

Workshop 7

The Stances in Action

Introduction

The envisionment-building process is recursive in nature, where at any given moment a reader can move from one stance to another, in no particular order. Envisionment describes the process competent readers go through as they make meaning out of what they read. Each stance provides another set of options—a panoply of ideas, filling out the reader’s depth of experience with the text and offering a fuller understanding of it.

Effective readers actively engage in literature in a meaningful, sophisticated manner, connecting text to their own personal experiences, literary experiences, and to the world in which they live. Competent readers are not aware of the stances as they build envisionments, nor should they be. It is necessary for educators to understand the envisionment-building process, as well as each stance, for the sake of instructional design and planning. Here, teachers can utilize their envisionment-building knowledge in order to create rich classroom experiences by asking questions that will stimulate student thinking. Students will benefit tremendously from creating their own envisionments, and from being a member of a literary community.

This program showcases the stances in action, where panelists are engaged in natural literary dialogue, recursively moving through all of the stances. Panel members build a rich understanding of the texts at hand, while adding layers of complexity to their envisionments.

Key Points

- Readers experience the envisionment-building process in a recursive manner, experiencing all four stances nonsequentially, at any given moment in their reading.
- Envisionment building is a natural process that all readers utilize. It suggests how teachers can help their students become more able readers. By asking questions framed in the various stances, teachers can help students gain a rich array of knowledge from different vantage points.
- Effective readers are not cognizant of the stances as they build an understanding of what they read, nor do they need to be. But less-successful readers need to learn the active process of thinking about texts in order to learn how to make meaning out of what they read.
- Effective readers engage in literature, gaining an understanding of not only the text, but also insight about the world in which we live and the human experience.

- Literature provides readers with a variety of legitimate responses, allowing them to make connections to their own lives, examine others', as well as to explore the craft of the author.
- The envisionment-building process is a valuable experience for students. It permits them to rely on their own understandings and background experiences, as well as their powers of observation and analysis to form a multi-faceted experience with an interpretation of a text.

Learning Objectives

After viewing this program, participants will be able to:

- Observe the value of the envisionment-building process, both for personal reading experiences and literary experiences within the classroom.
- Identify the four stances as unique relationships to the text, each one offering an opportunity to add layers of meaning to an envisionment, in a nonlinear order.
- Examine possible questions that a teacher may frame literary discussions around, in order to enrich students' experiences with the text by adapting a variety of perspectives.

Background Reading

In preparation for this workshop, you may want to read the poems "Icarus" by Stephen Spender, "Icarus" by Edward Field, "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Triumph" by Anne Sexton, "Landscape With the Fall of Icarus" by William Carlos Williams, and the first chapter of the novel *The House on Mango Street** by Sandra Cisneros. All texts 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.

* 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 7. The Stances in Action" and "Background Reading."

If you have not already done so, you may also consider reading Chapter 4, "The Classroom as a Social Setting for Envisionment Building," and Chapter 5, "A Practical Pedagogy," from *Envisioning Literature*.

For other resources, look under "Additional Reading" for "Workshop 7. The Stances in Action" on the *Conversations in Literature* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/.

Workshop Session (On-Site)

Getting Ready 30 minutes

Reading and Discussion: *The House on Mango Street*, Chapter 1

Listen to the excerpt from *The House on Mango Street*, then discuss. Consider the following questions:

- What are your initial reactions to the text?
- Why do the narrator and her family move so many times?
- Describe the way you see Esperanza and her family's many different houses.
- Why do you think the author made the house on Mango Street so different from the ones her family always told her she would live in?
- Why do you think the narrator takes so much time describing the house?
- How did you react when you read about the nun's comment "You live *there*?"
- What other texts have you read that illuminate or relate to this one? In what ways do the texts inform the other?
- What do you learn about the speaker? What is not revealed?
- How does this text relate to your own life experiences, if at all?
- What phrases or words did you find particularly interesting or significant? How did they add meaning to the text?
- The "house" never appears again until the last chapter of the novel. Why do you think Cisneros used the house as the title of this piece? What does the house signify?
- How would someone from a rural background react to this story? How would their viewpoint be different or similar to someone from an urban background?

Site Leader: If *The House on Mango Street* is not available, see **Materials Needed** on pp. 7-9 of this guide for instructions on selecting another text and preparing for this discussion.

