

Workshop 5

Rethinking

Introduction

When readers step out of a text and rethink what they know, they mentally cast themselves out of a text and reenter their own world. It is here they can learn from the text. When they stand in this position to a text, readers reflect on the decisions and choices they have made in their own lives, the things they have done, and dilemmas they have faced. Something they have encountered in the text—an event in the plot structure, a character's actions or reactions, for example—plunge them back into their past to consider other possibilities. Not only can readers learn about other cultures, eras, and even their own lives from the text, but also they can sometimes become cognizant of the information they are learning from it.

Readers are not always provoked to rethink their lives as they read. However, when they do find points of congruence between what they are reading and what they have lived, readers respond in many deep ways, rethinking a past decision or event from a different perspective, for example. They find alternatives that may not have occurred to them previously.

At times, readers deliberately enter a text to find a message there that they can translate into their own lives. But most often, especially when the literature is rich and complex, these moments for reflection present themselves serendipitously.

When such a connection is made, readers find themselves contemplating: How could they have reacted differently? How could they have felt differently? What else might they have been able to think about in that situation? Some other questions that readers mentally pose when they step out of a text and rethink what they know might include:

- How might I react if I were in a similar situation as the character in the text? Was I ever in a similar situation? Do I know anyone who was?
- What can I learn from the situation in this text?
- Why did I feel a certain way or act a certain way when I found myself in a situation similar to the one in the text?
- What were my choices? Did I make the best ones?
- How else could I have handled it? What should I do now?

- What did I gain from that decision? Was it the right one?
- How could I act if I wanted to become a more _____ person?

In asking and answering these questions, readers come to see literature as a portal, through which they can look at themselves, recreate their own identities, and imagine who they might become.

The text world can remain open to readers long after they have put the text aside. They can return here as they reconsider and think through what they have done, or said, or thought from the perspectives the text has offered them.

The opportunity to gain insight about one's life by reading literature is at the heart of why many of us continue to read. This program presents panelists engaged in a lively discussion about *Hamlet*, where each member of the conversation connects with the text on a unique personal level. The panelists demonstrate how this drama has been an opportunity to rethink their own life story from the vantage point of the text world.

Key Points

- When stepping out and rethinking what one knows, readers leave the text world and revisit their own world, in order to rethink their own lives.
- Some texts strike a chord within us, illuminating our own life experiences, choices, decisions, and actions.
- Readers use the text as a springboard to ask questions that focus on their own lives. In doing so, readers learn from the texts and extend their envisionments.
- The process of stepping out and rethinking what one knows does not occur as often as other stances. This stance requires that readers make a personal connection to the text.
- During the conversation in this program, the readers make a connection to *Hamlet* based on its themes of familial relationships and parental expectations.

Learning Objectives

After viewing this program, participants will be able to:

- Identify the mental processes that occur when readers step out of a text and rethink what they know.
- Offer a personal example of the way in which a text they have read caused them to rethink a previous event, decision, or opinion.
- Demonstrate through example one way in which the text *Hamlet* might cause readers to rethink a past event, decision, or opinion.

Background Reading

In preparation for this workshop, you may want to read the play *Hamlet*, by William Shakespeare.

- Select a passage from the text that you personally connected to or that made you reflect upon a life experience and rethink your way through it.

Online resources related to the playwright and his 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 5. Rethinking" and "Background Reading."

If you have not already done so, you may also consider reading Dr. Judith Langer's *Envisioning Literature*, Chapter 2, "Building Envisionments," pages 9-23, which examines the envisionment-building process and defines the stance Stepping Out and Rethinking What One Knows.

For other resources, look under "Additional Reading" for "Workshop 5. Rethinking" on the *Conversations in Literature* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/.

Workshop Session (On-Site)

Getting Ready 30 minutes

Discussion and Journal Writing: *Hamlet*

Discuss the following questions:

- What universal themes that speak to the human condition are present in the play *Hamlet*? (For example: duty, honor, responsibility, guilt, relationships, etc.)
- Explain why you identified that particular theme.
- Think about some of the dilemmas Hamlet faces throughout the play. Consider Hamlet's inability to make a critical decision, his disgust at his mother's remarriage, his attempts to find a way to avenge his father's death. Are there others that you can identify? Have you ever found yourself in an analogous situation? Perhaps you have not had to contend with a murder in the family, but many families today have had to deal with divorce and remarriage, for example. Perhaps you have had a tough time making a decision. What are the similarities and differences between the way these dilemmas played out in your own life and the way they were addressed in the play? How did reading about these dilemmas in Shakespeare help you see the dilemmas you have faced in a different light?
- What other situations in the play are congruent to your own life? How is the way they played out akin or contrary to the text?

