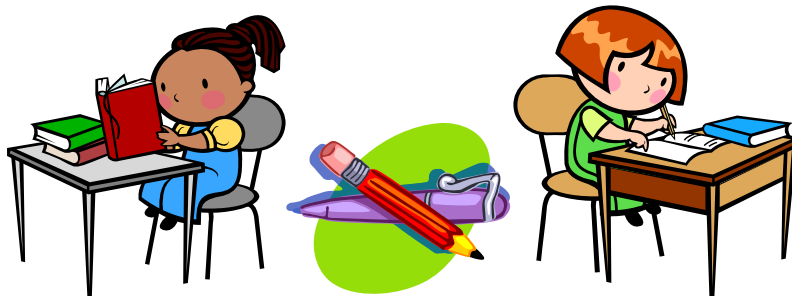


Frontier School Division
Reading and Writing Continua



An Information Handbook
For
Frontier School Division Teachers



Revised May, 2006

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Purpose

A continuum is a visual representation of observable descriptors depicting the developmental stages of literacy learning.

Teachers use a continuum to systematically observe what students “can do” and are “learning to do” in literacy learning. The teacher and student can use the continua to discuss and reflect on the student’s knowledge, skills, strategies, and attitudes in reading and writing. The information from continua informs instruction and provides a starting point for discussion with students, parents, and colleagues.

- Continua serve various purposes in the classroom, school, area, division and the larger community.
- Continua are resources that support teachers in planning for instruction, monitoring and assessing learning, and reporting student progress to parents.
- In the multilevel classroom, continua are an effective means of managing assessment across more than two grades.
- When used throughout the year in a school, in a school division, and in the province, continua may increase the consistency of student performance of provincial learning outcomes across grades.

Background History

The development of student continua in Frontier School Division began with the Area 3 Early Literacy Project in September, 1999. This project focused on classroom-based literacy assessment. An outcome of the project was the development of 3 continua for early years: Reading, Writing and Oral Language.

Following discussions with middle years’ teachers, administrators, and the divisional assessment committee, a decision was made to expand the writing continuum to include middle years writers. In the fall of 2002 the process of middle years continua development began with a Divisional Middle Year’s Committee.

“The gift of creative writing, like all natural gifts, must be nourished or it will atrophy. And you nourish it, in much the same way you nourish the gift of writing – you read, think, talk, look, listen, hate, fear, love, weep – and bring all of you life like a sieve to what you read. That which is not worthy of your gift will quickly pass through, but the gold remains.”

The Frontier writing continuum went through a process of development and revision and is now an extended writing continuum to be used in classrooms from Kindergarten to Senior 1.

Due to the success of the writing continuum, it was decided to also extend the reading continuum. This process began in May, 2004 and the Draft Continuum was completed in May, 2005. Implementation of the Frontier Reading Continuum began in September, 2005.

It is important to note that in all of these Frontier projects and committees, the Manitoba English Language Arts Curriculum was the foundation of all development. The descriptors for all of the continua have been developed from clusters of learning outcomes identified in the curriculum as observable behaviours and characteristics of learners.

Storage and Use of the Continua

Completed individual student Reading and Writing Continua must be stored in the school in a location accessible to other staff or substitutes who may require information about a student's ability. The student's cumulative file would be an optimum location. At the end of the year, the student's updated Reading and Writing Continua should be filed in the cumulative file.

The completed continua provide valuable information on what each child is capable of doing. This information is useful to various stakeholders including

- the current ELA teacher
- other teachers who teach or who will teach this student
- parents or guardians
- support personnel at the school including the resource teacher and other consultants/specialists

The information contained on the continua assists the current ELA teacher by informing further instruction for that student, assisting with grouping of students for instruction, and identifying trends and needs in the classroom literacy program.

Teachers are to return a copy of the reading and writing continua Class Summary for their class to their ELA consultant in May of each year.

“A novel or poem or play remains merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols. The literary work exists in the live circuit set up between the reader and text.”

