

Implications of Teaching Character Analysis in Reading for Continuation Writing in Senior High based on STEAL Character Analysis Method

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Abstract

In recent years, the continuation writing has emerged as a new question type in the college entrance examination for English. This task requires students to analyze and comprehend the provided text, and then creatively extend the narrative, ensuring that the continuation is closely aligned with the original content. This approach emphasizes the assessment of both students' input and output capabilities. Typically, continuation writing utilizes narrative texts, where the actions and behaviors of characters play a crucial role in shaping the plot and conveying the theme. Consequently, the teaching and learning of character analysis in continuation writing has become a significant challenge for educators and students alike, representing a key point in mastering the analysis and understanding of this writing task. This article explores the pathways and methodologies for character analysis in reading instruction for continuation writing, based on the STEAL Character Analysis Method.

Keywords

Continuation Writing; Reading; STEAL; Teaching and Learning.

1. Introduction

The "National English Curriculum Standards for Ordinary High Schools (2017 Edition, Revised in 2020)" (hereinafter referred to as the "Curriculum Standards") states: "Discourse is the foundational resource for English language instruction. Discourse provides language learning with themes, contexts, and content, and organizes and presents information through its unique internal logical structure, stylistic features, and linguistic forms, serving the expression of thematic meaning." In the context of continuation writing, narrative texts are often utilized as vehicles, making character portrayal an essential element within narratives. Heng Heng (2023) emphasizes that characters serve the theme of the story. Understanding characters aids students in grasping the core values conveyed by the narrative. Students must analyze the subtle clues within the text to understand the characters, thereby perceiving the deeper meanings of the article, and subsequently crafting reasonable character actions and dialogues that reveal and elevate the theme, fulfilling the purpose of continuation writing.

Therefore, starting from the STEAL Character Analysis Method, readers seek methods to guide students in analyzing and understanding characters within continuation writing instruction, aiming to cultivate students' critical thinking skills and laying the groundwork for high-quality narrative writing. This approach seeks to achieve coherence in content, logic, emotion, and language in continuation writing.

In the following discussion, I will use the November 2017 Zhejiang examination prompt-"A Vacation with My Mother" as an example, employing the STEAL Character Analysis Method to explore how to teach students to conduct a comprehensive analysis of characters in continuation writing, understand the plot and themes, and enhance their discourse and reading skills, thereby providing direction for students' narrative writing.

2. Main body

2.1. Reach Expertise in Employing the STEAL Reading Strategy to Thoroughly Analyse Characters.

Ge Wenshan (2022) notes that due to word count limitations, writing continuation cannot accommodate excessive twists and turns of suspense or convoluted conflicts. Consequently, the development of archetypal characters becomes the primary driver of plot progression. In other words, the ability to create archetypal characters is an essential skill for writing continuation. This skill necessitates that students pay attention to the various personality traits and characteristics of different characters within the text. In writing continuation, the material typically includes descriptions of the protagonist's character traits and timely character development. Understanding the characters is a prerequisite for students to effectively advance the plot. To this end, the author suggests that in writing continuation instruction, teachers should encourage students to actively employ the STEAL Character Analysis Method, which focuses on the characters' Speech, Thoughts, Effect on others, Actions, and Looks, thereby enabling a comprehensive analysis of characters and adequately preparing for the continuation of the narrative.

2.1.1. Teach the STEAL Character Analysis Method to Provide Reading Scaffolds.

Cai Qiong and Zhang Jinxiu (2020) emphasize the importance of guided reading for educators, highlighting its role in equipping students with strategies and methods for independent reading. This approach facilitates the extraction of textual information and provides scaffolding for students, enabling them to autonomously apply techniques and tools to analyze character traits, thereby enhancing their reading proficiency. Consequently, when tasked with character analysis, teachers should first instruct students in the STEAL Character Analysis Method, presenting it in an accessible manner. This could involve showing a relevant video or utilizing a tabular format for clarity.

Students should be made aware that character analysis should encompass five aspects: Speech, Thoughts, Effect on others, Actions, and Looks. Furthermore, educators should not only guide students in employing the STEAL framework after reading and writing exercises but also integrate this character analysis method into regular instruction, particularly in narrative genres. For instance, during the teaching of Book1 Unit1 published the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, STEAL Character Analysis Method can be effectively utilized.

