# AUTHENTIC QUESTIONING AS A FORM OF INQUIRY: WRITING IN THE DIALOGIC CLASSROOM

**Eamon Cunningham**

As a student, I loved the readings in my English classes—from Plato to Postmodernism—even before I had much of a clue about what these writers really meant. It's taken ten years on the other side of the desk to understand something a teacher of mine once told me a long time ago: "If you think you have everything figured out on the first reading, something must be wrong. Either you are not reading good writing, or you are not reading carefully enough." As a student, I was too often taken by the hand to the "right" answer, thinking in ways that had been mapped out for me, and writing in ways that did little for my own curiosity and sense of investigation. It was only when I began teaching and designing my own assignments that I began to read, write, and think differently. For the first time, I felt that I had the authority to question, challenge, and expand on not only the texts from class, but also my own writing and thinking: where my responses came from, the process by which I constructed knowledge, and how these processes might be expanded, intensified, or challenged. Reading and writing turned from a matter of coming up with answers to questions about a text to learning what type of questions needed to be asked in the first place. "Is it possible to replicate this essential experience I had as a teacher/reader for my students by letting them construct the lines of inquiry *they* wish to pursue for a text?" I wondered. Over the last few years, I have put this question to the test in my classroom.

Composition theory, while grounded in empirical research and sound practice, is a double-edged sword for teachers of writing. On one hand, theory provides the paradigms and methods to understand

*how* one reads, *how* one builds knowledge, and *how* one makes sense of the mélange of ideas right before pen is put to paper. On the other hand, there is often a gap between the teaching of writing as conjectured by theorists and its actual practice. This gap is often filled by eager teachers' expostulations that seldom work to change students' ideas about themselves as writers. The further that practice drifts away from sound theory, the less likely it is that students will ever realize themselves as having a writerly identity. And while there is no single solution to the range of difficulties that students face in composition classrooms, deep reading—including deliberate work by students to form their own questions around a cluster of readings—is one way that students can begin to discover how inquiry leads to the construction of knowledge. In doing so, the composition classroom becomes a place where *learning how to know* assumes greater importance than *conveying what is known* (Farmer 16). What I propose is an approach to reading and writing that shifts away from class routines "where boundaries seem pre-set and whose work as a result too often consists almost entirely of teacher talk, discrete assignments, and individual assessments" (Roskelly 24). Instead, this approach privileges critical writing models as the focal point of student work where students construct, or co-construct, the lines of inquiry for a text. A scene from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* will be used as the running example in this article, but this process can be just as easily applied to historical documents, informational texts, essays, speeches, and various other forms of print and digital media found in high school and college classrooms. For a complete narrative of this process in action, please consult this article's appendix. Teachers may prefer to implement these strategies gradually—say, using Step One as an auxiliary activity to add focus and dimension to a class discussion—or go at it wholesale and utilize these steps as the super-structure of a course's entire writing program. Whatever the choice, if classroom teachers decide to challenge themselves and give it a go, these methods can be a useful tool in getting students to read with a writer's eye and write with a reader's sensibility about the

complex texts found in high school, college, and work environments.

This approach draws from the body of research around Writing-to-Learn (WTL) and dialogism (Peter Elbow, Joseph Harris, Julie Christoph, Martin Nystrand, and Paul Hielker, among others) as well as "the interactive pedagogy of Paulo Freire, the learning theory taught by Leo Vygostky, and the dynamic nature of interpretation outlined by Louise Rosenblatt into the framework of a classroom" (Roskelly 23-24). Teachers need not be familiar with these theorists to enact the approach's main drive: to introduce students to the inquiry process by having them take on the imagined role of question writer where they will construct a set of questions in response to a text, provide answers to those questions, and vet these inquiries through their peers in order to have a deeper understanding of how the source text works, its internal logic and governing ideas. What's also at stake here is how WTL—a mode of discourse that is traditionally underemphasized in many English classrooms—lets students meaningfully interact with a text while not assuming a falsely authoritative voice that plagues far too many Writing-to-Show-Learning (WTSL) or summative assignment compositions. Some teachers adhere to the notion that the more formal writing students are doing, the better. But the approach of writing described in this article addresses a slightly different issue: "Do students need more writing, or do they need better assignments?" (Zemelman and Daniels 73). Of course, formal writing has a defined space in composition classrooms, but undergirding these formative assessments with regularly occurring "self-sponsored" (WTL) compositions is one way to purposefully harness the power of informal writing as a scaffold to more formal writing projects (Zemelman and Daniels 71-73). To get here, three things need to happen. First, students need to learn the characteristics of an "authentic question;" second, students need to apply these authentic questions in the persona of assignment designer, the producer (rather than the recipient) of the inquiry; third, students need to transfer the learning from these WTL exercises to WTSL compositions, thus closing the loop in the WTL-WTSL continuum.

By using the processes described herein, "we end up teaching texts, teaching readers, and teaching writers simultaneously" (Goldschmidt 64).

For teachers, especially those with struggling readers, the question now becomes, "How can I get students to engage with a text in complex and sophisticated ways without force-feeding the important points?" Mary Goldschmidt's "Marginalia: Teaching Texts, Teaching Readers, Teaching Writers"—from which the term "authentic question" is drawn—is the foundational methodology upon which the approach to reading detailed in this article rests. Goldschmidt makes the case that "rhetorical" (Haas and Flower), "introspective" (Salvatori), or "practice-based" (Adler-Kassner and Estrem) reading strategies "[have] been an important undercurrent in the past three decades of composition scholarship" (Goldschmidt 51). Though most composition scholars agree about the fluid relationship between reading and writing, "it is precisely our own already-automatized expertise in reading that can often be the cause of our frustration with students, since we expect students to read *the way we read*" (Goldschmidt 57). She advocates teaching students to become "meta-readers," self-conscious, rhetorical readers who demonstrate the "very kinds of critical reading habits that [instructors] routinely use but too infrequently verbalize or model except through the kinds of questions we ask in class" (Goldschmidt 58). To launch this transformation, she suggests that as students read, they should keep marginal notes—"marginalia"—with four categories in mind: comprehension notes, interactive/ evaluative notes, rhetorical notes, and extending notes (Goldschmidt 66-67). As the titles of the notations indicate, Goldschmidt's system compartmentalizes these notes into "types" which are both multi-dimensional (reading with different purposes in mind) and scaffolded (where comprehension leads to evaluation, which leads to extension, which leads to rhetorical analysis). The virtue of these categories is just how straightforward and practical they are for helping student readers make clear distinctions between explicit, inferential, and synthetic observations of a text, while keeping things low-stakes, informal, and in the WTL realm.

Figure 1 lays out an adaptation of Goldschmidt's theory, which can be scaled up or down depending on student ability.