- Louise Rosenblatt

The information from the completed summaries is useful for further classroom and school planning.

Completing the Reading and Writing Continua

It is expected that each student from Kindergarten to Senior 1 be profiled on the Frontier Reading and Writing Continua. Teachers can use the following steps:

1. At the start of the school year, locate copies of the reading and writing continua from the previous year.
2. Exam these copies to help focus your observations for this year.
3. Begin gathering work samples and dated anecdotal notes early.
4. Keep a portfolio for each student in both reading and writing. Collect data related to the specific, observable characteristics identified on the reading and writing continua.
5. Revisit at the end of the first term the data recently collected on each student to begin to fill in the reading and writing continua.
6. Share the information during the first term report to highlight what students “can do” and are learning to do.
7. Revisit each student’s reading and writing continua by recording any changes and progress on an ongoing basis.
8. Use opportunities such as the Frontier Divisional Assessments and provincial assessments to add to your information
9. Re-examine and update to reflect the end-of-year status of each student.
10. Submit a Class Summary of the Frontier Reading and Writing Continua to your ELA consultant in early June.

“I regard meaning as the ‘given’ in all reading – the source of anticipation, the guide to being on track, and the outcome and reward of the effort.”

- Marie Clay

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can students be in more than one stage?

Yes, you often find that student performance will span two or three stages. A student's behaviors seldom fall neatly into only one stage. Children develop at different rates. A continuum is not a scope and sequence of skills or a scoring rubric/checklist. The descriptors reflect characteristics of typical readers and writers at milestone stages of development.

2. How can I record on my class summary sheet students who are in more than one stage?

Reflect on the student's current knowledge, skills, strategies, and attitudes in reading and writing. Then check the one or two writing stages that best describe the student's stage of independence in reading and writing.

3. What tools do I use to find at which stage my student is reading and writing?

Some useful assessment tools for:

Writing	Reading
- checklists	- checklists
- dated anecdotal notes	- dated anecdotal notes
- dated writing samples over time (samples from writing folder and content areas)	- running records and/or miscue analysis
- journals	- inventories
- conferences	- questionnaires
	- notes/observations of literacy circles and or group discussions
	- journals
	- conferences

Remember- “you can't make it up – you have to back it up.” You must have evidence; you must see evidence of the behavior at least three times.

“Reading and writing should be treated as complementary activities; work on one informing and enhancing the other.”

- Gordon Wells

4. Where can I find some of these tools?

These and other useful tools can be found in

- a) The ELA Foundation for Implementation Documents.
- b) Success for All Learners Document.
- c) Other resources like Orchestrating Success in Reading by Dawn Reithaug.

5. How does the “Characteristics of Text” portion of the reading continuum help me in observing my students?

There is no one text or type of text to use in reading. A variety of text are important in balanced literacy. As you are looking at what your students are reading you can begin to locate the stage in the characteristics of text and correlate it to the student’s stage of development on the reading continuum. Text provides a starting point for your observations of what the student “can do” in reading.

High interest, low vocabulary texts are not reflected in any category of text characteristics on this continuum. Use of these books is based on the needs of the student.

6. How can I understand developmental stages vs. grade level?

In any one class there is always a wide range of ability. Children will develop as readers and writers at different rates throughout the year. There are no grade levels but ages can be a starting point to focus teachers’ observation of students. Below are the approximate ages per stage.

Approximate Age	Stage on Writing Continuum	Stage on Reading Continuum
4 – 6	Emergent	Emergent
5 – 7	Early	Beginning
6 – 8	Developing	Developing
7 – 9	Transitional	Transitional
8 – 10	Expanding	Expanding
9 – 11	Bridging	Bridging
10 – 12	Conventional	Fluent
11 – 13	Connecting	Proficient
12 – 14	Proficient	Independent

Ages are given as a starting point to focus teacher observation of student writing. Because students develop at different rates, ages should not appear on continua shared with parents. It can be disheartening to parents if their child’s stage does not match the age range shown.

