103 Things to do Before/During/After Reading
by Jim Burke

The following collection of reading activities first appeared in the appendix of *The English Teacher's Companion* (Boynton-Cook 1998)

- ***Pantomime*** a scene you choose or the class calls out to you while up there.
- ***Dramatic monologue*** for a character in a scene: what are they thinking/feeling at that moment--why?
- ***Dramatic monologue*** for a character while they are out of the book: where are they? why? thinking?
- ***Business Card Book***: write the story in the most compelling way you can on paper the size of a business card.
- ***Postcard***: write to a friend about this book; to the author; to a character in the book; write as if you were the character or author and write to yourself.
- ***Mapmaker***: draw a map of the book's setting.
- ***Moviemaker***: write a one page "pitch" to a producer explaining why the story would or would not make a great movie.
- ***Trailer***: movie previews always offer a quick sequence of the best moments that make us want to watch it; storyboard or narrate the scenes for your trailer. Focus on verbs.
- ***Billboard***: as in the movies, take what seems the most compelling image(s) and create an ad.
- ***Adjective-itis***: pick five adjectives for the book or character(s), and explain how they apply.
- ***Collage***: create an individual or class collage around themes or characters in the book.
- Haiku/Limerick: create one about a character.
- ***Cliffs Notes***: have each student take a chapter and, using Cliffs' format, create their own.
- ***Roundtable***: give students a chance to talk about what intrigues, bothers, confuses them about the book.
- ***Silent Roundtable***: the only rule is the teacher cannot say *anything* during the period allotted for class discussion of book.
- ***Silent Conversation:*** a student writes about a story on paper; then passes it to another who responds to what they said; each subsequent respondent

"talks" to/about all those before.

- ***Fishbowl***: impromptu or scheduled, 2-4 students sit in middle of circle and talk about a text; the class makes observations about the conversation then rotate into the circle.
- ***Movie Review:*** students write a review of (or discuss) a movie based on a story.
- ***Dear Author***: after reading a book the student(s) write the author via the publisher (who always forwards them).
- ***Surf the Net***: prior to, while, or after reading a book check out the web and its offerings about the book, its author, or its subject.
- ***Inspirations***: watch a film inspired by a story (e.g., *Franny and Alexander* is inspired by *Hamlet*) and compare/contrast.
- ***Timeline***: create a timeline that includes both the events in the novel and historical information of the time. Try using Post-Its on a whiteboard or butcher paper!
- ***Mandala***: create a mandala with many levels to connect different aspects of a book, its historical time, and culture.
- ***Transparencies***: copy portion of text to transparency; kids annotate with markers and then get up to present interpretation to class.
- ***Gender-Bender***: rewrite a scene and change the gender of the characters to show how they might act differently (e.g., *Lord of Flies*); can also have roundtable on gender differences.
- ***Picture This***: bring in art related to book's time or themes; compare, describe, discuss.
- ***Kids Books***: bring in children's books about related themes and read these aloud to class.
- ***Downgrade***: adapt myths or other stories for a younger audience; make into children's books or dramatic adaptation on video or live.
- ***Draw!***: translate chapters into storyboards and cartoons; draw the most important scene in the chapter and explain its importance and action.
- ***Oprah Bookclub***: host a talkshow: students play the host, author, and cast of characters; allow questions from the audience.
- ***Fictional Friends***: who of all the characters would you want for a friend? Why? What would you do or talk about together?

- ***State of the Union***: the President wants to recommend a book to the nation: tell him one important realization you had while reading this book and why he should recommend it.
- ***Interview Question***: when I interview prospective teachers, my first question is always, "What are you reading and do you like it?"
- ***Dear Diary***: keep a diary as if you were a character in the story. Write down events that happen during the story and reflect on *how* they affected the character and *why*.
- ***Rosencrantz and Gildenstern***: write a story or journal from the perspective of characters with no real role in the story and show us what they see and think from their perspective.
- ***Improv***: get up in front of class or in fishbowl and be whatever character the class calls out and do whatever they direct. Have fun with it.
- ***What If***: write about or discuss how the story would differ if the characters were something other than they are: a priest, another gender or race, a different age, or social class.
- ***Interrupted Conversations***: pair up and trade-off reading through some text; *any time* you have something to say about some aspect of the story, interrupt the reader and discuss, question, argue.
- ***Found Poetry***: take sections of the story and, choosing carefully, create a found poem; then read these aloud and discuss.
- ***13 Views***: inspired by Stevens's poem "13 Ways of Looking at a Blackbird": each stanza offers a different view of a character or chapter.
- ***Personal Ad***: what would a particular character write in a personal ad for the newspaper? After posting on board, discuss.
- ***Holden Meets Hamlet***: what would one character (or set of them) in one story say to another if given the chance to talk or correspond? Write a dialogue, skit, or letter.
- ***Character Analysis***: describe a character as a psychologist or recruiting officer might: what are they like? Examples? Why are they like that?
- ***Epistle Poem***: write a poem in the form and voice of a letter: e.g., Phoebe to Holden.
- ***Write Into***: find a "hole" in the story where the character disappears (off camera) for a time and describe what they do when we can't see them.
- ***The Woody Allen***: in *Take the Money*, Allen interviews the parents of a man

