

# An Application of a Three-phase Reading Comprehension Instructional Model in Teaching Language Arts at Vietnamese High Schools

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**Abstract** The article focuses on investigating the three-phase reading comprehension instructional model (pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading), based on which it will identify how to apply this model to teach reading comprehension in Vietnamese high schools. Before reading, readers need to activate their prior knowledge and experience, determine reading goals and strategies, and build background knowledge. During reading, readers make sense of the text by taking different actions to achieve both decoding and understanding the text simultaneously. Post-reading phase comprises recalling something done before, analyzing text elements in depth, connecting for expanding the topic, and applying what has been learnt in daily life. The three-phase reading comprehension instructional model has been researched and applied successfully to instruct reading. However, in Vietnam, reading comprehension instruction does not really pay attention to guiding students to actively read texts as highlighted in this model. Practicing the three-phase reading comprehension instructional model in Language Arts subject at Vietnamese high schools means, in fact, to guide students to use strategies effectively in line with each phase of reading comprehension process.

**Keywords:** reading, reading comprehension, reading instructional model, pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading

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## 1. Introduction

Teaching how to read texts effectively is the question that has been constantly answered in the field of research on reading comprehension. Many models have been proposed, tested and applied. The three-phase reading comprehension instructional model (before, during and after reading) is associated with reading comprehension studies at a later stage of the cognitive revolution and with the emergence of schema theory, theory of cognitive processes and metacognition of readers in reading [1-5],... In the set of thematic reports by the National Reading Panel, when systematizing works on reading comprehension instruction, the authors mention how reading strategies are used corresponding to a process that guides students to read and understand texts [6]. The book "What research has to say about reading instruction?" published by the International Reading Association in 2002 has two chapters dealing with this issue. In chapter 10 of the book, Nell K. Duke and David Pearson analyze effective practices for developing reading comprehension. In chapter 13, Michael Pressley, when dealing with metacognition and self-monitoring of comprehension activities, explicitly

states the phases of reading a text with the specific contents actively read by the reader at each phase in the process of constructing meaning [7,8]. Basically, the three-phase reading comprehension instruction model is the result of empirical research. In many ways including the "think-aloud" technique, researchers have "decoded" how the cognitive process takes place within the reader. Since then, they have been developing and completing the "portraits" of active readers and those who have difficulty understanding texts. This is the basis for identifying an effective reading process that begins before the reader actually perceives each part of the text, followed by reading the text in turn (while reading) and acting out after reading the text. From theoretical study, the three-phase reading model has been introduced to schools through teacher guides and high school Language Arts textbooks. These include the Texas Education Agency's "Comprehension instruction", and literary textbooks published by publishers such as McDougal Littell, Mc. GrawHill, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, etc.

In Vietnam, reading comprehension has become the content of teaching in the subject of Language Arts associated with the curriculum and textbooks after 2002. So far, there have been a number of studies about applying theories of reading comprehension [9]. However, the

three-phase reading model has not been paid adequate attention. Research into practical applications of the model can contribute to the development of generations of positive readers—the outcome of training with orientation to develop learners' competencies.

## 2. Content

### 2.1. The Three-phase Reading Comprehension Instructional Model (Pre-reading, While-reading and Post-reading)

Reading is a complex process that requires readers to actively involve in a close engagement with the text. Traditional approaches often rely on the outcomes of the reading process, so little attention is paid to the specific successes and difficulties readers experience in their journey of interaction with the text. Approaches that target the process of reading comprehension have opened up the possibility of further exploring what is actually happening as readers work on the text, and at the same time raises the research question about the implementation of appropriate interventions to promote reading comprehension of students, thereby developing reading competency, one of the core competencies attached to human success throughout life.

