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How to Conduct a Critical Discourse Analysis of a Text: A Guide for Teachers

■ In spite of the increasing emphasis on the role that racial, social class, and gender issues play in second language acquisition and ESL instructional research, little has been written on how to identify or analyze such issues in current ESL texts. This article answers that call in the literature. Drawing on examples from two popular ESL texts, this article presents a method organized around the concept of critical language awareness (CLA) for conducting a critical discourse analysis of ESL texts. Implications for practice reveal how completing a critical discourse analysis of a text can offer teachers valuable information on how to deepen instruction on issues around race, class, and gender.

Question From Text: *What things about York made the Indians admire him?*

Text: *Although York was Clark's slave, he was a well-respected member of the expedition, using his strength and power to help the group survive in the wilderness. In fact, Lewis and Clark were able to build good relations with many Native American tribes because the people were so curious about York. They were amazed by York's black skin, size and strength. In 1811, Clark gave York his freedom.* (Kroll, 2000, p. 88)

This passage is taken from *High Point: Success in Language, Literature, Content* (Teacher's Edition) by Alfredo Schifini,

Deborah Short, and Josefina Villamil Tinajero (2000), a language arts text for middle-school English as a second language (ESL) students. On the surface, the passage is an ordinary one that asks the students about why the Indians admired York. Put in the hands of a middle-school teacher who works from a content-based model of instruction, an approach that emphasizes the connections and strengths of combining language and content instruction, it could be paired with previously introduced vocabulary and skills-building work and used to develop the students' literacy skills. In the hands of a skilled teacher, it could be extended to a discussion on the nature of the Native Americans during Lewis and Clark's time and the ways in which Lewis and Clark were able to establish relationships with the Native Americans.

The same passage viewed by a teacher working within a framework of critical discourse analysis would view the exchange very differently. The reader begins with the awareness that the text does not represent the only source of information about Lewis and Clark or York. While each author may tell a similar story or begin with the same facts, the biases and beliefs of the author influence how that story is told. The reader's job is to uncover these biases. As such, the reader might ask a number of questions about the text: Why, for instance, is York's black skin a curiosity to the Native Americans? Why does the description open with a subordinating clause to describe York's identity as a slave? If York's skin and physique and skin were a curiosity, what does that mean for how Africans were understood in the 19th century?

Of the two lenses for evaluating a text, the first is probably the most familiar to many teachers. Content-based instruction is rooted in the excellent texts by Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (2003), Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2004), and Peregoy and Boyle (2005). Drawing on the works of Stoller (2002), Krashen (1982), and Swain (1985), Peregoy and Boyle explain that the content-based teacher "provides multiple opportunities for extensive reading, student choice, and collab-

oration in projects" (p. 317). According to Peregoy and Boyle, there are at least three advantages of combining language and content: First, it allows students to keep pace with academic topics while they are still learning English. Second, it increases student involvement by making use of authentic tasks. Finally, students receive content material that is appropriately adapted for their level of English development.

Critical discourse analysis, on the other hand, has only recently made its way into ESL instruction. Nonetheless, it represents a popular research method and theory that is often employed to investigate language learning and teaching (e.g., Case, 2005; Ernst-Slavit, 1997; Rogers, 2004). It is based upon the premise that stories are not a neutral source of information but driven by an underlying set of beliefs and assumptions set by the author(s) of the story. Students are charged with not only mastering the language and content of a story—as in a content-based approach—but extending their study of language to uncovering those assumptions.

This article provides a theoretically based but practical method of conducting a critical discourse analysis of a text. This method is of value to ESL teachers and administrators who wish to assess the ways in which textbook questions, activities, and exercises address problems around race, class, gender, and language in the lives of ESL students. The examples given in this article primarily relate to race, but the method is broad enough to encompass investigations of class, disabilities, gender, or any issue presented in texts. The organizational framework is based upon Fairclough's (1989) concept of critical language awareness (CLA), a four-step instructional application of critical discourse analysis.

The Need for a Critical Approach to Texts

From the literature on second language acquisition, researchers have increasingly turned their attention to exploring how social group membership in relationship to race, social class, and gender influence the process-

es of second language acquisition (SLA). Social groups, according to Peirce (1995) and McKay and Wong (1996), provide learners opportunities to use the second language. This is important because second language learners, for instance, who have large networks of friends in class, on sports teams, in the school band, or in after-school activities will be able to use their second language in many settings and for a variety of different reasons. These students are motivated to become a part of the group, or as Peirce (1995) explains, invest in the group. The outcome of investing in a group and using the language in a variety of social settings is the rapid development of second language proficiency.