“Students reading below the eighth grade level understand more of what is heard than what is read silently.”

- Source Unknown

7. Can I use these continua with Special Needs students?

Yes. Profiling what any student “can do” informs learning and instruction and shows progress over time. Collaboration with another teacher or resource teacher may be needed in order to do this.

8. How do I address parents’ concern? “Where should my child be?”

Use the information on the continua as a starting point for dialogue about what the child can do, is learning to do, and how the child has progressed over time. Parents need to know what the plan is for moving their child further along the continuum and what the role is for student, parent, and teacher. It is appropriate to say to parents that most students of this age are within this/these range/ranges. The continuum can also be a starting point for looking into other issues that may impact on the child’s literacy learning.

9. When should I start filling in the reading and writing continua?

The following are steps to consider in completing the continuum:

- a. Familiarize yourself with the student characteristics on the reading and writing continua. You will then have an idea of what you should be observing in your students.
- b. Collect information through various means regarding what each student can do in reading and writing.
- c. When you have sufficient evidence of what a child “can do,” document it on your working copy of the continua. You may want to use a date or a different colour or symbol to indicate the time of year when you noticed the student consistently exhibiting the characteristic.

Note: Characteristics have to be consistently observable. You should see evidence of the behavior at least three times.

- d. Continue to collect and gather information on each student’s literacy learning and continue to update the information on the continua.
- e. At the end of each school year, the reading and writing continua should be accurate and up-to-date.
- f. Transfer the year-end information to the permanent copy in the cum-file.

“Those who don’t read good books have no advantage over those who can’t”

- Mark Twain

10. Should I be looking at last year’s continuum to guide my instruction?

Yes, this is a place to start. The continua from the previous year should be accessible in each student’s file. Growth does not stop at the end of a grade; it is continuous. Professional dialogue with the previous teacher is a good way to learn about the needs of your students and how to best plan instruction to meet those needs.

11. How should the continuum be shared with parents?

Continua can be shared at any time during the school year with parents to give a current picture of what the child can do and is learning to do at any point in time.

Sending the continuum home may be confusing for parents. They need to talk about it with the teacher and to see evidence that supports the student’s learning.

12. How often should the continua be filled out?

Filling out the reading and writing continua should be ongoing throughout the year. As students exhibit characteristics, they can be profiled on the continua. It is important to document your observations of what the child “can do” very early in the school year. The reading and writing continua must be up-to-date and current prior to the end of the school year.

13. How much time will it take for me to profile each student on the continuum?

Profiling the students on the continuum takes very little time. It is the gathering of evidence that takes time, but it’s part of day-to-day formative assessment.

14. How much growth should I see in each child at the end of each year?

Different children grow at different rates and not always in a linear fashion. It takes longer to move through some stages than others. Different children require more practice and instruction at various stages. However, from year to year, growth should be evident.

“It is difficult to provide natural motivation for reading in an environment where books are things you work through rather than things you come to depend on for special pleasure and enlightenment.”

- Don Holdaway

15. What if a child does not show growth?

If a child does not show growth over an extended period of time, it is necessary to look further to see what other factors are impacting learning.

16. How does the information on continua help me in my instruction?

Teachers can use continua to:

- monitor and identify classroom trends in reading and writing
- group students for instruction based on needs
- identify what aspects need to be modeled and practiced in the classroom.
- give a positive look at what students can do
- guide instruction, theme/resources, selection of materials

17. What is done with the data from class summaries?

Data collected from class summaries helps the division and individual schools to determine whether more professional development on the continua is needed. Data may be used to help schools develop their literacy plans and school plans.

References

1. Education Department of Western Australia: First Steps Reading Development Continuum.
2. Fountas I and Pinnell: Guiding Readers and Writers Grades 3 – 6.
3. Hill, Bonnie Campbell: Development Continuums: A Framework for Literacy Instruction and Assessment K-8. Norwood, MA; Christopher-Gordon 1994
4. Manitoba English Language Arts Curriculum of Outcomes and Standards Foundation for Implementation.

