

ILA E-SENTENTIALS

21st-Century Literacy Skills

The SHOTS Strategy

Using Complex Narratives to Spark Independent Thinking



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The Introduction to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) states what it means to be a literate person in the 21st century. This vision includes the possession of several higher order thinking skills, such as questioning an author’s or speaker’s assumptions, assessing the soundness of reasoning, and thinking critically. The process of scaffolding higher order thinking skills (SHOTS) is necessary in order to make sense of the staggering amount of information in our computerized and digital society. In CCSS terminology, our students need to both “comprehend and critique text.”

The cognitive demands of the literate person of the 21st century require a broad vision of literacy, which includes the need to be “creative, independent thinkers...(who) continually produce new knowledge” (Lapp, Wise, & Johnson, 2013, p. 10). The goal of 21st-century literacy is not only to cultivate close reading and text-dependent literacy as sponsored chiefly by the CCSS, but also to develop and enhance creative reading skills to support text generative and independent thinking.

Today, the goals of a literate person require high literacy or the pursuit of reasoning skills and creativity. There is a need to provide for rigorous instruction in terms of content that is often complex, ambiguous, and emotionally and intellectually challenging. Specific scaffolding tools and processes are needed to develop creative and independent thinkers (Palincsar, 1986). The importance of scaffolding rigorous instruction is a major goal of CCSS, but it does not recommend or prescribe specific ways to achieve this goal.

This article presents a unit of study using a cognitive/literary strategy to scaffold the development of independent thinkers. The strategy contains varied scaffolding tools and processes for developing the higher order cognitive operations of convergent and divergent thinking. I call it a cognitive/literary strategy because it integrates the application



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of thinking skills, language functions, and the genre of literacy narratives.

The Five Phases of the Strategy

The cognitive/literary strategy follows five phases of development in a sequential and spiral pattern. In Phase 1, there is an introduction to the cognitive domain of the strategy that stresses the higher order thinking skills of convergent and divergent thinking. Here the focus is on the explicit teaching of SHOTS, which includes cognitive tools such as *cue cards*, *procedural prompts*, and *signal words* in addition to the cognitive processes of *teacher modeling* and *guided practice*. Phase 2 introduces students to different levels of literacy narratives beginning with *personal literacy narratives*, the least complex dimension of the genre. In this phase, students begin to apply their new knowledge of convergent and divergent skills in creating their own narratives.

Phase 3 advances to a more complex form of literacy narrative that contains literary and historical characters. This form can be identified as *traditional literacy narratives* because they are often presented in literary anthologies. Phase 4 consists of rigorous content that contains challenging figurative language. Here scaffolding maintains a varied and in-depth support system. I call this the *counter-literacy narrative* phase because many of its characteristics conflict with those of the traditional narratives. In Phase 5, students are encouraged to practice independently

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as the scaffolding tools and processes are internalized. Students should be ready to apply convergent and divergent thinking operations in reading, writing, and discussing literacy narratives on their own. See Figure 1 for a visual representation of the strategy and how each of the phases fit together.

The different layers of literacy narratives are presented in a *spiral graphic representation* of an “onion” whose outer layers can be peeled off one by one as you progress to the center of the process. Once the four outer layers have been peeled back successfully, then you can guide your students to apply higher order thinking skills to literacy narratives. It’s important to note that the progression is a cyclical one; you can guide your students back to previous layers when you believe it’s necessary. This cyclical pattern creates “message abundance,”

where you present numerous opportunities to scaffold complex and rigorous text for all your students (Gibbons, 2002, p. 17). Your goal is to reintroduce literary concepts and thinking skills at higher levels of complexity but contingent upon immediate feedback of students’ performance. Ultimately, your main objective is to scaffold for student independent learning (Beed, Hawkins, & Roller, 1991).

What Are Convergent and Divergent Thinking Skills?

Convergent and divergent thinking skills derive from students’ deep curiosity about ambiguous and unusual events. These cognitive processes can take different courses. You can guide your students to follow a narrow pathway that seeks information to solve a fixed problem. Here

you display *convergent* thinking. This type of inquiry consists of higher order thinking skills such as “analyzing ideas and events” and “critiquing faulty reasoning.” For example, one of your students might ask, “Why is my friend acting in such a strange or puzzling way?” Your student’s question seeks to find a reason to resolve the puzzling situation. It’s this rational quest to solve problems that displays convergent thinking in action. See Figure 2 for scaffolds and prompts helpful for understanding and applying convergent thinking operations.

On the other hand, you can guide your students to follow an alternate and open-ended pathway that is limited only by their imaginations. Point out that there are ambiguous and unusual events that they may not be able to explain away so readily. These events are *divergent* in nature and require a different pattern of thinking that includes “finding new

