

# Workshop 9

## Starting in September . . .

*“You set the stage and then you get off the stage. You let the kids just talk to each other because . . . that’s the kind of discussion you want. [You] want them responding in the most natural way for them. ‘What are your questions? What did you notice? What did you see? What surprises you? What seems significant to you?’ But you have to take them through that process at the beginning of the year . . . and you hear many more of their voices as the year progresses.”*

—Linda Rief, Eighth-Grade Teacher, Oyster River Middle School, Durham, New Hampshire

### Description

The adage “Well begun is half done” is particularly applicable to the classroom. The relationships and routines teachers establish at the beginning of the school year resonate throughout the months that follow. Wise teachers think carefully about what is important in their classrooms, and how they can convey those values from the first moments students enter the classroom. The physical arrangement of the room and its contents send powerful messages to an incoming class. The earliest experiences teachers offer their students can provide memorable starting points for what is to follow.

The envisionment building teachers you will meet in this video are particularly aware of the impact of first impressions. The experiences they design for the first weeks of school serve to develop important relationships—between the teacher and the students, between the students and the teacher, among the students themselves. Additionally, they are introducing students to the values and the processes of their particular classroom. Students are learning to speak respectfully to one another, to listen to different points of view, to make connections to a wide range of literary texts, and to share their developing understandings with one another. They are taking the first steps toward enjoying a lifetime as thoughtful readers of literature.

### Key Points

- The first days and weeks of school set the stage for what is to come.
- During this time, teachers help students learn to become a literary community.
- This is when teachers can help students learn to feel comfortable asking questions and sharing ideas.
- This is when teachers begin to develop an atmosphere that enables the high level of student involvement that is a hallmark of an envisionment building classroom.
- Many teachers begin with experiences that help them get to know their students, their strengths, interests, and needs.
- Other teachers help students get to know one another and get comfortable with one another.
- Some teachers use the early days of class to help students understand what will be important and what they will be doing throughout the year.
- A teacher’s knowledge of the students helps avoid difficulties in the formation of literature groups.
- Choosing a particularly memorable activity for the first day establishes an impression strong enough to last throughout the school year.
- Establishing rules, routines, and expectations during the first few days gives students a sense of security.
- Students need to trust that their opinions can be voiced safely.

- Teachers can ask students to discuss what they know about the class from previous students and to look around the room, interpret what they see, and make predictions about what the class will be like.
- Teachers use a variety of strategies for introducing students to novels and the literature discussion strategies they will use when they read throughout the year.
- Many use shared texts, often ones they read aloud, to begin teaching students envisionment-building strategies.
- Some choose a new publication that they have not read, and read it aloud to the class.
- Some read a series of teasers from a number of books as a way to help students decide which they would like to read.
- Some direct a class discussion that explicitly explores the qualities of discussion and conversation valued in the envisionment-building classroom.
- Some use discussions about movies or television programs to foreground the kinds of analysis and discussion they expect students to bring to their reading of literature.
- Some have students share journal entries based on literature that has been read aloud to introduce discussion strategies.
- Envisionment-building teachers help students ask some of the following questions as they experience literary texts: “What did you notice?” “What did you see?” “What surprises you?” “What are your questions?” “What seems significant to you?”
- Envisionment-building teachers help students explore possibilities. They ask questions and suggest ideas that help students think about other perspectives, motives, or outcomes.
- Envisionment-building teachers also help students learn to agree and disagree with each other, to refer to and build on what others have already said, and to introduce new ideas for the group to consider.
- Envisionment-building teachers know it takes time and direct instruction for students to learn to converse confidently and independently about their reading.
- By the end of the first few weeks of class, students should be able to articulate what is valued in the classroom as well as some of the ways the class will go about enacting those values.

## Learning Objectives

After viewing this program, you will be able to:

- identify key values and processes inherent in an envisionment-building classroom.
- consider a number of different ways to begin introducing your students to these values and processes early in the school year.

## Background Reading

In preparation for this workshop, read “Literary Thought and Literate Mind” in Dr. Judith Langer’s *Envisioning Literature* from the Teachers College Press. Copyright 1995. ISBN 0-8077-3464-0.

For additional online resources, go to [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature). Select *Making Meaning in Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 6–8*, click on Workshop 9, and go to Additional Reading.

# Workshop Session (On-Site)

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## Getting Ready (30 minutes)

Quite possibly, the beginning weeks of a school year are the most difficult, for both teachers and students. Typically, teachers have a number of administrative obligations to meet in addition to getting acquainted with their students and getting the year off to an effective start—both personally and educationally. No matter how much they have heard from their predecessors, students enter a new classroom anxious about a number of unknown factors: What will the teacher really be like? Will the work be boring or too hard? Will they be successful?

In the video you are about to watch, you will hear a number of experienced teachers talk about strategies they have found helpful as they get their classes off to a good start. Use their comments as a frame within which to consider your own practices and their effectiveness.

