


# The Effectiveness of Kaili Folktales to Improve Secondary Students' Reading Comprehension at SMPN 19 Palu

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effectiveness of Kaili folktales in enhancing students' reading comprehension at SMPN 19 Palu. The research was motivated by students' difficulties in understanding narrative texts, reflecting low reading comprehension levels. A quasi-experimental design was employed, involving 43 eighth-grade students divided into an experimental group (n = 23) and a control group (n = 20). The experimental group was taught using Kaili folktales, while the control group used general folktales. Data were collected through pre-tests and post-tests consisting of multiple-choice and essay questions. The results revealed that the experimental group achieved a higher average post-test score (71.04) compared to the control group (61.35). A Mann-Whitney test using SPSS 26 yielded a Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.001, indicating a significant difference between the groups. The findings suggest that incorporating Kaili folktales into English instruction effectively enhances students' reading comprehension.

**Keywords:** *Kaili Folktales, Reading Comprehension, Quasi-Experimental.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental skill that plays a crucial role in a student's academic success and overall development. According to Ningsih et al., (2019 p. 1), reading is one of the skills that must be possessed by students, therefore reading skills must be taught at the beginning of entering the educational level. Developing strong reading abilities enables students to engage with complex texts, fostering critical thinking and analytical skills. However, many students struggle to master reading comprehension, which limits their ability to access and process information necessary for future academic and career success.

Reading is a complex process that draws on many different skills. As stated by Astiantih et al., (2022 p. 1), reading comprehension is the attempt to comprehend, evaluate, and recognize the author's ideas in a reading text. A reader's comprehension is required to grasp the message or information contained in the text. This can be challenging for lots of reasons, such as the reader's prior knowledge, vocabulary familiarity, and the complexity of the text structure. The purpose of teaching reading to junior high school students is outlined in the national curriculum standard, which emphasizes the importance of comprehension and interpretation of various texts. Siregar & Harida, (2021 p. 78-79), reading involves two skills, receptive and active skills. First, receptive skills refer to the fact that readers have to infer meaning, using their knowledge. Second, reading as active skill, which a reader finds a reading passage interesting. This foundational skill set is vital for preparing students to navigate increasingly complex academic landscapes.

However, there is a significant gap in reading comprehension skills among students worldwide and, specifically, within schools. Research by Rizki Perdiana, (2022 p. 64), many students still struggle to understand text when they are first learning to read, particularly when it comes to reading comprehension. This indicates that many students, particularly in junior high, struggle to comprehend narrative texts effectively. This gap is concerning, as

reading comprehension is closely linked to overall academic achievement. Many students face challenges in understanding the main ideas, themes, and characters in narratives, which can hinder their performance across subjects.

Based on preliminary research observations, the reading comprehension of grade eight students of SMPN 19 Palu is lacking. The students are unable to comprehend and respond to reading texts. They cannot answer questions about the text, demonstrating their understanding of main ideas, themes, or characters. When the researcher asked them to read a paragraph, they could only read a few words and were unable to explain the paragraph's meaning. One major issue is the lack of engaging reading materials that resonate with students' interests and cultural backgrounds.

Considering this problem, the researcher chooses Kaili Folktale as a solution to improve students' reading comprehension. According to Laras et al., (2024 p. 411), folktales are one of the literary genres that could be employed in the reading classroom to help students develop their language abilities, encourage them as well, and increase cultural understanding and tolerance. In this context, Kaili folktales present a unique opportunity to bridge this gap. These stories, rich in cultural heritage and moral lessons, can captivate students and enhance their understanding of narrative structures.

The integration of local culture, such as Kaili folktales, into educational materials is crucial for several reasons. Culturally relevant pedagogy acknowledges and incorporates students' backgrounds and experiences into the learning process, making education more meaningful and engaging. As highlighted by Daud et al., (2021 p. 111), folktale is a traditional story that has been passed on by word of mouth – told from parent to child over many generations or passed on by countless storytellers sitting around countless evening fires. When students encounter stories that reflect their own cultural heritage, they are more likely to connect with the material on a deeper level, fostering increased motivation and comprehension. This approach not only improves academic outcomes but also promotes cultural preservation and identity among students (Johnson & Elliott, 2020). The use of culturally relevant narratives can foster a deeper connection to the text, encouraging students to analyse and interpret the material more effectively. This aligns well with the goal of improving reading comprehension skills through meaningful and contextually relevant content.