Students will likely need a few dry-runs before this process takes, but once some degree of confidence is attained, the imagined role of question writer can begin. Here, students will be the makers (and answerers) of their own close reading assignments and develop their early observations from the marginalia activity. Students will work within an easy-to-follow, four-step process to develop their questions from the ground up. Each stage is detailed under the subheadings below, along with an explanation of how these stages can be accomplished, and why we should do them at all.

## Step One: Identify the Key Ideas of the Text to Give Direction

As in any good reverse engineering or "backwards design" process, students should start by explicitly identifying their key insights into a text by writing a "significant statement," an idea that follows designs from David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky's *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts*. Significant statements are not merely a one-line precis or summary. Rather, this is an exercise that gets students thinking in rhetorical terms by asking them to consider how the main elements of written discourse—the author, the audience, the text itself—affect the way a reader makes meaning from a text (see Figure 2). Advanced students may not need much intervention here, but for struggling readers, some focused scaffolding may be in order, such as pre-teaching some paratextual information to help students to read with more focus and purpose. There's any number of places the teacher could nudge a student towards as a starting point. Notice that Shakespeare's troubled marriage to Anne Hathaway somehow underwrites the dynamics between the Macbeths? Start there. Wonder how Shakespeare's primary audience would understand this scene in live performance differently than a twenty-first century, mediated presentation? Start there. See that Lady Macbeth buries her intentions under thick layers of metaphor and analogy? Start there.

| Read the assigned text, and as you read, rather than highlighting or underlining, write notes in the margins. Since the text is sufficiently ambiguous enough to invite many interpretations, make sure that you do at least two types of “marginalia” for each category. You’ll want to revisit the text at least once for each note “type;” that is, read once for comprehension, a second for interactive/evaluative concerns, a third for extending observation, and a fourth for rhetorical analysis. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| On a first read, make | On a second read, using your comprehension notes make | On a third read, using your comprehension and interactive/evaluative notes make | On a fourth read, using your comprehension and interactive/evaluative, and extending notes make |
| **Comprehension Notes** are marginal comments that *summarize or paraphrase*: | **Interactive/ Evaluative Notes** are marginal comments that *question, analyze, criticize, praise, agree or disagree* with: | **Extending Notes** are marginal comments that *go beyond the text* and: | **Rhetorical Notes** are marginal comments that *examine*: |
| - The main argument/thesis<br>- A new point<br>- An example<br>- Evidence used as a sub-point<br>- Why the passage is important<br>- A contradiction | - The author’s idea(s)<br>- The author’s logic, examples, or evidence<br>- The author’s analysis<br>- The author’s assumptions<br>- The author’s methodology | - Offer an alternative explanation<br>- Offer additional or contradictory evidence<br>- Pose new questions<br>- React emotionally to the author’s style, tone, or substance<br>- Make a connection with your extra-textual knowledge (experience) | - How the author attends to, or fails to attend to, the reader’s needs<br>- The effectiveness of how the author responds to other scholars in the field or perspectives on the issue<br>- The scope of the author’s knowledge on the issue<br>- How the author establishes or undermines his/her own (or a character’s) credibility<br>- The author’s implied political stance or ideological grounding |

Figure 1: Marginalia Exercise for Student Readers

No reader can find everything in a text, but every reader can find one thing, and sometimes that's all it takes to get things going in the right direction. Significant statements provide focus to analysis, but more importantly, give space for students to ground their analysis in what they have found intriguing in a text. Teachers may need to nudge a bit, but once students connect with the text via their interests, the insights will unravel right along (Carter and Gradin 7). Since most good writing can address several of these concerns at once, students need not feel that they have to find the "right" direction. By having students respond in this way, passages that were silent now suddenly speak and each line of questioning allows a reader's wavering attention to be renamed and given priority as an act of attention (Bartholomae and Petrosky 21-22).

**Difficulties to Anticipate in Step One**

In Act III, scene iii of *Hamlet*, Claudius—overrun by his conflicting feelings of guilt and ambition—says, "I stand in pause where I shall first begin and both neglect," and students may feel similarly overwhelmed as they put pen to paper in this first step. Like any journey into an undiscovered country, my students who have shied away from Step One do so because they are intimidated by its new terminology and unfamiliar stances towards a text. If this is the case, it may be worthwhile to reframe what Step One is trying to do in terms of "prewriting," a familiar schema for most students who've been through other English courses. Because this step is interested in getting initial impressions down on paper, remind students that "not paying attention to your personal reactions may lead you to feel disconnected from the communication going on—as though some other people were arguing about something that you had no interest in" (Bazerman 119). To make explicit what you think about things *is* to involve yourself with the ongoing dialogue surrounding the issue. After reading, consider nudging students by asking, "How did you react?", "Why do feel that way?", "Did you react that way because of some experience in your life?", "Did you react that way from something you've learned in school?" Find out where students are coming from and pose a similar line of questioning to the one above

to encourage students that they will eventually find a way into the text.

