



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2009 Volume I: Writing, Knowing, Seeing

Seeing between the Lines: Teaching Students to Interpret Visual and Verbal Text

Guide for Curriculum Unit 09.01.10
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On the scoring rubric for the Response to Literature section of the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) the word *perceptive* appears three times, always to describe exemplary performance. To demonstrate excellence, our students are expected to develop *perceptive* interpretations, make *perceptive* connections and defend *perceptive* judgments about literature. By the time students reach high school, we expect them to be more adept at independently probing and analyzing text. While we want them to ground their thinking in the text, we expect them to see beyond it to its cultural and historical context, the character's motivations and conflicts and the author's probable intent. For some students, especially those that still struggle to decode what the text literally says, grasping the text's deeper meaning can be frustrating and discouraging. The aim of this unit is to demystify the process of interpretation by making the act of critical thinking more visible to students. Using *Visual Thinking Strategies* (VTS), an instructional model developed by cognitive psychologist Abigail Housen and museum educator Philip Yenawine, as a point of departure, this unit reinforces core skills of inquiry: making observations and inferences, defending claims with evidence from the text, and entering into an academic conversation.

(Recommended for English Language Arts, grades 9-12)

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