The core purpose of reading is to understand, be able to construct the text's meaning, apply and transform what is received into the "own" of the reader, bringing the outcomes into personal life, achieving the various purposes that the reader sets out, discovering and developing the potential of each reader. The process of reading indicates that it is necessary to go through certain phases and steps to master the text in an orderly manner, linear and synthesized, sequential, successive, deepening, expanding, developing, monitoring and adjusting what has been achieved in the previous step. Readers can also "swim upstream" at certain times to experience at a deeper level of fun, challenges or neglect which are timely monitored and "reminded" by the inner voice of "metacognition". Such a process has been successfully identified and used by researchers in the three-phase pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading process of reading instructional model.

#### a) Pre-reading

The notion that text meaning is based on the background knowledge of the reader and what the text directs, leads to, opens up and limits shows that readers need to be activated many things before they actually work directly with the world of words. Researchers have shown that the richer the reader's background knowledge is related to the subject of the text, triggered appropriately and timely, the easier and more advantageous it is to master the text in the next phases. In addition, reading activity is only successful when guided and targeted by specific goals from the beginning (of course it can be a survey of goals and expectations which continue to be adjusted and identified more clearly and more focused in subsequent phases of reading activity. The reading mind is also a factor in the deep structure of reading comprehension. A positive thinking about reading, willingness, and excitement

will become an important source of non-conscious energy in the process the reader comprehends texts.

As such, the main tasks of pre-reading activities include: determining clear reading goals (for recreation, for learning, for information seeking or for carrying out activities as directed); mobilizing background knowledge and experiences of readers related to the topic of the reading text; building background knowledge required for readers to be able to perform reading comprehension; creating readiness to read, excitement about reading; making initial predictions for activating orientation frame and expectations; and initially choosing appropriate reading strategies. This is also an "ideal portrait" of active readers in the pre-reading phase that teachers need to address in order for their students to realize all these in the reading comprehension instruction at high schools. Contrary to this is a portrait of a poor reader who starts reading activities without any preparation, who does not question "Why do I read?" and select "Which ways will I use to read this text? ", and who does not wonder "Do I need to equip myself with or learn anything before working with the text? ", [8,10], etc.

The scope of pre-reading activity is defined as the quick perception of some elements related to the external appearance of the text such as the presentation, visual images added, the volume of the text; quickly perceiving some features in the text such as title, author's name, genre, some critical quotes on the back cover of the book, skimming a few paragraphs at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the text (especially for long texts) to get an initial overview of the text to be read.

#### b) Reading

This is the reader's direct, concrete and intuitive contact with the object of reading comprehension which is the text, from the first line to the last. While the first phase is to prepare and "create momentum" for reading activity, the third phase (post-reading) is more rationalistic (while still retaining, following the sensory materials obtained during reading and, if necessary, it can still reinforce and revive the sensory materials of the second phase by re-reading the whole or part of the text, the most obvious difference of the second phase is the *direct interaction* with each part of the text, from the element to the whole. This is the sequential awakening of the linguistic symbols first by *decoding*. The reader must proceed in parallel decoding from the script symbol to the audio signal (word-sound) and from the audio signal to meaning (sound-meaning). There are a number of features of this process that need to be defined in order to have appropriate and effective reading instruction. First, for high school students, who have gone through the process of reading at elementary level, ensuring fluency reading, the decoding from word to sound is basically "automated". Thus, correct reading level in this code is generally decoded once, which is completed at while-reading phase. At the expressive level, the code also needs to be decoded several times and is closely related to the sound-meaning code, so it is generally only explored and gradually formed during reading and it is necessary to experience the post-reading phase to be able to perform perfectly. Second, in decoding the sound-meaning, any text should have coding processing at least twice. The first is associated with the natural language code, which is supposed to be "decoding on this

level is conducted automatically, the mechanism of the code becomes transparent, the users do not feel it.” [11]; 144, 365]. At this level, students basically decode once, unless they encounter obscure words that needs support or self-explore so that they can go through the process of understanding. However, when the secondary code superimposing on natural language code, decoding is much more difficult and needs to be repeated. Secondary code will play a decisive role back to the original code. So, the while-reading process can only be decoded to some certain extent. The decoding process for this secondary code will be continued in post-reading process.