In conclusion, the researcher used Kaili Folktales to improve students' reading comprehension in narrative text for the eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 19 Palu.

#### *Review of Literature*

Reading plays a crucial role in enhancing individual abilities and shaping identity and cultural values, which are beneficial in both social and professional contexts. As emphasized by Rombot et al., (2020 p. 57), reading skills become unique because not everyone can use the skills to promote oneself or internalize it as a culture. In the context of language learning, Qalby, (2014 p. 1) stated that reading skill is one of the main points to master English because a lot of students have the opinion that reading is an important target, with reading they can get information and entertainment besides for their career and study target.

Reading comprehension involves more than simply answering questions. According to (Yulianah, 2020), reading comprehension goes beyond answering questions; it involves the use of background knowledge to connect prior experiences with new information, thereby improving understanding and analytical ability. Reading is a complex cognitive process involving the interpretation of written symbols to derive meaning. It goes beyond recognizing words to understanding ideas, themes, and emotions. Hilaikal & Ayu, (2023) highlighted that reading involves seeking and obtaining information as well as comprehending the content's meaning.

Effective reading requires active engagement with the material, allowing readers to connect with and reflect on its implications. Mertosono et al., (2020) emphasized that reading goes beyond spelling out letters; it involves comprehending the message the writer wants to convey. Therefore, readers must be able to grasp the main idea of the text.

Reading is fundamental for academic success, as it supports learning across all subjects. As stated by Smith et al., (2021) reading underpins progress in various content areas by helping students understand subject matter and build a broad knowledge base. It also enhances critical and analytical thinking, broadens perspectives, and improves language, vocabulary, and communication skills—making reading a vital daily habit for academic achievement.

Yulianah, (2020 p. 1) asserted, “reading comprehension seems to be a very important issue for students to master. By mastering reading comprehension well, students can gain in-depth information in the passages.” Without grasping the meaning of what they read, students risk missing out on essential information. Comprehension involves recognizing vocabulary, understanding sentence structure, and drawing conclusions, while also connecting textual ideas with personal knowledge and experience.

Literal and inferential comprehension are two important levels. As stated by Nurjanah, & Putri, (2020), literal comprehension serves as the foundation for low level comprehension skills. Meanwhile, Samiei & Ebadi, (2021) defined inferential comprehension as the high level the ability to recognize hidden concepts and connections between the lines.

Narrative text is a form of writing that tells a story involving problems and resolutions. Yusismi & Jufri, (2017) explained that narratives describe complicated or problematic events. Sulistyono et al., (2013) noted that narrative structures may include evaluation to provide background such as time and place. Kaili folktales are one such narrative form rich in cultural values. Nyoman & Gana, (2018 p. 1) stated, “folktales, to a great extent, help students develop their critical reading skills, fluency, and vocabulary and comprehension ability of particular events.” However, Nyoman and Gana, (2018 p. 1) cautioned that “folktales have the deeper meaning than most young generation can digest and they are often hard to comprehend without properly studying them thorough” it means folktales can be difficult to understand, especially for younger readers.

## METHOD

This research employed a quantitative research approach, specifically a quasi-experimental design. It was suitable for evaluating the effectiveness of Kaili folktales on the reading comprehension of grade eight students of SMPN 19 Palu. The research aimed to prove whether Kaili folktales were effective in improving students' reading comprehension. There were two groups in this research, namely an experimental group and a control group. The design of this research could be seen in the following table:

Table 1: Research Design

Group	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
Experimental	$O_1$	X	$O_2$
Control	$O_3$		$O_4$

(Sugiyono, 2010)

### Respondents

The population of this study consisted of students at grade eight in SMPN 19 Palu. It consisted of four parallel classes. There were 23 students in class VIII A, 20 students in class B, 23 students in class C, and 24 students in class D. So, the sum of the population was 90 students. The distribution and total number of the population could be seen in the following table:

Table 2: Distribution of Population

No	Class	Number of students
1	VIII A	23
2	VIII B	20
3	VIII C	23
4	VIII D	24
<b>Total</b>		<b>90</b>

The sample in this study was selected using random sampling from four eighth-grade classes, as the research employed a quasi-experimental design with two groups. Class VIII A was chosen as the experimental group and class VIII B as the control group. Random sampling was used because it is effective and suitable for small populations (Sugiyono, 2020).

