

Video Clip 3

Starting Out

Length:	18:55
School:	Nathan Hale Elementary School
Location:	Roxbury, Massachusetts
No. of Students in School:	200
Teacher:	Jonathan Holden
No. of Years Teaching:	2
Grade:	Fourth
No. of Students in the Classroom:	19

About This Video Clip

"My job is to circulate and re-motivate kids when they stall [and] challenge them to take further steps in the discussion. Hopefully...I can keep them discussing and enjoying a poem; it helps push them to a higher level of understanding."

—Jonathan Holden, Fourth-Grade Teacher, Nathan Hale Elementary School, Roxbury, Massachusetts

Students often don't know how to discuss literature in interesting and productive ways in order to develop their understandings of a text with the help of conversations among peers. In such cases, teachers need to take steps to help students get started with such conversations; doing so not only helps students develop their comprehension and discussion skills, but also teaches them to appreciate the value of good literary conversations.

In this video, you will see how Jonathan Holden helps students make personal connections to poems while they enjoy the play of language and the experiences poems offer. By helping students focus on things they like and things they don't like about a poem, Mr. Holden helps them begin to make the personal connections that are an important means of literary engagement and meaning development. He also asks them to identify "puzzles" (questions) that the poems raise. This acknowledges that meanings in literature are not always immediately transparent and may take some working through in order for a reader to arrive at a satisfactory understanding. Asking students to complete a simple chart in response to a poem is one way to help them "get started" when they move into their discussion groups.

You will also see how Mr. Holden incorporates writing into his poetry class. For him the writing is an integral part of literature instruction, with each component informing the other. Mr. Holden believes that experiences with both writing and literary envisionment building help students develop deeper understandings in powerful and effective ways.

Visit the *Engaging With Literature: A Video Library, Grades 3–5* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature to access the lesson plan Jonathan Holden used to organize this classroom experience, as well as other related resources.

Featured Texts

Baseball, Snakes, and Summer Squash by Donald H. Graves

The poems in this book describe the follies and joys of growing up. Focused on specific events in childhood—teasing a younger brother, giggling in church, hating squash—these poems are particularly appealing to boys and very usable in the classroom.

"Last Touch," one of the poems from this book, is available online at the library Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature under Support Materials for Video Clip 3. The text is copyright 1996 by Donald Graves from *Baseball, Snakes, and Summer Squash: Poems About Growing Up*. Published by Wordsong, Boyds Mill Press, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

Hey You! C'Mere: A Poetry Slam by Elizabeth Swados

Everybody can be a poet! To prove it, seven young poets set out on a summer day and use ordinary situations as material for improvised poems. The slangy words and upbeat visuals suggest that poetry is something fun that happens when friends get together to play with language.

Visit the *Engaging With Literature: A Video Library, Grades 3–5* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature for Web sites related to poetry. Go to Additional Resources for this program.

Learning Objectives

If you are a teacher watching this video for professional development, you will be able to:

- Describe and evaluate several strategies for beginning to hold rich classroom discussions based on relevant poems.
- Explain how classroom discussions are further enriched by appropriate writing assignments.
- Evolve criteria for selecting poetry with which your students can interact, and give three examples of poems that meet those criteria.

Viewing Suggestions

Who Should Watch This Video

Teachers and teacher educators can use it as a professional and preservice discussion and reflection experience that lets them examine how one teacher introduces students to a literary form with which they may have limited familiarity. Viewers may be interested to note how Mr. Holden focuses student attention on easily accessible characteristics of poetry—sound and rhythm—as a point of entry. Viewers may also note how Mr. Holden uses an informal chart to structure students' initial responses to poems. Also worth noting is the interplay between small- and large-group discussion as a way of giving students opportunities to deepen their understandings of particular poems.

Although not seen in the video, viewers may wish to turn to the support materials available online to learn how Mr. Holden uses students' own writing of poems, particularly their imitation of model poems, as one way to continue their envisionment building.

