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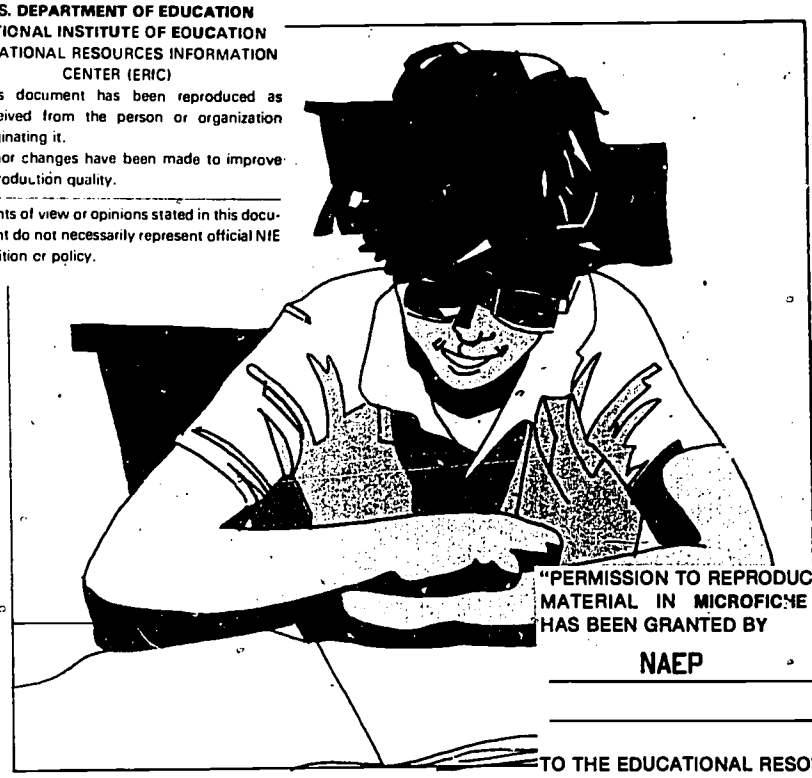
ABSTRACT

The reading objectives presented in this booklet are the most recent in a series that has included one set of combined reading and literature objectives, two sets of reading objectives, and two sets of literature objectives. As presented in the booklet, the objectives reflect the interactions of reader, text, and process rather than definitions of discrete units that can be directly translated into observable behaviors. The four objectives discussed are that the student: (1) comprehend what is read; (2) extend comprehension; (3) manage the reading experience; and (4) value reading. The final section of the booklet discusses the development of the objectives and provides a list of subject matter specialists, teachers, school administrators, researchers, parents, and members of the public who contributed to their formulation. (FL)

READING OBJECTIVES

1983-84 Assessment



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ETS

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Contents

Introduction

The reading objectives presented in this booklet are the most recent in a series that has included one previous set of combined reading and literature objectives (1979-80), two sets of reading objectives (1970 and 1974), and two sets of literature objectives (1970 and 1975).

With each successive set of objectives, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has tried to reflect advances in educational theory and practice. (See page 9 for a description of the process used to determine NAEP objectives.) The combination of reading and literature in the 1979-80 objectives marked a major shift in orientation as well as a recognition that the two areas involve many of the same goals. The present set of objectives carries forward this integration of objectives. In particular, separate objectives that dealt with the reader's comprehension (primarily of expository passages) and the reader's response (primarily to literary passages) have been reorganized. The objectives now reflect the current view that both the processes of comprehension and the extension of that comprehension through interpretation and analysis have a place in the reading of passages of all kinds. Objectives related to skills that support comprehension have also been reorganized in the present booklet; that is, those objectives are now incorporated as a part of the process of managing the reading experience. Included among the skills reorganized in this way are many previously grouped with study skills and with skills relating to awareness of text conventions and self-awareness.

The objectives are not defined in terms of age appropriateness. It is assumed that each objective and subobjective represents a continuum of difficulty. As students gain knowledge and experience, the complexity of the materials they read and of the tasks they are expected to perform increases. In addition, it is assumed that no fixed hierarchical relationship exists between objectives or between subobjectives.

Finally, the 1983-84 objectives were conceived as educational objectives that reflect the interactions of reader, text, and process rather than definitions of discrete units that can be directly translated into observable behaviors.

Objective I

Comprehends What Is Read

The first objective, *Comprehends What Is Read*, is central since every other objective is an outgrowth of that one.

Three factors apply to every reading situation: the type of material being read, the reader's purpose, and the background knowledge that the reader brings to the reading experience. Comprehension is an interactive process by which the reader constructs meaning both from the passage, which has a whole range of characteristics, and from the various kinds of background knowledge brought to the reading experience. Readers also bring their own purposes to the reading experience. These purposes guide them in setting expectations and deriving meaning consistent with their own goals. Thus, in discussing reading achievement, it is not enough to look at questions or tasks related to a particular passage. It is also necessary to ascertain the particular purposes for which the passage is to be read and to account for the kinds of knowledge that readers may already have that will help them more fully understand what they are reading. If concepts in the passage are new, they may need to be elaborated before readers will understand and remember them. If the concepts are familiar, readers may find it relatively easy to understand the passage—that is, to apply the concepts to new or more complex situations.

