

## *Chapter 6*

# **A Design Architecture for Engaging Middle and High School Students in Epistemic Practices of Literary Interpretation**

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Two fundamental and related questions underlie the work presented in this chapter: First, what types of knowledge, dispositions, practices, and skills are called upon when readers engage in literary interpretation? Second, what types of instructional designs might provide students with opportunities to develop these? To address these questions, we drew from theoretical and empirical work in literary reading to develop an account of epistemic cognition of literary interpretation—the aims, values, sources of knowledge, processes, and practices involved in literary meaning-making (Lee, Goldman, Levine, and Magliano, 2016). This account informed and was informed by our ongoing design work with middle and high school English Language Arts (ELA) teachers. Out of that work emerged a design architecture for instruction supporting students' engagement in literary interpretation.

This chapter first briefly summarizes the Lee et al. (2016) account of the epistemic cognition of literary interpretation. Then it describes components of the design architecture for instruction, including examples that illustrate these components as they were implemented in classrooms. The final section describes the organization and orchestration of the components to create literature units to engage middle and high school students (grades 6–12) in increasingly complex literary works and practices that embody the epistemology of literary interpretation.

## THE EPISTEMIC COGNITION OF LITERARY INTERPRETATION

Generally speaking, epistemology concerns the nature and structure of knowledge (Hofer and Pintrich, 1997). Epistemic cognition focuses on ways of thinking, questioning, and arguing that are particular to a discipline or domain. For example, in reading a poem, readers might assume that a single word could have multiple meanings, and the consideration of those meanings might contribute to their enjoyment and understanding of the poem. Quite the opposite is true in scientific reports, where readers generally seek precise and specific definitions of concepts and terms.

Increasingly, educational researchers, policy makers, and practitioners recognize that epistemic cognition differs across disciplines and are exploring the implications of these differences for learning goals, instructional materials, and practices of reading, questioning, reasoning, and arguing (Moje, 2008; Moje, Young, Readence, and Moore, 2000). In the discipline of ELA, attention to epistemic cognition is fundamental to engaging in "high literacy" practices that support students' literary engagement and reasoning (Langer and Applebee, 2016; Nachowitz and Wilcox, Chapter 1). From our perspective, "high literacy" involves multiple practices that constitute literary reading and argumentation: Students engage in dialogic discussion of texts with the aims of: wrestling with what it means to be human; exploring life's essential dilemmas and responses to them; and envisioning possible worlds beyond their own but in relation to their own experiences (Langer, 2011; Lee, 2007; Lee et al., 2016). Such engagement necessarily involves knowledge of the epistemic aims and values of literature in conjunction with the reading and reasoning practices and discourse forms that support oral and written communication of literary interpretations.

To explore the epistemic cognition of literary reading, we looked to Chinn, Buckland, and Samarapungavan (2011), who expanded the two-dimensional personal epistemology formulations of Hofer and Pintrich (1997) to propose a general, five-component model of epistemic cognition. We instantiated this general model to characterize epistemic cognition for literary interpretation (Table 6.1). As detailed in Lee et al. (2016), this instantiation drew on a broad range of theory and empirical research related to literary reading and response, including literary theory; cognitive and sociocognitive models of reading; contrastive studies of experts and novices reading literary works; examinations of everyday readers' resources and practices; and studies of various instructional tasks, texts, and strategies intended to engage novice literary readers cognitively and affectively with knowledge, practices, and competencies/dispositions observed in experienced literary readers.

Table 6.1 Epistemic Cognition in Literary Reading and Reasoning

| Components of Epistemic Cognition                     | Instantiations in Literary Reading  |
|---|---|
| Epistemic aims  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interrogate conundrums of the human experience</li> <li>• Examine relationships between content and form</li> <li>• Examine relations across texts</li> </ul>  |
| Structure of knowledge                                | Literary theorizing rarely assumes simplicity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multidimensional</li> <li>• Contextual</li> <li>• Probabilistic</li> </ul>   |
| Sources of experience and justifications of knowledge | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal knowledge and beliefs</li> <li>• Literary conventions</li> <li>• Language conventions</li> <li>• Literary traditions</li> <li>• Other texts—literary and nonliterary, including other's ideas on texts</li> <li>• Knowledge of authors</li> <li>• Philosophical, religious, political systems of thought</li> </ul>                               |
| Epistemic virtues and vices                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appreciation of literary texts and language as open to multiple interpretations</li> <li>• Dispositions to attend to nuances of language choice, language play, and text structure</li> <li>• Disposition to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity</li> <li>• Ideas about epistemic vices are rooted in debates over the nature of interpretation</li> </ul> |
| Reliable processes for achieving epistemic aims       | Reliable processes include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close reading</li> <li>• Argument</li> <li>• Consideration of multiple interpretations</li> <li>• Constructing or deriving patterns and tensions in texts</li> <li>• Considering emotional or affective responses as guides to interpretive salience and symbolic meaning</li> </ul>  |

The characterization of literary interpretation in Table 6.1 assumes that the central epistemic aim of literary interpretation is to make meaning of the human experience. As Rosenblatt (1982) and Dewey (1934) have argued, readers make meaning in transaction with a text. Their emergent interpretations draw on sources such as their own affective responses to form and content; knowledge and beliefs of both readers and authors; literary traditions and conventions; and philosophical, moral, ethical, and literary schools of thought. Each reader builds multiple responses to and perspectives on the human condition through their reading. These perspectives may be compared, contested, and argued, but epistemologically, those arguments are regarded as most reliable when they are derived through processes of close reading that

attend to nuances of language choice and language play, as well as elements such as plot, structure, and characterization.

In putting forth this view, we recognize that no epistemological account is comprehensive or universal. In particular, we acknowledge that our account has a Western bias, as almost all of the theory and research we reviewed came from the United States and Europe. Nevertheless, we hope our conceptualization represents several enduring epistemic principles that provide a resource for teachers and researchers interested in design of instruction in literary interpretation.