#### *Instruments*

Research instruments referred to the tools used by researchers in collecting data from research samples. The research instrument that was used in this study was an item, which consisted of pre-test and post-test. This test was used to measure reading comprehension competence. The test was given to the experimental and control groups twice, namely before treatment (pre-test) and after treatment (post-test). The pre-test was used to measure students' achievement before treatment, while the post-test was used to find out whether Kaili folktales were effective in improving reading comprehension or no.

Table 3: The Scoring System of Multiple Choice

No	Types of the Test	Number of items	Score of items	Maximum score
1	Multiple choice	20	1	20
Total				20

Table 4: The Scoring System of Essay

No	Types of the test	Number of items	Score of items	Maximum score
1.	Essay test	5	0-2	10
	a. Correct score		2	
	b. Incorrect		1	
	c. Do not answer		0	
Total				10

#### *Procedures*

After administering the pre-test, the treatment using Kaili folktales was conducted in the class for six meetings. Each meeting took 40 minutes. Thus, the total time spent during the treatment was 240 minutes. The following table illustrated the teaching activities.

Table 5: Teaching Outline

Meeting	Topic	Teacher activity	Student activity
The 1 <sup>st</sup> meeting	<b>The Origin of the Kaili Tribe</b>	<p>Greeted and Introduced</p> <p>Invited students pray first before starting the class, which is leads by a student</p> <p>Checkeds attendance list</p> <p>Explained the topic and generic structure of narrative text.</p> <p>Provided "The Origin of the Kaili Tribe" which was one of the texts from the Kaili folktales.</p> <p>Asked the students to read and identify the structure of the text together.</p> <p>Asked students about the difficulties of word in the Kaili folktale.</p> <p>Gave the written questions to the students.</p> <p>Took the students' answers.</p> <p>Checked the students' got the highest score.</p>	<p>Responded to greeted and introduced from the teacher</p> <p>A class leader help lead the prayer</p> <p>Listened to the teacher and answer when his/her name was called</p> <p>Paid attention to the teacher</p> <p>Tried to read and comprehend the text.</p> <p>Asked some questions relate to the topic.</p> <p>Discussed the Kaili folktale by reading and asking each other orally.</p> <p>Explained the response about the main idea in the paragraph.</p> <p>Answered the written questions based on the story individually.</p> <p>Discussed together.</p>

