

# Video Clip 4

## Facilitating Discussion

Length of Clip:	18:55
School:	Sherburne-Earlville Middle School
Location:	Sherburne, New York
No. of Students in School:	450
Teacher:	Tanya E. Schnabl
No. of Years Teaching:	14
Grade:	6th
Subject:	Language Arts
No. of Students in the Classroom:	15

*"I like kids to write their own questions because...they're more involved. If I always come up with the questions...[we] wouldn't get to what is important to them."— Tanya Schnabl*

# About This Video Clip

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Questions are at the center of classroom discussion for Tanya Schnabl's students. Because they are learning how to make connections and inferences independently, Ms. Schnabl supports and models the process for them. She asks students to prepare for discussion by writing questions on sticky notes while reading. She uses these questions to center the discussion and poses her own to help students connect personal experience with the practical and ethical dilemmas presented by the text.

Ms. Schnabl believes that integrating subject areas makes learning meaningful for students and tries to find ways to connect themes from science and history with their reading. She contextualized *Among the Hidden* within a class theme centered on the tensions between government limits and personal freedoms by helping the class understand and explore the implications of China's "one child" policy. She used discussion to help students decide if they would be for or against a two-child policy in the United States. They each then created a poster defining and supporting their positions. Displayed around the room, these posters provided visual links between their positions and the situation in the book.

After students read and discussed the novel, Ms. Schnabl introduced them to Jeffrey McDaniel's poem "The Quiet World." This poem presents a world in which the government has limited the speech of each citizen to "exactly one hundred/and sixty-seven words per day." In small groups, the class examined the ways in which the poem related to the novel, and then reported their observations to the class as a whole. As a culminating activity, the students wrote their own poems based on the 167-word rule and shared them with their classmates.

The role of the teacher is that of facilitator. In addition to organizing and supporting discussion directly, Ms. Schnabl's presentation of outside materials that link to the novel at hand helps students expand their understandings of the issues involved and the impact of (often seemingly reasonable) government edicts on human lives.

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 Ms. Schnabl used to organize this classroom experience, as well as other related resources.

## Featured Texts

*Among the Hidden* by Margaret Haddix

"The Quiet World" by Jeffrey McDaniel

Ms. Schnabl looks for books where "kids will have to think [because] it's not all laid out there for them." She hopes students will use their reading to help them make thoughtful decisions when confronted with real-life dilemmas.

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# Viewing Suggestions

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## 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 supports and facilitates thematically integrated literary discussions, where authentic student questions probe textual concerns, and where discussion functions to increase student understanding and personal connections.

The video can also provide an opportunity for communicating with parents in the school community at PTA meetings or back-to-school events. The video can be a tool 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 model for integrating topics throughout the curriculum or for using paired readings to extend students' literary experiences.

**Administrators** can use this video to generate awareness of strategies for the effective facilitation of literary discussion.

## Before Watching

Before viewing this video, consider the following:

- What are the characteristics of a "good" literary discussion?
- What role do questions play in literary understanding?
- How can teachers help students value the questions they have about literature, seeing those questions as useful points of departure for further discussion?

## Suggestions for Post-Viewing Discussion

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

- How does this teacher help students prepare for discussion? What additional strategies might a teacher use?
- What does the teacher say and do to help students develop and extend the discussion? Give specific examples.
- What are the values of integrating literary instruction thematically? What are the shortcomings of this approach?
- How might a teacher assess a literary discussion to determine its effectiveness for students?
- What ideas did you glean from the video that you would like to try in your classroom?
- What questions do you have about this teacher's instructional practices?
- How can you use this video to help teachers attempt new ways of facilitating discussion?

**Curriculum planners can discuss:**

- What themes or key ideas are at the center of your literature curriculum?
- What are some thematic pairings you might develop, using materials already included in your curriculum?
- Are there ways in which you might make thematic connections between literature in your curriculum and topics developed within other departments?

# Viewing Suggestions, cont'd.

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

- How is the discussion in this classroom similar to or different from discussions you have with your child at home?
- Did any of the student responses surprise or intrigue you? Why? Give examples.
- How can you support this approach to language arts instruction through activities with your child at home?

## **Administrators can discuss:**

- How can physical issues (classroom size and configuration, teacher/student ratio, external distractions, etc.) enable or prevent teachers from facilitating effective discussions?
- What professional development is available for teachers who wish to develop their skills as discussion facilitators?

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

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

- Make a list of open-ended questions (questions with more than one answer, or questions with no definite answer) that you might use in a literature discussion.
- What is the most effective discussion question or strategy you have used? Share it with your colleagues.
- Make a list of text pairings using works currently taught as well as new ones that you might use to refresh the curriculum. Look for short works (poems, essays, and short stories) that you could use to extend thematic discussion around a novel.

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

- Make a list of ways you can help families support their children's literature experiences at school. Consider using brief notes, email, a newsletter, or a course Web site to keep families informed about texts and activities their children will experience in your class.
- Prepare a handout for back-to-school night or parent conferences that clearly communicates what is expected of students in your language arts class. Families should know how much reading and writing their children will be doing as well as what responsibilities they will assume as they prepare for class.
- Invite families into your classroom to observe and—if they have read the text—perhaps even to participate in a literary discussion.
- If there is time (at least 20 minutes), use back-to-school night to model a literary discussion. Ask parents to read a short poem or a one-page story and then write one or two questions. Use those questions as the basis for a brief discussion.

### **For administrators:**

- Share this video with language arts teachers in your school. Discuss the value of this approach to literature instruction. Ask teachers to consider the ways in which this lesson succeeds, and to suggest ways in which it might be strengthened. Provide time for teachers to share their strategies for facilitating discussion.
- Use 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

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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, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 1998. ISBN 1-57110-042-3.

Ash, Barbara Hoetker. "Student Made Questions: One Way Into a Literary Text." *English Journal* (September, 1992): 61–64.

Berghoff, Beth, Kathryn A. Egawa, Jerome C. Harste, and Barry T. Hoonan. *Beyond Reading and Writing: Inquiry, Curriculum, and Multiple Ways of Knowing*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2000. ISBN 0-8141-2341-4.

Busching, Beverly A. and Betty Ann Slesinger. "Authentic Questions: What Do They Look Like? Where Do They Lead?" *Language Arts* (September, 1995): 341–343.

Close, Elizabeth Egan. "Literature Discussion: A Classroom Environment for Thinking and Sharing." *English Journal* (September, 1992): 65–71.

Commeyras, Michell and Georgiana Sumner (Jamie Metsala, ed.) "Literature Discussions Based on Student-Posed Questions." *The Reading Teacher*. (November, 2996): 262–265.

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. *Making Learning Happen: Strategies for an Interactive Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2000. ISBN 0-86709-493-1.

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

Hoonan, Barry. "Drawing on the Artist's Perspective: Ventures Into Meaning." *Literature Circles and Response*. Ed. Bonnie Campbell Hill, Nancy J. Johnson, and Katherine Noe. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 1995. ISBN 0-926-684-248 X.

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 A. *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*. Ed. Newell, George E. and Russel K. Durst. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 1993. 23–43. ISBN 0-926842-24-2.

*The Language of Literature* classroom anthology series (grades 6–12) and teacher support materials. Boston: McDougal Littell, 2002.

Morgan, Norah and Juliana Saxton. *Asking Better Questions: Models, Techniques, and Activities for Engaging Students in Learning*. Markham, ONT: Pembroke, 1994. ISBN 155-138-0455.

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.

# Additional Resources, cont'd.

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

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

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

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