The Effect of Gestalt Methods in the Classroom
An Action Research Plan
by
Education with a Purpose

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Abstract
This research project investigates the relationship between Gestalt-oriented learning and student interest and understanding. In particular, it explores what effect the application of Gestalt method has in a high school English Language Arts class.
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Introduction

American Educator magazine recently featured as its cover story, “The Case for Fully Guided Instruction” (Clark, Kirschner, & Sweller, 2012). In it, the authors claim to end the debate of fully versus partially guided instruction once and for all. The verdict is in, and partially guided instruction (i.e., constructivist, problem-based, discovery, experiential, inquiry-based, and all other related types of teaching) is out. The ideal mode of teaching, according to Clark et al., is when the instructor introduces to the students “a problem that has already been solved,” and “every step is fully explained.” This “constitutes the epitome of direct, explicit instruction” (p. 9). Compare this method to that of the famed French scientist, Poincaré (1914), who, echoing Plato, said, “[The students] should be made to see that they do not understand what they think they understand” (p. 123), and, “The educator must make the child pass through all that his fathers have passed through, more rapidly, but without missing a stage” (p. 127). Unlike Clark et al.’s hyperbolic polarization of discovery and direct instruction as partially guided and fully guided, Poincaré sees both* as being heavily guided by the instructor; but he only sees one as effectively leading toward true insight into the nature and solution of a problem.

In 1975, George Isaac Brown reported that “too damned many” classrooms are dead (p. 1). By dead, he meant the mechanization of learning, where students were spoon-fed predigested portions of content and then tested on such content through standardized tests. Today, over 35 years later, can we say the situation has improved? Are there less dead classrooms? Has the education establishment striven to employ methods that tap into the more creative† aspects of the

* Poincaré explicitly contrasts the method of directly explaining the discrete steps in solving a problem to his own method of having students discover for themselves the original, authentic nature of a problem and its solution (see pp. 10, 119).
† By creativity I do not mean the contemporary notion of being original, different, or new (though those aspects can fall under it); I mean it in the same way that Lawrence Kubie (1958) used it when he wrote that “creativity implies invention . . . It is, I believe, a fair generalization to state quite simply that although the uncovering of new facts and
human mind? How does the intellect of a graduate from today compare to that from 1975, or even 1875? Achievement tests might indicate that students are largely meeting the set standards, but do such results do much more than show that “testable standards” are being taught? In other words, do such tests truly measure intelligence or learning?

Perhaps the reader can begin to see where the problematic nature of Clark et al.’s assertion has its deepest roots. If the current climate of K-12 education is to assess students on how well they can recall facts, utilize formulae, and mimic established conventions of writing, analysis, etc., then of course it follows that fully guided instruction—providing all the parts and answers up front—is the most effective teaching method. However, Clark et al. miss the entire point: how has education reached a state where genuine problem solving is anathema and a step-by-step pre-solved transfer of information is panacean? Rather than questioning the state of education itself, American Educator’s featured authors hail that mode of teaching which most effectively reinforces a dubious system. To them, it matters not what the purpose of education is, as long as we are educating.

On the other side are those who believe that we should always be asking the question, “What is the function of a comprehensive education?” We have already heard from Poincaré and Brown. I would like to add the voice of Max Wertheimer, the founder of Gestalt psychology and author of Productive Thinking (1959). As if linking the words of Brown and Poincaré, Wertheimer asserted that any mode of teaching which does not recreate the steps of discovery required by a given problem situation serves to “cut to pieces living thinking processes,” and “dissect them, and thus show a dead picture stripped of all that is alive in them” (p. 237). Wertheimer was writing in a period when behaviorism was gaining momentum as the definitive
model for learning. At the same time, he had to address those who still believed in the all-encompassing magic of traditional logic. Wertheimer saw both theories of knowledge as having their place, but was convinced that an educational method that was comprised only of behaviorist style associations or logico-deductive steps falls far short of, first of all, the human ability to learn, and secondly, the requirements of knowledge in general.

In order to avoid the pitfalls of dead, piecemeal learning (as he called it), Wertheimer developed a systematic description of learning‡ that honors the inherent contexts and demands of a problem situation. By problem situation, he meant any problem that is to be overcome by the learner. He called this style of learning productive thinking, and it was nothing new. It merely distinguished already existent modes of learning that were productive from those that were not.

Perhaps an example is in order.

Wertheimer uses the example of a classroom he visited where the teacher was instructing students on how to find the area of a parallelogram. The teacher drew a parallelogram on the board and labeled the corners and lengths appropriately:

He then drew a perpendicular down from A and B, and extended CD to E.

‡ The main elements of which can be found in the “Action Plan” section below.
After going through the usual proof for finding the area of a parallelogram, with all of its axioms and postulates, the instructor finally gave the formula:

\[
\text{area of parallelogram} = (\text{base})(\text{altitude})
\]

His students were provided with various examples to practice their newfound knowledge. Nearly all of them arrived at the correct answers. The teacher therefore felt his lesson was a success. His students had mastered that particular standard. They would do well on the final assessment.

Wertheimer, however, was not so satisfied. Yes, the students were able to follow the teacher’s steps and produce correct answers when presented with different variations of the problem; but did they really learn anything? Did the students understand the structural requirements of the situation? Did they have the same insight into parallelograms that the original discoverer of the formula had? The following day, Wertheimer visited the same classroom and drew a parallelogram on the board:

Some students showed confusion. Others began to blindly carry out the operation they had learned on the previous day:
Clearly what they had learned would not work in this case. The base multiplied by the altitude gives an area entirely too large. The teacher’s lesson had shown them how to find the area of parallelograms in a certain manner, but it had given them no insight into the nature of the problem or its solution. It was transferrable only to a limited extent.

Wertheimer decided to approach the problem a different way. Working with subjects ranging from five years old to middle age, Wertheimer presented the problem of the parallelogram. First he would briefly go over with them how to work out the area of a rectangle, and then show them a parallelogram, asking for the area. No further guidance was provided. Students would first become fixated on the ends of the parallelogram, the parts that appear to stick out. These ends, the students would say, present a problem in the situation (such problems were called disturbances by Wertheimer). The students sensed that, somehow, the pointed ends interfered with the overall structure and were thus in the way of the solution. They then began to make hypotheses. Some students, in order to make these ends “fit,” asked for scissors, cut the ends off, and rearranged them.

![Diagram of parallelogram transformation](attachment:image.png)

The perceived gap was then filled and the problem solved. Not all students who solved the problem did so in the same way. All, however, perceived the disturbance, determined it did not quite fit, and struggled to find a way to make the situation more fitting. Unlike the other teacher’s students, Wertheimer’s subjects could be said to have learned something.
GESTALT METHODS IN THE CLASSROOM

What was missing in the classroom that Wertheimer initially observed? Though students were capable of finding the right answers, they did not have a real sense of the situation. There was no sense of the *gestalt*, a word roughly meaning *form* or *shape*, for which there is no English equivalent. In the parallelogram experiment, Wertheimer’s subjects felt the gestalt of the parallelogram to have a negative quality. Something within them felt the need to fix the situation, to turn a bad gestalt into a good one. This, then, is the main distinguishing factor between productive learning and what Wertheimer sees as arbitrary, piecemeal learning. “For real understanding one has to re-create the steps, the structural inner relatedness, the requiredness” (p. 238).

The groundwork for Gestalt theory was established through Wertheimer’s early experiments on perception. What he concluded from his findings can be seen as the framework for the theory as a whole. The experiments showed that perceptions tend to follow certain laws:

- law of proximity/nearness: items that are near to each other tend to be grouped together
- law of similarity: items with shared characteristics tend to be grouped together
- law of common fate: items that go through similar changes tend to be grouped together
- law of good continuation: successors in a series are grouped with other things in the series (e.g., frames on a film reel)
- law of closure: things are perceived “so as to attain maximum stability” (King & Wertheimer, p. 155).

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Wolfgang Köhler, a colleague of Wertheimer’s, argued that this tacit sense of the mind is due to electromagnetic and chemical properties of the brain that become, in effect, isomorphic to the situation at hand (1976).
All of these laws are characterized by the mind’s tendency for Prägnanz, which is a leaning toward “the good whole configuration” (p. 155). Not just the mind, but structures in nature themselves, often follow the Prägnanz principle. This principle can roughly be equated to Kepler’s “harmony,” and is the equivalent of Köhler’s (1959, 1976) “requiredness” (also called “organization”) and Polanyi’s (2009) “tacit dimension.” It is, in short, a question of dynamics.

One can draw out several principles about the world (both the phenomenological and transcendental* world) and the mind, from Wertheimer’s early research on perception. One conclusion is that the whole is nearly always greater than the parts. That is, one cannot determine the nature of the whole just by examining the individual parts of which it is composed. Polanyi (2009) points out, for example, that one could undertake a full chemical, physical, and electromagnetic analysis of a machine, leaving out not one iota of data, and yet there would be no way of telling the function (the dynamic nature) of the machine. The whole—in this case the machine’s purpose—determines the parts. A correlate to this example is biological evolution. Species that function on a higher level of organization cannot be derived from the particulars of lower level species. Yet, somehow, higher order species evolved from lower level species. There must be, Polanyi infers, a whole-quality principle above, which guides the particulars to its higher state of organization. The whole, therefore, is not only greater than its parts, it often determines the parts.

Another conclusion from Wertheimer’s work bears directly on the mind. We have seen from the parallelogram example that one can know something without having truly learned it. Those who do learn seem to have done so by following the pull of their mind toward Prägnanz—seeking out the just out of reach “good” gestalt. Later twentieth century theorists

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* For those unfamiliar with the term, the transcendental world is the world as it actually exists, outside of our phenomenological experience.
called this process (or at least the culminating moment of this process) *insight*. While specialists contend over particular aspects of insight, there is broad agreement on the process surrounding it. Insight involves

1. an initial sense of disharmony/confusion regarding a problem situation/structure (Dominowski & Dallob, 1995; Mayer, 1995; Duncker & Krechevsky, 1939; Maier, 1931)
2. sense of disharmony results in a strong need to know, a need to “fix” the situation (Köhler, 1976; McCarthy, 1975), due to a certain predisposition in the mind for harmony (Ogden, 1930)
3. a struggling or grappling, lasting anywhere from seconds to years, with the problem situation; various hypotheses†† may be formed and tested (Wertheimer, 1959; Poincaré, 1914)
4. a comprehensive/functional solution arises, often suddenly, from a preconscious/subconscious source (Polanyi, 2009; Reber, 1993; Duncker & Krechevsky, 1939; Maier, 1931)

We find instances of insight in the greatest moments of discovery: in Archytas’ solution for doubling the cube, in Eratosthenes’ measurement of the circumference of the earth, Kepler’s derivation of the planets’ elliptical orbits, Einstein’s theory of relativity. In fact, every development in the fields of science and math has been due to insight. We also find insight operating during the stages of individual human development: language acquisition, spatial reasoning, abstract thought, and empathy. We see insight in the humanities: the innovative use of language by Dante and Shakespeare, universal history by Schiller, dynamics by Leibniz, light by Rembrandt, contrapuntal harmony by Bach.

†† Husserl (1973) calls this hypothesizing *prefigurative intuition*, where one goes from an “unclear intending” to a course that “implicitly contains the sense” (p. 59).
If, then, insight was utilized to discover most of the major concepts (“standards”) we teach in schools today, and if the major stages of development in individuals occur through insight, then why are we not using methods of teaching that utilize insight? That is the preliminary question to my main research question: What are the effects of Gestalt-oriented learning (aimed at generating insight) on student understanding and interest? This question was designed in such a way to allow me to experiment with my own teaching methods and directly observe their results among my students. The words of Wertheimer, and likeminded theorists, make so much sense to me, that I wish to see the results of a practical application in the classroom. My own experience as a student—both as a high school and post-secondary student—served to disillusion my faith in the current education process as a whole. Though I have a great love for learning, I found it to be the case that the most significant learning experiences occurred during my own independent studies outside of school. Most of the learning that occurred in school was dissatisfying due to its kinship with the piecemeal learning so accurately described by Wertheimer. There were, of course, redeeming qualities of my education in the school setting. I therefore sought to examine those redeeming, genuine-learning-experience, moments, and reflect on what made them so.

Thus my general goal in this action research project is to see if I can, as a teacher, consciously and intentionally orchestrate genuine, productive learning among my students. For short, I call this teaching method Gestalt-oriented learning, due to the incisive specificity outlined by the founder of Gestalt theory in his treatise on the distinction between productive and non-productive thinking. Though my research question is limited to the effects of Gestalt-oriented learning on students, it is just as much a personal experiment to monitor the effectiveness of my own teaching. To rephrase Clark et al.’s question, it is not a matter of “fully
gestalt” vs. “partially guided” instruction, but rather a matter of what instructional methods are most effective in generating insight. Clearly I propose that the Gestalt methods of Wertheimer—the “productive” methods—are the most effective. In order to make this study fitting according to current standards, I homed in on two measurable facets of learning outcomes: interest and understanding. My expectation is that my Gestalt methods will result in an increase in these two areas among my target students.

The 26 students I am working with (in the capacity of student teacher) are tenth graders in an English honors class, in a high school that is part of Los Angeles Unified School District. Though the class is titled “honors,” it is only called so to distinguish it from the more basic level English classes. Most students in the class have a B average. The class covers literature from around the world, with a focus on three main content strands: persuasion, exposition, and literary analysis. My focus will be literary analysis. Each teacher in the English department must consult with and report to the department head. The curriculum is developed and modified as necessary through regular departmental meetings.

The ethnic makeup of the class consists of 19 Hispanic, 3 Asian, 1 Pacific Islander, and 3 Caucasian. The fact that the majority is Hispanic makes the use of culturally rich Latino references and material during instruction especially salient. The students come from a lower middle class to working class background, yet all have access at home to computers and the internet. A public library is located within a mile of the school. The regular teacher has arranged additional features in the classroom to aid learning. The desks are set up into two sections, so that one half of the class faces the other, all the while having an adequate view of the front and rear of the room (for the whiteboard and projection screen, respectively). There is also a full size whiteboard on the side wall devoted to the weekly agenda, on which class assignments and
content topics are posted for students to copy. The content standards have each been prominently written on color-coded cards (one color for composition, another for literary analysis, etc.), to be posted in the front of the room as they are taught. Additionally, students are able to access their grades and missing assignments through a secure online database.

Description of the Problem (Including Annotated Bibliography)

The problem I am addressing, as I perceive it, mirrors Brown’s complaint (see above) that too many of our classrooms are dead. As teachers we have become accustomed to transferring bits of pre-solved knowledge in an effort to cram in all of the required standards. My initial hypothesis is that students often express having such a negative, unfulfilling experience with education because much of teaching is dry, didactive, and focuses on the mere shadows and shells left by the living heart of a subject rather than the heart itself. I propose that a very carefully defined Gestalt-driven discovery approach can solve this problem.

Annotated Bibliography: Introduction

This annotated bibliography is designed to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature relating to Gestalt theory as applied to teaching and learning. The selection of the literature was based on soundness of thought and research behind questions related to the topic. It provides background information and establishes the framework for the investigation of the following research question:

What are the effects on students of gestalt-oriented learning (aimed at generating insight) on student understanding and interest?

The key ideas associated with Gestalt-driven learning and addressed in a significant amount of the literature are: 1). Gestalt theory itself, 2). student interest and motivation, 3). quality of comprehension, and 4.) what it means to learn. The word gestalt comes from the German, meaning “form” or “shape.” Gestalt theory is an explanation of reality that began in the field of psychology (via Max Wertheimer, 1880-1943) which emphasizes wholes, structure, and purpose. In contrast to logical systems, which use bits and pieces to build an argument with too attenuated a sense of direction; or associationist theory, which sees the formation of knowledge as the mere coincidence of two events repeated over and over, Gestalt theory bases its
epistemology on the idea of the whole guiding the parts, the structure determining the events, the purpose determining behavior. The theory is a simple one, and need not have been developed at all, had science and education (for example) not become so steeped in positivist-empirical mindset. But as it stood, the damage was already incurred, and thus Wertheimer formulated his “correction.”

Today the battle begun by Wertheimer is by no means over. It is especially felt in the field of education, where the appetite for concrete results has produced, largely, a system of piecemeal learning, where students are filed into classrooms to be taught a “subject” by memorizing facts and formulas, which is then recycled onto answer sheets, thus proving the “success” of the system. It is obvious what stance I take on the matter.

In the course of the literature review, some rather specialized questions have arisen, requiring further research and thought. For instance, why is there such a tension between learning models based on Gestalt and association theories? What is the link, if any, between student interest/motivation and lack of quality in comprehension? What happened to former experiments in education using Gestalt theory—did it become outmoded, improved, replaced? In addition to research, I am conducting field studies in order to ascertain directly the effects of Gestalt-style learning on students.

Annotated Bibliography


Of especial note in this book is the chapter entitled, “Gestalt Theory for Teachers.” Allender provides sage and practical advice on how to run an effective classroom. The emphasis throughout is on context. Within context, there is figure and there is ground; and the two are always shifting and morphing. It is extremely important for the teacher to nurture relationships, between student and teacher and between students themselves. There should also be a genuine sense of flexibility, where the present activity in the classroom is always modified according to a shifting past and future.

Were Allender’s advice not taken to heart by me, the result could be disastrous. To stick with a “plan” regardless of circumstances can be harmful to both student and teacher. The author has been an encouragement to build within each lesson a degree of flexibility that renders genuine respect for the student and subject. The nurturing of relationships will also be at the forefront of the research project, even if the results of such nurturing are not reported. It is an element that, were it missing, could ruin the entire study.


Brown’s introduction to this work attempts to spur the reader to action (or at least interest) by proclaiming that “too damned many” classrooms are dead (1). In such classrooms, students learn to assume a “subpersonality, called ‘me as a student’ that has

††One could place the historical “declaration of war” on the matter back in ancient Greece, when Socrates exposed the farcical nature of the reigning sophists of his day.
little or no relation to the rest of himself” (2). What is lacking in such cases is the promotion of the creative process, or intuition. The mechanization of learning has served to zap most forms of intuition from education.

Most readers would perceive Brown’s tone to be dogmatic; however, if what he says is true, it is difficult to imagine how he could speak in any less irate terms. When one speaks of a tendency to make students “dead” in public education, the issue transcends any argument over educational theory and seats itself, rather, in the realm of human rights. It is no wonder that Brown is so passionate about the subject.