Figure 1. SHOTS and Literacy Narratives

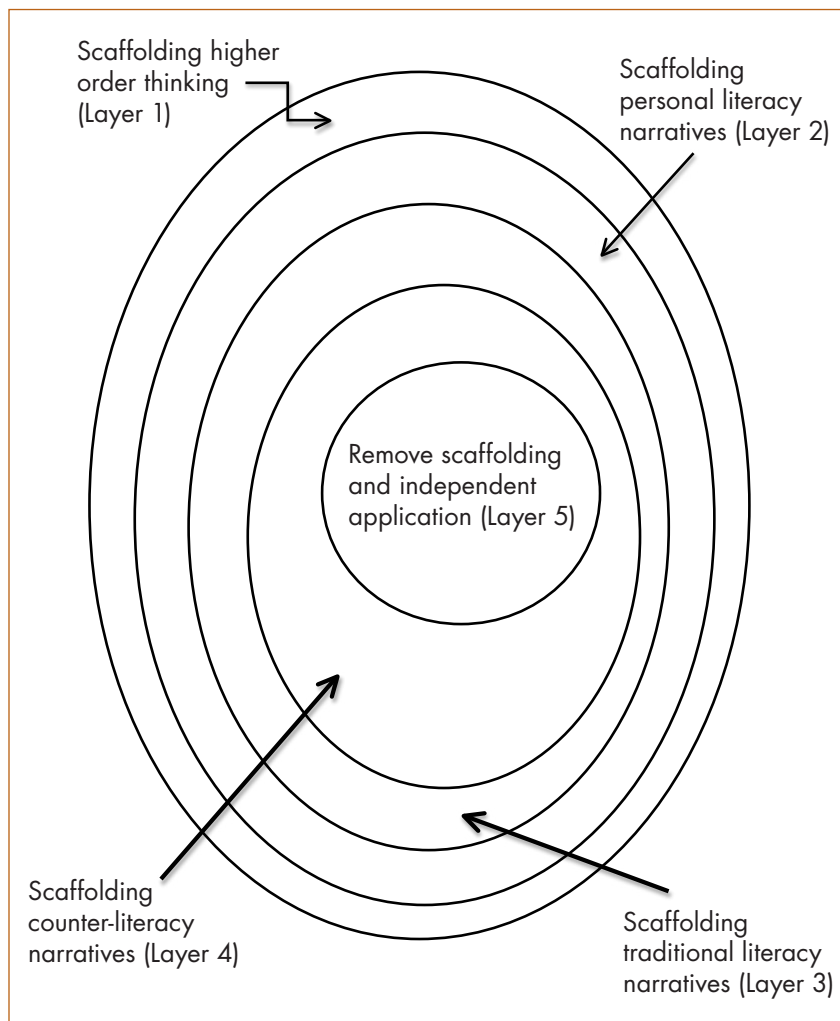


Figure 2. Cue Card for Convergent Thinking Operations

Convergent Thinking Signal Words: logic, analyze, compare/contrast, cause/effect, justify, critique, argue, evidence-based

Convergent Thinking Operations:

Performing logical reasoning/making a rational argument
Analyzing ideas and events
Finding evidence to support
Comparing ideas
Connecting causes and effects
Making logical connections between ideas and events
Justifying opinions
Monitoring comprehension
Critiquing faulty reasoning

Convergent Question Prompts:

Is the thinking expressed in the text logical?
Do I need to analyze this problem more deeply?
What evidence do I need to support my argument?
In what ways is this idea similar or different from others?
How can I connect this new idea to prior knowledge?

Figure 3. Cue Card for Divergent Thinking Operations

Divergent Thinking Signal Words: synthesize, imagine, generate, create, speculate, ambiguous, counterintuitive, dialogical

Divergent Thinking Operations:

Synthesizing information
Stimulating the imagination
Imagining possibilities
Finding problems to explore
Generating alternative answers and solutions
Finding new or unusual relationships and combinations
Creating new ideas
Suspending judgment
Detecting counterintuitive ideas
Tolerating ambiguity

Divergent Question Prompts:

How can I look at this problem in another way?
Can I imagine creative possibilities as answers to the problem?
Can both of these conflicting ideas be correct in some way?
Am I able to think of unusual relationships between different events?
How can I pause and ponder before making a decision?

and unusual relationships and combinations” and “stimulating the imagination.” Here your students may ask, “What other ways can I look at this problem?” Divergent thinking is another form of higher order thinking. See Figure 3 for additional procedural prompts helpful in understanding and applying divergent thinking operations.

