

Video Clip 6

Building Community

Length:	18:55
School:	Indianapolis Public Schools Center for Inquiry
Location:	Indianapolis, Indiana
No. of Students in School:	260
Teacher:	Latosha Rowley
No. of Years Teaching:	2
Grade:	Fourth and Fifth
No. of Students in the Classroom:	22

About This Video Clip

"One thing I really liked... [was] the fact that all of the groups were working together, and that's really an important thing when you get in literature discussion groups. [They have to] appreciate and accept other people's opinions and ideas, and at this age, that's a challenge. It helps us get closer.... It builds community in the classroom and that's wonderful."

—Latosha Rowley, Fourth- and Fifth-Grade Teacher, Indianapolis Public Schools Center for Inquiry, Indianapolis, Indiana

In this video, you will watch Latosha Rowley working with her fourth and fifth graders in a multiage setting as they discuss their novels—all historical fiction—in small groups. You will then join them as they decide on a culminating activity which they then present to others. Rich literature discussions such as those portrayed on this video don't happen automatically. Ms. Rowley notes that she has seen significant development since the beginning of the year in her students' abilities to handle the choices that she offers, in the books they decide to read, in the ways they approach discussion, and in how they choose to present their understandings for evaluation.

Often Ms. Rowley begins class with a whole-group discussion. She uses this time to model ways in which smaller groups might work as they ask questions, focus on meaningful passages, and tease out meanings from their books. Once students are in groups, she circulates, moving from group to group, monitoring conversations. In each group, she probes their understandings, asking questions that the students may not have thought of in an effort to help them take their discussion to another level.

The energy the students in this class bring to their reading and to their discussion groups is almost palpable. As you watch and listen, you may wish to observe how the students interact in their groups. You may notice how they work together to answer questions and resolve problems. You may be interested in what they have to say about the decisions they made as they worked together on a culminating project. Engagement with the project is unqualified; everybody in the group is involved in creating a satisfying final product. They are truly a community of learners working together in an envisionment-building classroom.

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

Featured Texts

Ms. Rowley believes it is important for her students to have choices about what they read. As a result, typically her students work in literature circles, with each of five groups reading and discussing a separate text. Because the Center for Inquiry has a literature-based curriculum, Ms. Rowley often groups literature selections to complement work the students are doing in other subject areas. The texts highlighted in this video are all biography or historical fiction.

I Have a Dream: The Story of Martin Luther King, Jr. by Margaret Davidson

A biography of the life of Martin Luther King, Jr., this popular biography written for young readers introduces students to his philosophies and achievements in the fight for civil rights while outlining key moments in his life.

Walking the Road to Freedom: A Story About Sojourner Truth by Jeri Ferris

Owned first by a Dutch-speaking farmer in New York State, Sojourner Truth was sold to John Neely when she was nine years old. In her new home she had to learn English along with many new ways of doing things. There she came to understand the importance of her religious faith to guide her actions. When she was sold again at age 13, her new master married her to Thomas, a slave much older than herself with whom she had five children. In spite of promises from her master, her only son and youngest child, Peter, was sold away when he was five. Determined to free him and herself, she enlisted the help of a Quaker family, the Van Wageners. Unable to persuade her daughters to join her although they, too, were finally free, she traveled to New York City to be with Peter. When she left, she felt like a brand new person and adopted her new name—Sojourner Truth—saying, "The Lord is my master and his name is Truth." In 1843 she left the city and became an itinerate orator at camp meetings where she sang and told her stories. Eventually she became an important and compelling voice for women's suffrage, although she had never learned to read or write.

About This Video Clip, cont'd.

Which Way Freedom by Joyce Hansen

This novel is based on the facts of the massacre at Fort Pillow, Tennessee on April 12, 1864. Obi, a slave of John and Martha Jennings, was taken from his mother as a child. When an opportunity presented itself, he escaped with the help of Burka, an old African who lived by the creek and who knew the way to the island where Obi's mother last lived. Unable to locate her, Obi found himself caught up in the war and becomes one of the 200,000 blacks who fought for their freedom.

A Family Apart by Joan Lowery Nixon

Based on the true history of the Orphan Trains that ran between 1854 and 1929 and transported 100,000 children to the west for resettlement and adoption, this book follows Frances May Kelly as she and her five brothers and sisters are sent west to new homes. Recently widowed, their Irish immigrant mother tried to support her children by working nights cleaning in an office building. When her older son Mike is arrested for stealing, the mother realizes she can no longer keep her children safe and decides to send them away. Frances cuts her hair and dresses as a boy in order to protect her younger siblings and enhance her chances of adoption. She anguishes as her brothers and sisters are sent to different homes but settles in under the care of Jake and Margaret Cummings. Accidentally she discovers two runaway slaves hiding in the barn and realizes that her new home is a link on the Underground Railroad. Eventually it is up to her to enable their escape to the next way station.

Riding Freedom by Pam Muñoz Ryan

Set in mid-19th-century New Hampshire, this story is based on the history of Charlotte Darkey Parkhurst, also known as "One-Eyed Charley," "Cockeyed Charley," and "Six Horse Charley." Orphaned at two, Charlotte has lived at the orphanage for 10 years without being adopted. Made to do all the kitchen work because she is a girl, Charlotte's only solace is the time she spends at the stables helping to care for the horses. Caught riding the stallion Freedom, Charlotte is banished from the stables forever. When her only friend Hayward is adopted, and Freedom dies unexpectedly of a fever, there is nothing to keep her at the orphanage any longer. She disguises herself as a boy, renames herself Charley, and escapes. After much traveling and nearly being recaptured, she finds a job as a stable boy for Ebenezer at the What Cheer Stables in Providence. When he decides to close the stables, Charley travels to California to fulfill her dream of owning her own stables. Only after her death was it discovered that "Charley" was really a woman. Her name is listed in the official poll list of the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* on October 17, 1868. Evidently she was the first woman to vote in the United States—52 years before any woman would be legally allowed to vote in a federal election.

