

## Making Text Kinesthetic

When Brad was a student teacher in a high school where the majority of the students did not speak English as their first language, he soon discovered that his struggling readers could not visualize the text that they were reading. He asked them, after reading *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, what the title character looked like. Jose, a sixteen-year-old latino student, looked at him and replied, “Hey Mr. B, I have no idea what he looks like.” Katie has similar teaching stories, as we are sure that readers of this book do. The question in dealing with struggling readers like Jose is, How do we help them visualize the text? We know that this is key to comprehending text and that it is critical for students who are reading linguistically complex literature that characteristically embodies the literature canon. One strategy for helping students visualize text is to “physicalize” the words on the page. If the students have a kinesthetic experience with the text, they are more likely to understand it.

### The Story Behind the Lesson

For example, in Brad’s twelfth-grade English class, as they read *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the students had difficulty remembering the complex names found in this text. Brad assigned each character a sound and action. As a result of this pedagogical application, the students became more motivated and interested in reading the text. By using kinesthetic strategies such as these, we can increase our students’ interest level, as well as provide them with an opportunity to relate further to the text through active participation (see Exhibit 3.2). The student-created sample script in Exhibit 3.3 can be used in your classroom. As mentioned previously, dramatic activities like this interactive reading create opportunities for struggling readers that are inviting. Every student can play some role, whether it’s creating the assigned sound for each character or reading a major part. All of the students are involved. It’s also helpful for literary works like *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to introduce and provide a strategy for tracking the numerous characters. (The upcoming character bookmarks discussed in this book are a perfect example of a character tracking strategy.)

### Walt Whitman’s “A Noiseless Patient Spider”

It’s ironic that teenagers who are rebellious challengers of authority would find the American transcendentalists like Emerson, Thoreau, and, arguably, Walt Whitman so challenging to understand. For sophomores in Katie’s English class this was a battle. She had to figure out how to connect the text to the students’ personal lives and help them understand the very strong transcendental message of how the individual fits into the larger whole. This is a pretty important message for most sophomores but also key in understanding the messages in transcendental literature.

### Exhibit 3.2 Making Text Kinesthetic Lesson Plan

<b>During-Reading Lesson</b>	
<b>Objective</b>	To enhance the student's ability to identify and connect to characters in a text through auditory and visual prompting.
<b>Materials</b>	Copies of selected text.
<b>Time</b>	20–30 minutes
<b>Procedure</b>	
<b>Step 1</b>	Pass out enough copies of the text excerpt so that each student has one.
<b>Step 2</b>	Collaborate with the students to assign sounds and actions for each character in the selected text. Ask two or three students to choral read each character. (Choral reading involves more than one student reading the text simultaneously.)
<b>Step 3</b>	Read the text with the students in a large group and discuss the following: Were the sounds and actions appropriate for each assigned character? How do the characters look? What do you know about the characters that you didn't know before? How did the sounds and actions change your understanding of the text? What questions do you have about these characters?
<b>IRA/NCTE Standards</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace, and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic, and contemporary works.</li><li>2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.</li><li>3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).</li></ol>

Exhibit 3.4 shows Katie's introductory lesson for Walt Whitman's *A Noiseless Patient Spider*. She used it every time she taught the American transcendentalists. Handouts for the lesson can be found in Exhibits 3.5 and 3.6.

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### Exhibit 3.3 Epic of Gilgamesh Character Assignments and Sample Script

Characters	Description	Make Sound-Say Phrase/Perform Action (performed by student actor)
Gilgamesh	A Sumerian king and ruthless ruler who abused his power and subjected his people to oppression.	*grunt* "HUUUUH!" *Flex muscles*
Enkidu	A man/beast created by Aruru - the Sumerian creator goddess (at the request of the populace of Uruk) to defeat Gilgamesh.	"Aroooooo!!" *raise head and howl*
Anu	The "creator" god of the Sumerian pantheon, and father of the gods.	My "children" *smile proudly, moving move right arm/palm up, from left to right*
Enlil	The leader of the Sumerian pantheon (Anu relinquished his power to Enlil at some point), who was the instigator of the great flood.	"Whssssssshhhh!" *move arms like you are swimming*
Shamash	The Sumerian sun god, who assists Gilgamesh and Enkidu in their battle with Humbaba because of a promise to Ninsun to protect Gilgamesh	"It's hot in here!" *wave hand to face to cool off*

**Script (With Student Sound Effects Written in Bold)**

Enlil (Whssssssshhhh! \*move arms like you are swimming\*) of the mountain, the father of the gods, had decreed the destiny of Gilgamesh (\*grunt\* "HUUUUH!" \*Flex muscles\*). So Gilgamesh (\*grunt\* "HUUUUH!" \*Flex muscles\*) dreamed and Enkidu ("Aroooooo!!" \*raise head and howl\*) said, The meaning of the dream is this. The father of the gods, Anu ("My children" - \*smile proudly, moving move right arm/palm up, from left to right\*) has given you kingship, such is your destiny, everlasting life is not your destiny. Because of this, do not be sad at heart, do not grieve or be oppressed. . . .But do not abuse this power, deal justly with your servants in the palace, deal justly before Shamash (It's hot in here! \*wave hand to face to cool off\*).