Scaffolding Convergent and Divergent Thinking

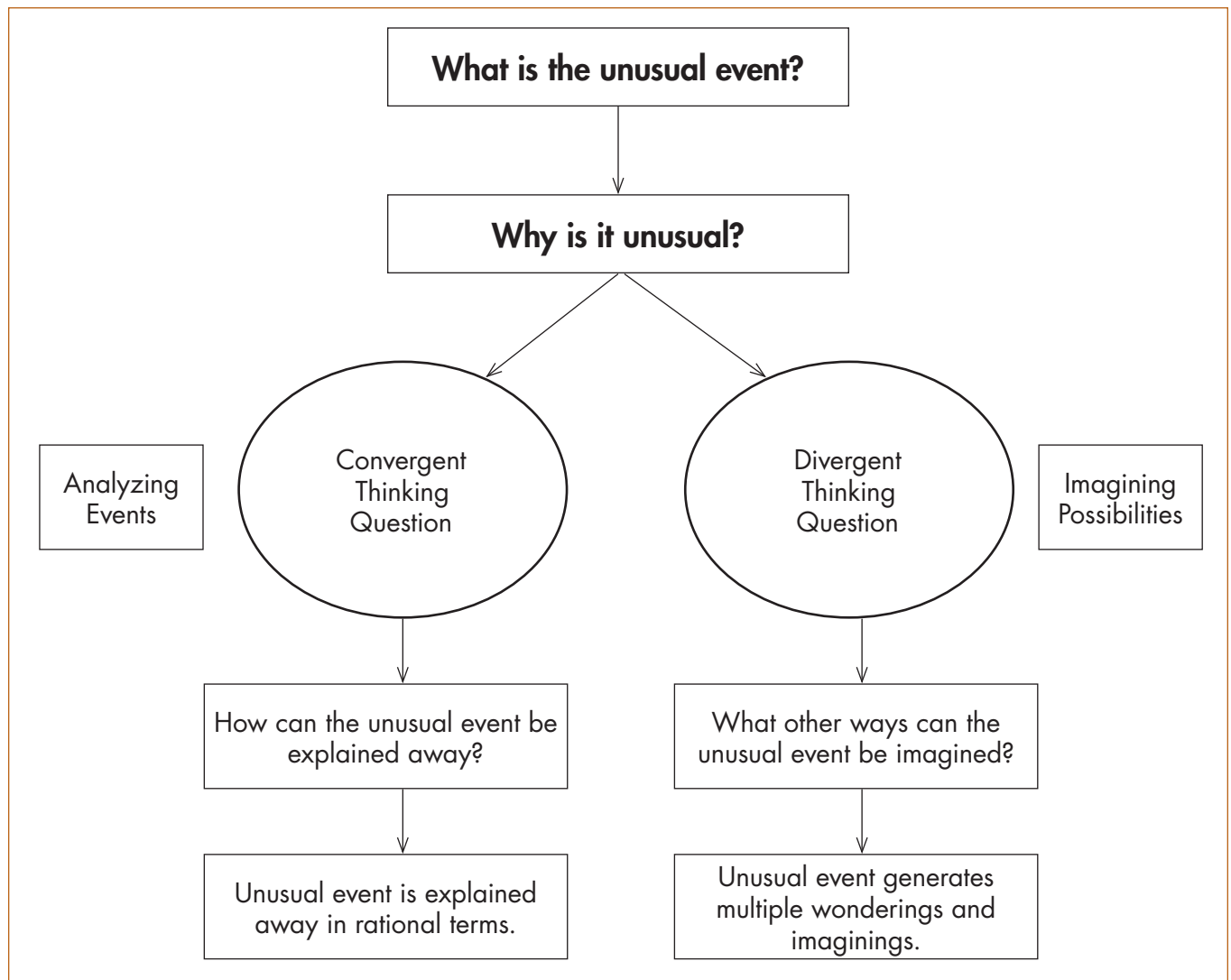
In literacy education, scaffolding has been used successfully in reading comprehension (Clark & Graves, 2005). I focus on scaffolding thinking skills. Specifically, I present instructional scaffolds (in italics) for teaching the higher order thinking operations of convergent and divergent thinking while reading and writing literacy narratives. Literacy narratives often contain complex levels of language and ambiguous ideas that are thought provoking and mentally challenging.

SHOTS is especially important because it helps to make below-surface mental concepts and processes visible to your students (Rosenshine & Meister, 1992). A graphic organizer is presented in Figure 4. You can simplify this process by using more accessible *signal words* and *sentence prompts*. For convergent thinking, you can present the signal word prompt, “What is the *why* behind the unusual event?” For divergent thinking, you can model the signal words prompt, “*What if* the unusual event seems rather ordinary?” Convergent and divergent thinking require teachers to continuously revise and alter scaffolding to adjust to the levels and abilities of their students.

What Are Literacy Narratives?

A literacy narrative is a subgenre of autobiographical and biographical literature.

Figure 4. SHOTS: Model Organizer



This genre tells stories in the lives of people that deal with the subplot of learning how to read and write (Ciardiello, 2012). I focus on literacy narratives of children and adolescents.

Most children begin reading, writing, and drawing simple literacy narratives in preschool and early elementary grades. These personal stories generally follow a conventional model in which the earliest memories of literacy acquisition are provided by parents, relatives, and teachers at home or in school. Literacy researcher Dorothy Brandt (1998) calls these support resources “literacy sponsors” (p. 166).

Childhood literacy narratives follow a traditional format in the sense that they focus on early reading and writing experiences in a generally supportive environment. In this

setting, those who strive for literacy are almost universally successful. Often these stories are romanticized versions of these experiences in which eager new readers overcome whatever obstacles have been placed in their paths (Serafini, 2004).

Personal literacy narratives are often commonplace and standard accounts. However, I have read students’ literacy narratives that go beyond the prototypical narrative and even promote critical reflection. One of my students described her first memories of learning to read in a firehouse where her dad worked. She wrote, “When I was three, my father was holding me up to a fire engine and pointed to the words on the door. Not many people can say that they learned to read in a firehouse.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON LITERACY NARRATIVES

- Ohio State University’s website [Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives](#) provides helpful prompts for writing literacy narratives as well as samples of elementary and middle-grade students’ writings.
- Williams, B. (2004). Heroes, rebels, and victims: Student identities and literacy narratives. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 47(4), 342–345.

Scaffolding Personal Literacy Narratives

Reading, writing, and drawing personal literacy narratives can be enriched by SHOTS, but it requires using varied scaffolding tools and processes. I recommend three types: drawing pictures with simple written captions, bridging prior knowledge and new information, and retelling personal narratives in light of the new learning experiences. See Table 1 for additional scaffolding tools and processes.