“Fluent reading is the product of a complex combination of knowledge, skills, and understandings.”

- New Zealand Ministry of Education

Appendix A Summary Sheet: Writing Continuum

School: _____

Grade: _____

Teacher: _____

Class Summary Form For Writing Continuum		Emergent	Early	Developing	Transitional	Expanding	Bridging	Conventional	Connecting	Proficient
Student Name										
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										
9										
10										
11										
12										
13										
14										
15										
16										
17										
18										
19										
20										
21										
22										
23										
24										
25										
26										
27										
Total										

Based on each student's current knowledge, skills strategies, and attitudes in writing, check the stage/s that best describe the student's stage of independence.

Summary Sheet: Reading Continuum

School:

Grade:

Teacher:

Class Summary Form For Reading Continuum		Emergent	Beginning	Developing	Transitional	Expanding	Bridging	Fluent	Proficient	Independent
Student Name										
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										
9										
10										
11										
12										
13										
14										
15										
16										
17										
18										
19										
20										
21										
22										
23										
24										
25										
26										
27										
Total										

Based on each student's current knowledge, skills strategies, and attitudes in reading, check the stage/s that best describe the student's stage of independence.

Appendix C

What is a Response Journal?

Journals provide learners with an opportunity to record their personal thoughts, emotions, ideas, questions, reflections, connections, and new learning on what they hear, view, read, write, discuss and think.

“What we as educators want is that their writing enable students to personalize a story and gain insights about the character, to help them reflect, and to help them see the world in a different way.” (Brownlie, 2005)

“Our reflections are the making of deeper meaning and richer understandings. Our reflections are our dreams, our ideas, our questions, our initiatives, our visions – our journeys of lifelong learning and teaching.” (Schwartz & Bone, 1995)

Why are Response Journals an effective reading strategy?

Response journals allow the students to “remember to hold on to their thinking” about what they are reading. (Zimmermann, 1997)

Response journals are easily implemented at all levels. They can be used to target specific outcomes of the Provincial ELA Curriculum.

Response journals can be used with any genre of literature (poetry, short stories, media text, novel studies) and in different content areas that use expository text.

When should Response Journals be introduced?

Response journals should be introduced as soon as possible using scaffolding such as sentence frames or prompts to start. The goal should be to have students enter the middle years feeling comfortable with recording their responses to reading with little or no scaffolding.

How can I ensure student success?

Choose poetry, stories or books with enough depth to elicit responses.

Students should have the opportunity to discuss the reading before ever being asked to write a response.

Use of the “Say Something” strategy (Brownlie, 2005) creates an atmosphere of acceptance and trust.

Modeling, scaffolding, building criteria with students and practice with feedback are the most important tools for improving the quality of responses.

Scaffolding is the use of a variety of starters, frames and graphic organizers to allow students to develop thoughtful responses. If needed, open ended prompts may be used for some students. (See Appendix D)

Modeling is critical to the success of student journal writing. Teachers need to model their thinking about a selected piece of text and how that thinking can be used to form a written response. This needs to be done regularly throughout the year with a variety of texts and responses.

Students require frequent practice in the various forms of journal writing. The teacher must provide feedback based on criteria that has been developed with the students.

This practice with feedback allows students to monitor their growth and set goals for future journal responses.