### A Tension between Literary Epistemology and Current Pedagogy

Lee et al.'s (2016) account of epistemic cognition and the conception of the work of literary interpretation are in many ways at odds with pedagogical approaches that still dominate typical school experiences with literature. Studies of practice in ELA classrooms indicate that despite their desire to help students explore and value multiple perspectives, teachers tend to fall back on "one right answer" approaches to literary interpretation, especially when working with students in lower-tracked classrooms (Alvermann, O'Brien, and Dillon, 1990; Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, and Gamoran, 2003; Cazden, 2001; Commeyras and DeGross, 1998; Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, and Long, 2003; Oakes, 2005; Watanabe, 2008). However, to engage students with the components of epistemic cognition of literary interpretation, teachers need to move to inquiry-based, dialogic, problem-solving models. Such dialogic interactions are central to literary instruction because they make visible multiple perspectives with which readers engage in transaction with texts. A classroom culture that supports exploration of these multiplicities is key to achieving the epistemic aims of literary reading.

We had an opportunity to explore the design of such inquiry-based instruction to support literary reading in the context of Project READI (Reading, Evidence, and Argument in Disciplinary Instruction, [www.projectreadi.org](http://www.projectreadi.org)), a six-year, design-research project that aimed to support students in taking up literary epistemologies and some of the knowledge and practices of experienced literary readers (Goldman et al., 2016; Hillocks and Ludlow, 1984; McNamara and Magliano, 2009; Rouet and Britt, 2011). This design work involved close collaborations among a team of classroom teachers, English education experts, and learning sciences researchers. In interventions across several schools and over several years, we found that students made gains in moving from literal to interpretive sense-making, building interpretive discussions, writings, and making "expert-like" moves in literary reading

(Goldman, McCarthy, and Burkett, 2015; Lee and Goldman, 2015; Levine, 2014; Levine and Horton, 2015; Sosa, Hall, Goldman, and Lee, 2016).

The READI literature design team formulated a set of student learning goals derived from components of literary epistemic cognition and our students' particular contexts, interests, and needs. For the various instructional units in our study, those goals included the following:

- engaging in close reading
- noticing authorial choices and considering potential implications of these choices for interpretive meaning
- building connections within and between texts
- constructing literary arguments orally and in writing, using conceptual criteria and textual evidence to support interpretive claims about characters, themes, and language
- articulating epistemic aims, goals, and purposes

To achieve these goals, the READI design team of teachers and researchers created an overall design architecture that would support different combinations of these and other epistemic goals.

### A DESIGN ARCHITECTURE FOR INSTRUCTION IN LITERARY INTERPRETATION

To build an overarching design architecture, we drew from prior instructional interventions in which students engaged the kinds of epistemic practices that experienced readers bring to literary inquiry and fulfilling reading experiences (e.g., Applebee et al., 2003; Langer, 1991, 2011; Lee, 2007; Levine, 2014; Lewis and Ferretti, 2011; Smagorinsky, McCann, and Kern 1987; Smith, 1992; Smith and Hillocks, 1988). From this research we derived four basic components that formed the foundation of ELA instruction: gateway activities (e.g., Smith, 1992), cultural modeling using cultural data sets (Lee, 2007), interpretive heuristics and scaffolds for interpretive practices (e.g., Levine and Horton, 2015; Morrell and Duncan-Andrade, 2005), and background knowledge.

We first briefly describe these components and then elaborate with examples of classroom discussions and activities that illustrate how these components helped support students with engaging in epistemic practices.

- *Gateway activities.* Gateway activities are designed to help students explore, question, and build conceptual schemata and criteria for values (e.g., good parenting) and themes and concepts (e.g., heroism, coming of

- age, sexism). Dialogue about such criteria also helps introduce students to the process and language of developing, supporting, and warranting claims.
- *Cultural modeling.* Lee's Cultural Modeling Framework (2006, 2007) is an instructional approach that enlists everyday "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez, 1992) that students bring to the classroom. In the context of designing and teaching ELA, cultural modeling relies on the fact that the language of everyday communication is made up of narrative, hyperbole, metaphor, and word play: that children develop rich, culturally based practices for using and interpreting language; and that children can and do call upon these everyday interpretive practices when reading and making sense of literary works. Cultural modeling functions to raise students' awareness of their everyday literary epistemologies and interpretive practices and their relevance to transactional reading of literary texts, both in and out of class.
  - *Heuristics and scaffolds for interpretive practice.* Instruction needs to provide students with access to the reliable epistemic processes of literary interpretation and the discourse forms that support their expression. A variety of interpretive heuristics and scaffolds along with teacher modeling with specific texts introduces students to ways of transacting with text, including affective engagement, attention to common authorial moves, and potential processes for building interpretations of those moves.
  - *Background knowledge activities.* Rich reading experiences may require students to build particular kinds of background knowledge about the historical and social contexts of the periods in which a literary work was produced or the settings portrayed in that work. This component is critical to consider in designing and implementing units but bears less directly on many epistemic interpretive practices and is therefore not discussed further in this chapter.

### Gateway Activities

Gateway activities introduce a thematic unit's essential questions. They provide opportunities for students to debate and establish defining criteria for major concepts and ideas in a unit, without yet having to address the challenges of unfamiliar language, settings, or storytelling techniques of more complex unit texts (Hillocks, 2010; Johannessen, 1982). Gateways often take the form of questionnaires, short scenarios, or carefully curated moral dilemmas, and are designed to steer students away from simplistic or snap judgments about concepts and choices. In discussions about gateway activities, students take up important epistemic practices: interrogating conundrums of human experience, drawing on personal knowledge as well

as social and cultural norms, and using discussion and argument to flesh out complex ideas.

### Example of a Gateway Activity

An example of such a gateway comes from an 11th grade READI unit in which *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Hurston, 1937) was the focal text. The unit explored both the practices of figurative interpretation and multifaceted themes of coming of age and gender. The unit was also designed to help students develop claims, support, and "warrants" (Toulmin, 2003) in the context of their arguments about the nature and expression of those themes. The READI team wrote the following gateway scenario to echo a key tension at the beginning of Hurston's novel, in which the protagonist has a kind of sexual awakening but is only half-aware of her new understandings and perspectives. Hurston's scene raises an interesting question about the nature of coming of age—how much self-awareness does a person need in order to be considered an adult?

Right around the time she turns thirteen, Hillary begins to see her neighbor, who is also thirteen, not just as someone to chase in the streets and make fun of, but someone that she thinks is cute. One day, they are both sitting on her front stoop, watching the cars pass by. Without even really knowing what she is doing, she leans over and kisses him.

