



# Reading Into It Like an English Teacher

Engaging in active reading and summarizing the impact of an author's choices

*Suggested Time: Add approximately 10 minutes to the anticipated reading time after initial instruction in the strategy (30 minutes is required to complete initial instruction.)*

## Student Tasks:

- Read or listen to text
- Actively annotate the text
- Analyze details to determine the impact of an author's choice on a reader's interpretation

## Online ThinkCERCA Resources

- Reading passages and text selections

Courtesy of:

Eileen Murphy Buckley

ThinkCERCA, Inc.

## Strategy

*Scholars across academic disciplines interpret from the point of view that texts are products of a maker's choices. Whether they are analyzing fashion, poetry, political speeches, or visual and performing arts, the task of an interpreter/explicator is to make claims about the intended and unintended effects of the maker's choices.*

*\*\*Please note that while the templates below can act as a formula of sorts for developing larger or smaller claims about text, they are not necessarily intended to represent complete sentences. Each component simply represents a part typically included in an interpretive claim or sub-claim, regardless of how many sentences it takes to express them.*

## Optimal Application Notes

Explain to students that describing the author's choices and an interpretation of the meaning of that choice is tricky. While a writer must remain unbiased in their summaries, when a writer is writing a literary analysis piece, their summary is making a claim of sorts. They are summarizing the intent of a choice a writer made and the impact of that choice on meaning. This is a way to walk students through what that sounds like as they are unlikely to hear it anywhere else, unless they later take an advanced academics class in a subject area or study this sort of thing in college. Modeling how these sentences are constructed and providing stems, a word bank, and plenty of practice is a great way to help students learn to write for an academic audience and to be more precise in giving feedback to peers as they workshop and edit their writing.

## Before:

- Have students read [William Carlos Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow."](#)
- Have students read it aloud at least twice. You can also play the audio.
- Then ask them to summarize the poem.
- Based on the summaries you hear, let them know that you are going to help them do the summary again, but model how one can incorporate analysis into the summary and develop sample sentences that describe the impact of a writer's choice on the meaning of a text.

## During:

- Share the sample with students.
- Walk through the example, then ask them to create a sample sentence that summarizes the poem using the template. Even if they use most of the example sentence adding only a twist to get started that is okay! This is hard.
- As students work independently or in a small group, encourage them to focus on descriptions of the author's choices.



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### During (Continued):

- As students work independently or in a small group, encourage them to focus on descriptions of the author's choices.
- Allow them to practice describing the choice and using the sentence stems such as "When I picture \_\_\_\_\_, it makes me think \_\_\_\_\_, so maybe what they are saying is \_\_\_\_\_."
- Continue to ask students to explain their thinking, reminding them that they must point to specific examples, words, and phrases to support their summary claims.
- Remind students that their summaries serve the role of letting readers know what they will prove as they continue to walk another reader through the text.
- Also, since texts can have multiple valid interpretations, summaries will vary, but the description of the facts of the text must be the same. Again, just the facts, all the facts, and nothing but the facts can be used in a summary of this sort.

### After:

- Students should use this one-sentence summary format frequently as they note the techniques authors use to achieve goals.
- Have students refer to their notes about the author's craft before their own writing.
- Have students use these one sentence summaries in peer workshops.

### Skills Targeted:

- Active Reading & Decoding
- Summarizing
- Relationships between author choices and impact on key ideas
- Connections between new material and prior learning

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# Summarizing an Author's Choices

**Instructions:** Read the example summary of the poem "[The Red Wheelbarrow](#)" by [William Carlos Williams](#), available at the Poetry Foundation website. Observe how each part of the one-sentence summary of the poem combines the name and title, a summary, a list of techniques used by the author, and the reader's interpretation of the text.

<b>Who/What did the action?</b> [author, speaker, element of the text]	<b>What action did they take?</b> [see list of verbs for describing text]	<b>What and how did the poet do it?</b> [the choice]
William Carlos Williams	recounts	a farm scene using unexpected line breaks and simple word choice
<b><i>Author/Choice-Maker</i></b>	<b><i>Verb for Describing Text</i></b>	<b><i>Choice (an idea, image, technique, etc.)</i></b>

<b>Why would the author make this choice?</b> [author's intention]	<b>What does it mean?</b> [reader's interpretation]
to help the reader explore	how art and artists can change our perceptions of reality.
<b><i>Verbs for Describing Impact</i></b>	<b><i>The Interpreted Meaning</i></b>

This writer claims to know what the poem is about, but now she has a lot of explaining to do. Note that the adjectives "unexpected" and "simple word choice" interpret as they describe. The phrase, "to help the reader explore" means the reader who is now writing about the text believes the author had a specific meaning in mind while making those choices. The reader who is now an interpreter has made judgments about images, line breaks, and diction. These implications also require further explanation. If this were the beginning of an analysis, additional evidence-based development would be needed to help readers understand some of the unspoken associated meanings the reader attached to the poem based on each aspect that was mentioned: line breaks, diction, and theme.

# Verbs for Describing an Author's Choices

**Instructions:** As you summarize and describe your interpretation of author choices, use the following list of verbs to vary your sentences. This list is taken from the sample sentences in professional literary criticism. The list is not meant to be exhaustive; rather, it is just a beginning list that illustrates the variety of verbs available to academic writers who make arguments about all sorts of texts. These verbs can be used to describe *actions, which can be performed by a writer, a speaker, a reader, or an element of the text.*

States	Illuminates	Specifies	Exemplifies	Appears
Leaves	Writes	Fashions	Demonstrates	Examined
Contrasts	Correct	Noted	Argues	Expected
Appears	Focused	Mused	Makes	Tended
Examined	Draws	Suggests	(readers)	Moved
Tended	Locate	Takes on	Warns	Claims
Moved	Becomes	Straddles	Allows	Keep
Claims	Appreciates	Struggle	Enables	Takes
Engaged	Remind	Makes	Grows	Find
Keep	Observed	reference to	Introduces	Establishes
Takes	Carries	Displays	Takes place	Seem
Establishes	Inscribed	Laid out	Calls	Preclude
Seem	Imitate	Immerses	Situated	Retains
Preclude	Underlines	Reformulates	Recognize	Speaks
Retains	Goes on to	Emphasizes	Rationalize	Assumes
Speaks to	tell	Include	Wonder	Mirrors
Assumes	Tells	Continues	Says	Describes
Mirrors	Offers	Catalogue		Declares
Describes	Announces	Signifies		Forces
Forces	Brings out	Evokes		Illuminates
	the nature			Correct
	Certifies			Focused
				Reads
				Suggests

# Summarizing an Author's Choices

**Instructions:** After you read a text, use the following framework to construct an effective summary of an author's choices and their impact. This is a summary that carries a specific interpretation about the author's choices. This framework can help you think critically about the facts of the text and the impact it has on meaning for you as a reader.

What major idea or theme did you take away from the reading based on your close reading? For example, what observation on the nature of human beings or societies did the author make? What question does the text pose? What general judgment can one make about situations like the one described in the text?

Interpreted Meaning

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What particular words, images, phrases, or techniques made you think about these ideas? In other words, what element or technique in the text will you focus on in your description? (Elements of Stories, Essays, Poems, etc.)

Choice (s) \_\_\_\_\_

Explain why these choices prove your inferences or interpretations are valid. "When the author said X, it made me think Y because when most people think of X, they think of..." Explain, explain, explain.

Associated meanings

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The frame can be used to kick off an analysis of a text or to provide feedback to peer authors about their work and the impact of their choices. More importantly, it really helps you understand your own thinking!

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