

ANALYZING PISA READING SAMPLE TEST "COW'S MILK" IN ENGLISH CRITICAL READING CLASSES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This paper explores the application of the PISA reading sample test, specifically the text "Cow's Milk," in English critical reading classes at the Uzbek secondary school level students. By integrating the test into the classroom, educators can foster students' critical thinking, analytical skills, and global awareness. This study examines the pedagogical merits of using standardized test materials, like those from PISA, to enhance literacy, evaluate reading comprehension, and provide opportunities for critical discourse in an English class setting. It also highlights potential challenges and offers strategies for successfully incorporating these texts in ways that deepen understanding of complex, real-world issues.

Key words: reading literacy, secondary school students, PISA reading tests, "Cow's milk" reading test, critical reading, Bloom's taxonomy.

Introduction

In a world dominated by rapid technological advancements and the globalization of information, literacy extends beyond the basic ability to read and write. It encompasses the skills of analysis, critical thinking, and engagement with diverse perspectives. Secondary school students, in particular, must be equipped with the tools necessary to navigate complex texts and extract meaning from a variety of sources. This paper examines how the reading sample test "Cow's Milk," from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), can be utilized in English critical reading classes to enhance these competencies.

PISA tests are globally recognized for assessing students' ability to apply reading, mathematics, and science knowledge to real-world scenarios. The text "Cow's Milk" provides an opportunity to delve into multifaceted discussions, from

effective debates to environmental and ethical considerations. This makes it a useful resource for encouraging critical engagement in the classroom, especially as students begin to comprehend with increasingly complex societal issues. By analyzing the content, structure, and potential pedagogical applications of "Cow's Milk," this paper outlines how secondary educators can integrate standardized reading tests into their lessons to improve comprehension and foster critical thinking.

PISA Reading Sample Test: An Overview

PISA is an international assessment coordinated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). It evaluates the knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics, and science. OECD (2021) informs that the reading section of PISA emphasizes comprehension, inference, and the ability to reflect upon and evaluate texts. Rather than focusing solely on factual recall, the tests aim to measure students' capacity to engage with and respond critically to diverse texts.

The "Cow's Milk" reading sample is an excellent case study in this regard. The passage presents factual information about cow's milk, its nutritional benefits, its environmental impact, and the growing trend of plant-based milk alternatives. The text is designed to be non-biased, providing balanced information to encourage students to think critically about the advantages and disadvantages of consuming cow's milk. The questions accompanying the text require students to extract key details, compare perspectives, and evaluate the reliability of the information provided.

The Nutritional Value of Milk: *Countless Benefits!*

Farm to Market Dairy milk products contain key nutrients: calcium, protein, vitamin D, vitamin B12, riboflavin, and potassium. These vitamins and minerals make *Farm to Market Dairy* milk products an important part of a healthful diet. Consuming *Farm to Market Dairy* milk products every day is a great way to ensure that you get the vitamins and minerals your body needs.

Consuming *Farm to Market Dairy* milk products increases weight loss and helps maintain a healthy weight. Milk increases bone strength and density. It even improves cardiovascular health and helps prevent cancer. One glass of milk is packed with vitamins, minerals, and a wealth of health benefits.



According to Bill Sears, MD, Associate Clinical Professor of Pediatrics at the University of California at Irvine, milk contains many important nutrients in one convenient place. The International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA) supports this idea. In fact, the IDFA suggests that many health professionals and groups would also agree.

Milk contains a complete nutrient package of nine essential nutrients. In addition to being an excellent source of calcium and vitamin D, it is a good source of vitamin A, protein and potassium. Dairy is recommended by doctors. Dairy's role in a healthy diet has long been established by the nutrition and science community. This includes the National Osteoporosis Foundation, the Surgeon General, the National Institutes of Health, the American Medical Association's Council of Scientific Affairs and many other leading health organizations.

International Dairy Foods Association, September 27, 2007

According to the IDFA, with which statement do leading health professionals and organizations agree?

- ☐ Consuming milk and milk products leads to obesity.
- ☐ Milk is a good source of essential vitamins and minerals.
- ☐ Milk contains more vitamins than minerals.
- ☐ Drinking milk is a leading cause of osteoporosis.

Refer to "Farm to Market Dairy" on the right. Click on a choice to answer the question.

What is the main purpose of this text?

- ☐ To argue that milk products increase weight loss.
- ☐ To compare *Farm to Market Dairy* milk products to other dairy products.
- ☐ To inform the public of the risks associated with heart disease.
- ☐ To support the use of *Farm to Market Dairy* products.

(Retrieved from www.oecd.org)

Importance of Critical Reading in Secondary Education

In secondary schools, the transition from simple comprehension to higher-order thinking is essential. Reading critically is not just about understanding the surface

meaning of the text but also about analyzing the deeper implications, identifying biases, and evaluating the evidence presented (Luke, 2012, p. 6). The idea is supported by Chall (1983) that these skills are crucial not only for academic success but also for students' ability to function as informed citizens in society.

