

Understanding the passage
Questioning the Text

[method from Marcia Hilsabeck - retired Round Rock High School]

The following chart contains a sentence by sentence look at the first paragraph from an excerpt from Henry Fielding's Tom Jones. As you read each sentence, write a question that comes to your mind about the contents, meanings of words, purpose for including details, or any other idea you may wish to know more about. [The first sentence is done for you.] The idea is to think about your thinking, also called metacognition. After you finish the first paragraph, continue the process with the remaining paragraphs.

From <i>Tom Jones</i> - Henry Fielding	Questions
Mr. Allworthy came to his house very late in the evening, and after a short supper with his sister, retired much fatigued to his chamber.	Who is Mr. Allworthy? Why was he so late? Why was his supper short? Is he wealthy? Why is he so fatigued?
Here, having spent some minutes on his knees-a custom which he never broke through on any account-he was preparing to step into bed, when, upon opening the clothes, to his great surprise he beheld an infant, wrapt up in some coarse linen, in a sweet and profound sleep, between the sheets.	
He stood some time lost in astonishment at this sight; but, as good-nature had always the ascendant in his mind, he soon began to be touched with sentiments of compassion for the little wretch before him.	
He then rang his bell, and ordered an elderly woman-servant to rise immediately, and come to him; and in the meantime was so eager in contemplating the beauty of innocence, appearing in those lively colours with which infancy and sleep always display it, that his	

<p>thoughts were too much engaged to reflect that he was in his shirt when the matron came in.</p>	
<p>She had, indeed, given her master sufficient time to dress himself; for out of respect to him, and regard to decency, she had spent many minutes in adjusting her hair at the looking glass, notwithstanding all the hurry in which she had been summoned by the servant, and though her master, of aught she knew, lay expiring in an apoplexy, or in some other fit.</p>	
<p>It will not be wondered at that a creature who had so strict a regard to decency in her own person should be shocked at the least deviation from it in another. She therefore no sooner opened the door, and saw her master standing by the bedside in his shirt, with a candle in his hand, than she started back in a most terrible fright, and might perhaps have swooned away, had he not now recollected his being undressed, and put an end to her terrors by desiring her to stay without the door till he had thrown some clothes over his back, and was become incapable of shocking the pure eyes of Mrs. Deborah Wilkins, who, though in the fifty-second year of her age, vowed she had never beheld a man without his coat.</p>	
<p>When Mrs. Deborah returned into the room, and was acquainted by her master with the finding the little infant, her consternation was rather greater than his had been; nor could she refrain from crying out, with great horror of accent as</p>	

well as look, "My good sir! what's to be done?" Mr. Allworthy answered, she must take care of the child that evening, and in the morning he would give orders to provide it a nurse. "Yes sir," says she; "and I hope your worship will send out your warrant to take up the hussy its mother, for she must be one of the neighbourhood; and I should be glad to see her committed to Bridewell, and whipt at the cart's tail. but for my own part, it goes against me to touch these misbegotten wretches, whom I don't look upon as my fellow- creature. Faugh! How it stinks!... I might be so bold to give my advice, I would have it put in a basket, and sent out and laid at the churchwarden's door. It is a good night, only a little rainy and windy; and if it was well wrapt up, and put in a warm basket, it is two to one but it lives till it is found in the morning. But if it should not, we have discharged our duty in taking proper care of it; and it is, perhaps, better for such creatures to die in a state of innocence, than to grow up and imitate their mothers; for nothing better can be expected of them."

There were some strokes in this speech which, perhaps, would have offended Mr. Allworthy had he strictly attended to it; but he had now got one of his fingers into the infant's hand, which, by its gentle pressure, seeming to implore his assistance, had certainly outpleaded the eloquence of Mrs. Deborah, had it been ten times greater than it was. He now gave Mrs. Deborah positive orders to take

<p>the child to her own bed, and to call up a maid-servant to provide it pap, and other things, against it waked...</p>	
<p>Such was the discernment of Mrs. Wilkins, and such the respect she bore her master, under whom she enjoyed a most excellent place, that her scruples gave way to his peremptory commands; and she took the child under her arms, without any apparent disgust at the illegality of its birth; and declaring it was a sweet little infant, walked off with it to her own chamber.</p>	