A good dose of Brown’s passion might serve as an impetus to my own research. Too often a study can lapse into a dry and pedantic exercise. Voices like Brown’s are apt reminders of the meaningfulness of what most research is about.


Clark, et al. claim to have solved the case, once and for all, regarding the debate over fully guided versus partially guided instruction. This is no exaggeration. The authors literally say, “Our goal in this article is to put an end to this debate” (6). Citing a host of controlled experiments from the 1980s and 1990s, they decide that all research unequivocally proves that fully guided instruction is superior to partially guided instruction. By fully guided instruction, they mean introducing new content by providing problem examples that have already been solved. The instructor’s job is to go through, step by step, how the already solved problem has been solved. The students can then mimic the steps shown by the teacher. This method, the authors rejoice, “constitutes the epitome of direct, explicit instruction” (9). In contrast to this, Clark, et al. point out the inadequacy of less guided instructional methods. Discovery and related methods result in confusion, poor transfer, and poor retention. It should not be assumed, however, that just because the authors frown upon partially guided instruction they also censure collaborative learning groups. On the contrary, the authors feel that student groups can fit well with fully guided instruction, as long as the groups mimic and repeatedly practice what the teacher has shown them. Under no circumstances should such groups be used as “vehicles for making discoveries” (6). Interestingly, at or about the middle of the article, it is confessed that “more-skilled learners tend to learn more with less-guided instruction” (8). One could suppose that this confession might cast a disturbing shadow over the authors’ shining assertions on the panacean nature of fully guided instruction, but the authors hold quite the opposite sentiment. Even though more-skilled learners might learn better with less guided instruction, fully guided instruction is better for them because such students “like it even though . . . they learn less” (8). They like the feeling that they can “achieve the required learning with minimal effort” (8).

There are no clues in the article to indicate that the authors are writing in jest. They provide a litany of sources to support their argument, and have even conducted their own independent research. Assuming that the authors are not joking, a number of significant problems come into view. First of all, the authors’ reasoning regarding more-
skilled and less-skilled learners is suspect. If more-skilled learners tend to flourish better under less guided instruction, then would it not follow that the instructor’s goal should be to raise less-skilled students to the level of more-skilled students? Instead, the authors see the trend as proof that less guided learning has no place in education (which implies, first, that less-skilled learners make up the majority of students, and second, that if such is the case then it will remain that way for the indefinite future). A second problem is the authors’ assumption that all discovery, experiential, or problem-based learning necessarily uses less guidance. It is often the case that such modes of learning require more guidance—a greater amount of student preparation and setup instruction from the teacher. Thus their polarization of direct and indirect instruction is a false one. A third problem presents itself when considering some of the research studies cited by the authors. Many of the studies on “discovery” learning involve a rigged experiment, where the subjects are presented with completely random (without organization or context) information, such as nonsense syllables, and then asked to “learn” it. No situation of the kind ever occurs in the classroom, so why use such experiments as proof for what occurs in the classroom? They cite similar examples from science classrooms, where unprepared students are asked to discover principles through highly decontextualized experiments. Again, such conditions do not occur in classrooms. It is a false experiment. Lastly, the authors fail to cite or challenge any of the bona fide discovery-oriented learning studies conducted in the last century. Maier, Katona, Duncker, and Wertheimer are nowhere to be found in the article or citations. Katona’s name is the most surprising omission, since his hundreds of experiments dealt directly and explicitly with the very issue the authors have purported to study.

I see this article as ardent proof that the overarching research question of my study is at the forefront of the current education debate. The issue is as old as Plato, and yet, as evidenced by the article, has not been solved—at least not by consensus. Though I am under no delusion that my research will alter the current course of the debate, I am hopeful that it will at least shed some valuable light on it.


This study assesses the effects of teaching style and academic press (high achievement expectations) on student interest and achievement. Research found that authoritative vs. authoritarian teaching makes little to no difference in student interest and achievement. Teacher expectations, however, make a huge difference. The study concluded that high academic press results in greater interest and performance among students.

The teaching methods that I plan to use, though interactive and stimulating, will demand a lot from students. Thus expectations for academic rigor and learning will be rather high. This study confirms that such a posture benefits the student in two very important ways: interest and achievement.

Dominowski and Dallob are very concise in their definitions and descriptions concerning insight. They define insight as a state that is reached when a problem is solved through restructuring (i.e., “a change in a person’s perception of a problem situation”) (33). It occurs when one goes from confusion to comprehension. The authors recognize two types of thinking, productive and reproductive, and assert that only the former can result in insight. Productive thinking applies to specific types of problem solving in which one has to overcome the limitations of past experiences. Reproductive thinking involves a “no-problem” situation in which behavior is performed based on prior experience to complete a task. The authors go over three types of problem situations in productive (insight-inducing) thinking. First, there is the object-use problem, where the function of an object must be seen in a new way (see the example of Maier’s two strings experiment below). Second, there is the spatial insight problem, for which one’s notion of space must be redefined, as when a subject is asked to connect nine dots with only three straight lines. Third, there is the verbal insight problem, where a situation is presented verbally that must be logically solved. Though the authors feel insight to be a major component in problem solving, they warn against overlooking other crucial aspects (which they fail to name). As for the intentional development of insight, the authors say it is only possible through metacognitive reflection.

The authors do not go very deep into the problem of insight, and offer nothing but previous laboratory experiments to support their arguments. They offer a well-rounded overview of the role of insight in learning, but with nothing new or insightful on the matter.

Dominowski and Dallob reinforce what many other authors have to say regarding insight. Their essay is a satisfactory introduction on the subject, one which others who wish to familiarize themselves with the notion of insight can be directed to. It may be worth mentioning the essay in a footnote for that purpose.


In order to bridge the divide between studies on learning and those on thinking, Duncker and Krechevsky, respective experts in the fields, got together to formulate a unifying schema that would dissipate alleged differences. The article first defines some terms. Thinking is the type of knowledge acquisition “which occurs in problem-solving (involving the discovery of a solution by the subject)” (177). Learning is a process of acquiring and retaining. Thus thinking is a type of learning. A functional solution is a solution that arises out of the dynamics/structure of a problem situation (thus it excludes any arbitrary solutions). The authors stress that they are both concerned with “‘qualitative’ aspects of problem solving” (178), meaning they are not interested in tests
that have to do with “time, trial, and error units” (178), but rather those which measure progressive alterations in the subject’s method. They also discovered that they both had similar models regarding problem solving. Given a problem situation, the subject initially has a vast array of actions at his disposal. As the nature of the problem becomes more clear, the possible actions are narrowed, and hypotheses are formed. In a kind of developmental trial and error, the subject tests out his current hypothesis and then revises it. This process repeats until a solution is found. However, this process will only successful in most cases if the solution is a functional one.

The authors’ collaboration did not involve a collaborative experiment of their own. They merely compared notes on their prior studies. The result was extremely worthwhile, but could have been made even more so had they conducted their own collaborative study.

In my own work, the idea mentioned here of a functional solution is of crucial importance. It is all too easy as a teacher to get caught in the trap of non-functional (i.e., arbitrary) solutions during instruction. Even true statements, such as, “The Pythagorean theorem means \(a^2 + b^2 = c^2\),” is an arbitrary solution, given that no background information or sense of the problem is provided. In English/Language Arts, the mere teaching of grammar rules, or even having students “discover” grammar rules on their own, are arbitrary activities unless the real structure of the situation (historical, logical) is given.


Edward attempts to answer the question: What teaching method most effectively “build qualities of mind that enable students to make discoveries”? (759). He compares his working assumptions, regarding the question, from years ago to the ones he has formulated today. They are the direct opposite, and are as follows:

Prior assumptions:
1. Teach background
2. Cultivate maturity
3. Inspire them
4. Ask good questions
5. Select the smartest students
6. Give open problems
7. Advertise the thrill of research
8. Be an expert in what you advise
9. Encourage independence (759),

New, corrected assumptions:
1. Nurture the *yawp* [a term from Whitman having to do with the innate pleasure in "eureka" moments]
2. Restore child-like curiosity and imagination
3. Create spaces for self-inspiration
4. Teach how to ask good questions
5. Select motivated students
6. Give open-ended problems
7. Set complete expectations [including frustration and disappointment]
8. Let the student be the expert
9. Give close guidance, and build community (768).

The instructor modified his teaching methods according to the new assumptions and compared student responses to those of his former methods. The independent variable is the method; the dependent variable is the response data. The author used 8th graders and college students for his study while teaching them mathematics. All students who participated in his study reported an increased interest and better understanding of the subject—in short, a stronger tendency toward being a habitual "discoverer."

Edward’s procedure lacks quantitative data, which would be of concern were his goal to satisfy the rigorous demands of publishing in a journal of psychology or education. The very nature of his question, however, has a qualitative character to it, which would be hard to measure in terms of quantifiable data.

The author’s conclusions are exactly in line with a major part of my own hypothesis: that learning is much richer and more effective when the “discoverer within” of each student is sought. His mode of assessment through qualitative means, though not very rigorous, provides an example of how to “measure” through student response. In the study that I perform, student responses will have to be more concretely documented, through self report and through an observation protocol.


Empson is a poet and literary critic, largely influenced by I. A. Richards. The book discusses exactly what the title suggests. Not only are poetic works full of ambiguity; they are full of different kinds of ambiguity. Empson has studied ambiguity excessively and has narrowed down its types to seven. Each chapter is devoted to one specific type of ambiguity, with a number of in-depth poetic examples and analysis. Empson sees ambiguity as a fundamental part of poetry’s metaphorical nature. While in most of the poetic examples he provides the poets are aware of their ambiguity, the fact of ambiguity is indicative of the power invested in the reader. The act of communication in itself is a creative process; ambiguity just makes us more conscious of this process.

Empson himself admits that in some cases he stretched the meanings of various lines of poetry. He justifies this by saying that, at some level, the poet in question must have been aware of the ambiguity Empson points out. Moreover, even if the poet was not aware of it, it is useful to detect such ambiguities in order to sharpen our ability to interpret poetry. The strongest parts in the book are when Empson speaks about ambiguity’s bearing on language and thought in general.
I have used Empson’s work to aid in the design of a lesson plan on poetic interpretation. Using Shakespeare’s *Sonnet LXXXIII*, I encouraged students to detect and interpret the threads of ambiguity in that work. As a culminating exercise, students were required to write their own ambiguous poem that, on the one hand, praised a person or thing, but, on the other hand, ridiculed it.


Fox set out to determine when, and for what purpose, images are typically called forth in thought. Using 15 subjects, and 12 statements from 3 subject areas, Fox ascertained when and how mental images were used. The methodology consisted of showing various statements to the subjects, who were instructed to take careful notice of their thought processes. Results showed that mental imagery occurred more frequently when propositions posed a greater level of difficulty. To put it another way, mental imagery was shown to be an effective aid in problem solving.

Fox was very thorough in his methodology and reporting. A greater amount of test subjects would have made his findings more trustworthy.

The idea that mental imagery is a useful tool in overcoming difficulty in understanding can be used in the present research project. Ideas presented to students that are particularly difficult to grasp can be supplemented with images of a structural nature (i.e., emphasizing the whole, the big picture, the mapping of the problem, etc.) in order to facilitate understanding.


The main idea of this research is concerned with the harmony of Gestalt theory with the "empirical method" provided by Richards' *Practical Criticism*. The procedure entailed introducing poetry with significant structural changes (e.g., rearranged lines) to a select group of students and assessing their ability to reformulate the original structure. There were also questions that pertained to subject-object interpretations in the poems. The findings of the experiments emphasize the crucial significance of using top-down conceptual models (i.e., presenting ideas (in this case, poems and their meanings) as an entire thought product, or gestalt) as the prime method of instruction. In such a method, the meanings are not only reached holistically, but the discovery of those meanings are attained by strenuous effort on the part of the student to arrive at a gestalt (a process that occurs naturally, given the right conditions). Moreover, the findings proved the merit of the method in working through metaphor, and the ambiguities posed by metaphor.

Though the treatment of this latter aspect (metaphor) was somewhat weak compared to other authors (cf. Empson, Polanyi), the utility of the method was thoroughly proven, nonetheless. One issue, however, stood out through all of their successes. The results of their experiments depended partly on student interpretation of various poems (and they
invested those students’ subjective meanings into the poems), but the question of the factors within each student that helped to determine those meanings was never asked.

The issue at hand is deeply connected to my research question in that it demonstrates, through experiments with student test groups, the unparalleled effect of Gestalt methods in helping students to understand the meaning of a literary text. The experiments are similar to the teaching method I have in mind—a method whose goal can be seen as facilitating the rediscovery of concepts in the minds of students.


After reviewing over 100 articles, the authors report on past and current trends in the subject of student motivation. Their focus is on interest and goals. Two types of interest are defined: individual and situational. The former pertains to an interest that more or less came with the student—so-called personal interests. The latter requires certain conditions to induce it and has the potential to not last as long. However, one must not conclude that individual interest should be an educator’s focus. With 25 or more students in one classroom, focusing on situational interest is a safer bet. Regarding motivation, theorists have distinguished between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. The authors suggest that a better model for discussing motivation should be based on autonomy—how much is a student’s learning behavior self-determined. Extrinsic factors, moreover, can increase this autonomy. Thus extrinsic and intrinsic factors work together to facilitate motivation.

The authors cite their own research more than that of others. Could the article, then, be a promotion of their own research? Is a series of articles which quote one another necessarily recursive? One would have to read more works by the two authors to make a determination.

Whether or not the article is a piece of self-promotion, the authors’ reporting of others’ research on motivation can be of great help. Their work has saved me from combing through dozens of articles on the same topic. They have reviewed and reported the matter fairly and thoroughly.


Beginning with the fundamental skepticism of Descartes’ ego cogito, Husserl builds a system of philosophy anew. He accuses Descartes of having the goal of his course arranged beforehand, whereas Husserl purports to genuinely begin from nothing, from the fact of pure consciousness (epoché), and proceeding step by step from what that fact alone entails. Perception plays a major role in Husserl’s Meditations, and is seen as the foundation for knowledge. This is not a perception of the empiricist philosophers, but a perception that includes any and all awareness, as it proceeds from the epoché. The most crucial part of Husserl’s work stems from his discussion on how we go from a state of
seemingly heterogeneous perceptions to a synthetic unity. This path to unity is where scientific discoveries are made.

The language of Husserl’s book is highly technical, but if one bears through it, the arguments and conclusions are undeniable. By reading *Cartesian Meditations*, one becomes aware of his own awareness, and, as in my own case, proceeds through life in a more careful, attentive way.

In the educational field, Husserl’s territory may perhaps be called metacognitive analysis. It deals with the questions: How does one come to know something? How is one aware that she knows? These processes are a major factor in Gestalt theory, and may serve to illuminate some of its the more intricate questions.


Katona begins by stating that the association (behavioral) model of psychology prevails in education, which he finds objectionable—not because it might be wrong, but because sole adherence to it has prevented other possible types of learning from being studied. He therefore took it upon himself to conduct a multitude of studies that tested alternatives to the association model. It even ended up being the case that many of the studies directly contradicted associationist theory—especially that espoused by Thorndike. The book reports Katona’s major findings on learning, with a special emphasis on memory, since implicit in effective learning is long-term retention. Here is a brief summary of his results:

1. Rather than being “taught” a principle, it is better that a principle is discovered without aid, as it results in better retention.
2. The opposite of rote learning is *learning by understanding*, which occurs when material is grouped so as to reveal inner relationships—an organization conducted by the learner.
3. Learning is more effectively transferred (applied to other tasks) when generalization occurs.
4. Direct practice, which is the shortest route to achieving a task goal, results in poor transfer of learning. It is better to study a multitude of examples and infer general principles than to quickly learn how to solve a problem.
5. Detours, or seemingly circuitous routes, prove to be more efficient than direct teaching. Spending extra time getting at structural features of given content results in better retention and transfer.

In short, Katona found that the immediate goal in education should be to see how much “memorizing and cramming can be eliminated” (259), so that students no longer “give back experience in the form in which they had received it,” but “learn to learn” (260).

Katona’s experiments were multi-faceted, rigorous, and many. He left no stone unturned, hoping to find the most effective modes of teaching and learning. Though it was evident that he was aligned with the Gestalt psychologists, each of his experiments provided ample room for opposing views to prevail. Yet they did not. And as the book
progresses, one can increasingly feel Katona’s sense of excitement as he relates, first his discoveries, and then more and more the implications of those discoveries.

This book has served to reinforce my own attitude toward the quickest route to learning. The most effective learning (which ends up saving time in the long run) is the plodding, circuitous route, that challenges the student to discover principles and make generalizations for him- or herself. Though the allotted time for my research project exerts pressure to “hurry up and teach,” the efficacy of Katona’s expressed methods should be kept constantly in view.


Biography and overview of a theory are combined in this book on the founder of Gestalt theory, Max Wertheimer. The theory itself is characterized by its attribution of Praeganz to perceptions and conceptions, which is, in short, “a tendency to the good whole configuration” (155). Perceptions, in particular, tend toward the following laws:

- law of proximity/nearness: items that are near to each other tend to be grouped together
- law of similarity: items with shared characteristics tend to be grouped together
- law of common fate: items that go through similar changes tend to be grouped together
- law of good continuation: successors in a series are grouped with other things in the series (e.g., frames on a film reel)
- law of closure: things are perceived “so as to attain maximum stability” (155)

In the larger picture, such gestalt qualities are found in thought and in nature. When explaining gestalt theory, it is often the case that one speaks of parts and wholes. According to gestaltists, the whole is not merely the sum of its parts (an idea as old as Plato). The whole, in fact, can be greater than its parts, and even precedes its parts. Structure is key; and it is the overarching structure that determines the parts. The traditional logic and associationist theories that dominated in Wertheimer’s time fell short in that respect. They adequately described parts and steps, but ignored the pulling force of the whole—the sense of direction/purpose exhibited by the structure or end result.

The book is coauthored by Wertheimer’s son, and could thus be construed as being either overly glorifying or overly critical of Wertheimer. In cases, however, where such tendencies were to be most expected, no such thing occurred. Instead, the work reports on Wertheimer from a fair distance, trying very hard not to judge one way or another.

A biography on Max Wertheimer, with an overview of his theory, is an essential locus for the present research. It is both starting point and ending point—the so-called radix of the matter.