Ask a volunteer to read the short excerpt aloud.

Reflect on the discussion. Did the discussion move through all four stances? Note how readers naturally move through the stances in a recursive nature, as they build their envisionments.

Watch the Workshop Video 60 minutes

Viewing and Discussion

Now you will view the video program "The Stances in Action," in which the panelists discuss a series of poems about Icarus, as well as an excerpt from the novel *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros. Observe how the readers in the program recursively move through all the stances as they build extended understandings of the texts.

Site Leader: Distribute one copy of the **Envisionment Building Stance Wheel** activity sheet to each participant.

Using the activity sheet as a guide, plot various comments in the literary conversations on the appropriate quarters of the Stance Wheel in order to understand the recursive nature of the envisionment-building process.

Workshop Session, cont'd.

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

Segment One

[**Site Leader:** Pause after Dr. Langer explains the four ways readers interact with text and before the dramatization of the poem “Icarus” by Edward Field.]

- Describe the four stances through which readers interact with text. Refer to your Envisionment Building Stance Wheel, making a note of the characteristics of each stance.
- As you view the next segment, make notes in the appropriate quarters of your Stance Wheel of key points in the conversation.

Segment Two

[**Site Leader:** Pause at the end of the Edward Field “Icarus” discussion, when Rafael Alvarez says, “And now he’s aging away in suburbia.”]

- Share your Stance Wheel with workshop participants, discussing how different points in the panelists’ dialogue represent the various stances.

This segment of dialogue shows readers building and extending their understanding, as they are in the text and moving through their envisionments. This is noticeable when Bobbi compares the story of Icarus with a moth flying up to a light bulb, only to fall back down again, as well as the conversation that surrounds this comment.

- At first glance, what struck you about the poem? (At this point, readers are trying to step into the text world.)
- What personal connections did you make to the poem? (Readers who are moving through the text often make personal connections to the work they are reading.)
- What do you think the poem warns us about in our own lives? (Readers who are stepping outside the text in order to rethink their own lives often pose these kinds of questions.)
- How did your knowledge of the myth of Icarus impact your understanding of the poem? (Here, readers call upon prior knowledge as they move through the text.)
- As you view the next video segment, again track the panelists’ conversation, making notes on your Stance Wheel of the relationships the readers create with the text.

Segment Three

[**Site Leader:** Pause at the end of the Stephen Spender “Icarus” discussion, when Bobbi Houtchens refers to the poem “Landscape With the Fall of Icarus” by William Carlos Williams, and before the next poetry dramatization.]

- Share your Stance Wheel with workshop participants, discussing how different points in the panelists’ dialogue represent the various stances.

The readers in this video segment are struggling with being outside of the text and trying to step in, as they had difficulties connecting with the Spender poem. When readers have difficulties stepping into the text, they search for fragments of meaning to try to access the piece. In this case, the panelists considered many questions and possibilities, working through each one in order to gain an entry point into the text.

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.

- What about Spender's "Icarus" is not clear to you? Share your thoughts with workshop participants. How does dialogue about these confusing points enrich your own understanding of the poem? Did you revise any of your initial understandings after discussing the poem?
- As you view the next video segment, jot down points on your Stance Wheel, tracing how the panelists' dialogue weaves through the various stances.

Segment Four

[Site Leader: Pause at the end of the Icarus poetry discussions, when Rafael Alvarez comments, "But at least once or twice in your life to know what you got, right?"]

- Share your Stance Wheel with workshop participants, discussing how different points in the panelists' dialogue represent the various stances.
- How do the four Icarus poems inform your understanding of all of them? (Readers who are stepping out of a text and objectifying their experience with it often call upon intertextual relationships to extend their understanding of each piece.)
- What in the texts mirrors your own life or the lives of people you know? (Again, the readers are stepping outside the text and rethinking what they know.)
- How do your opinions differ from others in your workshop session? How do these disagreements extend your own understandings of the poetry? (Multiple perspectives help readers move their own envisionments along, extending their understanding.)

Segment Five

[Site Leader: Pause after Sandra Cisneros's comment about her own writing, ending with "...if you know those stories of where those people live, how can you ignore that?"]

