiana, (2013) because some parents found the sexual references and profanity in the novel inappropriate for high school students.



## Practice Applying Theories to New Texts

- Group activities
- Whole class activities
- Usually picture books

### WHERE THE WILD THINGS



STORY AND PICTURES BY MAURICE SENDAK

# Step 2

## Application

# Students choose a text from approved list to analyze

- Primarily children's books
- All are texts that we are familiar with

Psychoanalytical Theory  
Archetypal Theory  
Traits/buzzwords of the theory

## Lit. Crit. Sample Outline *The Dark Knight*- Model Analysis

- I. Introduction
  - a. Hook/Attention Grabber
  - b. Introductory Transition
  - c. Thesis: "Warner Brothers' *The Dark Knight*, one of Batman's latest legacies, illustrates how **childhood experiences greatly shape later life**, as **Batman and Joker show a classic hero versus villain relationship.**"
- II. Body paragraph: **Batman's childhood experiences**
  - a. Witnesses parents' death
    - i. Event causes him to take vengeance on low life thugs like the ones that took the lives of his parents **(way of avenging parents' deaths)**
    - ii. **Atonement of Father**
  - b. Bruce as a young boy, hundreds of bats swarmed him
    - i. **Scars him for life**
    - ii. Embraces his fear to become Batman
- III. Body paragraph: **Joker the psychopath caused by childhood experiences and identity confusion**
  - a. Scars emphasized by his makeup
    - i. Scars caused in childhood by drunken father
    - ii. Scars inflicted by himself out of sympathy for wife
    - iii. Lies about scars so that no one knows where he came from or anything about his past.
  - b. No **true identity**
    - i. Joker arrested, police cannot find any information on his background
    - ii. Joker makes up stories because even he doesn't want to know his **true identity**
    - iii. No **true identity**-he can be what he wants like a Joker
- IV. **Batman the dark hero/protagonist**
  - a. Relies on **special weapons** of advanced technology (bat mobile, bat cave)
  - b. Does much damage as a result of his fight against crime (city property, fighting police, breaking all road violations)
  - c. Seen as a menace to Gotham City by its citizens

Psychoanalytical Theory  
Archetypal Theory  
Traits/buzzwords of the theory

- V. **Joker's the villain/antagonist**
  - a. **Ideology**: Chaos and power
  - b. **Evil**- enjoys killing
  - c. **Very intelligent**- Crimes planned out meticulously
  - d. Speech (direct quote) on society's plan killing a gang/banger or enemy's soldiers; killing on mayor
- VI. Body Paragraph: **Power struggle between hero and villain (good vs. evil)**
  - a. Joker
    - i. Joker Challenging Batman
    - ii. Joker really "loves" Batman
    - iii. Trying to find out who is under the mask
  - b. Batman
    - i. Batman conquering Joker
    - ii. Saving Joker's life at the end—cannot bring himself to kill him
    - iii. Batman being blamed for all of Gotham's hardships—becoming the **dark hero**
- VII. **Batman and Joker's relationship**
  - a. Both could never kill the other- stitched into each other's lives
  - b. Direct quote- Joker says you won't kill me out of some misplaced sense of self-righteousness
  - c. Direct quote- Joker says I won't kill you because you are just too much fun. I think you and I are destined to do this forever.
- VIII. Conclusion
  - a. Restate thesis
  - b. Analysis
    - i. Complete each other's life.
    - ii. **Childhood experiences** shaping their lives.
    - iii. Not being afraid of standing up for what they believe

# Step 3

## Analysis & Writing

# Results & Reflections

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- WOW!
- Amazing insights from 8th grade students
- Excitement for literature and the English Studies
  
- This unit, while challenging, is beneficial to do at the beginning of the year
- Scaffolding is a DEFINITE MUST
- Workshop Model is ideal for conferencing

Questions?

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