

Video Clip 4

Responding to Literature

Length:	18:55
School:	Canyon Elementary School
Location:	Hungry Horse, Montana
No. of Students in School:	250
Teacher:	Rich Thompson
No. of Years Teaching:	27
Grade:	Fourth
No. of Students in the Classroom:	17

About This Video Clip

"I see my role in two ways. One is as a reader, responding just like the kids while having a watchful ear on how their reading and thinking are going and how they are growing through the story and learning. [While] I'm helping kids make connections, at the same time I want to be involved in that reading and thinking process myself in a natural way. I don't want to come up with a 'teacher question'...I want to show my own reactions and my own responses as a reader...."

—Rich Thompson, Fourth-Grade Teacher, Canyon Elementary School, Hungry Horse, Montana

Not every class is ready for independent participation in literature discussion groups. Assessing the needs of their particular student populations, some teachers find that taking a role as an active participant in literature discussions can help students learn some of the important components of good discussions: preparation, turn-taking, receptiveness to alternate views, posing (and trying to answer) authentic questions, and a willingness to accept ambiguity.

In this video, you will see Rich Thompson working with a small group in this fashion. The discussion you see is only one small aspect of literature study in Mr. Thompson's classroom. Typically such discussions are prefaced by a full-class read-aloud of a book other than the ones students are working on in their individual groups. Mr. Thompson customarily uses the whole-class meeting to introduce a focus lesson that has to do with the development of what he labels "Critical Reader Thoughts"—in-depth or alternative ways to think about their reading. Students are encouraged to apply these lessons to the independent reading they discuss in small groups.

As students discuss the text in their literature groups, Mr. Thompson poses questions and helps them expand their answers. He reminds them of comments they made during previous discussions, and helps them connect those observations to their developing envisionments of the text. At the end of the session, he helps them reflect on their discussion processes, praising the thoughtfulness of their readings and their response logs and pointing out the effective discussion strategies they employed.

Literature discussion group time is customarily followed by half an hour of independent reading. Mr. Thompson uses this time to meet with individual students.

As you watch the video, note how Mr. Thompson assumes the role of engaged reader, and how he uses the discussion not only to support student contributions, but to model additional ways they might approach the literature.

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

Featured Texts

Rich Thompson tries to find books for his students that will engage them as readers while offering them windows into the lives and experiences of people different from themselves. Because his students come to him with a wide range of abilities as readers, he also needs to find a variety of books that are accessible to weaker readers and challenging to stronger readers. While this particular group discussion focuses on *Because of Winn-Dixie*, the following selections were those from which students could have chosen for literature discussion.

Souder by William Howard Armstrong

This Newbery Award-winning novel portrays the lives of a family of poor southern sharecroppers. To feed his family, the father resorts to stealing food and is hauled off to jail for stealing a hog. During his capture, Souder, a coon dog that the man has raised since he was a pup, is shot and disappears, reappearing later tattered and emaciated. The son is forced to take on a man's work to help support the family. He searches for his father who has been sent to do hard labor, eventually finding him. After being maimed in an accident, the father eventually returns before he dies.

About This Video Clip, cont'd.

Midnight Fox by Betsy Byars

Tom is unhappy when he is sent to spend the summer with his Uncle Fred and Aunt Millie on their farm. After his arrival, a fox begins eating the chickens. Instead of killing the young animal after its capture, they lock it in the shed, raising it as a pet. By the end of the summer, Tom has acclimated to life on the farm, and finds himself sorry when he has to leave.

Because of Winn-Dixie by Kate DiCamillo

Ten-year-old India Opal Buloni has recently moved to Naomi, Florida with her father, a preacher. Because of Winn-Dixie, the big, ugly, friendly dog she adopts at the grocery store, she makes new friends among the unusual residents of her new hometown and learns about the mother who left the family when she was only three.

Just Juice by Karen Hesse

School lessons are a mystery to nine-year-old Juice who simply cannot manage to understand letters and reading although she likes to explore and learn and has a talent as an apprentice metalworker in her Pa's makeshift shop. In spite of her family's persuasions, Juice avoids school as often as possible, choosing instead to work with her father who has been laid off from his work at the mine. Pa keeps it a secret that he can't read either, and because he can't deal with the official papers regarding past-due taxes, the family could lose their house. When her diabetic mother gives birth, Juice is the only one home. She forces herself to read the sugar monitor, does so properly, and saves her mother's life.

Pigs Might Fly by Dick King-Smith

Daggie Dogfoot is in danger because he is the runt of the litter and the Pigman is coming to get him. He runs away and decides to learn how to fly. Instead, he learns how to swim when he leaps off a cliff—a talent he uses to save the entire farm.

Visit the *Engaging With Literature: A Video Library, Grades 3–5* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature for Web sites related to the featured texts. 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:

- Explain the value of scaffolding students as they begin to discuss texts.
- Give two concrete examples of scaffolding offered in the video.
- Describe one technique you would use to help beginning conversationalists overcome their reticence and become active in classroom discussions of literature.

