

Workshop 3

Stepping In

Introduction

Imagine yourself entering a party. The first thing you do is scan the room, size things up, take a mental note of who you know, who is unfamiliar to you, the atmosphere, the noise level, what people are wearing, who is talking with whom, and where you might first enter the party, either by helping yourself to a refreshment or by saying “hello” to someone you have not seen in some time. Because it is a party, you are aware that people are going to be more relaxed than in a formal business setting, and the expectation is to enjoy yourself, socialize, and sample appetizers.

This very same intuitive mental process occurs for readers each time they pick up a text, whether it is a poem, a short story, or a novel. When readers are stepping into a text, they attempt to acquaint themselves with it by gathering information, making hunches, and predicting what will happen next. This process happens not only as readers begin a text, but also when readers encounter new information that confounds them or when they discover a new realization that alters their original envisionment. Here, readers are thrown outside the text, and need to reshape their envisionment. When readers step into the text, it is also a time for them to attempt to gather information about story elements, while at the same time connecting that information to what they already know and to their own life experiences. For instance, if a piece is set during the Great Depression, readers can immediately call up knowledge about that era and other experiences related to the topic and then connect the information to the literature, asking themselves what to expect from the characters and the challenges they face during that time period. Here, readers build a sketch or beginning point, as the envisionment they have developed is very thin.

Some of the questions that readers mentally ask themselves when stepping into the text might include:

- What is the title and what does it suggest? Can I make any predictions based on the title?
- Who is the author and what do I already know about his or her writing? What can I expect from this author?
- What does the book jacket suggest about the story? What predictions can I make about the story based on the illustrations or the teaser on the cover?
- Who are the characters and what are they like? What can I expect from them in the future?

- In what time period does this take place? What do I already know about this era that can inform my understanding?
- What is the setting and how is this going to impact the piece?
- What is the organization of this piece and what does this tell me about the text?
- What genre is this text and how does that impact what I can expect to encounter in the piece?
- How is this story similar to something I have already experienced?
- What do I think may happen next? What do I think the piece may be about?

It is helpful for teachers to become aware of the stances as a way to support the processes readers go through as they make meaning of what they read. Understanding what good readers do as they step into a text allows teachers to strategically design instruction, so that students successfully experience the process of building their own envisionments. As student readers become more savvy, this will be a natural step in their own reading discovery process.

Key Points

- Being Out and Stepping In occurs when readers are entering the literary experience and beginning to create their envisionments. This process begins from the moment readers encounter the text.
- All readers approach, or step into, a text by gathering clues and predicting what the piece will be about.
- Readers may go back to Being Out and Stepping In if their envisionment has been proven wrong based on new information, or if it doesn't make sense. Then readers may need to rebuild that initial hunch and begin the process again.
- Readers' personal background knowledge and life experiences impact how they step into a text.
- The tentative first steps readers take as they enter a text and the hunches they have about where they are going directly mirror the first steps writers often take to process an experience or idea.
- The first impressions readers gather in this stance often stay with them throughout the reading experience. The impressions become an early road map that they constantly refine, expand, reject, or reconfirm as they continue reading and reflecting on the experience.
- Readers need to have permission to try out initial ideas, refine some, and rethink others as they move forward within a text. They need to know that they are not just looking for an "accepted" interpretation, that posing questions is part of the process, and that answers to those questions can be multiple.
- The classroom literary community plays a significant role for readers as they attempt to step into a text. For readers who have difficulties stepping into a text because of unfamiliar subject matter or because it is different from what they know, the community can help them make sense of the text. Many times, a question serves as a catalyst for the reader to enter the text.

Learning Objectives

After viewing this program, participants will be able to:

- Identify the process readers go through as they approach, enter, and access a text for the first time.
- Understand the process readers go through when they are thrown out of the text, either because they are confounded by new information or because new information radically changes their original envisionments.
- Utilize and understand strategies for helping students approach, enter, and access texts.

Background Reading

In preparation for this workshop, you may want to read the poem "The Lifeguard" by James Dickey and the short story "First Confession" by Frank O'Connor. Literature selections can be found in *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing*, 5th edition, Edgar V. Roberts and Henry E. Jacobs, Prentice Hall. Copyright 1998. ISBN 0-13-010076-5.