Decoding activity is intended to construct the meaning of the text. In the process of reading, meanings are constructed in both the bottom-up and top-down directions [12]. In the bottom-up direction, the meaning is defined through levels of meaning of words, sentences, paragraphs, sections, chapters, parts, etc. to the whole text. In the top-down direction, the meaning is derived from the original orientation frame related to the background knowledge of the reader and the textual overview of the pre-reading phase. This frame will continuously be filled up, confirmed or adjusted in progress while reading the text. Making sense in reading is a process that is both progressive and regressive, both forestalling and jumping. Between the meaning of the parts and the meaning of the whole text is a dependent relationship, the parts making up the body in a “super-total” manner and the whole determining the parts.

Constructing meaning in the while-reading phase is the continuous variation of the units of “super-total” in the direction of exploration and gradual confirmation. The mind and emotions of the reader first focus on the flow of facts, details, the information gradually unfolding in the text according to the reading process, and certain ways of organizing the text makes expressions become interesting (such as in literary texts). The flow of information is gradually shaping the impact on the reader's perceptions and emotions, allowing them to give certain feedback. There may be associations, connections; inferences to fill the content of the gaps, white points, to initially step in to explain what the author and the text really want to say; predictions based on background knowledge and reading context; adjustment of predictions; monitoring to continuously assert or adjust the content of constructed meaning and the way the reader uses to construct meaning, etc. The common nature of all these creates an unique characteristic of the reading process that is it is directly related to the concrete existence, the sensibility of the object and the characteristics of being “unfinished”, “in present continuous tense”, “being shaped”, heading towards the “goal” when reaching the completion of text reading. Thus, in reading instruction, if there are no interventions in this process in order to decode the sound-meaning simultaneously with the symbol-sound, it can lead to students’ misconception that reading is merely to pronounce the symbols, or the student will not know which way to maintain that parallelism as they proceed to read the text. As such, the quality of the knowledge building activity will be severely affected [6].

The scope of while-reading phase is to read from the beginning to the end of the text, including certain “pauses” (pitches) on that journey to “give way” to thinking and the

emotions associated with the words to have a chance to emerge, and the passages that are re-read a couple of times because of some emotion or pondering, in short, all that is happening in a close and direct relationship with text, marked by the starting point-the first letter- and the ending point-the last letter that closes the text. The duration and depth of the “pauses” and the implementation of factors related to the “pauses” while reading are dependent on the reading text and the reader’s intention. However, it can be said that the “anchor” of the while-reading phase is a string of surface information that corresponds to the textual structure of the text, and at the same time, the information obtained in this phase belongs to the short-term storage phase cognitively. In short, this will determine the level of exploitation of the “pauses” to avoid “pausing for too long”, “going too far away” to be unable to “stick” to the necessary “anchor”.

The product and also the level of meaning construction activity in the while-reading phase are mainly the surface information of the text, connections, predictions, adjustments, pondering, interpretations, etc. connected with each element and the context of the parts, in the direction toward the whole text while the while-reading is complete, and the specific emotional experiences that the textual elements bring for the reader. All of this becomes materials and the “input” for the third step—the reader’s post-reading activity.

#### c) Post-reading

The end point of the while-reading journey is the starting point of the post-reading phase. This is where readers complete the perception of the overall text; the meanings reach to the “super-total” level of the unit of communication that authenticates—the level of text. After the specific and direct perception step, readers will work with the text primarily as a symbol in their minds and emotions. This symbol retains all the living material sensations they have experienced. They can also “pause” and return to the while-reading phase to learn more deeply or to confirm, enjoying certain interesting emotions that the text brings by reading more times. They may also face a sense of confusion or inappropriate orientation toward the realization of their perception. Re-experiencing the while-reading phase in part or in whole the text is absolutely possible.

The scope of the post-reading phase has a starting point but no end, understood in the most comprehensive way. The gradual discontinuity of the lesson, the full generalization of a given message to the reader, the orientation to apply or directly applying what is learned from the text into real life is only “pause” at that moment and how long it will last depends on the potential of the text, and readers’ interest in it.

