

High School English Lesson Plan: Short Stories

Introduction

Each lesson in the Adolescent Literacy Toolkit is designed to support students through the reading/learning process by providing instruction before, during, and after reading/learning.

Note that lessons incorporate the *gradual release of responsibility* model. When this model is used within a single lesson and over several lessons, students are provided with enough instruction and guidance to use the literacy strategies on their own. The following lesson includes some examples of explicit instruction and modeling, guided practice, and independent practice, but students need more practice and feedback than is possible within the context of a single lesson.

Bold print indicates a direct link to the *Content Area Literacy Guide* where readers will find descriptions of literacy strategies, step-by-step directions for how to use each strategy, and quadrant charts illustrating applications across the four core content disciplines.

The following lesson plan and lesson narrative show English teachers how they can incorporate the use of literacy strategies to support high school students to learn English language arts content and concepts. The lesson is designed for one block period (80–90 minutes) or two traditional classes (50 minutes).

Instructional Outcomes

NCTE Standards: 1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works. 12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes.

Content Learning Outcome: Students improve reading comprehension and critical thinking skills through creation and discussion of questions related to stylistic elements, theme, plot, character, and setting in short stories.

Literacy Support Strategies and Instruction

Before reading/learning: **QAR** (explicit instruction, teacher modeling)

- Materials: image/visual text (e.g., *The Scream*, by Edward Munch, <http://images.google.com>), chart paper, marker, questions for modeling

During reading/learning: **QAR** and **Paired Reading** (guided practice)

- Materials: short story text (e.g., *The Most Dangerous Game* by Richard Connell http://fiction.eserver.org/short/the_most_dangerous_game.html), questions for guided practice

After reading/learning: **Quick Write** (individual practice)

- Materials: paper

Before Reading/Learning (25 minutes)

Literacy outcome: Students will learn how to classify types of questions as Right There, Think and Search, Author and Me, and On My Own.

Teacher facilitation: Tell students you will model **QAR**, which is short for Question-Answer Relationships. Questioning is a strategy that good readers use intuitively as they make sense of text. **QAR** is helpful because it focuses reading on the analytical thinking required to answer four specific types of questions. These are the types of questions readers often have, and students are often asked to respond to, at the end of a reading assignment. Experiencing **QAR** enables students to understand which questions require understanding of text, which questions require understanding of text and connections to prior knowledge, and which questions require analysis beyond the text.

Using an image as a visual text, the teacher will model the four types of questions: Right There, Think and Search, Author and Me, and On My Own.

- 1) Pose a question to the class that may be answered by looking in one location on the image (if using *The Scream*, an example of a Right There *question* might be: *Who is the subject of this image?*) and call on a volunteer to answer it. Then ask the student what she did to figure out the answer to the question. Write the question on chart paper and apply the label—Right There.
- 2) Next, ask a question that may be answered by looking in more than one location on the image (e.g., *What is the setting in the image?*). After a student answers and explains that he had to look in more than one location on the image, the teacher writes the question on the chart paper along with the label—Think and Search.
- 3) Then pose a question that requires “reading” the image and using knowledge that is in your head (e.g., *Is the man in the foreground the protagonist/hero or the antagonist/villain?*). When a student responds that she had to look at the image and use prior knowledge, write the question and the label Author and Me on the chart paper.
- 4) Lastly, ask a related question that can be answered without having to read the image, (e.g., *What are some things that might cause a person to scream?*). Elicit responses from several students. When a student responds, ask what kind of thinking was required to answer that question. Write the question on the chart paper and label it—On My Own.
- 5) Explain that labeling the types of questions helps you to provide a thoughtful response that appropriately answers the question as stated. Review the four questions, the four types of questions, and the thinking that was necessary to provide an answer to each. Explain **QAR** is a cognitive strategy that can also be applied to traditional text like a story in the anthology or a chapter in a textbook in other content areas. Explain that this strategy is especially useful when they are asked to read something and answer questions about it. Check for understanding of the **QAR** strategy.

Tell students they will start by using the strategy with a suspenseful short story.

NOTE: All questions relate to the short story The Most Dangerous Game. Teachers might choose a different short story, of course, and could follow this lesson design to develop parallel questions, prompts, and learning activities.

Project a short section of *The Most Dangerous Game* on the overhead. Ask students to follow along with you in their own texts as you read aloud the first several paragraphs. Then stop and refer to the following questions you have posted or are projecting on the board.