*Ultimately, to what degree do you think Hillary is more mature today than she was yesterday?*

*Why and/or why not?*

*Add to your definition of coming of age based on your explanation above. "Coming of age means . . ."*

In small groups, the students discussed this scenario, with the aim of developing a partial definition of "coming of age." An excerpt from the discussion of one small group follows (pseudonyms are used):

*Estefania:* No. Just thinking somebody is cute isn't the same thing as being mature.

*James:* But a little, a little. It's like she's now seeing him differently. She's thinking about him as a boy, not just a kid with no . . .

*Carlos:* But at that age, like at 13, who really knows what they think at age 13?

*Daniel:* So you saying that when you were 13 . . .

*Carlos:* This is different! This is different! She's basically reading a book by its cover—she's not getting in details, you get me? And she calls him "cute." That's a kid word. That's just kids' stuff.

*Daniel:* No, she has come of age because she's experiencing like, love. Not *true* love, but some kind of love. She's young, but she has . . .

*James:* She's experiencing something new. The door opened and the light shone in (imitates angelic choir).

*Carlos:* She doesn't know what she's experiencing. It says, "Without really knowing what she's doing." You have to know what you're doing.

*Estefania:* So we can say that (writes on the handout) coming of age means knowing why you do the things you do.

*Carlos:* Yeah. You have to be older.

*Daniel:* It doesn't matter how old. She made a choice. She wants to. If a kid says why she wants a dog, and you know her past is responsible . . . You could be eighty years old and thinking, "I want that shirt," and then go shopping and blow your money away, money you don't have. You could be eighty and not yet have matured.

*Carlos:* Right, yeah. That's true.

In this excerpt of small group discussion, students engaged in at least two parallel processes. First, they engaged in an argument about the nature of maturity, drawing on textual details (e.g., "It says, 'Without really knowing what she's doing'") to develop and refine general criteria for coming of age (e.g., "Coming of age means knowing why you do the things you do"). Second, they engaged in several epistemic practices of literary reading and reasoning. They shared and occasionally seemed persuaded by different perspectives about coming of age. They drew on their own knowledge and experience to develop ideas about human nature, as when Daniel offered an example of an eighty-year-old who "blows" all their money on a shirt, or when Carlos asked, "Who really knows what they think at age 13?" They attended not just to the events of the text but to its language, as when Carlos pointed out that the word "cute" had connotations of immaturity: "That's a kid's word."

Generally speaking, the teacher's role in these activities is not to lead students toward particular interpretive conclusions. Instead, their goal is first to create questions and situations that allow students to use dialogue to flesh out their own conflicting ideas, and second to help make visible the literary ways of thinking in which students have engaged. For example, after Carlos acknowledged Daniel's point about the relationship between age and maturity, the teacher joined the group. She said,

Those are cool generalizations. You see what you—how you moved from the specific to the more general there. These are like the "so-whats" when you're making an argument . . . And I want to highlight where these generalizations are coming from. They are coming from your reading of the text, here, but also from your own, your own ideas and experiences. Both.

The teacher highlighted the process by which students moved from particular textual details to generalizations about maturity and coming of age. She also emphasized the importance of the students' own experiences, in combination with their experience of the text, as sources of knowledge.

Scenarios such as this one provided a forum for students to develop definitions of maturity in relation to sexuality, without yet having to take on the cognitive load of Hurston's dense, poetic imagery, unfamiliar settings, and use of African American Vernacular English, which many students do not often encounter in print (Rambsy, 2012). Accompanying scenarios introduced questions about what it means to be or become a woman, both in the world of the novel and the world of a student.

Scenarios like these are not necessarily richly detailed or poetically written. Their purpose is to set up dilemmas and questions that encourage student dialogue and help students build criteria for concepts that they will revisit as the unit continues. In the case of this unit, the criteria that students developed during this gateway activity entered into their discussions several days later, as they began reading *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and came upon the scene of sexual awakening in Hurston's novel.

#### *General Design Process for Gateway Activities*

This brief scenario is just one example of one part of a gateway activity. Below is a more generalized design process for such activities:

1. Consider the unresolved questions or dilemmas in a text and look at tensions and conflicts about which students might authentically disagree.
2. Write or find brief scenarios, surveys, or other engaging questions that use everyday settings and language to represent a simplified version of those tensions or conflicts.
3. Ask students to discuss and articulate the general values or warrants they used to make judgments about these questions or issues and be prepared to reflect on or modify those warrants as questions and situations become more nuanced.
4. Make visible the epistemic processes in which students engage.

#### **Cultural Modeling**

Cultural modeling is implemented through cultural data sets. These are everyday texts (e.g., music lyrics, clips from movies, TV shows, advertisements, etc.) that are drawn from popular culture or current contexts, are familiar to and valued by students, and invite interpretive challenges (e.g., exploration of symbolism, irony, unreliable narration) similar to those which students will

encounter in more complex focal texts of an instructional unit. The assumption of cultural modeling is that students already employ strategies to engage the interpretive problems of these everyday cultural data sets; for example, many students easily recognize and make sense of satire in a TV show or interpret symbolism in music lyrics that they value. While one goal of cultural data set activities is to provide a forum for students to articulate their interpretations of everyday texts, a second and equally important goal is to help students articulate *how* they came to build interpretive meaning. In other words, the cultural data set activities should help students analyze how and why they attended to particular features of a text, and what processes they used to construct their interpretations. Lee (1995, 2007) refers to these as metacognitive instructional conversations—discussions in small and whole groups where students make public the strategies they use to notice and construct meanings about what they notice.

Students typically describe their strategies in local terms, referring to specific details of interest in a cultural data set: for example, students looking at a 30-second car commercial might say, “They keep showing the car under the moonlight. The moon keeps showing up.” The teacher’s role is to revoice (O’Connor and Michaels 1993) students’ local explanations by using more general and sometimes academic language (Short and Fitzsimmons 2007) or helping students translate their specific moves into more general strategies or heuristics that students can then apply to other texts and interpretive activities. Thus, a teacher might respond, “You’re noticing a repeated image. Sometimes that’s called a motif. You can always be looking for repeated images in anything you see or read—then you have to figure out what kinds of effects they have on you or a larger audience.”

#### Example of a Cultural Data Set

The following example of a cultural data set activity comes from an 11th grade class whose teacher hoped to help students develop approaches to building their own interpretations of potential metaphor and symbol in literary texts. As a team, we looked for texts that were familiar, engaging, and offered accessible metaphors for students to notice and interpret. We chose the song “Titanium” (2011) because it was a pop hit at the time of the study, which meant many students knew it well, and the teacher counted on at least a few students to notice the song’s simple metaphors (e.g., words as bullets), which stood out from the rest of the literal lines in the song, creating a “rupture” in the text (Rabinowitz, 1987).