		Concluded the material and gave feedback on the students' activity.	
The 2 <sup>nd</sup> meeting	<b>The Legend of Batu Bagga</b>	<p>Greeted</p> <p>Asked to pray together</p> <p>Checked student attendance</p> <p>Provided "The Legend of Batu Bagga" which was one of the texts from the Kaili folktale.</p> <p>Continued the material.</p> <p>Explained the topic and generic structure of narrative text.</p> <p>Asked the students to read and identify the structure of the text together.</p> <p>Asked the students' difficulties of word on the Kaili folktale.</p> <p>Gave the written questions to the students.</p> <p>Took the students' answer.</p> <p>Checked the students' answers and told which students got the highest score.</p> <p>Concluded the material and gave feedback to the student's activity.</p>	<p>Responded to greets</p> <p>Responded and answer greeted and lead praying together.</p> <p>Listened and responded to attendance</p> <p>Paid attention to the teacher</p> <p>Tried to read and comprehend the text.</p> <p>Asked some questions relate to the topic.</p> <p>Discussed the Kaili folktale by reading and asking each other orally.</p> <p>Explained the response about the main idea in the paragraph.</p> <p>Answered the written questions based on the story individually.</p> <p>Discussed together.</p>
The 3 <sup>th</sup> meeting	<b>Ngkai Tabulanggi</b>	<p>Greeted</p> <p>Asked to pray together</p> <p>Checked student attendance</p> <p>Continued the material.</p> <p>Explained the topic and generic structure of narrative text.</p> <p>Provided "Ngkai Tabulanggi" which one of the text from the Kaili Folktales.</p> <p>Asked the students' to read and identify the structure of the text together.</p> <p>Asked the students' the difficulties of words in the Kaili folktale.</p> <p>Took the students' answer.</p> <p>Checked the students' answers and telling which students got the highest score.</p> <p>Concluded the material and gave feedback to the students' activity.</p>	<p>Responded to greeted</p> <p>Responded and answer greeted and lead prayed together.</p> <p>Listened and responded to attendance</p> <p>Paid attention to the teacher</p> <p>Tried to read and comprehend the text.</p> <p>Asked some questions relate to the topic.</p> <p>Discussed the Kaili folktale by reading and asking each other orally.</p> <p>Explained the response about the main idea in the paragraph.</p> <p>Answerd the written questions based on the story individually.</p> <p>Discussed together.</p>
The 4 <sup>th</sup> meeting	<b>The Hero's story</b>	<p>Greeted</p> <p>Asked to pray together</p> <p>Checked student attendance</p> <p>Continued the material.</p>	<p>Responded to greets</p> <p>Responded and answering greetings lead praying together.</p> <p>Listened and respond to attendance</p>

		<p>Explained the topic generic structure of narrative text.          Provided "The Hero's story" which one of the texts from the Kaili folktale.          Asked the students to read and identify the structure of text together.          Asked the students' the difficulties of words in the Kaili folktale.          Gave the written questions to the students.          Taking the students' answer.          Checked the student' answers and told which students get the highest score.          Concluded the material and gave feedback to the students' activity.</p>	<p>Paid attention to the teacher          Tried to read and comprehend the text.          Asked some questions relate to the topic.          Discussed the Kaili folktale by reading and asking each other orally.          Explained the response about the main idea in the paragraph.          Answered the written questions based on the story individually.          Discussed together.</p>
The 5 <sup>th</sup> meeting	<b>Mangge Rante</b>	<p>Greeted          Asked to pray together          Check student attendance          Continuing the material.          Explaining the topic generic structure of narrative text.          Providing "Mangge Rante" which one of the texts from the Kaili folktale.          Asking the students to read and identify the structure of text together.          Asking the students' the difficulties of words in the Kaili folktale.          Giving the written questions to the students.          Taking the students' answer.          Checking the students' answers and telling which students get the highest score.          Concluding the material and giving feedback to the students' activity.</p>	<p>Responded to the greeted          Responded and answering greetings lead praying together.          Listened and responded to attendance          Pay attention to the teacher          Tried to read and comprehend the text.          Asked some questions relate to the topic.          Discussed the Kaili folktale by reading and asking each other orally.          Explained the response about the main idea in the paragraph.          Answered the written questions based on the story individually.          Discussed together.</p>

The 6 <sup>th</sup>	Randa Tovea		
meeting		<p>Greeted</p> <p>Asked to pray together</p> <p>Checked student attendance</p> <p>Continued the material.</p> <p>Explained the topic generic structure of narrative text.</p> <p>Provided "Randa Tovea" which was one of the texts from the Kaili folktale.</p> <p>Asked the students to read and identify the structure of text together.</p> <p>Asked the students about the difficulties of words in the Kaili folktale.</p> <p>Gave the written questions to the students.</p> <p>Took the students' answers.</p> <p>Checked the students' answers and told which students got the highest score.</p> <p>Concluding the material and giving feedback to the students' activity.</p>	<p>Responded to greets</p> <p>Responded and answered greeted lead pray together.</p> <p>Listened and responded to attendance</p> <p>Paid attention to the teacher</p> <p>Tried to read and comprehend the text.</p> <p>Asked some questions relate to the topic.</p> <p>Discussed the Kaili folktale by reading and asking each other orally.</p> <p>Explained the response about the main idea in the paragraph.</p> <p>Answered the written questions based on the story individually.</p> <p>Discussed together.</p>

### *Data Analysis*

In this study, the researcher used the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group and control group as the main data to evaluate the effectiveness of the applied method. After collecting the pre-test and post-test scores, the researcher compare the results to see the changes in student performance between the two groups. The data were then analyzed using a t-test with a significance level of 0.05 to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the experimental group and the control group.