What are the different formats for Response Journals? (See Appendix D for examples)

1. **Double Entry Journal**
This is the most common response journal. The page is divided in half lengthwise. One side refers to a specific piece of text in the form of a quote or a summary. The specific text may target a literary strategy, technique or element of the author's craft. It may also elicit a personal response such as a connection, feeling or opinion. The other side targets the students' thoughts regarding the selected piece of text.
2. **Diary Entry**
In this style, the student writes from the point of view of one of the characters. It should include what the character might be thinking or feeling.
3. **Illustration**
Students draw or illustrate a specific scene using thought bubbles or captions to show the character's thoughts and feelings or demonstrate the scene's importance. (Brownlie, 2005)
4. **Interview**
The student makes up questions they would ask one of the main characters. The questions are answered in the characters "voice".
5. **Letter**
There are many options in this response. Students may write a letter to a character, to the author, to the teacher, to a friend, to another student. In the letter they are asking questions or sharing ideas about what they have read. At times, certain letter types could be responded to in the same fashion as a Dialogue Journal.
6. **Dialogue Journal**
Students reading the same novel work in pairs. They write a reflection to their partner in response to the novel. The following day, they exchange journals and write back to their partner. (Brownlie, 2005)
7. **Graphic Organizers**
Graphic organizers such as KWL Charts, Mind Maps, Venn Diagrams, Timelines, Bar & Line Graphs are used to assist students in constructing meaning from text.
8. **Coding the Text**

There are a variety of coding techniques including the use of stickies or highlighting to target specific elements of text such as vocabulary, figurative language, and confusing parts of text, questions and memorable quotes. If specific letter/symbol codes are being used, they should be developed in collaboration with your students and clearly posted in your room.

How do I assess my students' journal responses?

Teachers assess for content not conventions. Students must be part of the criteria setting process. This will enable students to set clear and realistic goals.

Teachers may choose to examine journal entries as evidence of student writing at the draft stage. However, this does not mean that students cannot choose one of their responses to take through the writing process and publish at a later date.

How do I build and use criteria with my students?

Criteria are the standards by which something can be judged or valued. When we determine these criteria, we are deciding what counts. Teachers set criteria with their students. When students are involved in developing criteria, they are much more likely to understand what is expected of them, “buy in”, and then accomplish the task successfully.

A four step process for setting criteria with students encourages student participation, understanding and ownership. The first three steps should be carried out before or as students are beginning their project or assignment.

- Brainstorm
- Sort and Categorize
- Make and Post a T-Chart
- Add, Reuse, Refine

For further information on setting criteria, refer to *Setting and Using Criteria*. Copyright 1997. Kathleen Gregory, Caren Cameron, Anne Davies, Connections Publishing.

How do I tie the Reading Continuum descriptors to my students' journal responses?

At every level of the continuum, there are descriptors that can be assessed by some type of journal response. For example, at the Expanding Level students should be able to “express opinions with evidence from the text”. In the journal response, the teacher should be looking for opinions supported with evidence from the text. The teacher should see evidence of this at least three times before noting this skill on the reading continuum.

Recommended Resources and References

- Au, Kathryn H., Jacqueline H. Carroll, and Judith A. Scheu. Balanced Literacy Instruction: A Teacher's Resource Book. Norwood MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers Inc., 1997.
- Brownlie, Faye. Grand Conversations, Thoughtful Responses: A Unique Approach to Literature Circles. Winnipeg MB: Portage and Main Press, 2005.
- Campbell Hill, Bonnie, Nancy Johnson and Katherine Schlick Noe. Literature Circles and Responses. Norwood MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 1995.
- Daniels, Harvey and Nancy Steineke. Mini-Lessons For Literature Circles. Portsmouth NH: Heinmann, 2004
- Gregory, Kathleen, Caren Cameron and Anne Davies. Getting and Using Criteria. Merville B.C: Connections Publishing, 1997.
- Harvey, Stephanie and Anne Goudvis. Strategies That Work. Markham ON: Pembroke Publishers Limited, 2000.
- Manitoba Education and Training. English Language Arts Foundation For Implementation. Winnipeg MB: The Crown in Right of Manitoba, 1996.
- Oliver Keene, Ellin and Susan Zimmerman. Mosaic of Thought. Portsmouth NH: Heinmann, 1997.
- Pollack Day, Jeni, et al. Moving Forward with Literature Circles. Broadway NY: Scholastic, 2002.
- Schwartz, Susan and Maxine Bone. Retelling, Relating, Reflecting. Concord ON: Irwing Publishing, 1995.
- Stickland, Kathleen and James Strickland. Making Assessment Elementary. Portsmouth NH: Heinmann, 2000.
- Tovani, Chris. I Read It, But I Don't Get It. Portland ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2000.

