



THE 4C'S

After reading a text:

- **Connections:** What *connections* do you draw between the text and your own life or your other learning?
- **Challenge:** What ideas, positions, or assumptions do you want to *challenge* or argue with in the text?
- **Concepts:** What *key concepts* or ideas do you think are important and worth holding on to from the text?
- **Changes:** What *changes* in attitudes, thinking, or action are suggested by the text, either for you or others?

Nonfiction texts of varying sorts are used in all subject areas and across all age ranges. It can easily be taken for granted that these texts simply provide a source of content information. Although certainly nonfiction can be a very rich source of information, these texts can also provide a means to elicit vibrant discussions and further develop deep thinking. The 4C's routine provides a set of questions that encourage learners to grapple with the information provided in the text in a purposeful and structured way.

Purpose

This routine provides learners with a structure for a text-based discussion built around making connections, asking questions, identifying key ideas, and considering application. It encourages the reading and revisiting of texts in a focused, purposeful way that enables readers to delve beneath the surface and go beyond first impressions. Although originally designed for use with nonfiction texts, it can be applied to fiction as well with only minor changes.

Each step asks for different thinking moves that correspond to the kinds of active, thoughtful reading teachers want all readers to do. Although presented here in an order, and this order may be kept to facilitate discussion, each of these thinking moves is actually nonlinear in the practice of reading for comprehension. Asking the learner to make *connections* between the text and their own experiences personalizes the content while broadening it, as each new connection adds dimension to the text. Identifying *challenges* invites critical thinking and conveys to readers that one should raise questions

of truth and veracity as one reads nonfiction texts. Recognizing *key concepts* requires learners to compare and prioritize ideas to uncover themes and messages. The idea of identifying possible *changes* to one's behavior or approach asks learners to think beyond information to consider its import and how it might be used. This calls for both analytical thinking and synthesis.

Selecting Appropriate Content

The 4C's routine works most effectively when utilized with texts that incorporate complex ideas and concepts that can be considered from more than one perspective and are "meaty" enough to encourage grappling with ideas and promote discussion and debate. Texts can come from a wide variety of sources and can include excerpts from opinion papers, newspaper articles, scientific reports, scholarly articles, personal essays, and so on. It is possible some textbooks may be appropriate; however, often textbooks try to not put forth any position or opinion overtly while spelling out key concepts in bold print. This tends to makes them less interesting sources for discussion. Although texts provide a vehicle for review, the routine can also be used with video or after listening to a provocative presentation such as a TED talk (www.ted.com).

Fiction can be a source of material as well if chosen with the steps in mind. Some simple modification on the wording would generally be appropriate. For instance, under "Challenges," you might ask students to focus on character actions with which they disagree. "Concepts" can be related to themes. "Changes" can focus on how the characters themselves changed and evolved over the course of the story and what caused those changes. However, with some stories it may be appropriate to ask, "How does the story *change* your thinking about things? What do you take away as a lesson or key learning?"

Steps

1. *Set up.* Invite learners to read the selected text either before the session if it is a lengthy text, or provide adequate reading time at the commencement of the session. After the routine has been learned, it is often useful for learners to know that the 4C's will be the framework for discussing the text. List the 4C's in a place clearly visible to all learners as a framework for the discussion.

2. *Make connections.* After reading the text, invite learners to find passages from the text that they can identify with, either from something that has happened to them or is somehow connected to other learning experiences. Begin group discussions by asking learners to read the passage from the text to which they are connecting. Ask them to explain the connection.

3. *Raise challenges.* Ask learners to find ideas or positions in the text that, as they read them, raised a red flag for one reason or another. These might be things that they did not agree with and want to challenge or simply feel they need more information before they can make a decision. With fiction, these might focus on a character's actions. Begin discussion by having students read from the text and then explain what questions came into their minds as they read those ideas.

4. *Note concepts.* Encourage readers to briefly review the text and note the key concepts, themes, or ideas. These are those elements that they might share with someone who hasn't read the text in discussing its main points and key ideas. These will not be text-based ideas as the previous moves have been; however, it is still appropriate to follow up student comments with, "What makes you say that?" to elicit the foundation for their ideas.

5. *Identify changes.* Ask learners to reflect on the overall text and think about its implications. If we take the text seriously, what does it suggest or encourage as actions or positions? Identify any changes of thinking or behavior that may have occurred for individuals as a result of the reading. For fiction, focus on the changes that occurred for the characters and the impetus for those changes. These ideas will not be specifically text based, but students should be asked to give reasons and justification for their responses.

6. *Share the thinking.* In the previous steps, learners have been sharing their thinking at each stage of the process. An alternative to this structure would be to provide time for the identification of all the 4C's at the outset and then commence discussion, working through each of the C's in turn. In either case, take a moment at the end of the discussion to debrief the conversation: How did the structure help learners to develop a deeper understanding of the text? Was it difficult to find material for any of the 4C's? Were there things that came up in the discussion that surprised them?