#### *Normality Test*

The normality test was conducted to check if the data from the experimental and control groups follows a normal distribution. As stated by Field (2013), this test checks if the data is symmetrically distributed around the mean, forming a shape typical of normal distributions. The data analysis was performed using SPSS version 26 with the following criteria for the normality test: if the result of the normality test is greater than 0.05, the data can be considered normally distributed; however, if the result is less than 0.05, the data is regarded as not normally distributed.

According to Field,(2013), if the p-value is greater than 0.05, this means that there is not enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis, and thus, the data can be considered normally distributed. This indicates that the data does not significantly deviate from normality, suggesting that it follows a normal distribution.

#### *Homogeneity Test*

After conducting the normality test, the next step was to assess the homogeneity of the data using Levene's test, which, as explained by Field (2013), evaluates the null hypothesis that the variances of the groups are equal. This test checks whether the data from both groups have homogeneous variances and was performed using SPSS version 26 with the following criteria: if the significance value (Sig.) is greater than 0.05, it indicates that the variances of the two population groups are the same (homogeneous), whereas if the significance value (Sig.) is less than 0.05, it indicates that the variances of the two groups are different (not homogeneous).

#### *Mann Whitney U Test*

In In this study, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine whether there was a significant difference in reading comprehension between the experimental group, which used Kaili folktales, and the control group, which did not. According to Markus Birahi at all (2016) The Mann-Whitney test was used to examine whether two population means were equal or

not, particularly when the data were not normally distributed or the sample size was relatively small. This non-parametric test compared two independent groups and assessed whether there was a difference in the distribution or central tendency of the scores between them. The analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26 to ensure accurate results and provide clear insights into the effectiveness of using Kaili folktales compared to conventional methods. Thus, the Mann-Whitney test helped to identify whether the performance differences between the two groups were statistically significant and not due to random chance.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Before the treatment, a pre-test with 25 questions was given to both experimental and control groups to assess their initial reading comprehension of narrative texts. The test evaluated skills such as identifying main ideas, vocabulary understanding, making inferences, and recognizing text structure. The results served as a baseline to compare students' comprehension levels before introducing the Kaili folktales treatment.

Table 6: Pre-test Results of Experimental and Control Groups Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-test Experimental	23	50	73	64.13	5.225
Pre-test Control	20	30	73	52.60	12.292
Valid N (listwise)	20				

The descriptive statistics show that before the treatment, the experimental group (23 students) had a higher average pre-test score (64.13) compared to the control group (20 students) with an average of 52.60. The experimental group's scores ranged from 50 to 73 with a lower standard deviation of 5.225, indicating more consistent performance, while the control group's scores ranged from 30 to 73 with a higher standard deviation of 12.292, showing greater variation in ability. These differences highlight that the experimental group had a more homogeneous and higher initial reading comprehension level. Therefore, this baseline gap must be considered when analysing post-test results to ensure the intervention's effectiveness is evaluated accurately and fairly.

Table 7: Post-test Results of Experimental and Control Groups Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Post-test Experimental	23	60	83	71.04	6.328
Post-test Control	20	40	77	61.35	9.842
Valid N (listwise)	20				

The post-test descriptive statistics reveal that the experimental group (average score: 71.04) outperformed the control group (average score: 61.35), indicating better learning outcomes after receiving the treatment. The experimental group also had higher minimum and maximum scores (60–83) compared to the control group (40–77), with a lower standard deviation (6.328 vs. 9.842), suggesting more consistent performance. These results imply that the instructional method used for the experimental group positively impacted students' reading comprehension. However, to confirm the effectiveness statistically, an independent samples t-test is needed, where a p-value below 0.05 would indicate a significant difference between the two groups.

