The Thompson TDA Model

Text Dependent Analysis: Reading Elements and Structures

Text dependent analysis is defined as a: *detailed examination of the elements or structure of text, by breaking it into its component parts to uncover interrelationships in order to draw a conclusion (Thompson & Lyons, 2017).* The key to unlocking the meaning of this definition and providing students with intentional text dependent analysis instruction is grounded in understanding the reading elements and structures within narrative and informational texts.

To help make sense of different elements, consider a house. All houses have a *structure*—foundation, frame, walls, beams and roof. There are some parts of a house that are absolutely necessary in order to say a building is a house. For example, most all houses have a kitchen, bathroom, and a bedroom. Without these *elements* there is no house. Additionally, some people include additional *choices* in their houses, such as wallpaper, hardwood floors, or a deck. This same analogy can be used when considering texts.

All texts, whether narrative, poetry, informational, or texts beyond the written word printed on a page (videos, photographs, images, media) have a *structure*. Narrative texts have a plot structure which is embedded within a genre structure. Informational texts have an organizing structure or framework. All texts employ the use of literary *elements*. Some are more commonly used than others, but literary elements are always present. In addition to literary elements there are also *choices* that authors make when writing, which are often referred to as literary techniques, devices, or author's craft. Techniques are frequently and universally used by authors; therefore our definition of text dependent analysis (detailed examination of elements) embeds techniques under the meaning of elements.

Literary elements, some common techniques, and structures are identified in the standards. However, it is important to note that techniques are text dependent. In other words, unless an author employs the use of a specific technique, it is impossible to explore or analyze its use. For example, situational irony cannot be taught or analyzed unless the selected text includes situational irony. Therefore, the choice of analyzing different techniques must be made by local districts when determining the selection of text for use in classrooms.

In order for students to analyze reading elements and structures, teachers must first have an understanding of the reading elements and their grade level appropriateness. A listing of commonly found reading elements and structures, that students might be expected to analyze, begins on page 3. It is important to note that this is not an exhaustive list, neither is it a list of elements limited to the PSSA test.

Analysis of Reading Elements and/or Structures

Demonstrating analysis of reading elements requires an understanding of the definition of text dependent analysis:

*A detailed examination of the **elements** or **structure** of text, by breaking it into its component parts to uncover **interrelationships** in order to draw a **conclusion** (Thompson & Lyons, 2017).*

A key aspect of this definition is uncovering interrelationships. The goal of analysis is not simply to uncover parts within the whole, but to understand the connection of the parts to each other as a whole. Once the parts are identified, analysis then seeks to determine how those parts are related by recognizing the relationship and patterns between them. In the analysis, the whole is seen as greater than the sum of its parts and requires drawing a conclusion and generalizing the meaning of the text (Thompson, 2018).

The interrelationship of the reading elements and/or structures is not necessarily a one-to-one match. For example, figurative language does not always contribute to the conflict. The teacher needs to deeply understand the author's meaning and the choices made within a text, bearing in mind the reading elements and/or structure(s) utilized. This understanding suggests how to construct the text dependent analysis prompt and how to guide students in analyzing a text. The following examples are not all-inclusive but provide teachers with a strategy for guiding students in analyzing literary elements.

How do the _____ **contribute** to the _____?

*Narrative text example: How do the **character's thoughts, actions, and words** contribute to the theme?* (Interrelationship of a character and theme)

*Informational text example: How do the **descriptions** contribute to the development of the **central idea**?* (Interrelationship of the descriptive text structure and the central idea)

How does the _____ **support the development** of _____?

*Narrative text example: How does the **setting** support the development of the **main character**?* (Interrelationship of the setting and character)

*Informational text example: How does the **graphic** support the development of the **problem and solution text structure**?* (Interrelationship of the graphic and problem/solution structure)

How is the _____ **important** in the _____?

*Narrative text example: How is the **figurative language** important in the **development of the tone**?* (Interrelationship of the figurative language and tone)

*Informational text example: How is **Jim Johnson's finding** important in **the demonstration of "groupthink"**?* (Interrelationship of the individual and a concept)

How is/are the _____ **significant in revealing** _____?

*Narrative text example: How are the **character's actions** significant in revealing the **conflict**?* (Interrelationship of the character and the conflict)

*Informational text example: How is **Jackson's perspective** significant in revealing **specific characteristics of the crowd**?* (Interrelationship of the individual and concept)

Below are reading elements, techniques, and structures commonly found in texts. Some are directly named in the English Language Arts Standards.

