

# “Coaching Through Literature”

Katherine Brickey



**Think back to when  
you were a young  
adult, heading off to  
college or simply  
starting your life as an  
adult...**

**"It matters not what  
someone is born, but what  
they grow to be."**

*J.K. Rowling, **Harry Potter and the Goblet  
of Fire***

# Objectives

- 01 What is coaching?
- 02 Three components of coaching.
- 03 What science says about reading fiction.
- 04 Apply “Coaching through Literature” to advising.

*Keywords:* Connecting, critical-thinking, problem-solving

*Note:* Coach=Advisor, Coachee=Student, Piece=Story

# 01

## What is coaching?



An approach to building connections by using open-ended questions to help the coachee's grasp of the situation around the issue(s) they are facing. \*After the coaching session, the coach needs to check and assess the coachee's problem-solving capability, continuing to observe and provide constructive feedback without interpretation to the coachee's efforts.

### **What is Coaching Through Literature?**

Reading about how fictional characters negotiate the terrain of life can help students to create stronger, more creative narratives.

# 02 Three Critical Components of Coaching

## Component 1 – Prepare Your Questions



A coach needs to prepare the questions before a coaching session. These questions can become part of your standard coaching tool kit.\*

### **What kinds of questions should advisors prepare?**

The questions that a coach needs to ask are those that they don't already know the answer to or questions that don't have a standard reply that they would expect. The challenge is to ensure the coach has open questions that help to dig deeper, rather than leading questions about what the coach is already thinking or may have preconditioned assumptions about.

A starting question might be “What is on your mind after reading the piece?” and follow up with “Is there anything else?” These two questions can lead to a strong start to the conversation and from there the coach can explore issues the student is having by restating the problem as the coach currently understands the situation. This can then lead to discussing steps to overcome challenges the student is having, for example, “Where should we start?” or “What is the next step?”

# Examples of Coaching Through Literature Questions

1. What was your favorite part of the piece?
2. What was your least favorite?
3. Did you race to the end, or was it more of a slow burn?
4. Which scene has stuck with you the most?
5. What did you think of the writing? Are there any standout sentences?
6. Did you reread any passages? If so, which ones?
7. Would you want to read another piece by this author/poet?
8. Did reading the story impact your mood? If yes, how so?
9. What surprised you most about the story?
10. How did your opinion of the piece change as you read it?
11. If you could ask the author anything, what would it be?
12. How does the story's title work in relation to the story's content? If you could give the piece a new title, what would it be?
13. Is this story overrated or underrated?
14. Did this story remind you of any other stories or books?
15. How did it impact you? Do you think you'll remember it in a few months or years?
16. Would you ever consider re-reading it? Why or why not?
17. Who do you think would most benefit from reading this story?
18. Are there lingering questions from the story you're still thinking about?
19. Did the piece strike you as original?

# Cont. Three Critical Components of Coaching



## Component 2 – Question with Respect

Coaching must be approached from a position as equals when meeting about challenges or life experiences the student is having. This will help to develop a connection with the student, understanding the challenges they face. Through coaching through literature an advisor can help the coachee to develop more in-depth answers to questions, rather than simply answer with a “yes” or “no”. The challenge is to enquire further and move to a deeper level of understanding, critical thinking, and problem solving.

# Cont. Three Critical Components of Coaching

## Component 3 – Actively Listen to the Reply\*



For the coach, most of the message is delivered by the way the student is speaking, their tone expressions, body language and the context that is discussed. All of these Components are important during the conversation and are taken in subconsciously but when the coach concentrates and develops their listening skills, they will get a deeper understanding of the coachee and issues.

When the coach has asked an open question, listen to what the coachee is saying. They need to limit the thinking of their own thoughts. Listen for understanding and hidden meaning. Is what the coachee saying aligned with their tone and body language? Without active listening, the coach may hear only the words from the coachee and miss some meaning. By tuning into the tone and the meaning underneath allows for the exchange of information to flow. Concentrating on the reply can lead to helpful insights and pieces of information about what is really being said.

