

Activity Sheet:

Hints on Helping Students Step Out of a Text and Rethink What They Know

When students look back to their lives as they read, they can offer many different kinds of comments, based on what they have thought, done, or said in the past. For example, Dr. Langer presented these examples from her research in the article "The Process of Understanding Literature" available at <http://cela.albany.edu/process/main.html>. The text the students were reading was Ray Bradbury's short story "I See You Never." The italicized text is from the story.

- *Mr. Ramirez saw the long table, laid with clean white linen, and set with a platter, cool shining glasses, a water pitcher with ice cubes floating inside it, and a bowl of fresh potato salad, and one of bananas and oranges, cubed and sugared.*

"I don't think I've ever had bananas and oranges cubed. And I don't think I would like sugar on them, but maybe I would. It would be interesting to try."

- *She pulled the chair out and sat down. She picked up the shining knife and fork and started once more upon her steak.*

"It never happened to me. But I know I would feel like Mrs. O'Brian and not be able to eat my steak. She makes me see you don't have to pretend when you're feeling so sad."

Because this stance is such a personal one, and depends so much on the text chosen, it is helpful to think of model questions to ask students in terms of a specific text. We have included the first part of Chapter One in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* here to help you see how you can scaffold readers as they adapt this stance.

"Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents," grumbled Jo, lying on the rug.

"It's so dreadful to be poor!" sighed Meg, looking down at her old dress.

"I don't think it's fair for some girls to have plenty of pretty things, and other girls nothing at all," added little Amy, with an injured sniff.

"We've got Father and Mother, and each other," said Beth contentedly from her corner.

The four young faces on which the firelight shone brightened at the cheerful words, but darkened again as Jo said sadly,

"We haven't got Father, and shall not have him for a long time."

She didn't say "perhaps never," but each silently added it, thinking of Father far away, where the fighting was.

Nobody spoke for a minute; then Meg said in an altered tone, "You know the reason Mother proposed not having any presents this Christmas was because it is going to be a hard winter for everyone; and she thinks we ought not to spend money for pleasure, when our men are suffering so in the army. We can't do much, but we can make our little sacrifices, and ought to do it gladly. But I am afraid I don't." And Meg shook her head, as she thought regretfully of all the pretty things she wanted.

Have you ever been part of a family holiday celebration that you just knew wasn't going to be the same as it used to be? How did you feel? How did you feel as you read about the same situation in this book?

Think about the family in the book. Do you think they like each other? Is this the same or different from the way you think about your family?

Has your family ever asked you to give up something you wanted to do because they couldn't afford it? Did you feel like Meg did?