This book is more or less a defense of Gestalt psychology, using behavioral psychology and association theory as foils. The explanation proper of Gestalt psychology, however, stands on its own, requiring no comparison with other methods. Köhler uses a plethora of abstract examples to demonstrate the basic meaning of Gestalt theory. Most of his demonstrations focus on perceptual phenomena, while others delve into machine theory, biology, and ontogeny in general. All discussions point to the idea that parts are nearly always directed toward a generalized whole—an “organization,” as he calls it, which determines the behavior (or perceived behavior) of the parts.

One can feel Köhler’s passion for the subject throughout the text. He is not merely sharing a theory; he is defending a view of reality which he sees to be the best alternative to the deadening effects of behaviorism and association theory. Rather than taking away from his “objectivity,” such an attitude fills his writing with a certain amount of vigor and insight which end up making his explanations even more clear. His attacks on the prevailing theories of his day are quite detailed, and sometimes humorous.

Köhler’s book lays important groundwork for the present study. Though its many proofs are drawn from empirical experiments, it amounts to a working philosophy that can be used to determine the types of dynamics in field experimentation that I plan to carry out.


Tired of hearing erroneous arguments about the “pure facts” (unadulterated by humans) of science, and disillusioned by the subjectivism of Schopenhauer and phenomenology, Köhler set out to find a middle ground. He ended up with a system that shows, on the one hand, that there is no such thing as a pure fact, scientific or otherwise, and, on the other hand, that human thought must necessarily reflect the actual (non-phenomenal) world due to the brain’s isomorphic properties with that world. Through a long and tedious course, that delves into physics and biology more than philosophy or psychology, Köhler shows that, yes, Kant’s thing-in-itself (reality) cannot be directly accessed through the senses, but we nonetheless detect functional properties that are indicative of various types of “requiredness” within a given system (and, he argues, there are no things, i.e., facts, without a system (context)). This term, requiredness, is key to his work. He defines it through four main properties and two additional tendencies:

1. Everything is within a context.
2. Requiredness does not exist on its own; rather, it depends on the items (data, entities, acts) within a context inasmuch as they do or do not fit among each other.
3. Though depending on particular parts within a context for its existence, requiredness transcends those parts through its bearing on other parts in the same context.
4. Requiredness accepts or rejects the status of a given context (based on the dynamic relations of its parts), and therefore has a demanding character.
(5) Requiredness tends to correct situations, bringing them nearer to perfection, by pointing out the direction which must be taken, as the imperfect situation indicates.

(6) Requiredness is often based on a clear apprehension of how the characteristics of facts in a given context fit or do not fit each other.

Köhler most usefully compares this notion of requiredness to that of forces in physics. It can easily be seen how a force fits can be characterized by each of the six points above. The analysis of requiredness in *The Place of Value in a World of Facts* has some important ramifications regarding the learning process. The concept of insight, for example, is directly related to requiredness, and is defined by Köhler as “recognizing the relations which make one thing demanded in a constellation of others” (34). This rather technical definition of insight brings the key elements of requiredness into account: context, functional relations, and vector-like directionality. Köhler also sees the relationship between requiredness and human interest. An experience with requiredness tends to generate interest. The demands of the situation naturally pull the learner into its problem-context, and ask that it be solved.

*The Place of Value in the World of Facts* is not for the faint-hearted. It is highly technical, and its arguments often stretch over hundreds of pages. There are, in fact, large portions of the book where the reader might think, “What has this to do with the title?” But the efforts are rewarded in the end. Köhler neatly ties together all of his arguments, and even answers the most troubling objections. Anyone looking for a “book on philosophy” or a “book on education” will be sorely disappointed. Köhler’s work is those things, but much more. It knows no boundaries in its field matter, and takes whatever direction the author might feel is required by the situation.

*The Place of Value in a World of Facts*, shows how, in a way, the stated problem of my research is an issue that has its roots in nature itself. Insight is something produced by the requirements of a given context, just as the vectors of forces, whether they be an electrical current in copper wire or the synapses of the brain, tend to follow the direction that results in a decrease of potential energy. Köhler’s thoughts on interest also fit in rather well with my research. The idea is not to find out what is interesting to students, and then create lessons based on those interests; but to see how a problem-situation (involving requiredness) can be created that will demand a solution, which effectively generates interest.


Lawrence Kubie was a psychiatrist. His professional experience led him to the hypothesis that blockages in the mind (he used the somewhat outmoded term *neuroses*) tend to have an adverse effect on creative ability. Moreover, he became disillusioned by the popular belief that neurotic distortions of the mind somehow lead to greater creativity. Believers in that notion point to the suicide of Hemingway, the psychosis of van Gogh, and the episodic tragedies of Nijinsky as evidence that neurosis and creativity go hand in hand. Kubie, on the contrary, held that those individuals would have been
more creative were they less neurotic. The preconscious mind (an area of the mind between the subconscious and conscious), he claimed, becomes more free to operate as neuroses are cleared. Since the source of creativity lies largely in the preconscious mind, where tacit syntheses are generated, the mentally healthy individual has greater freedom to establish the conceptual relationships necessary for creative discovery.

Admittedly, some of Kubie’s terminology and concepts are at times outdated. Nevertheless, the myth correlating a dysfunctional mind with creativity is still prevalent. Thus Kubie’s voice is pertinent for today.

Kubie’s notion of the nature of creativity will be useful to cite in my own work. I see the learning I am trying to facilitate as creative insight; however, the term creative has lost much of its meaning in recent years. Kubie’s parameters on the term help to bring what I mean by it into view.


Maier set up an experiment to discover what the conscious process is in finding solutions. In a room were placed two strings, chairs, tables, extension cords, pliers, poles, and clamps. The strings were suspended from the ceiling and touched the floor, one of them against the wall, and the other in the middle of the room. They were distanced so that they could, if pulled toward each other, reach and be tied together. They were not close enough, however, to be able to grab one and walk over and grab the other. Subjects were required to find solutions for tying the two strings together. Four types of solution were possible:

1. Extension: Make a hook-like device with the pole and clamp in order to extend one’s reach.
2. Anchoring: Hold the string in place with a chair.
3. Lengthening: Tie the extension cord to the string.
4. Automation: Turn the string into a pendulum by attaching pliers to the end.

Maier’s focus was on the fourth type of solution, and subjects were directed to pursue new solutions until they found the fourth. Those who had difficulty in discovering the solution were provided with the hint of the experimenter walking past the string and nonchalantly causing it to swing. Maier was most interested in subjects who found the solution after being provided with the hint (which was 37.7% of the 61 subjects). Each subject was interviewed. The overall results showed that the solution would appear in its totality in a single moment. Furthermore, those subjects who were given the hint were not consciously aware that the hint played a part in helping them find the solution. Maier interpreted these results as being “typical of the Gestalt view,” where “[c]hanges in meaning and organization are experienced suddenly” (191). First the subject experiences a sense of disharmony in the situation, and then a transformation occurs, where a solution is seen that relates the elements into a new organization.

Maier’s experiment was carried out very thoroughly, and with sufficient leeway for results to occur contrary to his own views. He left little room for criticism.
Maier’s work has caused me to realize the significance of “helps” or hints in solution-achievement. Providing participants hints that do not seem like hints can be just enough of a subconscious cue to jar the mind into grasping a solution. Lesson plans in line with this research should provide suggestions for such hints.


Despite the title of his essay, Mayer does very little grappling with the questions of Gestalt psychology. He does, however, provide a concise overview of the work done on the matter of insight. He defines insight as “the process by which a problem solver suddenly moves from a state of not knowing how to solve a problem to a state of knowing how to solve it” (3). Later on, he clarifies this definition by formulating it in what he says are Gestalt terms: insight is “the process by which a person understands the underlying structure of a problem” (28). Throughout his own work on insight and the study of others, Mayer has come to identify five types of insight.

Insight as . . .
1. completing a schema: occurs when a solution is found by filling in the gap, keeping structural integrity, and/or meeting the requirements of a problem. Mayer gives Franklin’s work with electricity as an example. Franklin wanted to bring the electricity from the sky down to the earth, and therefore was required to fill the gap (between sky and earth, between uncontained and contained electricity) without defying the structural requirements of the problem.
2. the sudden reorganization of visual information: occurs when a solution is found by seeing the same elements in a different way. Mayer gives geometrical examples, and also cites Köhler’s work with chimpanzees.
3. reformulating a problem: occurs when the goal is perceived in a new way. Maier’s two-string problem is an example (see “Maier” entry above). Another example is Duncker’s zap the tumor scenario. It was explained to subjects that there was a stomach tumor that could be eliminated by a powerful ray of multiple beams. The problem, however, was that the beams would critically damage the tissue en route to the tumor. Subjects were asked to provide a solution that would eliminate the tumor without harming the tissue. By looking at the goal in a different way—by seeing it in terms of minimal ray strength through the tissue and maximum at the tumor, the solution could be arrived at of shooting multiple beams from different directions with the tumor as focal point. Thus each individual beam would not be strong enough to harm the tissue, but would be strong enough to kill the tumor when combined with the other beams.
4. overcoming mental blocks: occurs when a solution is reached by overcoming preconceived notions (based on past experience) of how an object is to be used or a problem is to be solved. For example, Duncker set up an experiment where subjects were provided, each in cardboard boxes, three candles, three tacks, and three matches. They were asked to mount the three candles to the wall at eye level. The solution, which was to use the three boxes as mounts, was mostly not
reached by subjects due to the fact that they saw the function of the boxes as containers, and thus could not overcome the mental block of box-as-container.

5. finding a problem analog: occurs when the solution is found by relating the structure of the problem to other similar structures. Wertheimer, for example, worked with learning disabled children to build bridges out of three blocks. In each case, two blocks were the same length, and the third was different. If two short blocks were used as supports in the first round, Wertheimer would make it so the same short block would have to function as the bridge in the next round. Most subjects were able to see the underlying structure of the problem, and successfully build a bridge each time, rather than mindlessly trying to use the same type of block in the same way.

Mayer’s survey of studies on insight is comprehensive, and the categories are convenient. Unfortunately, there was a glaring error on the first page of his essay, which, in private correspondence with this researcher, he was not willing to correct. This should cause the reader to question the validity of some of his other statements. The error was an issue of citing a statement of one author about another author without checking the other author’s work to see if the statement was true.

Mayer’s creation of the five categories of insight is an excellent tool for devising one’s own problem situations. When I become stuck in trying to come up with an idea for teaching a lesson, a quick rundown through the five types of insight should serve to evoke some useful ideas. Moreover, in troubleshooting students’ struggles with comprehending a concept, these categories will aid in locating the exact nature of their struggle.


“If there is no need to know, learning will not take place,” is McCarthy’s jumping off point for promoting the use of Gestalt theory in education (47). This “need to know” is the beginning of a series of internal processes that make up learning. McCarthy puts the theory in sharp contrast with the behaviorist’s focus on external actions: “objectivity can be concerned only with objects” (49).

McCarthy’s article serves as a unique overview of Gestalt theory applied to learning. His views, though a bit overgeneralized from traditional Gestalt theory, carry fully the spirit of the Gestaltists.

In the endeavor to articulate Gestalt theory as a learning model, McCarthy is of help. He effectively transfers the language of Gestalt psychology to that of education.

This article was written at a time when “[t]he view of learning most frequently found in the textbooks is the simple one that things which happen together form a union” (280). Another name for such a view is association. Ogden wholeheartedly rejected this view as the mode of education. The first concrete expression of association theory is found in Aristotle’s *Parva Naturalia*, from which Ogden quotes extensively. The idea is that the mere coincidence of one thing happening after something else establishes a connection in the mind. In Ogden’s time, each occurrence of association was believed by most psychologists to be formed by a chemical reaction in the brain. Ogden denied such a belief, decrying the idea of “elementary bits, . . . bonds of synaptic connection” (281). Instead, he supported the Gestalt view, that the mind exists in a dynamic relationship with its environment and is affected as a whole through interactions with that environment. The superiority of this view is proven by the fact that some associations are more likely to be assimilated than others due to a certain prepotency, or Prägnanz. It is as if the mind has within itself a certain predisposition to harmony, which, when recognized, experiences a sense of insight—also known as learning.

Ogden’s view is logically sound, and redeems a large part of the human psyche that reductionistic psychology has thrown away. His defense of the Gestalt view will greatly bolster my own defense of Gestalt-oriented learning.


By “scientific theory,” Pearlman is mainly referring to what behavioral psychologists have done to the field of education. He is especially critical of the rise of standardized tests in assessing learning: “if objective tests fail as indices of what we consider intelligence, or of what is learned, it is either because they are not good indicators or because intelligence, or what is learned, is not measurable in their terms” (54).

Pearlman’s critique of the “scientific” method of the behaviorists is an accurate one. By pointing out the paradoxes that arise in the application of behavioral ideology to education, the author forces a reconsideration of behaviorism.

As part of my study will be to “measure” qualitative aspects of learning, Pearlman’s caveats regarding the pitfalls of mere behavior observation and standardized testing are apropos. Modes of assessment different from standardized tests will have to be developed. Especially useful will be “what-if” type assessments§§, where students are asked to explain/predict written or orally what the results may be of changing certain factors in a given situation. *** A role-play assessment also falls into this qualitative category. To be able to engage in dialogue from another specific person’s point of view requires a level of understanding of that person that goes beyond information recall.

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§§ Not exactly the same as Swaak’s (see below) WHAT-IF test.

*** For example, if studying Poe’s *The Raven*, students could be asked how the poem would be different if the narrator was a woman telling about a lost man. Students could even be asked to rewrite the poem from that perspective.
The authors provide an overview of the prevailing trends in education. Of particular interest was the chapter on Gestalt theory, in which **insight** was emphasized as the key factor in learning. Even the learning processes of chimpanzees tend to exhibit crucial moments of insight, as demonstrated by the experiments of Wolfgang Köhler. Genuine learning, according to Gestalt theorists, requires knowing the elements that make up a problem and realizing what are and are not potential solutions. Furthermore, a notion of the whole situation is required; only then can the actual solution be “seen” by the learner.

*Perspectives on Learning* is noteworthy for its humble approach. It makes no claims of superiority for one model of learning over another. Even if there were one panacea-like model, it would, the authors point out, be impossible to reach consensus. It is therefore the authors’ practice to point out the strengths of each theory without any explicit commitment to any of them.

In my own research, the element of insight is of central importance. Unfortunately (or fortunately), insight cannot be broken down or quantified, and is therefore inimical to the behavioral mode of most education research. The problem of making the element of insight palatable in the field should prove to be an interesting challenge.


In the heyday of the pure logical systems of Hilbert, Russell, et. al., Poincaré composed a work that demonstrated, step by step, the necessary bankruptcy of such systems. Poincaré was especially aware of the damage caused by the logico-deductive method in the field of education, through his observations at the École Polytechnique. In particular, as he pondered on the elegance of great mathematical proofs, Poincaré wondered why such proofs were often incomprehensible to students. He came to the conclusion that it was because the long chain of arguments in a proof leave out “that indefinable something that constitutes the unity of the demonstration” (126). In other words, students failed to see the whole picture and thus could not grasp the proof. To many of Poincaré’s colleagues, this condition of the student mind was seen as a defect. In return Poincaré asked poignantly, “Should we constrain young people to change the nature of their minds?” (126). He naturally answered in the negative and insisted it is the instructor who must adapt. In this capacity, the duty of the instructor is to treat the student like an embryo, which is said to pass through the stages of evolutionary history as it develops. “The educator must make the child pass through all that his fathers have passed through, more rapidly, but without missing a stage” (127). In fact, Poincaré’s advice for finding the best way to teach something is to find out how that thing was originally discovered, and to attempt to find the original, true nature of the discovery, and then to cause that same discovery to occur in the mind of the student. All else is a
mere relating of discrete facts or an imposition of arbitrary logic. Logic, however, is not
seen by Poincaré as being bad in itself. It is necessary for providing proofs of
discoveries; but the actual discovery occurs through the process of intuition.

Poincaré’s ideas regarding learning seem to make much sense. His critique of the
prevailing mode of instruction seems to be indicative of an experience that most people
face even today. It would be interesting to investigate whether or not France took his
words to heart, and what the results were.

The idea of recreating original discoveries in the minds of students has always been of
interest to me. It is an important element in the research itself, it being the case that
Gestalt theory lends itself to the reenacting of discoveries. In Language Arts, a deep
sense of historical development may have to replace “discovery” in many cases; but it
still falls in the same spirit of getting at the kernel of what the person in question (author,
poet, linguist) discovered or developed, and then generating a similar moment of insight
in the student.

published 1966).

Almost fully in line with the Gestalt school of perceiving and knowing, Polanyi divides
the latter into two: proximal and distal. Proximal knowing involves the particulars of
what one is trying to comprehend. Distal knowing is the comprehensive meaning of
the particulars in question. For example, the distal aspect of a pianist’s performance is the
music that she makes. The proximal aspect is the individual movement of each muscle
in her fingers. If she were to focus on only the proximal, the music itself would be lost.
The same phenomenon of loss of meaning occurs when one repeats the same word over
and over again until it becomes a mere sound impression to the hearer. Such a fact
seems obvious enough, but it is its bearing on knowledge in general that so thoroughly
fascinates Polanyi. In nearly every case of *knowing*, there are hidden, or tacit, elements
that tend to elude the knower. In recognizing another person by their face, for instance,
the one who recognizes often cannot pinpoint which aspects of the recognized
physiognomy distinguishes that person from another. Though a computer with a digital
photographic device might mimic the process by mapping out a person’s face, it ends up
being the furthest thing from the human process, in which no such mapping of
particulars occurs. Instead, the human has an immediate tacit comprehension of the
distal import of the face. All creations and discoveries are made by integrating the
particulars through tacit knowing, forming what Polanyi calls a comprehensive entity. In
most instances of discovery, the comprehensive entity cannot be found, or deduced,
from the particulars. Instead, there is something which transcends the particulars, and in
a way determines them, that the particulars themselves do not comprise. When a higher
order occurs that cannot be found in the particulars themselves, it is called emergence. In
emergence, there is a higher principle guiding the lower principle, establishing a higher
order of existence. Polanyi extensively discusses biological evolution in terms of
emergence. There is nothing within a lower life form from which the arrangement of a
higher life form can be derived; yet, the higher life form evolves from the lower. Thus
Polanyi says, “[I]t is impossible to represent the organizing principles of a higher level by the laws governing its isolated particulars” (36). Especially convincing in this regard is the emergence of life from nonlife. All of the preceding arguments have significant implications for teaching and learning. First and foremost, Polanyi asserts that instruction does not and cannot consist of passing along information. Rather, the learner tries to catch a “hidden” meaning through the teacher’s instruction. Take the simple case of explaining a word. The teacher is not actually explaining the word to the student; the teacher is pointing toward a referent which the student must somehow grasp. The teacher can merely point toward various particulars so that the student can reach a comprehensive tacit meaning. Secondly, and consequently, learning—and especially discovery—involves a sort of indwelling on the part of the learner. It is, remarks Polanyi, an “existential choice” (80). The learner can be seen as pouring himself into subsidiary clues in order to arrive at discovery at something having a real bearing on reality. It is only by this type of indwelling that we can begin to comprehend the joint meaning of subsidiary clues.