For the coach, his state of awareness as he listens to the message is not the only thing that is happening. They also are experiencing the event which creates inner thoughts and emotions about what the coach is hearing. The coach may be wondering about the person and what they are telling you and why, and what they want you to understand. This internal feedback will help you extend your understanding of the situation.



# 03 What Science Says About Reading Fiction\*

Researchers have found that regions of the brain—such as the **medial prefrontal cortex, posterior cingulate/precuneus, and bilateral temporal parietal junction**—that involved in mentalizing (the ability to understand one's own and others' mental states, thereby comprehending one's own and others' intentions and affects) are also involved in the processing of stories.

“Engaging in the simulative experiences of fiction literature can facilitate the understanding of others who are different from ourselves and can augment our capacity for empathy and social inference.”

Another experiment tested the hypothesis that art can cause significant changes in the experience of one's own personality traits under laboratory conditions. The experimental group read the short story “The Lady With the Toy Dog” by Chekhov, while the control group read a comparison text that had the same content as the story but was documentary in form. The results show the experimental group experienced significantly greater change in self-reported experience of personality traits than the Documentary group.\*\*

# How Literature Can Influence Us

Hope and a safe place



Connection and comparison



Introspection and reflection



# 04

## Apply “Coaching through Literature” to advising



# Where do I start?\*

## Office

- **Wall Décor**
- **Literature Jar**
- **Icebreaker**

## Email

- **Signature**
- **Call to Action**

## Coaching sessions

- **Check in**
- **Academic Warning/Academic Standing**

# Quick Practice

Pair up

Select a piece of paper from jar

Role play

Ask questions

Reflect

# In Conclusion



As an advisor it can be a hard to know if you're making a difference, but the focus of your efforts is to improve the student's skills as they find ways to address the issues and challenges faced and progress towards a solution. Following the 3 Components will help you be ready build to improve student's critical thinking and problem-solving skills and set your students up for long-term success. \*

# Works Cited

“APA Dictionary of Psychology.” *American Psychological Association*, American Psychological Association, <https://dictionary.apa.org/mentalization>.

Djikic, Maja, et al. “On Being Moved by Art: How Reading Fiction Transforms the Self.” *Creativity Research Journal*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2009, pp. 24–29., <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400410802633392>.

Mar, Raymond A. “The Neural Bases of Social Cognition and Story Comprehension.” *Annual Review of Psychology*, vol. 62, no. 1, 2011, pp. 103–134., <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-120709-145406>.

Mar, Raymond A., and Keith Oatley. “The Function of Fiction Is the Abstraction and Simulation of Social Experience.” *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2008, pp. 173–192., <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6924.2008.00073.x>.

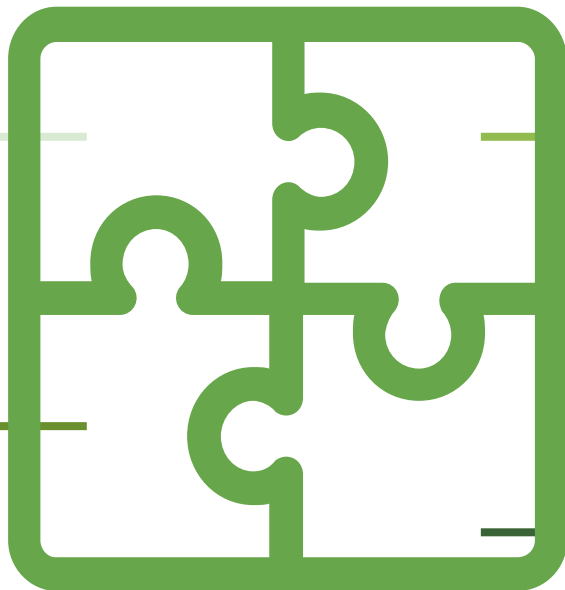
# Research

## Gather participants

Academic advisors  
and students

## Text selection and study implement

Selection of diverse  
texts and poems  
addressing diverse  
issues. One month  
long qualitative and  
quantitative data  
collection



## Training

training on effective  
listening and  
communication skills,  
diversity and  
inclusivity, and  
extracting meaning  
from texts

## Outcomes

Students build on their  
critical thinking, decision-  
making, problem-solving,  
introspection, and self-  
advocacy—life-long  
essential skills