

“The Birthday Party” Three Levels of Reading/Concentric Circles Analysis

Overview:

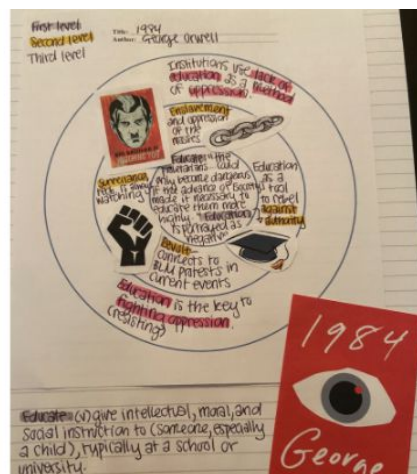
Readers who use close reading strategies will discover the three layers of reading as they slow down to notice each aspect of the text. The three levels of reading are:

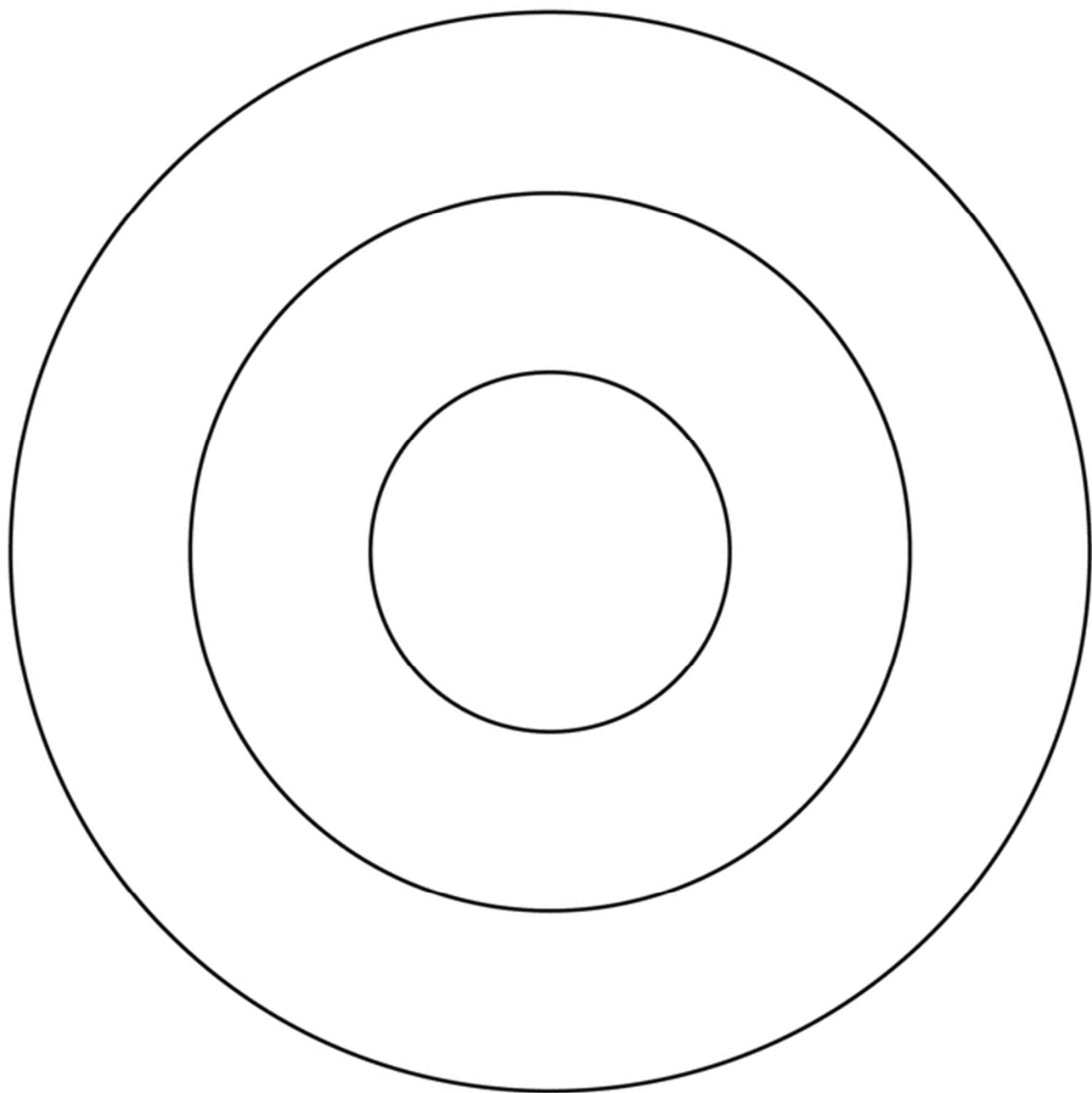
- reading on the line (level 1)
 - students find meaning **directly in the text**. As they read, they are mentally answering the questions *who, what, when, and where*
- reading between the lines (level 2)
 - students **draw inferences** from what is in the text. As they read, their key concerns are the following: *what does a passage represent, suggest, or personify?* What does a certain allusion or metaphor mean? What does a certain allusion or metaphor mean? How do an author’s choices reveal attitude or meaning? They are also **analyzing** what they read: **interpreting, classifying, comparing, contrasting, and finding patterns.**
- reading beyond the lines (level 3)
 - students move **beyond the text to connect to universal meaning**. As they read, they should be asking mental questions: *How does this text connect with my life? With life in a larger sense? With all human beings? With my ideas about morality or values? What kinds of perceptions about life in general is the author communicating to me? What do I think of those perceptions?* At this level, students will move from **what** of the text to the **so what**. They **connect literature with their own experiences and with universal meaning**.

