

Video Clip 8

Finding Common Ground

Length:	18:55
School:	Fair Oaks Elementary School
Location:	Marietta, Georgia
No. of Students in School:	612
Teacher:	Bileni Teklu
No. of Years Teaching:	3
Grade:	Fifth
No. of Students in the Classroom:	23

About This Video Clip

"I have chosen reading to be the venue by which these children will find a voice. I believe that if they are able to connect with the characters in books, where authors have written about the feelings of these characters and [if they] make these strong connections, they will get hope."

—Bileni Teklu, Fifth-Grade Teacher, Fair Oaks Elementary School, Marietta, Georgia

Complex educational circumstances demand thoughtful and inventive responses. In this classroom, you will see a highly transient student population that comes to school with limited literacy experiences, and, that, in many cases, harbors a distrust of reading in general. Helping these students enjoy literature and become independent literary envisionment builders means first overcoming that distrust by showing them ways literature can enrich their lives. Only then can they begin to learn to approach literature in increasingly thoughtful ways.

This video offers you a look at how Bileni Teklu often focuses classroom instruction on developing her students' enjoyment of reading and appreciation for literature. Beginning each lesson with a brief 10- to 15-minute mini-lesson, Ms. Teklu devotes most of her instructional time to student independent reading. During that hour, Ms. Teklu conducts individual conferences with students, monitoring their progress and encouraging them to talk about the value reading has for them. In addition, she encourages them to articulate the specific connections they discover between literature and their own lives or the world around them.

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

Featured Texts

Ms. Teklu's students have little control over their life experiences. As a result, she feels it important that they exercise full control over what they read. She makes suggestions, does book talks as a way of inviting students to experience particular titles and authors, and models her own choices. In the end, however, her students are free to choose any book they like for independent reading. The Support Materials on the library Web site include a list of suggested titles that have worked well with her students. The books listed below are those that are mentioned in the video.

Martin Luther King: The Peaceful Warrior by Ed Clayton

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

A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens

Dickens's dramatic narrative of the French Revolution is a novel centering on great sacrifices being made for the sake of principle. The novel is notable for its vivid representation of France during this troubled time and was modeled on Carlyle's *The French Revolution*.

Out of the Dust by Karen Hesse

Set in the bleak landscape of Oklahoma during the dust bowl, this Newbery winner is told in a series of free-verse poems by 14-year old Billie Joe Kelby. Her mother and newborn brother die as a result of a terrible accident and her hands are severely burned in the fire that kills them. Denied the solace of her piano playing, she fights her guilt, anger, and estrangement from her father, finally learning to forgive him and herself.

The Green Mile by Stephen King

Set on Death Row at Cold Mountain Penitentiary, this novel explores the conviction of John Coffey. Is he truly a murderer? Paul Edgecombe, head of security, investigates. With the help of Eduard Delecroix, a convicted murderer, and his pet mouse Mr. Jingles, Edgecombe discovers the truth and is forced to make the most difficult decision of his life.

About This Video Clip, cont'd.

The Last Battle by C. S. Lewis

This book is the final installment in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. A false Aslan is roaming Narnia, commanding everyone to work for the cruel Calormenes. Eustace and Jill must find the true Aslan and restore peace to the land. The last battle is the greatest of all and the final struggle between good and evil.

The Story of Harriet Tubman, Conductor of the Underground Railroad by Kate McMullan

As a small child, Harriet Tubman was forced to work in the fields and was treated badly by her owner. Leaving her family behind, she ran away to the North. There she became a "conductor" on the Underground Railroad—returning South again and again to rescue over 300 slaves as well as becoming a nurse, a scout, and a spy for the Union forces during the Civil War.

Behind the Bedroom Wall by Laura E. Williams

Thirteen-year-old Korinna, an ardent member of the Hitler youth group, is horrified to learn that her parents are concealing Sophie Krugmann and her five-year-old daughter Rachel in a secret room behind her wardrobe. While she anguishes about reporting her parents as she has been taught, she begins to feel affection and compassion for the Krugmanns. Warned that her house will be raided, Korinna is able to help them escape to the next safe house. When the Gestapo arrives, Korinna has turned the secret room into a shrine to Hitler. She and her parents must also go into hiding or risk being punished.