The Tacit Dimension provides succinct arguments for each of the main points. Though this makes the work easier to understand at first, it leaves a multitude of unanswered questions. On the whole, however, Polanyi’s assertions make a great deal of sense, and can be seen as a valid starting point for developing a philosophy of knowing as tacit comprehension.

For my own research, Polanyi’s book has been especially enlightening. He has argued, without laboratory experiments or elaborate citations, that the human mind, fundamentally, operates on the tacit level. The arguments, moreover, are by all appearances sound ones. That means that my research question taps into not just a particular mode of learning, but a mode of learning that consciously utilizes the tacit functions of the mind.


Reber makes the distinction between implicit and explicit learning, and claims that the former occurs far more frequently, it also being the dominant mode in evolutionary history. The book opens with a complaint that nearly all textbooks on learning are rife with behaviorism with a major disconnect from cognition and language acquisition. Most of Reber’s own studies have involved grammar experiments, where participants were repeatedly exposed to seemingly random strings of letters and eventually asked to decode the language rules behind them. He concluded that, “when people are presented with an environment that is structured, they learn to exploit that structure” (35). In other words, the mind subconsciously picks up underlying structures when repeatedly exposed to phenomena. It is always the case, moreover, that this understanding occurs before it is able to be articulated. Yet the learner has the definite sense that he has learned something. “Subjects know they know something; they simply do not know what it is they know” (136). This experience of a sudden awareness of knowing something is also called intuition. In education, in particular, implicit learning is drastically under-
emphasized, obfuscated by an undue focus on “specific tutoring of rules and formulas” (159).

Reber’s experiments are very precise, and give results that are measurable across a variety of domains. It may be the case, though, that his preoccupation with the exactitude of clinical trials has caused him to narrow down terms and variables to the degree that their meaning becomes compromised. By working only with letter strings and the arbitrary rules he constructs behind them, Reber is exposed to a rather small subsection of learning.

It is important to keep Reber’s work in mind when working with students. Instead of focusing on the explicit, it is often more beneficial to the student to come to know the implicit. The teaching of new forms or ideas can be picked up by the learner through repeated exposure to examples of those forms or ideas. Teaching about writing business letters, for example, may be better comprehended through repeated exposure to various sample business letters, rather than a presentation on the components of a business letter. (Of course, eventually attention must be called to such components.)


By surveying a multitude of literature on the subject, the authors tried to answer the question: what are the best ways to look at, measure, and increase student interest? They concluded that the best way to . . .
1) conceive of student interest is to focus on assumptions. Each author and researcher has their own reasoning behind what student interest means, but often fail to articulate such reasoning. Asking questions about these assumptions can greatly clarify what interest means in the first place.
2) measure student interest seems to be self-reporting. It is important, however, to triangulate with other methods, such as behavior observation.
3) increase student interest is through social interaction or by modifying the learning environment.

Renninger and Hidi’s research provides valuable insight for how to triangulate when measuring student interest. Since interest is largely a subjective term, researchers tend to rely solely on self-reporting methods. But self-reporting, though it gets to the heart of the matter in the most direct way, is not a flawless system. It is possible that a subject might falsify information, refuse to participate, or leave out essentials. Therefore it will be necessary to supplement self-reporting with direct observation, and even through questioning of other instructors.


Swaak and de Jong set out to prove that discovery simulations (via computer) result in more effective learning (i.e., better, more intuitive understanding). Attached to their
problem is the question of how “effective learning” can be measured. Subjects were provided with interactive computer simulations dealing with the concept of circuitry. The simulations were designed to have low transparency (less explicit than textbooks and require more inference). No information or formal teaching was given beforehand. While students were using their simulations, the researchers observed the learning process. Afterwards, the learned content was assessed through a series of WHAT-IF tests. These tests were used because they were determined to be the best way to measure the quality of knowledge gained. The WHAT-IF test asks students to make predictions, and measures “the quick perception of anticipated situations” (288). In other words, it seeks to ascertain if the new information was integrated at a deep level. The results of the study showed, firstly, that deep knowledge is innately intuitive. Moreover, discovery simulations were shown to be an effective method for instilling intuitive knowledge. The “intuitive” learning approach can be described as top-down (concept-driven) rather than bottom-up (data driven).

The researchers were very rigorous in their study. It would, however, have been of help had they clarified what was meant by “intuitive.” The term is a vague one which is used by various theorists to mean many, and often contrary, things. It might have also been useful had they included a discussion of how their model could be applied to non-computer environments.

As for my research, the article provides terms regarding knowledge that will certainly help in the articulation of the main hypothesis and corresponding research. Additionally, the WHAT-IF test seems to be a useful method in measuring depth and quality of knowledge.


This seminal work of the pioneer of gestalt theory, Max Wertheimer, lays out how thought processes (toward discovery) work, which, in effect, provides a framework for how learning occurs. In contrast to utilizing blind repetition, arbitrary trial and error, given formulae, deductive/inductive logic, or associationist stimulus-response behavior, a genuine learning experience has the following characteristics:

1. sense of a problem that emerges from a gap, disturbance, or “trouble” within a given structure; i.e., a problem that is dynamically driven by the whole of the structure itself
2. a grasping toward structural truth (as opposed to piecemeal truth) through which possible solutions are guided by the structural requirements of a situation
3. a consistency of development that remains “sensible” within the requirements demanded by the structure
4. moment(s) of insight in which proposed solutions are seen to naturally fit the situation

Wertheimer illustrated these processes in action through various examples that he himself had witnessed over the years. Some examples were with grade school students, others with adult subjects, and the rest include figures such as Galileo, Einstein (a personal friend of Wertheimer), and Wertheimer himself. Through problem situations
such as finding the area of a parallelogram, discovering relativity, describing a workplace hierarchy, etc., Wertheimer detailed, step by step, how each of these problems were solved (or, in some cases, not solved) by the subject. They involved processes that cannot be explained merely through the prevailing theories of associationism and traditional logic. In fact, even though great discoveries are often handed down to us in logical terms, such logic (which is useful for explanation) is imposed on the discovery after the fact for the sake of stating it in clear terms. Einstein, for instance, did not produce his theory of relativity through a series of axioms and postulates resulting in a syllogistic, stepwise proof. The process, rather, deeply involved the steps mentioned above, and only afterwards could be stated in deductive terms. Thus, as Wertheimer asserted, any mode of teaching which does not recreate the steps of discovery required by a given problem situation serves to “cut to pieces living thinking processes,” and “dissect them, and thus show a dead picture stripped of all that is alive in them” (237).

Wertheimer’s method in outlining his theory is similar to the theory itself. The rigorous steps involved in the various discoveries he relates are provided in almost narrative fashion: providing initial realization of the problem (perceived disturbances in the structure), possible steps toward a solution that remain true to the structure (including false leads and inept, “blind” solutions), and the final solution(s) that, in a moment of insight, clears up the initial disturbance. Thus, in reading Wertheimer’s book, the reader essentially discovers gestalt theory in ways akin to Wertheimer’s own discovery. Throughout, the thought process remains crucial, albeit consistent, sensible, and sincere.

The application of Wertheimer’s model of productive thought to teaching and learning would be a very practical exercise. It is made all the easier by the fact that each example in Wertheimer’s book is a practical, “field study” case. It may, however, take a bit of creative work on my own part to apply the theory to lessons in non-scientific subjects, such as Language Arts. However, a few of Wertheimer’s case studies (such as the workplace hierarchy and badminton dilemma problems) do tend in that direction. The reason Wertheimer leaned heavily on scientific/mathematical examples was because they have less factors in their problem structures, and thus serve his descriptive purpose more directly.


This article is a transcript of Michael Wertheimer’s presentation at a conference commemorating his father, Max Wertheimer. Much of it features excerpts from some of his father’s notes that he had just found. The notes dealt mostly with specialized issues within Gestalt psychology. The most relevant quote to this study pertains to the nature of explanation, and is as follows:

What matters in explanation is not simply and only the strictness and validity of the steps involved in the procedure, but how the matter looks after the explanation compared to how it looked before, that is, how it appeared to a person who wants
to understand it when it was in a state of being unexplained as compared to the way it appears to that person afterwards (71).

This quote has great significance in the pre- and post-assessment process in teaching. As teachers, we are not only assessing understanding, but also whether or not our functional explanation was a good one. The preliminary assessment, therefore, should ask: how do you see things now, before any explanation occurs? And the post assessment must ask: How does the matter seem to you now that you have received an explanation? It would be useful to keep this frame of reference in mind when creating assessments.


Though most examples of teaching in the gestalt mode fall within the fields of mathematics or science, Yeomans demonstrates the usefulness of applying the gestalt method to Language Arts. After an overview of why gestalt theory is especially suited to education, Yeomans gives specific examples of its application in a grade school literature class. For instance:

- In teaching the parts of speech, the teacher can ask, “How does it feel to be a verb?”
- For vocabulary studies, students can imagine they are a word and “play” that word.
- For diction/word choice, ask: “If you were this sentence/poem/essay what would you need?”
- In poetry, encourage students to search for and play with the different gestalts of the poem.

Yeomans’ ideas, while initially refreshing, seem to be repetitive. It would have been more productive had he stated overarching ideas that could be applied to Language Arts, and then given one or two specific examples.

I plan to use a few of Yeomans’ examples in teaching Language Arts, in order to see how effective they are in promoting student interest and comprehension.
Research Methodology

This study is an action research project in which I was an active participant. Its main element is that of concept analysis, where I employ Gestalt-oriented teaching methods in the classroom in order to see their effects on students.

Goals and Expectations

The plan of this research was to determine: What are the effects of Gestalt-oriented learning (aimed at generating insight) on student understanding and interest? Implicitly tied into this goal is the idea that Gestalt-oriented learning is more in harmony with the way the mind functions, and is thus likely to result in an increase of the two dependent variables (understanding and interest). At the same time, I sought to see whether I could effectively implement Gestalt-centered learning in the classroom. My teaching subject is English Language Arts, whereas most of the learning experiments in Gestalt psychology have been conducted in mathematics, science, and logic.††† It was therefore a challenge for me to come up with the teaching ideas themselves and communicate them to students. Nevertheless, I did not expect that either would end up being a problem.

Expected Outcomes

It was expected that, after implementing gestalt-oriented teaching methods students would, first of all, adequately apprehend the challenges presented to them. That is, from the outset it was assumed that students would automatically grasp such a style of teaching and utilize it to generate moments of insight. It would then follow that the students would have a stronger, deeper grasp on the subject matter and feel a greater sense of interest in it. In my own learning experience, and in witnessing students, it is evident that deeper, insightful learning results in

††† One author, Reber (1993), conducted a series of experiments about learning the syntax of nonsense syllables in order to test implicit learning, but such decontextualized, controlled experiments are hardly relevant to language arts.
better understanding, or (in more measurable terms) better test scores. It is also evident that
to understand, especially if it goes into the heart of a subject, results in greater interest. It
therefore seemed to me that introducing my own teaching methods that lean heavily on those
developed by the Gestalt theorists would almost inevitably result in a greater understanding of
subject matter and a growth of interest among a new (to me) group of students. More
particularly, since the unit I taught was on literary analysis, the bulk of my burden for the
research project fell to measuring and analyzing the effect of Gestalt-oriented learning on
students’ ability to analyze literature, and on student interest in literature.

**Measurement of Outcomes**

In order to measure the latter two goals, I devised multiple sources of data collection.
An outline of these sources can be seen in Appendix A. Students’ ability to analyze literature
will be measured in three ways:

1. evaluation of the depth and quality of their literary analysis essays (see Appendix B for
   student guidelines and grading criteria of essay)
2. informal assessment of in-class discussions regarding literary texts
3. analysis of depth, quality, and accuracy of answers on student assignments, quizzes,
   and tests (see Appendix C for full lesson plans and activities)
4. student self-assessment based on entrance/exit survey (see Appendix EE)

Students’ interest in literature will likewise be measured in three ways:

1. student journal entries on their attitude toward literature
2. classroom observation of differences in engagement and interest during different
   activities (form in Appendix DD)

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The initial goal—that students would be able to utilize my method of teaching—was not directly tested, because
it was already assumed in the research question itself that students would utilize the teaching.
Analysis

In order to measure an increase in something, there must first exist a relative starting point. Thus in analysis of the gathered data, the initial assignments, surveys, and observations gathered will serve as a point of comparison for later assignments, surveys, and observations. It follows that any graphs or charts used will have at least two points of comparison: before and after. For the measurement of student interest, self-reports will be more heavily weighted than other data, as such reporting seems to be the most valid indicator of interest (Renninger & Hidi, 2011).

The type of visual representation used to illustrate the change in students’ ability to understand literature will be a line graph.

Unlike a bar graph, the line graph can show the rate of change over time. Since the students’ ability to understand literature is something that would probably grow during the course of a unit regardless of teaching method, a line graph makes it possible to compare the extent and rate of
the change with other teaching methods. For an analysis of student interest, however, a bar graph will be more suitable. For it is only necessary to show whether a student became more interested or less interested in literature, and by how much.

![Bar graph sample](image)

**Figure 3.** Bar graph sample

The parameters of this study are such that I am limited to using descriptive statistics. Since for each of the two areas of measurement there are only two variables, the method used to analyze the data will be a simplified Pearson correlation. The correlates will be, first, the independent variable of gestalt-centered learning with the dependent variable of ability to analyze literature; and, second, the same independent variable with the dependent variable of level of interest in literature.

**Action Plan**

Carrying this research project requires, first of all, having an English class to teach. Then it is required to develop a curriculum that leans heavily on gestalt methods (again, see Appendix C for the resulting lesson plans and assignments). For help in developing gestalt-oriented content, I consulted, first of all, a work by Max Wertheimer (mentioned above), founder of the Gestalt movement, called *Productive Thinking* (1959). The whole purpose of *Productive

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§§§ Direct comparison with other teaching methods is not within the scope of this research project.
Thinking is to explain, in detail, which learning experiences involve productive thinking and which do not. I have tried, accordingly, to keep my lessons and activities in line with productive thinking. The best way to understand Wertheimer’s notion of productive thinking is to go through the examples he provides; but he also provides a general outline of the attributes of productive thinking:

1. sense of a problem that emerges from a gap, disturbance, or “trouble” within a given structure; i.e., a problem that is dynamically driven by the whole of the structure itself
2. a grasping toward structural truth (as opposed to piecemeal truth) through which possible solutions are guided by the structural requirements of a situation
3. a consistency of development that remains “sensible” within the requirements demanded by the structure
4. moment(s) of insight in which proposed solutions are seen to naturally fit the situation

The final attribute listed led me to also look into research dealing specifically with insight. Richard Mayer (1995), though somewhat inimical to Gestalt methods, penned an excellent overview of the significant field work done on the matter of insight. In completing his research, Mayer was able to identify five types of insight experiences, all of which it is useful to think about when creating an educational curriculum:

1. completing a schema: occurs when a solution is found by filling in the gap, keeping structural integrity, and/or meeting the requirements of a problem. Mayer gives Franklin’s work with electricity as an example. Franklin wanted to bring the electricity from the sky down to the earth, and therefore was required to fill the gap (between sky and earth, between uncontained and contained electricity) without defying the structural requirements of the problem. In my own lessons, this type of insight is utilized in the
“what-if” scenarios (e.g., what if this piece of literature were written in a different time period?).

2. the sudden reorganization of visual information: occurs when a solution is found by seeing the same elements in a different way. Mayer gives geometrical examples, and also refers to Köhler’s work with chimpanzees (as cited in Mayer, 1995). One of my lessons uses this type by having students try to order (by pasting pre-cut lines of poetry) the lines of a Helen Keller poem. (The metaphor of seeing within one’s blindness is also at play here.)

3. reformulating a problem: occurs when the goal is perceived in a new way. Maier’s (1931) (not to be confused with Mayer) two-string problem is an example. Another example is Duncker’s zap the tumor scenario (as cited in Mayer, 1995). It was explained to subjects that there was a stomach tumor that could be eliminated by a powerful ray of multiple beams. The problem, however, was that the beams would critically damage the tissue en route to the tumor. Subjects were asked to provide a solution that would eliminate the tumor without harming the tissue. By looking at the goal in a different way—by seeing it in terms of minimal ray strength through the tissue and maximum at the tumor, the solution could be arrived at of shooting multiple beams from different directions with the tumor as focal point. Thus each individual beam would not be strong enough to harm the tissue, but would be strong enough to kill the tumor when combined with the other beams. Students in my class use this type of insight when they are required to rewrite a Frost poem without figurative language.

4. overcoming mental blocks: occurs when a solution is reached by overcoming preconceived notions (based on past experience) of how an object is to be used or a
problem is to be solved. For example, Duncker (as cited in Mayer, 1995) set up an experiment where subjects were provided, each in cardboard boxes, three candles, three tacks, and three matches. They were asked to mount the three candles to the wall at eye level. The solution, which was to use the three boxes as mounts, was mostly not reached by subjects due to the fact that they saw the function of the boxes as containers, and thus could not overcome the mental block of box-as-container. I tap into this type of insight by asking my students to write an obituary for a literary term. Their preconceived notion of a particular literary term must be seen in a new way as it fits into an obituary. This is an excellent way to assess their understanding of a given term.

5. finding a problem analog: occurs when the solution is found by relating the structure of the problem to other similar structures. Wertheimer (1959), for example, worked with learning disabled children to build bridges out of three blocks. In each case, two blocks were the same length, and the third was different. If two short blocks were used as supports in the first round, Wertheimer would make it so the same short block would have to function as the bridge in the next round. Most subjects were able to see the underlying structure of the problem, and successfully build a bridge each time, rather than mindlessly trying to use the same type of block in the same way. Wertheimer goes over this experiment, in detail, in his *Productive Thinking*. My lessons involving context utilize this principle. Students look at pieces of music, art, and poetry out of their context, and then see how the subsequently provided context entirely alters the meaning of the part.