As with the gateway activities, the teacher’s goal in choosing this cultural data set was not to lead students to a particular or “correct” interpretation of the song’s metaphors; instead, the goal was to help students articulate *how*

they moved from the song’s literal images to figurative interpretations. Students might then call on that process when reading other, more complex texts. The teacher introduced the activity by reminding students that they themselves engaged in interpretation of symbols and metaphors every day, and that she wanted to show them an example.

The discussion we share here began after students had listened to the song, read the lyrics, and discussed their initial responses with a partner. The teacher pointed students to the first stanza and asked what they thought was going on in the song. For context, the lyrics to the song’s first stanza are below.

*Titanium*  
*You shout it out*  
*But I can't hear a word you say*  
*I'm talking loud not saying much*  
*I'm criticized but all your bullets ricochet*  
*You shoot me down, but I get up. . .*  
*I'm bulletproof. . . I am titanium.*

Students spontaneously offered interpretations of bullets as insults or emotional abuse, and titanium as a representation of resilience. The teacher then pressed them to explain how they knew that the speaker had not been literally shot. Randall spoke first, saying, “She’s having an argument with someone but like then it jumps to the metaphorical gun thing.”

Here, Randall’s use of the phrase “but then it jumps” signaled his detection of an unexpected shift or rupture in the passage. The teacher then highlighted that process of detection:

*Teacher:* Yeah. So we’re having this big argument right? These two people are arguing and then all of a sudden, what shows up?

*Sienna:* Bullets.

*Teacher:* Bullets. Is that something that seems to fit literally here?

*Sienna:* No.

*Teacher:* Why not?

*Sienna:* Cause . . . cause when you’re having an argument with somebody, in general, you’re yelling or probably trying to . . .

*Damon:* Depending on what kind of argument.

*Sienna:* Yeah, depending on what kind of argument, but you know, we just don’t . . . bullets don’t come out your mouth. You know. But it’s like words can hurt somebody. So I guess that’s what she means by it.

*Alissa:* Words hurt just as much as bullets.

*Sienna:* Right. Words can hurt just as much as bullets when somebody’s using them.

*Teacher:* Yeah. I want us to think about that idea . . . . When we see bullets, it doesn't seem to fit the rest of the text. This is what you can call a "rupture," when the literal meaning doesn't make sense, and you feel like you have to come up with another kind of meaning. It was like you were trying to figure out what else could it mean, because it wasn't actually bullets, and then you thought about bullets causing hurt and pain, like you were making associations or what we call "connotations."

In this discussion, the everyday interpretive knowledge and practices that students brought to the song lyrics became explicit and visible. The teacher-led discussion acted to support students in articulating their interpretations of the meanings of the song and the meta-level understanding of how they came to those interpretations. In this case specifically, students came to the lyrics knowing that people cannot really be made of titanium, and bullets are not really shot out of a person's mouth. They could thus focus on how they recognized and used this everyday knowledge to consider the symbolic and metaphoric intent of these lyrics. Such attention to *how* is critical when students move to less familiar and more complex literary texts throughout the units (Lee, 2007). It is also important to note the distinction between strategies for noticing interpretively salient details and strategies for constructing interpretations of those details. Epistemic cognition values both. In English classes, students are sometimes asked to identify a literary device such as a symbol or metaphor without being asked to build interpretations of the devices' potential effects. The use of cultural data sets is intended to help students articulate both strategies for noticing *and* interpreting, since identification is not particularly meaningful without attention to implications for interpretations.

#### *Building on Interpretive Practices Over Time*

In order to illustrate how unit sequencing functioned to build knowledge and practices over time, we present an example of how these strategies presented early in the unit on cultural modeling were applied to later texts. A few days after the above discussion of "Titanium," the students read "Linoleum Roses," a vignette from Sandra Cisneros' figuratively rich *House on Mango Street* (1991). Cisneros' narrator tells the story of Sally, an 8th grade girl who marries an older, clearly abusive man. Although Sally says she is happy, the narrator's language contradicts Sally's claims: "She says she is in love, but I think she did it to escape"; "She is happy, except sometimes her husband gets angry"; "Most days he is okay. Except he won't let her talk on the telephone" (p. 101).

After reading the story on their own, the teacher asked students for their first responses or questions. One student began:

*Samuel:* I don't get it.

*Teacher:* Okay, so, Samuel was brave enough to say he didn't get it. What do you mean you did not get it?

*Samuel:* Because it is talking about how this girl Sally is married and her husband is really, really mean and awful, but then she sits there and she's still happy looking around the house. I don't get that. How are you happy if he doesn't like you?

*Teacher:* You're saying that she should be miserable, but she's not. I think you've really clued into something important by saying, I don't understand.

*Nate:* Yeah, and this is kind of odd [student points to the word *except* in the text]

*Teacher:* Tell me what you mean [by] "odd."

*Nate:* Because, right. But it's like, if you supposed to be happy and, you know, good things are happening, but then she put the *except* part in there, is meaning there's another half to it. So, it's like, yeah, she likes being married, he does give her money, he buys things, but then again, her friends can't come over, she's looking at the floor.

*Samuel:* She can't talk on the phone.

*Nate:* It's like he took the PS3 from her, you know, she can't look out the window. She can't even look out the window. Who does that? You can't look out the window?

*Teacher:* You found another rupture—something doesn't fit.

As they did when discussing the cultural data set "Titanium," students once again identified a rupture in the text and used that rupture as a cue to take notice of a particular set of details. In the case of "Titanium," students attended to a potential metaphor, while in the case of "Linoleum Roses," students attended to a set of character actions that violated their social norms. They also questioned the literal meaning of the text in a different way—they were skeptical of the reliability of the character's claims. As they questioned the text, both in this and the cultural data set discussion, students paid close attention to word choice and patterns of language in service of their interpretations.

As students progressed in the unit, reading more complex and often longer texts, they continued to apply these epistemic principles and practices to their interpretive work.

