

Martha Hamilton and Mitch Weiss – *The Singing Crow*

Learning Objective: To give students the opportunity to use the reading and writing habits they have been practicing on a regular basis to absorb the meaning of this fable. By reading and rereading the passage closely and focusing their reading through a series of questions and discussion about the text, students will learn the characteristics of fables as well as about the human shortcomings of pride and false praise.

Reading Task: Students will read along with the teacher, following along with the text in their hands as the teacher and/or students read aloud together, or read silently, depending upon the development of the students. The teacher will then lead students through a set of text-dependent questions that encourage students to reread specific lines and examine illustrations closely and discover the meaning of the fable. The students will be asking and answering questions about key details in the text as well as describing the characters, setting and major events in the story using key details.

Vocabulary Task: Most of the meanings of words in the exemplar text can be discovered by students from careful reading of the context in which they appear. Teachers can use discussions to model and reinforce how to learn vocabulary from contextual clues, and students must be held accountable for engaging in this practice. Where it is judged this is not possible, underlined words are defined briefly for students to the right of the text in a separate column whenever the original text is reproduced. At times, this is all the support these defined words need. At other times, particularly with abstract words, teachers will need to spend more time explaining and discussing them. There is a longer discussion of this in the “Vocabulary” section of the Introduction. In addition, in subsequent close readings of passages of the text, high value academic (‘Tier Two’) words have been **bolded** to draw attention to them. Given how crucial vocabulary knowledge is for academic and career success, it is essential that these high value words be discussed and lingered over during the instructional sequence.

Discussion Task: Students will discuss the text in depth with their teacher and their classmates, performing activities that result in understanding and enjoying the text. The goal is to foster student confidence when encountering complex text and to reinforce the skills they have acquired regarding how to build and extend their understanding of a text. A general principle is to always reread the passage that provides evidence for the question under discussion. This gives students another encounter with the text, helping them develop fluency and reinforcing their use of text evidence.

Writing Task: Students will have opportunities to retell trickster tales orally and then write and illustrate an original trickster story or fable that includes a title, setting, animals that speak, events that lead up to a trick being played, a trick and a moral or lesson. Students may choose to use a technology application such as Kidspiration to create a concept map or plan to organize their ideas for the original story. Kindergarten students and beginning first grade students with prompting and support would dictate a group story with the teacher being the scribe (the language

experience approach).

Foundational Skills: The opportunity to focus upon isolated letters and sounds and then to bring phonological learning of separate isolated skills into original context is part of this lesson, depending upon student need. The students learn to identify the suffix /ing/.

page 2 sing + ing = singing

page 5 see + ing = seeing

page 6 look + ing = looking

page 8 laugh + ing = laughing

Text Selection: This text is an example of a short narrative in the fables and trickster tales genre, in which animal characters with human features convey folk wisdom to help children understand human nature and human behavior. These stories were originally passed down through the oral tradition and were eventually written down. Using multiple texts, students become familiar with fables and trickster tales from different cultural traditions and compare and contrast themes of fables and trickster tales from different cultures. Students can learn to differentiate between the cautionary lessons and morals of fables and the celebration of the wiles and wit of the underdog in trickster stories.

Outline of Lesson Plan: This lesson can be delivered in two to three days of instruction based upon the extended discussion of the questions, looking closely at the academic vocabulary and working in great length on the writing assignment.

Standards Covered: The following CCS standards are the focus of this assignment:

RL.K.2 With prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details. (Read Aloud for Kindergarten)

RL.1.2 Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.

RL.2.2 Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures and determine their central message, lesson or moral.

RL.K.9 With prompting and support, compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters
in familiar stories.

RL.1.9 Compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in stories.

RL.2.9 Compare and contrast two or more versions of the same story (e.g., Cinderella stories) by
different authors or from different cultures).

W.K.3 Use a combination of drawing, dictating and writing to narrate a single event or several loosely

linked events, tell about the events in the order in which they occurred, and provide a reaction to
what happened.

W.1.3 Write narratives in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced

events, include

some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure.

W.2.3 Write narratives in which they recount a well elaborated event or short sequence of events,

include details to describe actions, thoughts, and feelings, use temporal words to signal event order and provide a sense of closure.

RF.3 Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.