I supply a description of the types of insight problems here so that my research project is more easily transferrable to other researchers. To expect a researcher to be able carry out my
action plan exactly as I have done would be rather foolish. They would have to be teaching the same grade and subject, with the same unit and district curriculum requirements, with the same type of students who have the same needs. While I do supply, below, every step I have taken, in detail, I also strive to provide enough contextual information so that my project can be assimilated into almost any classroom.

Other writings along the same line as Wertheimer’s are helpful in supplying the utterly crucial idea of what productive, gestalt-oriented learning looks like. Especially poignant is Katona’s report on his own research, Organizing and Memorizing (1949), which not only goes through his numerous experiments on comparing associationist (“direct”) learning with discovery learning, but explains the general teaching principles that can be derived from those experiments. Gestalt-oriented learning and teaching is not procedure; it is a mindset. In order to gain, or at least understand, that mindset, it is also recommended that the landmark studies (Kohler, 1959; Duncker, 1939, Ogden, 1930) of Köhler, Duncker, and Ogden be read. They each focus on a different aspect of Gestalt psychology and learning, all indispensable to the gestalt-minded teacher.

The literature already mentioned is quite enough for developing a clear idea of the type of instruction and learning that falls under Gestalt theory. There are, moreover, a few (not many) articles that provide specific ideas for teaching English language arts in a Gestalt manner. These sources will be referenced accordingly in the step-by-step action plan that follows. Further descriptions of activities can be found in the corresponding lessons (e.g., “First day of instruction” corresponds to Lesson 1) in Appendix C. (Note: Each of my class sessions with students were 90 minutes duration.)
### Step-by-step Action Plan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT?</th>
<th>WHEN?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investigate background of student population</td>
<td>Preliminary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observe student engagement/interest</td>
<td>Throughout instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal assessment of in-class discussions</td>
<td>Throughout instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct entrance survey (Appendix E)</td>
<td>First day of instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students journal their attitude toward literature</td>
<td>Periodically throughout instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plato’s cave allegory: read, discuss, writing activity with student illustration</td>
<td>First class session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulate the “need to know” literary analysis (McCarthy, 1975)</td>
<td>Second class session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen Keller poem cut and paste activity (based on a Gestalt experiment conducted by I. A. Richards (Goodblatt &amp; Glicksohn, 2010))</td>
<td>Second class session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary terms: constructive definitions</td>
<td>Third class session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read narrative and conduct “WHAT-IF” experiment†††† (Swaak &amp; Jong, 2001; Pearlman, 1975)</td>
<td>Third class session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Frost poem rewrite experiment</td>
<td>Fourth class session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking on persona of literary character assignment</td>
<td>Fifth class session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary (literary term) obituary assignment (inferred from Yeomans, 1975).</td>
<td>Fifth class session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parts and whole context activity</td>
<td>Sixth class session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parts and whole ambiguity reading and assignment</td>
<td>Sixth class session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assign final literary analysis essay (Appendix B)</td>
<td>Sixth class session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct exit survey (Appendix E)</td>
<td>Sixth class session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze data</td>
<td>After instruction period</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the implementation and analysis of the above steps and their results, I will be giving particular attention to the depth of student responses (verbal, written, body language, etc.)

**** For rationale behind illustration, see Fox, C. (1914). The conditions which arouse mental images in thought. *The British journal of psychology*, 6(6), 420-431.

†††† Logistical limitations made it impossible to plan for and use the “quick anticipation” aspect of Swaak and Jong’s experiment.
for each activity. I will compare them to earlier activities, and to my prior observations as a whole during my teaching career. While I have already made it clear that my research will measure projected increases in understanding and interest, I am also keen to discover whether or not my activities elicit deeper, more whole-quality thinking among the students (whereas in the past I am used to seeing piecemeal, “correct-answer” thinking that shows little evidence of the productiveness indicated by Wertheimer).

**Data Analysis**

For data gathering, all 26 of the 10th grade English students were taken into consideration. Their written responses, actions, comments, and scores were taken from each and every student. Various sources of evidence were used in order not to rely too heavily on any one source. This triangulation of data, which we have already seen in Appendix A, was broken down even further into an analysis matrix (Appendix F).

**Data Relating to Students’ Ability to Analyze Literature**

It was expected that Gestalt-oriented learning in the classroom would result in an increase in students’ ability to analyze literature. Various methods were used to measure this ability. We will first discuss the survey.

Although direct assessment of student work and in-class dialogue is a more accurate indicator of academic performance, student self-perception on the matter can also be revealing. The entrance/exit survey (Appendix EE), which was given to all students present on each of the two survey days, had two questions directly related, and two indirectly related, to students’ ability to analyze literature. Questions three and four are the directly related ones. Students answered on a scale of 1-5. A higher score indicates a more positive response. (Question four, it will be noticed, makes a negative statement, and thus the scoring for that one is reversed. In other
words, in analysis of the data, I counted the response scale for question four in reverse order so that it would be consistent with the other data.) The less direct questions were questions two and six, which dealt more with students’ confidence in analyzing literature. For the reader’s convenience, I here list the four related questions accordingly:

**Question 2** (indirect): I feel confident when I am reading. (1=Never, 5=Always)

**Question 3** (direct): Poems are easy for me to understand. (1=Rarely, 5=Almost always)

**Question 4** (direct): I have difficulty comprehending literary texts. (1=Not at all, 5=Definitely (responses reversed for consistency in data analysis))

**Question 6** (indirect): I am better than most people at analyzing poems and stories. (1=Not at all, 5=Most certainly)

The average was calculated for each question for each survey session. The results are shown in table 1, and the differences between the two sessions (entrance/exit) are indicated by a line connecting the two averages.

![Figure 4. Entrance/exit survey data on students’ ability to analyze literature](image)
The slope is indicative of either an increase or decrease in self-perception of ability to analyze literature. The table indicates conflicting results. Nonetheless, they may still prove to be helpful.

The indirect survey questions (nos. 2 and 6) have to do with students’ confidence level, and both show a decrease over the three week period. There are two possible interpretations for this result (it is possible that both apply):

1. Students felt an exaggerated sense of their own confidence during the preliminary survey, and then had a “fresher,” more realistic sense for the exit survey.

2. The Gestalt-oriented challenges that I offered them proved to be somewhat beyond their current capabilities, and thus served to lessen their sense of confidence.

In light of Gestalt theory, it is possible that students’ diminished confidence could be the beginning stages of an overall useful intellectual crisis. Most of the major works on insight (Dominowski & Dallob, 1995; Mayer, 1995; Duncker & Krechevsky, 1939; Maier, 1931) refer to the arising of a sense of disharmony—a cognizance of a problem situation—which is the initial step in productive, insightful learning. This abstract “disturbance” can be compared to Socrates’ more concrete practice of showing people that they do not know what they think they know. This is the beginning of learning. On the other hand, the results did not differ by very much. The decrease could have been influenced by the limitations inherent in this facet of the research project. Such limitations include possible student misunderstanding of survey questions and possible inaccurate student self reports. However, the questions were worded in such a way as to avoid the first limitation, and student performance in the past has been trustworthy enough to almost wholly dismiss the second.

The more direct questions (nos. 3 and 4) seem, at first, to contradict one another. On the one hand students felt that poems were more difficult to understand after being taught my unit
than before, and on the other hand felt a greater ease in comprehending literary texts. How can these seemingly conflicting results be reconciled? I attribute it to the difficulty level of the chosen literary selections themselves. The majority of the poems were abstract, indirect, and full of literary devices, while the majority of the stories were straightforward and concise. It is easy to see, therefore, why students felt less comfortable with poetry and more at ease with literature in general.

It is also useful to examine the same data using a radar distribution graph, which shows the ratings of each student. (Note that during the exit survey, two more students were present. This is taken into account.)

By comparing two distribution graphs (entrance and exit) for the same survey question, we can tell where the differences lie. In the particular case of question two, for example, it can be seen that the decrease in confidence occurred exclusively among those who previously saw themselves as feeling very confident when reading. These students were, in a manner of speaking, put in their place. Whereas before my unit these students felt themselves to be quite
comfortable with reading all types of literature, the rigorous writings I selected (Dickens’ “The Black Veil, for example) made them realize that reading and understanding literature does not always come with ease.

I will show the comparison graphs for the remaining three questions, and briefly explain their implications.

The two graphs for question 3 make it evident that the decrease in self perception of ability to understand poetry was more or less heterogeneous. One or two students from each confidence level experienced what we might call a correction in their perceived analytical skills.
For question 4, students’ perceived increase in ability to understand literature occurred among those who already had a sense that they were fairly competent in literary analysis. The highest level of perceived competence (level 5) did not even appear in the entrance results, while the exit results show two students were added to that category. Those with an initial medium level of ability also showed an increase.
For question six, there was a very slight decrease (from an average of 2.63 to 2.58, only .05 difference), so slight that the difference is nearly null. The radar distribution graph, however, shows that there was some fluctuation among the levels. Thus in our data analysis we can see that a seemingly null result in the final numbers can actually reveal quite a bit when explored in its details. The single student who initially chose level five later feels less confident, as well as some of the level 4 respondents, but at the same time a level 1 respondent indicated greater confidence. The additional level 1 respondent, by the way, is likely one of the students who was absent for the initial survey.

The more direct assessment of student work and in-class dialogue/behavior will now be taken into account. In order to analyze this type of data, I created a version of my analysis matrix that was more suitable for daily use (Appendix H) while at the same time applicable to both target areas of my research question.

Students’ ability to analyze literature varied greatly among students and assignments. In order to make the data more accurate and comprehensible, I assigned numerical values to three areas:

1. How Gestalt-oriented is the lesson or activity? 1 = not at all; 5 = extremely. The levels were determined according to two sets of criteria. First, is the idea of Wertheimer’s productive thinking combined with the four stages of insight (in the “Action Plan” and “Introduction” sections of this paper, respectively). Did the lesson/activity utilize those combined elements? Secondly, is the lesson/activity in accordance with one of the five types of insight problems outlined by Mayer (see “Action Plan” section above)?
2. How accurate was the students’ understanding of the lesson or literary work? 1 = not at all; 10 = extremely. The main factor for determining this value is assessment of student work, although in-class response is also considered.

3. Did students qualitatively understand what was required by the given situation, were their responses in-depth? 1 = not at all; 10 = extremely. Again, this is measured through analysis of student work in addition to in-class responses.

Using these three value areas, students’ ability to analyze literature can be measured and compared among the various activities or lessons.

‡‡‡‡ Only the major activities and assignments are included here. Also, some lessons or parts of lessons that were significant to this research, such as the first half of the lesson on context (“Lesson 6” in Appendix C), were skipped due to strict time constraints.
The Gestalt level being the independent variable, we see that the dependent variables of accuracy and depth (quality) of students’ ability to analyze literature fluctuate significantly. At face value, were my expected outcomes correct, the accuracy and depth levels would not appear as the yo-yo
they do, but would rather more or less increase as the Gestalt level increases. This is clearly not the case. Rather than explain away this apparent failure on my part by delving into the various difficulties of each lesson/activity (which, as a teacher who taught each lesson and graded all assignments, would be easy to do), I will leave it as it is and explore the causes in the “Results” section below. For the time being, I will point to an argument I made earlier, that one of the stages of insight is the realization that one does not understand something as well as they thought they did. Many of the assignments seemed to pose just such a scenario to many of the students. Nonetheless, the activities marked as Gestalt levels 4 and 5 do indicate a relative overall increase in comprehension, especially if the “Frost poem rewrite” (a poem and written assignment that were far beyond the students’ level) is excluded from the chart.

An assigned literary analysis essay (guidelines in Appendix B) was the culminating assignment for my Gestalt-oriented instructional unit. Looking at the quality of the students’ performance on this assignment will aid in determining how well the students grasped the subject matter presented. First, however, here is a bar graph displaying the scores.

![Figure 14. Final essay scores](image-url)
Only 21 scores were reported because four students did not turn in the assignment and another transferred to a different school. Results show that two students did not receive a passing score, while the remainder adequately completed the formal requirements of the assignment. In line with my research question, however, it must be asked, “Did most of the students truly grasp what it means to play the role of a literary analyst? Did they capture and convey the gestalt of literary analysis?” In my estimation, only two students’ papers can be seen as fulfilling these expectations. The rest seemed too fragmentary, surface-level, rote, and/or arbitrary. As an example of a typical paper I received, I include a work sample ("Essay Sample A") in Appendix G. The student has a semblance of somewhat fulfilling the requirements for the paper, but is missing a sense of unity throughout. She rightfully covers a few significant literary terms, but in an and-sum fashion, without an overall purpose, often without a proper understanding of their use. Like the students initially observed by Wertheimer in the parallelogram example (see “Introduction” above), the writer of “Essay Sample A” failed to realize the structural requirements of the assignment. “Essay Sample B” (also in Appendix G), on the other hand, has a clear, unitary intention throughout the paper. The literary terms used are fully understood and lend themselves well to the thesis of the essay. This particular student is one who has consistently produced high quality work fitting to the purpose of each given assignment, even before I began my teaching unit. The other student who demonstrated an adequate structural understanding of what was required also has a record of nearly always producing comprehensive and fitting work.

Looking at all of the evidence together, what was the effect on Gestalt-oriented learning on students’ ability to analyze literature? As an objective researcher, I must say at this point that the evidence is inconclusive, and thus failed to meet expectations. There are too many
contradictions, as well as too many uncontrolled variables. However, being intimately involved in this research and being aware of multiple factors not initially accounted for (such as difficulty of assignments, difficulty of readings, absences, workload, etc.), I am able to see how the evidence points to an overall increase in students’ ability to understand literature. More on this is related in the “Results” section.

Data Relating to Students’ Interest in Literature

Regarding student interest, most of the literature shows that self-report is the most accurate indicator (Renninger & Hidi, 2011). Recall that it was expected that there would be an increase in interest as a result of the learning methods. The entrance/exit survey (Appendix EE) had two questions directly relating to student interest. They were:

**Question 1:** I love to read literature. (1=Completely false, 5=Absolutely true)

**Question 5:** Without literature, life would be boring. (1=Uhh, not really, 5=Totally!)

The rating scale has identical characteristics to the other four survey questions mentioned in the previous section. Likewise, a table showing the averages is helpful in seeing differences between the entrance and exit surveys. This time, a bar graph is used to make clear the degree of increase.

*Figure 15. Entrance/Exit survey data on students' interest in literature*
It is clear that an increase occurred for both interest questions, but not by a very large degree. Are the increases enough to signify a real change? Again, a radar distribution chart will aid in shedding more light on the nature of the changes that occurred.

**Figure 16.** Question 1 (Entrance): Distribution of responses

**Figure 17.** Question 1 (Exit): Distribution of responses

Recall, first, that two more students took the exit survey than entrance survey. These two students alone could have been enough to cause the increase; yet the distribution chart shows that there are additional increases besides the two extra students. The greatest number of students whose interest increased occurred among the level 1 range (those who claimed it was “completely false” that they loved to read literature). To me, this shift for the students who went from level 1 to 2 is more significant than, say, a shift from 3 to 4, because these level 1 students shifted away from their negative polarization on the matter. There are also two less level 2 ratings, which clearly did not move to a lower level. It can therefore be stated conclusively that the increase was not due solely to the two additional students.
Again, for question 5, it should be noticed that two of the increased ratings can possibly be accounted for by the two additional students for the second survey (we don’t know for sure, since the survey was anonymous). Rating 5 had the greatest increase in being chosen, which means that 11% more of the class, after my instructional unit, completely agreed that life would be boring without literature, making up a total of 22% of students in this category. On the other hand, the 2 rating gained some supporters, which could only have been former supporters of the 3 rating (which was the only level that had less supporters than before). These level 3 students, who were wavering on their love of literature in the first place, possibly ended up being discouraged by the unusual challenge presented to them over the course of the instructional unit.

It was initially planned that ongoing student journals were to be kept by each student throughout the course of the instructional unit, for the purpose of monitoring student interest. This was done during the first class session, but was not continued thereafter. I attribute this to a lack of planning on my part. Nonetheless, the surveys, classroom observations, and student work are sufficient to serve as a triangulation of data. We now move on to analysis of “student interest” data based on classroom observation and student work.
As in Figure 13, the independent variable of Gestalt level for each lesson will serve as counterpoint for the dependent data, which are interest level and engagement level. These two variables were rated as follows:

1. Interest level: 1 = not at all; 10 = extremely. About equal weight was given to student work and in-class behavior. Were the students autonomously motivated to complete the assignment, or did they require extrinsic motivation (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000)? Was there evidence that interest was generated during the lesson (Köhler, 1976)?

2. Engagement level: 1 = not at all; 10 = extremely. About equal weight was given to student work and in-class behavior. Did students show evidence of a “need to know” (McCarthy, 1975)? Did the urge to focus on the task at hand outweigh competing points of focus?

It might be asked what types of behavioral evidence, specifically, can indicate interest and engagement. During each class session, a number of particulars combined to provide a sense of overall interest/engagement. I paid attention to behaviors such as eye contact, voluntary answering of questions, response time, facial expression, tone of voice, etc. However, those who wish to replicate the experiment are cautioned not to simply note and add up incidences of these behaviors. For instance, just because a student is maintaining eye contact for the entire class session does not mean that he is engaged and/or interested. He could have been daydreaming about something else the whole time. Thus the researcher must use her intuitive sense based on social experience to properly ascertain the import of any and all such behaviors.

Here, then, is a visual representation of the results:
Do the data show that student interest increased in tandem with the Gestalt level? Notice, first of all, that interest and engagement are closely related. Students who are interested are engaged (although the reverse is not always true). Secondly, notice that the highest peaks correspond with the highest Gestalt levels and the lowest point corresponds with a very low Gestalt level. There
is, then, a rough correspondence between an increase in Gestalt-oriented learning and increased student interest in literature.

In combination with the other evidence, it can safely be said that according to this research there is a correlation between Gestalt-oriented learning and increased student interest. More details are given in the “Results” section below.

Results

The questioned was posed: What are the effects of Gestalt-oriented learning (aimed at generating insight) on student understanding and interest? Regardless of whether the collected data fit with the expectations of the researcher, the data is most revealing. Through its analysis I have come to several conclusions about the students and my own methods.

Students’ Ability to Analyze Literature

It was earlier stated that, based on the data alone as it is presented, the evidence is inconclusive as it bears on the effect of Gestalt-oriented learning on students’ ability to analyze literature. However, through an insider’s perspective of the data and the circumstances surrounding them, the case can be made that Gestalt-oriented learning had a positive effect on students’ ability to analyze literature. Here are the two main points supporting the case.

