



Critical Literacy: A Powerful Tool for Reading the World

Many years ago when most of us were still in school, we believed everything we read, almost never questioning the perspectives presented nor the authors who presented them. At that time, we had somewhat limited access to information. Today, however, there is seemingly unlimited access to information thanks to the world wide web and multi-media where a plethora of biases, values and opinions are presented. So, students are now faced with a multitude of perspectives on any given topic.. How do they make sense of all of this? Students need to develop critical literacy skills, looking beyond the literal meaning of texts to observe what is present and what is missing, in order to analyse and evaluate the text's complete meaning and the author's intent (*The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10, English, p. 110*). They need strategies to help them become more aware of how various texts portray individuals, genders, groups, and situations. In the 1970's, Brazilian educational thinker, Paulo Friere, believed that education should raise student awareness by teaching them to think critically, democratically, and to continually question and make meaning from everything they learn— "read the word to read the world". For many boys, taking on a questioning or a critical stance may be a way of piquing their interest and engaging them in a topic.



Me Read? No Way! and *Me Read? And How!* outline some critical literacy practices to help all students develop these skills. Students are encouraged to:

- Examine multiple viewpoints (think about texts from the perspectives of different characters or from perspectives not represented in the texts)
- Focus on issues related to fairness, equity, and social justice (think about power in relationships between and among people and explore how power relationships shape perceptions, responses, and actions), Lewison, Flint and Sluys (2002)

Parents can help their children develop these skills by engaging in conversations about what they are reading, watching or viewing. To help start the conversation, parents can ask the following questions as a way of getting their child to think critically:

Who is the author of the text?

Why did the author write this text?

Who benefits from this text? How?

What does the author of this text want us to know? Think? Believe?

What do the words or images suggest?

Whose voices are left out? Why?

Is there another point of view?

How is gender, race, social class, age, etc. portrayed in this text? Why?

For more information about critical literacy, see

http://www.edugains.ca/resourcesLIT/CoreResources/Critical_Literacy_Guide.pdf

You can access *Me Read? No Way!* and *Me Read? And How!* at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/>



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