### Discuss:

Discuss the following questions:

- What are some strategies that you use to get to know your students quickly at the beginning of the school year?
- What are some ways you help students learn your expectations and processes at the beginning of the year?
- What is the one most important “rule” that you have in your classroom? How do you make sure students understand it?

**Site Leader:** Use these questions to spark discussion before viewing the workshop program. Participants may write answers to the reflection questions in their journals, as time permits. You may use all of the questions or select only a few.

If you have Internet access, display the workshop Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature), making participants aware of online resources and interactive opportunities.

### Reflect in Workshop Journals:

Respond to the following in your workshop journal:

- Have you ever had a “bad start” or a “good start” at the beginning of a course (either as a student or as a teacher)? What caused it? How did you recover or benefit from it? What did you do to avoid or repeat a similar experience later?

## Watch the Workshop Video (60 minutes)

### Think About and Discuss:

Pause at “Introducing Novels.”

- Were there any strategies that the teachers on the video discussed for getting to know students that you might like to try? Which ones? Why do you think they would be helpful or effective?
- How do you establish your expectations with your students at the beginning of the year? Were there any strategies on the video that you would like to try with your students?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

**Site Leader:** If you are watching on videocassette, you may pause at the segments indicated here to give participants opportunities to discuss, reflect, and interact with the program. If needed, rewind and replay segments of the program so that viewers can thoughtfully examine all pertinent information. If you are watching a real-time broadcast, ask participants to consider the questions as they view the program, and discuss them later.

You may select any or all of the questions to discuss, as time permits and according to the interests of your participants.

# Workshop Session, cont'd.

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**Pause** at “Why We Do What We Do.”

- What are some strategies you use to introduce students to novels they will be reading?
- What strategies for teaching students how to have a good discussion seem most effective to you? Why?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

**View program until the end.**

- What are two or three things you do at the beginning of the year to help students get started? Why do you do each one?

## Going Further (30 minutes)

### **Brainstorm and Discuss:**

Spend five minutes listing your key classroom values in your workshop journal. That is, what is it that you want students to know and know how to do when they leave your class at the end of the year? Form groups and discuss your lists, revising your own as you see fit. Choose at least one item from everybody's list and, as a group, brainstorm a list of ways you could introduce it to students early in the year.

# Between Sessions (On Your Own)

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## Homework Assignment

### **Journal:**

Respond to the following in your workshop journal:

- Think about the physical arrangement of your classroom. Does it work to convey the values of an environment-building classroom? What might you add, eliminate, or rearrange to make it a more effective space for literature discussions?

### **Reading:**

For additional online resources, go to [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature), select *Making Meaning in Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 6–8*, and look under Additional Reading for Workshop 9.

## Ongoing Activity

### **Channel-Talk:**

You are encouraged to participate in an email discussion list called Channel-Talk. Send comments and questions regarding the workshop to other participants around the country. Comments can also be viewed on the Web site. Go to [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature), select *Making Meaning in Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 6–8*, and click on Channel-Talk.

# Between Sessions, cont'd.

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## Extension: Classroom Connection

### Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner:

Trust is a central component of an envisionment-building classroom. The students have to trust that their thoughts and feelings will be received with respect, both by the teacher and by their classmates. The teacher has to trust that students are capable of thoughtful, independent responses to the literature. How do you go about establishing an atmosphere of trust in your classroom? How do you encourage your students to participate fully in classroom conversations?

### Student Activities:

Try these activities with your students.

- Bring several of your favorite books to share with the class (including some that you enjoyed as a child). Spend several minutes telling about each and explaining why they were important in your life. Ask students what books are special to them and why.
- Find an interesting poem or short story that is long enough that each student can have at least two lines (for a poem) or two sentences (for a story). Cut it into sections and mount each section on colored paper. As students arrive for the first class, hand each a piece of text. Give the class 10 minutes or so to get their pieces in order. Have them read it aloud.
- Divide the class into five groups. Choose five different short poems, each on a different topic. Cut each poem into the same number of parts as you have students in a group. Give the class 10 minutes to find the others who share the parts of their poem and to arrange their parts in the proper order (humorous poems work very well for this activity).
- Ask students to explore their course text (or the books in the classroom library) and read a poem or a story that looks intriguing. During the next class period or two, have each student identify what he or she read and give a thumbnail sketch of the reading.
- For more activities to use at the beginning of the year, see the following in the Appendix: Say Howdy, Be as Smart as an OWL, OWL Log, First-Line Text Teasers, and Where Are They Coming From?

## Additional Reading

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.

Atwell, Nancie. *In the Middle*. 2nd ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. ISBN 0-86709-374-9.

Bayer, Ann Shea. *Collaborative-Apprenticeship Learning: Language and Thinking Across the Curriculum, K-12*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1990. ISBN 0-87484-882-2.

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

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.