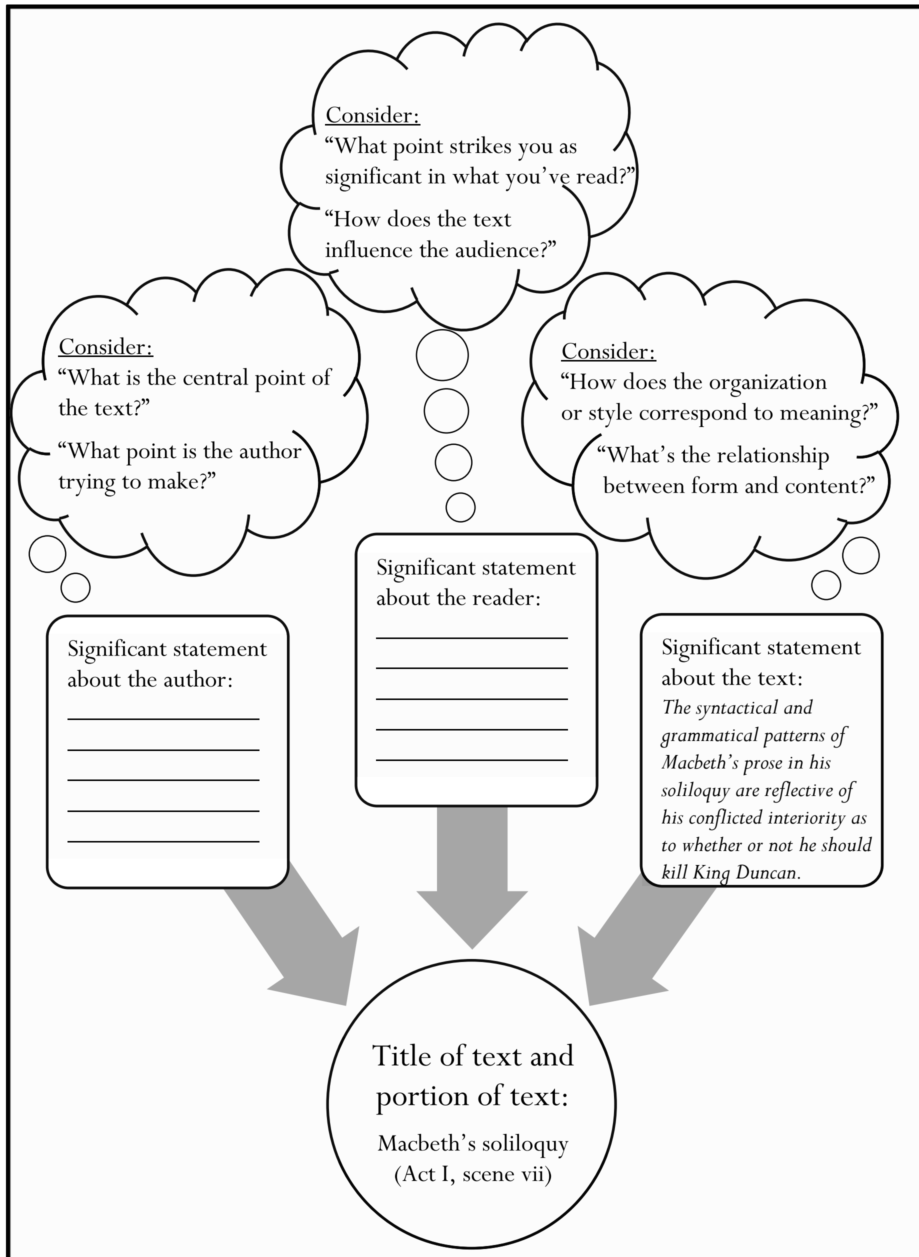



Figure 2: Significant Statement Exercise for *Macbeth* (Act I, scene vii)

## Step Two: Choose Passages to Focus On

Once students have clarified a text's "significant statement," they should hone in on specific lines and passages to expand upon these initial reactions. Having the student—not the teacher—select the important passages is the objective of this stage. By linking quotes to the insight generated from the significant statement (see Figure 3), students are doing what I would call "Quoting-to-Learn" since the quotes students choose should tell the teacher something about the way students have oriented themselves towards what can be extrapolated from the "significant statement." Most students tend to associate quotes with arcane rules of punctuation, citation, and integration, but quotations can't, and shouldn't, always be reduced to a simple matter of rules (Harris 28).

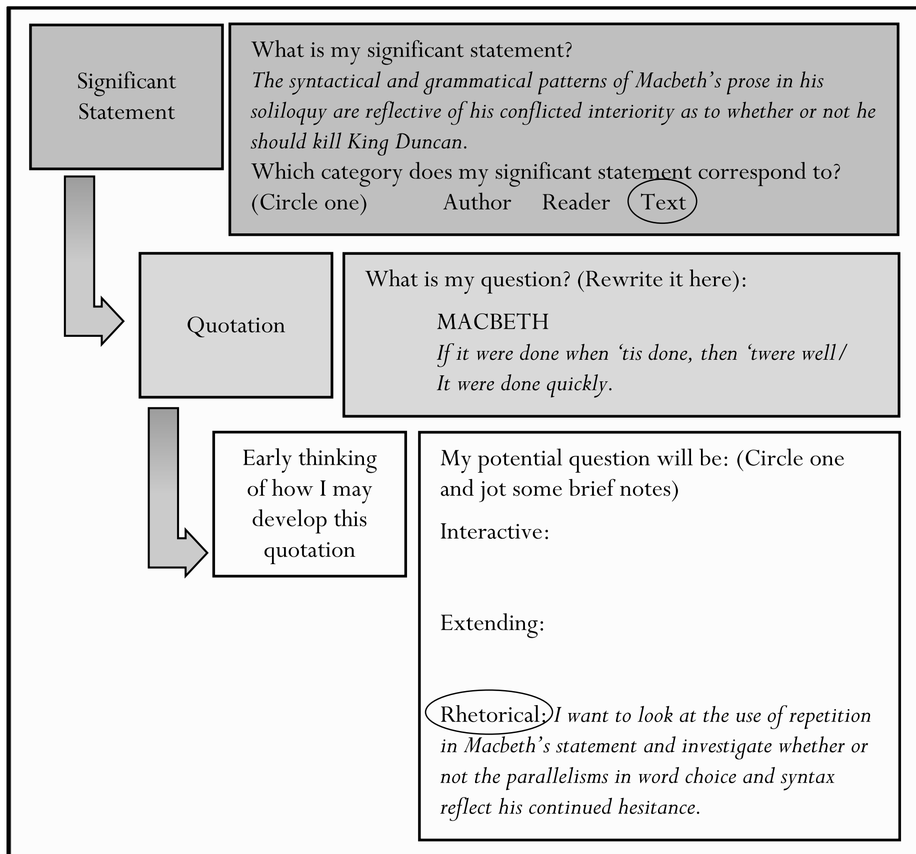



Figure 3: Quote Selection Exercise for *Macbeth* (Act I, scene vii)

The quotes students choose, then, are essential to their developing inquiry since "quotation is the very act in which one voice creatively absorbs another and defines it in relation to that second voice. When we interrupt the quoted text, interrogate it, clarify its point, or expose its ambiguities, we make an opening for our own utterances and give it shape to our own roles in the conversation" (Bialostosky 18). Students likely discover meanings or allusions that other readers have missed—it happens all the time—and such a perception of oneself as a reader is empowering and contributes to how students may make up their mind about the text they hold in their hands.[1]

**Difficulties to Anticipate in Step Two**

Quoting is the salt and pepper of composition, and it's possible that teachers may become easily frustrated when students are reticent to work with quotes in the varied ways that Step Two calls for. I've found that many composition students tend to have a one-track mind when it comes to quotes, thinking of them as little more than backup for what's said in the paper and unable to work outside this paradigm. Since the handling of quotes in this process has only partly to do with quotes-as-proof models, not knowing other ways of how quotes can be put to use is a common roadblock. Perhaps encourage students to think of the quotes as a process of "recirculating the author's writing, highlighting parts of the texts for the consideration of others" (Harris 36) as a way to put a personal stamp on the ideas presented in the text. If more concrete intervention is required, perhaps suggest that students read the passage several times, each time with a different purpose in mind (Block and Duffy), as seen in Figure 4.