After reading, readers first *harvest* what they have done in the process of reading the text at the level of the whole. The surface information of decoding the text is captured and sequenced. The breadth and depth of information of additional constructions resonating with the text at the while-reading phase is “gathered” to shape and make up the whole. Impression and overall feeling of the text have been formed thanks to the outcomes of the previous phases. This early harvesting also includes the general feeling that readers’ understanding is on the right track or it seems to be in a deadlock which requires examination and adjustment.

Post-reading is also the time readers *dig deep and extend* the outcomes just harvested as a whole. They will *analyze and deeply interpret elements* of the text through selecting a certain “weight” based on the completion and adjustment of the original orientation frame. For example, with informational texts, after harvesting the overall surface information of the text (What is written about? What is the new point of view or information mentioned?...), readers will select to deeply analyze aspects of the content of the information mentioned (for example, what the information about the situation encompasses, from which perspectives, what material, whether it is persuasive, how it provides us with the overall picture, etc.). With literary text, the elements for deep interpretation can be narrative setting, characters, narrative modes, emotional analysis of lyrical characters, and artistic symbols, etc. *Connecting the text that has been read with other texts* based on similar or opposite associations will be mobilized at this phase to make the analysis and interpretation more profound and comprehensive, the reading text consciously joins in the intricate, complex and always open network of inter-text. Connecting text with the reader's life experience is how background knowledge is incorporated into the post-reading activity so that readers can easily enter the world that the text builds, putting that life picture into the “filter” of what they have experienced in order to be able to infer, fill up, or contemplate the life-situations discovered by the text, or to authenticate, interpret, make concrete the generalizations in the text, also possibly refine existing perception, and make the information in the text relevant to the individual reader. Information constructed from the text is also *evaluated* according to certain criteria used by readers to receive it deeply, critically, formulate and affirm their own views on the text and be able to participate in dialogue with other views. Reading outcomes impact readers in an “inward” way, “toward the inner self” to create the process of self-awareness, self-reflection in the long run. Reading outcomes can also be observed by *applying* in real-life contexts to solve life tasks to varying degrees. The meaning and meaning of the text constructed by readers in the post-reading phase is also a “super-total variable in line with the degree of these activities. If in the while-reading phase, this variation is moving mainly in the direction from the parts to the whole, from the orientation frame with countless possibilities to some certain possibilities in the linear order of the reading activity, in the post-reading phase, the movement occurs in the direction from the whole to go deeper into the parts and then to synthesize, generalize, and deepen the whole. Reading process is both linear and synthesized.

Basically, in the post-reading phase, the reader is not entirely in direct contact with the text as in the while-reading phase. A certain distance exists between the text and the reader. However, whenever necessary, the reader may return to direct contact with the text in two ways of reading as pointed out by Louise Rosenblatt—mainly referent reading of informational texts and mainly aesthetic reading of literary texts [13]. Thus the division and boundary of the phases before, during and after reading are not rigid. We may return to the reading, and each time we take steps of before, during and after reading, starting from the inheritance of previous readings.

## 2.2. Ways of Applying the Three-phase Reading Comprehension Instructional Model in Teaching Reading in Language Arts Subject