Bloom (1956) defines that the use of critical reading in secondary education aligns with Bloom's taxonomy, which categorizes levels of thinking from lower-order to higher-order skills. While basic comprehension (understanding and remembering) forms the foundation of literacy, the ultimate goal is to reach higher-order thinking skills like analyzing, evaluating, and creating. By analyzing texts like "Cow's Milk," students move beyond simple understanding to interrogate the source of the information, its intent, and its broader social and environmental implications.

The PISA test, with its emphasis on real-world contexts, is particularly suited to this educational aim. The "Cow's Milk" text serves as an entry point for broader discussions about health, environmental sustainability, and ethics, making it an effective tool for engaging students in critical analysis (OECD, 2021). This can foster a classroom environment that values open discussion, debate, and a multiplicity of viewpoints, all of which are crucial for developing critical literacy.

Analyzing "Cow's Milk": Structure, Content, and Classroom Application

The "Cow's Milk" reading sample is designed to be informative while also prompting reflection on broader societal issues. The text is structured in a way that presents students with factual information about the nutritional benefits of cow's milk, followed by contrasting arguments about its environmental impact and the rise of alternative milk products. This juxtaposition encourages readers to weigh the merits of both sides, thus sharpening their ability to engage in critical discourse.

In an English critical reading class, teachers can use the "Cow's Milk" text as a springboard for a range of activities that focus on analysis and critical thinking. Some possible pedagogical approaches include:

1. **Close Reading and Analysis:** Students can begin by conducting a close reading of the text, identifying key arguments, claims, and supporting evidence. Teachers can encourage students to question the reliability of the sources, the

credibility of the arguments presented, and whether any biases are apparent in the way the information is framed.

2. **Debates and Discussions:** The contrasting views on cow's milk versus plant-based alternatives offer fertile ground for class debates (Yoon & Kim, 2018, pp. 99-115). Students can be divided into groups, with one side arguing for the continued consumption of cow's milk, citing nutritional benefits and traditional uses, while the other side advocates for the environmental and health benefits of plant-based alternatives. This kind of debate promotes critical thinking and encourages students to back up their positions with evidence.
3. **Evaluating Sources:** Teachers can introduce supplementary materials on the topic, such as articles, research studies, or advertisements from dairy companies or plant-based milk producers. By comparing these different sources, students learn to evaluate the credibility of information, recognize potential bias, and develop skills for distinguishing between fact and opinion (Schraw & McCrudden, 2013, pp. 523-544).
4. **Ethical Discussions:** The environmental impact of cow's milk production, as mentioned in the text, can lead to deeper ethical discussions. Questions about animal welfare, sustainability, and the role of personal choice in mitigating climate change can be explored. This not only develops critical reading skills but also fosters students' moral reasoning and empathy for global challenges.
5. **Creative Projects:** Students can be encouraged to create their own public service announcements, infographics, or essays that present their conclusions about the topic. These projects can help students synthesize the information they have gathered and present it in a coherent, persuasive manner.

Potential Challenges

While the integration of PISA reading samples into secondary English classrooms offers many benefits, there are also challenges that teachers must consider. First, standardized tests like PISA may not fully align with the curriculum goals in every school or region. Teachers may need to adapt the materials to fit the learning objectives for their particular class, which can require additional preparation.

Another challenge is that some students may struggle with the level of complexity involved in critical reading exercises. OECD (2021) reports that PISA tests are designed to assess higher-order thinking skills, and students who are still developing basic comprehension abilities may find these tasks daunting. To address this, teachers should provide differentiated instruction, ensuring that struggling readers receive the support they need to engage meaningfully with the text.

Additionally, there is a risk that students may focus too narrowly on the information presented in the "Cow's Milk" text without considering the broader context or recognizing that there may be other perspectives not represented in the passage. Teachers should encourage students to seek out additional information and remind them that critical reading involves questioning not just the content of the text but also what is left unsaid.

The Role of Teacher Guidance

The success of incorporating texts like "Cow's Milk" into English critical reading classes largely depends on the teacher's guidance. Teachers play a crucial role in facilitating discussions, asking probing questions, and encouraging students to explore multiple viewpoints. By modeling critical thinking and demonstrating how to deconstruct complex arguments, teachers can help students develop the skills necessary for independent analysis.

Furthermore, teachers should strive to create a classroom environment where students feel comfortable expressing their opinions, even if those opinions differ from the majority. Critical reading classes should be spaces where diverse perspectives are welcomed, and students are encouraged to think for themselves (Gee, 2008, pp. 120-130).

Conclusion

The PISA reading sample test "Cow's Milk" provides an excellent resource for secondary school English critical reading classes. By analyzing the text and engaging in discussions about its content, students can develop their critical thinking, reading comprehension, and analytical skills (Paris & Hamilton, 2009, pp. 32-53). The real-world relevance of the text also encourages students to connect classroom learning to broader societal issues, such as environmental sustainability, health, and ethics.

While there are challenges in adapting standardized test materials for classroom use, the potential benefits far outweigh the drawbacks. With proper teacher guidance and thoughtful lesson planning, the "Cow's Milk" text can be a valuable tool for fostering critical literacy in secondary education. Through the integration of such texts, educators can prepare students not only for academic success but also for the complex, interconnected world they will face beyond the classroom.

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