| Strategy: | Question to pose to struggling student: |
| --- | --- |
| Predict | Were there any places in the reading where you thought the author was trying to foreshadow something? Did this come true? If it did, what tipped you off? If it didn't, why do you think the author made these suggestions of purpose? |

| | |
|---|---|
| Monitor | Were there places in the reading that were more difficult to understand than others? Why may the author have written that portion in a dense or tough-to-understand style? |
| Image | Were there any passages that were rich in imagery? What were the images that came to your mind? Can you connect these images to other places in the text? |
| Infer | Were there places in the reading that you understood because of your prior knowledge on the topic? Was it an allusion? A reference to a fact or anecdote? Do you think the author assumes the reader will know it? |
| Evaluate | Were there places in the reading that you made a judgement about? Do you think the author wants the reader to take a moral stance? Are they suggesting something here about the larger takeaways for the reader? |
| Synthesize | Were there places in the reading that you connected to things outside of the reading? How did this connection add depth and dimension to your understanding of the passage? |

Figure 4: Suggestions for Struggling Readers on How to Choose Purposeful Questions

## Step Three: Compose the Questions

Once students have selected a pool of quotes that link up to their significant statement, the real explication of the text can begin. Students, here, will formalize their inquiry of the text in the persona of an assessment designer tasked with developing a close-reading assignment that focuses on their selected passage. This imagined persona is certainly a bit odd, but its purpose is to help students break with the surface-level, and often predictable, handling of quotes reinforced by most standard WTSL compositions. Such a style of inquiry asks that students self-consciously identify and internalize the moves they have made while reading that will, in turn, help them to become more intentional, rhetorical readers (Goldschmidt 59). While students will certainly be encouraged to throw their thoughts and experiences into the mix as they write their questions, they should adhere to some general

guidelines as they put pen to paper. Each question they write should have two parts: a "where-in-the-text-do-I-see-this" part that ties the question to the text and a "why-does-this-observation-matter" part that extends the textual observation to an interpretive or evaluative inquiry. An example of this two-pronged approach to questioning is illustrated in the "Question" box of Figure 5. As questions begin to take shape, Goldschmidt's marginalia categories can be a useful storehouse for records of a student's early thinking as well.

| **Example Question** | | **Modeled Thinking of Example Question** |
|---|---|---|
| Context statement (if needed) | In Act I, scene vii of Shakespeare's *Macbeth,* the title character considers the prospect and consequences of killing King Duncan, an action, if completed, that would result in him becoming King of Scotland. In his soliloquy, he weighs the extensive consequences of regicide (killing a king) and ultimately decides that his action is not for him. | I felt that it was important to provide a brief context setting statement here since to take any Shakespearean line out of context may misrepresent its function in the larger play. Also, in a play that is constructed around the public/private face dichotomy, it's important to note that this line is drawn from a soliloquy which, by dramatic convention, usually means that we are getting a character's true thoughts and feelings (his private face, so to speak). |
| Quote | MACBETH:<br>*If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well/It were done quickly.* | I chose the opening line of the soliloquy because it's Macbeth's lead-off idea and all that follows in the speech flows from this line. He may counter or affirm what he says here, but he can't escape it. |
| Question | In the first two lines, what word does Macbeth repeat several times? How does this foreshadow his reluctance to commit the deed? | The first question is the "where" part which asks readers to simply find repetition in a small amount of text. The second question is the "why" part which asks for inference out of the textual observation. |

| What's my question doing? Circle one and explain how your question is: | Comprehending<br><br><br><br>Interacting/evaluating<br><br><br><br>Extending<br><br><br><br>(Rhetorically Analyzing) | For clarity, I'll include the explanation in this box of how the question is rhetorically analyzing.<br><br>Rhetoric is not solely the tool of the speech giver, the essay writer, or the filmmaker. Rhetorical moves are sometimes best illustrated through the mouths of invented characters in imaginative literature. The question that I have asked keys into the rhetoric of the fictional speaker Macbeth. The opening line establishes his implied stance of hesitance ("implied stance or ideological grounding" in marginalia terms) that is initially his source of strength for *not* killing the king. He announces the results of his deliberations to Lady Macbeth, and she responds to his remarks by pressing him to follow through with the murder of King Duncan. In doing so, this initial statement, which was once a source of strength, now becomes the very thing that undermines Macbeth's virtue (or how "the author establishes or undermines his/her own [or a character's] credibility" in marginalia terms) and shows him to be a hypocritical figure. |
|---|---|---|

Figure 5: Question Writing Exercise for *Macbeth* (Act I, scene vii)

### Difficulties to Anticipate in Step Three

Most students are adept at answering questions about a text, but few are expert at asking them. This tends to be the most difficult step for students because to ask probing questions "means making public what is private—a process dependent on explication, illustration, and critical examination of perception and ideas" (Petrosky 20). Asking good questions begs the student to engage

and explore both their own knowledge and the purposes of the text. This "participative pedagogy" brings to the forefront the generative effects of having students play with subject and form as a means of exploring the text they hold in their hands (Halasek 107). Consider Figure 6 as a resource for students who may think, "I don't know what to ask."

| *Generative Questions for the "Where" Question* | *Connecting "Why" Question* |
|---|---|
| Where does the main point of the passage show up? | Why do you think it shows up at the beginning? Why does it delay until the middle? What's gained by waiting until the end? |
| Where does the author/character show us that he's worth listening to? Where does he connect with you emotionally? Where does he provide hard proof? | Why are these important to your understanding of what the author/character has to say? How do these either draw you in or push you away from what's said? |
| Where does the author/character's proof or examples appear in the passage? | Why do you think they're in the order they are? Why may it start with a shock and work back? Why may it begin with broad claims and follow with specifics? |
| Where do you see the author/character making an assumption? | Why does this assumption matter to what they are saying? Why is it bias? Why does it seem honest? |
| Where do you see any unusually long sentences? Short sentences? Fragments? | Why would the author place these sentences where she does? How do they emphasize, or de-emphasize, the point it's making? |
| Where do you think the author/character may not be telling us everything they know? Where do they seem genuinely confused? | Why would the author/character not be forthright? What is gained or lost by this move? |
| Where do you see patterns in the writing? Where does the author/character repeat things? | Why do you think these patterns are meaningful? What is the point of using the same verbs over and over again? Adjectives? |

Figure 6: Suggestions for Struggling Readers on How to Write Purposeful Questions

## Step Four: Extend the Inferences—Answer the Questions

The natural companion exercise to asking questions is to answer them, and here students will bring closure to their developing insight on the text. By asking students to fully write out their responses to the questions they pose, they must think even more deeply about the inquiries from Step Three and flesh out what they know, establish the limits of what they don't know, or open up new pathways for further inquiry. In other words, by answering their questions they are "making visible the thinking that is often invisible… as they grapple with the writer's writing, the reader's reading, and the mediating contexts that shape both. [By doing so], students are trained to be more intentional and rhetorically sophisticated writers themselves" (Goldschmidt 59). When answering their own lines of inquiry, students will step out of their persona from Steps One, Two, and Three and back into that of a student who is WTSL (see Figure 7). Though there will be varying levels of success and finesse with this switch, the hope is that students grasp the important ideas of the text more readily because they are translating these findings into a language they understand—their own (Davies 34).

