

Video Clip 5

Seminar Discussion

Length of Clip:	18:55
School:	DeWitt Clinton Elementary School
Location:	Chicago, Illinois
No. of Students in School:	1,600
Teacher:	Dorothy Franklin
No. of Years Teaching:	16
Grade:	7th
Subject:	Language Arts
No. of Students in the Classroom:	30

“Literary reactions in a whole-group setting are important because students get a chance to gauge the opinions of their peers. They get to see how their thinking rates with everyone else. It also puts them in a position where sometimes they have to defend what they’re thinking.”
— Dorothy Franklin

About This Video Clip

Students in Dorothy Franklin's Chicago urban classroom participate in a quarter-long study of Black History, spanning slavery, the Civil Rights Movement, and modern times. In order to meet the needs of the diverse student population, including newly proficient ESOL students, special education students, and students reading at or above grade level, Ms. Franklin uses a variety of instructional approaches, including independent reading of books and small book group and whole-class seminar discussions.

In this lesson, students participate in the second part of a seminar discussion focusing on the short story "Passing" by Langston Hughes. In part one of the seminar, students discussed the short story "Guests in the Promised Land" by Kristin Hunter. This lesson preceded the one you will see in this video. Both stories deal with Black oppression and lend themselves to a natural pairing. In preparation for discussion, students independently respond to questions in writing before the seminar, so that they can thoughtfully offer their opinions and provide supporting evidence. Ms. Franklin encourages students to express their unique perspectives, to respectfully disagree with her and classmates, and to explore possibilities that they may have not considered on their own. In response to the seminar experience, students are asked to compare and contrast the actions and motives of the protagonists in the two stories. Ms. Franklin hopes to provide students with an opportunity to examine how two different Black characters responded to their circumstances of oppression. The students in the seminar model many of the hallmarks of a classroom community focused on literature: their ideas are at the center of the classroom; questions are viewed as central to the literary experience; it is assumed by both the teacher and the students that they will build on the understandings they came to class with; and it is assumed that multiple interpretations are both expected and helpful.

Visit the *Making Meaning in Literature: A Video Library, Grades 6–8* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature to access the classroom lesson plan Ms. Franklin used to structure this experience, as well as other related resources.

Featured Texts

"Guests in the Promised Land" by Kristin Hunter

"Passing" by Langston Hughes

"Passing" by Langston Hughes examines how one character deals with racism by blending into Euro-American culture. In contrast, the short story "Guests in the Promised Land" by Kristin Hunter, presents a protagonist who fights back against his situation of oppression with anger and force. As background knowledge for this classroom lesson's seminar discussion, students read "Guests in the Promised Land." This text pairing affords students with an opportunity to see how two different individuals might have dealt with being African American during the early 1930s. Use the companion text, *To Be a Slave*, by Julius Lester, to expand students' background knowledge. *To Be a Slave* is a nonfiction account drawn from actual slave narratives.

Visit the *Making Meaning in Literature: A Video Library, Grades 6–8* Web site at 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 video as a professional development or preservice education tool to see how one teacher uses whole-class seminar discussion to engage students in responding to literature in a meaningful way.

The video can also provide an opportunity for teachers who reach out to the school community at PTA meetings or back-to-school events. In these settings, the video can be the centerpiece of a program where they can share instructional goals, practices, and expectations.

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.

Administrators can use this video in presentations to their groups, to focus on and talk about the instructional practices presented there, examining what they add to the students' experiences with literature.

Before Watching

Before viewing this video, think about these questions:

- What is the value in using formal seminar discussion to help students respond to literature?
- What ground rules can the teacher and classroom community create collaboratively in order to ensure a successful seminar discussion, one that enhances students' understanding of literature and provides them with a safe, productive forum for sharing ideas?

Suggestions for Post-Viewing Discussion

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

- How does the teacher facilitate the seminar discussion? What does the teacher do to move the conversation along? How do students contribute to the conversation? How does the teacher encourage students to contribute?
- What can students best gain from participating in a seminar discussion about literature?
- What are some variations of whole-class discussion that teachers can implement in their own classrooms?