- 1) Begin with a Right There question: *How many days will it take until the men reach Rio?* Show students how you can point to the answer right on the page.
- 2) Then ask a Think and Search question: *What are the men going to Rio to do?* **Think-Aloud** as you search through this section of text for evidence, and explain how you piece the evidence together to determine what it is Rainsford and Whitney plan to do in Rio.
- 3) Ask an Author and Me question: *What social class do Rainsford and Whitney belong to?* Think aloud for students about how you use textual evidence, like a yacht, and your own knowledge about yachts and social classes to determine what social class the two might belong to.
- 4) Then ask an On My Own question: *When have you felt most afraid and what were you afraid of?* Tell students although Whitney discusses fear with Rainsford, there is nothing in the text that can help answer this question. You are on your own to come up with a response. However, by thinking about fear in this way, it may help to understand the story.

During Reading/Learning (45 minutes)

Literacy outcome: Students will learn how to classify types of questions as Right There, Think and Search, Author and Me, and On My Own, and connect the type of question to the thinking and use of the text required for a thoughtful response.

Teacher facilitation: Project or write a set of questions that correspond to the **QAR** categories on the board. For example:

- Why are the sailors jittery when they pass the island?
- How does the author create a sense of foreboding?
- What is the relationship between Whitney and Rainsford?
- What will happen to Rainsford after he falls off the yacht?

Ask the students to read the story up to the point where Rainsford falls off the yacht (“...the sound of an animal in the extremity of anguish and terror.”), reading independently or using the **Paired Reading** strategy (one person reads a paragraph, the other summarizes, and then they switch roles). When they have read to this point, they should answer the four questions. Tell students to think about their thinking so they can be aware of what they did to answer each question. Students should ask what kind of thinking was necessary to answer the question. Then students will label each question based on the **QAR** categories—Right There, Think and Search, Author and Me, and On My Own.

Students will have 15 minutes to read and answer the questions together and label the questions. They may continue reading the story if they finish early.

- 1) When all students have finished this assignment, elicit answers to the questions and question categories.
- 2) Probe students about the kind of thinking needed to answer each question and emphasize the importance of this analytical stance.
- 3) When these initial questions have been discussed, ask students how the **QAR** strategy helped to deepen understanding of the text, where there is still confusion, and how using the strategy might be useful with other academic texts.
- 4) Ask students what makes an “interesting” or “good” question to answer as opposed to a “boring” question. Jot down characteristics students contribute about each and prompt additional responses. Tell them “good” questions encourage the reader to think more

deeply about the story and “interesting” questions often ask readers to predict or draw conclusions or form opinions. Read aloud another chunk of the text. Elicit several questions from students and share one or two “good” questions a reader might have related to that section of the story.

- 5) Inform students they will read the remainder of the story in pairs and formulate at least six “good” questions that will be discussed in the next class. Each pair should come up with questions as they read, complete the reading, work together to respond to each question, and then decide together, based on the thinking and use of the text required to answer the question, which type of **QAR** category each falls into.
- 6) Explain that each pair should try to generate some of each of the **QAR** types of questions but they should be more concerned with asking “good” questions that interest them and make them think more deeply about the story, than the specific type of question. The questions should be written on one side of the paper, and the answers and the type of question should be written on the other side of the paper. Students can begin this task if time permits and continue it in class the next day; otherwise this is the beginning activity for the next day.

Allow students plenty of time to discuss their response to the story and any other questions they still have, once they have completed the reading and answered the initial assigned questions.

After Reading/Learning (10 minutes)

Literacy outcome: Students will identify how the **QAR** strategy helped them to be metacognitive.

Teacher facilitation: When there are about 10 minutes remaining in the class period, tell students they will be doing a **Quick Write**.

- 1) Ask them to describe metacognitively (thinking about their thinking), in one to two thoughtful paragraphs, how using **QAR** helped their learning today and what questions, if any, remain about **QAR**.
- 2) Collect the students’ lists of questions and the **Quick Writes** as students leave.

Like all student-completed literacy strategy templates, these student-generated questions and **Quick Writes** provide valuable data for teacher reflection. These should not be graded. The student responses should be used to assess student learning and make decisions about next steps in teaching.