| | |
|---|---|
| Context Statement (if needed) | In Act I, scene vii of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the title character considers the prospect and consequence of killing King Duncan, an action, if completed, that would result in him becoming King of Scotland. In his soliloquy, he weighs the extensive consequences of regicide (killing a king) and ultimately decides that his action is not for him. |
| Quote | MACBETH<br>*If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well / It were done quickly.* |
| Question | In the first two lines, what word does Macbeth repeat several times? How does this foreshadow his reluctance to commit the deed? |

| Answer | The neat thing about this line is that, depending on the way that the reader emphasizes the words in the mind's ear as they read, there are actually three plausible answers to the "where" component of the question. On first read, the repetition of "it" (and its related "'tis" and "'twere") was the first to catch my eye. On a second read, I noticed that the verb of each clause, "were," is also notably repeated. And yet, on a third read, the repetition of "done" is undeniably present, and its monosyllabic beat gives us the backing rhythm to the iambic line. So I guess now that we've noticed these repetitions we have to consider how each work in concert to foreshadow Macbeth's eventual reluctance.<br><br>Grammatically speaking, "it" is a pronoun, but in this syntax of this line, it is a pronoun that lacks its antecedent companion. Since this is the opening sentence of the soliloquy, we're given an ungrammatical line to start things off, and it's hard to believe that Shakespeare—so sensitive to the use of the English language—would unwittingly commit such a grammatical misstep. By obscuring the reference to the murder by proxy of the pronoun, the reader can see Macbeth's distant consideration of the deed, but he's so hesitant to consider it in "real terms" that he can't even bring himself to say the word. Likewise, the verb "were" contributes to his tone of hesitation. Every instance of this verb's appearance works to couch each of Macbeth's clauses into the conditional mode. He is flirting with the concept, but giving himself an out: if it *were* to happen, there's still an equal and opposite possibility that it *were not* to happen. The "done" repetition is an outgrowth of this effect. Never do we see a rundown of the grisly details, or even a mention of "murder." He wants the payoff of the action, but doesn't want to get his hand dirty to go through with it. He wants it to be "done," "done," "done." |
|---|---|

Figure 7: Question Answering Exercise for *Macbeth* (Act I, scene vii)

## Difficulties to Anticipate in Step Four

The most common misstep for students in this stage is to think that all the hard work has been done: the thinking through of significant statements, the selecting of quotations, the writing of the questions. All of those processes are what Anne Berthoff would call, "'forming activities' in which students should discard the faulty

notice that when you compose you 'figure out what you want to say before you write,' and accept instead this more helpful slogan: 'You can't know what you mean until you hear what you say'" (46). Once student have formed their thoughts, it's time to communicate their final insights. For students attuned to the distinctions between WTL and WTSL—and it may be useful to make this distinction to them at this point if they are not—tell them to think of Step Four in terms of a traditional WTSL exercise. This stance towards classwork is one that is undoubtedly familiar to all students, and by explaining this step as a re-entering to familiar territory (or, writing in ways they are normally accustomed to), students should be more easily able to communicate their ideas and not just let the question "speak for itself."

The approach to inquiry writing detailed in this article will no doubt come more naturally to "experienced readers [who understand] that both reading and writing are context-rich, situational, and constructive acts" (Haas and Flower 182). Though these more sophisticated readers already have in their mind's ear the "sounds" of thought, such a process can be both generative and constructive for inexperienced readers as well. In some ways, the very absence of precision, or "error," in the question writing and answering process can be just as productive for students. In David Bartholomae's "The Study of Error" he notes that, "basic writers...are not performing mechanically or randomly but making choices and forming strategies as they struggle to deal with the varied demands of a task, a language, and a rhetoric. Errors, then, are stylistic features, information about *this* writer and *this* language; they are not necessarily 'noise' in the system, accidents in composing, or malfunctions in the language process" (Bartholomae 257). Though Bartholomae's discussion of error focuses on student missteps at the sentence level, the spirit of his comments translate to the larger interpretive issues that are at stake in this article. In other words, though the final product produced in these WTL exercise may not be "teacher-quality," its words and thoughts are still performing a vital function for the developing

reader while giving feedback to the teacher about the student's present understanding and/or growth.

Whether students are "right" about a text is another thing; this process, if approached with an open mind and heart, will help students facilitate a dialogue between a text and their ideas. It can help students learn *how* to find a productive focus, craft an engaged response to class texts, develop a coherent and organized line of thought, work carefully with source materials, and support interpretations using apt examples and quotations. But more than this, it shows that complex texts are problems with which to engage; they're meant to be complex—not just a thing to demonstrate one's mastery or to declare ready-made opinions. What's produced is what the students see, and they see it because it is really there for them, and when a teacher reads what they've written, they should nod and say, "Yes, there is truth in that. It may not be the only truth, but these students have seen, and have told us honestly what they have seen."

## Conclusion

It's worth acknowledging a number of questions that arise with an approach to inquiry like this: What kinds of instruction accompany this type of writing? How can this project extend into work with peer review? How does a teacher deal with the reality of giving feedback and grades for this type of writing? How much needs to be sacrificed in the existing curriculum to make space for such an involved approach to inquiry? What if students' writing "makes sense" to them but is incomprehensible to anyone else? What recourse is there if students intentionally write easy questions to reverse engineer easy answers? Each of these are important and relevant questions for teachers to consider should they choose to adopt some of this article's methodology to the teaching of reading and writing. There's not space in this article to address each one, though I will say that this process bears benefits whether it's done in full or scattered piecemeal among existing class exercises. John Locke once said, "Reading furnishes the mind only with *materials* of knowledge; it is thinking that makes what we read ours" (Locke

quoted in Mann 371). The approach to reading and writing detailed in this article tries to make good on both parts of what Locke says. As students expand, intensify, or challenge their own thinking, they are doing something quite special in an English classroom: they are self-generating the insight into a text through a process in which *they* must come up with the main insights and *they* must develop these insights in light of the evidence that they've gathered. But more than this: it's a way for students to take their first steps in the direction of a dialogic stance toward writing—a stance that acknowledges that everything is prompted by and preparing for some other utterance—in a non-threatening way. Once my students leave the borders of my classroom, they're on their own as readers, writers, and thinkers. The mountain stands in front of them, so to speak, and all I have given them here is a pickaxe and a small wheelbarrow, but moving any mountain begins by carrying away a few small stones.

## Note

[1] Readers especially attuned to concerns of dialogism may recognize this "making up of one's mind" as a key idea that runs through the work of Mikhail Bahktin ("ideological becoming") and Kay Halasek. Such an experience is crucial for burgeoning independent readers who, as they struggle to find and claim an orientation towards their text, will experience a liberation (however small) "from the authority of other's discourses" (Baktin quoted in Halasek 109).