The three-phase process of reading comprehension has been applied in effective instruction of Language Arts in many countries. In Vietnam, reading comprehension has been an alternative to lectures or analysis of literary works associated with the implementation of curriculum and textbooks since 2002. There have been many updated theoretical studies, many active methods, measures, and techniques of teaching are applied to activate learners [14,15,16,17], etc. However, has the three-phase reading model been paid attention and effectively applied? Survey of major teaching materials including high school textbooks, teachers' guides and direct observation of lessons show that the instructional model is not well equipped in theoretical terms and not applied in a concrete manner in the teachers and students' reading activities. Before reading the text, there is usually a general introduction to the author and the literary work with the default meaning that this is the *necessary and missing* background information and thus should be provided to students. Reading comprehension knowledge section in advanced textbooks at high school is placed at the end of the unit. The knowledge provided in the pre-reading phase is not guided to use in order to engage in meaning construction activity at subsequent phases. The presentation of the learning materials shows that in addition to placing footnotes in the footer, there is *no single instructional or methodological support for students in the while-reading phase* [18]. In the classroom, the reading activity is usually displayed in two ways: One student stands up and reads the text aloud, the whole class is asked to quietly listen to the reader and follow the text or the whole class reads the text in silence. Thus, much of the efforts by students focus on decoding from script to audio signal but are not paid attention to teaching how to simultaneously decode the second set of codes in the while-reading phase. Due to the pressure of knowledge, in the classroom, teachers often only guide students to read expressively (reading aloud) to express the outcomes of receiving the text through voice and sound, then ask them to read part of the text. There is not enough time for students to read the whole text. Teachers also do not instruct students how to work with each specific letter when coming into contact with it. All the weight of the reading activity is concentrated in the post-reading phase. However, in this phase, *the reading questions are not really systematic in line with various levels of reception*. The background knowledge of the reader is not really activated to engage in the process of constructing meaning. *Students are not equipped with the reading comprehension skills associated with each phase*; therefore, they can answer each question available in the reading, but when reading a text without reading comprehension questions, they will hardly be able to read themselves and present how they understand the text. A full understanding of the three-stage reading model can help overcome these limitations.

**2.2.1. Instructing Students with Reading Comprehension before Reading**

In this phase, teachers instruct students to *activate background knowledge and experience* in various ways by different activities. Teachers need to identify what kind of background knowledge and experience students may have that is closely related to the receptive mind and the understanding of the text to activate. It is possible to mobilize what students have learned through hypothetical situations, stimulating questions associated with images, excerpts, awakening memories and creating excitement for students to express themselves and share about that. For example, in preparation for reading the text “The man in the case” (Chekhov), teachers can use the question and ask students to fill in the diagram and share it as suggested in the figure on the right (Figure 1).

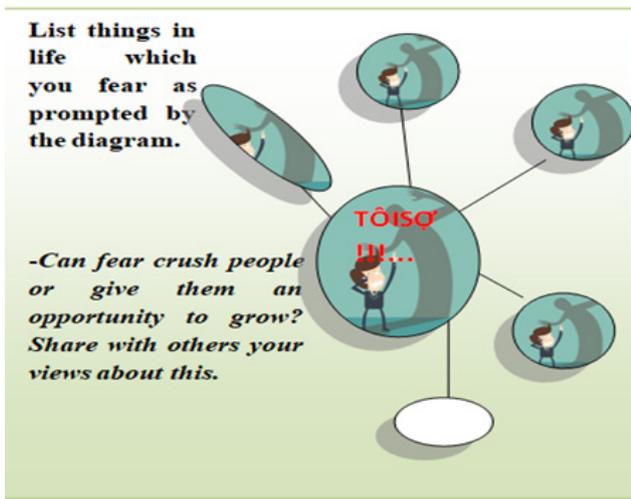


Figure 1. Pre-reading worksheet

In addition to provide background knowledge for students, textbooks often provide general introductory information about authors and works. Teachers can create interesting forms of activities to help students read and get information about the text by *crossword puzzles, mind maps, and objective multiple-choice tests*, etc. To determine reading goals and building the orientation frame before actually reading the text, readers can *havean overview or make predictions about the text, etc.*

**2.2.2. Instructing Students for Reading Comprehension during Reading**

To ensure timely and appropriate pedagogical effects in the while-reading phase, it is necessary first to *change the presentation of the text* to facilitate background knowledge, the mind, impression, connection, and inference, etc. to create conditions for readers to interact directly with the words. The reading material should be presented in two columns. The left one is for text content. The right one is for instructions on reading strategies and other support. Footnotes will be incorporated here corresponding with the text to help students understand difficult words, and, simultaneously, to connect their meaning to the linear flow of the reading sequence, ensuring the flow of information in the text “not to be broken”.

