A key question: What themes and ideas would you explore? Think of one of your favorite films or novels and imagine that you are.

When addressing deficits in college students’ reading skills, most of the assignments that students complete when working with these texts are analytical and interpretive in nature. Why don’t we invite students to respond to these artistic texts in more personal and creative ways?

For example, here is one writing prompt: Write a journal entry exploring how Isabel feels at the end of chapter 16. What is she worried about? What are her expectations for the future?

Student quotes:
- “I was able to dive deeper within myself (…) I felt like I was living, albeit briefly, in those times.”
- “I was living, albeit briefly, in those times.”
- “I feel much more engaged when it comes to the creative writing activities.”
- “I feel much more engaged when it comes to the creative writing activities.”

Hypothesis: I believe student engagement, knowledge of the source text and understanding of the socio-historic context will be enhanced through the creative writing activities they complete.

(2) If they gained insights into the socio-historic context:

Common themes: application of knowledge, experience of empathy

Student quotes:
- “I was feeling more engaged because they were simply more fun”
- “I feel much more engaged when it comes to the creative writing activities (…) I played with fiction and things that are more creative (…) and thus I like to interact with a text in a more creative way. (…) Also it’s not something I do much in school, so the uniqueness of it was a welcomed change”
- “I was more emotionally engaged with the assignment”
- “The creative assignments felt more engaging because they were simply more fun”
- “I feel more engaged. (…) understanding the individual characters’ relation to their socio-historic context was more difficult but rewarding.”
- “I think these were more fun to do because they asked us to think outside the box.”

(3) If they felt more engaged when doing these assignments:

Common themes: the activities are perceived as more fun, more creative, unique

Student quotes:
- “I was able to dive deeper within myself (…) I felt like I was able to relate to the characters of the novels more…”
- “I was able to dive deeper within myself (…) I felt like I was able to relate to the characters of the novels more…”

(4) When asked if they considered how the novels’ themes, ideas and situations related to their own lives, responses were mixed. Some students didn’t see similarities, citing the vast difference in historic moment and geography. Others were able to find connections between their own experiences and those of the novels’ characters.

Student quotes:
- “I didn’t fit into the character’s shoes.”
- “I was able to dive deeper within myself (…) I felt like I was able to relate to the characters of the novels more…”
- “I was able to dive deeper within myself (…) I felt like I was able to relate to the characters of the novels more…”

REFERENCES

COMMON THEMES:
Deeper engagement with characters’ emotions, narrative empathy

Student quotes:
- “…the activity gave me new insights because they change the perspective from just reader/character to something deeper…”
- “It was purely the thoughts of the characters that you were inhabiting and it forced you to delve into their mind”
- “I was able to dive deeper within myself (…) I felt like I was able to relate to the characters of the novels more…”

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