

# Critical Literacy for Life: Creating Critical Readers

---

Anne Beamish and Kathryn Byrne, MEES

# Aspects of Critical Literacy

**Examines** representation, stereotypes and bias

**Constructs** an interpretation

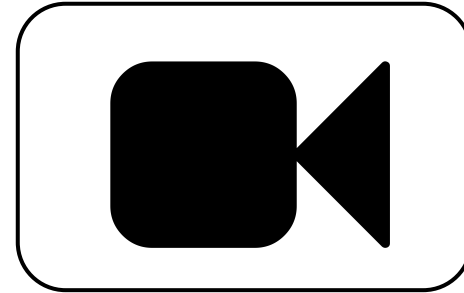
**Analyses** crafting choices

**Recognizes** multiple perspectives

# Why is critical literacy important?



What do you notice about this student's reading?



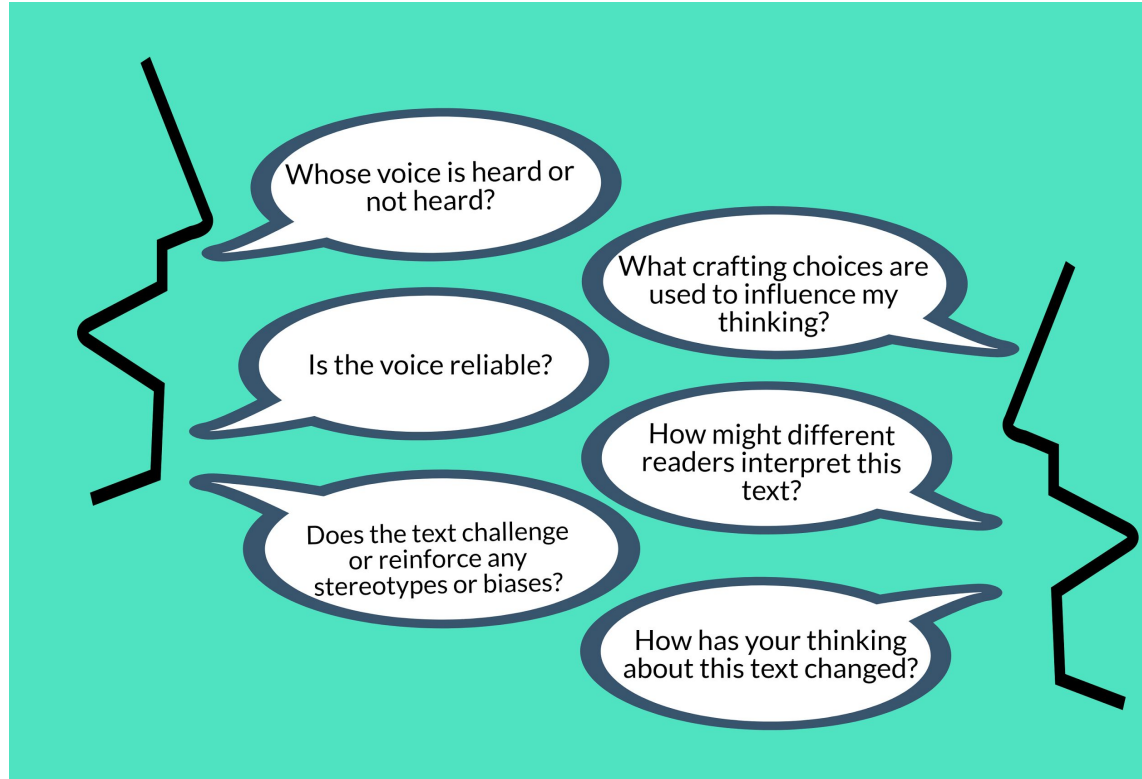
# What Can Teachers do to Foster Critical Reading?

Teachers can model ways to:

- ask open-ended questions
- consider bias and stereotypes
- notice and analyze crafting choices
- think about the perspective of others
- use critical literacy questions

# Critical Literacy Questions

1. With a partner, choose a book.
2. Decide how and when you might **model** the six questions with this text.



# Texts that Support Critical Literacy

## Elementary English Language Arts

### Examining Multiple Perspectives to Develop Critical Thinking



**Zoom**  
Istvan Banyai  
Grades 1-6

In this wordless story, a surprising series of pictures conveys intriguing scenes viewed from an ever-shifting perspective.



**They All Saw a Cat**  
Brendan Wenzel  
Grades 1-6

In simple, rhythmic prose and stylized pictures, a cat walks through the world. Each creature it encounters sees the cat differently.



**Seven Blind Mice**  
Ed Young  
Grades 1-6

In this retelling of an Indian fable, seven blind mice argue over the different parts of an elephant, each one believing he has the big picture.