Viewing Suggestions

Who Should Watch This Video

Teachers and teacher educators can use it as a professional or preservice education tool that shows how one teacher uses personal participation in small-group discussion to help students develop the social and critical skills needed for independent practice. Viewers might note how the teacher takes a few moments at the end of the discussion to foreground successful processes he observed. The video might also assist teachers who reach out to families in the school community at back-to-school events. In these settings, the video can demonstrate how literature discussions might develop increasing independence of thought.

Curriculum planners can use this clip as a model for identifying the processes of effective literature discussions and considering ways to help students expand their repertoire of environment-building strategies.

Administrators can use this clip to show how a teacher can scaffold students' developing expertise with small-group discussions.

Before Watching

Before viewing this program, consider the following:

- What do students need to know how to do in order to be effective in group literature discussions?
- How can you help students learn to participate effectively in literature discussions?

Discussion Questions

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

- How might supported small-group literature discussions such as the one presented in this video fit into a sequence of instruction designed to lead students to participate in such groups independently?
- How might small-group literature discussion groups fit into an overall literacy program, designed to help students experience the pleasures of becoming effective readers of literature?
- How does informal assessment such as that demonstrated by Mr. Thompson help a teacher design effective lessons?
- What ideas from the video would you like to try in your own classroom?
- What questions do you have about Mr. Thompson's instructional practices?

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

- How would your child respond to small-group discussions such as the one portrayed in this classroom?
- How would your child respond to the opportunity to choose the book he or she would read?
- Was there anything about the discussion that surprised or intrigued you? Give examples.
- How can such discussions help students learn?

Viewing Suggestions, cont'd.

Curriculum planners can discuss:

- What are some key components of effective literature discussions? How might they be taught?
- What kinds of text choices do you offer your students? How are those choices determined? Do the choices offered adequately serve the educational needs of your student population?

Administrators can discuss:

- Do teachers have appropriate resources (book sets, for example) to enable small-group discussions?
- What are the budgeting implications of offering students choices among a number of paperback titles rather than having each student work from a shared anthology?
- 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 (or might be made available) for teachers who wish to develop their skills as discussion facilitators?

Suggested Activities

For teachers involved in professional development and preservice education:

- Make a list of strategies you might teach students to help them prepare for literature discussions.
- Make a list of the social skills students need to exhibit for small-group discussions to be effective. How might you help these become automatic for your students?
- Ask students how they would like to have choices in their reading. How might you incorporate some student choice into your literature instruction?

For teachers reaching out to families:

- Make a list of ways you can help families support their child's daily reading and their experiences with literature. 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 class.
- Invite family members into your classroom to observe, and—if they have read the text—perhaps even to participate in a literary discussion.
- Ask family members to make a list of book titles their child has enjoyed outside the classroom. Would any of these books be good choices for your students?
- Consider using a class parent journal to enhance parent-school communication. Provide a three-ring binder, notebook paper, and a cover letter explaining the procedures you would like to establish for responding to and exchanging journal entries.

For administrators:

- Share this video with language arts teachers in your school. Discuss ways to help students learn how to participate effectively in literature discussion groups. Ask teachers to discuss ways in which Mr. Thompson's strategy succeeds, and to suggest ways in which it might be strengthened. Provide time for teachers to share their strategies for facilitating literature discussion groups.

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.

You may also be interested in the following texts:

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.

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

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.

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.

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

Calkins, Lucy McCormick. *The Art of Teaching Reading*. New York: Longman, 2001. ISBN 0-321-08059-9.

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

Keane, Nancy J. *Booktalks and Beyond: Thematic Learning Activities for Grades K–6*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2001. ISBN 15-795006-25.

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. "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 Russel K. Durst. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 1993. 23-43. ISBN 0-926842-24-2.

Additional Resources, cont'd.

- 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.
- Lewis, Valerie V. and Walter M. Mayes. *Valerie and Walter's Best Books for Children: A Lively and Opinionated Guide*. New York: Avon, 1998. ISBN 03-807943-81.
- 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.
- Noe, Kathlerine L. Schlick and Nancy J. Johnson. *Getting Started with Literature Circles*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon, 1999. ISBN 0-926842-97-8.
- Peterson, Ralph and Maryann Eeds. *Grand Conversations (Grades 2–6)*. New York: Scholastic, 1999. ISBN 05-907342-29.
- Phelan, Patricia, ed. *Literature and Life: Making Connections in the Classroom*. Classroom Practices in Teaching English Vol. 25. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1990. ISBN 0-8141-2962-5.
- Rief, Linda. *Vision and Voice: Extending the Literacy Spectrum*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 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.
- Schoenbach, Ruth, Cynthia Greenleaf, Christine Cziko, and Lori Hurwitz. *Reading for Understanding*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999. ISBN 0-7879-5045-9.
- Short, Kathy G. and Jerome C. Harste with Carolyn Burke. *Creating Classrooms for Authors and Inquirers*. 2nd ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996. ISBN 0-435-08850-5.
- Short, Kathy Gnagey and Kathryn Mitchell Pierce, eds. *Talking About Books: Literature Discussion Groups in K–8 Classrooms*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1990. ISBN 0-325-00073-5.
- 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.
- Whitin, Phyllis. *Sketching Stories, Stretching Minds: Responding Visually to Literature*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996. ISBN 0-435-08879-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