First, Gestalt-oriented learning helped students to gain a more realistic view of their abilities. The data, especially as presented in the distribution graphs, indicate that students experienced a correction of self perception. They were, so to speak, put in their place. On the one hand there were those who felt very confident about literary analysis, and then became aware that they were one of those people “who don’t know but think they do know” (Plato, 1997). One is only ready to learn when they are conscious of their own ignorance. On the other hand, there
were those who were initially wary of their ability to analyze literature (they knew that they did not know), and then gained a more sure footing, which increased their confidence.

Second, when certain factors—not yet spoken of—of the assignments/activities are taken into consideration, the data show an increase in students’ ability to analyze literature in accord with an increase in Gestalt level of learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
<th>Depth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Define literary terms together as a class (Lesson 3)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read “Powder” in class (Lesson 3)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrate Plato’s cave (Lesson 1)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final essay (Lesson 6)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motif word categorization and poem (Lesson 3)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Salomon’s Story” letter (Lesson 5)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read “Sonnet LXXXIII” in class (Lesson 6)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“To You, From Me” poem analysis (Lesson 2)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Powder” “What If?” handout (Lesson 3)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary obituary (Lesson 5)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Chant of Darkness” cut and paste (Lesson 2)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write ambiguity poem (Lesson 6)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 21. Students’ ability to analyze literature (MODIFIED)*
The figure is a modified form of Figure 13. Students’ ability to analyze literature assignments/activities have been removed. For what reason? Upon reflection, it was realized that the chosen texts were too difficult for the students’ current reading level or that the lesson did not provide nearly enough scaffolding to prepare most of the students to complete the assignment in line with teacher expectations. The Dickens and Frost reading selections, for example, were far too difficult for most students to read and comprehend on their own. Thus the completed assignments related to them fell far below expectations. Rather than having anything to do with the Gestalt level of the lesson, the students’ decrease in ability to analyze literature was due to the difficulty of the texts. With these activities/assignments removed, it can be seen that students’ depth of understanding goes higher as the gestalt level goes higher. A few of the contradictory dips can be sufficiently explained, making the case even stronger. The gap between accuracy and depth for the “To You, From Me” (Lesson 2) assignment was entirely intended. That particular lesson attempted to make students realize the necessity for literary analysis by using a poem loaded with figurative language. The students, by not being able to accurately understand the meaning of the poem, were successfully made aware (hence the depth) of what they needed to learn in order to understand it. For the “What If” handout (Lesson 3) the depth level is so low because students were assigned it for homework without being provided with any explanation. Most thus treated it as any other homework assignment, rushing through it with shallow, albeit “correct,” answers. Finally, then, with all of the data contrary to my expectation explained, results are indicative of an increase in ability to analyze literature, especially when it comes to depth.

Even with those two points in support of my hypothesis, my overall sense of the student response is disappointing. In spite of my efforts to present challenges that would cause students
to look into the structural requirements (gestalt) of a given situation and respond accordingly, the response was not very different from those Wertheimer initially observed in the parallelogram example (see “Introduction” above). The tendency was for students to provide solutions that were piecemeal, unfitting to the situation, minimal, shallow, incomplete, and ready-made. It was quite obvious that they were accustomed to turning out a certain style of work throughout their educational histories. To them, my instruction and my assignments were more of the same, so they produced more of the same. I had not made it sufficiently clear that this time was supposed to be different, that manufacturing correct answers and showing structural understanding of something have very little in common. My instruction and my prompts had such a notion embedded in them, but perhaps too deeply. It should have been made more explicit at the beginning. The class needed to be shocked into productive thinking. In the end, students began to sense what was required, but by then it was too late, for my two to three week round of teaching was over. By the time most of their assignments for this unit were graded and handed back, they were will into the next unit with their regular teacher. The feedback mechanism of grading, therefore, had no chance to do its work.

**Data Relating to Students’ Interest in Literature**

Data collected from the survey showed a nearly negligible increase in student interest. I do, however, invest a weighted significance in the shift among level 1 respondents for question 1. Those students who virtually hated literature for the entrance survey all but disappeared for the exit survey. To me, this is a greater victory than had all the level 3 and level 4 respondents gone up a level; for those upper level respondents were already sold on literature, whereas the level 1 respondents were not. By the end of my instructional unit, they were brought into the fold of at least considering the idea of liking literature. As for the handful of students who chose a lower
level for question 5, I reported my speculation that they became discouraged by the unusual challenge of my instruction. This is not necessarily a negative event, since it includes the possibility that my instruction (rudely) awakened them from their preconceived notions of literary analysis.

The corroborating evidence of student work and in-class behavior makes the case for Gestalt-oriented learning correlating with increased interest somewhat stronger. It still must be admitted, however, that this result is nowhere near conclusive. As with the question of students’ ability to analyze literature, the question of interest, as it was studied in this research project, had too many factors, too many uncontrolled variables, bearing upon the situation. To use the language of Gestalt theory, there were too many elements presenting themselves within the context of the learning environment to be able to recognize the essential elements that were responsible for guiding the outcomes. Had the instructional period been longer—perhaps an entire school year—I would have been able to recognize which factors were the most determinate. Patterns would have emerged, changes occurred, and things stood out, all helping to form an accurate picture of the phenomenon of student interest. As it stands, I am not able to tell whether the apparent increases in interest were due to my teaching methods or what the students had for breakfast each morning. The time period was simply too short.

**General Recommendations**

Were this action research project to be repeated, the following modifications are recommended to ensure better results. The data gathering should take place for a minimum of six weeks. This allows more time for patterns to emerge and for teacher feedback to take effect. Next, the instructor should make his expectations more explicit at the beginning and devise a plan for scaffolding understanding up to the desired level. For my group of students, it became
evident that my style of teaching and expectations fell beyond what they were accustomed to. In response to an open-ended question about the best learning method, not one of the students mentioned anything akin to discovery, insight, finding solutions to problems, etc. Rather, most preferred Dewey’s doctrine of practice or experience. The second most common answer referred to visual representations. It is thus clear that the Gestalt method should be explained to students in detail, since they have never before explicitly encountered it.

I would also add that extremely difficult texts should not be used (appropriate level of difficulty can be determined through formative assessment). Writings that fall too far above students’ current level of ability will only serve to skew the data. The instructor can also use the ongoing student journals to keep track of how students feel about the texts and their learning. The problem with keeping journals that was encountered in this research can be circumvented by adding journal-type questions to the end of assignments. By doing so, lack of class time is not an issue and the responses fit more seamlessly with student work. Finally, assignments should be graded and returned promptly, especially if the project duration is any shorter than a few months. It is essential for students to get feedback on their work so that they can adjust to teacher expectations.

**Reflections**

The professor guiding me in this action research project asked us, toward the beginning of the project, to think about major life themes that guide our course in life. I came up with six life themes, and after my experience teaching in the high school classroom, especially in relation to my action research project, I have found that my personal values and life themes have largely been reinforced. In particular, four of my life themes stand out as being especially in line with the work I have done: understanding, discovery, principle, and growth/development.
All four motifs go hand in hand as they relate to my teaching. My research question dealt primarily with a matter of principle: what does it mean to learn? How does one learn? My earlier readings of Plato oriented me toward a model of learning that shied away from learning as an imparting of knowledge. Instead, I came to see the starting point of knowledge as knowing that you do not know. Such a learned ignorance (to use the terminology of Nicholas of Cusa) puts one in the humble posture required for learning, or understanding. Once humbled by ignorance, one is ready to partake in a process of discovery. Most of my teaching techniques are based on this strictly defined discovery method. In modern parlance, students must learn to learn for themselves. Some areas of “critical thinking” also fall within this category. Repeated learning in this manner tends to generate legitimate interest in the subject matter, resulting in self-motivated growth. In contrast to this Platonic principle, the very name of the state-mandated protocols, “standards,” betrays the assumption of a more Aristotelian model, a model which I have clearly taken issue with. Current models, shaped by claims of efficacy (high test scores) and Dewey’s (1939) pragmatism (which in the worst cases manifests itself as Thorndike’s (see Katona, 1949) pure association model), treat knowledge as chunks of information—a Wikipedia-like construction of knowledge to be bandied about. Even successful mathematics courses produce a coterie of students who carry out operations correctly and find lots of correct answers, all the while having not a clue why such operations produce their effects.

I still hold to the Platonic idea of teaching, even though my efforts were often frustrated during my time as an action researcher working with students. The conflict was not one of theory versus practice; it was students’ customary behavior versus what I expected of them. Their accustomed role in an educational environment did not line up with the role I had in mind for them. I was looking for explorers and discoverers, while they were used to being retailers of
information. However, this misalignment was more my fault than theirs. I failed to ascertain their scope of horizon, and painted it too broad. Before embarking on my Gestalt-learning experiment, I should have closely examined their horizon and then sought ways to broaden it. Instead, I jumped right into my method as if they were already familiar with it.

While teaching, I have been able to reflect back on my own academic experience in high school. All four years fell within my adolescent “I don’t care” stage. I cared about life, friends, family, and other things, but saw school as a waste of time. This attitude was perhaps due to a threefold cause. The first cause was the education system itself, which seemed to be trapped in the monotony of the learn-recall method. The other two causes were within myself. “Learning” was easy for me, on the one hand, and incomprehensible on the other. The ease of learning, which occurred mainly in the humanities, made it boring and not worth the effort. The incomprehensibility of learning, which tended to happen in the sciences, made it equally not worth the effort. When teaching my own students I recall this twofold frustration and try to avoid teaching methods that may serve to duplicate it. For English and History, a transference of predigested facts intended for recall will not do. For Math and Science, a mechanical explanation of how to “do” math or science for the purpose of producing correct answers (with a mysterious absence of whence or why) will not do either. Such practices, due to my own displeasure with them as a youth, are to be avoided.

The challenge comes, however, in trying to execute the alternative. What model did I have in secondary school to follow? There was no model. There were very brief moments of enjoyable insights, but nothing more. I chose, then, to focus on these insights. Of what were they comprised? Interest, motivation, and the like were secondary. The key elements were, first, a sense of burning curiosity (all the better if generated by the teacher) due to a perceived problem
or inconsistency with what I already knew, and then a bold effort to overcome the problem, followed by an insightful resolution (either through a teacher’s demonstration or my own work). When such moments of genuine learning occurred, it is difficult to say whether the teacher was conscious of his or her insight-producing method. If she was conscious of it, then why did she not employ it more often? Today, how can I consciously employ the method on a consistent basis?

The result of that question is this action research project. I wanted to know whether a fully insight-oriented teaching unit could be successfully delivered. Stated in those terms, I failed on two counts. The unit, for one, was not fully insight-oriented; and secondly, I did not prepare the students for what I was about to do.

On a broader note, the experience I gained as a result of this action research project has made my passion for education reform all the more acute. Upon entering my graduate program, I held a “back to the basics” mentality about teaching. Not merely a pre-Dewey back to basics (though that would be a good start), but a carefully defined methodology in the tradition of people such as Max Wertheimer, Anne Sullivan, Henri Poincaré, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Nicholas of Cusa, and yes, even back to Plato. I believed that Dewey’s pragmatism confused results with causes. It may be the pragmatic result of learning engineering that one can build a useful bridge, but that does not mean we should start instructing children, “Go forth and build bridges.” The “pragmatic” part of education comes naturally. “Of what use is electricity?” a person once allegedly asked Benjamin Franklin. “Of what use is a newborn babe?” he asked in response. In the same manner we can see the usefulness of any of the branches of knowledge in the distant, as-yet unforeseen effects in the future. Education, then, is primarily a development of
the mind. It is a seed that is planted, the most useful results of which may never be personally witnessed by the teacher.

From my own observations in a multitude of classrooms, it is clear that this view of education (education as mental development) is all but missing. A return to teaching methods that focus on productive thought, rather than thought content, is most needed. I feel this more strongly now than when I began. What I did not realize, is the immensity of the challenge before us. Before we can do what must be done, a lot of undoing is first in order. The Gestalt method of Wertheimer is not a magic potion that will automatically produce learners. It requires a great deal of patience and gentle prodding. It requires, moreover, a quality of teacher-student relationship engendering mutual trust. Most importantly, it must be built up from within. Yet I, as an action researcher, more or less imposed the method from the outside. My efforts in the future will be focused on creating a more personal and organic transition in the classroom toward this learning method.
Appendices
## Triangulation Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the effects on students of Gestalt-oriented learning (aimed at generating insight) on students’ ability to analyze literature?</td>
<td>Student final essays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the effects on students of Gestalt-oriented learning (aimed at generating insight) on students’ interest in literature?</td>
<td>Student journal entries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Literary Analysis Essay:
Choose one of the literary selections you have read for this unit. (An alternate selection is possible, with teacher approval.) Develop a thesis/position of one of the following types:
- a. what the author was trying to achieve
- b. how the selection is a strong reflection of the author’s life and times
- c. why the selection was effective/ineffective (you may, if you wish, compare/contrast it with another literary work)
- d. the role of context in determining particular meanings
Prove your position with ample evidence from your own knowledge of literary devices and the literature selection. Be specific, use literary terms, and provide examples.

Though I want you to have fun with this essay, the main purpose is for you to demonstrate your mastery of literary analysis by accurately using literary terms in connection with a chosen text. Formal academic writing is a must. There is no specific form to follow, but the essay must be sensibly arranged, and have a clear introduction, body, and conclusion.

This is a test grade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirements for essay</th>
<th>Possible Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong thesis clearly stated</td>
<td>/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis strongly supported with proper use of evidence</td>
<td>/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrangement, coherence, flow</td>
<td>/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuation, spelling, paragraphing, word usage, grammar</td>
<td>/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length: 2-5 pages, double-spaced</td>
<td>/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct use of precise academic language, including literary terms</td>
<td>/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This sheet attached</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>/70</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For up to 7 bonus points on this assignment, illustrate an idea from your paper or literary selection.
Lesson 1

Subject: English Language Arts
Grade: 10
Lesson: Allegory of the Cave
Lesson Length: 90 minutes

CA Content Standard(s):
R 3.7 Recognize and understand the significance of various literary devices, including figurative language, imagery, allegory, and symbolism, and explain their appeal.
3.10 Identify and describe the function of dialogue, scene designs, soliloquies, asides, and character foils in dramatic literature.

Objective(s): Students will be able to successfully interpret an allegorical text by creating an accurate drawing of the literal meaning and a written essay on the allegorical meaning.

Preparation:
Items needed:
- transparency of “Cave Allegory” excerpt from Plato’s Republic, Book VII, 514a-517a.

Activity: Allegory of the Cave
1. Question students regarding their knowledge of Socrates and Plato. Also discuss the function of dialogue in Plato’s writings.
2. Project “Cave Allegory” transparency. While teacher reads aloud, students are required to illustrate what is being read. To lower their affective filter, let them know they will not be graded on the quality of their drawing, but rather on the content. As you read, stop periodically and question for understanding. Hold off on interpreting the text during the initial reading. On the board, write down key elements of the allegory as you read. Some examples are: cave, shadow, light, pain, ascent, happiness, rewards.
3. After the reading, ask directly: What do you think this story means? Ask about specific elements, such as those written on the board. To get the conversation going, compare the cave and the shadows to common features of modern life: success, television, Facebook, being cool, etc.
4. On the other side of the paper with their illustration, students will answer the prompt: What does Plato’s allegory mean to you? In your answer, specifically address each of the elements discussed.
5. If time remains, students will create another drawing that represents their interpretation of the allegory.

Closure: Students may choose to share their unique interpretation of the allegory.

Accommodation: Some classes may need additional aid in comprehending the text, which can be facilitated by drawing an illustration on the board of the content as it is read.

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1 It may be desirable to give one student the role of Glaucon so that the power of dialogue is more apparent.
Lesson 2

Subject: English Language Arts
Grade: 10
Lesson: (Re)introducing Literary Analysis
Lesson Length: 90 minutes

CA Content Standard(s):
R 3.11 Evaluate the aesthetic qualities of style, including the impact of diction and figurative language on tone, mood, and theme, using the terminology of literary criticism.
W 2.2a Demonstrate a comprehensive grasp of the significant ideas of literary works.

Objective(s):
1. Students will demonstrate understanding of the significance of the elements of literary analysis through written and verbal responses.
2. Students will be able to grasp the overall sense of a poem through meaningful arrangement of the line order, and be able to justify their chosen arrangement in written academic language.

Management Standards:
1. Circulate the room during group work to ensure understanding and on-task activity.
2. If it is noticed that some students are not paying attention, a pop quiz on simple comprehension questions can be given at the end of class. Telling students that they will be graded on their class notes can also help in maintaining their full attention.

Preparation:
Items needed:
- overhead projector
- transparency of poem, “To You, From Me”
- transparency of “Literary Analysis” concept map
- transparency of excerpt from Helen Keller’s poem, “A Chant of Darkness”
- copies of “Spring Literary Analysis Unit” handout for each student
- copies of Helen Keller’s poem, “A Chant of Darkness,” each line cut into strips, for each pair group
- copies of Charles Dickens’ short story, The Black Veil, for each student
- glue sticks

Anticipatory Set/Statement of Purpose:
1. Project the poem, “To You, From Me.” Ask students to imagine that this is a poem they received anonymously. Their goal is to figure out what the writer is trying to say. To guide their thinking, use prompts, such as:
   “How does the writer feel about you?”
   “What should you be prepared for at the meeting?”
   “Would you try to write back to this person?”
Students may or may not have trouble interpreting the poem. Either way, point out that their understanding of the poem is based on their own background knowledge, a great part of which is literary analysis.
2. Project the “Literary Analysis” concept map. Explain that this is one way of looking at literary analysis. The concept map shows how the interaction between text and reader is what creates meaning. Authors employ many literary devices to express themselves. The reader, therefore, must be familiar with the same literary devices in order to get the most out of the text. Readers whose skills in literary analysis are less than proficient have less of a chance of understanding and enjoying a literary text. Thus the goal for this unit is to equip students with the essential tools and skills for literary analysis so that they may get the most (comprehension and enjoyment) out of a text. Ask students why else they think literary analysis might be important. Some ideas might be:
   - To develop the mind.
   - To make literature more enjoyable.
   - To aid in understanding personal communication.
   - To be able to get the most out of, and employ, literary references in reading, writing, and social situations.

3. In their writing journals, students will respond to the prompt, “How do you feel about literary analysis? Does it matter to you? Does it matter at all?”

4. Briefly provide overview of content and expectations for the unit, using the “Spring Literary Analysis Unit” handout. Individual assignments will be explained in more detail in future lessons.