Children’s drawings can uncover the literacy narratives young students bring to school. One of my students recalls how she learned how to read and write by first using finger paints. Her mother required that she write a label for each finger painting. Drawings can also provide a scaffold for writing about early literacy encounters such as reading a first book, visiting the library, or writing a journal. Educational

researchers tell us that “unlike conventional methods, the images of literacy that children construct in their drawings provide insights into their personal experiences of literacy” (Kendrick & McKay, 2002, p. 47). Children’s illustrations can also be an impetus to concept development and a pathway for creating novel stories.

Personal literacy narratives can be used as support structures for developing higher order thinking by bridging prior knowledge and new learning experiences. As indicated earlier, many students write commonplace and romanticized versions of how they acquired literacy. By critically discussing other students’ literacy stories—especially those that are novel and creative—they can appreciate the fact that literacy is a complex skill that sometimes happens in unusual places (i.e., firehouse, or by atypical personal sponsors, or even with unconventional resources). These unique literacy narratives provide opportunities to stimulate convergent and divergent thinking.

Upon synthesizing their own literacy experiences with those of others, our students can also learn that literacy is a multidimensional experience. I suggest giving your students the opportunity to re-view and retell their personal literacy narratives in light of different or unusual experiences discussed in class. In this manner, students can appreciate that learning to read and write is not just a conventional or mundane experience, but also a creative one.

Table 1. Varieties of Instructional Scaffolds

Verbal	Written	Illustrative, graphic, and digital
Bridging prior knowledge and new knowledge Read aloud poetry Retelling: personal literacy narratives Self-talk & think-aloud protocols Teacher modeling (i.e., question prompts) Teacher/student dialogues	Chunking complex sentences; rewriting and paraphrasing Exemplary student work Guided practice/independent practice Poems and folk tales containing figurative language Teacher feedback—revising literacy narratives Re-presenting content in different genres Text exemplars Text sets (e.g., biographies, fiction)	SHOTS graphic organizer Children’s book illustrations Cue cards, signal words, and question prompts “Digital Archives of Literacy Narratives” Matrix—figurative language Spiral graphic representation Children’s drawings



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Scaffolding Traditional Literacy Narratives

Use personal literacy narratives as a transition to traditional literacy narratives, a subtopic of many autobiographical memoirs and biographies. These historically based narratives often contain more complex plots and abstract ideas for students to comprehend and critique. They require varied types of appropriate scaffolds that are multimodal in nature. Refer again to Table 1 for varied support structures in the form of verbal, written, illustrative, graphic, and digital scaffolds. Decide which of these scaffolds are most appropriate for your students' ability levels.

A classic traditional literacy narrative is that of young Abraham Lincoln. The glowing tale of a young 19th-century frontiersman walking miles to attend a one-room schoolhouse is well known. Overcoming obstacles such as poverty, social barriers, parental indifference (from his father), Lincoln's literacy journey followed the route of a successful self-made man; see for example, *How Lincoln Learned to Read: Twelve Great Americans and the Educations That Made Them* by Daniel Wolff. It eventually, as the narrative describes, leads him on the path to the presidency.

Traditional literacy narratives provide opportunities for convergent thinking. The protagonist attempts to solve problems in the most logical and rational ways. In these stories, the seeker often follows a direct, linear route to success. Convergent thinking requires specific

cognitive operations (review Figure 2). As an example, a third-grade student used a simple *think-aloud* scaffold and the *bridging* process (connecting to prior experiences) while reading about the literacy achievements of young Abe Lincoln from the age-appropriate picture book *Stand Tall, Abe Lincoln* by Judith St. George. She reflected, "There is no way I could have done this myself (as Lincoln did) in a pioneer schoolhouse. But it does not matter how you learn to read and write because as long as you work hard at it, you can be successful." Notice how the student made connections to her own prior literacy experiences by using a *bridging* scaffold. She thought aloud about how Abe's literacy experiences were different from her own, but in the end believed that they were both successful.

Traditional literacy narratives often provide a one-sided interpretation of literacy success. However, they offer a foundation for understanding the more complex narrative structure and ambiguous ideas of the counter-literacy narrative.

What Are Counter-Literacy Narratives?

There is a variation of the traditional literacy narrative in which the goals are often ambiguous, conflicting, and multidimensional. Here the literacy journey does not follow a linear pathway, so the protagonist is often compelled to discover unusual and alternative ways to achieve success. Typically, she needs to think in a creative and often duplicitous manner to find her way around fixed obstacles. Success is not always assured, because some societal institutions view literacy as a right only for selected groups of people. Because of the complexity of counter-literacy narratives, more extensive cognitive processing is demanded. Hence, the major focus of this article is on this type of literacy narrative.

This literacy narrative variation is tied to the quest for freedom. Sometimes these stories are referred to as literacy narratives of freedom

because specific literacy sponsors, blockers, and events play a dominant role in the emancipation of oppressed people (Ciardiello, 2012). The protagonist is a person denied freedom to read and write because of racial, ethnic, or gender laws and other societal barriers. Literacy and freedom are inextricably bound together in counter-literacy narratives.

[Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave, Written by Himself](#) (Douglass, 1845/1997)—from this point referred to as *The Narrative*—is the benchmark text that in many ways defines the “genre” of the counter-literacy narrative. The major literacy events in the childhood of Frederick Douglass, which can be read in Chapters 1, 6, and 7, are the focus of this counter-literacy narrative.