## Works Cited


Adler-Kassner, Linda, and Heidi Escrem. "Reading Practices in the Writing Classroom." *WPA: Writing Program Administration,* vol. 31, no. 1/2, Fall/Winter 2007, pp. 35-47.

Bartholomae, David. "The Study of Error." *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook,* edited by Gary Tate and Edward P. J. Corbett, Oxford UP, 1999, pp. 303-17.

Bartholomae, David, and Anthony Petrosky. *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts.* Heinemann, 1986.

Bazerman, Charles. *The Informed Writer.* Houghton-Mifflin, 1994.

Berthoff, Ann. *Forming, Thinking, Writing*. Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1989.

Bialostosky, Donald. "Liberal Education, Writing, and the Dialogic Self." *Contending with Words*, edited by Patricia Harkin and John Schilb. Modern Language Association of America, 1991, pp. 11-22.

Block, Cathy, and Gerald Duffy. "Research on Teaching Comprehension: Where We've Been and Where We're Going." *Comprehension Instruction*, edited by Cathy Collins Block and Sheri R. Parris. Guilford Press, 2011, pp. 19-37.

Carter, Duncan, and Sherrie Gradin, editors. *Writing as Reflective Action*. Pearson/ Longman, 2001.

Davies, Anne. "Involving Students in Classroom Assessment Process." *Ahead of the Curve*, edited by Douglas Reeves. Solution Tree Publishing, 2007, pp. 31-58.

Elbow, Peter. "Reflections on Academic Discourse: How It Relates to Freshmen and Colleagues." *College English,* vol. 53, no. 2, Feb 1991, pp. 135-55.

Farmer, Frank. "A Language of One's Own: A Stylistic Pedagogy for the Dialogic Classroom." *Freshman English News,* vol. 19, no.1, 1990, pp. 16-22.

Goldschmidt, Mary. "Marginalia: Teaching Texts, Teaching Readers, Teaching Writers." *Essays in Reader-Oriented Theory, Criticism, and Pedagogy,* Fall 2010, pp. 51-69.

Haas, Christina, and Linda Flower. "Rhetorical Reading Strategies and the Construction of Meaning." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 39, no. 2, May 1988, pp. 167-83.

Halasek, Kay. *A Pedagogy of Possibility: Bakhtinian Perspectives on Composition Studies*. Southern Illinois UP, 1999.

Harris, Joseph. *Rewriting: How to do Things with Texts*. Utah State UP, 2006.

Hielker, Paul. *The Essay: Theory and Pedagogy for an Active Form.* National Council of Teachers, 1996.

Mann, Horace. "Hand Book: Caution and Counsels." *The Common School Journal,* vol. 5, no. 24, Dec. 1843, p. 371.

Petrosky, Anthony. "From Story to Essay: Reading and Writing." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 33, no 1, 1982, pp. 19-36.

Roskelly, Hephzibah. *Breaking (into) the Circle: Group Work for Change in the English Classroom.* Boynton/Cook Heinemann, 2003.

Salvatori, Mariolina. "Conversations with Texts: Reading in the Teaching of Composition." *College English,* vol. 58, no. 4, Apr. 1996, pp. 440-54.

Zemelman, Steven, and Harvey Daniels. *A Community of Writers: Teaching Writing in the Junior and Senior High School*. Heinemann, 1989.

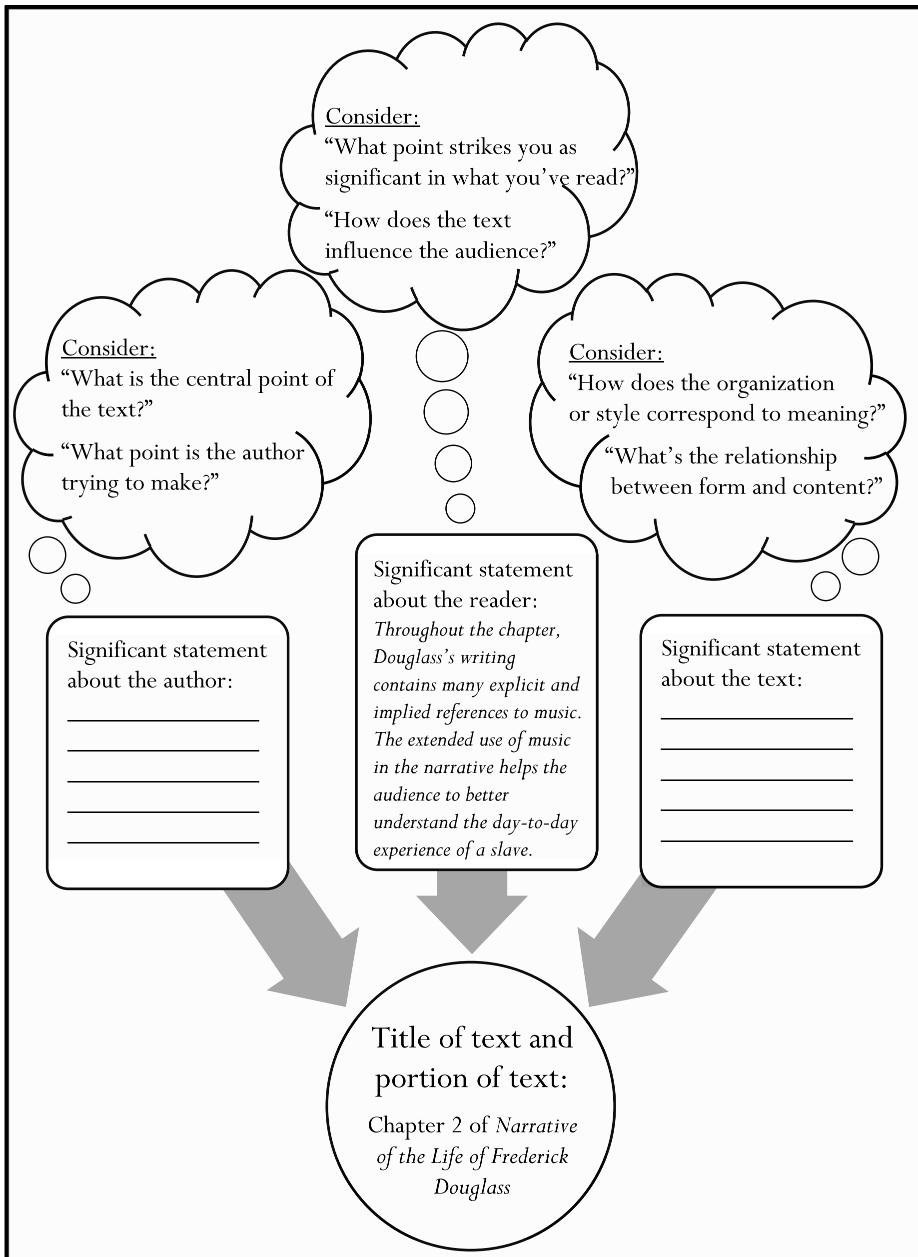
## APPENDIX
## EXAMPLE OF STUDENT WRITING OUTPUT FOR *NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS*