The instructions which specify which line, image, and detail to read carefully, and where to “pause” for pondering, etc. will also be included here. Along with these instructions are while-reading strategies such as *marking and annotating* important keywords, asking *questions and answering while reading, linking different texts, and connecting literature with personal experiences.* Given reading materials published currently, teachers can transfer the pedagogical effects in the while-reading phase to the study card to assist students in performing this activity. The card will be used in parallel with the text during the reading process. The instructions on the teaching method shown on the card will assist students in reading, helping their thinking to be activated, decoding simultaneously both the sound-meaning set and the symbol-sound set. For example, this is a study card that helps students focus on identifying key events as they read the text “An offshore boat” by writer Nguyen Minh Chau (Figure 2).

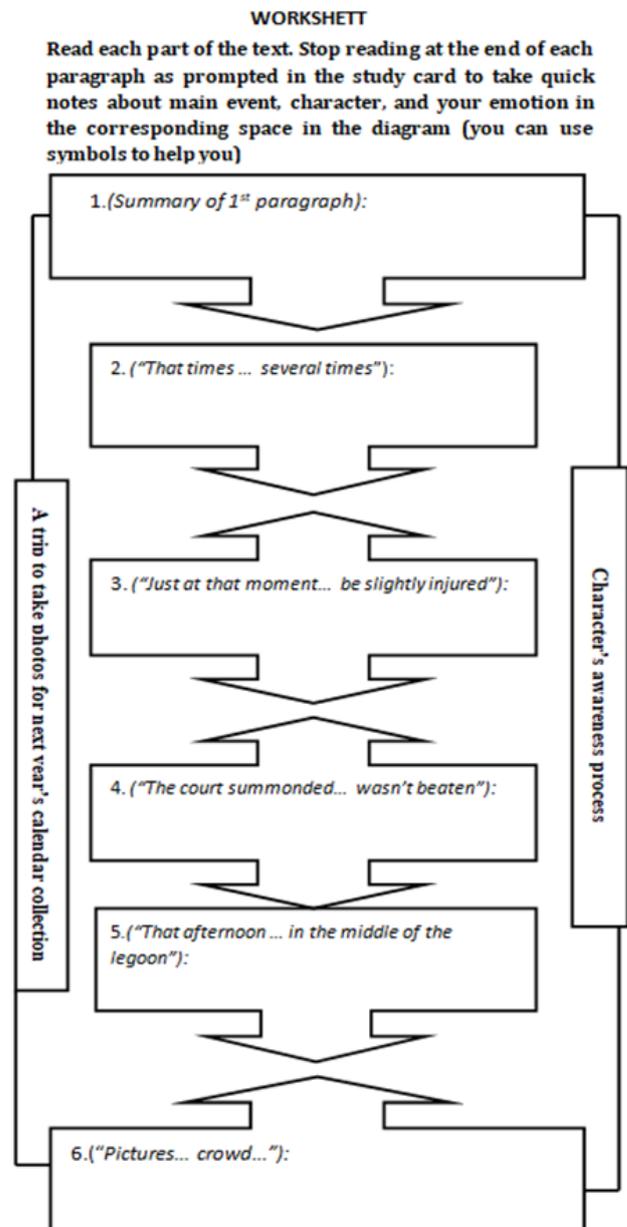


Figure 2. While-Reading Worksheet

### 2.2.3. Instructing Students for Reading Comprehension after Reading

Teachers will instruct students to chain a series of information by *recapitulating the text* based on the outcomes of the while-reading phase. *Mind mapping* can be a useful tool for this strategy. Students are also instructed to *express the general impression*, identify the character, image, and detail in the text which gives them an initial feeling or thought. During *analysis and deep interpretation*, students can use *imagery* (in case of literary texts) to “draw” the picture of life in words, or using words combined with other symbols. In order to fill in the gaps in the text, recognizing the depth of what is reflected on the surface of the text, students are taught the strategy of *inferring*.

#### WORKSHEET

1. Which heroic story does this picture reminds you in the history of the nation? Let's share about the story briefly in words.



