



Short Story Exercise
WILU 2016
Dave Brier & Vicky Lebbin
University of Hawaii at Manoa Library



Research as Inquiry

Research is iterative and depends upon asking increasingly complex or new questions whose answers in turn develop additional questions or lines of inquiry in any field.

Experts see inquiry as a process that focuses on problems or questions in a discipline or between disciplines that are open or unresolved. Experts recognize the collaborative effort within a discipline to extend the knowledge in that field. Many times, this process includes points of disagreement where debate and dialogue work to deepen the conversations around knowledge. This process of inquiry extends beyond the academic world to the community at large, and the process of inquiry may focus upon personal, professional, or societal needs. The spectrum of inquiry ranges from asking simple questions that depend upon basic recapitulation of knowledge to increasingly sophisticated abilities to refine research questions, use more advanced research methods, and explore more diverse disciplinary perspectives. Novice learners acquire strategic perspectives on inquiry and a greater repertoire of investigative methods.

Knowledge Practices

Learners who are developing their information literate abilities

- formulate questions for research based on information gaps or on reexamination of existing, possibly conflicting, information;
- determine an appropriate scope of investigation;
- deal with complex research by breaking complex questions into simple ones, limiting the scope of investigations;
- use various research methods, based on need, circumstance, and type of inquiry;
- monitor gathered information and assess for gaps or weaknesses;
- organize information in meaningful ways;
- synthesize ideas gathered from multiple sources;
- draw reasonable conclusions based on the analysis and interpretation of information.

Dispositions

Learners who are developing their information literate abilities

- consider research as open-ended exploration and engagement with information;
- appreciate that a question may appear to be simple but still disruptive and important to research;
- value intellectual curiosity in developing questions and learning new investigative methods;
- maintain an open mind and a critical stance;
- value persistence, adaptability, and flexibility and recognize that ambiguity can benefit the research process;
- seek multiple perspectives during information gathering and assessment;
- seek appropriate help when needed;
- follow ethical and legal guidelines in gathering and using information;
- demonstrate intellectual humility (i.e., recognize their own intellectual or experiential limitations).

A FABLE
by Robert Fox

The young man was clean shaven and neatly dressed. It was early Monday morning and he got on the subway. It was the first day of his first job and he was slightly nervous; he didn't know exactly what his job would be. Otherwise he felt fine. He loved everybody he saw. He loved everybody on the street and everybody disappearing into the subway, and he loved the world because it was a fine clear day and he was starting his first job.

Without kicking anybody, the young man was able to find a seat on the Manhattan-bound train. The car filled quickly and he looked up at the people standing over him envying his seat. Among them were a mother and daughter who were going shopping. The daughter was a beautiful girl with blond hair and soft-looking skin, and he was immediately attracted to her.

"He's staring at you," the mother whispered to the daughter.

"Yes, Mother, I feel so uncomfortable. What shall I *do*?"

"He's in love with you."

"In love with me? How can you tell?"

"Because I'm your mother."

"But what shall I do?"

"Nothing. He'll try to talk to you. If he does, answer him. Be nice to him. He's only a boy."

The train reached the business district and many people got off. The girl and her mother found seats opposite the young man. He continued to look at the girl who occasionally looked to see if he was looking at her.

The young man found a good pretext for standing in giving his seat to an elderly man. He stood over the girl and her mother. They whispered back and forth and looked up at him. At another stop the seat next to the girl was vacated, and the young man blushed but quickly took it.

"I knew it," the mother said between her teeth. "I knew it, I *knew* it."

The young man cleared his throat and tapped the girl. She jumped.

"Pardon me," he said. "You're a very pretty girl."

"Thank you," she said.

"Don't talk to him," her mother said. "Don't answer him I'm warning you. Believe me."

"I'm in love with you," he said to the girl.

"I don't believe you," the girl said.

"Don't answer him," the mother said.

