

3. Ask the students to sit in a circle.
4. Ask each learner to express his/her preference for a particular food item and the reason for the same. Facilitate this task for the students by providing them with this structure, "I like to eat \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

(Depending on the linguistic level of the learners, the structure can be made more challenging.)

For example: Once the students have expressed their preference and explained why they have made this choice, encourage them to ask about the preference of the person sitting next to them. Give them the following structure, "I like to eat \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_. What do you like to eat?"

I like to eat salad because it is healthy. What do you like to eat?

5. Continue with the activity until all the students have had a chance to speak.

**Follow up activity:** Encourage your students to express their preferences on the following themes.

- Vegetables
- Dresses
- Fruits
- Games
- Cartoon characters

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## Language Activity in Critical Reading

*Shefali Ray*

**Name of the activity:** An exercise in critical reading

**Focus area of the activity:** Ability to read critically, separating truth from rhetoric

**Language for which the activity is designed:** English

**Level for which the activity is designed:** Senior secondary/tertiary

**Estimated time for the activity:** 20 minutes

**Number of students:** Class of 30-40 students; they may work independently to begin with and then discuss their responses in small groups of 5-6 students each

**Objectives: Reading critically**

- Identifying the genre of the text based on its theme and organization
- Making predictions and assessing one's hypothesis
- Making inferences and judgements
- Using evidence to arrive at a conclusion
- Keeping in mind the author's intention
- Keeping in mind the precepts and assumptions
- Arriving at the meaning of new vocabulary using clues from the text

**Materials needed:** Worksheet 1

Worksheet 1

**Read the passage and answer the questions.**

**Time: 20 minutes**

**Note:** Work individually and note down your responses.

Now and then, as he walked, Stebbins removed his new straw hat, wiped his forehead with a stiff new handkerchief, looked with some concern at the grime left upon it, then felt **anxiously** for his short crop of grizzled hair. He would be glad when it grew only a little, for it was at present a telltale to observant eyes. Also, now and then he took from another pocket a small mirror which he had just purchased, and **scrutinized** his face. Every time he did so, he rubbed his cheeks violently, then viewed with satisfaction the hard glow which replaced the yellow prison **pallor**. Every now and then, too, he remembered to throw his shoulders back, hold his chin high, and swing out his right leg more freely. At such times he almost **swaggered**, and became fairly insolent with his new sense of freedom. He felt himself the equal if not the **peer** of all creation. Whenever a carriage or a motor-car passed him on the country road, he assumed with the skill of an actor, the air of a business man hastening to an important engagement. However, his mind was always working over a hard problem. He knew that his store of money was **scanty**, that it would not last long even with the strictest economy; he had no friends; a prison record is sure to leak out when a man seeks a job. He was facing the problem of bare existence.

From *The Umbrella Man* by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman

Where do you think this passage has been taken from (an article/a report/a story, etc.)?  
.....

How is the text organized?  
.....

Who/What is the passage about? Find the words that illustrate this. ....  
.....

Identify the words that have been used to describe the man in the text. Does he have a problem? What is it?  
.....

What is the situation presented in these lines?  
.....

Is it an ordinary and commonplace situation? Why/why not? .....  
.....

Is the situation in which the main character finds himself a comfortable one? Why/Why not?  
.....

What do you think is the author's purpose in presenting this situation? .....  
.....

What do the following words in the passage mean: anxiously, scrutinized, pallor, swaggered, peer, scanty? Mention the clues given in the text.

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....
- 6.....

How do you visualize Stebbins?  
.....

Do you think the author is biased against people who have undergone a jail term? Give reasons for your answer.  
.....

Do you sympathize with Stebbins?  
.....

**Follow-on Activity: Discussion**

Time needed: 20 minutes

Organize the class into groups of 4-6 students each and discuss their individual responses, providing evidence from the text as support.

You may discuss the following points:

- questions that received similar responses
- questions that elicited differing responses
- reasons for the differences
- reading as an individual activity with the reader creating a unique meaning

**Time needed:** 20 minutes for reading and responding, and another 20 minutes for discussion

**Methodology:**

1. Briefly discuss what reading entails.
2. Distribute Worksheet 1 and ask the students to work individually and try to answer all the questions. Assure them that they do not need to write complete sentences. They can simply jot down the points.
3. Remind them to read the entire passage once or twice before attempting the questions.
4. If the students need more time, give them another 5-7 minutes to complete the task. It is important that they arrive at the answers on their own.

**III Discussion in Small Groups**

1. Ask the students to compare their responses with those of their classmates. (Remind them that every reader interprets and constructs meaning differently.)
2. Ask the students to discuss the questions in light of the four points given earlier.
3. They may retain their viewpoint (using open-ended questions) if it is based on evidence from the text, background knowledge, real life experiences or certain assumptions.
4. If they are unable to identify the reasons for the differences in their responses, you may step in.
5. In a plenary, explain the broad objectives of the individual questions.
6. Reiterate what critical reading entails.

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