#### *General Design Process for Cultural Data Sets*

In designing activities with "cultural data sets" to make literary epistemologies and practices visible, we have found the following general process to be helpful:

1. Reflect on the *epistemological aims* and epistemic practices in which you hope students engage.
2. Consider *reliable processes for achieving epistemic aims* which students might already engage in their everyday lives (e.g., close reading, consideration of multiple interpretations, identifying and interpreting patterns and tensions in a text, and drawing on emotional or affective responses as interpretive resources).
3. Look for—and ask your students about—*everyday texts* that are familiar and valued parts of students' cultures and communities (e.g., music lyrics, clips from movies or TV shows, advertisements, school announcements, etc.), with which students might already engage in close reading, consideration of multiple interpretations, and so on.
4. Design *activities to make processes visible* and explicitly analyze those processes by asking, for example, “*How did you come to that symbolic interpretation?*” or “*How did you decide this phrase had literal and figurative meanings?*”

### Heuristics and Scaffolds for Interpretive Practices

Both gateway activities and cultural data sets rely on particular kinds of texts (scenarios, surveys, popular songs) to help students recognize and reflect on a unit's big-ticket themes or interpretive practices. The third component of the design architecture does not require finding or creating a specific type of text, but instead involves flexible, adaptable interpretive approaches and scaffolds that students can use with many different texts.

A number of interpretive heuristics are adaptable to different texts and contexts, including learning and applying archetypal symbols (Peskin, Allen, and Wells-Jopling, 2010), or reading through various critical lenses (Appleman, 2000; Stovall, 2006). In this chapter we describe an affect-based interpretive heuristic and several interpretive scaffolds that supported students in articulating their interpretations across several READI instructional units.

#### *Affect-based Heuristic*

The affect-based interpretive heuristic takes up the epistemic practice of considering emotional or affective responses as guides for literary engagement. The approach draws on the relationship between literary reading and affective (positive and negative) responses and evaluations. Empirical work indicates that non-expert literary readers experience and make use of affective and emotional responses at many interpretive levels, including interpretation of metaphor, character, and theme. For instance, studies of literary reading indicate that readers have strong affective responses to “literary”

language (e.g., metaphors or imagery) (Hunt and Vipond, 1986; Miall and Kuiken, 1994; van Peer, Hakemulder, and Zyngier, 2007). Other studies show that readers judge character traits and make thematic inferences based on their evaluations of characters' actions and goals (Williams et al., 2002; Zillmann, 1995).

In practicing this heuristic, which our team called “up/down/both/why,” students used a simple set of affect-based questions to focus on their interpretations of textual tones, moods, or their own aesthetic or critical evaluations of a text. The students learned to

1. Identify textual language and events they perceive to be especially emotionally evocative or affect-laden
2. Make subjective evaluations of valence in that language (Does it seem very positive? Kind of negative? Both?)
3. Explain their evaluations

#### *Example of an Interpretive Heuristic*

Several examples from READI units illustrate the affective heuristic as students applied it to different types of texts and for different purposes. In one unit for 10th graders, a teacher introduced students to “up/down/both/why” at the word level by using a cultural data set. She told students that actor Jamie Foxx's given name was Eric Bishop, and then asked students why they thought he changed his name from one to the other. She asked, “How might fans respond to each name? More positive? More negative? Or both?” and then asked students to explain their evaluations. One student immediately evaluated “Foxx” as having both positive and negative effects, because the word suggested both trickery and cleverness; “That's better for show business,” he said. Figure 6.1 shows the “up/down/both/why” annotations of one group of students during this activity. The arrows indicate students' positive and negative evaluations, along with their explanations for those evaluations.

The teacher then made explicit the affect-based process students used to build connotations of the text, introducing the short-hand term “up/down/both/why” and the formal term “connotation.”

#### *Building on Interpretive Practices Over Time*

As was true for several READI classes, this 10th grade class also engaged in a gateway activity around coming of age, and they too read Cisneros' vignette, “Linoleum Roses.” While reading the vignette, this class used “up/down/both/why” as a tool for building their interpretations. For reference, the last paragraph of the vignette is printed here.



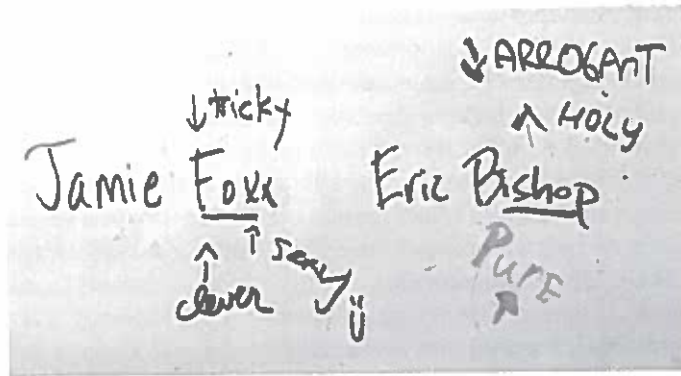


Figure 6.1 Student Annotations on a Cultural Data Set Used to Make the Affect-based Heuristic Visible. (Photographer: Sarah Levine)

[Sally] sits at home because she is afraid to go outside without his permission. She looks at all the things they own: the towels and the toaster, the alarm clock and the drapes. She likes looking at the walls, at how neatly their corners meet, the linoleum roses on the floor, the ceiling smooth as wedding cake.

After reading, the teacher began a discussion with an “up/down/both/why” question.

*Teacher:* (Makes “thumbs up” and “thumbs down” gestures): So overall, more optimistic about this relationship? More pessimistic? Both?

*Jason:* It’s “down,” because it says smooth like the um, the “ceiling smooth as wedding cake,” yeah, like she trapped and . . . like can’t do nothing.

*Julio:* Well, I agree with Jason that it’s “down” but disagree with why. Because she [the speaker] pretty much says “ceiling smooth as wedding cake,” saying that the wedding cake is kind of where she’s stuck. It’s a cake and it’s lovely, but it’s pretty much like a prison and she’s stuck there.

*Natalie:* I think, um, she’s stuck figuratively, cause her mind and her heart is back at the wedding day when she was so happy, and even though things aren’t good now, she’s still thinking about the wedding cake and her marriage and how she was happy then.

*Xochitl:* Going back to “the ceiling smooth as wedding cake,” I think the ceiling is “down” because it resembles a limit—

*Teacher:* Oh!

*Natalie:* Hm.

*Xochitl:* So, she pretty much says “ceiling smooth as wedding cake” and uh, it’s smooth, but uh, there’s a limit, and for her, the limit is restrictions, obedience, and following what he says.

