

## **Chapter 8: Teaching Literature (Maxwell, Meiser, McKnight, 2011)**

Our past experiences influence much of our understanding of life and literature. Reader response theory emphasizes the importance of relationships between reader and text as a way for students to understand and critically analyze what they read. Louise Rosenblatt (1995) says the reader “brings the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment” (Cited by Maxwell et al., 2011, p. 204). I believe this idea is central to teaching English Language Arts (ELA). Almost every time we read a text or hear a story, we relate the character’s experiences to our own lives or try and understand what that character is experiencing. The more we read about other people’s experiences, the more empathetic we become.

However, this does not just happen in an ELA class. Maxwell et al. provide many examples for how teachers can use reader response theory in the classroom and increase comprehension. Using responses as a source or starting point for class and group discussions allows students to grasp their opinions and ideas of the text. Maxwell et al. mention that having students prepare discussion questions before it begins encourages involvement in the discussion. I have seen this in action with my resident teacher. My resident teacher has students look at the title and predict the theme/main idea. They write it down on their worksheet then discuss it as a whole class. Another activity discussed in chapter eight that I have seen in a classroom is creating guided reading questions for different chapters or paragraphs of the text. Coupling this with group discussions after every few chapters could be an effective way to practice reading comprehension skills and eventually lead to a final assessment paper or presentation.

In my classroom, I want students to enjoy reading and feel pride in their analysis. Historically, there has been the belief that there is only one correct analysis or meaning in a poem or story. This idea eliminates the experiences a reader brings to a story and does not create a culturally diverse classroom. Through reading journals and literary responses, I want my students to explore and reflect on their analysis of the text we consume. I want them to share with their peers, opening each other's minds to other ways of thinking and viewing the world around them. As students practice their journal writing, they will gain confidence in their ability to write. Maxwell et al. present some intriguing ideas of how to teach literature and writing that I will adapt and utilize in my future classroom.