Site Leader: After discussing the following questions, give the group a short period of time to jot down in their journals their personal impressions about the discussion.

Site Leader: Allow participants to read aloud the passage that represents their personal connection, as well as explain their response.

Watch the Workshop Video..... 60 minutes

Viewing and Discussion

Now you will view the video program "Rethinking," a discussion about the play *Hamlet*. The panelists in the program experienced significant personal reactions to the characters' choices, actions, and dilemmas. Each member of the discussion related to *Hamlet* in a different way, reflecting upon his or her own life and demonstrating this rich part of the envisionment-building process.

Note in your journal some of the ways different panelists stepped out of the text and rethought their own lives.

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

Segment One

[**Site Leader:** Pause after Dr. Langer's definition of Stepping Out and Rethinking What One Knows.]

- What does it mean to Step Out and Rethink What One Knows?
- How is this stance different from all the others?

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 after Dr. Langer comments on Bobbi's reactions to *Hamlet*, ending with the statement, "After all, the same text speaks differently to the same reader at different points in their life."]

- How does the play *Hamlet* help Bobbi understand her own relationship with her children?
- What about Hamlet's relationship with his mother helps you to clarify or question a relationship in your own life?

Segment Three

[**Site Leader:** Pause after Dr. Langer comments, "Other readers found great import in other family relationships, such as that shared by the ghost-king father and his son."]

- How do your personal background and your place in life impact how the texts help you to rethink your own life? Consider how you would have responded to *Hamlet* as a teenager vs. now. Consider responses at other stages in your life as well.

Segment Four

[**Site Leader:** Pause after Rafael Alvarez's explanation of his connection to the ghost and how it informs his quest to get to know his grandmother.]

- Why do you think Dale Allender and Rafael Alvarez make such unique connections to the ghost-king in *Hamlet*?
- Does the ghost-king father and son relationship help you step back and rethink anything in your own life?

Segment Five

[**Site Leader:** Pause after Dr. Langer comments on expectations and Linda Williams's use of the text to inform her own life. Here she concludes, "That consideration is the cornerstone of this stance, and being able to use the text in such a way, the mark of an effective reader."]

- What expectations have family members placed on you? How does *Hamlet* remind you of this and how does it inform your own life?
- Select a passage from *Hamlet* that resonates with you, causing reflection about expectations you place on family members and expectations placed on you. Share the passage and its significance for you with other workshop participants.

Segment Six

[**Site Leader:** Pause after Patricia Elam reflects on expectations she places on her children, ending with the comment, "...we have opposing demands," and just before Dr. Langer begins to speak about the relationship between Polonius and his children.]

- Based on what you have seen in *Hamlet*, how would Shakespeare define the perfect family? How would your family compare to this model?
- What is the play saying about expectations we place on our children and our family members? What can we learn from this?

Workshop Session, cont'd.

Segment Seven

[Site Leader: View the remainder of the workshop program.]

- Does the relationship between Polonius and Laertes and Polonius and Ophelia make you rethink your own relationships with your children—how you treat boys vs. girls? In what ways?
- Kenneth Burke once said, “Literature is an imaginative rehearsal for living.” What does that mean to you when considering the stance Stepping Out and Rethinking What We Know?

Going Further 30 minutes

Sharing and Discussion

Share your notes regarding the different personal reactions of the panel members.

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

- Why do you think there is such a variety of personal responses to *Hamlet*? What factors in the text allowed them to make such a personal connection to a text?
- What do you think students can gain by using a text to reexamine their lives?
- What kinds of questions can you ask students to help them more easily see the ways literature connects to their lives?
- What other pieces of literature have you read with your students that sparked personal response? Why do you think this happened? Talk about the role you played in the discussion, student grouping (small vs. large), the text, teacher expectations, etc.
- What other texts have you personally read that inspired you to reflect on what you had done, said, or thought in the past? Do you think that the next time you encounter a similar situation, you will react differently because of what you have read?

Between Sessions (On Your Own)

Homework Assignment

Journal

In your workshop journal, respond to the following:

What are three concrete things you can do to encourage your students to see themselves in the literature you engage with in the classroom?

Reading

In preparation for Workshop 6, you may want to read the poems "Theme for English B" by Langston Hughes and "Revolutionary Petunias" by Alice Walker. Both selections are available from *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. "Revolutionary Petunias" is also available from *Fiction 100: An Anthology of Short Fiction*, 9th edition, James H. Pickering, University of Houston, Prentice Hall. Copyright 2001. ISBN 0-13-014328-6.

Within the workshop session, you will be reading one of the following poems: "Richard Cory" by Edward Arlington Robinson, "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" by Dylan Thomas, or "She Walks in Beauty" by George Gordon, Lord Byron.*

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

Online versions of some of the poems listed above 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 6. Objectifying the Text" and "Background Reading."