Within the workshop session, you will be reading the Langston Hughes poem "Let America Be America Again,"* which can also be found in the anthology mentioned above.

* or an alternative selection. Check with your Site Leader.

Online resources related to the authors and their works can be accessed at the workshop Web site. Go to the *Conversations in Literature* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/ and click on "Workshop 3. Stepping In" and "Background Reading."

If you have not already done so, you may also want to read Chapter 2, "Building Envisionments," pages 9-16 in *Envisioning Literature* by Dr. Judith Langer. This excerpt explains the process of building envisionments and gives an overview of the stance Being Out and Stepping In.

For other resources, look under "Additional Reading" for "Workshop 3. Stepping In" on the *Conversations in Literature* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/.

Workshop Session (On-Site)

Getting Ready 30 minutes

Activity and Discussion: Photo Response

Look at the two photographs on the Photo Response activity sheet, and select one. In your journal, write down an initial reaction to what you think is happening in the scene. Your initial response to the photographs mirrors that of a reader approaching a text for the very first time.

Site Leader: Distribute the **Photo Response** activity sheet to assist the participants with this activity.

Share photograph responses and discuss:

- What is the first thing you do when you pick up a piece of literature for the very first time, before you begin to read and as you start to read?
- How is this similar to the process you went through when looking at the photograph?
- What do effective readers do when they approach a text for the first time? Brainstorm a list of ideas with the group. Record these ideas in your *Conversations in Literature* journal.

Watch the Workshop Video..... 60 minutes

Viewing and Discussion

Now you will view the video program “Stepping In,” in which panelists discuss and read several pieces of literature for the very first time. While you are viewing the video, think about what Being Out of a text and Stepping In means in the envisionment-building process.

In your *Conversations in Literature* journal, list examples and ideas reflecting the process of Being Out and Stepping In. Mirror the process of reading and making meaning of the poem “The Lifeguard” and the short story “First Confession” that you see in the video.

As you view the video program, consider the questions below.

Segment One

[**Site Leader:** Pause just before Rafael Alvarez says, “This village of children believed....”]

- What sorts of clues did you gather as you first encountered the poem “The Lifeguard?”
- How do your sensory impressions and background knowledge impact your thoughts as you read “The Lifeguard?”

Site Leader: If you are watching on videocassette, you may pause at the segments indicated below to give participants opportunities to discuss, reflect, and interact with the program. If you are watching a real-time broadcast, have participants consider the questions as they view the program, and discuss them later.

You may select any or all of the questions below to discuss, as time permits and according to the interests of your participants.

Workshop Session, cont'd.

Segment Two

[**Site Leader:** Pause just before Judith Langer states, "The first impressions readers gather in this stance often stay with them throughout the reading experience."]

- How are questions important in the process as you begin to unravel the meaning of the poem "The Lifeguard"? What questions do you have?
- How are personal experiences important as you step into the text?
- How is determining setting important in your ability to make meaning of the poem?
- How does the process of stepping into the text and making meaning of it mirror that of the process Dickey describes when he begins to write a new piece?

Segment Three

[**Site Leader:** Pause just before the drama "First Confession" begins.]

- How have you built upon your initial impressions of "The Lifeguard"? What original hunches were revised? What fuller understandings were developed?
- How did group discussion of the poem enhance your understandings?

Segment Four

[**Site Leader:** Pause just after the scene in which Jackie sits in a pew awaiting to confess his crimes of a lifetime.]

- What causes a reader to be thrown out of a text?
- What happens when readers are thrown out of the text or encounter obstacles in their reading that confounds them?
- How can a community of readers help you to access the text or find your way back into it? Use examples from the workshop program and from your own reading experiences today.
- What is the value of raising questions as you revise your envisionments and clarify what confounds you?

Workshop Session, cont'd.

Going Further 30 minutes

Discussion (10 minutes)

Discuss as many of the questions below as time permits. You may want to answer more of the questions in your journals as homework.