The Narrative has been identified as a text exemplar by the CCSS (see [Appendix B](#)). It is recommended for the sixth to eighth grade-level band in terms of text complexity. However, the New York State Common Core State Standards (2013, November 12) includes selections from *The Narrative* as one of a variety of short texts in an instructional module for fourth graders. No doubt the classic is a challenging text, but sections can be read by younger students if provided with flexible and varied support structures, including references to multiple sets of children’s nonfictional and fictional picture books (see Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2. Text Sets of Children and Juvenile Nonfictional Literacy Narratives

Bradby, M. (1995). *More than anything else*. New York, NY: Orchard.

Cameron, A. (1995). *The kidnapped prince: The life of Olaudah Equiano*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

Cline-Ransome, L. (2012). *Words set me free: The story of young Frederick Douglass*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

Girard, L.W. (1994). *Young Frederick Douglass: The slave who learned to read*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman.

Malone, M.G. (Ed.). (2004). *The diary of Susie King Taylor: Civil War nurse*. New York, NY: Marshall Cavendish.

Table 3. Text Sets of Children and Juvenile Fictional Literacy Narratives

Hansen, J. (1997). *I thought my soul would rise and fly: The diary of Patsy, a freed girl, Mars Bluff, South Carolina, 1865*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Lyons, M.E. (2007). *Letters from a slave boy: The story of Joseph Jacobs*. New York, NY: Atheneum Books for Young Children.

McKissack, P.C. (1997). *A picture of freedom: The diary of Clotee, a slave girl, Belmont Plantation, Virginia, 1859*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Vaugh, M. (2003). *Up the learning tree*. New York, NY: Lee & Low.

Whelan, G. (2009). *The listeners*. Chelsea, MI: Sleeping Bear.

Scaffolding Counter-Literacy Narratives Containing Figurative Language

Counter-literacy narratives present not only challenging concepts and thinking skills, but also complex and varied language functions. Figurative language plays a significant role in counter-literacy narratives. Understanding this language function requires your students to comprehend words that have multiple meanings and to analyze ideas that go beyond the stated text. You need to train students to recognize that the protagonist in the story does not always speak in direct or literal language. Researchers tell us that teachers themselves need to have a grasp of figurative language devices if they are to guide and support their students in increasing their understanding of complex texts (Hiebert, 2014).

The CCSS recognizes the importance of learning figurative language. Indeed, it emphasizes that middle-grade students understand and interpret denotative and connotative language, or the literal and implied meanings of text ([L.6.5.c](#)). An important part of detecting implied meanings of text is the ability to demonstrate competency in understanding figurative language ([L.6.5](#)). Figurative language is the expression of ideas in which words convey nuances in meaning. Words often do not mean what they say.

The figurative literary devices of metaphor and irony dominate counter-literacy narratives. You should expect your younger students to be challenged by these language functions because they express implicit and below-surface ideas. There are patterns of thinking associated with metaphor and irony that relate to convergent and divergent thinking. With regard to metaphor, the pattern is generally one of convergence or coming together of different ideas or situations. Similarity or comparison is at the heart of metaphor and is also a major cognitive operation of convergent thinking. Refer to Figure 2 and note that “comparing ideas” is mentioned as a distinctive convergent thinking operation.

In contrast, the literary device of irony deals with ideas and events in opposition (Winner, 1988). Although metaphor and irony both employ convergent and divergent thinking operations, the latter thinking operation is more characteristic of irony. To understand irony, one is required to think in a counterintuitive way about events that are unusual or contradictory. Review Figure 3 for these and other words that signal divergent thinking operations.

SHOTS and Metaphor

The literary device of metaphor plays a prominent role in *The Narrative*. At the beginning of his autobiography, Douglass uses metaphorical language to describe the inhumanity of his slave condition, particularly of being denied knowledge of his birthday. He says,

I have no accurate knowledge of my age.... By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant. (p. 1)

A sixth-grade student reacted to this passage with the following comments in an extract from a teacher/student dialogue.

He (Frederick) was never treated as a human being. He was always treated as an object or an animal. Once he found out his birthday it made him into a real person. I mean he was treated as a human... like all the white boys who got to celebrate their birthday (sic) when they were little.

This student was able to understand Douglass’s poignant use of the slave/horse metaphor in connecting inferior slave status and regressed identity formation. For your students who are not able to understand the complex metaphorical language of *The Narrative*, I suggest you provide an age-appropriate “metaphor poem” that contains the same message. A metaphor poem uses figurative language to make lyrical comparisons between two apparently different subjects. Figure 5 presents a dialogue form to dramatize the similarities between a slave and a horse. Select two students to read aloud each part of the model.

A single counter-literacy event can be of such complexity that it poses a real challenge to comprehension and thinking. In *The Narrative*, this event is the one in which the 7-year-old slave was taught to read by Mrs. Auld, wife of Douglass’s slave master. She readily taught him

Figure 5. Metaphor Poem

“A Slave Is a Horse”		
<i>Subject A</i>	<i>Together</i>	<i>Subject B</i>
I am a slave		I am a horse
I have no human voice		I do not speak
	We are both alike	
I do not know my birthday		I do not know my birthday
I am not allowed to read and write		I can never learn to read and write
	A slave is a horse	

the ABCs and to spell three- and four-letter words from the Bible. This pivotal literacy event, however, represented only one perspective of the situation. The slave master, Mr. Auld, strongly disapproved, and admonished his wife that it was unlawful and unsafe to teach a slave how to read—even a young one. This pivotal event was quite unusual and puzzling for many students to understand as recorded in the following teacher/student dialogue:

Teacher: Did you know that it was illegal or against the law for slaves to learn how to read and write?