"I really do," he said. "In fact. I'm so much in love with you that I want to marry you."

"Do you have a job?" she said.

"Yes, today is my first day. I'm going to Manhattan to start my first day of work."

"What kind of work will you do?" she asked.

"I don't know exactly," he said. "You see, I didn't start yet."

"It sounds exciting," she said.

"It's my first job, but I'll have my own desk and handle a lot of papers and carry them around in a briefcase, and it will pay well and I'll work my way up."

"I love you," she said.

"Will you marry me?"

"I don't know. You'll have to ask my mother."

The young man rose from his seat and stood before the girl's mother. He cleared his throat very carefully for a long time. "May I have the honor of having your daughter's hand in marriage?" he said, but he was drowned out by the subway noise.

The mother looked up at him and said, "What?" He couldn't hear her either, but he could tell by the movement of her lips and by the way her face wrinkled up that she said, What.

The train pulled to a stop.

"May I have the honor of having your daughter's hand in marriage!" he shouted, not realizing there was no subway noise. Everybody on the train looked at him, smiled, and then they all applauded.

"Are you crazy?" the mother asked.

The train started again.

"What?" he said.

"Why do you want to marry her?" she asked.

"Well, she's pretty—I mean, I'm in love with her."

"Is that all?"

"I guess so," he said. "Is there supposed to be more?"

"No. Not usually," the mother said. "Are you working?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact, that's why I'm going into Manhattan so early. Today is the first day of my first job."

"Congratulations," the mother said.

"Thanks," he said. "Can I marry your daughter?"

"Do you have a car?" she asked.

"Not yet," he said. "But I should be able to get one pretty soon. And a house, too."

"A house?"

"With lots of rooms."

"Yes, that's what I expected you to say," she said. She turned to her daughter. "Do you love him?"

"Yes, Mother, I do."

"Why?"

"Because he's good, and gentle, and kind."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Then you really love him."

"Yes."

"Are you sure there isn't anyone else that you might love and might want to marry?"

"No, Mother," the girl said.

"Well, then," the mother said to the young man. "Looks like there's nothing I can do about it. Ask her again." The train stopped.

"My dearest one," he said, "will you marry me?"

"Yes," she said.

Everybody in the car smiled and applauded.

"Isn't life wonderful?" the boy asked the mother.

"Beautiful," the mother said.

The conductor climbed down from between the cars as the train started up and straightening his dark tie, approached them with a solemn black book in his hand.

Questions for Students to Discuss

1. Using the *Research as Inquiry* frame as a guide, in what ways does finding a husband or wife differ from finding information for, say, a course assignment? Before answering, though, make sure to consider the myriad of tools available to help you find love and spouses on the Internet.
2. Explain why you do or don't agree that the characters in "A Fable" should have asked increasingly complex and new questions as they received answers to their questions.
3. In "A Fable," does the daughter consult with anyone in her search? Does the young man? Why was or wasn't this consultation adequate? Who else should they have consulted with before making their decision? Why? Why is or isn't it adequate to make such a personal decision by yourself without assistance from others? Is the same true for research for a school assignment?
4. In "A Fable," the characters meet, fall in love, and marry within the course of a few minutes. Why do (or don't) you agree this was an adequate amount of time to make this decision? In other words, was the search thorough? Explain how one might know how much information is enough to know when one is in love and should marry someone. Now, think about research for a school assignment. Explain when you know how much research is enough.
5. If you were asked to continue the story in divorce court a year after the couple was married, describe the questions you think the judge would ask the couple about what has gone wrong and how this happened?
6. What are the important lessons from this story that can be applied to research in your life and for your schoolwork?

Brier, D. J., & Lebbin, V. K. (in press). *Teaching Information Literacy through Short Stories*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. + 2 articles

Bravender, P., McClure, H. & Schaub, Gayle (eds). (2016) *Teaching Information Literacy Threshold Concepts: Lesson Plans for Librarians*. ACRL.