

Comprehensive Comprehension

Read like a writer

Reading Like a Writer

Normally, when we read, we focus on *what* the writer is trying to say. When we read like a writer, however, we focus on *how* the writer is saying it. We pay close attention to the techniques a writer is using and how those techniques contribute to the meaning of the piece and improve its quality. We may even borrow the techniques we learn for our own writing.

1. Ideas

Ideas are the heart of the piece, what the writer is writing about and the information her or she chooses to reveal about it. When we read like a writer, we try to answer questions like these:

How does the writer reveal the main idea?

What types of details does the writer use? How does the writer achieve his or her purpose?

2. Organization

Organization refers to the order of ideas and the way the writer moves from one idea to the next. When we read like a writer, we try to answer questions like these: What kinds of leads and endings does the writer use? How does the writer handle transitions? What techniques does the writer use for sequencing? How does the writer control pacing?

3. Voice

Voice is how the writing feels to someone when they read it, it's the expression of the writer's individual personality through words.

When we read like a writer, we try to answer questions like these: How does the writer demonstrate passion for the topic? How does the writer reveal emotions? How does the writer put personality into the piece?

4. Word Choice

Word Choice refers to writer's selection of particular words and phrases to express ideas.

When we read like a writer, we try to answer questions like these: What techniques (simile, metaphor, strong verbs, etc.) does the writer use to make the word choice more specific, more memorable, and more effective?

5. Sentence Fluency

Sentence Fluency is the rhythm and flow of the language as we read it. When we read like a writer, we try to answer questions like these: What kinds of sentence constructions does the writer use? How does the writer vary the length and construction of his or her sentences? How does the writer use "sound" effects like alliteration, rhyme, and rhythm?

6. Conventions

Conventions are the ways we use punctuation, spelling, grammar, and other things that make writing consistent and easy to read. When we read like a writer, we try to answer questions like these: How does the writer use conventions to make the writing easy to read and more meaningful? Does the author use conventions in unusual ways that are successful?

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Read like a writer: fiction

Eddie had always been able to fly, but it wasn't until his fifth birthday party that he realized that it would turn out to be a bit of a social problem. Until that embarrassing day on the Johnson's lawn, Eddie's parents had treated his airborne peculiarity as something of a childish whim. His father was always saying things like "Boy's gotta stretch out, learn what he can do," and his mother, things like "I just worry that he'll hurt himself, you know, bump into the ceiling or get his eye poked out by a bird, but I don't know..." The neighbors weren't so understanding.

For the young Eddie, flying was just another discovery about his developing body, like learning that he could reach out his arm and ring the bell on his cradle railing, or finding that he loved the taste of peas, and while the first time his parents came into the nursery and found Eddie hovering a foot or two off the floor it came as a bit of a shock, they eventually shrugged it off; parents are, after all, forever discovering special little things about their children. Eddie's mother thought that perhaps they should take their son to see a specialist, but his father vetoed the idea, saying "It's not like anything's wrong with him, and I don't want him getting a complex about it."

1. Ideas

Ideas are fictional. A flying baby boy, in the context of what appears to be a realistic setting, is interesting and provokes the reader's curiosity. The writer provides several examples to illustrate his point. There are a lot of details about some things, like his parents' thoughts, and not about others, like what happened on the Johnson's lawn. This makes the reader invest in the story, and want to know more.

2. Organization

The opening line is great, since it gets our attention and makes us want to find out more. The story is organized into detailed paragraphs based on each separate idea (Eddie can fly, what Eddie thinks about Flying).

3. Voice

The writer's voice is light-hearted and playful, just as one might imagine a flying baby boy to be. There's a calmness to the writing that makes it seem like everything is normal even though Eddie is not, which adds humour since it is so strange.

4. Word Choice

Interesting, creative, and specific word choices are made (like "airborne peculiarity" or "specialist" or "complex") to highlight the unique situation Eddie is in. The strong word choice, "Vetoed" tells us that Eddie's dad is the dominant figure in the family. There is a lot of variety in the words that are used.

5. Sentence Fluency

The writer uses many long sentences to communicate examples, and comparisons between characters. Alliteration, like "son to see a specialist" increases the artistic flow of the sentence, and makes it sound smoother. There is a lot of variety in the sentence types used.

6. Conventions

Punctuation is used effectively to make the writer's long, complex sentences easy to read. Quotation marks surround quotations from the parents. The use of an ellipsis at the end of the mother's comment makes her seem vague, spaced-out, and not as worried as she should be.