

Grades 11–12 Playlist: Matters Left Uncertain

Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1:

- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Welcome

Roland is thumbing through the paper one Sunday morning and finds an article about the “zero waste” movement. The idea behind “zero waste,” he learns, is to throw away as little as possible and instead to recycle, reuse, and compost all trash. He finds it so interesting that he reads it to his mother. “A community on a small island managed to recycle all of its waste when it ran out of landfill space,” he says in an excited tone. “Why can’t we do something like that in our own town?” “It sounds wonderful in theory, Roland,” his mother replies. “But what about discarded food that cannot be composted, like meat and dairy products? Where would they go if they couldn’t be thrown away? And there are some materials that cannot be recycled, such as that polystyrene cup that you’re drinking your soda from. How many times do you think you can reuse that cup?” Roland pauses before taking another sip of his soda. The article described “zero waste” as if it were an ideal solution, but there were a lot of important questions it did not answer!

Objective

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- determine where a text leaves matters uncertain.

Review

Key Terms

- An **analysis** of a text is a close and detailed examination. When analyzing a text, the reader “takes it apart” and studies every detail and its relation to the text as a whole.
- The information and ideas presented in a text are either:
 - **explicit**, meaning that the text clearly states the information and idea in a way that is easy to understand and that cannot be misinterpreted; or
 - **implicit**, meaning that it is not clearly stated, and it must be identified and understood by “reading between the lines.”
- An **inference** is an idea drawn from analyzing information in a text. Inferences are implicit, as the author wishes the reader to determine what he or she is trying to say by analyzing the text.
- To **synthesize** information in a text is to bring it together in order to draw conclusions about what the facts given (and not given) express as a whole.



Watch!

For a quick review of how authors use inferences in informational texts, watch this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1oqdl5JMjN4>

Practice!

Complete this exercise to practice analyzing an informational text:

<https://www.opened.com/assessment/cite-strong-and-thorough-textual-evidence-to-support-reader/1074071>

Exploring the Standard

This playlist will explore uncertainty in an informational text. It will discuss reasons why an author may decide to omit certain details or leave some matters uncertain and how doing so may support an author's purpose in writing.

A Closer Look: Why Was This Left Out?

In an informational text, it is important that every piece of evidence included be relevant to the text. However, not every piece of evidence that relates to the text may be included. An unintended gap or inconsistency in a text may bring the author's credibility into question. It is possible that the author does not have the expertise to write about the subject knowledgeably. But if a text appears on a scholarly website or is printed in a prestigious academic journal, the person writing it is probably very well educated and knows the material thoroughly. So why would an author make any part of a text vague or ambiguous?

An intentional gap in the information or evidence that a text gives can mean several things. The author may wish to support a certain point by leaving some matters uncertain—or the author may wish to push the reader toward a specific conclusion. In a literary text, omitting details will require the reader to make inferences about the plot and the characters. In an informational text, gaps and omissions can serve a similar purpose—requiring readers to synthesize what they already know (or think they know) about the subject with what the text explicitly tells them.

Example

Below is an informational text titled “Scientists Observe Light Fighting to Escape Black Hole’s Pull.” This article discusses research conducted on black holes by scientists at NASA in July 2002. While reading the text, keep track of any questions that arise about the content.

¹Scientists have found new evidence that light emanating from near a black hole loses energy climbing out of a gravitational well created by the black hole, a key prediction of Einstein’s theory of general relativity.

²This observation of warped space, made with the Chandra X-ray Observatory and the XMM-Newton satellite, also offers a novel glimpse inside that chaotic swirl of gas surrounding a black hole called an accretion disk: The scientists captured bright hotspots in small, localized regions within the disk, a crucial step needed to map such a region.

³T. Jane Turner of NASA Goddard Space Flight Center and the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, is the lead author of an *Astrophysical Journal* letter published this week discussing these results.



Teaching Notes: Matters Left Uncertain

The goal of RI.11-12.1 is for students to be able to analyze a text to determine where the author intentionally leaves matters uncertain or presents the information in a vague or ambiguous fashion. Students should also be able to hypothesize why an author may choose to do this and how it might serve the author's purpose for writing. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classroom as well as additional resources to peruse and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Activities

1. Begin a discussion on a subject of the students' choosing, such as a current event that all students are most likely informed on. Ask each student to contribute to the conversation. As the students speak, write the points they make on the board. After each student has spoken, take an inventory of the points students have made. Then, discuss whether or not these ideas would be sufficient to form the basis for a full essay or article on the subject. What information has been omitted, and what matters are left uncertain?
2. As a class, examine the article on black holes that appears in the playlist. Analyze each paragraph in detail and decide which details are missing. How would the addition of these details change the reader's understanding of the text?

Writing Prompts

1. Choose an informational text, such as a well-known speech, and instruct the students to closely read and annotate the speech, noting where the speaker leaves matters uncertain. Then, have them write footnotes for the speech, which would serve the purpose of answering the open questions that a reader may have when reading it.
2. Have the students write an argumentative essay on a subject of their choice. After they finish a final draft, instruct them to choose relevant information to omit and revise the essay to exclude it. Then, have students exchange their essays with partners. Each student will determine where their partner's essay leaves matters uncertain.

Additional Resources

Consider these additional resources when teaching RI.11-12.1:

- **“Teach Content-Rich Nonfiction and Informational Texts”**: This resource provides links to informational texts in books and journals, links to lesson plans, and links to web seminars.
<http://www.ncte.org/standards/common-core/nonfiction-texts>
- **“Guide/Assess Nonfiction Reading with Graphic Organizers and Writing”**: This resource provides links to many graphic organizers and worksheets.
http://teacher.depaul.edu/html/Guide_Assess_Nonfiction.html