A. Comprehends Various Types of Written Materials

In their personal as well as their school lives, students encounter a wide variety of written materials; each of these poses its own problems of comprehension and interpretation. Making sense of the perhaps cryptic notes on a shopping list is different from understanding a complex essay or interpreting a literary work. Reading a science textbook differs from reading an historical essay. Letters, reports, inventories, and a wide range of record-keeping systems are integral to many businesses in today's "information society." To learn to manage problems of comprehension and interpretation, students need to read, discuss, and write about these different types of materials.

B. Comprehends Materials Read for a Particular Purpose

Reading purpose should determine the way something is read. The kind of attention required for skimming through a mail-order catalog to pick

up relatively isolated bits of information differs from the kind of attention required for following detailed instructions line by line to assemble a new bicycle. These kinds of reading, in turn, differ markedly from the careful reading of integrated concepts that is required for preparing to write a research report. Similarly, the level and kind of attention needed for reading a play purely for enjoyment is quite different from that required for reading to prepare for directing or staging a play. Experience in reading for a variety of purposes can help the student develop varied strategies.

Objective II

Extends Comprehension

Whenever people read, to some degree they analyze, interpret, and evaluate the material they are reading. Objective II, however, has to do with deliberate, conscious kinds of analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of the sort, say, that a student undertakes when participating in a class discussion or that the reader is involved with when developing a viewpoint for a talk or a paper.

There are several major avenues that readers use in expanding their comprehension. They can examine their personal experience to increase their understanding of particular ideas, characters, or situations. They can use their awareness of the emotional impact of a passage as a source of information about its purpose and quality. They can make a general comparison of what they are reading with other materials they have read or they can examine particular ideas in light of specific information from other sources. They can examine the structure and conventions of a passage. They can judge the validity of the ideas and information presented. Such activities are not necessarily separate from one another; some or all may take place as readers extend their comprehension of any particular passage.

A. Analyzes What Has Been Read

When they analyze what they have read, readers may clarify their initial interpretations by employing increasingly explicit ways of communicating their views to others. Analysis can take many different forms. It may involve tracking the logic of an argument, identifying the emo-

tional appeals underlying a political statement, explaining the motivations of a character in a story, or tracing the causes of a sequence of historical events. Such activities can lead to the discovery of inconsistencies in an initial interpretation (and hence to a reinterpretation of the passage) or they can lead to the discovery of additional evidence for explaining or defending an initial point of view.

B. *Interprets What Has Been Read*

Fluent readers use a variety of skills to deepen their understanding of what they have read. These include relating the concepts to their own experiences, to other works they have read, and to their own initial reactions to a passage. After putting a passage aside, readers may reflect on their own experiences with similar problems or events and may, in the process, form opinions concerning the validity or worth of what has been written. They may also compare what they are reading with something they have read before. Sometimes this means relating two books by the same author. Sometimes it means exploring other sources of information on the same topic. Sometimes it means relating a work to other works dealing with the same historical, cultural, or ideological theme. Such explorations are important steps in extending comprehension of any set of new ideas or experiences.

Reading involves both intellectual understanding and personal response. Many works are intended to entertain, persuade, or illustrate through emotional appeals. Therefore, another goal of reading instruction is to help students become aware of their emotional reactions in interpreting what they read. By articulating their personal reactions through discussion or writing, students can become more involved with characters, events, and ideas. They can also better understand the subtle ways in which writers influence their audiences. One way is to present a serious message within the context of a humorous piece. Another is to use an emotional appeal to promote a cause that cannot stand rationally on its own merits.

C. *Evaluates What Has Been Read*

One part of a reader's reaction to any passage is a judgment or evaluation of its usefulness or quality. At the simplest level, such a judgment controls the initial selection of reading material as well as the decision about continuing once the reading is under way. At a more formal level, readers judge the success of a work against either their specific purposes for reading or more general criteria of successful writing.

In most situations, evaluation is intertwined with a reader's comprehension of a passage and continues throughout interpretation and analysis. Defending or explaining an evaluation helps the reader articulate the criteria upon which an evaluation is based and relate characteristics of the work to those criteria.

Instruction in reading and literature should not lead students to a single scale of values by which to judge what they read. Rather, it should lead students to develop their own values and apply them appropriately to a variety of reading experiences.

Objective III

Manages the Reading Experience

Good readers develop a variety of strategies to help them comprehend what they read. Applied throughout the reading experience, these strategies vary according to the characteristics of particular passages, the reader's knowledge and experience with similar materials, and the reader's purpose for reading.

