

What do we mean by *Critical Literacy*?

“Critical literacy refers to students critically analyzing and evaluating the meaning of text as it relates to issues of equity, power, and social justice to inform a critical stance, response, and/or action.”
Adolescent Literacy Guide, (2012)

“Critical literacy is the capacity for a particular type of critical thinking that involves looking beyond the literal meaning of a text to determine what is present and what is missing, in order to analyse and evaluate the text’s complete meaning and the author’s intent. Critical literacy goes beyond conventional critical thinking by focusing on issues related to fairness, equity, and social justice. Critically literate students adopt a critical stance, asking what view of the world the text advances and whether they find this view acceptable.”

Ontario Science Curriculum Gr. 9 & 10, (2008)

“The acquisition of critical thinking skills may, in turn, help students shape how they interact with one another in the learning environment. By teaching students to reflect on human rights and social justice issues, critical literacy may help students develop empathy.”

Nicolini, M. B., (2008)

Critical Literacy means...

- Going beyond simply decoding and understanding texts
- Recognizing that texts contain certain perspectives and biases
- Recognizing that point of view influences how a text is interpreted and understood
- Determining whose voices are present or absent
- Evaluating multiple perspectives for bias, reliability, fairness, validity
- Analyzing how language is used
- Taking a stance and engage in a response in the interest of equity, fairness and social justice
- Using technology to seek divergent perspectives, interact with authentic audiences, and express ideas

Examples:

Language

The Paper Bag Princess by Robert Munsch. This book, which is appropriate for younger readers, reverses the gender roles in traditional fairy tales; the princess is the one who must slay the dragon and rescue the prince.

Teachers could ask:

- From whose perspective is the story being told?
- How are the prince, princess and dragon portrayed in this story?
- How would the story be different if told from the prince’s perspective? From the dragon’s perspective?

Does this fairy tale resemble a small or large number of fairy tales?

Why do you think so?

What Works Monograph: Promoting Critical Literacy Across the Curriculum and Fostering Safer Learning Environments, LNS, 2013

Arts

Students imagine themselves as artists in a cultural context. Students are asked what they would design if they were stained glass artists living and working in medieval Europe. After viewing and discussing the cultural context of Maoist posters, students create a poster that depicts social or political action relevant to their own lives using techniques similar to those in Maoist posters.

Critical Literacy and Art Education: Alternatives in the School Reform Movement, Urban Education Journal, 2009

Mathematics/ Health

Supply nutritional data and have students calculate the grams of sugar as a percentage of total serving size for each cereal. Use this as an opportunity to discuss how advertisers market to children and whether key health information is downplayed.

What Works Monograph: Promoting Critical Literacy Across the Curriculum and Fostering Safer Learning Environments, LNS, 2013

Science

Having students individually complete an "Assessing Trustworthiness Survey" on sources of information about climate change. Use electronic survey or polling technology to collect and share data from the survey. Facilitate a discussion about any trends or anomalies in the data, points of interest or differences of opinion. Extend the discussion by posing: How do our biases shape our assumptions about conflicting information from different sources.

Edu Gains- Unit and Lesson examples

Resources:

Adolescent Literacy Guide A Professional Learning Resource for Literacy, Grades 7-10, (2012)

http://www.edugains.ca/resourcesLIT/AdolescentLiteracy/Vision/AdolescentLiteracyGuide_Interactive.pdf

Edu Gains- Unit and Lesson examples

http://www.edugains.ca/newsite/literacy/classroomlearning7_12/science_technology.html

Nicolini, M. B. (2008). Chatting with Letters: Developing Empathy and Critical Literacy through Writing Communities. *The English Journal*, 97, 76–80.

The Ontario Language Curriculum, Grades 1-8, (2006)

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/language18currb.pdf>

The Ontario Science Curriculum Grades 9 & 10, (2008)

http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/science910_2008.pdf

What Works Monograph: Promoting Critical Literacy Across the Curriculum and Fostering Safer Learning Environments, LNS, (2013)

http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/WW_PromotingCriticalLiteracy.pdf

What Works Monograph: Critical Literacy, LNS, (2009)

http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/critical_literacy.pdf

Critical Literacy and Art Education: Alternatives in the School Reform Movement, *Urban Education Journal*, 2009

http://www.urbanedjournal.org/sites/urbanedjournal.org/files/pdf_archive/PUE-Fall2009-V6I2-pp68-71.pdf