Fifth-grade

student: No, that can't be right.

Teacher: I know it doesn't seem right, but unfortunately it's true. [Teacher turned to *illustrations* in David Adler's *A Picture Book of Frederick Douglass* showing Mr. Auld yelling at his wife for teaching the slave boy how to read. The student expressed his disdain over Mr. Auld yelling].

Student: What's his problem? What is he, like a cop? *A reading cop?* [emphasis mine]

Note how in this dialogue the student used a simile and a metaphor (italicized) that relates well to the counter-literacy narrative theme of literacy and freedom. This exemplary example of SHOTS can serve as a model for your less able students. Indeed, one could use the term “more capable peer” to describe the mentoring role this type of student could play in your classroom (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Further, Douglass tells us that his master's prohibition inspired in him a desire and determination to learn all the more. In fact, the young slave admitted the discrepant and unusual idea that he owed almost as much to the bitter opposition of his male slave master as to the kind initial support of his female slave master. He acknowledged the benefits of both his literacy sponsor (Mrs. Auld) and blocker

(Mr. Auld) and claimed “from that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom” (Douglass, 1845/1997, p. 29).

SHOTS, Metaphors, and Other Literary Genres

Before reading the complex metaphorical language in *The Narrative* itself, I suggest that you make the connection between literacy and freedom using other more accessible readings from genres besides literacy narratives. I have taught this complex connection using an easy-to-read poem and an antislavery folk tale. In the first instance, I read aloud a poem entitled “Reading Is the Pathway” by acclaimed African American poet Maya Angelou (2006) from the Foreword in Sandra Pinkney's book *Read and Rise*. Dedicating this poem to her slave heritage, she writes in the first lines that “reading is the river to your liberty.”

To further scaffold this concept, I used an age-appropriate antislavery folk tale. Slaves also expressed themselves using oral forms of literacy such as African folk tales to make the connection between freedom and literacy. African American folklorist Virginia Hamilton (1985) referred to an old tale called “The People Could Fly.” (This folk tale is a CCSS curriculum exemplar for the sixth to eighth grade-level band). The folk tale states that “words could lead to freedom.” Slaves needed to be taught



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these words directly. Not all slaves could fly away but only those who heard and recited the ancient words could. The magical words were “Way above the plantation, way over the slavery land. Say they flew away to freedom” (p. 22). For oppressed people, literacy and oral traditions were not just symbols of freedom, but also they were in a metaphorical sense freedom itself.

In both instances, I used the more accessible metaphorical language of the poem and the folk tale to get this key message across. Decide for yourself how you wish to proceed. Some of your students may be able to deal with the more complex figurative language and cognitive demands of *The Narrative*. For others, the supportive poem and folklore will provide an easier transition to the more challenging text. To teach SHOTS, it is very important that you amplify opportunities for your students to think critically and creatively about the reading instead of simplifying the original text per se (Walqui, 2006).

SHOTS and Irony

Our masters always tried to hide
Book learning from our eyes...
But some of us would try to steal
A little from the book,
And put the words together,
And learn by hook or crook

This is a brief verse from a poem written by a 19th-century African American poet Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1872), entitled “Learning

to Read.” The message is clear: African Americans who were denied the natural rights of literacy often had to perform acts of stealth and trickery to acquire literacy. Indeed, these acts can be described as “stealing literacy.”

After losing his first literacy sponsor (Mrs. Auld), the young Frederick Douglass set out to learn to read on his own. This time he resorted to stealth and trickery. Taking the extra copy-books that the young master Thomas laid aside when he was at school, Douglass would use this spare time to write secretly in the spaces left in the book, copying over what the white boy had written. He continued to do this until he could write in a hand very similar to that of Master Thomas.

I present a SHOTS graphic organizer (refer to Figure 4) to help my students think critically and creatively about different literacy events. This graphic model can be used to represent situations related to “stealing literacy.” A fifth-grade student used this model to facilitate higher order thinking related to the ironical literacy event (see Figure 6). This exemplary student-written work became a scaffolding tool for other students to emulate and use.

Alternative Ways to Scaffold Irony

A lot of rigorous thinking is involved in applying irony to counter-literacy narratives. I suggest you use in-depth and varied scaffolds for this instruction. Begin by *re-presenting* the ironical concept of “stealing literacy” in accessible language from sources that are more age appropriate and text friendly. Figure 7 shows how I re-presented a complex ironic event from *The Narrative* similar to one containing more accessible language from a juvenile fictional book recommended, Patricia McKissack’s (1997) *A Picture of Freedom: The Diary of Clotee, a Slave Girl, Belmont Plantation, Virginia, 1859* (see Table 3).

