

# Video Clip 2

## Building a Literary Community

Length of Clip:	18:55
School:	Fondren Middle School
Location:	Houston, Texas
No. of Students in School:	1,000
Teacher:	Joe Bernhart
No. of Years Teaching:	6
Grade:	7th
Subject:	Language Arts
No. of Students in the Classroom:	32

*"...My goals are to have them have meaningful interactions with texts, to have meaningful interactions with literature, to frame literature the same way they might frame talking about...something as common as...wrestling or a TV show." — Joe Bernhart*

# About This Video Clip

---

Students in Joe Bernhart’s classroom explore literature in book groups, each one selecting a novel to read from a set of 10 choices. Students often receive their first or second choices.

In this lesson, students are at various stages in the book group process that Mr. Bernhart has structured for the class. This process begins with teacher-directed mini-lessons about literary concepts. In this case, Mr. Bernhart introduces foreshadowing as hints in a text that help readers predict what might happen next in the plot. Students are then asked to apply this concept to their individual books. Students read aloud their books during class time, working through the books together. This allows students to discuss the books as they experience the literature, constantly reshaping their initial interpretations of the works, as well as apply new concepts. Students set new daily and weekly reading goals and consult with the teacher about their progress, questions, and accomplishments. Each group appoints a leader and recorder for group discussion. The students’ OWL logs—or discussion guides that focus on their observations, wonderings, and links to real life—serve as a guide for rich dialogue about the literature. Students select from a wide range of creative book projects to demonstrate their understanding of their books’ plots, characters, themes, and literary concepts. Students are assessed through their OWL logs, as well as their book project presentations to the entire class.

The role of the teacher in all phases of these literary activities is that of facilitator, knowledgeable reader, monitor, and coach. The teacher also utilizes mini-lessons to provide brief segments of whole-class, direct instruction on a variety of literary concepts. Students are then expected to apply new learning to the novels they are reading in their groups and later in culminating projects and performance assessments.

Students in Joe Bernhart’s classroom are empowered to make their own reading choices, monitor their own reading progress, and take ownership over their own learning. Students are expected to challenge one another, ask questions, take risks, and think about what the literature means to them. Students are invited to open their minds to multiple perspectives, as they consider their peers’ interpretations and a variety of other vantage points.

Through all of these rich literature experiences, students hone their critical literacy skills, construct deep understandings, make connections to their own lives and the world around them, and participate in meaningful conversations about literature with their peers and the teacher.

Visit the *Making Meaning in Literature: A Video Library, Grades 6–8* Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature) to access the lesson plan Mr. Bernhart used to design this classroom experience, as well as other related resources.

## Featured Texts

*The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis

*Forged by Fire* by Sharon Mills Draper

*Tears of a Tiger* by Sharon Mills Draper

*The Skin I’m In* by Sharon Flake

*Julie of the Wolves* by Julie Craighead George

*Gaucho* by Gloria Gonzalez

*Heaven* by Angela Johnson

*Necessary Roughness* by Marie G. Lee

*Letters From a Slave Girl: The Story of Harriet Jacobs* by Mary E. Lyons

*Somewhere in the Darkness* by Walter Dean Meyers

# About This Video Clip, cont'd.

---

Mr. Bernhart's literature selections are considered contemporary young adult literature, featuring mostly ethnic teen protagonists facing real-life conflicts. It is Mr. Bernhart's hope that students will recognize themselves and the world around them in the texts they read.

Visit the *Making Meaning in Literature: A Video Library, Grades 6–8* Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature) to access suggested companion texts, brief summaries, and additional resources related to this literature.

# Viewing Suggestions

---

## Who Should Watch This Video

**Teachers and teacher educators** can use this as a professional development or preservice education tool to see how one teacher facilitates and manages a literature-based, multi-text classroom, where authentic student literary dialogue deepens student understanding and learning.

The video can also provide an opportunity for teachers who reach out to families in the school community at PTA meetings or back-to-school events. In these settings, the video can be a vehicle for sharing instructional practices and expectations in order to foster support at home for classroom instructional goals.

**Curriculum planners** can use this video as a focus for both content and best practices meetings, looking at the innovative practices in language arts instruction it offers. As such, it might be the impetus for folding such practices into existing curricula.