In using the heuristic, students enacted literary ways of thinking and epistemic practices by using affective response, engaging in close reading, and offering multiple interpretations of a single line of text. For example, they identified language they felt was interpretively salient (e.g., “ceiling smooth as wedding cake”) by attending to their heightened affective responses to the text. They interpreted this image in multiple ways: as purely negative, representing a trap; as both negative and positive (“it’s lovely, but it’s pretty much like a prison”); and as a representation of the character’s forced obedience to her husband.

In this discussion, as in others we described in this chapter, students also engaged in dialogue with one another, building on their classmates’ interpretations, as opposed to looking to the teacher for the “right answer,” or engaging in conventional I-R-E discussion. We argue that the gateways, cultural data sets, and the affective heuristic support such dialogue because they are accessible and flexible enough to allow students to draw on their everyday resources for inquiry while guiding them toward close reading and literary reasoning.

#### *Scaffolds for Articulating Interpretations*

Along with interpretive heuristics that offer students a foothold for building interpretations, the READI units included several scaffolds for developing and articulating interpretations that students and teachers could incorporate, refine, and enhance as they saw fit. These scaffolds included graphic organizers for tracking plot, developing interpretations of character, and visualizing processes for interpreting potential symbols, satire, irony, or unreliable narration (depending on the unit). In addition, we designed scaffolds with language and sentence stems to support students’ engagement in epistemic practices for interpretation and articulation of ideas around such practices (see Goldman, 2018 for several examples).

Several interpretive scaffolds were built on theory and research arguing that authors draw from a repertoire of common literary moves, sometimes called “rules of notice” (Rabinowitz, 1987) or “rules of significance” (Culler, 2002) that invite readers’ attention and interpretation. As suggested earlier in the chapter, when a reader encounters a rupture in conventional expectations or meaning, they might ascribe increased interpretive importance to the details that created such a rupture. The same rules apply to repeated imagery, figurative language, and beginnings and ends of texts, among other elements (Booth, 1983; Culler, 2002; Rabinowitz, 1987). Attention to such rules of notice are folded into experienced literary readers’ epistemic cognition, and are fundamental to their construction of connotation, thematic inference, and

other interpretive responses (Graves, 1996; Kurtz and Schober, 2001; Peskin, 1998; Zeitz, 1994).

*Examples of Interpretive Scaffolds*

The READI team designed a scaffold to help students attend to some of the most common rules of notice. Students used the acronym TRICEPS (developed by the first author) as a reminder to attend to *Tensions, Ruptures, Imagery, Characterization, Endings, Patterns, and Symbols*. Others offer similar lists, some with a bit more guidance for younger students (e.g., Beers and Probst, 2012).

While the rules of notice acronym reminded students of these authorial moves, it did not help students build interpretations of those moves—that is where students drew on interpretive heuristics such as up/down/both/why. We also designed simple sentence frames as a scaffold to support students in building and articulating connections between technique and effect. In Figure 6.2 below, the introductory phrases in the first column focus on rules of notice. The second column provides verbs to connect to potential interpretive effects, which are expressed in the third column and invite affect-based interpretation. Note that each phrase can be completed with several different verbs and interpretive effects.

Students used this template in two ways. Some focused on a particular authorial move (e.g., imagery or symbol) and then borrowed from the language of the template to help themselves articulate their interpretation of its effects. Alternately, other students first built interpretations of textual effects and then moved back to the text to consider what kinds of devices might have been at play in creating those effects.

The team designed another scaffold to support students in constructing meaning from aspects of the text they thought might be symbolic (Figure 6.2). These scaffolds were based on heuristics developed by Lee (2007). Once students noticed an image in the text that they thought might have symbolic

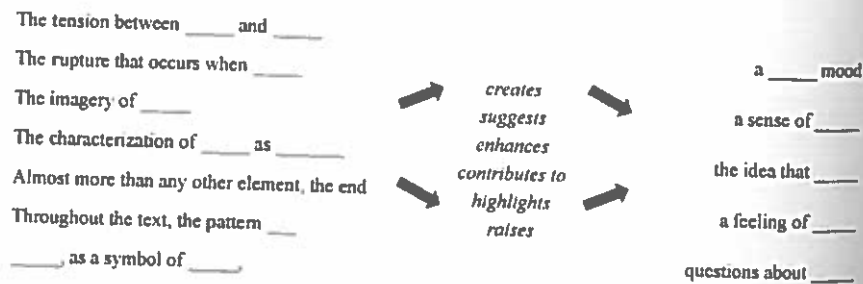


Figure 6.2 Scaffold for Describing Connections between Techniques and Readers' Responses.

meaning (perhaps because it seemed especially positive, negative, or both), they gathered details about and recorded their associations with that image. This process supported students in considering possible meanings and interpretations of characters or the world of the text.

An example of this scaffold in use comes from an 11th grade unit in which the focal text was Eugenia Collier's "Marigolds," a short story set in the Great Depression, in which a young girl and her friends harass an elderly neighbor tending to her marigolds. The story ends as the young girl, frustrated by the injustice in her life and the impossibility of redress, destroys the marigolds, even though the flowers provided a bright spot of beauty in her world. Using the TRICEPS rules of notice scaffold, students noted that the author chose