Reading Elements in Literature

1. **Plot** – the structure of a story; the sequence in which the author arranges events in a story. All narrative texts include events or occurrences that comprise the plot. The structure often includes the rising action, the climax, the falling action, and the resolution. The plot may have a protagonist who is opposed by an antagonist, creating what is called conflict. However, a plot has six components:
    a. **Beginning or Exposition** – usually where major characters and setting are introduced to the reader.
    b. **Problem or Conflict** – the main character's problem or struggle. In some texts, characters have multiple conflicts—major conflicts and minor conflicts.
    c. **Rising Action** – the tension or events in a story that leads up to the climax of the plot. Usually this is where minor conflicts are addressed. The minor conflicts keep the plot moving forward and build tension leading to the plot's climax.
    d. **Climax** – the part of the story where the characters finally confront the problem and many rising action questions are answered. This is the "peak" of the plot where all the tension of the rising action finally comes to a head. The climax is often identified by figuring out which part of the story is the moment where the main character or hero will either succeed or fail.
    e. **Falling Action** – everything that happens after the climax but before the resolution. Questions are further explained, and the tension recedes.
    f. **Resolution** – the conclusion of the story, but this doesn't mean every issue is resolved happily—or even satisfactorily. Sometimes an author introduces a new conflict at the resolution of a story.

2. **Mood** – the reader's emotion or feeling while reading or listening to the text conveyed through imagery, word choice and setting.

3. **Tone** – the attitude of the author toward the audience, the characters, the subject, or the work itself (e.g., serious, humorous). The manner in which the author approaches the theme. Tone is conveyed through word choice and point of view.

4. **Setting** – the time and location in which the story takes place; there may be multiple settings.

5. **Theme** – the central message or underlying meaning the author conveys often through characters' thoughts, words, and actions. Other actions and events may contribute to the theme.
   a. **Theme Topic** – one- or two-word subject that is relevant to the story (e.g., *love, hope, courage, friendship, coming of age*).
   b. **Theme Statement** – the meaning of the text expressed in a more detailed complete sentence (e.g., *Unconditional love withstands any obstacle; Hope can help a person to survive any dark time; People of different ages can still be friends.*); avoids specific references to the specific details in the text.

6. **Point of View** – the position or perspective of the narrator from which the story is told.

7. **Narrator** – the person who is telling the story.

8. **Characters** – person, object, or animal in narrative text; there are many different types of characters, but the two most common are:

   a. Protagonist – main character, often heroic.
   b. Antagonist – usually one main character who impedes the protagonist's progress.

Reading Elements in Informational Text

1. **Central Idea** – unifying element of the text; what the author wants you to remember most.

2. **Individuals** – the main person(s) in the text.

3. **Point of View** – the position or perspective of the speaker of the text from which the information is told.

4. **Events** – facts or information presented in a text to explain a topic.

5. **Concept** – an important point or idea: abstract idea.

6. **Use of Words and Phrases, including Figurative Language** – use of words and phrases which create visual representations of actions, objects, and ideas in a way that appeals to our physical senses. Figurative language includes imagery.

Genre Structures of Narrative Text

1. **Traditional Literature** – often reveals the values and beliefs of a culture. It provides opportunities for discussing human problems and solutions, morals and values, and contributions of different cultures to our own society.

   a. **Fairy Tales** –
   - Time and place are generic (e.g., "Once upon a time in a faraway castle…").
   - Endings are generic (e.g., "They lived happily ever after.").
   - Stories are not intended to be accepted as possible or true.
   - Plots use predictable motifs (ogres, magic, supernatural helpers, quests, etc.).
   - Story line is frequently a series of recurring actions.
   - Characters are one-dimensional.

   b. **Fables** –
   - Tales concern human conduct with moralistic overtones usually about human nature and relationships.
   - Animals exhibit human qualities and behaviors.
   - The characters are not well developed and are generally unimportant.
   - Limited use of description.
   - Occasional dialogue.
   - The setting is incidental and often unknown.
   - Often includes a life lesson.

   c. **Tall Tales** – stories that are told as if they were true but contain exaggerated or unbelievable parts. They often represent oral lies, jests, yarns or foolery. These tales have been related by travelers, preachers, hunters, workers or others to amuse the audience. Many popular tales were written by advertisers to promote certain industries such as lumber, shipping, and railroads. Tall tales have also been called "fakelore".

   d. **Folk Tales** – may reflect values, characters, life lessons, or magic that is sometimes unacceptable to some groups but provide insights into human relations.