Curriculum planners can use this video to consider ways to approach literature instruction with students who come to school with minimal prior experience reading this kind of literature. What kind of talk about literature helps students expand their repertoire of literary skills? What activities help students discover the pleasures of literature? How can writing and reading literature be combined to enhance the learning of both?

Administrators can use this video to help teachers consider the differences between instruction—helping students learn how to read certain texts, learn to enjoy literary nuances, and learn to create original works of their own in a similar genre—and instructions—simply giving students poems to read and asking them to explain them or telling them to write a poem. Offering instruction means being sensitive to the kinds of critical thinking students need for particular tasks and modeling and providing practice with activities that will help students develop those skills.

Before Watching

Before viewing this program, consider the following:

- When students come to school with limited prior experience with "school literacies" (the kinds of reading and writing students are asked to do in school) what activities must the school offer to help them develop those literacies?
- What is the value of reading and writing poetry in addition to developing reading comprehension?
- What makes students enjoy poetry? What might make them dislike it?

Discussion Questions

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

- What are the benefits of presenting a poetry unit as Mr. Holden does with his students, rather than simply offering students experiences with poetry throughout the school year? What are the drawbacks?
- How do your students respond to reading poetry? To writing it?
- What ideas in this video would you like to try in your classroom?
- How does a lesson like this support students' comprehension development?
- What questions do you have about Mr. Holden's instructional practices?

Viewing Suggestions, cont'd.

Teachers holding PTA meetings and back-to-school events might use these questions to start group discussion:

- What was your response to the kinds of instruction portrayed in this video? Explain.
- What experiences has your child had with poetry? How has he or she responded? How might he or she respond to a unit such as the one portrayed in this video?
- Was there anything about the students' responses to this instruction that surprised you?

Curriculum planners can discuss:

- What do students need to know and know how to do in order to enjoy and appreciate poetry? How might these things be taught?
- What are some of the "best" poets and poems for classroom instruction at your level of curriculum development?

Administrators can discuss:

- Do your teachers have adequate resources (appropriately equipped classroom or school libraries, for example) to allow teachers to develop poetry units such as the one portrayed in this video?
- What support would your teachers need in order to be able to develop strong poetry instruction? What support do they need in order to feel comfortable doing so?

Suggested Activities

For teachers involved in professional development and preservice education:

- Make a list of activities that you might model to help students become better readers of poetry.
- Brainstorm or list: What are some poems or poets that you personally enjoy? Why are they favorites?
- Brainstorm or list: What are some poems or poets that you think your students would enjoy? Why might they be favorites?
- Discuss or write in your journal: If you could have just one poetry collection in your classroom, what would it be? Why?

For teachers reaching out to families:

- Make a list of ways you can help families support their child's enjoyment of poetry. Consider using brief notes, email, a newsletter, or a course Web site to keep families informed about the experiences their children will have in class.
- Create and share a small publication of "kid-tested" poems for families to read together. Invite parents to annotate the collection with responses. You may even wish to include a simple response form such as the Poetry Response Chart developed by Mr. Holden (see Support Materials in Program 3 of the *Engaging With Literature: A Video Library, Grades 3–5* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature.)

For administrators:

- Share this video with language arts teachers in your school. Ask them to think about both positive and negative experiences they have had with poetry and to identify specific reasons for those responses. Discuss what kinds of instruction might help prevent such negative responses.
- Ask teachers to share the names of poets or poems that they have found particularly effective in their classrooms.
- Invite teachers to submit a list of poetry titles that they would like the school to purchase, either for their classrooms or for the library.

Additional Resources

The classroom lesson plan, student activity sheets, teacher tools, and links to related resources are accessible at the *Engaging With Literature: A Video Library, Grades 3–5* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature.

The following poetry collections may be helpful as you look for poems to use with your students:

Cullinan, Bernice E., ed. *A Jar of Tiny Stars: Poems by NCTE Award-Winning Poets*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1996. ISBN 1-56397-087-2.