Activity:
1. Students get into pairs. Give each pair the line strips from the poem “A Chant of Darkness” and a glue stick. Students are to glue the strips on a piece of paper in the order they think is most sensible. On the bottom or back of the paper, they must write what they think the poem means and provide a rationale for their choice of arrangement.
2. Read some of the groups’ arrangements aloud, allowing others to comment on whether or not they make sense.
3. On the overhead projector, show the excerpt as Keller actually wrote it. Discuss what the poem is about, including aspects of Keller’s life. Point out some of the literary devices employed. (Students need not worry about taking notes at this point.)
4. Explain that the activity was meant to show how the internal clues of a literary work shape its overall picture. Certain qualities of the poem lend themselves to some arrangements and not others. Beholding the actual arrangement can cause the reader to “see” all at once the sense of the poem. A thorough knowledge of literary devices is crucial to this process.

Closure:
1. Pass out copies of Dickens’ Black Veil, letting them know that this is one of their choices for the final essay (see “Spring Literary Analysis Unit” handout). Ask what they know about Dickens, and then ask why they think it might be important to know about an author. Begin to read the story aloud. Explain challenging terms and phrases.
2. Remind students to bring textbook for next class session.

Independent Practice: Students finish reading Black Veil at home, and are required to find at least seven words in the story that were difficult or unknown to them, for their vocabulary journals.
To You, From Me

My heart has ached, as of late,
A quake for Aetna’s mount.
If only you’d consanguinate,
The oceans’ every fount

Would flow with airs like Calliope’s;
Yet you’d not have it so:
Your atmosphere’s miasmic tropes
Turn fire into snow.

I write this, then, as albatross
(In the vein of Coleridge):
Your presence is as silver’s dross,
A tollgate on a bridge.

Then Tuesday next, when we meet,
And our destiny discussed,
What you’ve sown, will then accrete,
Becoming naught but dust.
from A Chant of Darkness
by Helen Keller

"The man is blind. What is life to him?
A closed book held up against a sightless face.
Would that he could see
Yon beauteous star, and know
For one transcendent moment
The palpitating joy of sight!"

All sight is of the soul.
Behold it in the upward flight
Of the unfettered spirit! Hast thou seen
Thought bloom in the blind child’s face?
Hast thou seen his mind grow,
Like the running dawn, to grasp
The vision of the Master?
It was the miracle of inward sight.

Lesson 3

Subject: English Language Arts
Grade: 10
Lesson: Literary Toolbox
Lesson Length: 90 minutes

CA Content Standard(s):
R 3.7 Recognize and understand the significance of various literary devices, including figurative language, imagery, allegory, and symbolism, and explain their appeal.
W 2.2 Write responses to literature:
   c. Demonstrate awareness of the author’s use of stylistic devices and an appreciation of the effects created.
   d. Identify and assess the impact of perceived ambiguities, nuances, and complexities within the text.

Objective(s):
Students will be able to personally explain all of the literary terms required for the unit by creating an instructional poster.
Students will be able to forecast different outcomes in a text if significant literary elements are altered, as evidenced by their written responses.
Students will be able to identify the key literary elements of a poem.

Management Standards:
1. Groups who finish their posters early will be encouraged to provide additional illustrations, examples, or corrections.
2. For Activity #3, make sure that only one student from a group is up at a time to write on the posters. Those who are still seated should be searching for more examples.

Preparation:
   Items needed:
   - poster size paper (Post-its are preferable)
   - markers
   - copies of “What’s Your Motif?” exercise for each student
   - students must bring Holt’s Elements of Literature: Perspectives in Multicultural Literature textbook
   - copies of “What If?” handout for each student
   - Microcosmos (Nuridsany and Pérennou, 1996) documentary film
   - digital projector with computer

Anticipatory Set/Statement of Purpose: Ask students to remind you of the purpose of knowing the concepts of literary analysis that was discussed in the last class session. Explain that one way to look at them is as tools, rather than as ends in themselves. They are tools used to construct meaning through interaction with a text. Today they will be making sure their “toolbox” has all the tools necessary for working with literature.

Activity:
1. Literary Terms: Organize students into groups of three. Each group will be assigned to one of the following categories:
On the poster, each group will attempt to explain their given terms through writing, illustration, and/or examples. Explain that since these are all terms they should have learned previously (earlier in the year, and in previous classes), they should try their best not to consult the textbook. You want to see their current understanding of the concepts, not a copied definition. If possible, they should try to provide an example from Dickens’ *The Black Veil*. Once finished designing their posters, each group will bring it to the front of the room to be “interrogated” by the teacher, while the rest of the class take notes in their vocabulary journals. Make it clear that you want every single literary term from every poster put into their vocabulary journals with a working definition (this will ensure everyone is engaged). Clarify terms as necessary.

2. *Powder* by Tobias Wolff (pp.158-160).

a. Before reading the story, ask students to quickly skim over the text and find two or more words that are not entirely clear to them. They should write their own two words in their vocabulary journals. For the next two minutes, they will consult with a partner to see if they know the meanings of the words, and write them down. After the two minutes, any words left over (that nobody knew the meaning of) will be shared with the teacher and their meanings discussed with the class.

b. Begin by explaining that the choices authors make are very intentional. Students read the story aloud. Assign a narrator, the father, and the boy. The reading will be stopped frequently to question and point out the literary devices used. Students must, in their class notes, write down each literary device that is discussed. Remind students that their notes are part of their grade. It might be useful to have them take notes Cornell style for a later activity. Some of the elements that are covered in this story are character development (interaction, foil), foreshadowing, irony, imagery, simile, metaphor, tone, and mood.

3. “Small Portions” by Julia Alvarez (pp. 221-222)

a. Show a short two-minute clip from the film *Microcosmos*, to orient the class toward the world of the small.

b. Have a student read aloud “Meet the Writer” on page 222. Ask why it might be important to know about an author.

c. Read the poem aloud to the class.

Closure:
Assign homework:
1. Students will be reinforcing and developing their sense of figurative language by completing the “What’s Your Motif?” handout.
2. Students will demonstrate their understanding of literary devices by writing well-formulated responses to the questions on the “What If?” handout.

**What’s Your Motif?**

Discover the symbols and metaphors you already carry within you. On a separate sheet of paper (or the back of this one) make eight categories and label them with the motifs DEATH, LIFE, HOPE, DESPAIR, GOOD, EVIL, LOVE, HATE. (If you feel the need to add another category of your own, that’s okay.) Place each word below with the category you feel fits best.

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<th>albatross</th>
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<th>apple</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>baby</th>
<th>bed</th>
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<td>mirror</td>
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**Powder**

**WHAT IF?**

Every element of a story is put there by the author for a specific reason. On a separate sheet of paper, determine what the story would be like if . . .

1. How would *Powder* be different if it were written in third- instead of first-person point of view?

2. What if the narrator were a girl instead of a boy? How would that affect character development?

3. What if the holiday were Independence Day instead of Christmas?

4. What if the tone was sad, angry, or somber (pick one)? How would the story be different?

5. What if the story took place in colonial America?

6. What if there were no dialogue?

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BE THOROUGH AND PRECISE, USING LITERARY TERMS AND ACADEMIC LANGUAGE IN YOUR ANSWERS!

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Lesson 4

Subject: English Language Arts
Grade: 10
Lesson: The Power of Poetry
Lesson Length: 90 minutes

CA Content Standard(s):
R 1.2. Distinguish between the denotative and connotative meanings of words and interpret the connotative power of words.
W 2.2 Write responses to literature:
   a. Demonstrate a comprehensive grasp of the significant ideas of literary works.
   c. Demonstrate awareness of the author’s use of stylistic devices and an appreciation of the effects created.

Objective(s):
Students will be able to demonstrate their understanding of denotative and connotative meanings by writing poetic examples of each.
Students will be able to analyze the effect of various literary devices employed by an author, by explaining their significance in a well-written essay.

Management Standard: For the Robert Frost activity, some students will finish the tasks earlier than others. These students can begin annotating the other poem on the handout, “Revelation,” and then reflect on how their own experience compares to that described in the poem.

Preparation:
Have prompt ready (to project) from activity 1b.
Items needed:
   - overhead projector
   - copies of “Robert Frost” handout for each student
   - copies of “Beth Gêlert” handout for each student
   - “Poem Examples” transparency
   - “Analyzing Beth Gêlert” transparency

Anticipatory Set: Students take out their completed homework assignment, “What’s Your Motif?” They will write a short poem in their writing journals using five words from the assignment that stood out to them; but first, for 3-5 minutes, they will share with a partner how they organized the various words in the assignment. Then provide 5-10 minutes for them to write their poems. The poems can be in meter or free-verse, and will be assessed on use of figurative language only. If some students have difficulty starting their poem, show the examples from the “Poem Examples” transparency.
   While they are writing, collect “What If” homework assignment.

Activity:
1. “Small Portions”
   a. In groups of three, students compare what they have underlined and labeled from their homework. Visit each group to ensure understanding.
b. As a class, ask which literary devices stood out the most. Steer the conversation toward the tension Alvarez holds between the macrocosm and microcosm. Ask students to defend one outlook over the other.

1. Robert Frost
   a. Pass out “Robert Frost” handout to each student. Briefly discuss the author. Since poetry is meant to be heard, students will get with a partner and take turns reading “Bond and Free” aloud. They must write down at least one difficult word for their vocabulary journals. Then, they should look for instances of metaphor, symbolism, and personification. They should underline and label each instance. Regroup as a class and discuss their findings.
   b. Show the following prompt: You are Robert Frost. You have just written the poem “Bond and Free,” and submitted it to the publisher. The publisher hates it. She says the poem has too many literary devices. Rewrite “Bond and Free” without any metaphors, similes, symbols, or personification. Students need to copy the prompt on a sheet of paper. Guide the students through the first stanza to model how this can be done. Then have students finish the task for homework.

   a. Begin by asking about the difference between poetry and prose. Emphasize that both can relate a story equally well, and sometimes poetry with even greater effect.
   b. Pass out “Beth Gêlert” poem. Briefly discuss the person of Spencer. Explain that with this poem, the focus will be on meter and sound. Looking at the first stanza, ask someone to identify the rhyme scheme, then the meter. Read the stanza the wrong way and the right way to show the differences in meaning and effect. Briefly review the literary devices that pertain to the way a poem sounds.
   (c.) If time permits, prepare students for the story by asking what they would do if their pet harmed someone.
   d. Take turns reading the poem aloud, assigning a few stanzas at a time based on their episodic content. Ask about and point out patterns in sound. Periodically check for comprehension.
   e. Project the “Analyzing Beth Gêlert” transparency. Students will begin to complete the listed tasks, and write down prompts for any uncompleted tasks (for homework).

**Independent Work:** For homework, students will finish any incomplete tasks from “Analyzing Beth Gêlert” transparency.

Note: Remind students to bring textbook for next class session.
Robert Frost

Bond and Free

Love has earth to which she clings
With hills and circling arms about—
Wall within wall to shut Fear out.
But Thought has need of no such things,
For Thought has a pair of dauntless wings.

On snow and sand and turf, I see
Where Love has left a printed trace
With straining in the world’s embrace.
And such is Love and glad to be.
But Thought has shaken his ankles free.

Thought cleaves the interstellar gloom
And sits in Sirius’ disc all night,
Till day makes him retrace his flight,
With smell of burning on every plume,
Back past the sun to an earthly room.

His gains in heaven are what they are.
Yet some say Love by being thrall
And simply staying possesses all
In several beauty that Thought fares far
To find fused in another star.

Revelation

We make ourselves a place apart
Behind light words that tease and flout,
But oh, the agitated heart
Till someone really find us out.

’Tis pity if the case require
(Or so we say) that in the end
We speak the literal to inspire
The understanding of a friend.

But so with all, from babes that play
At hide-and-seek to God afar,
So all who hide too well away
Must speak and tell us where they are.

The spearmen heard the bugle sound,
And cheerily smiled the morn;
And many a brach, and many a hound,
Obeyed Llewelyn’s horn.

And still he blew a louder blast,
And gave a lustier cheer;
‘Come, Gêlert, come, wer’t never last
Llewelyn’s horn to hear.

‘Oh where does faithful Gêlert roam,
The flower of all his race;
So true, so brave, a lamb at home,
A lion in the chase?’

‘Twas only at Llewelyn’s board
The faithful Gêlert fed;
He watched, he served, he cheered his lord,
And sentinelled his bed.

In sooth he was a peerless hound,
The gift of royal John;
But now no Gêlert could be found,
And all the chase rode on.

And now, as o’er the rocks and dells
The gallant chidings rise,
All Snowdon’s craggy chaos yells
The many-mingled cries.

That day Llewelyn little loved
The chase of hart and hare;
And scant and small the booty proved,
For Gêlert was not there.

Unpleased Llewelyn homeward hied,
When near the portal seat
His truant Gêlert he espied,
Bounding his lord to greet.

But when he gained his castle door
Aghast the chieftan stood
The hound all o’er was smeared with gore,
His lips, his fangs ran blood.

Llewelyn gazed with fierce surprise;
Unused such looks to meet,
His favourite checked his joyful guise,
And crouched, and licked his feet.
Onward in haste Llewelyn passed,
And on went Gêlert too;
And still, where’er his eyes he cast,
Fresh blood-gouts shocked his view.

O’erturned his infant’s bed he found,
With blood-stained covert rent;
And all around the walls and ground
With recent blood besprenct.

He called his child—no voice replied—
He searched with terror wild;
Blood, blood he found on every side,
But nowhere found his child.

‘Hell bound! My child’s by thee devoured,’
The frantic father cried:
And to the hilt his vengeful sword
He plunged in Gêlert’s side.

His suppliant looks, as prone he fell,
No pity could impart;
But still his Gêlert’s dying yell
Passed heavy o’er his heart.

Aroused by Gêlert’s dying yell,
Some slumberer wakened nigh:
What words the parent’s joy could tell
To hear his infant’s cry!

Concealed beneath a tumbled heap
His hurried search had missed,
All glowing from his rosy sleep,
The cherub boy he kissed.

Nor scathe had he, nor harm, nor dread,
But, the same couch beneath,
Lay a gaunt wolf, all torn and dead,
Tremendous still in death.

Ah, what was then Llewelyn’s pain!
For now the truth was clear,
His gallant hound the wolf had slain,
To save Llewelyn’s heir.

Vain, vain was all Llewelyn’s woe:
‘Best of thy kind, adieu!
The frantic blow, which laid thee low,
The heart shall ever rue.’

And now a gallant tomb they raise,
With costly sculpture decked;
And marbles storied with his praise
Poor Gêlert’s bones protect.

There never could the spearman pass,
Or forester, unmoved;
There, oft the tear-besprinkled grass
Llewelyn’s sorrow proved.

And there he hung his horn and spear,
And there, as evening fell,
In fancy’s ear he oft would hear
Poor Gêlert’s dying yell.

And till great Snowdon’s rocks grow old,
And cease the storm to brave,
The consecrated spot shall hold
The name of ‘Gêlert’s grave’.

Poem Examples

**Homesick Blues**

*by Langston Hughes*

De railroad bridge’s
A sad song in de air.
De railroad bridge’s
A sad song in de air.
Ever time de trains pass
I wants to go somewhere.

I went down to de station.
My heart was in ma mouth.
Went down to de station.
Heart was in ma mouth.
Lookin’ for a box car
To roll me to de South.

Homesick blues, Lawd,
’S a terrible thing to have.
Homesick blues is
A terrible thing to have.
To keep from cryin’
I opens ma mouth an’ laughs.

---

**Rose Leaves**

*by Percy Bysshe Shelley*

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heaped for the beloved’s bed,
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on.

Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory,--
Odours, when sweet violets sicken,
Live within the sense they quicken.

**Full of Life Now**

*by Walt Whitman*

Full of life now, compact, visible.
I, forty years old the eighty-third year of the States,
To one a century hence or any number of centuries hence,
To you yet unborn these, seeking you.

When you read these I that was visible am become invisible,
Now it is you, compact, visible, realizing my poems, seeking me,
Fancying how happy you were if I could be with you and become your comrade;
Be it as if I were with you. (Be not too certain but I am now with you.)

---

1 From *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems.*


3 From *Leaves of Grass.*
Analyzing Beth Gêlert

1. Mark the accents (stressed and unstressed syllables) for the first two stanzas and last two stanzas.

2. Label the rhyme scheme of the first five stanzas.

3. Underline the letters/words in the poem that show alliteration or repetition.

4. Find three new or difficult words and put them in your vocabulary journal.

5. Answer each of the following questions with at least one full, well-written paragraph:

   a. How does the rhyme and rhythm of the poem help or hurt the story? What if it didn’t rhyme? What if it was written in free-verse? How would you have related the story?

   b. If you read this story in prose, do you think you would have had the same emotional reaction? Why or why not?

Amy Lowell’s “Fireworks” (p. 224 or 234)

1. With what single phrase could you replace lines 1, 12, and 22 that would entirely change the meaning of the poem?

   1a. What would the extended metaphor of fireworks come to mean if those lines were replaced with your new phrase?

   1b. In light of your answer to 1a, explain how context determines meaning. Make your answer specific to “Fireworks.”

2. Annotate the stresses, alliterations, and repetitions; then describe the meter and rhyme that Lowell uses.
Lesson 5

**Subject:** English Language Arts  
**Grade:** 10  
**Lesson:** Conflict and Form  
**Lesson Length:** 90 minutes

**CA Content Standard(s):**  
R 3.3 Analyze interactions between main and subordinate characters in a literary text (e.g., internal and external conflicts, motivations, relationships, influences) and explain the way those interactions affect the plot.  
3.6 Analyze and trace an author’s development of time and sequence, including the use of complex literary devices (e.g., foreshadowing, flashbacks).  
3.11 Evaluate the aesthetic qualities of style, including the impact of diction and figurative language on tone, mood, and theme, using the terminology of literary criticism.

**Objective(s):**  
1. Students will be able to exhibit a developed understanding of internal/external conflict, as developed by tone, mood, symbolism, foreshadowing, and character interaction, by writing a first-person letter based on a literary character.  
2. Students will be able to describe, through a written response, how a poem’s form and sound devices fit its function.