2. **Fantasy** – a genre that highlights the importance of the imagination, the process of transforming the impossible to the possible, the inclusion of the supernatural, the need to portray other worlds rooted in "fact". They are often a journey or quest that includes the appearance of "magic" in the real world.

3. **Mystery** – allows the reader to anticipate vicarious thrills in a secure setting. The best mysteries have well-drawn characters and well-structured plots.

4. **Realistic Fiction** – content often addresses aspects of coping with life (peer relationships, death, identity, family problems, handicapping conditions, courage, and survival). The plots, settings, and characters reflect those found in real life. Endings are not always happy, but reality is frequently relieved by wit and humor.

5. **Historical Fiction** – a subgenre of realistic fiction. Historical fiction highlights a period of time before the reader's life began. Historical fiction includes a setting and events based on actual happenings, but many details and characters may be fiction.

Text Structures of Informational Text

1. **Sequential** – steps or phases of a process are specified without cause-effect relationships being implied.

2. **Time Order/Chronological** – date or time ordering of when events occur.

3. **Description** – identification of a topic and an elaboration of important ideas, characteristics, or attributes.

4. **Compare-Contrast** – shows similarities and dissimilarities between objects, actions, ideas, or concepts.

5. **Cause-Effect** – explores the implication that the effect is produced by a specific cause or that consequences follow from a specified antecedent; often has a call to action.

6. **Problem-Solution** – presents a problem and shows how it can be or has been solved.

7. **Question-Answer** – used when the author poses a question and answers it or provides a call to action within the text; often used in interviews.

Text features are the building blocks for text structures. They allow the reader to make sense of what they are reading by providing a roadmap to what is important in the text. Common text features can be subdivided by print features, graphic features, and organizational features.

1. **Print Features**
   a. Title – indicates the topic and/or central idea of the entire text.
   b. Heading/subheadings – indicates the main idea or topic of a section of the text.
   c. Bold print – signals important vocabulary integral to understanding the content of the text.
   d. Italics – indicates proper nouns and important vocabulary.
   e. Sidebar – provides additional details, facts, or information related to the text.

2. **Graphic Features**
   a. Pictures, illustrations, or photographs – provides a visual representation of an event or object.
   b. Captions – helps the reader understand the meaning of a picture, illustration, or photograph.
   c. Graphics –
      i. *Charts or table* – allows the reader to easily read and compare data related to the text.
      ii. *Graphs* – condenses data and/or displays numeric information important to the text, including comparing amounts or showing changes over time.
      iii. *Maps* – shows where something or someone is located, as well as trends of geographic areas.

       iv. *Cross section or cutaway* – helps the reader visualize the layers or interior of a person, place, or thing in a text.

  3. **Organizational Features**
     a. Table of contents – helps the reader quickly find the topic within the text.
     b. Index – helps the reader quickly find where the specific information is located within the text.
     c. Glossary – helps the reader understand new or text-critical words.

Common Literary Techniques/Devices or Author's Craft

1. **Imagery** – use of words and phrases which create visual representations of actions, objects, and ideas in a way that appeals to our physical senses. Imagery often includes figurative language.
   a. Simile and metaphor – compares two distinct objects and draws similarity between them.
   b. Hyperbole – deliberate exaggeration or overstatement of actions and ideas for the sake of emphasis.
   c. Personification –a thing, idea, or animal is given human qualities.
   d. Alliteration – refers to the same consonant sounds in words coming together.

2. **Plot** – a device used to propel a story and alter the sequence of events.
   a. Flashback – provides a character's backstory.
   b. Foreshadowing – hints at the possible outcome in the future, without interrupting the events or character dialogue.
   c. Cliffhanger – keeps the reader yearning for more by not resolving an ending.

3. **Symbolism** – use of an object or word to represent an abstract idea.

4. **Situational Irony** - an unexpected event which occurs in an absurd or mocking opposition to what is expected or appropriate.

5. **Dramatic Irony** - the audience or reader is aware of something important, of which the characters in the story are not aware.

The list of literary techniques is much too long to include all of them here. However, it is imperative that if students are expected to analyze them, they must be taught, know how it is used within a text, and how to analyze it in conjunction with another reading element.

For more information on the different aspects of text dependent analysis, refer to the series of Text Dependent Analysis Resources by Dr. Jeri Thompson, Center for Assessment.

Thompson, J. (2020). Text Dependent Analysis Resource: Literary Elements and Structures. www.nciea.org, http://www.education.pa.gov, and http://pdesas.org.

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