What follows is a recreated example of student writing based on Chapter 2 of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass.* Each of the four steps are accompanied by the student's writing output as well as my own semi-narrative reflections that detail points to difficulty, success, and intervention. The student, "Nick," whose interests gravitated towards music and performing arts, was enrolled in my upper-level composition class, a course that focused primarily on rhetoric and composition, in the fall of 2014. The examples/reflections contained in this appendix are intended to concretize some of the article's broad goals, namely to show:

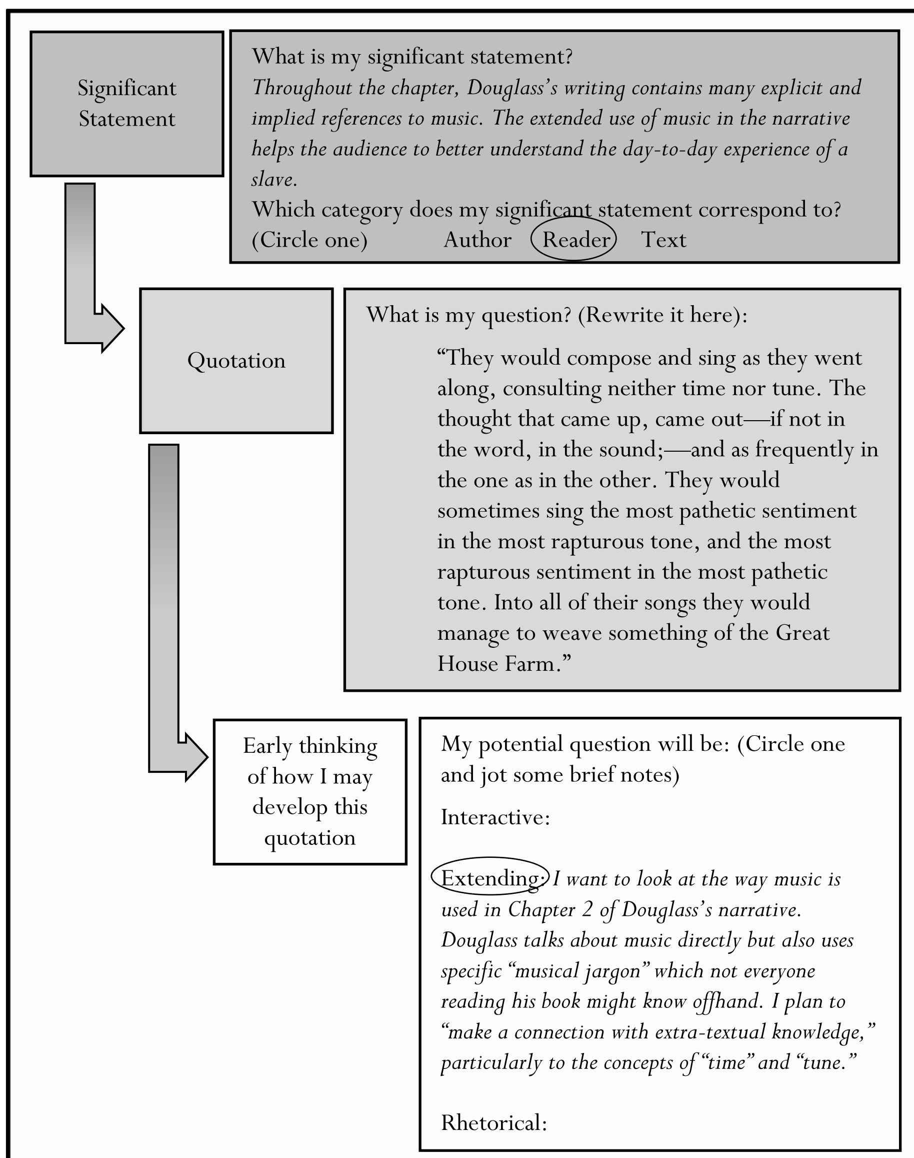
- How students may build their own scaffolding for inquiry to construct a full set of authentic questions in response to a text—and provide answers to those questions —in order to have a deeper understanding of how the source text works, as well as understanding its internal logic and governing ideas.
- How students can develop a thoughtful and patient approach to critical reading that allows them to appreciate the multiple forms, viewpoints, and tactics present in complex texts, and to gather perspective prior to arriving at their own writing, writing that is now more situated in the discourse of the subject.
- How teachers can emphasize the formative role of WTL as a meaningful stage in the construction of knowledge that lets students interact with a text while not assuming a falsely authoritative voice that plagues far too many WTSL compositions. WTL is not just about the act of writing; this type of writing here is really about inquiring, and it's this type of inquiring that facilitates the learning.

Students were first asked to read and annotate the opening paragraphs of Chapter 2 of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* along the lines of the marginalia exercise (Figure 1). After recording their initial impressions, I gave students about 20 minutes to re-read and re-consider their annotations to see if any patterns emerged and organized their lines of thinking. Nick immediately honed in on Douglass's discussion of music that appears in the passage, particularly the use of technical language in the sentence, "They would *compose* and sing as they went along, consulting neither *time* nor *tune*." I wasn't surprised that Nick was drawn to this concept, and I encouraged him to see if there were other discussions of music (or suggestions of musicality) elsewhere in the chapter. He was able to locate a few but became a bit frustrated with how to stitch all of these observations together into a "significant statement." I intervened, as I did with several other students in the class, by saying, "Given that this chapter is largely an exposition on the hardships of slave life, why may Douglass have deliberately included a running discussion of music? What is *that* doing *there*?" I let the question bubble and stew with Nick as I checked in with other students. I returned a bit later to see that he had begun to make some early breakthroughs with his initial observation about music and its rhetorical function in the text. He wrote down his "significant statement" and though his word choice of "better understand" and "day-to-day experience" I felt were a bit vague, I allowed the ambiguity to remain. I told Nick that leaving things thoughtfully unresolved is sometimes a mark of maturity and sophistication as a reader

and leaving some degree of fruitful ambiguity will allow for flexibility in the coming steps.