Suggested Subsequent Lessons

Teachers should review the **Quick Writes** and student-generated questions to assess student learning of the strategy and their understanding of the story. In the next class, pass the question sheets back to the students. Students should complete the reading of the story using the **Paired Reading** strategy, if this did not happen in the first lesson, and generate a minimum of six good questions. Then students should work together to formulate an answer and based on the thinking required to respond to the question, label each of their questions according to **QAR** type. Then each pair should decide which are their two “best” or most interesting questions. When everyone has completed the story and their list of questions, ask students to take turns sharing the questions with the whole class, engaging students in a discussion of these questions. A pair should share the question and before anyone answer the question, the other students should be asked to identify to which **QAR** category the question belongs. When all pairs have shared one of the questions they thought was a “good” question, the teacher could engage students in a discussion about critical reading and the types of questions and thinking

that generate critical reading using the Think and Search, Author and Me, and On My Own questions. After additional modeling and guided practice, students may eventually compose **QAR** questions independently with literary text and/or with informational text. As students become more comfortable using **QAR**, it might also be paired with **Reciprocal Teaching**.

High School English Lesson Narrative: Short Stories

Teachers: As you read the lesson narrative, think about the following questions. You may want to discuss them with fellow English teachers.

- *What does the teacher do to support students' literacy development and content learning before, during, and after reading/learning?*
- *What challenges do you anticipate if you were to implement this lesson in your own classroom? How would you prepare to meet these challenges?*
- *How would you make improvements to this lesson?*

Mrs. Plaziak was excited to begin the unit on short stories with her ninth grade class after finishing up the first unit of the year on poetry. The students made connections between popular music lyrics and poetry and enjoyed writing and performing original raps for their peers. But she knew her students were having a difficult time getting beyond literal understanding of the reading they had been doing. They would need explicit instruction on how to read and respond more thoughtfully to text and improve their reading comprehension, as well as help to build stamina for reading these longer texts written at grade level, which for many would be above their ability level. She chose to focus on a high leverage questioning strategy (originally developed by Taffy Raphael, 1982, 1986) called **QAR** to help students develop some strategies to engage actively with the text in the first short story.

Before Reading/Learning

Mrs. Plaziak explained she would be introducing a new strategy for this lesson. She projected an image of *The Scream* for the whole class to see. Mrs. Plaziak asked, "How many people are in this image?" Charlissee raised her hand. "There are three men." Mrs. Plaziak asked what Charlissee had to do in order to answer that question. Charlissee answered, "I looked at the image. It's right there." Mrs. Plaziak asked if she had to search to find the answer and Charlissee said, "No." Mrs. Plaziak wrote the question on the chart paper and labeled it—Right There. Mrs. Plaziak said, "It's a Right There question, because you only had to look in one place in the image."

Mrs. Plaziak asked a second question. "What is the setting in this image?" Among several waving hands, she called on a quiet student named Sam. Sam said, "It's during the day, on a bridge, near the ocean or a river." "Sam, what did you have to do to answer that question?" Sam said that he looked around the image to see the swirling water, the handrail, and the boardwalk. Mrs. Plaziak probed, "Sam did you have to look in more than one spot to answer the question?" Sam nodded. "Thanks, Sam. This type of question is called a Think and Search, because you had to look in more than one place to answer the question. She added the question and label to the chart paper for all the class to see.

For the third question, Mrs. Plaziak asked, "Do you think the man in the foreground is the protagonist or hero, or is he the antagonist or villain?" Mrs. Plaziak wrote the question on the chart paper to reinforce the terms protagonist/antagonist for students. Jasmine said, "I think he's a villain. His eyes look scary to me. And very intense." Ron objected, "He's not scary looking, he looks like he's panicked. Or trying to get away from something maybe." After a few minutes students weighed in on the question without a clear consensus and becoming increasingly confused. Mrs. Plaziak asked what kind of thinking students had to do to answer the question. Ron hesitated, but offered, "We looked at the man's face in the image and tried to read the emotion on his face—some of us thought he looked mean and others thought he looked worried. What's the right answer?" Mrs. Plaziak said, "So Ron, I think I'm hearing you say you

looked at the image and you thought about what the man was feeling.” Ron agreed that was what he’d done. Mrs. Plaziak labeled the question—Author and Me, while explaining you couldn’t answer the question only by looking at the image, but you had to use the knowledge in your head as well. Jasmine said, “So I’m still confused. What is the right answer? Is the man a protagonist or an antagonist?” Mrs. Plaziak emphasized that getting the right answer is not as important at this point as analyzing the thinking needed to answer the question. “Jasmine, let’s take another look at the question. Can you definitively say whether the man is a protagonist or antagonist?” Jasmine thought, “No, it’s asking you to make a prediction or like give your opinion.” Mrs. Plaziak inquired, “In that case, could your answer and Ron’s both be correct at this point?” Jasmine said, “Yes, we’re both entitled to our opinions and we gave evidence to support our opinions.” Other students nodded.