A. Uses the Structure and Organization of the Text

Comprehension of a passage is based on information drawn from many different elements at many different levels. Traditionally, teachers have tended to view these elements hierarchically, beginning with words, then moving to relationships among words and sentences, and then to devices that give structure to the passage as a whole. Actually, these elements cannot stand alone. They are all interrelated; and they also are related to the reader's previous experience. Indeed, in reading an entire passage or a complete work, good readers are aware of and sensitive to relationships and structures that govern larger units of a text. For example, sensitive readers develop an awareness of an evolving plot and of the relationships among the characters. In general, a good reader is guided by a sense of the structure of the particular genre (story, newspaper article, letter, research report) as well as by a growing understanding of the author's purpose and direction.

In longer works, paragraphs, clauses, and sentences are typically linked together to express relationships among the ideas or events that are being presented. Sometimes the relationships are stated, as in the following sentence: "The table wobbled because one leg was shorter

than the other three." At other times, the relationship is simply implied: "Sarah hit Jim. Jim went home crying." Good readers look for these relationships to help them understand the passage they are reading.

Word meanings are, of course, dependent on context. The word *fly* has one meaning in the context of getting from New York to Chicago and quite another in the context of a baseball game. Vocabulary skills involve both the understanding of various dictionary meanings and the ability to choose from among those meanings according to the context in which the word is used.

B. Uses Readers' Aids

Many books provide a variety of aids that can simplify their use. These include typography (e.g., boldface, italics), layout (e.g., headings, subheadings), illustration (e.g., charts, graphs, photographs), and various kinds of listings and guides (e.g., table of contents, index, footnotes, bibliography, glossary). Although an experienced reader may automatically make use of such aids, a novice may need to have them pointed out and explained.

C. Shows Flexibility in Approach to Reading

Different purposes for reading require different approaches. For example, a reader may study a textbook carefully to remember details, read a mystery story quickly to get the gist of the plot, skim a newspaper article for an overall impression, or scan an encyclopedia entry to locate specific information. Notetaking, outlining, summarizing, or other study techniques can increase understanding and retention of what has been read. Good readers choose from among a variety of approaches, depending on their specific purpose in reading.

D. Selects Reading Materials Appropriate to the Purpose

From the vast array of reading materials available, readers must learn to select those appropriate for their purposes. Sometimes their selections are guided by the suggestions of parents, teachers, or friends. At other times, readers have to turn to the reference materials available in their school and community libraries. Some reference tools, such as dictionaries or encyclopedias, provide the reader with all the information that is needed. Others, such as bibliographies, card catalogs, indexes, and abstracts, may point them toward the required sources. In any case, readers must learn how to find the relevant materials and how to evaluate the usefulness of particular information.

Objective IV

Values Reading

Students should acquire a growing appreciation of the ways reading can affect their lives. At one level of appreciation, readers are marginally aware that reading can be pleasurable or informative. They choose reading over other activities only when the other activities are limited or unrewarding.

At another level of appreciation, readers actively seek opportunities to read or write. In their spare time at home or at school, they are often deep in a book they have chosen. They buy books or borrow them from the library and discuss what they read with friends and family. Some may even volunteer to tutor other students in reading.

A. Values Reading as a Source of Enjoyment

If students enjoy reading, they are likely to continue to read after their formal schooling is over. Thus, students should be encouraged to read for pleasure and to enjoy a wide variety of literary and expository materials.

B. Values Reading to Expand Understanding and Fulfill Personal Goals

Reading can enrich people's understanding of themselves and the world. Ideas or situations encountered in reading can help readers understand themselves, the people they meet, and the situations in which they find themselves. Some reading may be directly psychological, inspirational, or philosophical. Some may allow the reader to appreciate historical, contemporary, or fictional personalities. In some cases, reading can help develop a personal sense of justice and an understanding of the ranges of choice open to every individual.

C. Values Reading as a Means of Acquiring Knowledge and Learning New Skills

Reading serves a variety of utilitarian functions. People must read to choose groceries at the store, select a movie from the entertainment section of the paper, or complete income tax forms. They also must read to plan vacation trips, keep up with the daily news, and learn new skills.

The current popularity of "how to" books dramatizes the importance

of written materials for acquiring knowledge and solving problems. Throughout the school years, textbooks provide students with information about new topics and once formal schooling is completed, reading continues to be a primary source of new information.

D. Values the Cultural Role of Written Language

Students should learn to appreciate the critical role written materials play in society. Words can profoundly affect individuals; and individuals, independently and collectively, change societies. As students mature, they gain an increasing sense of the importance of the interaction between written materials and society and of the importance of protecting and sustaining this interaction.

The Development Process

The reading objectives in this booklet were developed in preparation for the fourth national assessment of reading. Mail reviews and conferences organized by NAEP staff were conducted during the period between November 1982 and December 1983 to obtain information about the current thinking on reading from a variety of constituencies. Subject-matter specialists, teachers, school administrators, researchers, parents, and members of the lay public were asked to react to previous objectives and to comment on a draft of the new objectives. Participants in the objectives development process were:

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