**Purpose for reading:**  
The student becomes a more critical reader by responding to what is personally relevant to her/him and then gradually shifting her/his attention to the perspectives of others. QEP, ELA, p. 74



**Duck! Rabbit!**  
Amy Krouse Rosenthal  
Grades K-6

It's a rabbit! No, it's a duck!  
Two unseen characters argue about which creature they are seeing.



**Big Bug**  
Henry Cole  
Grades K-4

Beginning with a bug, various objects are revealed as being big and small in comparison with other objects on a farm under the big, big sky.



**Black and White**  
David Macaulay  
Grades 4-6

Four simultaneous perspectives combine to tell an impressionistic and humorous story about the cause and effects of a train delay.

#### Sample Questions to Guide Discussion:

What is perspective? Discuss the how the perspectives among your classmates might differ. Reflect on, revise and add you your definition as you read.

How do the illustrations convey multiple perspectives?

How are the different perspectives in each text the same and different? Use a graphic organizer to record your thinking.

#### Sample Activities to Complement Discussion:

Read a teacher-selected text, ie, a non-fiction text on a current or historical event or a fairy tale. Discuss the different perspectives of characters. OR

Role play characters from a teacher-selected text. Participate in a panel discussion where these characters have the opportunity to present the story from their perspective.

Choose one from an array of teacher-selected images (for example, a mouse stealing a piece of cheese). Write or draw to show how the image might be perceived by two or more characters that are seen or unseen in the image.

Explore how multiple perspectives can deepen our understanding of social justice issues when we consider whose voices are heard and unheard. Use one of the texts below to get started.

#### Social Justice Texts for Further Reading:

*Last Stop on Market Street* Matt de la Pena

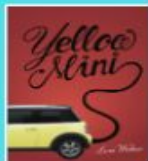
*Maddi's Fridge* Lois Brandt

*Viola Desmond Won't Be Budged* Jody Nyasha Warner



# Texts that Support Critical Literacy

## Examining Multiple Perspectives to Develop Critical Thinking-Secondary



### Yellow Mini

Lori Weber  
Cycle I and II

Stacey used to be friends with Annabelle and Mary, but now she's busy with a cool new boyfriend, Mark. Annabelle's a dedicated student who discovers social justice and activism.

### Purpose for Reading Cycle I

"By considering textual details in light of their own experience and knowledge, as well the ways readers are situated or positioned by a text, students begin to develop critical judgment."

SELA 1 p. 110  
Cycle II

"As students construct interpretations of different text, by examining the context in which they were created and in which they are read, they learn to exercise critical judgment."

SELA 2 p. 32

### October Mourning

Leslea Newman  
Cycle II



This response to the murder of Matthew Shepard is a personal, powerful and creative compilation of 68 poems that capture the incident from a multitude of viewpoints.



### Lost and Found

Shaun Tan  
Cycle II

In all three stories, language is spare, but always deliberate and inventive. The surreal illustrations, integral to the stories, depict imagined worlds and important messages using collage and snippets of text.

### Looks Like Daylight

Deborah Ellis  
Cycle I and II



Indigenous youth across North America discuss their life history, hopes and advice based on their own experiences.

### The Watertower

Gary Crew  
Cycle I



Two boys go for a swim at a deserted water tower. The language portrays their very different characters and backgrounds in a few deft strokes, while building an ominous and disturbing tone.

### Sample Questions to Guide Discussion:

What is perspective? Reflect on, revise and add your own definition as you read.

Discuss the way perspective affects the reading experience.

How do the illustrations convey multiple perspectives?

Continue to explore the concept of multiple perspectives in the context of social justice.

Explore the different ways texts position the reader by offering ideas that aim to change the reader's perception and position readers to respond in a certain way.

### Sample Activities to Complement Discussion:

Use a graphic organizer to note the perspectives that are included in each story.

Write a quickwrite about a text, excerpt or illustration. Share ideas in a small group. Use a production process to develop ideas into a spoken, written or multimodal text.

Use a response process to create a written response to the text.

Discuss the issue and ideas stemming from the text(s) during literature circle discussions.

### Social Justice Texts for Further Reading:

*I am Not a Number* by Jenny Kay Dupuis

*The Secret Path* by Gordon Downie and Jeff Lemire

*The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander

*The House that Crack Built* by Clark Taylor



Literature hand-picked for today's students by Québec educators

[www.quebecreadingconnection.ca](http://www.quebecreadingconnection.ca)



# Thank You

---

[Anne.Beamish@education.gouv.qc.ca](mailto:Anne.Beamish@education.gouv.qc.ca)

[Kathryn.Byrne@education.gouv.qc.ca](mailto:Kathryn.Byrne@education.gouv.qc.ca)