If you have not already done so, you may consider reading *Envisioning Literature*, Chapter 2, "Building Envisionments." Additional information on this stance 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 6. Objectifying the Text" and "Background Reading."

For other resources, look under "Additional Reading" for "Workshop 6. Objectifying the Text" on the *Conversations in Literature* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/.

NOTE: Public and college libraries have access to a search engine called POEM FINDER, a library Internet service which provides indexing and detailed subject access to over 600,000 poems and the full text of over 50,000 poems. Check with your local public or college library to use this research tool to find these and other poems.

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 Connections

Activity One

Select a passage of literature that is rich in description, plot, and character development. It is best to choose a text that features adolescents and their related concerns, so that the students can easily make a personal connection. Online resources related to the suggestions below 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 5. Rethinking” and “Extension: Classroom Connection.”

Some novels that might work with your students include:

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain
Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck
To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee
Night Flying Woman: An Ojibway Narrative, by Ignatia Broker
The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros
The Member of the Wedding by Carson McCullers

Some short stories include:

“Thank You, M’am” by Langston Hughes
“Teenage Wasteland” by Anne Tyler
“Raymond’s Run” by Toni Cade Bambara

Some poems include:

“The Lifeguard” by James Dickey
“We Real Cool” by Gwendolyn Brooks
“Nikki Rosa” by Nikki Giovanni
“New Clothes” by Julia Alvarez
“Dear John Wayne” by Louise Erdrich
“Street Kid” by Duane Niatum

Some dramas include:

Our Town by Thornton Wilder
Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare

Dramatically read the passage aloud or use Reader’s Theater for a dramatic class reading experience in which readers take on the role of one of the characters in the text.

Ask students to personally respond to the literature by drawing a picture of something the passage reminds them of in their own life. This could be a part of the text that is connected to memories, a problem or dilemma, or a person they may know. Ask students to write a short paragraph explaining what the picture represents and how their reading of the literature made them rethink the experience or memory. Students should have the opportunity to share their art and writing in small groups.

Talk about the ways in which the text they read helped them think about this event or person. Some questions you might like to ask include:

- What part of the text—plot, theme, a character, a setting—made you remember something that happened to you?
- How was what happened to you different from this part of the text?
- How was it the same?
- If this ever happened to you again, would you do things differently, based on what you read?

Between Sessions, cont'd.

Activity Two

Read several fables and/or nursery rhymes, such as “The Tortoise and the Hare” or “Jack and the Bean Stalk.” Ask students to explain what advice they can take from the fables and implement in their own lives. Talk about extending the message into their own lives. For example, in the fable “The Tortoise and the Hare,” the message clearly is that what seems obvious at the outset might not always come to pass. When have your students expected something to happen that didn’t? How did the outcome make them feel? What other ways might this message influence their lives? Ask students to write their own fable offering their advice for peer readers, using characters and settings that make sense to them today. Encourage students to call upon their personal experiences, conflicts, and challenges in designing and writing their fable. Online fairy tale and folklore resources 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 5. Rethinking” and “Extension: Classroom Connection.”

Activity Three

Brainstorm a list of adolescent conflicts and/or problems, such as peer pressure, teen pregnancy, not receiving the respect they think they deserve, getting into college, etc. Together, generate a list of texts that “speak” to these problems. (See online sources for texts in Activity One if you need some reminders.) Ask the students to explain their choices. What lessons might a reader take away from these texts? This list can be posted near the classroom library or on a bulletin board to encourage reading. The teacher may also choose to post the list on the school Web site, to share with the school community.

Activity Four

Ask students to select a young adult novel as an independent reading project or for use in literature circles or small book groups, depending upon your preference. Invite students to keep a dialectical journal or reading log that focuses on personal connections to the text. A dialectical journal is a two-column journal where students comment on short passages, phrases, or lines of text. One column features a direct quote from the text and the other column features the students’ reactions to the passage from the text. For the purpose of this activity, ask students to only select passages that spark a personal response or reaction based on their own life experiences. Ask them to think about “How is this similar or different from how I have acted in the past or how is this similar or different from my own life? What can I learn from this? How does this change my perspective, if at all?” You may want to model a few passages before asking the students to do this on their own.

It is also helpful to provide a list of open-ended questions for students to work from, such as those included in the Hints on Helping Students activity sheet in this guide. You could also use this information to make a bookmark or a class activity sheet. If they feel comfortable about doing so, students could share their dialectical journals with each other.

Additional Reading

For other resources, look under “Additional Reading” for “Workshop 5. Rethinking” on the *Conversations in Literature* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/.

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?

Notes