## Exhibit 3.4 Walt Whitman's "A Noiseless Patient Spider" Lesson Plan

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<b>During-Reading Lesson</b>	<b>Making Connections</b>
Objective	To identify key vocabulary and themes in a shorter text, applying kinesthetic reading strategies to develop textual comprehension.
Materials	2 or 3 beach balls, string, and slips of paper with key vocabulary words
Time	30–40 minutes

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**Procedure**

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Step 1	<p>Pass out the vocabulary words identified in the accompanying worksheet. Arrange the students in a circle in the classroom. (This can be done! Katie had 28–32 students in a circle in her classroom.) In the circle, the students will say a vocabulary word and then “gently” throw the ball to another classmate in the circle. Once the students have tossed the beach ball to classmates while saying their vocabulary word, add the other balls, one at a time. By the time the students have completed this part of the lesson, three beach balls are being tossed around the circle.</p> <p>After about five minutes of beach-ball tossing, the students will have heard all the vocabulary words numerous times. Ask the students the following question: “You’ve heard words from the poem that we are about to read. What do you think the poem might be about?”</p> <p>Allow the students to predict what they think the poem might be about and discuss.</p>
Step 2	<p>The students are still in the beach-ball circle. This time, explain to the students that they will say their word and instead of tossing a beach ball, we will exchange string. The teacher should start the string toss. So it works like this: The teacher says the vocabulary word while holding the string. The teacher holds the end of the string and then tosses the ball of string to a student. The student who catches the ball of string holds on to the end and then tosses the ball to another student. By the end of the activity, all the students will be holding the string and will have created a giant web in the circle. This will take about 10 minutes to complete the giant string web.</p>

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### Exhibit 3.4 (continued)

During-Reading Lesson	Making Connections
	<p>Once every student holds the string, read the entire text of “A Noiseless Patient Spider” and have a large-group discussion. These questions can help to introduce the students to transcendental themes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What happens if one of us lets go of the string? What happens when it’s pulled or dropped? In Katie’s classes they would often realize that they are all connected to the string web and an individual’s actions can influence the entire web.</li><li>2. What do you think Whitman is trying to tell the reader in his poem?</li><li>3. How do your actions influence a larger group?</li><li>4. How can your actions affect a larger group?</li></ol> <p>This portion of the lesson takes about 5–10 minutes.</p>
Step 3	<p>Ask the students to let go of their string at the count of three: 1-2-3 Drop. This always has a dramatic effect on the students. Give them copies of the poem so they can refer to it if they wish.</p> <p>Ask the students to respond to the following in writing (their responses can be written in journals):</p> <p>How do individuals affect larger groups and events? What have you learned from this activity and why is it important?</p> <p>The students can discuss in small groups after they write their responses or there can be a large-group discussion.</p> <p>This lesson segment takes about 15 minutes.</p>
IRA/NCTE Standards	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace, and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic, and contemporary works.</li><li>2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.</li><li>3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).</li></ol>

### Exhibit 3.5 “A Noiseless Patient Spider” Handout 1

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*Directions:* Cut up these words and give one to each student in your class. You can have duplicate vocabulary words if necessary.

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noiseless                      ductile

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promontory                    venturing

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isolated                        anchor

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filament                        soul

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gossamer                        unreeling

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ceaselessly                    musing

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tirelessly                        spheres

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### Exhibit 3.6 “A Noiseless Patient Spider” Handout 2

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*Directions:* Make copies to distribute to students.

#### **A Noiseless Patient Spider by Walt Whitman**

A noiseless, patient spider,  
I mark'd, where, on a little promontory, it stood, isolated;  
Mark'd how, to explore the vacant, vast surrounding,  
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself;  
And you, O my Soul, where you stand,  
Surrounded, surrounded, in measureless oceans of space,  
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, — seeking the spheres, to connect them;  
Till the bridge you will need, be form'd — till the ductile anchor hold;  
Till the gossamer thread you fling, catch somewhere, O my Soul.

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