Hale, Gloria, ed. *Read-Aloud Poems for Young People: An Introduction to the Magic and Excitement of Poetry*. New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, 1997. ISBN 1-57912-135-7.

Hopkins, Lee Bennet, selector. *Marvelous Math: A book of Poems*. New York: Aladdin Picture Books, 1997. ISBN 0-689-84442-5.

Hopkins, Lee Bennett. *Sing a Song of Seasons*, Littleton, MA: Sundance, 1984. ISBN 1-56801-X.

Hudson, Wade, ed. *Pass It On: African-American Poetry for Children*. New York: Scholastic, 1993. ISBN 0-590-45770-5.

Hughes, Langston. *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994. ISBN 0-679-88347-9.

Janezko, Paul B. ed. *A Poke in the I: A Collection of Concrete Poems*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2001. ISBN 0-7636-0661-8.

Kennedy, X.J. and Dorothy M. Kennedy, eds. *Talking Like the Rain: a Read-to-Me Book of Poems*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1992. ISBN 0-316-38491-7.

Koch, Kenneth. *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red: Teaching Great Poetry to Children*. New York: Vintage Books, 1973. ISBN 0-394-71885-2.

Medina, Tony. *Love to Langston*. New York: Lee & Low Books, 2002. ISBN 1-58430-041-8.

Pinsky, Robert and Maggie Dietz, eds. *American's Favorite Poems: The Favorite Poem Project Anthology*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000. ISBN 0-393-04820-9.

Rosen, Michael, selector. *A World of Poetry*. New York: Kingfisher, 1985. ISBN 0-7534-5547-1.

You may find these books useful if you are helping students write their own poems:

Fletcher, Ralph. *Poetry Matters: Writing a Poem From the Inside Out*. New York: Harper Trophy, 2002. ISBN 0-380-79703-8.

Glover, Mary Kenner. *Poetry Writing in the Elementary Classroom*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1999. ISBN 0-8141-1823-2.

Janezko, Paul B. ed. *Seeing the Blue Between: Advice and Inspirations for Young Poets*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2002. ISBN 0-7636-088-15.

Koch, Kenneth. *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: Teaching Children To Write Poetry*. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.

Livingston, Myra Cohn. *Poem Making: Ways To Begin Writing Poetry*. New York: Harpercollins Juvenile Books, 1991. ISBN 0-060240-19-9.

Null, Kathleen Christopher. *How To Write a Poem, Grades 3–6*. Westminster, CA: Teacher Created Materials, 1998. ISBN 1-576-903-311.

Routman, Regie. *Kid's Poems: Teaching Third and Fourth Graders To Love Writing Poetry*. New York: Scholastic, 2000. ISBN 0-590-22735-1.

Weishart, Jodi. *Joyful Ways To Teach Young Children To Write Poetry*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 2001. ISBN 0-4392-2243-5.

Additional Resources, cont'd.

You may also be interested in the following texts about teaching students to enjoy poetry:

Denman, Gregory A. *When You've Made It Your Own...Teaching Poetry to Young People*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988. ISBN 0-435-08462-3.

Graves, Donald H. *Explore Poetry*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992. ISBN 0-435-08480-5.

Heard, Georgia. *Awakening the Heart: Exploring Poetry in Elementary and Middle School*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. ISBN 0-325-00093X.

Heard, Georgia. *For the Good of the Earth and Sun: Teaching Poetry*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1989. ISBN 0-435-08495-X.

Tiedt, Iris McClellan. *Tigers, Lilies, Toadstools, and Thunderbolts*. Newark, DE: The International Reading Association, 2002. ISBN 0-87207-170-7.

The following books provide general guidance about literature and literature instruction:

Benedict, Susan and Lenore Carlisle. *Beyond Words: Picture Books for Older Readers and Writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992. ISBN 0-435-08710-X.

Finney, Susan. *Keep the Rest of the Class Reading & Writing...While You Teach Small Groups (Grades 3–6)*. New York: Scholastic, 2000. ISBN 05-906856-X.

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

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.

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.