

Lesson 2: Chapter 1

2 Class Periods

Reading Skills: **Creating Sensory Images**
 Making Connections
 Questioning

Purpose:

Proficient readers have a movie going in their heads while they read. They use their imaginations and sense memories to make the reading “come alive.” Poor readers frequently don’t know that they should be using their senses as they read. The result is that their words on the page remain flat and lifeless for them. They need modeling and practice to activate their senses while they read. In Chapter 1, the authors of *Four Perfect Pebbles* have used many descriptive words to help readers imagine how Bergen-Belsen might feel, smell, look, sound, and taste. My goal is to help my students use these prompts to make the experience of reading the chapter a surround-sound, Technicolor, multi-sensory experience.

Materials Needed:

A copy of *Four Perfect Pebbles* for each student
A sheet of newsprint or blank copy paper for each student
Every student will need a pencil for drawing

Process:

Read the chapter aloud and ask the students to follow along in their own texts. At intervals, stop reading and ask students to practice using sensory images and asking questions. Depending on how familiar students are with thinking about what they read, you may need to “Think Aloud” to model for the students how good readers create sensory images and ask questions as they read. To facilitate the development of visual images, the students could draw the pictures that form in their minds as a result of reading certain passages of text. You will need to pause every so often to give them some drawing time.

To help the students activate other senses, you may need to describe how you imagine the situation and show how you connect it to your own prior experience. For example, I have memories of camping places where there were no modern plumbing facilities. In other words, I have been in an outhouse. I can magnify this smell in my memory to help myself imagine the communal outhouse described on page 3. Every student can imagine the smell of dirty clothes and unwashed bodies; they just have to remember what their clothes smell like after soccer practice! How would the boards of the bunk feel? What would the soup taste like? Start describing how you imagine these things and watch the reactions on your students’ faces!

Suggested Stopping Points:

I've included references to photos that may be helpful to you and your students as you try to visualize the scenes described in the text.

- At the end of paragraph 2 – Ask students to sketch in their journals the way they imagine the “three-decker bunks” would look that “ran the length of the barrack.” This might be a situation where students might use prior knowledge if they have ever seen a picture of the bunks where prisoners slept in a Nazi concentration camp. After students have a moment to draw their pictures, you could show them photos to build background knowledge for students who haven't seen such photos before.

Photo Reference: TTWR – pages 93, 54-55
WMK – page 193

- The last full paragraph on page 3 and the next paragraph that continues onto page 4 have a description of the outhouse and what the prisoners would have to do to relieve themselves. Ask students to draw a picture of how this communal outhouse might look. They could also imagine what the prisoners smelled. The sensory images are unpleasant, but the text lends itself well to forming strong images.
- The second-to-the-last paragraph on page 4 tells about *Appell* or roll call and the paragraph that runs from page 4 to 5 describes the electrified barbed wire surrounding the camp, the guards, the dogs, and the searchlights. The paragraph does not mention guard towers, but I asked the students how the guards would use the searchlights to keep watch on the perimeter of the camp. They were able to infer that there would be guard towers along the fence. Ask them to draw how they think these things might look.

Photo Reference: TTWR – pages 54-55
WMK – pages 136

If you have a copy in your school library, Surviving Hitler by Andrea Warren has a photo on page 79 of a guard tower and a portion of fence at Auschwitz. Be sure to read the caption under this photo and explain about the grass. On the back cover, there is a view from the guard tower.

It is important for students to realize that skillful authors anticipate questions that readers will ask and provide the information needed to answer many of those questions. Students must learn to recognize when this happens in a text. Pages 7-9 of Chapter 1 explain why the book is called Four Perfect Pebbles. This question should be among those raised during the survey process. Take time to discuss Marion's search for four perfect pebbles. Is this just a silly child's game? What other questions do they have about the chapter? You could continue the list of questions and background knowledge started in Lesson 1.

At the end of this lesson, I wanted the students to notice something about the structure of this text and effective writing. In the lingo of the “Six Traits” used to evaluate samples for the Kansas Writing Assessment, this book offers a good example of “organization.” Chapter 1 is a strong lead for the rest of the book. I asked the students to look ahead at the first two pages of Chapter 2 and notice that its content was going to go backward in chronological order; it begins with how Ruth and Walter met each other. I asked the students why the author might have started the book with an incident from the chronological middle of the story. They didn’t get where I was going with my question until I asked it a new way: What would their impression of the book have been if the family history in Chapter 2 had been first? Would they have wanted to keep on reading? They said “No.” They agreed that Chapter 1 was compelling; it increased their curiosity about Marion’s story and caused them to want to continue reading the book.

NOTE: A teachable moment presented itself as we were working through Chapter 1. The students asked me if people tried to escape from the camps. Others wanted to know why the prisoners didn’t tunnel under the fence to get out. I shared with them that in addition to patrolling the perimeter with dogs and using searchlights from towers to watch the fence-line, the Nazis also used a technique called *collective responsibility* to discourage resistance. Please read the following passages to familiarize yourself with this concept:

Reference: WMK – page 171

NOTE: Later in the unit during Lesson 24, students will have the chance to make connections between Four Perfect Pebbles and One Survivor Remembers, the film memoir of Gerda Weissman Klein. In the film, Gerda describes how she occupied her mind by deciding whether she would have a red or blue dress for the celebration she imagined she would have after the war. She speaks about how important it was to have imagination – some way to occupy your mind - in order to survive. Help the learners make a connection between Gerda’s debate about her dress and Marion’s search for the pebbles.