- How can teachers help students enter a text as they begin the envisionment-building process? What questions or activities might help students access the text?
- Are some texts more accessible or easier to step into for your students? Explain.
- What factors might impact a text's accessibility for any given reader? What can the teacher do to help students overcome these potential obstacles?

Activity and Discussion: Think Aloud (20 minutes)

You are going to participate in a think aloud, similar to the ones in the workshop program. A think aloud is an activity in which readers verbalize their internal thoughts as they begin to make meaning out of a text, starting from the moment they pick up the text.

After the think aloud, discuss the following questions:

- What are the benefits of a think aloud in a classroom community?
- How can this activity be implemented in a classroom?
- What did you find difficult about this activity? How can you assist students with similar difficulties?

Site Leader: See **Materials Needed** on pp. 7-9 of this guide for instructions on selecting a poem for this activity.

Distribute the **Student Think Aloud** activity sheet from Workshop 2 to assist the participants with this activity.

Have participants take turns reading stanzas aloud and then pausing for initial reactions and responses from the group. Utilize the Student Think Aloud activity sheet to spark participants' responses.

Between Sessions (On Your Own)

Homework Assignment

Journal

In your workshop journal, respond to the following:

List three ways that you as a teacher can help students enter a text for the first time.

Reading

In preparation for Workshop 4, you may want to read the poem "Lost Sister" by Cathy Song and the short story "All Gone" by Stephen Dixon. Literature selections can be found in *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing*, 5th edition, Edgar V. Roberts and Henry E. Jacobs, Prentice Hall. Copyright 1998. ISBN 0-13-010076-5.

Within the workshop session, you will be reading the poem "Sympathy" by Paul Laurence Dunbar. The poem can also be found in the anthology mentioned above.

Online resources related to the authors and their works can be accessed at the workshop Web site. Go to the *Conversations in Literature* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/ and click on "Workshop 4. Moving Through" and "Background Reading."

If you have not already done so, you may also want to read Chapter 2, "Building Envisionments," pages 9-17, in Dr. Judith Langer's *Envisioning Literature*. This excerpt examines the process of envisionment building and defines the stance Being In and Moving Through an Envisionment.

For other resources, look under "Additional Reading" for "Workshop 4. Moving Through" on the *Conversations in Literature* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/.

Ongoing Activities

Channel-Talk

Remember to post comments and questions on Channel-TalkLitConversations. Go to www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/ and click on "Channel-Talk."

Between Sessions, cont'd.

Extension: Classroom Connection

Activity: Think Aloud

In the video program, you saw the modeling of a think aloud, where readers verbalize their internal thoughts as they approach a text and begin the envisionment-building process. Consider conducting a think aloud with your own students. Start by modeling the process for the students, and then allow them to try it on their own in small discussion groups. See Activity Three from Workshop 2's Classroom Connection for more information. Use the Think Aloud Teacher Resource, the Sample Think Aloud Response to Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," and the Student Think Aloud activity sheets from Workshop 2 to assist you in this activity.

After the think aloud experience, ask the students to make a list of items to think about when approaching a piece of literature for the first time and for the beginning of a reading experience. What kinds of questions can they ask themselves before they begin to read a text and as they read? Post this list of ideas where all students can refer to it easily.

Additional Reading

For other resources, look under "Additional Reading" for "Workshop 3. Stepping In" on the *Conversations in Literature* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/.

Activity Sheet: Photo Response

Select one photo. Take five to six minutes to think and write. In order to elicit a response that mirrors the process of stepping into a text, consider the following:

- What do you notice?
- What seems to be going on here?
- Where do you think this takes place?
- When do you think this takes place?
- Does this connect in any way to your own life experiences?
- What confuses you? What doesn't make sense to you?
- What would you like to know?
- If the photo were in a storybook, what do you think the piece would be about?
- What photo might you see next in the storybook?



Photo One



Photos by Susan Noonan

Photo Two

Think About:

What is the first thing you do when you pick up a piece of literature for the very first time, before you begin to read, and as you start to read? How is this similar to the process you went through when looking at the photograph?

Notes