While social groups offer a conduit to second language proficiency, membership is not always easily achieved. According to McKay and Wong (1996), second language learners may be excluded from joining social groups by teachers, other second language learners, or native English-speaking classmates because of beliefs reflected throughout society about race, social class, and gender. As an example of how second language learners control group membership, McKay and Wong document how Brad, a student from mainland China, grew discouraged with learning and began misbehaving in class. He became defensive with his classmates from Taiwan who came from families with more money and regularly teased them about their different skin color and physical features.

Case (2004) builds upon the work of McKay and Wong (1996) and Peirce (1995) and details the instruction of Mr. Wilson, a highly successful ESL instructor who discovered that his students were restricted from social groups based on their religion and social class. For instance, a problem that many of the students had was how to maintain the strict Islamic prayer schedule. When students tried to pray outside of Mr. Wilson's class, they were mocked and often physically harassed. When they prayed inside Mr. Wilson's class, they requested a special section of the room and their prayer blankets to kneel upon.

To create opportunities for his students to join various social groups inside and outside of the ESL classroom, Mr. Wilson drew on his own experiences with racial and social class discrimination and created a critically based curriculum. Mr. Wilson organized a unit of instruction on the Muslim world that explored its history and geography. They watched news reports, read short articles, and listened as Muslim students described their experiences in their native homes. As students progressed through the unit, a sense of community emerged within the class. Barriers that once existed along racial and religious lines began to break down as opportunities opened for students—Muslim and non-Muslims alike—to use English.

Despite this recognition of how race, class, and gender play into instruction and second language acquisition, few have explored the ways in which inequity issues are presented in ESL texts or offered guidance for teachers on how to explore such issues. According to Grady (1997), “A critical approach to what kinds of knowledge are legitimated in ESL texts and programs has been slow to emerge” (p. 7). Most of the challenges to the ideologies and politics of ESL programs and texts have focused on the areas of adult education or teaching English internationally and ignored the political, social, and cultural challenges that middle- and high-school ESL students in the US face each day.

In response, this article explores a variety of techniques ESL teachers and administrators can use to examine texts from a critical perspective. The purpose is not to judge the value of a particular text, nor to give a full accounting of critical discourse analysis. That is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, I introduce some basic techniques teachers can use to assess how such problems as racial, religious, and social class intolerance in the lives of ESL students are addressed in textbook questions, activities, exercises, and illustrations. The techniques I introduce are drawn from work by Case (2005), who adapts Fairclough’s (1989) model of critical language awareness (CLA) to conduct an analysis of

language arts textbooks for ESL students. After a brief introduction of the texts used for illustration, I introduce the background concepts concerning CLA and then present examples of how to apply selected CLA techniques. The article ends with suggestions for ways teachers can put into practice what they have learned as a result of this type of analysis.

The Texts

Two widely used content-based language arts texts for middle-school students provide the examples. They are *High Point: Success in Language, Literature, Content (Teacher’s Guide)* by Alfredo Schifini, Deborah Short, and Josefina Villamil Tinajero (2000) and *Voices in Literature* by Mary Lou McCloskey and Lydia Stack (1996). Schifini, Short, and Tinajero (2000) is the most advanced text in a larger series of three texts, and the one from which I draw the majority of examples. The stories are organized according to five themes: (a) the creative touch, (b) the force of discovery, (c) turning problems into solutions, (d) it’s up to you, and (e) breaking through the barriers. The second text, *Voices in Literature*, is a literature-based text with a thematic focus designed to meet the needs of beginning English language learners, grades 6-8. Five themes organize this text as well: (a) patterns, (b) nature, (c) messages, (d) people, and (d) peace. These, however, are not detailed with subthemes as they are in Schifini, Short, and Tinajero (2000).

Critical Language Awareness: Background Concepts

The notion of CLA was developed by Norman Fairclough (1989) as an instructional application of his work on critical discourse analysis. Fairclough explains that the application of CLA began in England and later spread to the US, Australia, and South Africa. Fairclough argues that because schools or school systems are unprepared to bridge the racial, linguistic, and class gaps students encounter in the classrooms, students must be given the resources to take control of their

own learning and reduce these gaps themselves. Fairclough offers CLA as an instructional approach aimed at helping students to read a text critically and to find opportunities in their own lives to change these inequities. Below, I review the concepts of discourse, ideology, and language. These provide the background for understanding how to conduct a critical discourse analysis.