who became a bank robber. Write an imaginary interview with friends and family of a character whom they try to help you understand.

- ***Author Interview***: write an interview or letter in which the character in a story asks the author a series of questions and reflects on how they feel about the way they were made.
- ***The Kuglemass***: Woody Allen wrote a story in which the character can throw any book into a time machine and it takes you inside the book and the era. What would you do, say, think if you "traveled" into the story you are reading?
- ***Time Machine***: instead of traveling into the book, write a scene or story in which the character(s) travel out of the book into today.
- ***Biography***: write a biography of one of the characters who most interests you.
- ***Autobiography***: have the character that most interests you write their autobiography of the time before, during, or after the story occurs.
- ***P.S.***: After you read the story, write an epilogue in which you explain--using whatever tense and tone the author does--what happened to the character (s) next.
- ***Board Game***: have groups design board games based on stories then play them. This is especially fun and works well with the *Odyssey*.
- ***Life Graph***: using the Life Graph assignment, plot the events in the character's life during the story and evaluate their importance; follow up with discussion of graphs.
- ***Second Chance***: talk or write about how it would change the story if a certain character had made a different decision earlier in the story (e.g., what if Huck had not run away?)
- ***Poetry Connection***: bring in poems that are thematically related to the story; integrate these into larger discussion. Use *Poetry Index*.
- ***Reader Response***: pick the most important word/line/image/object/event in the chapter and explain why you chose it; be sure to support all analysis with examples.
- ***Notes and Quotes***: draw a line down the middle of the page; on one side write down important quotes; on the other comment on and analyze the quotes.
- ***Dear Classmate***: using email or some other means of corresponding, write

each other about the book as you read it, having a written conversation about the book.

- ***Convention Introduction***: you have been asked to introduce the book's author to a convention of English teachers. What would you say? Write and deliver your speech.
- ***Sing Me a Song***: write a song/ballad about the story, a character, or an event in the book.
- ***Write Your Own***: using the themes in the story, write your own story, creating your own characters and situation. It does not have to relate to the story at all aside from its theme.
- ***Executive Summary***: take a 3x5 card and summarize what happened on one side; on the other, analyze the importance of what happened and the reasons it happened.
- ***Read Aloud***: one student starts the reading and goes until they wish to pass; they call on whomever they wish and that person picks up and continues reading for as long as they wish.
- ***Quaker Reading***: like a Quaker meeting, one person stands and reads then sits and whomever wishes to picks up and reads for as long as with wish...and so it goes.
- ***Pageant of the Masters***: in Los Angeles this remarkable event asks groups to stage different classical paintings in real life. People would try to do a still life of some scene from a book or play; the class should then discuss what is going on in this human diorama.
- ***Create a Diorama***: create a diorama of a particularly important scene such as the courtroom or Ewells' house in *Mockingbird*.
- ***Day in Court***: use the story as the basis for a court trial; students can be witnesses, expert witnesses called to testify, judge, jury, bailiff, reporter; great fun for a couple days.
- ***Censorship Defense***: imagine that the book you are reading has been challenged by a special interest group; students must write a letter defending the book, using specific evidence from the book to support their ideas.
- ***Call for Censorship***: in order to better understand all sides to an argument, imagine you are someone who feels this particular book should *not* be read and write a letter in which you argue it should be removed.