Bridges, Lois. *Creating Your Classroom Community*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 1995. ISBN 1-57110-49-0.

# Between Sessions, cont'd.

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Brown, Rexford G. *Schools of Thought: How the Politics of Literacy Shape Thinking in the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991. ISBN 1-55542-314-0.

Brozo, William G. *To Be a Boy, To Be a Reader: Engaging Teen and Preteen Boys in Active Literacy*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2002. ISBN 0-87207-175-8.

Buehl, Doug. *Classroom Strategies for Interactive Learning*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2001. ISBN 0-87207-284-3.

Clayton, Marlynn K. and Mary Beth Forton. *Off to a Good Start: Launching the School Year*. Greenfield, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children, 1997. ISBN 0-9618-6366-8.

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

Commeyras, Michell and Georgiana Sumner. "Literature Discussions Based on Student-Posed Questions." Ed. Jamie Metsala. *The Reading Teacher* (November, 1996): 262-265.

Daniels, Harvey. *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups*. 2nd ed. York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2002. ISBN 1-57110-333-3.

Denton, Paula and Roxann Kriete. *The First Six Weeks of School*. Greenfield, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children, 2000. ISBN 1-89298-904-2.

Elliott, Joan B. and Mary M. Dupuis, eds. *Young Adult Literature in the Classroom: Reading It, Teaching It, Loving It*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2002. ISBN 0-87207-173-1.

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. *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*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1988. ISBN 0-8141-1753-8.

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

Graves, Donald H. *Build a Literate Classroom: The Reading/Writing Teacher's Companion*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991. ISBN 0-435-08488-7.

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.

Kohn, Alfie. *What to Look for in a Classroom...and Other Essays*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998. ISBN 0-7879-4453-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.

Kutz, Eleanor and Hephzibah Roskelly. *An Unquiet Pedagogy: Transforming Practice in the English Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991. ISBN 0-86709-277-7.

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. George E. Newell and Russell K. Durst. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 1993. 23-43. ISBN 0-926842-24-2

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

Langer, Judith A., ed. *Literature Instruction: A Focus on Student Response*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1992.

# Between Sessions, cont'd.

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*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, ON: Pembroke, 1994. ISBN 155-138-0455

Moss, Joy F. *Teaching Literature in the Middle Grades: A Thematic Approach*. 2nd Ed. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc., 2000. ISBN 1-929024-14-2.

Noe, Kathlerine L. Schlick and Nancy J. Johnson. *Getting Started With Literature Circles*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon, 1999. ISBN 0-926842-97-8.

Rief, Linda. *Seeking Diversity: Language Arts With Adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH, 1992. ISBN 0-435-08598-0.

Rief, Linda. *Vision and Voice: Extending the Literacy Spectrum*. Portsmouth, NH, 1998. ISBN 0-3250-0097-2.

Rief, Linda and Maureen Barbieri, eds. *All That Matters: What Is It We Value in School and Beyond?* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995. ISBN 0-4350-8848-3.

Ross, Carol. *Making Your Classroom Work: Tried and True Organization and Management Strategies*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 1994. ISBN 1-5513-835-8.

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

Routman, Regie. *Invitation: Changing as Teachers and Learners K-12*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991. ISBN 0-435-08836-X.

Samuels, Barbara G. and Kylee 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.

Soter, Anna O. *Young Adult Literature and the New Literary Theories: Developing Critical Readers in Middle School*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1999. ISBN 0-8077-3880-8.

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.

Wong, Harry K. and Rosemary Tripi Wong. *The First Days of School: How To Be an Effective Teacher*. Mountain View, CA: Harry K. Wong Publishing, 1998. ISBN 0-96293-602-2.

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.

## *Professional journals about literature instruction:*

**ALAN Review:** The National Council of Teachers of English's Assembly on Literature for Adolescents produces a review of adolescent literature and literature instruction three times a year (fall, winter, and spring).

**CELA Newsletter:** The National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement, State University of New York, Albany, publishes a newsletter in the fall, winter, and spring. The newsletter addresses a wide range of issues concerning literacy. The newsletter can be accessed for free on their Web site at <http://cela.albany.edu>.

**The National Council of Teachers of English Journals:** NCTE publishes many subscription journals, including *The English Journal*, high school level, *Voices From the Middle*, middle school level, and *Language Arts*, elementary and middle school levels.

# Between Sessions, cont'd.

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*Texts mentioned by teachers in this workshop program include:*

**Picture Books:**

*Smoky Night* by Eve Bunting

*My Ol' Man* by Patricia Polacco

**Poems:**

"Signifying Monkey" by Oscar Browne

"The Two-Headed Calf" by Laura Gilpin

**Novels:**

*Gaucho* by Gloria Gonzalez

*Holes* by Louis Sachar

For additional resources, go to [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature). Select *Making Meaning in Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 6–8*, Workshop 9, and Additional Reading.