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 what decisions should be a factor in selecting whether class discussion should focus on whole-class or small-group discussion.
- Discuss knowledgeably when teachers should participate in a class discussion and when they should observe, evolving a set of personal criteria to implement in your work with students.
- Create a rubric for the creation of a culminating project for a successful classroom discussion.

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 helps students develop and focus thoughtful discussions around biography and historical fiction in a literature-based curriculum. Viewers might be especially interested to see how Ms. Rowley directs her students' attention to particular aspects of literary discussion—focusing on a particular passage for example—in order to model productive discussion strategies that they might take to their groups. Viewers might also note how Ms. Rowley circulates among the discussion groups, posing questions designed to enrich students' thinking about their reading. Teachers reaching out to families at back-to-school events might also find the video helpful as a way of demonstrating how student-centered literature discussions might work.

Curriculum planners can use this video as a springboard for discussion about literature-based curricular units in subjects such as history, science, and math. Focus questions might include, "What reading, research, and problem-solving skills do students need to develop within each discipline?" and "How can literature be used to help develop those skills while enriching content understandings?" Developing a list of appropriate literature titles for use in a particular discipline might be a further outcome of such discussions.

Administrators can use this video to demonstrate how a conventional curriculum area might be enriched by blurring existing disciplinary lines without losing content or skill development. Ms. Rowley combines instruction in literature and history, and students learn literary skills while acquiring historical information.

Before Watching

Before viewing this program, consider the following:

- What kinds of literature in addition to short stories, novels, drama, and poetry might you include to broaden your students' literary experiences?
- What are the characteristics of a "good" discussion about literature?
- What roles might you assume in order to support student-centered literature discussions?

Discussion Questions

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

- What are the benefits of a literature-based curriculum such as the one portrayed in this video? What might be its drawbacks?
- What are the benefits of student-centered literature discussions such as those portrayed in this video?
- What ideas from the video would you like to try in your classroom?
- What questions do you have about Ms. Rowley's instructional practices?

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

- What was your response to the idea of a literature-based curriculum for teaching history, math, or science?
- What was your response to the roles assumed by the teacher and the students in this video?
- How would your child respond to the small-group discussions such as portrayed in this classroom?
- Was there anything about the discussion that surprised or intrigued you? Explain.

Viewing Suggestions, cont'd.

Curriculum planners can discuss:

- What criteria might you apply when choosing literary selections for use in disciplines other than English/language arts?
- Do the texts you provide in English/language arts offer a balance of genres, themes, and topics appropriate to the content in other disciplinary areas?

Administrators can discuss:

- Do teachers have appropriate resources (book sets, for example) to enable small-group discussions?
- What kinds of support do teachers need in order to develop interdisciplinary curricular units such as the one portrayed on this video?

Suggested Activities

For teachers involved in professional development and preservice education:

- Make a list of strategies you might teach students to help them become successful participants in literature discussions.
- What are some activities you have found useful to help students further their thinking about literary texts? Share them with your colleagues.
- What literature selections have you found effective when used to support learning in other disciplinary areas? Share them with your colleagues.

For teachers reaching out to families:

- Make a list of ways you can help families support their child's experiences with literature. Consider using brief notes, email, a newsletter, or a class 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.
- Encourage family members to read the same book and invite them to school for a special afternoon or evening where students, parents, and the teacher can discuss the book together.
- Videotape your students working in a discussion group and use it to center discussion at parent meetings.

For administrators:

- Share this video with language arts teachers in your school. Ask them to consider possibilities for literature-based interdisciplinary units at your school. Ask them to consider ways in which this lesson succeeds and to consider 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 text:

Bird, Marsha, Vicki Libby, Latosha Rowley, and Joseph Turner. "Plan for Making Meaning." *Primary Voices K–6* (January 2002): 25–30. (Note: for the full text of this article, visit the *Engaging With Literature: A Video Library, Grades 3–5* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature. Go to Classroom Snapshot for Video Clip 6.)

The following resources provide general guidance about literature discussion groups:

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.

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

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.

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

Daniels, Harvey and Marilyn Bizar. *Methods That Matter: Six Structures for Best Practice Classrooms*. York, ME: Stenhouse, 1998. ISBN 157-11008-22.

Evans, Karen S. *Literature Discussion Groups in the Intermediate Grades: Dilemmas and Possibilities*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2001. ISBN 0-87207-293-2.

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.

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

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.

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.

Peterson, Ralph and Maryann Eeds. *Grand Conversations (Grades 2–6)*. New York: Scholastic, 1999. ISBN 05-907342-29.

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.

Additional Resources, cont'd.

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.

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.

The following resources provide general guidance about assessment:

Herman, Joan L., Pamela R. Aschbacher and Lynn Winters. *A Practical Guide to Alternative Assessment*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1992. ISBN 0-87120-197-6.

Power, Brenda Miller. *Taking Note: Improving Your Observational Notetaking*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 1996. ISBN 1-5711-0035-0.

Ryan, Concetta Doti. *Authentic Assessment*. Westminister, CA: Teacher Created Materials, 1994. ISBN 1-55734-838-3.

Strickland, Kathleen and James Strickland. *Reflections on Assessment: Its Purposes, Methods, and Effects on Learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. ISBN 0-86709-445-1.

Notes