**Administrators** can use this video to make other teachers aware of new strategies they can consider in planning for and initiating classroom experiences with literature.

## Before Watching

Before viewing this video, think about these questions:

- How can teachers empower students to develop their own understandings of literature?
- What is the value of students interacting with peer groups when reading literature?
- How can teachers manage multiple learning groups and multiple texts in a literature classroom where collaborative dialogue is the goal?

## Suggestions for Post-Viewing Discussion

**Teachers involved in professional development and preservice education may want to discuss:**

- What did the teacher say and do, and what did the students say and do that demonstrated deeper thinking about the works of literature?
- What is the role of the teacher in this classroom? What is the role of the student? Give examples.
- What additional ways could students in this classroom interact with literature in a meaningful way?
- What is the value of this approach to literature instruction?
- What criteria do you use for selecting literature to read with your students?
- What ideas did you glean from the video that you would like to try in your own instructional practices?
- What questions do you have about this teacher's instructional practices?

**Teachers holding PTA meetings, back-to-school events, or other outreach meetings can use questions like these to start group discussion:**

- How are the experiences in this classroom different from or similar to your own literature experiences in school?
- What do you think about this approach to literature?
- How might you support this approach to language arts instruction through activities with your children at home?

# Viewing Suggestions, cont'd.

---

## **Curriculum planners can discuss:**

- How can these practices be folded into existing curricula? What is the benefit of doing so?
- What other approaches for expanding the student role in literature discussions can our teachers explore?

## **Administrators can discuss:**

- What can teachers take from this video to enhance their classroom practices?
- How can you use this video to inform teachers about innovative practices in the language arts classroom and to promote further dialogue on this topic?

## **Suggestions for Post-Viewing Activities**

### **For teachers involved in professional development and preservice education:**

- Develop your own mini-lesson or series of mini-lessons to be used during a literature unit. Consider focusing on literary concepts that can be applied to any fictional text, such as characterization, conflict, tone, setting, and mood.
- Select a novel to read that appeals to adolescents. Upon the completion of the book, prepare a dramatic read-aloud or book commercial to share with students. Refer to Additional Resources in this guide for annotated booklists, as well as the online Additional Resources at the *Making Meaning in Literature: A Video Library, Grades 6–8* Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature).
- Develop a structure for your own classroom book groups. Think about these questions as you start planning:
  - What key activities or elements would you require of students?
  - What processes would groups go through with each book?
  - What specific roles will you implement for students in each group?
  - How will students select books?
  - How will you encourage meaningful dialogue about literature?
  - How will you create a literary community?
  - How will you assess the students' learning?
  - How will you manage the daily activities of your students?
  - How will this structure support your school's curriculum requirements and standards?
  - How often will book groups meet?
  - How will you teach the students the structure and process of the book groups? Create an outline of the structure for book groups in your own classroom as well as your management system. Keep in mind that it is easiest to start out with a simple structure and add layers to it as your students learn your expectations. While implementing these new instructional practices, keep a reflective journal, noting what works, what does not, and how the structure can be revised.

# Viewing Suggestions, cont'd.

---

## **For teachers reaching out to families:**

- Encourage families to ask their children about language arts classroom activities and reading experiences at school. Clearly communicate what is expected of students in your language arts class. Remind families that talking with their children regularly about their classroom experiences will support their learning. Refer to the online Teacher's Tools on the *Making Meaning in Literature: A Video Library, Grades 6–8* Web site to access Tip Sheet: Supporting Your Child's Learning at Home ([www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature)).
- Encourage families to read with their children. They might consider working with some of the books assigned in their children's language arts classrooms. Stress the value of discussing the literature with their children, soliciting their interpretations of the piece.
- Model a read-aloud to families, showing them how to grab their children's reading interests by changing voice tone, reading in character, asking listeners to make predictions, etc. Encourage families to read aloud with their children at home.

## **For administrators:**

- Share this video with language arts teachers in your school. Talk with teachers about the value of this approach to instruction. Ask them to consider specific ways in which this lesson succeeds and possible variations of the lesson for implementation with their own students. Provide time for teachers to collaborate and share ideas that support instructional practices featured in this video.
- Share this video at PTA gatherings, board meetings, and other school leadership activities, in order to educate members about different instructional approaches that language arts teachers may use in their classrooms.