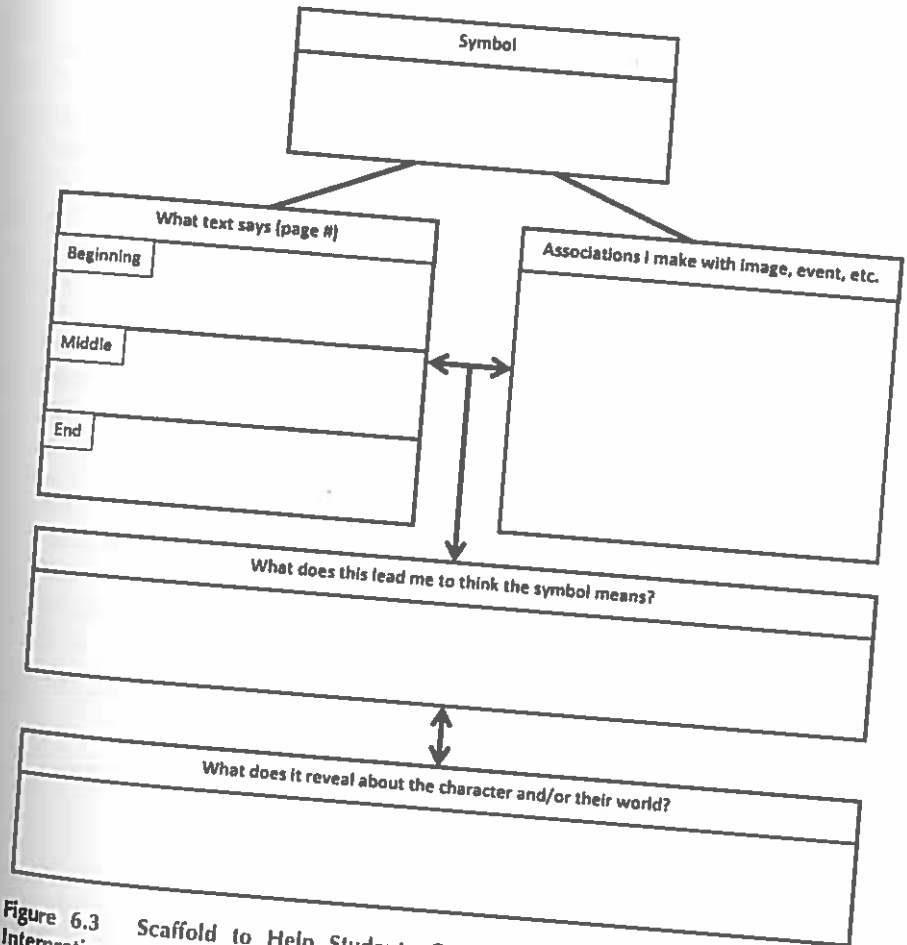


Figure 6.3 Scaffold to Help Students Connect Identified Symbols to Potential Interpretive Meaning.

“Marigolds” as the title of the story, and that imagery describing marigolds appeared repeatedly throughout the text. As a class, they decided to consider potential symbolic meanings for marigolds.

Students used the symbolism scaffold as they examined descriptions of marigolds throughout the course of the story, building a combination of positive and negative associations with that imagery as the story progressed. One student wrote that at the beginning of the story, the bright flowers were compared to the dry dust of the neighborhood, and therefore seemed positive because of their beauty. Later in the story, the student wrote that the marigolds seemed both positive and negative, because they were still beautiful, but the narrator found them upsetting; the beauty didn’t seem to belong in the town.

In writing and discussion, students considered the imagery’s connotations and what those connotations might indicate about the characters or world of the story. Finally, students considered the story as a whole, including the last line, in which now grown narrator admits that “I, too, have planted marigolds.” They then used sentence stems to articulate their ideas about the symbolic effects of marigolds overall. Another student, Samuel, shared his response:

*Samuel:* I wrote down, “The symbol of the marigolds creates a sense of hope with the idea of beauty everywhere.”

*Teacher:* How do you get that from this [ending]?

*Samuel:* You know how people associate pretty flowers with love, they can associate flowers with everything . . . They saw them in this ugly setting, this decrepit old house and then beautiful marigolds in the sun. We can find something so beautiful in something so ugly so there has to be hope somewhere.

Samuel noticed and attributed significance to the juxtaposition of the beautiful flowers with the “ugly setting” to construct his interpretation of the story. His responses reflect the process of connecting symbols to interpretations as depicted in Figure 6.2, attention to endings (e.g., *E* in TRICEPS), and use of the sentence frames illustrated. These scaffolds, and others used in the READI units, were designed in consideration of the epistemic practices the team hoped our students would engage in as they read.

### PUTTING THE COMPONENTS TOGETHER

What does it look like to put all these components together, paired with texts and activities so that students begin to develop the knowledge, epistemic practices, and accompanying confidence to engage literary works at multiple

levels of complexity and challenge? In the final section of this chapter we illustrate the READI literature design team’s process for implementing the architectural components in actual instructional units.

### A Backward Design Process

The READI team—researchers and teachers together—began their unit design by examining the range of themes and interpretive challenges offered by the particular focal texts that the classroom teachers on the team intended to use with their students. These focal text selections varied widely across teachers, with choices based on a host of variables specific to the needs and demands of teachers’ districts, schools, classrooms, and students. Using the principles of backward design (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998), the team asked questions, such as “What knowledge and interpretive skills would a student need in order to engage in a rich transactional reading with this text?” “What kinds of human dilemmas and difficult questions about human nature does this text raise?” “Where does this text lend itself to the kinds of epistemic cognition and practices that we hope to help students build?” Figure 6.4 depicts the unit design process as beginning at the intersection of interpretive challenges of focal texts, epistemic goals, and compelling themes.

Consideration of this intersection set the stage for designing and building the components of instructional units: gateway activities, cultural data sets, interpretive heuristics and scaffolds, and activities to build background knowledge; along with opportunities for pair, small group, and whole class discussions. Activities and discussion were intended to build knowledge and skills that “prepared” students to engage the challenges of the focal text as well as to engage more generally in rich, pleasurable, and challenging

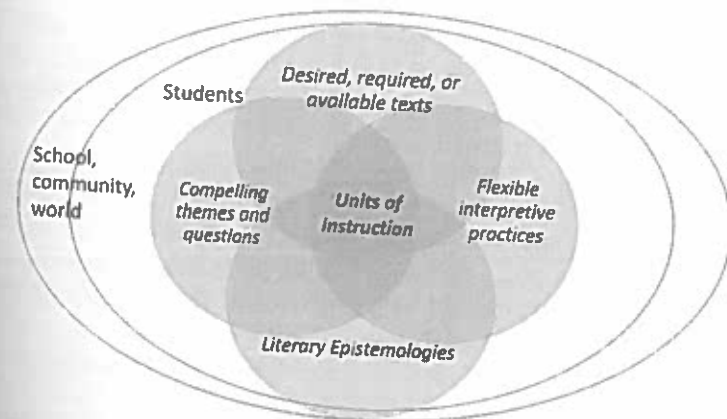


Figure 6.4 Units of Instruction Reflect the Intersection of Multiple Considerations.

reading experiences, as well as spoken and written expression of interpretive arguments.

To illustrate the design process, we discuss a unit that was implemented in an 11th grade class with a diverse population in an urban school. Additional examples of units are available through the Project READI website both as technical reports and as cases featuring teacher annotations (<https://www.projectreadi.org>).