Discourse and Ideology

Fairclough (1989) equates the concept of discourse with language. Any use of language, whether it is speaking, an advertisement, or a narrative in a textbook, is a form of discourse. How language is used, however, is not neutral or apolitical. Speakers and writers ground the use of language in a set of beliefs, or what Fairclough terms ideologies. Because ideologies are belief systems, they can vary with different individuals. For instance, some individuals may hold an ideology that strongly supports bilingual education while others may not. A number of examples are possible, but Fairclough is most interested in those connected to race, class, or gender.

Ideology and Discursive Acts

Fairclough (1989) is interested in how writers influence readers' thoughts on a particular topic, in other words, how they advance a particular ideology, through the subtle use of very specific features of language. The example below, which is fictional, is set in a school lounge between two ESL teachers.

- T1: Why is Mei-ling struggling in her speech class? Bob said that she doesn't seem motivated at all. Doesn't she come from a real traditional Chinese family?
- T2: While Chinese students are often motivated and do have a lot of family support to succeed, Bob told me that the problem is with her pronunciation. She is always dropping the ends off of her words and he can't understand her.

In this example, teacher one (T1) places Mei-ling's failure in speech class in opposition (a discursive act) with the values of a traditional Chinese family when she asks if Mei-ling comes from a "traditional Chinese family." This cues an ideology on Asian-Americans as the model minority who succeed because of family values that are consistent with the schools'. Teacher two (T2) subordinates the importance of the ideology through the use of the word "while" and argues that Mei-ling's failure can more clearly be attributed to a problem with pronunciation.

The use of the word "while" is what Fairclough (1989) terms a discursive act. It has the ability to subordinate, in a very subtle way, one ideology in favor of another. Other examples of discursive acts include the use of the passive voice and coordinating conjunctions. In this example as in others, discursive acts are important to the teacher doing a discourse analysis because they offer landmarks that point to ideologies.

Language

Fairclough (1989) explains that language can be defined and studied in at least two ways. The first is to study language use and variation as a shared code in every individual. Learners make choices about how to use language based on individual competence, viewing as less important the influence of the local community, the broader culture, religion, race, class, or gender on how language is used. Teachers working under this model would be most concerned about helping students in mastering the formal features of language. Grammar exercises, drills, vocabulary work, and skill-driven assignments that emphasize high technical mastery of the language are how students will master the code.

Fairclough rejects this in favor of a view of language use that is tied to the context in which it is used. Language, according to Fairclough (1989), is in a two-way relationship to society. On one hand, language acts as a social phenomenon. When students read a text, they become a part of the larger discus-

sion on that particular topic. On the other hand, social phenomena are also linguistic. Discussions, for instance, on how to best describe groups such as the homeless, those with disabilities, or linguistic minorities are often a war of words. The language itself is more than a reflection of the debate but a real and integral part of it. The words themselves become part of the phenomenon.

Thus, teachers working under Fairclough's model will always teach language with an eye toward how it is used in different settings. A story, for instance, about a young boy in a wheelchair would necessitate a discussion about the different words that are used to describe people with disabilities. Students might list the words, talk about their connotations, and then investigate why and how they have changed. In this way, the words themselves become more than a piece in the puzzle or another clue to crack the code. Students come to recognize language as a social phenomenon, one that is contested and part of an ongoing discussion.

Critical Language Awareness: Stages of Evaluation

According to Fairclough (1989), instruction operates from the assumption that all text is driven by a set of beliefs or ideologies that the author hopes to forward, and an important part of developing literacy skills is gaining the ability to detect those ideologies. Fairclough explains that instruction moves the students through four stages: reflection, systemizing, explanation, and developing practice. Collectively, these stages allow students to ponder how discourses in the stories connect to their own lives (reflection), how language is used to advance the beliefs that authors hold and make them appear as common sense (systemizing and explanation), and, finally, how students can find ways to change these discourses in their own lives (developing practice).