Uses and Variations

When Bialik College grade 1 teacher Roz Marks tried this routine for the first time, she asked a group of five students to read a fiction book during a guided reading session and then gave them a piece of paper divided into four equal sections. She explained the routine to them, clarifying and simplifying the vocabulary of the routine when appropriate. She asked the students to draw the connection they made, what they didn't agree with in the story, what was most important to them in the story, and whether they had learned something new or important from the story.

On another occasion, Roz used the 4C's routine informally for the group's discussion of the story "Feraï and the Lute" from the Junior Great Books program. Roz paraphrased the questions from the 4C's: "What connections do you make to the story from things that you know from your own life? Is there anything in the story that you want to challenge or don't agree with? What ideas do you think are the most important in the story and what makes you say that? Do you think after listening to this story that your thinking or ideas about things have changed?" As the group worked through each of the questions, Roz recorded students' responses on chart paper.

In the monthly professional meetings of the Ithaka Project, Julie Landvoigt used the 4C's routine as a regular protocol for the discussion of professional readings. Before each meeting, attendees all knew the articles would be discussed in this way and prepared accordingly. Because the meetings had a tight time schedule, a rotating facilitator kept the discussion moving through each of the C's during the 40-minute session while a documenter recorded and later posted the group's conversation on a wiki. (You can read more about this group's use of the routine in Chapter Seven.)

Assessment

The choices learners make for their connections, challenges, concepts, and changes give insights into both their understanding of the text and their ability to see the themes within it in a wider context. Are their connections related only to personal experiences, or are students also connecting to the other learning they are doing in your class? Are they going beyond the obvious? What sort of questions are they posing when challenging ideas or concepts? Are they able to display a healthy skepticism, recognizing bias and overgeneralization in a text? Are they identifying universal themes or big ideas? Can they differentiate key concepts from those less important? As you ask students to explain the changes they are thinking about and the reasons behind them, look for the reasons they have for proposing those changes.

Tips

Although the routine has four steps and their ordering tends to be the most effective in terms of sequencing discussion, in the act of reading or even reflecting upon a text the steps are likely to be very nonlinear. The first time through the routine, you might want to work sequentially through the order as described above. However, once the routine is learned, students may be more comfortable taking notes or organizing for the discussion in a less sequential manner. The routine can be introduced before the text and learners

can respond to it as they progress through the text, or alternatively, the questions can be posed at the conclusion of the reading. As students become familiar with the routine and its expectations, it can act as a protocol to structure student-directed discussions of the text.

The 4C's routine allows for a rich and fairly complete discussion of a text. Nonetheless, each step can be used as a stand-alone discussion. For example, at the end of a reading, you may ask, "In this reading, did you make any connections with anything we have done earlier this year? What changes are we noticing in these characters?" And so on.

This routine can be useful in training students in the process of a text-based discussion, which may or may not be something that they are used to doing. In a text-based discussion, explicit reference to the text is used as the starting point for discussion. This keeps a discussion centered and on track rather than veering down other paths. However, the teacher or facilitator will need to be vigilant in pushing learners to provide the textual reference. To set this up, provide time for learners to identify the places in the text they want to reference before discussion begins. In the discussion, ask speakers to first give the page and paragraph number in the text so that others can follow along as they read the passage.

A Picture of Practice

The grade 5 students in Saroj Singh's class at Bialik College were reading the novel *Holes* by Louis Sachar, a book that deals with many issues that Saroj considered important for her fifth grade students to think about. With this goal in mind, Saroj began to plan how she would introduce and proceed with the book study. She thought that incorporating the 4C's routine could lead to deeper understanding and extend her students' thinking. "I felt the plot of the story was rich enough for me to try my hand at a routine that I had never done before, and when I read the 4C's, even while reading it, I was mentally thinking where and at what juncture I could use this routine," Saroj stated.

This routine provided Saroj with a structure and a set of questions that she felt would be useful for debriefing the deeper meaning of the book once the class had finished reading. However, since it was a rather long text for fifth graders, she thought it would be better to introduce the routine before reading the book as a way of getting students to attend to issues beyond the plot.

Saroj discussed the 4C's of the routine, explaining that these were thinking moves that readers naturally engaged in as they read. She modeled her own reading of the morning newspaper and thought aloud for students so they could see how she was making connections, challenging ideas, identifying key concepts, and thinking about implications and challenges. She told students she wanted them to think of the 4C's while they were reading and to write their thoughts in the margins of their books as they progressed through the story.

Saroj noticed that the discussions following each chapter were becoming much more thoughtful. Students were finding similar situations in the wider world and making connections with issues such as apartheid, prejudices, racism, and more. The content of the discussions deepened and became more insightful as they drew closer to the end of the novel. Without Saroj's prompting, the children would begin the class keen to discuss a particular "C" that they thought fit closely with the text. She was heartened to see the students, who often were very reticent or would answer in only short utterances, join in the conversations and clearly state their stances or thinking.

