

Redacted Reading – Teaching Strategy

Quick Overview

Students read a text-based primary source to identify its central idea by progressively cutting the source down to its fundamental words and phrases. This strategy features interpersonal work, vocabulary mastery, and argument construction which bolster students' reasoning skills.

Skill Objective

Students will...

- examine vocabulary and meaning
- practice writing a clean and clear argument from the content of a primary source
- work together to negotiate the tensions between clarity and concision in writing

Content Objective

Students will...

- critically engage with the ideas in a primary source

Civics Skills Connection

Reasoning Skills:

- **evaluate evidence:** students engage with primary sources for an extended period of time
- **analytical/critical thinking:** students identify how authors construct arguments and practice paraphrasing them in their own words
- **critique of arguments:** students assess primary sources from a linguistic perspective to assess rhetoric and how they convey essential meaning

Prep ahead

- Educators print out several copies of the selected primary source(s) for each student or group of students. This exercise works best with medium-to-long length written sources to give students the most flexibility in their redacting process.
- A physical dictionary may be a helpful tool to complete this exercise, but it is not essential.

Strategy Steps

1. Divide students into groups of 2-4 or have students complete this exercise individually

2. Students read the source from beginning to end, marking words that they think are essential to the text's central idea.
3. Students or groups paraphrase the essential meaning (or thesis, or main argument, depending on the educator's preferred language and unit objectives).
4. Students return to the source and identify the key words and ideas in the source that helped them understand its essential meaning. Students then redact or cross out any words, phrases, or full sentences that do not directly contribute to that essential meaning, with the goal of cutting down the source to be as short as possible.
5. Students or groups share their redacted sources with others and compare their choices.

Customizations

- **Option 1: Gamify it**
 - Groups or students working with the same source compete to see who can get the text to be the shortest while retaining its essential meaning. Students can vote on each other's work, or the educator can determine the "winner."
- **Option 2: Assess it**
 - Educator collects the redacted sources from each group and leaves comments on their work, assessing the completeness of the essential idea and the teamwork observed during the process.
- **Option 3: Extend it**
 - Educator prompts students to consider the significance of the words that they crossed out. Say, "Look at the un-redacted version of your source and now highlight the words that you crossed out in the other version. If these are not part of conveying the essential meaning of the text, why might the author have included them? What do they add to this source that is lost in the redacted version?"
- **Option 4: Expand it**
 - Students or groups work with different sources and show the "before" and "after" to their peers after doing their redacting.
 - *This option requires more prep ahead for the teacher to create a collection of several sources that are roughly comparable in length and topic. Students get to teach and learn from their peers to engage with a wider range of topics. This will work best for groups that have a strong teamwork dynamic and a willingness to engage with learning from their peers.*