How these stages of instruction can be translated into a method for evaluating texts is introduced by Case (2005) in his study of ESL textbooks. Below, Case's (2005) methods are expanded and modified for classroom use. Table 1 shows how the CLA evaluation

Table 1
CLA Framework

<i>What to focus on</i>	<i>Where to look</i>	<i>What kind of information</i>
Potential to inspire discussion around themes that touch issues concerning race, class, or gender from the story	Primarily prereading but throughout text	Visual information such as pictures and illustrations Linguistic information such as questions, exercises, and activities
Extent to which text asks students to critically examine the use of language in the story as it relates to issues around race, class, or gender	Work given during reading such as combinations	Linguistic information such as question/answer Discursive acts such as subordination, passive voice
Questions are analyzed for their potential to inspire student to take action on an issue of interest	Postreading	Linguistic information such as questions, activities, and exercises

process is based on the organization common to many language arts textbooks: a) prereading, b) during reading, and c) postreading. Also addressed is how to assess visual information, illustrations, and pictures. The assessment of linguistic information, including questions, question and answer combinations, activities, and exercises, is also streamlined for use in the classroom.

Prereading

Work begins in the prereading section of the textbook. The prereading section of a textbook generally includes questions, activities, or exercises that direct the students' attention to key topics in the story before beginning reading. It may, for instance, ask the students to examine a picture and predict what the story will be about. Here, teachers determine the extent to which illustrations, pictures, questions, and vocabulary work to provide opportunities for students to discuss issues concerning race, class, and gender. Reflection, which calls for teachers to open a discussion on the themes that concern these issues, is the thrust of the analysis. Successful examples prompt students to discuss, consider, or write about the connections between the ideologies within the text and their lives.

According to Case (2005), an example of a successful question that engages the students in reflection comes from the prereading section of Chambers's (2000) *Amistad*. Here, the students are asked to consider what the words freedom and slavery make them think of and then to create symbols to represent the meanings of those words. The question references a thought-provoking picture of a young African male standing in front of a slave ship. While the question clearly will build language skills in a way that is consistent with a content-based approach, it also opens the possibility for the teacher to open a discussion on race, the language that is used to depict people from different races, and how that language is used to advance certain beliefs about race and subordinate other beliefs.

An example of a picture that would pro-

vide a thought-provoking springboard for a discussion on the intersection between race and beauty comes from Alvarez (2000). A teenage girl from the Dominican Republic is pictured on the first page of the story. There are two images of her posed in front of the American flag. In the foreground image, she is holding her head in her hands and smiling. The background image is more ephemeral and shows the teenager posed in a Miss America costume. The opening question asks the students to respond to the question, "Is looking like everyone else important?" (p. 117), and then to create a graph of their responses. Next, the teacher leads a discussion on what they think that Julia, the teenager in the story, is dreaming about. This question provides an excellent opportunity to discuss how beauty is viewed across different cultures. In the US, for instance, the emphasis is on being slim and tall. Other cultures may determine beauty in a very different way.

In contrast, Kroll's (2000) *Lewis and Clark* provides an example of a prereading exercise that is more driven by a content-based instruction than a critical one. Kroll opens with a drawing of Lewis, Clark, York, and Sacagawea in front of a mountain, valley, and river. The question asks, "What problems do you think the explorers had?" The possible answers given in the text are "bad weather, waterfalls, lack of food and hostile Indians" (p. 83). While this is a reasonable question, it does not ask the students to reference how questions related to race, class, or gender within the expedition might be reflected in their own lives.

During Reading

This section involves students in answering and completing questions, exercises, or activities that require reading of the text. Students may be asked, for example, to answer comprehension questions about events in the story or complete a vocabulary exercise using words from the story. The thrust of analysis during reading is to examine the extent to which the questions, activities, and exercises

presented by the textbook authors help students to critically examine the text and understand the discourses that the authors forward in the stories. This is an important change in focus. In prereading, analysis centers on locating opportunities that the textbook authors provide students to examine discourses concerning race, class, or gender in relationship to themselves. Analysis during reading involves examining the relationship between the questions, activities, or exercises written by the textbook authors and the discourses in the stories. Questions that reflect a critical perspective will point students' attention to the discourses in the stories.

Work in this stage begins by locating question/answer combinations given during reading. Teachers can begin by narrowing the selection of question/answer combinations for analysis by focusing on those passages that contain discursive acts such as coordination, subordination, or euphemism. Not every passage will contain a discursive act, but those that do will often mark a larger discourse on race, class, or gender. This process of sorting passages by those that contain discursive acts and those that do not is what Fairclough (1989) terms systemizing. It's important that discursive acts are only suggestive of larger discourses and ideologies. Teachers should use them as a cue or landmark for finding issues in the text and not associate every discursive act with a discourse and ideology.

