

AN INTRODUCTION  
TO  
CRITICAL READING

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## ABSTRACT

## AN INTRODUCTION TO CRITICAL READING

This paper is concerned with critical reading, its particular importance in today's society, and the ways in which attitudes fundamental to critical reading and, ultimately, to critical thinking can be introduced to students from late elementary school on. Experiences and attitudes discussed are seen as the beginnings of a widening spiral extending through high school and, indeed, through college.

Critical reading is here defined as reading with an awareness of the writer--of his purposes, point of view, sensitivity, possible prejudice or motive--with a feeling for the connotative values of words, a perception of the difference between fact and opinion, an understanding of the techniques of distortion and propaganda, and an appreciation of the depth and nuances of language.

The theme is developed in the following fashion. Discussed first is the changing role of reading in our society from the primarily religious orientation of the colonial agrarian culture to the secular mass-culture of today's complex industrial society with its flood of written communication in the service of all fields of knowledge, entertainment, advertising, and propaganda. Noted here is the fact that written communication is

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omnipresent and is produced for varied purposes; the difficulty of evaluating who is saying what for what purpose becomes apparent. Though difficult, the importance of this kind of analysis in a free society where the individual is expected to analyze truth for himself emphasizes the imperative need for critical reading today.

With this need and importance thus emphasized, the writer goes on to describe some of the kinds of language arts activities--listening, writing, speaking, along with reading--which are perceived as meaningful in initiating analytical attitudes of critical listening and reading among ten- to fourteen-year-old students.

To elaborate on the way in which one such experience might be implemented in a classroom, an account of an experimental newspaper unit as conducted with a fifth grade class is given. The approach, objectives, and evaluation of the unit in terms of some of the criteria developed are described.

The writer's concern throughout is with the active nature of the reading process, the role of the reader as interpreter and creator. While many of the experiences suggested may be similar to those traditionally used, the approach is in terms of the writer's belief in the prime responsibility of the school in shaping critical readers and thinkers for an ever more complex world.