- ***Speculation***: based on everything you know now in the story, what do you think will happen and why do you think that?
- ***Questions Anyone?***: students make a list of a certain number of questions they have about a particular character or aspect of the book; use these as the basis for class discussion.
- ***Newspaper Connection***: have students read the newspapers and magazines to find articles that somehow relate to issues and ideas in the book(s) you are reading; bring in and discuss.
- ***Jigsaw***: organize the class into groups, each one with a specific focus; after a time rotate so that new groups are formed to share what they discussed in their previous group.
- ***Open Mind***: (some people use a bathtub instead). Draw an empty head and inside of it draw any symbols or words or images that are bouncing around in the mind of the character of a story; follow it up with writing or discussion to explain and explore responses.
- ***Interrogation***: a student must come up before the class and, pretending to be a character or the author, answer questions from the class.
- ***Post-Its***: If they are using a school book in which they cannot make notes or marks, encourage them to keep a pack of Post-Its with them and make notes on these.
- ***Just the Facts Ma'am***: acting as a reporter, ask the students the basic questions to facilitate a discussion: who, what, where, why, when, how?
- ***SQ3R***: when reading a textbook or article, try this strategy: **(S)urvey** the assigned reading by first skimming through it; then formulate **(Q)uestions** by turning all chapter headings and subheadings into questions to answer as you read; next **(R)ead** the assigned section and try to answer those questions you formulated; now **(R)ecite** the information by turning away from the text as soon as you've finished reading the assigned section and reiterate it in your own words; finally, **(R)eview** what you read by going back to your questions, the chapter headings, and asking yourself what they are all referring to, what they mean.
- ***Brainstorming/Webbing***: put a character or other word in the middle of a web; have students brainstorm associations while you write them down; then have them make connections between ideas and discuss or writing about them.

- ***Cultural Literacy***: find out what students already know and address what they need to know before reading a story or certain part of a story.
- ***Storyboard***: individually or in groups, create a storyboard for the chapter or story.
- ***Interactive Story***: if you have a student who is a computer genius, have them create a multimedia, interactive version of the story.
- ***CyberGuides***: search the Net for virtual tours based on the books you might be studying. Try www.concorde.org.
- ***Tableau***: similar to the Pageant of the Masters, this option asks you to create a still life setting; then someone steps up to touch different characters who come alive and talk from their perspective about the scene.
- ***Audio Books***: There are many audio editions of books we teach now available; some are even read by famous stars who turn the book into its own audio performance. Recommend to students with reading difficulties or play portions of them in class.
- ***Sound Off!***: play a video version of a book you are reading---only turn off the sound while they watch it. Have them narrate or discuss or write about what is happening, what the actors are revealing about the story through their gestures. Then compare what you saw with what you read.
- ***Narrate Your Own Reading***: show kids how you read a text by reading it aloud and interrupting yourself to explain how you grapple with it as you go. Model your own thinking process; kids often don't know what it "looks like" to think.
- ***Magnetic Poetry***: if working with a poem, enlarge it on copier or computer and cut all words up into pieces; place in an envelope and have groups create poems from these words; later on discuss using same words for different texts. Heavier stock paper is ideal.
- ***Venn Diagram***: use a Venn diagram to help you organize your thinking about a text as you read it. Put differences between two books or characters on opposite sides and similarities in the middle.
- ***Write an Essay***: using one of the different rhetorical modes, write an essay in which you make meaningful connections between the text and your own experiences or other texts you have read.
- ***P.O.V.***: how would it change the story if you rewrote it in a different point of view (e.g., changed it from first to third person)? Try it!

- ***Daily Edition***: using the novel as the basis for your stories, columns and editorials, create an newspaper or magazine based on or inspired by the book you are reading.
- ***Read Recursively***: on occasion circle back around to the beginning of the chapter or text to keep yourself oriented as to "the big picture." This is especially important if you have questions to answer based on reading.
- ***Oral History***: if you are reading a historical text, have students interview people who have some familiarity with that time period or the subject of the book.
- ***Guest Speaker***: if you are reading a book that deals with a subject an expert might help them better understand, invite one in. Try to Veterans of Foreign Wars, for example, if reading about war.
- ***Storytelling***: After reading a story, pair up with others and tell the story as a group, recalling it in order, piecing it together, and clarifying for each other when one gets lost.
- ***Reciprocal Teaching***: a designated student or group reads a section of a text and comes prepared to present or teach it to the class; follow up with discussion for clarification.
- ***Make Your Own Test***: have students create their own test or essay questions about the text; this allows them to simultaneously think about the story and prepare for the test on it.
- ***Recasting the Text***: students rewrite a poem as a story, a short story as a poem or play. All rewrites should then be read and discussed so as to understand how the different genre work.
- ***Debates***: students reading controversial texts or novels with debatable subjects such as *1984* should debate the issues.
- ***Literature Circles***: students gather in groups to discuss the text and then report out to the class for full-class discussion.
- ***That Was Then, This Is Now***: after reading the text, create a Before/After list to compare the ways in which characters or towns have changed over the course of the story. Follow up with discussion of reasons.