Picture book illustrations can also be used as scaffolds for dealing with figurative language and higher level thinking. There are a few children’s illustrated books devoted exclusively

Figure 6. SHOTS: Fifth-Grade Student’s Organizer

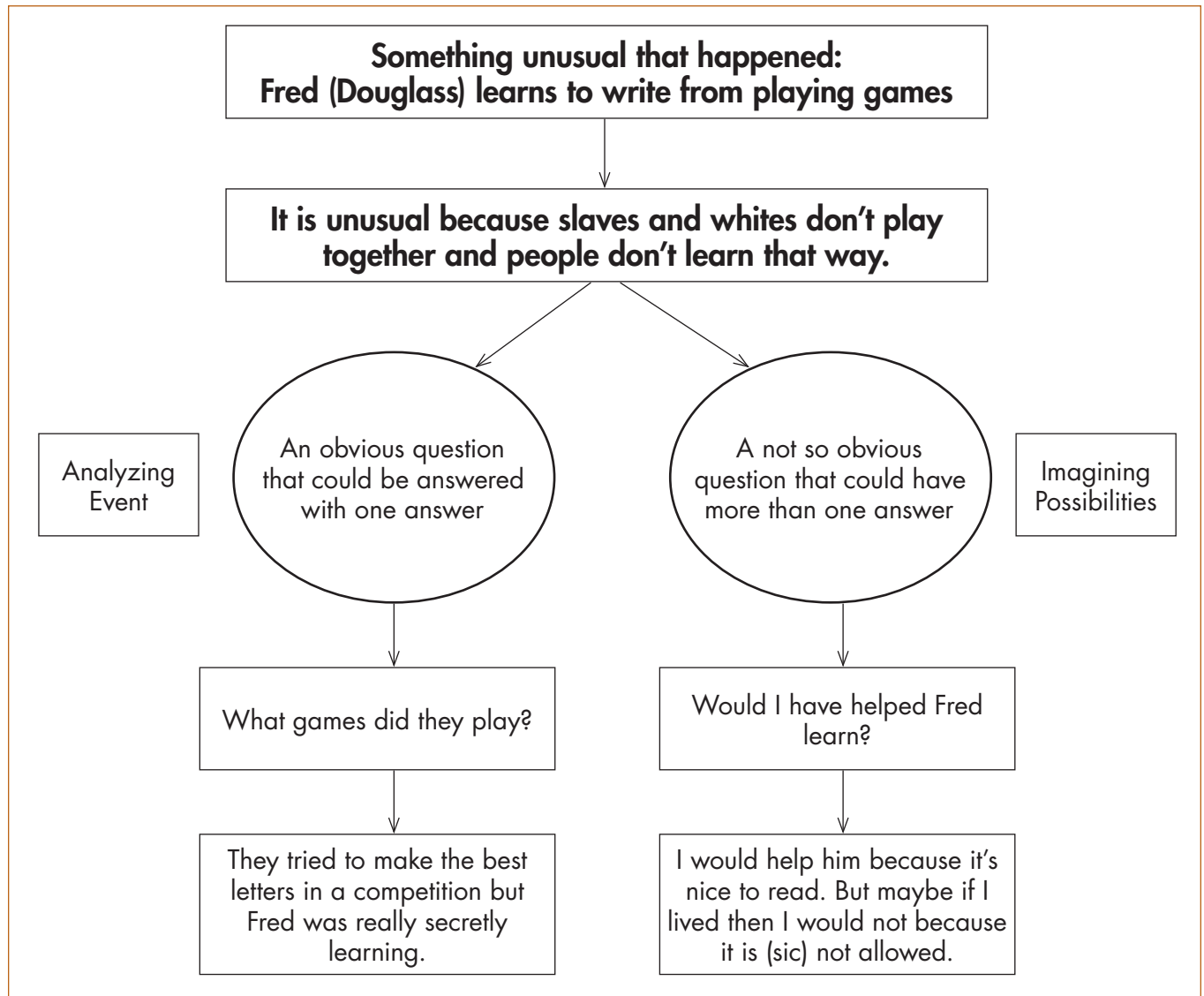


Figure 7. Different Genre Versions of a Similar Literacy Event

Juvenile Fictional Account: *A picture of freedom: The diary of Clotee, a slave girl, Belmont Plantation, Virginia, 1859* (Young slave Chloe) “Slaves aine s’posed to know how to read and write, but I do. Miz Lilly would fell down in a fit if she knew I had made myself a diary like the one she’s (she has) on her bed. And I aim to write in it whenever I get a chance” (pp. 3–4). “I let up writing for a few days, ‘cause I’ve been too scared to go near the hiding spot, what with Missy slipping around” (p. 86).

Autobiographical Memoir: *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, An American slave, written by himself* (Young slave Frederick) “My little Master had gone to school, and learned how to write, and had written over a number of copy-books. These had been brought home and laid aside.... When left thus (alone in the house) I used to spend time in writing in the spaces left in Master Thomas’s copy-book, copying what he had written. I continued to do this until I could write in a hand very similar to that of Master Thomas” (p. 56).

to the literacy quest of the young Douglass, such as *Words Set Me Free: The Story of Young Frederick Douglass* by Lesa Cline-Ransome and *Young Frederick Douglass: The Slave Who Learned to Read* by Linda Walvoord Girard (see Table 2).

I suggest you do a picture walk focusing on unexpected events such as the one in which the young slave is tricking the white boys to teach him how to read and write. Illustrations of this literacy event can be found in the two

mentioned sources. Then refer to the same incident in Chapter 7 of *The Narrative*. Have students compare both print and illustrated versions. To further support student thinking about this ironic literacy event, you can use a complementary scaffold that is presented in matrix form (see Figure 8).

The hidden motives of young Douglass contain metaphor as well as irony. On occasion, young Douglass sought out new literacy sponsors from poor white boys on the streets of Baltimore. Often the well-fed slave would trade extra food that he carried with him in exchange for reading assistance. As Douglass (1845/1997) described the literacy event, “the bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins was done so that in return they would give me the more valuable bread of knowledge” (p. 33). See Figure 9 for an alternative SHOTS to aid in the understanding of the “bread of knowledge” metaphor.