Kroll's (2000) Lewis and Clark provides an example of a question/answer combination that is appropriate for analysis. The passage below is a description of York. The question from Schifini, Short, and Tinajero (2000) asks, "What things about York made the Indians admire him (p. 88)?" The answer is a description of York.

Although York was Clark's slave, he was a well-respected member of the expedition, using his strength and power to help the group survive in the wilderness. In fact, Lewis and Clark were able to build good relations with many Native American

tribes because the people were so curious about York. They were amazed by York's black skin, size and strength. In 1811, Clark gave York his freedom. (p. 88)

By emphasizing York's physical appearance, Kroll (2000) builds a discourse concerning race. York's black skin becomes a curiosity that helps the expedition, and there is no mention of what kinds of skills he may have had that would have helped the expedition.

A textbook question written from a critical perspective will ask the reader to explore how the writer has opened this discussion on race. It may point students' attention to how Kroll (2000) used subordination or ask the students to consider how Africans were treated during the time of Lewis and Clark. Fairclough (1989) labels this kind of work explanation because it directs the students to question the text. Teachers should not be surprised to find multiple passages like the one above in their texts. Texts that fail to include this component will focus students' attention on the semantic and grammatical features of language and ignore the social context of language.

Clearly, the associated question from Schifini, Short, and Tinajero (2000), "What things about York made the Indians admire him?" (p. 88) is not written from a critical perspective, and it is more reflective of a content-based approach. For the question to address a critical perspective, it would have to ask the reader to consider how a discourse connected to race defined York. For instance, students might be asked to consider if this passage helps the reader to understand something about slavery and how it defined what it means to be black.

Identifying the role of illustrations relies more on judgment. Teachers cannot rely on discursive acts to suggest the presence of a discourse but must consider the illustration in light of what they know about issues concerning race, class, or gender. An example of a picture/question combination that cues a discourse on gender and people with disabilities can be found in Howard's (2000) *Aimee*

Mullins: World-Class Athlete. The photograph shows Aimee sitting with a long, white, satin dress holding a barbell. The question on page 243 asks, "Do her actions show that she considers herself ordinary? How?" Below the picture, the caption reads, "Aimee is both glamorous and athletic."

The question and caption are strong examples of how to approach the analysis of an illustration from a critical perspective. Because the picture is at the end of the story and the reader is aware of the fact that Aimee is a double below-the-knee amputee, both the caption and the question challenge the readers to consider the discourse Howard presents on gender and disability. Even upon very close inspection of the photograph, it is nearly impossible to determine that both legs are artificial. Accordingly, the picture adds to a discourse that because of advances in prosthetics women with artificial limbs can be glamorous and athletic.

Postreading

Postreading activities, questions, and exercises occur after the students have finished reading the story. Examples may involve the students in completing a small drawing showing what they have learned or discussing how they can apply what they have read to a problem in their own school. The purpose of postreading for the teacher is to examine the postreading questions, activities, exercises, and illustrations for their potential to inspire what Fairclough (1989) terms emancipatory discourse. From an instructional perspective, this means that students are asked to apply what they have learned by searching for a solution to a problem that they have read about and studied. As an example, after students read about Lewis and Clark in Schifini, Short, and Tinajero (2000), they might investigate whether or not there are written accounts of the Teton Sioux, the Yankton Sioux, or the Arikaras, written by members of the tribe or someone else, that tell the story of Lewis and Clark from the perspective of the Native Americans. If so, the

students could write a petition requesting that the school library buy the books. While this is a project that takes place on a very small scale, it is consistent with the notion of emancipatory discourse because it serves to open a new discussion on the experience of the Native Americans during the time of Lewis and Clark.

Evaluating texts for their potential to engage students in emancipatory discourse requires teachers to search for the kinds of activities, questions, or exercises described above. Howard's (2000) *Aimee Mullins* provides an interesting example. After reading the story about Aimee Mullins's accomplishments as a double below-the-knee amputee athlete in track and field, the students are asked to conduct a survey of the accessibility of public places for people with disabilities and send what they have learned to the mayor. Presumably, the letter would call for a change in access to the buildings.