For the last question, Mrs. Plaziak asked, “What kinds of things make a person scream?” Al, a tall, burly student raised his hand and said; “Nothing makes me scream. But my sister screams when we’re watching scary movies.” “Yes, fear can make you scream. Al, what kind of thinking did you use to answer this question? Did you look at the image?” Al said his sister puts her hands on her face and screams when she’s scared and it reminded him of the face in the picture. “So you just used the knowledge in your head—not the image—to answer the question, Al?” As Al nodded affirmatively, Mrs. Plaziak wrote the question and label—On My Own.

“Good work, class! We worked hard just now to put thinking at the heart of answering questions about an image or visual text. Next, we’ll be ratcheting up our thinking to answering questions about text that will be a little more challenging than the image. If no one has any further questions, let’s dig into the text.” She asked students to open the book to *The Most Dangerous Game*.

Mrs. Plaziak projected a short section of *The Most Dangerous Game* on the overhead and asked students to follow along with her in their own texts as she read aloud several chunks of text without stopping. Then she stopped and told her students “I’m going to begin with a Right There question: *How many days will it take until the men reach Rio?* Well,” she said, pointing to the lines in the text where she found the answer, “Whitney said ‘We should make it in a few days’ so I think they’ll be on this boat for a couple of days.” Then she told them she would come up with a Think and Search question. “*What are the men going to Rio to do?* I know they are talking about hunting. And Whitney said he hoped the jaguar guns would be in at Purdy’s, which I guess must be a store, and he thought they’d have good hunting up the Amazon. And Rainsford told Whitney ‘You’re a big game hunter, not a philosopher,’ and they were talking about whether a jaguar feels fear. So I think they were going to go to the Amazon to hunt jaguar. Do you see how I had to look in a few places to search through this section of text for evidence, and then I pieced the evidence together to determine what it is Rainsford and Whitney were planning to do in Rio?” Some of the students nodded. She decided they needed to try some of this with a partner as she continued on. “Now, I’ll ask the question, and you turn to a partner and talk about how to find the answer. Here’s the first one: *What social class do Rainsford and Whitney belong to?*” Someone said, “Huh?” But Mrs. Plaziak continued. “What kind of people do you think they are? Everyday working people, poor people, privileged people? Talk to each other and use the lines we just read.” She gave them a minute and listened to the kind of thinking students were doing in their pairs. “I heard some of you saying they were on a yacht, and your own knowledge about yachts and who usually has yachts helped you to determine the fact that Rainsford and Whitney might be upper-class or wealthy people. Great! One more: *When have you felt most afraid and what were you afraid of?* Turn and talk with your partner about your greatest fear, and then decide what kind of question that is.”

Mrs. Plaziak circulated for just a minute or two, smiling as students became a bit animated in their discussions about personal fears and events. Then she explained to them that, although Whitney discusses fear with Rainsford, there is nothing in the text that can help them answer this question. They were On Their Own to come up with a response. However, by thinking about fear in this way, it may help them to understand the story.

During Reading/Learning

Mrs. Plaziak asked the class to choose a partner for **Paired Reading**. She gave them a few minutes to move around and get settled in pairs, and then she gave directions. “Read to the part in the story where Rainsford falls off the boat and hears the sound of an animal in terror. You can read the story on your own or you can use the **Paired Reading** strategy. When you have both read to the stopping point, work together to answer the four questions I have put up on the blackboard. Then discuss and decide based on the thinking you needed to do to answer each question, which category of **QAR** each question is.

- *Why are the sailors jittery when they pass the island?*
- *How does the author create a sense of foreboding?*
- *What is the relationship between Whitney and Rainsford?*
- *What will happen to Rainsford after he falls off the yacht?*

You will have 15 minutes to read, answer, and label the questions together and you may continue reading the story after you finish with your questions.” Mrs. Plaziak continued to circulate. She stopped to listen to certain students as they read aloud in their pairs. She listened to them read, noting which students were reading fluently and which students were working harder to read the text. She realized she might have to assign pairs in the future to make sure some of her students weren’t struggling too much during the reading.