On the day the class had finished reading the story, Saroj placed four large sheets of paper on the classroom walls. Each paper had one of the 4C words in large print at the top of the page. Saroj reminded her students of the thinking and documentation they had been doing throughout their reading and directed their attention to the four large sheets posted on the four walls of the classroom. "Now I want you to think about the book as a whole and what really stands out for you. What do you think the key concepts are? What connections are you making? What actions and events did you want to challenge? What changes have you noticed in the characters attitudes and behaviors?" Saroj then gave students sticky notes to record their thoughts about each question and place on the appropriate sheet (see Table 5.3 for a collection of students' responses).

Once students had finished posting their ideas for each of the 4C's, the class discussed each poster in turn. They carefully looked at each of the papers, discussing the ideas posted there, looking for commonalities in the responses, and identifying the big ideas that were arising. What was interesting to Saroj was the impact using the routine had on her personally. "My thinking was extended also," reflected Saroj. "As an adult with more life experiences, I may look at a character or situations differently to my students, but hearing their responses definitely gave me food for thought and challenged and broadened my thinking too."

Table 5.3 Fifth Grade Students' 4C's for the Book, *Holes*

Connections	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I get blamed at home for things I do not do and I usually don't get to explain my side of the story. Like Stanley I am always in the wrong place at the wrong time! I'm reading a book called <i>Reaching the Summit</i>. It is the story about Sir Edmund Hillary. It's about people surviving with very little resources while climbing Mt. Everest. Stanley and Zero too had to survive on just onions when they were up in the mountain. It says in the book, "It felt good to blame someone." I too sometimes like blaming my brother for things that I do. Text to Text—<i>Cherub</i> and <i>Holes</i>. In <i>Holes</i>, whenever they talked about the past incidents, the book had a different font. It was the same in <i>Cherub</i> too. Mr. Pendanski said that Zero had nothing in his head. I too have been called "Stupid." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why did Stanley think he would be going to a fun camp when he was in trouble? Everyone thought Zero was "Nothing," but he never got to show anyone who he really was except Stanley. How did the people at Camp Green Lake assume that hard labor would build one's character? Why was the reference made to "it's not a girl scouts camp" "innumerable times? – Girls are not inferior!!!!!"
Concepts	Changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Never give up trying! Try, try, try again, you'll succeed. When you live your whole life in a hole, the only way you can go is up. Friendship Perseverance Belief in oneself Leadership Determination Give a friend a helping hand. Bravery What goes around, comes around. Never judge a book by its cover. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The story clearly states the prejudice people had back then (even now, maybe less) regarding colored people. Kate used to be a wonderful woman, till Sam's death changed her completely. Certain incidents can change the way you think forever. I thought that Stanley's father was silly to be doing stuff with sneakers but at the completion of the book I thought of him in a different way. After Stanley caught the shoes "falling" from the sky, everything changed for him. He got arrested, taken to Camp Green Lake and had a tough time. Even then he thinks of what happened as "Lucky"!!! Halfway through the book I realized that Zero was not a white person.

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THE MICRO LAB PROTOCOL

Reflect individually on the issue or topic being examined, then working in triads:

- Share:** The first person in the group shares for a set time (usually 1–2 minutes). The other members listen attentively without comment or interruption.
- Pause** for 20–30 seconds of silence to take in what was said.
- Repeat** for persons two and three, pausing for a moment of silence after each round.
- Discuss** as a group (5–10 minutes), referencing the comments that have been made and making connections between the responses of the group.

The Micro Lab Protocol was originally developed by Julian Weissglass for the National Coalition for Equality in Education as a structure for discussion. What is presented here includes adaptations made by Tina Blythe. The Micro Lab is a simple structure for ensuring that all voices are heard and ideas attended to before the topic of focus is discussed. Though the Micro Lab isn't a thinking routine per se, that is, it doesn't prompt specific thinking moves, teachers have found it to be a valuable tool for making students' thinking visible and a useful structure for directing group conversation. Consequently, the Micro Lab has become a routine in many classrooms and staff rooms dedicated to creating cultures of thinking.

Purpose

Teachers often ask groups to discuss ideas in classrooms with more and less success. Often groups get sidetracked and/or a single person dominates while others sit back. The Micro Lab is designed to ensure equal participation and make sure everyone contributes. The rounds of sharing are timed by the teacher or facilitator. This keeps all groups on track and focused. The moments of silence provide time to think about what the last speaker said and a chance for the entire group to "recenter" itself. Groups of three provide for optimal interaction without asking people to be silent for long periods.

Once all ideas have been shared, an open discussion of the small groups occurs. Discussants now can make connections between ideas, ask clarifying questions, highlight themes, and further explore the topic. Teachers have found that regular use of this protocol helps students to be better listeners and to learn how to build on and connect

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