Instructions

1. Across the top of your paper, write the title of the work and the author’s name
2. Draw 3 large concentric circles on the paper (one circle inside another circle inside a larger circle). You may also use the template I provide.
3. **First level of reading** (reading on the line): For the innermost circle:
 - a. Write the most significant word from the part of the story you have been assigned.
 - b. Quote the entire sentence in which the word appears (document the source of the quotation in parenthesis...this should be author’s last name and page number)
 - c. Look up and write **multiple** dictionary definitions of the word (denotation)
 - d. Explain why the word is important to the meaning of the work by placing it in the context of the narrative (explain what is literally happening in the text when the word is used)
4. **Second level of reading** (reading between the lines): For the middle circle:
 - a. Draw four images that relate to the assigned part of the reading
 - b. Write an explanation of the link between each image and the word you have written in the innermost circle.
5. **Third level of reading** (reading beyond the lines): For the outer circle:
 - a. Write **2** thematic statements drawn from the significant word you wrote in the innermost circle and the images you drew in the middle circle. These should include “because”, be universally applicable, and should NOT refer directly to the text.

Example from 1984





Birthday Party

They were a couple in their late thirties, and they looked unmistakably married. They sat on the banquette opposite us in a little narrow restaurant, having dinner. The man had a round, self-satisfied face, with glasses on it; the woman was fadingly pretty, in a big hat.

There was nothing conspicuous about them, nothing particularly noticeable, until the end of their meal, when it suddenly became obvious that this was an Occasion—in fact, the husband’s birthday, and the wife had planned a little surprise for him.

It arrived, in the form of a small but glossy birthday cake, with one pink candle burning in the center. The headwaiter brought it in and placed it before the husband, and meanwhile the violin-and-piano orchestra played “Happy Birthday to You,” and the wife beamed with shy pride over her little surprise, and such few people as there were in the restaurant tried to help out with a pattering of applause. It became clear at once that help was needed, because the husband was not pleased. Instead, he was hotly embarrassed, and indignant at his wife for embarrassing him.

You looked at him and you saw this and you thought, “Oh, now, don’t *be* like that!” But he was like that, and as soon as the little cake had been deposited on the table, and the orchestra had finished the birthday piece, and the general attention had shifted from the man and the woman, I saw him say something to her under his breath—some punishing thing, quick and curt and unkind. I couldn’t bear to look at the woman then, so I stared at my plate and waited for quite a long time. Not long enough, though. She was still crying when I finally glanced over there again. Crying quietly and heartbrokenly and hopelessly, all to herself, under the gay big brim of her best hat.