# Additional Resources

---

The classroom lesson plan, student activity sheets, and links to related resources are accessible at the *Making Meaning in Literature: A Video Library, Grades 6–8* Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature).

You may also be interested in the following texts, many of which can be purchased through the National Council of Teachers of English at [www.ncte.org](http://www.ncte.org):

Allen, Janet, and Kyle Gonzalez. *There's Room for Me Here: Literacy Workshop in the Middle School*. York, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers, 1998. ISBN 1-57110-042-3.

Andrasick, Kathleen Dudden. *Opening Texts: Using Writing To Teach Literature*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1990. ISBN 0-435-08522-0.

Atwell, Nancie. *In the Middle: New Understandings About Writing, Reading, and Learning*. 2nd ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. ISBN 0-86709-374-9.

Beers, Kylene and Barbara G. Samuels, eds. *Into Focus: Understanding and Creating Middle School Readers*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gorden Publishers, Inc., 1998. ISBN 0-926842-64-1.

Daniels, Harvey. *Literature Circles*. York, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers, 1994. ISBN 1-55138-048-X.

Evans, Karen S. *Literature Discussion Groups in the Intermediate Grades: Dilemmas and Possibilities*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2001. ISBN 0-87207-293-2.

Golub, Jeffrey. *Activities for an Interactive Classroom*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1994. ISBN 0-8141-0046-5.

Golub, Jeffrey, NCTE Committee on Classroom Practices. *Focus on Collaborative Learning: Classroom Practices in Teaching English, 1988*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1988. ISBN 0-8141-1753-8.

Kaywell, Joan, editor. *Adolescent Literature as Complement to Classics, Volume 2*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 1994. ISBN 0926842439.

Krogness, Mary Mercer. *Just Teach Me, Mrs. K: Talking Reading, and Writing With Resistant Adolescent Learners*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995. ISBN 0-435-08815-7.

Langer, Judith. *Envisioning Literature*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1995. ISBN 0-8077-3463-0.

Langer, Judith A. "Discussion as Exploration: Literature and the Horizon of Possibilities." *Exploring Texts: The Role of Discussion and Writing in the Teaching and Learning of Literature*. George E. Newell and Russell K. Durst, eds. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 1993. 23–43. ISBN 0-926842-24-2. Also available at [cela.albany.edu/discussion/index.html](http://cela.albany.edu/discussion/index.html), Report 6.3.

*The Language of Literature* classroom anthology series and teacher support materials. Evanston, IL: McDougal Littell, 2002.

Routman, Regie. *Conversations: Strategies for Teaching, Learning, and Evaluating*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000. ISBN 0-325-00109-X.

Samuels, Barbara G. and Kylene Beers, eds. *Your Reading: An Annotated Booklist for Middle and Junior High 1995–96 Edition*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1996. ISBN 0-8141-5943-5.

Schoenbach, Ruth, Cynthia Greenleaf, Christine Cziko, and Lori Hurwitz. *Reading for Understanding*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999. ISBN 0-7879-5045-9.

Soter, A. O. *Young Adult Literature and the New Literary Theories: Developing Critical Readers in Middle School*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1999. ISBN 0-80773-8808.

Tchudi, Stephen and Susan Tchudi. *The English/Language Arts Handbook*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1991. ISBN 0-86709-288-2.

# Additional Resources, cont'd.

---

Tiedt, Iris McClellan. *Teaching With Picture Books in the Middle School*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2000. ISBN 0-87207-273-8.

Trelease, Jim. *The Read-Aloud Handbook*. New York: Penguin Books, 1995, ISBN 0-1404-6971-0.

Whitin, Phyllis. *Sketching Stories, Stretching Minds: Responding Visually to Literature*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996. ISBN 0-435-08879-X.

Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. *You Gotta BE the Book*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1997. ISBN 0-8077-3566-3.

Wilhelm, Jeffrey D., Tanya N. Baker, and Julie Dube. *Strategic Reading: Guiding Students to Lifelong Literacy 6–12*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2001. ISBN 0-86709-561-X.

Yokota, Junko, ed. *Kaleidoscope: A Multicultural Booklist for Grades K–8*. 3rd ed. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2001. ISBN 0-8141-2540-9.