2. Like Can Giuoc heroic farmer-soldiers in the battle in the past, the soldiers in this monument strongly held hands together to protect the sacred national flag of the nation. They have made a “circle of immortality” in the heart of Vietnam.

What emotions and thoughts do the story of farmer-soldiers in the early days of the fight against the French in “An eulogy for Can Giuoc righteous soldiers” and the actions of the brave and heroic soldiers that the monument carves out trigger in you? Please share it by writing a paragraph.

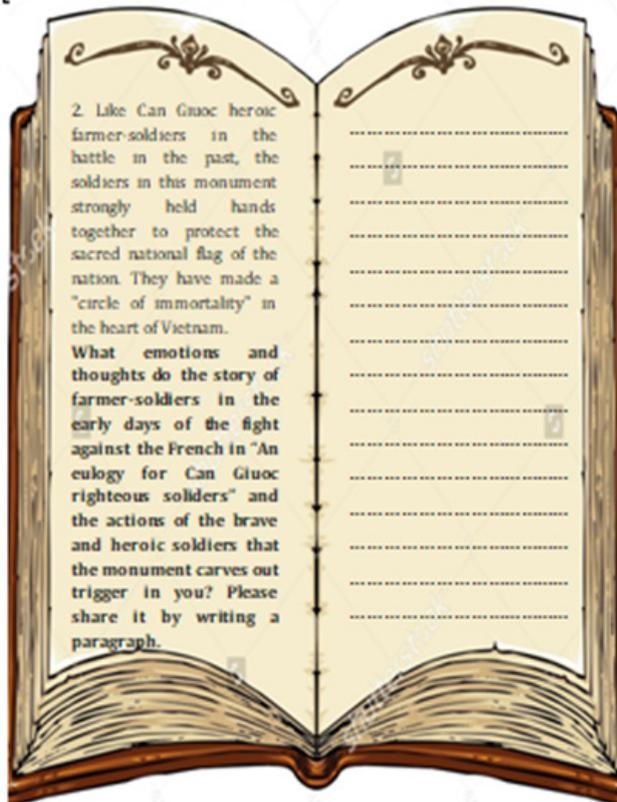


Figure 3. Post-reading worksheet

They will rely on the text as an important fulcrum with the details and elements presented as the basis for inferring. At the same time, another aspect of inferring is background knowledge and life experience. *Connecting* strategies are used in analysis such as linking with other texts and relating to the reader's personal life. *Questioning-answering* strategy is used in post-reading to find out, discover the knowledge units of the text, to discuss and share with friends in cooperative learning activities. The strategy “*Character – desire ... but*” is a tool to analyze deeply the conflicts of the character world.

*Collaborative notes* strategy is used to share and resonate the reading outcomes among members of the inferring community. *Literary communication* strategy aims to develop inter-textual dialogue, inter-readership, broadening the scope of reading, connecting, and applying the issues of the reading text into students' real life, etc.

All of these contents should be arranged in a unified sequence in the system of reading texts to form a common way of thinking for students in the post-reading phase. At the same time, background knowledge about the elements of texts in general, about each type of text in particular, will play an important role in helping readers to identify, select and analyze. To help students apply the knowledge gained by reading into real-life situations so that they can recognize the practical meaning of the reading text, teachers can organize *learning projects*. With these projects, students will have the opportunity to integrate their knowledge and skills in reading with those in other fields, to form and develop their competencies. In addition, reading activities are *integrated with listening, speaking and writing* to develop the capacity to use language effectively among students. Example (Figure 3) is one of the ways teacher can use to help students implement the strategy of connecting text with life, integrating reading-writing after reading the “An eulogy for Can Giuoc righteous soldiers” (Language Arts, Grade 11).

## References Formats

In summary, the three-phase reading comprehension instructional model can be effectively applied to reading instruction. By employing this model in teaching literature, students will be trained to become active readers, able to read independently in their individual lifelong learning journey, contributing to overcoming the situation of “teachers learning instead of students” that still exists in our country's general education schools today.

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