### Example of a Unit

While many other READI units featured novels as focal texts, the focal texts for this 11th grade unit were two shorter texts: "Marigolds," a short story by Eugenia Collier, and "Two Kinds," a chapter from *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan. Both stories are narrated by characters who are coming of age in different ways, and both stories are rich in characterization, setting, and symbolism. To prepare students to engage with these two texts, the READI team designed gateway activities that explored dilemmas around coming of age, and cultural data sets and scaffolds to help students gain a meta-level awareness of their processes of noticing and interpreting aspects of character, setting, and symbol.

As depicted in Figure 6.4, this unit began with cultural modeling activities, one in which the students listened to the pop song "Titanium" to surface strategies they use for noticing and interpreting, and a second in which the affect-based heuristic was introduced through the comparison of celebrity names (e.g., Jamie Foxx and Eric Bishop). During these initial activities, students engaged in cycles of participation structures, which allowed them to work independently while reading and annotating, discuss their observations and interpretive ideas in small groups, and then sometimes move to whole class discussions. These rotating participation structures allowed students opportunities to explore and share multiple perspectives on a text, while giving the teacher the opportunity to push students to make their thinking visible and name interpretive processes and strategies so students could call on them during future reading with more complex texts.

The teacher then introduced students to the conundrums of coming of age through short gateway scenarios, with which students debated and developed criteria to define that concept. Again, the routines and participation structures allowed students multiple opportunities to work independently and share their thoughts with others. The teacher also kept track of student thinking by displaying students' criteria for coming of age on a large post-it chart, which the class referred to and expanded on throughout the unit. Then, to practice interpreting literary texts with strategies and criteria in mind, students read Cisneros' "Linoleum Roses" and Tupac Shakur's poem "The Rose that Grew from

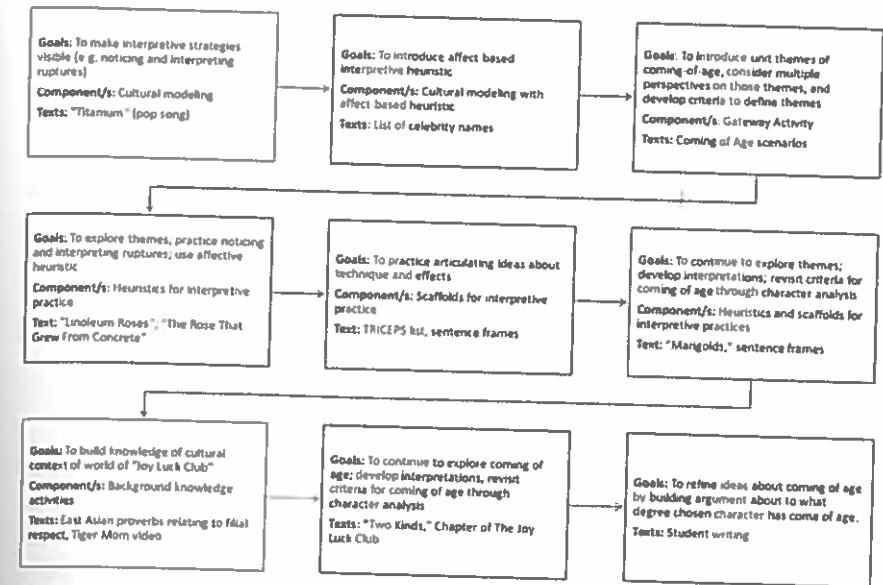


Figure 6.5 Design Sequence for Example Unit.

Concrete" (1999) to further explore views on coming of age and to practice interpretive heuristics around literary noticing and interpreting. During these activities, students worked independently, using up/down/both/why and the TRICEPS scaffold to annotate the text. They shared their annotations in small groups, and then independently wrote interpretive claims using sentence stems. They then shared and debated their ideas in whole class discussion.

These activities used short, relatively accessible texts, thereby allowing students to focus on instructional meta-conversations, where they surfaced what they already knew and did with texts. Students also practiced classroom routines of discussion, writing, and shifting participation structures to support their engagement with texts and each other. The knowledge, strategies, and practices used in these introductory activities formed the basis of their work with the subsequent longer, more complex unit texts.

When students moved on to read the focal text "Marigolds," they continued to develop interpretations and explore multiple perspectives on story characters, themes, and language. They revisited their list of criteria for coming of age through character analysis and examined potential symbols with interpretive scaffolds. The teacher continued to rotate participation structures, thus allowing students to work independently, in small groups, and as a whole class. Students also wrote short arguments either as preparation for or as refinement after discussions.

Finally, students moved to Tan's "Two Kinds," a story that foregrounds generational conflict in a Chinese immigrant family. Before they began their reading, we added brief activities to build some background knowledge about East Asian family cultures and stereotypes. Again, the students had opportunities to apply the knowledge and practices they had developed across the unit. At the end of the unit, students further developed their ideas about coming of age by building a written argument about the degree to which a character from either "Marigolds" or "Two Kinds" had met the students' criteria for coming of age.

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

If researchers and teachers want students to engage in the "high literacy" explored in this book, we need to help teachers disrupt conventional ELA instruction by reflecting on and making visible the epistemic values, goals, and practices that underlie instruction in literary interpretation. Our research suggests a particular design process for helping students engage in transactional interpretive reading: First, build instructional units at the intersection of student needs and interests, epistemological goals, compelling thematic questions, and interpretive demands of texts. Second, include the components of gateway activities, cultural data sets, heuristics and scaffolds for interpretive practice, and background knowledge activities. The rest of the unit is left to teachers and students, as it should be, and will play out with all of the surprises, backtracking, frustration, and pleasure that define classroom teaching and learning.

By outlining this design process, and more specifically by encouraging the explicit exploration of interpretation, we do not mean to suggest that interpretation is a prescriptive process or a mechanical act. The opposite is true. By helping students become more aware of their own and others' approaches to interpretation, students can become more fluid and expansive interpreters of literature. And by using cultural data sets and affect-based heuristics, students can develop their individual and idiosyncratic approaches and responses to texts. However, we do want to guide students and teachers toward an understanding of literary ways of knowing that includes reliance on self, text, and world as sources of knowledge for interpretation, and an explicit awareness of their epistemic aims and values. We also want to encourage the education community writ large to examine and surface the epistemologies and epistemic practices that underlie literary teaching and learning.

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### Part III

## CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION FOR HIGH LITERACY