# Chapter 5
# Checking Students' ORAs:
## Oral Assessments With Butler, Kesey, and McBride

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## ABSTRACT

*Online technology tools eliminate the need for teachers to bend to the strictures of traditional essays during assessments. Inspired by a shift in teaching and assessment needs during the pandemic, the authors experimented with requiring students to submit oral responses to novel studies in their high school English classrooms. The benefits of the digital oral reading assessment persist even as pandemic learning restrictions loosen, and the authors have since incorporated oral reading assessments into their classrooms as a matter of routine. Recommendations are provided in structuring prompts, creating rubrics, and collecting filmed responses, and solutions are offered to the problems of teacher time constraints, student testing anxiety, and the relative ease of student plagiarism. The authors provide the reader with three oral reading assessment prompts for texts of literary merit, including Octavia Butler's Kindred, Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, and James McBride's The Color of Water, along with rubrics that can be adapted for use with any novel.*

## CHECKING STUDENTS' ORAS: ORAL ASSESSMENTS WITH BUTLER, KESEY, & MCBRIDE

Like many other teachers in the world, in early 2020 we found ourselves teaching through it was a unique challenge. Your authors, secondary teachers Matthew and Whitney, didn't know how to flip seamlessly from face-to-face instruction to virtual environments. However, we did know that we didn't want to give up our plans for teaching novels and other long reads. Although we were inexperienced visitors to the instructional landscape of teaching via videoconference, especially as recent advancements in commu-

nications and online technology have greatly impacted the direction of digital education (Kocdar et al., 2018), when it came to using novels, we were on firm ground. Whether we were teaching annotation skills to sophomores, introducing juniors to critical theories, or guiding seniors through comparative responses, we were confident in our texts, not only for the pedagogical opportunities they afforded us, but for the opportunities they provided for students to discover engaging meanings, connections, and value in their readings (Blau, 2003).

Unexpectedly being thrown into online teaching let us consider numerous aspects of our own instruction that needed updating. Due to technological advancements in many professions and corners of society, students' overall educations need to evolve to better train and prepare young people for future roles (Nieveen & Plomp, 2018). To gain confidence in any digital area, students should receive more opportunities to practice using online information and communication technologies (Peñarrubia-Lozano et al., 2021). Online assessments utilizing a variety of digital tools offer students continued discovery of authentic situations in which they are more likely to find themselves in the future (Akimov & Malin, 2020; Darling-Aduna, 2021; Theobold, 2021). Overall, to be successful in their future schools and careers, no matter their paths, students need to communicate confidently and skillfully, and much of this is likely to take place online (Akimov & Malin, 2020). Ironically, even though the majority of our post-graduate education learning has been online, giving our students the needed digital exposure and practice has been a struggle. And as we transition into a newer model of education with updated goals and digital priorities, it is important not to entirely dismiss everything that has been successful in traditional teaching (Nieveen & Plomp, 2018).

As literature teachers intent on not abandoning novel studies, online instruction with our students raised a major concern for us that we weren't quite sure how to solve: Were our students actually reading these books that we were working so hard to teach? Our fears of our students not reading the literature are not unique. For instance, one recent longitudinal study found the rates of students seemingly either not reading or grossly misunderstanding the literature triple in just a few years (Smith, 2021). Remote or not, we were not interested in supporting this trend.

## ASSESSMENT OPTIONS FOR ONLINE INSTRUCTION: WADING THROUGH THE LITERATURE

To help us track if our students were reading the full texts, we explored our assessment options. There are four categories of assessment from which to choose: selected response, written response, performance assessment, and personal communication (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2020). Selected response assessments include multiple-choice, true or false, matching, and fill-in-the-blank questions. Written response includes both short and extended responses. Performance assessments include creative demonstrations and student-developed products. And personal communication includes interviews and conferences, student journals and reading logs, participation in discussions, and oral examinations.

In order to choose the most effective type of assessment for the digital landscape, we needed to consider which method would yield the best evidence for our desired results (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Pandemic learning forced us to rethink traditional assessment strategies and consider how, or whether, those would translate to an online environment with which we–and our students–were just becoming familiar. Because cheating and plagiarism are common concerns with online assessment (Akimov & Malin, 2020; Fisher et al., 2020; Kocdar et al., 2018), we wanted to ensure that we selected an assess-

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