Step One: Significant Statement



Step Two: Quotation Selection

Since Nick was drawn to Douglass's use of musical jargon in his initial reading, the quotation selection stage seemed like a no-brainer to him. He initially decided to quote, "They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune." I agreed with him that this was an apt choice, but as students were given some time to make their final decisions, I circled back to Nick to discuss how he planned to develop this brief quotation with a close reading question that he must provide a detailed answer

for. He seemed a bit fixated on his prior knowledge about "time" and "tune," and I worried that his extra-textual knowledge may end up causing him to digress. So, we looked again at the text. We discussed the "So What?" question of the musical terms, and I suggested possibly expanding the range of the quotation so as to give himself a little more to work with. "He talks about the lack of 'time' and 'tune,'" I said, "Do you see the prose equivalents of these concepts elsewhere in his writing?" I wasn't really sure myself what this question would yield as I asked it. When I introduced *Narrative* to the class a few days prior, I spent some time discussing how Douglass, despite being wholly self-educated, was one of the consummate prose stylists of 19th century American Literature. His style, Nick noted, is one of order and precision (or "time" and "tune," I clarified). Nick read some of the surrounding sentences in Chapter 2, looking for moments of eloquence and refinement in the style. Nick was surprised, but not entirely surprised, to find that the very next sentence which followed his initial quotation was quite difficult to read. Knowing Nick was a strong rhetorical reader, I suggested that he parse the sentence to see if he could generate some question based on the interplay of Douglass's description of the slave songs and the prose style found here in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. He thought for a while, and then put pen to paper.

Both Nick and I were encouraged by the insight that began to emerge. He had a substantial quote upon which to base his question and his early inquiry about the relationship of "time" and "tune" to Douglass's prose style had great potential for development. As Nick began to write his question, I reminded him (and the class) of some key considerations. I said, "The writing of the question is another stage in the clarification of *your* insights on the text. The question must urge a would-be responder to make some inference based on the quotation that you've made to be the focal point. Don't be too leading, but don't be too vague. Picture a friend in your mind's eye and write the question for him or her: someone with intelligent interests but who hasn't thought about this topic as you have." He drafted a few proto-type questions which I felt were a bit heavy on the "where-in-the-text-do-I see-this" concern. I redirected Nick to the questions from Figure 6 to help. After some trial-and-error, he felt he had found his way as he planned to ask how the lack of "time" and "tune" in the slave songs is replicated in the style of the subsequent sentence. I loved the connection, but I had to push him a bit further since this insight, on its own, felt like an unsatisfactory conclusion. "Is this merely a showing off of his rhetorical skill or is there some reason Douglass's narrative temporarily adopts the cadence of the slave songs?" I asked. I felt this was a big question that had to be accounted for, but I approached this discussion with care in order to leave Nick in control of the ultimate direction of the inquiry. After some back and forth, Nick drew the conclusion that by adopting the speech patterns of the slave songs, Douglass demonstrates an unquestionable ethos for his criticisms of the Great House Farm, and the institution of slavery, in Chapter 2. All the insights had fallen into place. Now it was up to Nick to provide some final clarification as he explained the answer to the question he successfully posed.

"By asking you to fully write out the responses to the questions you have posed," I said to the class, "you not only are asked to think critically about the inquiries you have initially presented in the questions from Step Three, but to also self-consciously identify, label, and give voice to these concerns." Nick, like most students in the class by Step Four, was excited to put the finishing touches on the self-generated insights that

had been built over the last few class periods. I could see a very justified sense of satisfaction as the students began to write, despite the intellectual challenges and creative demands of what I was asking them to do. They felt like active participants in the writing who were able to put whatever thoughts and experiences they had into dialogue with the world of the text. I was thrilled to see this experience draw to a close as I observed a very justifiable sense of accomplishment and an increased "sense of writerly agency in the academy" (Goldschmidt 64). For Nick, in particular, he learned that he didn't have to check his personal passion for music at the door. He was able to see these interests as a space of possibility and potential to let knowledge flow in new directions and link into a text as never before. As a teacher, I can't think of anything more powerful than that.

| | |
|---|---|
| Context statement (if needed) | Chapter 2 of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* details the experiences of slaves surrounding promotion to the Great House Farm. Douglass specifically focuses on the use of music in the slave community in this chapter. |
| Quote | "They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune. The thought that came up, came out—if not in the word, in the sound;—and as frequently in the one as in the other. They would sometimes sing the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone. Into all of their songs they would manage to weave something of the Great House Farm." |
| Question | How does Douglass describe the songs of the slaves? Where else in Chapter 2 are there sentences composed with "neither time nor tune" and how do these sentences influence the reader's perception of the narrator? |
| What's my question doing? Circle one and explain how your question is: | Comprehending:<br><br>Interacting/evaluating:<br><br>Extending: My question will first ask readers to identify what Douglass literally says about music in the passage. I then plan on having responders to my question take this idea and apply it to the way Douglass himself writes. The ideas of "time" and "tune" will be a big factor of my question since I want to show how Douglass raises his ethos as a credible narrator by speaking in the same manner as the slave songs he describes.<br><br>Rhetorically Analyzing: |

Step Three: Question Writing Activity

| | |
|---|---|
| Context statement (if needed) | Chapter 2 of *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* details the experiences of slaves surrounding promotion to the Great House Farm. Douglass specifically focuses on the use of music in the slave community in this chapter. |
| Quote | "They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune. The thought that came up, came out—if not in the word, in the sound;—and as frequently in the one as in the other. They would sometimes sing the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone. Into all of their songs they would manage to weave something of the Great House Farm." |
| Question | How does Douglass describe the songs of the slaves? Where else in Chapter 2 are there sentences composed with "neither time nor tune" and how does this influence the reader's perception of the narrator? |
| Answer | Douglass says, "They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune." To fully get what Douglass is saying, a reader needs to know the definitions of two words: "time" and "tune." "Time," or time signature, represents a uniform number of beats in each measure and "tune" refers to the correct musical pitch or key. Songs lacking these things will not be pleasing to the ear and are generally considered to be poor songwriting. Douglass is obviously not a composer, so his writing doesn't literally have time or tune. However, the question asks readers to closely analyze Douglass's syntax choices to find where the writing sounds like the slave songs he's describing.<br><br>The lines "The thought…House Farm" is written like a song with "neither time not tune." Instead of having a clear flow, the sentence has several stops and pauses which make it hard to read smoothly. The phrase "came up, came out" is the first example of this. It sounds like Douglass is missing a word but the fact that it sounds like he made an error is a perfect illustration of writing that lacks "tune." Right after this first phrase is another example when he says "—if not in the word, in the sound;—". The way Douglass uses punctuation is unusual. He puts a semicolon just before the second dash. Since both dashes and semicolons make a reader stop when they are reading, having two of them makes an extra-long pause in the middle of the sentence. This is an example of Douglass writing without "time." In addition, despite its length of 25 words, this quotation is actually a sentence fragment. The main subject, "thought," is just followed by a bunch of things that describe it which can be seen as another example of the sentence lacking both "time" and "tune." |

| | |
|---|---|
| | By having Douglass's sentence reflect the music of slave songs, he is building his ethos as a speaker. He speaks in a way that seems authentic to the reader. Since he has been a slave from birth, he may be doing this unconsciously, but slave life is so much a part of who he is that he can't help but speak this way. |

Step Four: Question Answering Activity