2.1.2. Utilize Transition Devices to Cultivate Students' Summarization and Analytical Skills.

Wang Qiang (2024) states, "Information presented in a straightforward textual format does not enhance information retention. When textual information is converted into another format (for instance, a visual format), it can be processed and retained more effectively. The method of converting information from one format to another is referred to as a transition device." Educators should guide students in integrating the STEAL Character Analysis Method with transition devices to improve their efficiency in processing and organizing textual information. Based on "A Vacation with My Mother," educators can present the following:

By utilizing the table, students can efficiently capture key information. Within the STEAL analysis framework, they can examine character traits through dialogue, actions, and behaviors, thereby grasping the narrative's progression and deepening their understanding of the theme. This provides valuable informational support for subsequent writing.

The article "A Vacation with My Mother" portrays a "loving, sweet, absent-minded, and forgetful" mother, detailing three specific incidents: returning home due to forgotten items, the protagonist's anxiety about using the bathroom because of the mother's carelessness, and the mother's attitude towards finding accommodation. In these three events, students should

identify the reactions of the four characters, noting that not all characters may be depicted in every incident, with particular emphasis on the protagonist-the mother’s actions and demeanor.

Table 1. Character Analysis Framework for STEAL

STEAL Method Chart							
	STEAL					Words	Personality traits
	S	T	E	A	L		
Mother							
Me							
David							
Father							

2.1.3. Use STEAL Character Analysis Method to Infer the Character's Actions.

Cao Qifeng(2023) suggested that maintaining consistency in character portrayal with the preceding text is essential for ensuring narrative coherence in continuation writing. Different character traits will lead to varied actions; therefore, to achieve alignment between the continuation and the original characterizations, students must infer character representations based on the statements and details presented in the original text. Subsequently, they should emphasize and develop the established character profiles in their continuation writing.

In the text "A Vacation with My Mother," the author's mother, characterized by her careless nature, leads the family into numerous "troubles," while simultaneously infusing the author's childhood with countless joys. Furthermore, her loving and sweet qualities position her as a mentor in my life, effectively guiding author’s values and fostering a positive and optimistic mindset. Based on the provided continuations, "The next day we remembered the brand-new tent we had brought with us" and "We drove through several states and saw lots of great sights along the way," it is evident that the author's mother again creates challenges for the family during the journey. However, her admirable traits also imbue this trip with love and happiness, rendering it an unforgettable experience for the author’s family, during which the author gains insights into life. In the continuation, students should utilize the STEAL to infer the potential actions and dialogues of all characters in subsequent events, ensuring the narrative remains coherent.

To achieve this, educators can employ the STEAL to pose questions to students, thereby laying a solid foundation for subsequent character development and plot progression, while also enhancing students' cognitive skills:

- Q1:According to the STEAL chart, what kind of person is “My mother”?
- Q2:Would “My mother” make troubles in the journey?
- Q3:If there are troubles made by “My mother”, what reactions or actions author’s family may have?
- Q4:How would author’s family think about existing troubles?
- Q5:In the process of driving, what author’s might do?
- Q6:When seeing lots of great sights along the way, what does mother say and act?

The STEAL Character Analysis Method serves not only as an effective framework for character analysis but also as a crucial approach for students to extend their writing regarding characters' actions and behaviors. Educators should emphasize the development and application of the

STEAL character framework, enabling students to engage with texts, comprehend their content, and transcend the material.

3. Conclusion

Shuai Ying and Tian Duo Shuai (2024) emphasize that "Continuation writing should utilize discourse as a medium to guide students in exploring thematic significance, thereby enhancing language quality through daily accumulation. Comprehension serves as the foundation, with the sequel stemming from understanding and writing being integrated into daily practice."

Understanding is a prerequisite for effective sequel writing. Consequently, fostering students' discourse competence is an essential component of proficient continuation writing. Reading transcends mere decoding; it necessitates the application of strategic approaches. Educators must cultivate an awareness of imparting various reading strategies to accommodate diverse learning styles and meet students' educational needs. Among these strategies, STEAL Character Analysis Method serves as a fundamental reading analysis tool in narrative pattern. In instructional settings, teachers should consistently guide students in employing STEAL Character Analysis Method's framework, enabling them to identify key content within texts and leverage their prior experiences to construct their understanding, thereby establishing a scaffold for continuation writing.

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