Suggestions for Practice

While teachers may choose to tally the number of questions, activities, or exercises that are representative of the stages of CLA after completing a critical discourse analysis of a text, there is a more practical use. Armed with a deeper understanding of the ways that text and story interact concerning issues of class, race, and gender, teachers can use what they have learned to extend their current content-based texts. An instructor who uses a CLA framework to evaluate stories can answer questions about how, when, and where to supplement content-based instruction and assessment.

Information gathered from an analysis of prereading can guide teachers on how to improve prereading instruction. Typically, prereading exercises include a vocabulary component in which the students must master upcoming key language within the story. The CLA framework encourages the teacher to seek out additional vocabulary and extend the study of the selected vocabulary to a discussion of the ways that ideal-

ogy and discourse are used within the story. An excellent example of this is from Chambers's (2000) *Amistad*, but other stories hold the same potential. In *On Speaking Up for Each Other*, Niemoller (2000) describes the systematic killing of one group after another in Nazi Germany and the unwillingness of any one group to speak up against it. The vocabulary items include "communists, Jews, trade unionists, Catholics, and Protestant." After students are given the opportunity to learn the meanings of these items through pictures or discussion (a content-based approach), they could determine how they are described within the story in relationship to the events in Nazi Germany (a critical approach).

Information collected during reading gives teachers ideas about how textbook questions, exercises, and activities interact with the discourse and ideology found in stories. This will include question/answer combinations, pictures or illustrations, and discursive acts such as subordination and the passive voice and will help teachers to understand how and when to both deconstruct and reconstruct the discourse within a text. I have illustrated how to deconstruct a text. Reconstructing the stories and their discourses occurs when teachers supply additional readings about a topic. Teachers who lead their students in a reading of *Lewis and Clark*, for instance, would recognize that an additional reading or discussion on the slavery of the time would be a valuable way of helping students to examine how York is portrayed. Texts such as *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt* (Hopkinson, 1993), *Nightjohn* (Paulsen, 1993), or *Nettie's Trip South* (Turner, 1987) describe the experiences of Africans during the time of slavery and would provide excellent supplements. Questions, activities, and exercises from the textbook collected from postreading inform teachers on the extent to which the text pushes students into taking action on a particular issue. While this is a task that relies on the teacher's judgment about time and appropriateness, it is also one that would

benefit teachers who decide to begin a project that calls for change.

Throughout the instructional process, CLA calls on teachers to find ways in which students can take a thoughtful and critical disposition toward their own learning that extends what is done in content-based instruction. The advantage of such an approach is that students become actively engaged in their own learning and begin to take ownership of the stories that they read and the issues that they elect to take on in their community. This is done through CLA as students expand their understanding of how language is used to advance the motivations and biases of authors. Students learn about the importance of connotation in vocabulary, develop a historical perspective on what they read, and ask questions aimed at uncovering the bias and motivations of the authors they study. All of this is necessary for critical and analytical thinking and writing assignments.

This approach is so interesting because it is empowering on many levels. This begins during reading with the premise that the text is only one source among many on any given topic and part of learning about any subject is questioning the content. It continues into postreading as the emphasis becomes finding ways in which students can act on what they have learned, educate others about a problem, and search for a solution.

Clearly, there are some challenges to implementing a CLA approach. Probably the largest obstacle for busy teachers is finding the time to conduct an analysis. It requires a closeup analysis of the story in relationship to the questioning, some background in linguistics, and a fairly broad understanding of the larger social issues facing ESL students. While these are formidable challenges, there are some solutions. First, teachers can begin with analyzing a single story that concerns issues that they are knowledgeable about. Working with the pictures is a good start, and it is something that students can do immediately as well. ESL teachers can work with content-area teachers to learn more about the

topics a story may address. Social studies teachers, literature teachers, and science teachers could all contribute their expertise on the importance of their subject to understanding a text.

Critical discourse analysis of texts is still new to the literature on teaching and SLA. Teachers who decide to pioneer its use in their classes will make an important decision that speaks to the purposes behind teaching ESL students to read and write and the very definition of literacy. Within a content-based approach, the definition of literacy and its purpose is tied to the comprehension of the text. This, of course, is key for students at all levels and must be a first step. Beyond that, teachers must consider more sophisticated ways of involving students in social change through interrogating the readings they are given and finding ways in which they rebuild the discourses that touch students' lives. This is the work of critical theory in general and CLA in particular, and it is a needed step.

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