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 some of the educational and social benefits that engaged readers enjoy from their close interactions with a text.
- Evolve a general statement of philosophy upon which you can build a plan of action for engaging disinterested students in literature experiences.
- Offer suggestions for other activities through which less-experienced readers can be brought into the world of the text.

Viewing Suggestions

Who Should Watch This Video

Teachers and teacher educators can use it as a professional and preservice tool that shows how one teacher often centers literature instruction around independent reading. Viewers might be interested to note how Ms. Teklu models her own responses to literature as a way of encouraging similar responses from her students. Additionally, viewers might be interested in how Ms. Teklu uses individual interviews to track her students' reading progress.

Curriculum planners can use this video to consider ways to approach literature instruction with students who come to school with minimal prior experience. What kinds of reading and talk about reading help students become independent readers, able to build their own envisionments of the literature they encounter?

Administrators can use this video to encourage a vision of the kinds of engagement students are capable of, both during independent reading and during class discussion. They might wish to use this clip to support discussion about effective ways to support students in their development of such independence.

Before Watching

Before viewing this program, consider the following:

- When students come to school with limited prior experience with "school literacies" (e.g., reading stories and talking about them, or writing for school purposes), what activities must the school offer to help them develop school literacies?
- What is the value of independent reading for students?
- What makes students dislike reading?

Discussion Questions

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

- What are the benefits of allowing students to choose their own books for independent reading? What are the drawbacks?
- How would your students be likely to respond to having free choice of the titles they read? How would their parents respond?
- What ideas from this video would you like to try in your classroom?
- What questions do you have about Ms. Teklu'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 kinds of instruction portrayed on this video? Explain.
- How would your child respond to an hour of independent in-class reading time every day?
- Was there anything about the students' responses to this kind of instruction that surprised you?

Viewing Suggestions, cont'd.

Curriculum planners can discuss:

- What do students need to know and know how to do in order to make effective selections when given full choice over their reading? How might these things be taught?
- How might opportunities for student choice be integrated into your existing curriculum? What changes would you have to make to enable this? What would be the benefits of such choice for the students? For teachers?

Administrators can discuss:

- Do your teachers have appropriate resources (adequate classroom or school libraries, for example) to allow students a wide selection of literary titles for independent reading?
- What administrative changes would help teachers develop a classroom structure such as the one portrayed in this video?

Suggested Activities

For teachers involved in professional development and preservice education:

- Make a list of mini-lessons that would support students developing into thoughtful independent readers such as the one Ms. Teklu developed to teach her students ways to make personal connections to their reading.
- What are some ways you have helped students make good choices about the books they would like to read? Share them with your colleagues.

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 the experiences their children will have in class.
- Invite family members into your classroom to observe.
- Videotape your students during their literature time and use it to center discussion at parent meetings.

For administrators:

- Share this video with language arts teachers in your school. Discuss the value of offering students extended time to read during class. Ask teacher to consider ways in which this lesson succeeds, and to suggest ways in which it might be improved.

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.

Bomer, Randy and Katherine Bomer. *For a Better World: Reading and Writing for Social Action*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001. ISBN 0-325-0026-30.

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.

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.

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

Harvey, Stephanie and Anne Goudvis. *Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding*. York, ME: Stenhouse, 2000. ISBN 15-7110-310-4.

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.

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.

The Language of Literature classroom anthology series (grades 6–12) and teacher support materials. Boston: McDougal Littell, 2002.

Lewis, Valerie V. and Walter M. Mayes. *Valerie and Walter's Best Books for Children: A Lively and Opinionated Guide*. NY: Avon, 1998. ISBN 03-807943-81.

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.

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

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.

Additional Resources, cont'd.

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.

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

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.

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.

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

Tchudi, Stephen and Susan Tchudi. *The English/Language Arts Handbook*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1991. ISBN 0-86709-288-2.

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.

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