The Text:

Exemplar Text	Vocabulary
<p>One fine morning, a hungry fox spied a crow way up in a tree. The crow had a big piece of cheese in her beak.</p> <p>The fox’s mouth watered as he caught the <u>scent</u> of the delicious cheese. “I will have that cheese in no time,” the fox thought to himself.</p> <p>The fox stood under the tree and called up to the crow, “You are a fine bird! I have never seen feathers as shiny and black as yours!”</p> <p>The crow <u>ruffled</u> her feathers and puffed herself up with pride. Seeing this, the fox went on, “The way your feathers <u>sparkle</u> in the sunlight takes my breath away. Do you sing as well? A beautiful bird like you must have a lovely voice.”</p> <p>The crow, of course, had an awful voice. But she thought, “The clever fox thinks I am good-looking. Perhaps he is right about my voice as well.”</p> <p>The crow opened her beak wide and <u>squawked</u>, “CAW! CAW! CAW!”</p> <p>As she did, the cheese fell out of her beak, and into the mouth of the sly fox.</p> <p>The fox <u>gobbled</u> it down and ran off, laughing to himself.</p> <p>The moral of this story is: Beware of those who give too many <u>compliments</u>.</p> <p>The moral of this story is: Beware of those who give too many compliments.</p>	<p><i>a distinctive odor; to perceive by the sense of smell; to hunt prey by means of the sense of smell; used by hounds.</i></p> <p><i>to fluff up, loosen, make less dense</i></p> <p><i>to reflect light, to flash and glitter</i></p> <p><i>to utter a harsh scream; screech, a noisy complaint.</i></p> <p><i>to devour in greedy gulps; to grab, to eat rapidly.</i></p> <p><i>An expression of praise, admiration, good wishes</i></p>

Day One: Instructional Exemplar for Hamilton & Weiss *The Singing Crow*

Summary of Activities

Teacher introduces the day's passage with minimal commentary and students read it independently.

Teacher or a skillful reader then reads the passage out loud to the class or small group, as students follow along in the text. Teachers can reverse numbers 1 and 2 if they feel students need the support of hearing the text read aloud first.

Teacher asks the class to discuss the first set of text-dependent questions and perform targeted tasks about the passage, with answers in the form of notes, annotations to the text, teacher recording answers on chart paper or a dry erase board, or more formal responses as appropriate.

Text Passage under Discussion	Instructional Commentary/Guiding Questions For Teachers/Proficient Responses
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One fine morning, a hungry fox spied a crow way up in a tree. The crow had a big piece of cheese in her beak.

The fox's mouth watered as he caught the scent of the delicious cheese. "I will have that cheese in no time," the fox thought to himself.

The fox stood under the tree and called up to the crow, "You are a fine bird! I have never seen feathers as shiny and black as yours!"

The crow ruffled her feathers and puffed herself up with pride. Seeing this, the fox went on, "The way your feathers sparkle in the sunlight takes my breath away. Do you sing as well? A beautiful bird like you must have a lovely voice."

The crow, of course, had an awful voice. But she thought, "The clever fox thinks I am good-looking. Perhaps he is right about my voice as well." The crow opened her beak wide and squawked, "CAW! CAW! CAW!" As she did, the cheese fell out of her beak, and into the mouth of the sly fox. The fox gobbled it down and ran off, laughing to himself.

The moral of this story is: Beware of those who give too many compliments.

1. Introduce the passage and students read independently.

Other than giving the brief definitions offered to words students would likely not be able to define from context (underlined in the text), avoid giving any background context or instructional guidance at the outset of the lesson while students are reading the text silently. This close reading approach forces students to rely exclusively on the text instead of privileging background knowledge. It is critical to cultivating independence and creating a culture of close reading that students initially grapple with rich texts without the aid of prefatory material, extensive notes, or even teacher explanations. That being said two initial readings provide much support, but all coming from the text rather than outside of it.

2. Read the passage out loud to the class as students follow along in the text.

Asking students to listen to *The Singing Crow* exposes students a second time to the rhythms and meaning of her language before they begin their own close reading of the passage. Speaking clearly and carefully will allow students to follow the fable, and reading out loud with students following along improves fluency while offering all students access to this complex text. Accurate and skillful modeling of the reading also provides students who may be dysfluent with accurate pronunciations and syntactic patterns of English (English Language Learners or Students With Disabilities).