Appendix D

Examples and Exemplars of Response Journals

i. JOURNAL PROMPTS

Book Title




Nov. 2, 2002



- ◆ Tell about what happened in the story.
- ◆ Ask questions about things that confuse you or that you wonder about.
- ◆ Describe your feelings about the events.
- ◆ Describe your feelings about characters.
- ◆ Copy down a quote from a character and tell why you think it's meaningful.
- ◆ Describe your favorite part.
- ◆ Make a prediction about what will happen next.
- ◆ Tell how you would react if you were one of the characters in the story.
- ◆ Describe a part that surprised you.
- ◆ Does the author use any strong imagery in the story (similes, metaphors, etc.)?
Give examples.
- ◆ Write a letter to the author or a character.
- ◆ Draw pictures or create graphic organizers.

Adapted from *Grand Conversations, Thoughtful Responses*. Copyright 2005. Faye Brownlie. Portage & Main Press

JOURNAL PROMPTS

Summary 	Personal Response 	Think Questions 	Vocabulary – Page # and New Word
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main idea • Beginning Middle End • Characters Setting Problem Solution • Important events or information <p style="text-align: right;">Author’s and how use it</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Like or don’t like • Agree or don’t agree • Favorite part or favorite character • Prediction • Connection to life • Compare to another Story <p>Message I can use in my life</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why? • How? • What would happen if? • I wonder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lóók In • Lóók Around • Lóók It Up <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Language</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awesome adjectives • Vivid verbs • Precise nouns • “Show not tell” • Similes • Other “powerful language”

ii. **DOUBLE ENTRY JOURNALS**

What's Happening	My Thinking
Brief Summary	Reader's reaction/opinions supported with evidence from the text
Key events/facts/details	Why they're important/What's the author's message?
Key Quotations	My thinking/interpretations about the meaning or significance
Themes	Text reference/In my head reference
New Vocabulary	What I know about the word/how it connects to the text
Confusing Part	What I did to get unstuck

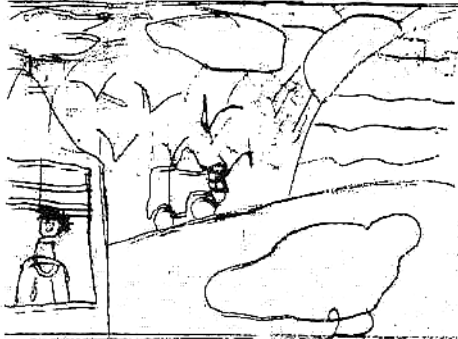
Adapted from *Grand Conversations, Thoughtful Responses*. Copyright 2005. Faye Brownlie. Portage & Main Press

DOUBLE ENTRY JOURNALS

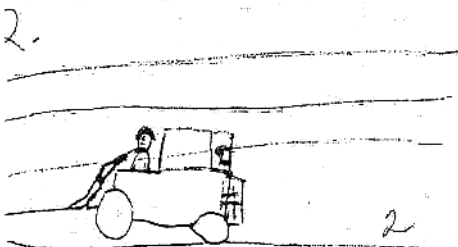
What's important or interesting to me	Author's message (what is the author trying to say?)