**Preparation:**  
Write examples from activity 2a on board.  
**Items needed:**  
- overhead projector  
- students must bring Holt’s *Elements of Literature: Perspectives in Multicultural Literature* textbook  
- transparency with “Salomon’s Story” prompt (see activity #1b)  
- transparency of obituary  
- copies of “Vocabulary Obituary” handout for each student

**Anticipatory Set:** Have students take out completed “Analyzing ‘Beth Gêlert’” homework assignment. Ask if anyone wants to share their thoughts on question 4b. Collect. Tell students that today they will be reading another story where an animal dies, but this time the author intends for the reader to sympathize with the killer instead of the killed.

**Activity:**  
*a. Students open Holt textbook to p. 227, Salomon’s Story. Students will silently read the story, with a focus oriented toward the conflict faced by the protagonist. Suggest what elements they should look for in trying to understand the conflict, and write them on the board. Examples are tone, mood, foreshadowing, symbolism, and character interaction/dialogue. While reading, students should take notes on things in the story that lend themselves toward establishing and clarifying the conflict. Those who finish early can compare notes with a classmate. Discuss their findings as a class.  
*b. Based on the story and their notes, students will write a letter based on the prompt:*
You are Salomon. Write a letter to your father including the following:

- why you left the tribe
- the nature of your conflict (external and internal)
- what the turtle meant to you
- what you have learned from your trial
- how you feel now (hopes, fears, other emotions)

Closure: Remind students that this is the penultimate lesson in the unit, which means that you will begin to really challenge them to see how well they have grasped the content. Then go over the following assignments:

1. Vocabulary Obituary: Pass out the handout and explain. Due next class. Show a real obituary as an example.
2. Literary Analysis Essay: Ask students to take out the “Spring Literary Analysis Unit” handouts that they were given in the first lesson. Though this is not due until after spring break, each student must have their thesis ready (written down) by the next class. Go over the other requirements for the final essay.
3. Remind students to bring textbook for next class session.

Independent Practice:
If additional time remains, let students begin their vocabulary obituaries.
**Vocabulary Obituary**

You are going to write an obituary for two of the following literary terms:

- allegory
- symbolism
- satire
- meter
- analogy
- metaphor
- simile
- personification
- imagery
- tone
- ambiguity
- irony
- mood

Each obituary must include:

- name of newspaper
- article title
- name of deceased word
- circumstances of death
- what that word has contributed in its lifetime
- what existence will be like without that word
- testimony/quote from a dear friend of the word (i.e., from another word)
- funeral arrangements

---

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Obituary

JUDY MARIE FONTANINI ELLIS

Judy M. Ellis, 75, of Lee's Summit, Missouri, passed away March 15, 2012. She was born to John and Velma Fontanini in Des Moines, Iowa on April 1, 1936, the second of five siblings. Judy graduated from Lincoln High School in Des Moines. She was married to Bruce C. Ellis for 57 years, and has three children Bruce (Kim) Ellis, Marta (Jorg) Will, Lisa (David) Brown, all living in the greater KC area. Before settling in Lee's Summit, they moved around the country during Bruce's 20 years in the Marine Corps. Judy worked at Hickman Mills Clinic for 25 years retiring in 1995. She loved spending time with and attending the activities of her eight grandchildren Bob, Lauren, Natalie, Andrew, Alex, Kate, Sydney and Jake. Judy loved the beach, traveling, and having family over on Sundays and holidays (she was well-known for her famous spaghetti and meatballs). She was an avid reader who enjoyed playing cards and games with family and friends. In addition to those mentioned above, Judy is survived by her sisters, brothers and their families, three great-grandchildren, and many aunts and nephews. Special thanks to Northcare Hospice, sisters Deanna and Becky, family and friends during Judy's illness. In lieu of flowers, please send donations to ALS Association, Keith Worthington Chapter, 6950 Squibb Rd., Prairie Village, KS 66202. Visitation will be held Sunday, March 18, from 3:00-5:00 p.m. at Mt. Moriah & Freeman Funeral Home, 10507 Holmes Rd., Funeral Mass will be at 10:00 a.m. Monday, March 19, at Holy Spirit Catholic Church, 1800 Southwest State Rd., Lee's Summit, Missouri. Burial following Mass in Mt. Moriah Cemetery South. Online condolences, Mt. Moriah & Freeman Funeral Home, 10507 Holmes Rd., Kansas City, MO 64131, (816) 942-2004, www.mtmortah-freeman.com

Published in Kansas City Star on March 17, 2012
Lesson 6

Subject: English Language Arts
Grade: 10
Lesson: Context and Ambiguity
Lesson Length: 90 minutes

CA Content Standard(s):
R 3.5 Compare works that express a universal theme and provide evidence to support the ideas expressed in each work.
3.8 Interpret and evaluate the impact of ambiguities, subtleties, contradictions, ironies, and incongruities in a text.
3.12 Analyze the way in which a work of literature is related to the themes and issues of its historical period.

Objective(s):
Students will demonstrate an understanding of context by showing, through their writing, how modification of a small part can change the whole.
Students will effectively use ambiguity in the composition of a laudatory poem.

Preparation:
Items needed:
- transparency of Robert Burns’s “The Book Worms” and “On James Grieve”
- transparency copy of Amy Lowell’s “Fireworks”
- students must bring Holt’s Elements of Literature: Perspectives in Multicultural Literature textbook
- digital projector with laptop, internet connection, and speakers
- audio recording of Khachaturian’s Two Gossiping Old Women
- image of Pieter Bruegel’s Parable of the Blind Leading the Blind
- overhead projector
- copy of Shakespeare’s Sonnet LXXXIII for each student.

Anticipatory Set:
1. Allow students to voluntarily share their vocabulary obituaries.

THE BOOK WORMS

Through and through th’ inspiréd leaves,
Ye maggots, make your windings;
But O, respect his lordship’s taste,
And spare the golden bindings!

---

EPITAPH ON JAMES GRIEVE, LAIRD OF BOGHEAD

Here lies Boghead amang the dead
In hopes to get salvation;
But if such as he in Heav’n may be,
Then welcome—hail! damnation.

Show the first poem, but with the last line covered. Explain that this is something Burns wrote upon seeing a Shakespeare book eaten by worms. In their writing journals, students copy the poem and come up with their own last line. Reveal the last line. Briefly discuss the idea of what is fitting within a given context and what is not, and ask if anyone can see the irony/humor in the poem. If they enjoyed the activity and wish to do another one, do the same with the second poem.

Activity:
1. “Fireworks” by Amy Lowell
   a. Students should not have their textbooks open for the first part of this activity. Project the transparency of “Fireworks,” with only lines 3-10 showing. Ask a student to read the lines aloud, and then ask what they think the poem is about. Then show only lines 13-20, and do the same, asking if this additional segment changes their initial interpretation. Finally, reveal the entire poem. Ask which lines have changed the entire meaning of the poem (lines, 1, 12, and 22). Discuss how context determines meaning, and how the metaphor of fireworks is completely transformed by the crucial lines, 1, 12, and 22.
   b. To reinforce the idea of how context determines the meaning of individual parts, provide the following examples from music and painting.
      i. Play a recording of Khachaturian’s piano piece, “Two Gossiping Old Women,” from measures 39 through 40. (On YouTube, the video “Nichole Piano – Two Gossiping Old Women” can be used. These measures occur at time 1:00-1:13.) Do not mention the title, and ask students about the mood/feeling of the piece. Play the same portion again, but this time start from measure 31 (0:53-1:13 on the YouTube video). Ask how the additional context has changed their idea about the song. Now tell them the title of the piece, and play the same segment, but this time starting at measure 19 (0:35-1:13 on YouTube). Ask for further consideration on the character of the piece in light of context.
      ii. Show the image of Pieter Bruegel’s Parable of the Blind Leading the Blind. First show the man on the left side of the painting, and ask students what they think the painting is about. Then reveal the next man, and the next, until finally the whole painting with its clear allegorical message is revealed. Ask students how their view of the first man on the left has changed now that they have seen the whole painting.
   c. For “Fireworks,” ask students to get in pairs and think about alternate phrases for lines 1, 12, and 22 that would completely alter the meaning of the poem. They should write their ideas in their writing journals, and may share aloud with the class.
2. Shakespeare’s “Sonnet LXXXIII”:
   a. Hand out copies of poem to each student. Explain that the focus for this poem will be the use of ambiguity. Review/check with students the meaning of ambiguity.
b. Provide the background that in this sonnet Shakespeare might possibly have been responding to a request by someone that he compete with another poet to compose a panegyric. Read poem aloud. Ask for any thoughts on the poem. Discuss its meaning. Before proceeding, ask them to divide the poem into to quatrains (to help structural visualization) by drawing lines.

c. Ask for any ambiguities they have detected. Write them on the board, having them annotate on their handout at the same time. Some of the ambiguities are:

1) line 2 can go with line 1, meaning either:
   a) I never praised you in verse because you are so wonderful that not even praise would improve your reputation
   b) I never (until now) realized that you thrive on flattery

2) or, line 2 can go with line 3, meaning either
   a) after I hadn’t painted your fairness, I discovered that you even exceeded my notions of your beauty
   b) after not painting your fairness, I was appalled to discover your haughty thirst for flattery
   c) (however, the parallel structure of I never to I found favors line 2 going with line 1)

3) debt which exceeds in line 4 can be either:
   a) debt owed by a poet:
      i) your wondrous nature goes beyond anything that can be written by a poet
      ii) I valued our relationship too much to be a mere hired poet
   b) debt owed to a poet:
      i) you acted more like my friend than a hirer of poets
      ii) you paid me too much
      iii) it seemed like you really admired me, while I was just doing my job

4) Or, line 4 can be the object of I found, meaning either:
   a) you treated me as a mere hireling
   b) an appositive explanation of the first three lines, meaning: it’s all due course for a poet to be enamored/infatuated with his subject

5) Therefore in line 5 can function either:
   a) as a parallel to therefore in line 2, thus either going with found or saw
   b) in reference to the preceding four lines
   c) as a subordinate clause to line 6

6) slept in your report (line 5) either means:
   a) I haven’t written about you
   b) I haven’t carried on the rumors that others are spreading about you

7) That (line 6) means either:
   a) so that I would be out of the way so the full glory of your fame (or infamy) would show
   b) the fact that you still have a reputation at all is (with line 5) because I haven’t written about you

***** Most of ideas for interpreting this sonnet are from Empson, William. Seven Types of Ambiguity. New York, New Directions: 1947.
c) (with line 7) what if your respected existence is testimony to the paucity of poetry?

8) line 8 either refers forwards or backwards:
   a) forwards: only my silence could communicate your ineffable worth (or infamy)
   b) backwards: all the ink in the world could not praise you enough

9) *bring a tomb* (line 12) could mean:
   a) other poets try to puff up a man with words, but end up killing him (especially you, because your real reputation would be exposed)
   b) writing about you cannot do justice to your beauty (cf. “Sonnet XVII”)
   c) I, Shakespeare, if I were to write about you, it would ruin your reputation, because now I know what you’re really like
   d) I, Shakespeare, by not speaking (line 11), make you immortal
   e) I, Shakespeare, offer you a lifetime of service (to the grave), in contrast to the bread-fed poets who merely sing praises so they can live their own lives

10) line 13 is either:
   a) praising the boundless beauty of the subject
   b) accusing the subject of having a grossly distorted view of his own greatness
   c) accusing the subject of being a philanderer

11) overall, the poem holds a tension between esteem and bitterness, love and loss

Of course, there is no need (nor time) to point out all of these. The outline is here just to show the different routes the teacher or student can take in exploring ambiguity.

d. In their writing journals, students should respond to the prompt:

**Imagine that you have been commanded to write a laudatory poem about something you don’t like. Using ambiguity, write a poem that follows the command, but also expresses your true feelings. (Must be 10-14 lines, rhyme or free-verse.)**

Example topics:
- It is the year 1900 and you have been ordered by the British royal family to praise the British empire in a poem
- Joseph Stalin “asks” you to write a poem about the wonders of the Soviet system
- Joseph Goebbels orders you to write a poem on “The Golden Age of the Third Reich” to be published in *Der Stürmer*

**Closure:** While students write their ambiguity poems, check their analysis essay theses (see previous lesson).

**Independent Practice:** Finish ambiguity poem for homework.
Parable of the Blind Leading the Blind
Pieter Bruegel
I never saw that you did painting need,
And therefore to your fair no painting set,
I found (or thought I found) you did exceed,
The barren tender of a Poet’s debt:
And therefore have I slept in your report,
That you yourself being extant well might show,
How far a modern quill doth come too short,
Speaking of worth, what worth in you doth grow,
This silence for my sin you did impute,
Which shall be most my glory being dumb,
For I impair not beauty being mute,
When others would give life, and bring a tomb.
There lives more life in one of your fair eyes,
Than both your Poets can in praise devise.

W. Shakespeare
Sonnets, lxxxiii
## Appendix D

Daily observation measurement form

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Based on 1-10 scale
Appendix E

What about you?

Rate the following statements as accurately as possible. Remember to read each one carefully.

- I love to read literature.
  
  1  2  3  4  5
  Completely false Absolutely true

- I feel confident when I am reading.
  
  1  2  3  4  5
  Never Always

- Poems are easy for me to understand.
  
  1  2  3  4  5
  Rarely Almost always

- I have difficulty comprehending literary texts.
  
  1  2  3  4  5
  Not at all Definitely

- Without literature, life would be boring.
  
  1  2  3  4  5
  Uhh, not really Totally!

- I am better than most people at analyzing poems and stories.
  
  1  2  3  4  5
  Not at all Most certainly
### Appendix F

### Analysis Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity / Lesson/ Project</th>
<th>Evidence of ability to respond to literature (understanding)</th>
<th>Evidence of quality in-class discussion (understanding)</th>
<th>Evidence of ability to use literary terms (understanding)</th>
<th>Evidence of interest in literature</th>
<th>Evidence of interest in literary analysis</th>
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Appendix G

Essay Sample A

Literary Analysis

Things aren't always what they seem to be. We, as people tend to instigate on the untold. Usually poems are written to express true feelings, stories are meant to teach us lessons, but do we really learn from what we learn? On "Beth Gelert" by William Robert Spencers, the poet was trying to reflect how quick we are to get to assume. The author writes the story as a poem to give it more of a dramatic and emotional feel. Spencers' poem can be ambiguous, in my opinion.

The poet achieves what he wants to reflect by writing about what we can relate to our lifestyle. Sometimes it is not the idea of writing about something being-obvious, but to create a mood as well. In Beth Gelert imagery is shown "with blood-stained covert rent; and all around the walls and ground with recent blood besprent," when Llewelyn went back home and heard no cries from his child. Immediately he saw the dog with his blood-stained snout, he jumps into conclusions and kills Gelert. His poem can be ambiguous because many can take their own interpretations such as vengeance can lead to tragic ends. "Ah, what was then Llewelyn's pain! For the truth was clear; His gallant hound the wolf had
slain, To save Llewelyn's heir," Llewelyn's feelings of vengeance and anger lead him to making a decision he will regret for the rest of his life; the death of his beloved hound.

The selection was effective because the poem gives mood, climax, has some ambiguity, and is alliterate. William Robert Spencer has a lot of alliterations within every rhyme scheme, which goes in A, B, A, B format. The climax was given when he finally found his son "what words the parent's joy could tell To hear his infant's cry!," safe and sound from the wolf. On Shakespeare's sonnet Ixxxiii also has ambiguity, but also expresses sarcasm. Shakespeare praises the 'man of glory', but is disrespecting him at the same time. His laudatory poem displays his true feelings towards the man. Shakespeare expresses his feelings of what a waste of time it would be to write about the man "That you yourself being extant well might shoe, How far a modern quill doth come too short, Speaking of worth, what worth in you doth grow."

Drawing conclusions is what we do the best. We don't think we are wrong, we fool ourselves with appearances when it's really beyond the surface like in Beth Gelert displays for us. "Things aren't always what they seem to be," has been a quote many people have used for many generations and different
Essay Sample B

Literary Analysis Essay

Sonnets, lxxxiii by W. Shakespeare

A man created a contest and asked William Shakespeare to participate in it. The task was to write a poem that praised the man who created the competition. Shakespeare refused to participate. In addition to his refusal, he wrote a sonnet to express why it was unnecessary for him to compete in the contest. The context of Shakespeare's Sonnets, lxxxiii contains many ambiguous statements that can be interpreted in several ways.

Shakespeare used positively connoted words in the context of the poem to flatter the man he wrote the poem about, or at least to make the man think he was being flattered. For example, Shakespeare wrote, "How far a modern quill doth come too short, / Speaking of worth, what worth in you doth grow" (7-8). The reader can infer that a poem could never have been written long enough to describe the man. A worthy man is deserving and respectable. Since the man's worthiness is constantly growing, a poem could never equal his level of worth. Also, Shakespeare added, "For I impair not beauty being mute, / When others would give life, and bring a tomb" (11-12). Shakespeare did not do anything negative to the man by refusing to write a poem about him. Other poets had agreed to write beautiful poems about the man, but could never express the man's true magnificence through their poetry. Finally, the poem says, "There lives more life in one of your fair eyes, / Than both your Poets can in praise devise" (13-14). Even if all of the poets in the competition came together to write the poem for the man, the poem
would only contain a fraction of the things that make the man so great. No one could ever write a poem broad enough to represent the successful man.

It is ironic that the sonnet seemed to compliment the man because Shakespeare’s true feelings about the man were not so positive. Readers must interpret Shakespeare’s true feelings from the context of the poem. First, Shakespeare said, “I found (or thought I found) you did exceed, / The barren tender of a Poet’s debt” (3-4). Shakespeare believed that the man requested much more flattery than a poet could ever express in a poem. Later in the poem, Shakespeare wrote, “That you yourself being extant well might show, / How far a modern quill doth come too short” (6-7). In other words, no poet could have ever written a poem that would have satisfied the gaudy man. The man would have wanted to be flattered more than the poets could have written. At the end of the third quatrain, Shakespeare said, "For I impair not beauty being mute, / When others would give life, and bring a tomb" (11-12). Shakespeare did not write the poem about the man because the man was already too proud of himself. No one should have ever written a poem that benefited the man’s haughtiness.

The context of Shakespeare’s sonnet reveals many meanings. Shakespeare probably intended to tell readers not to contribute to a person’s excessive pride. He expressed his message by using the example of the man who wanted him to write the poem. It is likely that Shakespeare hid the true message under a series of compliments because he did not want to publicly humiliate the man who he wrote the sonnet about. It is important to understand all of the possible interpretations of a poem in order to discover its true meaning.

"You effectively took sides with a particular interpretation"
### Appendix H

**Daily Analysis Matrix**

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Based on 1-10 scale
References


works (pp. 557-595). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.