3. Ask the class (or the small group) to answer a set of text-dependent guided questions and perform targeted tasks about the passage, with answers in the form of notes, annotations to the text, or more formal responses as appropriate.

As students move through these questions and reread the fable, be sure to check for and reinforce their understanding of academic vocabulary in the corresponding text (which will be

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The fox stood under the tree and called up to the crow, "You are a fine bird! I have never seen feathers as shiny and black as yours!"

The crow **ruffled** her feathers and puffed herself up with pride. Seeing this, the fox went on, "The way your feathers sparkle in the sunlight **takes my breath away**. Do you sing as well? A beautiful bird like you must have a lovely voice."

The crow, of course, had an awful voice. But she thought, "The clever fox thinks I am good-looking. Perhaps he is right about my voice as well." The crow opened her beak wide and squawked, "CAW! CAW! CAW!" As she did, the cheese fell out of her beak, and into the mouth of the sly fox. The fox gobbled it down and ran off, laughing to himself.

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tasty enough to make you salivate

(Q1) Why was the fox thinking, "I will have that cheese in no time?" (pp. 2-3)

The fox was hungry and his mouth was watering as he smelled the cheese. He is plotting how to trick the Crow out of her cheese.

(Q2) What does it mean when the author says, "the fox's mouth watered"? (p. 3)

The fox is hungry and here the text is referring to pleasing the sense of taste (and smell) because the fox caught the scent of the cheese. The writer is leading the reader to understand the cheese is appetizing to the fox; this is important for students to understand as it sets the stage for what is to come.

(Q3) The fox tells the crow, "You are a fine bird! I have never seen feathers as shiny and black as yours!" What does the fox mean? (p. 4)

Why does the crow ruffle her feathers and puff up with pride? (p.5)

The fox is telling the crow how beautiful she is and complimenting her for her physical beauty. She ruffles her feathers and puffs up with pride because she is happy and satisfied to be admired by the fox. Crow fluffs up and loosens her feathers with her beak to make them less dense or packed down. Another word for this is preening... when birds groom their feathers.

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(Q6) Fox says, “the way your feathers sparkle in the sunlight takes my breath away.” What is the meaning of the phrase *takes my breath away*? (p.5)

Through discussion students understand the phrase does not mean the fox stopped breathing or that his breath was stolen. This is an idiomatic saying meaning something is so amazing it is beyond words or someone is speechless.

(Q7) On page 6, the authors tell us Crow has an awful voice, yet she chooses to believe the fox’s compliment about her lovely voice. Why (p. 6)

Through oral discussion, the students will determine sometimes it is easier to believe the kind or nice things people say about us rather than be realistic about our own limitations.

(Q8) The authors use several adjectives (words that describe nouns) to help us understand the traits or character of the fox. What are those adjectives and are there additional ones you would add?

Through rereading and skimming the text, the students will find the fox was hungry, clever and sly. The fox was also deceitful, shrewd, cunning, etc.

(Q9) What human traits do the two main characters represent? Cite evidence from the text for each part of your answer.

The crow represents vanity

Day Two (or Three): Explanatory Writing Assignment for Hamilton and Weiss' *the Singing Crow*

Directions for Teachers and Students / Guidance for Teachers

Writing Assignment A:

Explain which character Crow, or Fox, had the worst shortcomings or foible in their character. Be sure to clearly cite evidence from the text for your answer.

Writing Assignment B:

After the students have explored several fables, this writing assignment can be completed.

Fables are short tales used to teach a moral lesson, often with animals as the characters. Their purpose is to teach humans a lesson about recognizing and overcoming their foibles. Characteristics of fables include:

Brevity – the story is usually quite short

The main characters are usually animals that speak

The animal or main character displays a foible or shortcoming being critiqued; the animals represent human traits.

The foible or shortcoming brings embarrassment or a downfall to the character; this conclusion leads directly to the moral

The moral follows the story and is stated in one sentence.

Your assignment is to write a short fable that includes a setting, animal characters and a moral. Your fable should include the animal characters speaking and having a shortcoming or foible. The following rubric will be used to help students and the teacher evaluate the written responses.

Rubric Suggestion:

HYPERLINK "http://www.learnnc.org/lp/media/lessons/katebboyce1142004123/Rubric_-_Fable.htm" http://www.learnnc.org/lp/media/lessons/katebboyce1142004123/Rubric_-_Fable.htm

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