Table 8: Normality Test Results

Group	Kolmogorov-Smirnova <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk			df	Sig.
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.		
Reading Comprehension	Pre-test Experimental (Kaili Folktales)		.240	23	.001	.888	23	.015
	Post-test Experimental (Kaili Folktales)		.174	23	.070	.937	23	.158
	Pre-test Control (Folktales)		.166	20	.149	.927	20	.133

Post-test Control (Folktales)	.217	20	.015	.904	20	.049
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## a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The results of the normality tests using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk methods show mixed findings across the test groups. The pre-test scores of the experimental group were not normally distributed, with significance values below 0.05 (0.001 and 0.015). However, the post-test scores for the same group indicated normal distribution, as both values were above 0.05 (0.070 and 0.158). In the control group, the pre-test scores were normally distributed (0.149 and 0.133), but the post-test scores were not, as their significance values were 0.015 and 0.049.

In summary, only the post-test experimental and pre-test control groups met the assumption of normality. The pre-test experimental and post-test control groups did not. Since some data sets are not normally distributed, the researcher opted to use a non-parametric statistical test—the Mann-Whitney U test. This decision is supported by the normality test results showing significance values below 0.05, confirming that the data do not follow a normal distribution.

Table 9: Mann Whitney Test Result

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>

	Reading Comprehension
Mann-Whitney U	93.000
Wilcoxon W	303.000
Z	-3.370
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.001

The researcher conducted the Mann-Whitney U test to determine whether the difference between the two groups was statistically significant. The results of the Mann-Whitney U test for reading comprehension, the Mann-Whitney U value is 93.000, with a Wilcoxon W value of 303.000. The Z-score is -3.370, and the Asymptotic Significance (2-tailed) is 0.001. Since the significance value (p-value) is less than 0.05, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference in reading comprehension scores between the experimental group and the control group.

This result indicates that the treatment or instructional method applied to the experimental group (e.g., using Kaili folktales) had a significant effect on improving students' reading comprehension performance compared to the control group. The use of the Mann-Whitney U test was appropriate due to the non-normal distribution of some of the data, and the significant result confirms that the difference observed is unlikely to have occurred by chance.

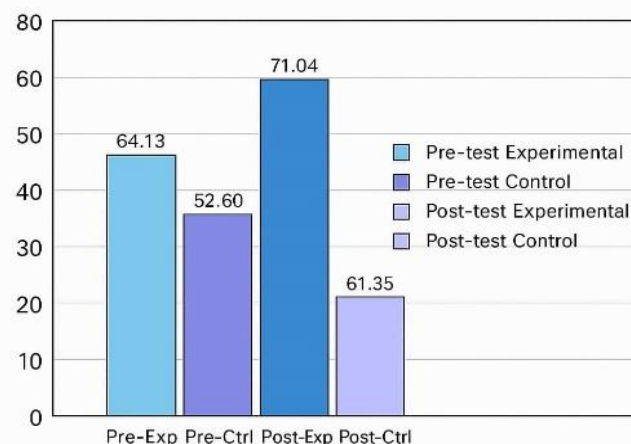


Figure 1. Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Results of Experimental and Control Groups

The bar chart in Figure 1 shows a comparison of pre-test and post-test scores between the experimental and control groups in reading comprehension. The experimental group had a pre-test average of 64.13 and improved to 71.04 in the post-test. The control group started with a lower pre-test average of 52.60 and increased to 61.35 in the post-test. This visual presentation clearly indicates that both groups showed improvement after the treatment, but the experimental group improved more significantly. The higher gain in the experimental group suggests that the use of Kaili folktales as a treatment had a positive and effective impact on students' reading comprehension skills.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study demonstrated that using Kaili folktales as a teaching medium significantly improved the reading comprehension of eighth-grade students at SMPN 19 Palu compared to conventional printed texts. The cultural familiarity, engaging narrative structure, and contextual richness of the folktales helped students relate to the material, activate prior knowledge, and enhance comprehension, leading to higher post-test scores and more focused learning outcomes. These findings highlight the value of integrating local cultural narratives into reading instruction to make learning more engaging and meaningful, particularly in multicultural settings.

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