

THE 4C'S

After reading a text:

- *Connections*: What *connections* do you draw between the text and your own life or your other learning?
- *Challenge*: What ideas, positions, or assumptions do you want to *challenge* or argue with in the text?
- *Concepts*: What key *concepts* or ideas do you think are important and worth holding on to from the text?
- *Changes*: What *changes* in attitudes, thinking, or action are suggested by the text, either for you or others?

Nonfiction texts of varying sorts are used in all subject areas and across all age ranges. It can easily be taken for granted that these texts simply provide a source of content information. Although certainly nonfiction can be a very rich source of information, these texts can also provide a means to elicit vibrant discussions and further develop deep thinking. The 4C's routine provides a set of questions that encourage learners to grapple with the information provided in the text in a purposeful and structured way.

Purpose

This routine provides learners with a structure for a text-based discussion built around making connections, asking questions, identifying key ideas, and considering application. It encourages the reading and revisiting of texts in a focused, purposeful way that enables readers to delve beneath the surface and go beyond first impressions. Although originally designed for use with nonfiction texts, it can be applied to fiction as well with only minor changes.

Each step asks for different thinking moves that correspond to the kinds of active, thoughtful reading teachers want all readers to do. Although presented here in an order, and this order may be kept to facilitate discussion, each of these thinking moves is actually nonlinear in the practice of reading for comprehension. Asking the learner to make *connections* between the text and their own experiences personalizes the content while broadening it, as each new connection adds dimension to the text. Identifying *challenges* invites critical thinking and conveys to readers that one should raise questions

or truth and veracity as one reads nonfiction texts. Recognizing key *concepts* requires learners to compare and prioritize ideas to uncover themes and messages. The idea of identifying possible *changes* to one's behavior or approach asks learners to think beyond information to consider its import and how it might be used. This calls for both analytical thinking and synthesis.

Selecting Appropriate Content

The 4C's routine works most effectively when utilized with texts that incorporate complex ideas and concepts that can be considered from more than one perspective and are "meaty" enough to encourage grappling with ideas and promote discussion and debate. Texts can come from a wide variety of sources and can include excerpts from opinion papers, newspaper articles, scientific reports, scholarly articles, personal essays, and so on. It is possible some textbooks may be appropriate; however, often textbooks try to not put forth any position or opinion overtly while spelling out key concepts in bold print. This tends to make them less interesting sources for discussion. Although texts provide a vehicle for review, the routine can also be used with video or after listening to a provocative presentation such as a TED talk (www.ted.com).

Fiction can be a source of material as well if chosen with the steps in mind. Some simple modification on the wording would generally be appropriate. For instance, under "Challenges," you might ask students to focus on character actions with which they disagree. "Concepts" can be related to themes. "Changes" can focus on how the characters themselves changed and evolved over the course of the story and what caused those changes. However, with some stories it may be appropriate to ask, "How does the story *change* your thinking about things? What do you take away as a lesson or key learning?"

Steps

1. *Set up*. Invite learners to read the selected text either before the session if it is a lengthy text, or provide adequate reading time at the commencement of the session. After the routine has been learned, it is often useful for learners to know that the 4C's will be the framework for discussing the text. List the 4C's in a place clearly visible to all learners as a framework for the discussion.

2. *Make connections*. After reading the text, invite learners to find passages from the text that they can identify with, either from something that has happened to them or is somehow connected to other learning experiences. Begin group discussions by asking learners to read the passage from the text to which they are connecting. Ask them to explain the connection.

3. *Raise challenges.* Ask learners to find ideas or positions in the text that, as they read them, raised a red flag for one reason or another. These might be things that they did not agree with and want to challenge or simply feel they need more information before they can make a decision. With fiction, these might focus on a character's actions. Begin discussion by having students read from the text and then explain what questions came into their minds as they read those ideas.

4. *Note concepts.* Encourage readers to briefly review the text and note the key concepts, themes, or ideas. These are those elements that they might share with someone who hasn't read the text in discussing its main points and key ideas. These will not be text-based ideas as the previous moves have been; however, it is still appropriate to follow up student comments with, "What makes you say that?" to elicit the foundation for their ideas.

5. *Identify changes.* Ask learners to reflect on the overall text and think about its implications. If we take the text seriously, what does it suggest or encourage as actions or positions? Identify any changes of thinking or behavior that may have occurred for individuals as a result of the reading. For fiction, focus on the changes that occurred for the characters and the impetus for those changes. These ideas will not be specifically text based, but students should be asked to give reasons and justification for their responses.

6. *Share the thinking.* In the previous steps, learners have been sharing their thinking at each stage of the process. An alternative to this structure would be to provide time for the identification of all the 4C's at the outset and then commence discussion, working through each of the C's in turn. In either case, take a moment at the end of the discussion to debrief the conversation: How did the structure help learners to develop a deeper understanding of the text? Was it difficult to find material for any of the 4C's? Were there things that came up in the discussion that surprised them?

Uses and Variations

When Bialik College grade 1 teacher Roz Marks tried this routine for the first time, she asked a group of five students to read a fiction book during a guided reading session and then gave them a piece of paper divided into four equal sections. She explained the routine to them, clarifying and simplifying the vocabulary of the routine when appropriate. She asked the students to draw the connection they made, what they didn't agree with in the story, what was most important to them in the story, and whether they had learned something new or important from the story.

On another occasion, Roz used the 4C's routine informally for the group's discussion of the story "Feraj and the Lute" from the Junior Great Books program. Roz paraphrased the questions from the 4C's: "What connections do you make to the story from things that you know from your own life? Is there anything in the story that you want to challenge or don't agree with? What ideas do you think are the most important in the story and what makes you say that? Do you think after listening to this story that your thinking or ideas about things have changed?" As the group worked through each of the questions, Roz recorded students' responses on chart paper.

In the monthly professional meetings of the Ithaca Project, Julie Landvogt used the 4C's routine as a regular protocol for the discussion of professional readings. Before each meeting, attendees all knew the articles would be discussed in this way and prepared accordingly. Because the meetings had a tight time schedule, a rotating facilitator kept the discussion moving through each of the C's during the 40-minute session while a documenter recorded and later posted the group's conversation on a wiki. (You can read more about this group's use of the routine in Chapter Seven.)

Assessment

The choices learners make for their connections, challenges, concepts, and changes give insights into both their understanding of the text and their ability to see the themes within it in a wider context. Are their connections related only to personal experiences, or are students also connecting to the other learning they are doing in your class? Are they going beyond the obvious? What sort of questions are they posing when challenging ideas or concepts? Are they able to display a healthy skepticism, recognizing bias and overgeneralization in a text? Are they identifying universal themes or big ideas? Can they differentiate key concepts from those less important? As you ask students to explain the changes they are thinking about and the reasons behind them, look for the reasons they have for proposing those changes.

Tips

Although the routine has four steps and their ordering tends to be the most effective in terms of sequencing discussion, in the act of reading or even reflecting upon a text the steps are likely to be very nonlinear. The first time through the routine, you might want to work sequentially through the order as described above. However, once the routine is learned, students may be more comfortable taking notes or organizing for the discussion in a less sequential manner. The routine can be introduced before the text and learners