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

- What do you think about this classroom experience? What did you like about it? What did you see here that you would like to see in any language arts classroom?
- What might families do to encourage their children to talk about the books they are reading?

Curriculum planners can discuss:

- What percentage of time should a class spend discussing texts as they did in this video?
- How can these instructional practices become part of our existing curriculum?
- What are some other methods of whole-class discussion that teachers might add to their repertoire of classroom techniques?

Viewing Suggestions, cont'd.

Administrators can discuss:

- In what ways did the students benefit from the discussion in this classroom? How do you know this?
- What were some of the hallmarks of the discussion you saw in the video? How are these different from or similar to those you have observed in other classrooms?
- How can you use this video to inform teachers about innovative practices to support student comprehension in the language arts classroom?

Suggestions for Post-Viewing Activities

For teachers involved in professional development and preservice education:

- Create seminar discussion format guidelines and expectations in collaboration with your students. As a reference, consider using the Suggested Seminar Rules and Rubric listed within this lesson on the *Making Meaning in Literature: A Video Library, Grades 6–8* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature. You might try brainstorming ideas with your colleagues before attempting the activity with students.
- Use a seminar discussion format with a pairing of texts that supports your own curriculum. Focus on similar themes, conflicts, or time periods to select the paired texts. Invite students to draft seminar questions and answers. To start the dialogue, select pairs of students as the seminar discussion leaders. Invite students to interject new questions as the conversation grows. This format may be best used once students have experienced a seminar led and modeled by the teacher. You might try this discussion format with your colleagues first, utilizing this as a professional development opportunity to dialogue about instructional practices. Suggested text pairings can be accessed at the *Making Meaning in Literature: A Video Library, Grades 6–8* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature.
- Ask students to create their own seminar discussion participation rubric, or system for assessing their participation in the seminar. As a class, collaboratively agree upon the final rubric elements for assessment of their participation. At the end of the seminar, ask students to assign themselves a participation grade based on the rubric and write a one-paragraph reflection about their experience in the discussion, any new realizations they made about the literature, as well as questions they still have.
- As a reflective practitioner, make a note of what worked in your own class's seminar discussion. Consider who spoke up and who stayed quiet. How can you draw in all students' participation? How did the pairing of the texts enhance the discussion and the students' understandings? What happened when the dialogue got off track? How did you refocus the conversation? How did you deal with student responses that were not appropriate ones? What is considered appropriate and inappropriate? What would you do differently next time?
- Tape record a seminar discussion and allow students to view the tape, evaluating the quality of the discussion as well as student participation. Show key clips from the video to your students, providing students with questions to think about as they view the videotape. Discuss the video clips with your students, focusing on ways to improve class discussion in the future.

For teachers reaching out to families:

- Encourage families to read some of the books assigned in your language arts classroom. Ask them to discuss the text with their children, soliciting their reactions to the piece, and discussing ideas and questions they might have.
- Plan a meeting with families to showcase your students and their interaction with literature. Assemble a model discussion group and ask them to demonstrate how they talk about the books they read. Talk about the way they discussed and point out important behaviors they demonstrated. Involve the audience in a discussion of what they can do to support this activity in their homes. You may also want to display samples of book projects they have created.

Viewing Suggestions, cont'd.

For administrators:

- Share this video with language arts teachers in your school. Talk about the value of this instructional approach and the specific ways in which this lesson succeeds. Invite teachers to share ideas about similar or related lessons they can try.
- Initiate a discussion with language arts teachers focused on ways they foster a safe learning environment in which students can thoughtfully participate in class discussions about literature, take risks, and challenge one another.
- As a follow-up to the above professional development activities, ask teachers to read one of the articles from the National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement about conversation in the literature classroom. These articles can be accessed at the *Making Meaning in Literature: A Video Library, Grades 6–8* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature, under “Additional Resources” for this video clip.

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.

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:

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*. Newell, George E. 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, 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.

Notes