Also you can employ children’s and juvenile nonfictional biographical literature to support understanding. I have used *More Than Anything Else*, a picture book biography by Marie Bradby of another young slave, Booker T. Washington. This young slave also was determined to read against the wishes of his master, driven by what Washington called “a hunger in my head” (Bradby, 1995, p. 7). Compare the different examples of metaphorical language related to the same literacy event in both *More Than Anything Else* and *The Narrative*.

For your students who continue to be challenged by this complex literacy event, I recommend using the very accessible fictional picture book accounts *Up the Learning Tree* by Marcia Vaughn and *The Listeners* by Gloria Whelan. See Table 3 for additional childhood and juvenile fictional accounts illustrating the metaphor of “stealing literacy.”

SHOTS and Ambiguity

Ambiguous literacy events in *The Narrative* may require additional instructional scaffolding especially with regard to conflicting interpretations of the same literacy event. One of these rigorous texts is the one in which Douglass suggests that literacy has been a paradox for him. He sees it as both a blessing and a curse. Refer to Chapter 7 in *The Narrative*. For this complex idea, I suggest that you model the process of *chunking*. This is a process of breaking down contradictory text into smaller and manageable semantic units. Often these units can be divided by highlighting complex phrases or clauses by using different types of font or with color coding (Kibler, Walqui, & Bunch, 2014; see Figure 10). To further enhance this skill, I suggest also that you guide students into *rewriting* and *paraphrasing* each of the highlighted parts. Provide vocabulary aids to help students with difficult and arcane vocabulary such as *writhed*, *sting my soul*, and *unutterable anguish* in this excerpt. More on how

Figure 8. Scaffold for Figurative Language: Irony

Type of figurative language	Literacy event	What you expect to happen	What actually happened
Irony: saying or doing something opposite to intention	Using deception to learn to read and write	Slave boy plays games with white boys in an ostensibly fun activity	Slave boy uses stealth to trick white boys into teaching him how to read and write—a forbidden activity

Figure 9. Scaffold for Figurative Language: Metaphor

Type of figurative language	Literacy event	Description of first similar item	Description of second similar item
Metaphor: comparing one thing in terms of another	Young slave trades extra food for forbidden literacy lessons	Reading and writing	bread

Figure 10. Chunking Irony in Different Fonts

“As I read and contemplated the subject (slavery), **behold! That very discontentment which Master Hugh had predicted would follow my learning to read** had already come, to torment and sting my soul to unutterable anguish. As I writhed under it, **I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing.**”

to use the chunking scaffold can be found at www.facing.org/resources/strategies/chunking.

Recognizing the notion that a single literacy event can have a contradictory effect stimulates the divergent thinking characteristic of tolerating ambiguity. Your students might be puzzled and wonder how literacy can be both a blessing and curse at the same time. This ambiguous situation stimulates divergent thinking. Model the following *question prompt* to generate a class discussion: Can both of these conflicting ideas be correct in some way?

Becoming Independent Thinkers

The goal of instructional scaffolding is not to maintain support structures indefinitely when applying the cognitive/literary strategy. Rather it is to gradually remove and eventually eliminate scaffolding. This objective aligns well with CCSS, which strives to have K–12 students become independent thinkers and self-directed learners.

To advance the progression of students towards independent thinking, it would be helpful to refer to the onion graphic in Figure 1. Note the recursive nature of the spiral model. Move back and forth through the different layers depending on your students’ abilities to adjust to the increasing complexity of the literacy narratives. For example, while students are reading and thinking critically and creatively about the counter-literacy narrative of Douglass, you can guide them into making connections between their own personal literacy experiences and that of the heroic slave. A perceptive third-grade student made this connection while practicing this strategy. She said in disbelief, “I cannot believe that Frederick Douglass had to go through

all of that just to learn how to read and write.... I did not learn how to read in secret.” This student started to *reinterpret* her own literacy experiences in a new light. She developed an insight and appreciation that *not* everyone’s path to literacy is a straightforward process. She learned that there other factors that are often outside of one’s personal efforts and responsibilities. Becoming literate can have multiple meanings, sometimes even conflicting ones.

Further, *retelling* literacy narratives provides opportunities to challenge your students’ romantic notions of literacy, which are especially evident during the personal literacy phase. These romantic notions include descriptions of literacy agents in one-dimensional terms. In contrast, the motives and intentions of key figures in counter-literacy narratives are often self-conflicting. Recall how this became evident in the manner in which Douglass viewed his own literacy as both a blessing and a curse. By providing a richer multidimensional portrait of literacy, you can guide your students to independently *revise* and *rewrite* their own literacy narratives in the light of their new knowledge.

Conclusion

The cognitive/literary strategy presented here stimulates the progressive development of SHOTS. Incorporated within the strategy are instructional scaffolding tools and procedures to teach students to generate convergent and divergent thinking operations when reading three different types of increasingly complex literacy narratives. This article focused mostly on counter-literacy narratives because they are the most complex and rigorous of the genre. I suggest that teachers use the scaffolds cyclically and flexibly in attempting to accomplish the CCSS. Because the standards are considered to be a “living work,” adaptable to change, I believe that applying the support structures presented here can provide a durable foundation for purposeful student expression in language, literacy, and higher order thinking. Teaching SHOTS is vital for 21st-century learning and living.

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