

Video Clip 6

Dramatic Tableaux

Length of Clip:	18:55
School:	Stephen Decatur Middle School
Location:	Berlin, Maryland
No. of Students in School:	650
Teacher:	Dr. Janis Currence
No. of Years Teaching:	28
Grade:	7th
Subject:	Integrated Language Arts
No. of Students in the Classroom:	26

“Helping them to look at characters as people and try to personalize and make connections is something that I have found really is helpful, and I know is an important thing to do.”
— Dr. Jan Currence

About This Video Clip

Integrated language arts provides an interdisciplinary learning experience for Dr. Currence's inclusion students. Units are thematically planned, weaving social studies, science, and even math into the language arts experience. The lesson featured in this video is part of a historical fiction unit, in which students read a novel as a class and select one from the same genre to read on their own. Dr. Currence creates a student-centered environment for her students, where meeting a range of students' needs is a priority. Because of this, it is nearly impossible to determine which students in her class have special needs and which ones do not. Dr. Currence wants her students to choose to learn, and this philosophy drives her work with them. She hopes to engage her students in literature through a variety of activities, including read-alouds, dramatics, writing, picture books, journaling, and creative culminating projects.

In this lesson, students participate in an activity Dr. Currence refers to as Tableaux With a Twist. A tableau is a dramatic activity where a group of students are asked to physically construct a significant scene from literature through body placement, facial expressions, and the use of a few props. This "freeze frame" invites students in the audience to identify the scene, its importance, and the significance of the characters, their actions, and reactions. Dr. Currence's Tableaux With a Twist invites students in the audience to tap a character in the scene, hearing what they have to say. The tapped characters in the scene explain what they are doing and why they are doing it. This activity focuses on characters' actions and motives, allowing students to walk in the characters' shoes. This is particularly important for the students' current unit of study, historical fiction, in which they are expected to see how realistic characters change when some element of history impacts their lives. Tableaux help kids become part of the book, create personal responses to the literature, and connect with the characters, conflicts, and plot in a meaningful way.

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 Dr. Currence used to guide her work on this activity, as well as other related resources.

Featured Text

The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963 by Christopher Paul Curtis

Dr. Currence selected a young adult novel for a historical fiction unit of study. This particular novel, set against the historical backdrop of the burning of the Sixteenth Avenue Baptist Church, features sibling rivalry at its best, which engages students in making personal connections to the text.

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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 drama to engage students in responding to literature in a meaningful way. Through this activity, students can examine fictional characters' actions and reactions, while seeing them in the context of significant historical events.

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. Teachers can surround the video with discussion of how what the audience views in the video relates to what they hope to accomplish in their classrooms.

Curriculum planners can use this video to focus on the uses of dramatic activities within their curriculum, the purpose and goals of such an activity, and ways to incorporate and assess these kinds of experiences into their current language arts practices.

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. They can also use the video to introduce and discuss how their groups can use this activity within current standards and objectives to help enrich language arts instruction.

Before Watching

Before viewing this video, think about these questions:

- What is the value in using drama to help students increase their understanding of the literature they read in class?
- What kind of drama activities can be used in a language arts classroom to enhance students' understanding of literature?
- What are some other ways that teachers can help students examine character development?

Suggestions for Post-Viewing Discussion

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

- List some ways in which the teacher led, interacted with, and coached the students. How do these instructional approaches enhance the learning experience for students? Which techniques were the most successful and why?
- What can students gain from participating in dramatic tableaux?
- How can teachers utilize dramatic tableaux as a springboard for examining characters' choices and actions, and as a tool for connecting the literature to students' lives?
- What are some variations of this activity that you can implement in your own classroom?

Viewing Suggestions, cont'd.

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

- How might acting out a passage from a book help readers? What do they see that they might otherwise miss?
- Do your children ever act out stories or television shows that they have watched? How can you use this to help them relate to the books they are reading in school? What are some other activities you might work on with your children to help them “see” or “experience” literature?
- Why does your child need this kind of support? What kinds of things might be gained by involving the whole family in literature experiences such as these?

Curriculum planners can discuss:

- How can we include drama in our existing language arts curriculum or practices?
- What criteria should we establish for using dramatic activities to enhance interaction with literature?
- How can we assess such activities?

Administrators can discuss:

- How can students benefit from interacting with literature in this way?
- How might we expand or amend this activity to make it useful to all members of our group?
- How can this video be used to inform teachers about innovative practices in the language arts classroom?

Suggestions for Post-Viewing Activities

For teachers involved in professional development and preservice education:

- Experiment with different variations of dramatic tableaux, including the Tableaux With a Twist presented in the video. Consider:
 - Assigning the same scene to several groups to see different student interpretations of characters and their actions.
 - Tableaux Remote Control: This variation of tableaux asks students to use improvisational theater to act out a scene from a literary text. A selected student in the class has the power of the “remote control,” where he or she can stop, slow down, speed up, or freeze isolated characters or the whole scene by calling out a command. Students in the tableau dramatically respond based on their knowledge of the plot and characters, as well as their own interpretations of the text.
- Ask teachers to brainstorm ways in which they can debrief students after a dramatic tableau experience. Direct them to think about ways to help students examine the plot, the characters’ actions, and how they can connect the text to their own lives.
- How could this experience be used in cross-curricular activities?

For teachers reaching out to families:

- Encourage family members to talk with their children about classroom experiences with literature. Remind families that a regular dialogue with their children about their classroom experiences will support their learning and help family members understand and support their efforts.
- Plan to surround the video experience with a “performance” that your students have completed, based on a text they are currently reading. Encourage the audience to participate by asking questions of the participants as they take the roles of the characters in the text.

Viewing Suggestions, cont'd.

For administrators:

- Share this video with language arts teachers in your school. Talk about the value of this approach to instruction and the specific ways in which this lesson succeeds.
- Consider developing a professional development in-service for language arts teachers in your school, where lead teachers model dramatic approaches to literature instruction, as well as other “best practices.”

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*. Urban, 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, 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