iii. ILLUSTRATION

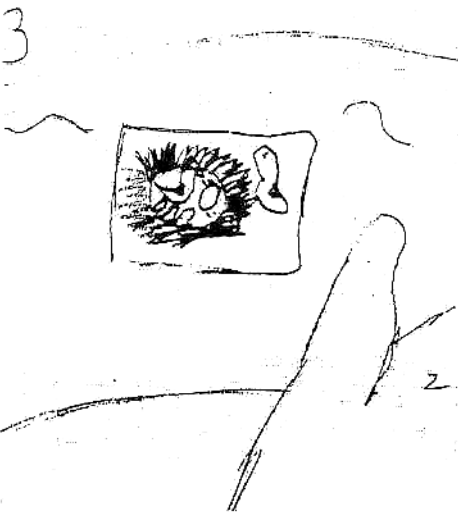
by Barbara Smucker Jacob's Little Giant
Jacob lives in the Snyder farm. It was the beginning of summer and the ice in their pond was beginning to melt. They going to start planting potatoes.



When Jacob woke up he looked out his window and saw a hundred Canada Geese. Jacob thought that they would land on their pond but they didn't.






Jacob was riding the potatoe planter. He would poke the potatoe into the ground whenever the machine missed.



The ducks were in the pond with their new born ducklings. But there was still one more egg in the nest it hasn't hatched yet.

Regine, a Grade 4 student, has identified the general setting of *Jacob's Little Giant* (Smucker) and has drawn three specific images.

iv. DIALOGUE JOURNAL

Cassie	Cleopatra, VII	Jan 21, 2006
<p>Dear Melissa,</p> <p>Cleopatra is a great book. I feel so sorry for Cleopatra because she is stuck in Rome, where she doesn't have any friends in. And besides she is only twelve. She might look strong and brave outside, but they are not like that inside. That is what most authors do to their main characters. I guessed this one did that too. I don't think I want to live during the ancient times because you either be a slave or a worker, or part of the royal family or a general and lots more. Firstly I don't want to be a slave because it's unfair and there are a lot of works to do. I don't want to be a member of the royal family either because your brothers and sisters try to kill each other. Same with being a general. You can still get killed nowadays, but it's not as bad as it was like back then. Anyways, I think we should finish the book this week. Don't you? How do you like the book? What do you think of Cleopatra?</p>	<p>Hi, Cassie</p> <p>I agree that this book is great. I also feel sorry for Cleopatra that she doesn't have a friend except for her maid Nerva. Nerva is nice, I like Nerva. I would like to be a member of the royal family except I would like to be the only child. I think that Cleopatra is very brave and kind.</p> <p><i>Melissa</i></p> <div data-bbox="1015 1081 1242 1344" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <p>The Royal Diary</p>  <p>Cleopatra, VII</p> </div>	
 <p>Like it? I know it's weird?</p>	<p>Stopping Responding & Re-reading</p> 	

An amusing dialogue journal prepared by a pair of Grade 7 girls.

Grand Conversations, Thoughtful Responses. Copyright 2005. Faye Brownlie. Portage & Main Press

DIALOGUE JOURNAL

Mike and Adam Discuss the First Chapter of North and South

North and South

Dear Adam,
This book has a lot of similarities to The Bastard [another John Jakes book]. In both, the mothers die and the sons are out for revenge. Also, the stories start out in Europe and then the main characters want to journey to the colonies. Both characters learn a trade in Europe and then use it in the colonies. I think we'll meet this character's stepfather's family in America.

Mike

Dear Mike,
It seems like you know what you're talking about. I'm interested in what happens with Joseph since he's a slave now. I was wondering what happened to his mother after Joseph left. I think that Joe is going to be a very important character because he is going to fight in the Civil War as a slave. I also think that you are right about meeting Joseph's step-father's family in America. I would like to read the book The Bastard.

Adam

v. **GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS**

Check the Blackline Masters of the ELA Curriculum Guide
Check the Reading Strategies – At A Glance Document

vi. **CODING THE TEXT**

INSERT Codes for Taking Notes

INSERT (Best Practice High School Variation)

If a section:

- ✓ Confirms what you thought
- ✗ Contradicts what you thought
- ? Raises a question
- ?? Confuses you
- ★ Seems important
- ! Is new or interesting

If a word

Gets repeated
Seems important
Is unknown

Box it:

Word