The room got louder as the pairs began to discuss the questions on the board, their answers, and the types of questions. When all students had finished the assignment, Mrs. Plaziak asked them to report out as a whole class. “What kind of thinking was needed to answer the first question?” Students were slow to respond, but she waited a few minutes. Someone finally called out, “Think and Search.” Mrs. Plaziak asked, “And the rest of you, do you agree?” A few others nodded tentatively, so she emphasized the importance of taking this analytical stance with questioning the text. “You want to be thinking about how you develop understanding when you read a story. This **QAR** strategy will help you. Let’s keep at it.” When all questions had been answered, and the class discussed what kind of thinking was necessary to get those answers, Mrs. Plaziak told her students they would continue to read the story and formulate their own questions with their partners. When they finished reading, they would work with their partners to formulate answers to their questions, using the text evidence as much as possible. Tomorrow each pair would discuss and agree on the type of **QAR** category each question belonged to. “Don’t worry about types of questions up front. Just come up with questions about the story as you read. I will collect these questions today and hand them back to you at the beginning of class tomorrow.”

“Write your questions on one side of the paper, and put the answers and the type of question on the other side of the paper. Tomorrow, we’ll look at your questions again to see which ones you think are the most interesting. For today, I just want you to brainstorm questions so we can talk about them later,” she told them. Collecting the questions today would help her assess the kinds of questions they were asking and help her plan for tomorrow’s discussion.

Students went back to the text and read the story. Several students stopped intermittently to write questions and identify the question type during their reading, while others chose to finish the story first and then go back to write questions and identify the type once they were finished. Mrs. Plaziak reminded them to be sure to allow enough time to finish so they could begin a discussion of the text before the end of the class period.

After it looked as though all students had finished reading and had done at least a few questions, Mrs. Plaziak called them back as a whole class. “So, first, what did you think of that story?” Jim said, “That was awesome, man. I was completely creeped out by General Zaroff.” Mrs. Plaziak smiled and looked around. Beth said she vaguely remembered seeing a movie about something like this. “Yes, there have been a few film adaptations of this story. Did you make any connections to the film?” Beth shook her head no. “I barely remember it. I just remember the idea of it—a guy who hunts people.” “How was it trying to come up with your own **QAR** questions?” Mrs. Plaziak probed. Jim said, “We asked this one: *When did this story take place?* We asked because we wondered what war Zaroff was a general in. But we really weren’t sure how to label it. And we really weren’t sure when the story took place. We thought it might be sometime after World War I. The fact the general said he was a Cossack made us think that it couldn’t have been modern times, because I’m not really sure what Cossacks are or when they lived. I think because I know more about World War II, I guessed World War I. Is that an Author and Me question or not?”

Mrs. Plaziak could see the students were starting to be able to identify the types of questions, but they needed a lot of support from her and from each other to entirely grasp the idea. She realized she had been a bit optimistic to think she could teach this strategy in one lesson. But she also liked the kind of thinking she was hearing from students today. She decided the students would definitely need more practice with this to understand the **QAR** strategy, including how it helps to deepen understanding of the text and how it can be useful with other academic texts. And she knew some students in the class were getting it faster than others. She was looking forward to reading the questions, both to see what students focused on when reading the story, and to see what she needed to do tomorrow to help them understand the literary elements of this story and the **QAR** strategy.

After Reading/Learning

She decided to end the class with a **Quick Write** about using the strategy, both to help students use writing to learn and think about the strategy, and to get a quick assessment of individual student thinking about it. There were about 10 minutes remaining in the class period when Mrs. Plaziak told students they would be doing a **Quick Write** to describe metacognitively (thinking about your thinking), in one to two thoughtful paragraphs, how using **QAR** helped their learning today and what questions, if any, remain about the strategy. “I will be collecting your question sheets and the **Quick Writes** as you leave,” she told them. When she saw some of them look distressed she added, “These are not for me to grade. I am interested in what you are thinking right now, both about this story and about the strategy. The purpose is to help me plan for tomorrow’s lesson.” Mrs. Plaziak allowed students to write until the bell rang, collecting the papers from students as they filed out. She was anxious to look at the questions and the **Quick Writes** to see if she should make adjustments for tomorrow’s lesson.