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# Reading for *CultureNature Literacy*

## Guideline for an Anthropocene reading of CNL narratives

The Anthropocene discourse encompasses a wide range of subjects, including the entanglement of human beings and their more-than-human environments, the planetary effects of human alteration of natural processes, and the imperative for knowledge, values, and perception to interact in order to sustainably reshape culture-nature relations. Narratives and images facilitate comprehension of the nature-culture interdependence in its scalar complexity, and as such, they can be employed in a variety of ways in learning processes on cultural sustainability to promote *CultureNature Literacy* as an Anthropocene competence. The following proposal sets out a guideline consisting of key questions for a cultural-ecological or Anthropocene reading of text-image narratives. This guideline can be employed by teachers, (not only) in literary and media pedagogical settings, but also to sensitise students to the reshaping of human-nature relationships in the Anthropocene through literary reading.

*Cultural-Ecological Literary Pedagogy, Anthropocene Reading, Ecological Reading*

## Ecological Reading in the Anthropocene

### Impulses of Cultural-Ecological Literature Pedagogy

The field of cultural-ecological literature pedagogy is characterised by a diverse approach to the subject area of culture and nature. The programme has been developed to encourage innovative pedagogical approaches by integrating traditional and contemporary literary and media examples. From a literary-aesthetic perspective, knowledge can be constructed that does not compete with other forms of knowledge, but rather complements them in a unique way by combining cognitive, affective and conative aspects of learning. This approach fosters narrative thinking, in which emotions, causality and consequence (cf. Breithaupt, 2022, p. 61) are interconnected and can be linked to questions that bear significant future relevance.

Ecological or ecocritical reading is recommended as an action-oriented learning activity 'that will uncover the sustainability frame'. It encompasses "to interpret literary texts (prose fiction, poetry and drama) by focusing on the environment and humans' relationship to it and how such relationships have social and economic implications" (UNESCO MGIEP, 2017, p. 173). Ecological reading draws on interpretation and thinking skills that learners have already acquired through school reading education. If ecological reading is now specifically dedicated to literary readings in their various forms as a purely linguistic or text and image-combining offer, then at least the following possibilities open up:

- *Multiperspectivity*: Students are instructed in the existence of divergent viewpoints on ecological issues and the manner in which these perspectives can interact, thereby engendering the modification of extant views. This facilitates the recognition and comprehension of interconnections.
- *Empathy*: Students are instructed in the practice of perspective-taking, which involves the ability to understand the viewpoint of another individual, albeit temporarily. It is noteworthy that these "others" do not necessarily have to be of human origin; non-human life forms and even inanimate matter can fulfil this function. Consequently, respect for all life forms and phenomena on Earth is engendered, thereby facilitating a more profound comprehension of the living conditions on this planet, as the emotional aspect of learning is incorporated.
- *Values*: It is imperative to note that students become acquainted with pertinent values such as sustainability and engage in their further development, weighting, and significance for the future of the Earth. Moreover, literature provides students with spaces to experiment with possible future actions and to foster their imagination and conceptualisation.

### Form, Content, Language: Anthropocene Reading Practice

The reading of narratives, images or their combination as text-image narratives, which *CultureNature Literacy* aims to promote as Anthropocene competence (cf. the definition in the CNL manual, Wanning & Sippl, 2023, p. 242), is understood from a cultural-ecological perspective as an Anthropocene reading practice. This is "by no means a singular method", but rather an interest "in the interactions between humans and non-human beings in the context of a planetary reality" in the Anthropocene (Probst, Dürbeck & Schaub, 2022, p. 13, translated from German). In Anthropocene reading, we learn to "understand human existence, psyche, society and culture in their manifold interrelationships with other living beings. By reading literature as part of the earth, [...] we make it an instrument of perception for the planetary dimension of our existence." (Probst, 2024, p. 68, translated from German) Anthropocene reading practice can use ecological reading as a focus in teaching/learning settings.

An Anthropocene reading in the context of *CultureNature Literacy* first poses the following questions concerning the general aspects (cf. Probst, Dürbeck & Schaub, 2022, p. 13f.), which are then analysed on the levels of form, content and language:

**(1) To what extent does the text address human-nature relationships in the Anthropocene?**

- Which interdependencies between culture and nature are depicted, and how?
- Are human interventions in the Earth system recognizable in the associated scalar complexity, i.e. in the clash of geological deep time and human lifetime (e.g. nuclear waste)?
- Is it about the consequences of climate change for humans and for the non-human environment (e.g. loss of biodiversity or solidarity)?
- How are these temporal dimensions represented?
- Is an epochal reference made (e.g. industrialization, colonialism)?
- Is it possible to gain knowledge about ecosystems and material cycles in their Earth system dimension?
- Through which actions, events, happenings is all this narrated?
- What does the narrated world look like?
- Which characters act in the story and how do they act?

**(2) Do non-human living beings have agency in the story?**

- Are they not just a background or symbols for the thoughts and actions of human characters, but does their presence change something?
- What interactions exist between human and non-human characters and how are they influenced, with what consequences?
- What role does their presence play in the narrative situation?
- Who tells the story and from what perspective?

**(3) How is the material, non-living environment inscribed in the story?**

- Which spheres of the Earth (lithosphere, pedosphere, hydrosphere, cryosphere, biosphere, atmosphere) are represented, and how is reference made to the anthroposphere resp. technosphere?

These guiding questions are designed to initiate a process of preparation for teachers, with a view to assessing the suitability of a literary text for an Anthropocene reading with learners. The assessment is initiated in a general capacity, utilising the guiding questions as a framework. Subsequently, the assessment is conducted with greater rigour, employing the guiding questions as a structured methodology for the analysis of the literary text's form, content, and linguistic composition. This analysis can then be used to derive suitable transfer tasks for

the learners' ecological reading. Action- and production-oriented tasks are considered suitable for the phases preceding, during and following reading, with the objective of integrating text-productive, scenic, visual, acoustic and intermedia methods to facilitate the linkage of reception and production processes (Ballis & Burkard, 2014, p. 128; cf. Spinner, 2019).

## Didactics

The CNL learning scenario “With Literature to *CultureNature Literacy*: Experiencing Human-Nature Relationships through Perspective-Shifting” (Capatu & Sippl, 2024) offers an example of pedagogical implementation.

## Literature

Ballis, Anja & Burkard, Mirjam (2014). *Kinderliteratur im Medienzeitalter. Grundlagen und Perspektiven für den Unterricht in der Grundschule*. Erich Schmidt Verlag.

Breithaupt, Fritz (2022). *Das narrative Gehirn*. Suhrkamp.

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## Quality criteria | SDGs

**Sustainability:** The learning scenario invites students to read ecological literary texts in order to practise multi-perspectivity, empathy and appreciation and to recognise that people are part of nature (cf. GreenComp).

**Inclusion:** The learning scenario can be adapted to special needs through appropriate text selection and supported communication of the reading questions.

**Digitality:** Reading can be done using digital tools (tablet, highlighter, read-aloud function) and the reading results can be translated into a digitally designed format.

**Target group correspondence:** The learning scenario is aimed at teachers and student teachers, but can also be used for ecological reading in levels secondary 1 and secondary 2 with appropriate reduction and text selection.

**SDG:** SDG 4 (Quality Education) and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) resp. all SDGs thematically addressed in the literary text

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