- Reread the excerpt from *The House on Mango Street*.
- What personal connections do you immediately make with the text? Is there anything that the passage reminds you of in your own life? (In this relationship to the text, readers are moving through their envisionment, calling upon personal experiences to build and extend meaning.)
- Do you have difficulties making a connection to the text? Why or why not? (Here, readers are outside of the text, attempting to step into it or access it on one level or another.)
- Is there anything in the text that confounds you? Discuss this with workshop participants. How has the discussion clarified your understanding? (When readers have difficulties stepping into a text or if they are thrown outside of it from encountering new information, they can access or reenter the text more easily through dialogue in a literary community. The community helps individual envisionments grow and evolve.)
- How does your knowledge of the author and her works enhance your understanding of this piece, if at all? (When readers call upon background knowledge to make meaning out of what they read, they are in the text and moving through an envisionment.)

Workshop Session, cont'd.

Segment Six

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

When discussing the following questions, consider the stance Stepping Out and Objectifying the Experience. In this relationship to text, readers examine a text with a critical eye, analyzing the craft of the author, including language choice, the text's structure, and literary elements.

- Take a look at Cisneros's language choices with a critical eye. What immediately strikes you? What is your favorite line or phrase? Explain.
- How does the language impact your reading experience with the text and your understanding of it?
- Describe the voice of Esperanza and how the author crafts her persona. What does Esperanza signify? What makes you think this?
- What do you think Sandra Cisneros wants her audience to know from reading the text? How successful do you think Cisneros is in crafting that message?
- In general, discuss how the panelists moved in and out of the various stances recursively, as their understandings of the texts in the workshop program grew.

Going Further 30 minutes

Using an additional copy of the Envisionment Building Stance Wheel activity sheet, brainstorm a list of questions that would be appropriate to ask at each stage of the envisionment-building process.

Share questions with the rest of the group. Review the sample questions that can be found on the Envisionment Building Stance Wheel Sample Questions activity sheet.

It is important for teachers to understand the stances and how the recursive envisionment-building process works in order to provide meaningful literary discussions and activities in the classroom—ones that foster the opportunity for students to build their own envisionments. It is in no way necessary or appropriate for students to learn about the stances and what they represent.

Site Leader: Distribute the second copy of the **Envisionment Building Stance Wheel** activity sheet and a copy of the **Envisionment Building Stance Wheel Sample Questions** activity sheet to each participant.

Between Sessions (On Your Own)

Homework Assignment

Journal

In your workshop journal, respond to the following:

How can envisionment building impact your current classroom instructional practices and student literary experiences? What instructional strategies are you currently utilizing that support envisionment building?

Reading

In preparation for Workshop 8, you may want to read Chapter 6, "Strategies for Teaching," in Judith Langer's *Envisioning Literature*.

For other resources, look under "Additional Reading" for "Workshop 8. Returning to the Classroom" 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."

Extension: Classroom Connection

Activity One

Videotape a classroom literary discussion. View the tape later for analysis, focusing on the quality of the conversation and the stances students and teacher utilized in the discussion. As a reflective practitioner, think about the extent to which you as the teacher and facilitator influenced the dialogue. What can you do in the future to guide the students through all facets of the envisionment-building process? How can teacher comments push the process along? How can teacher comments hinder the process? What questions could you ask that might bring about a richer literary dialogue? What comments could you have made after student interjections that would lead the conversation in a more complex direction? What hints can you pick up from student comments that indicate their level of understanding or lack of understanding? Did you validate students' input? Were all students in the community involved in the conversation? How can you get more students involved? Did the literary community support all ideas presented? What activities might lend themselves well to this process and community? What follow-up activity would benefit the students in this community?

Between Sessions, cont'd.

Activity Two

Consider implementing literature circles or small discussion groups, in which each member of the group has a specific role and responsibility. Allow students to lead their own literature discussions. Circulate throughout the classroom to observe groups as well as to hear threads of discussion. Wrap up the class meeting with the groups reporting about their discussions and accomplishments. Use this time to allow groups to challenge one another, as well as to raise questions. If this is the first time you have implemented small group literature discussions, you might consider utilizing one group the first time, positioning them at the center of the room while the rest of the class observes the group, its roles, the conversation, and how the group works together. This is a “fish bowl” effect. This will allow you to teach the students about the group roles, your expectations, and about how literature groups should work in your classroom.

Online resources related to literature circles 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 7. The Stances in Action” and “Extension: Classroom Connection.”

Activity Three

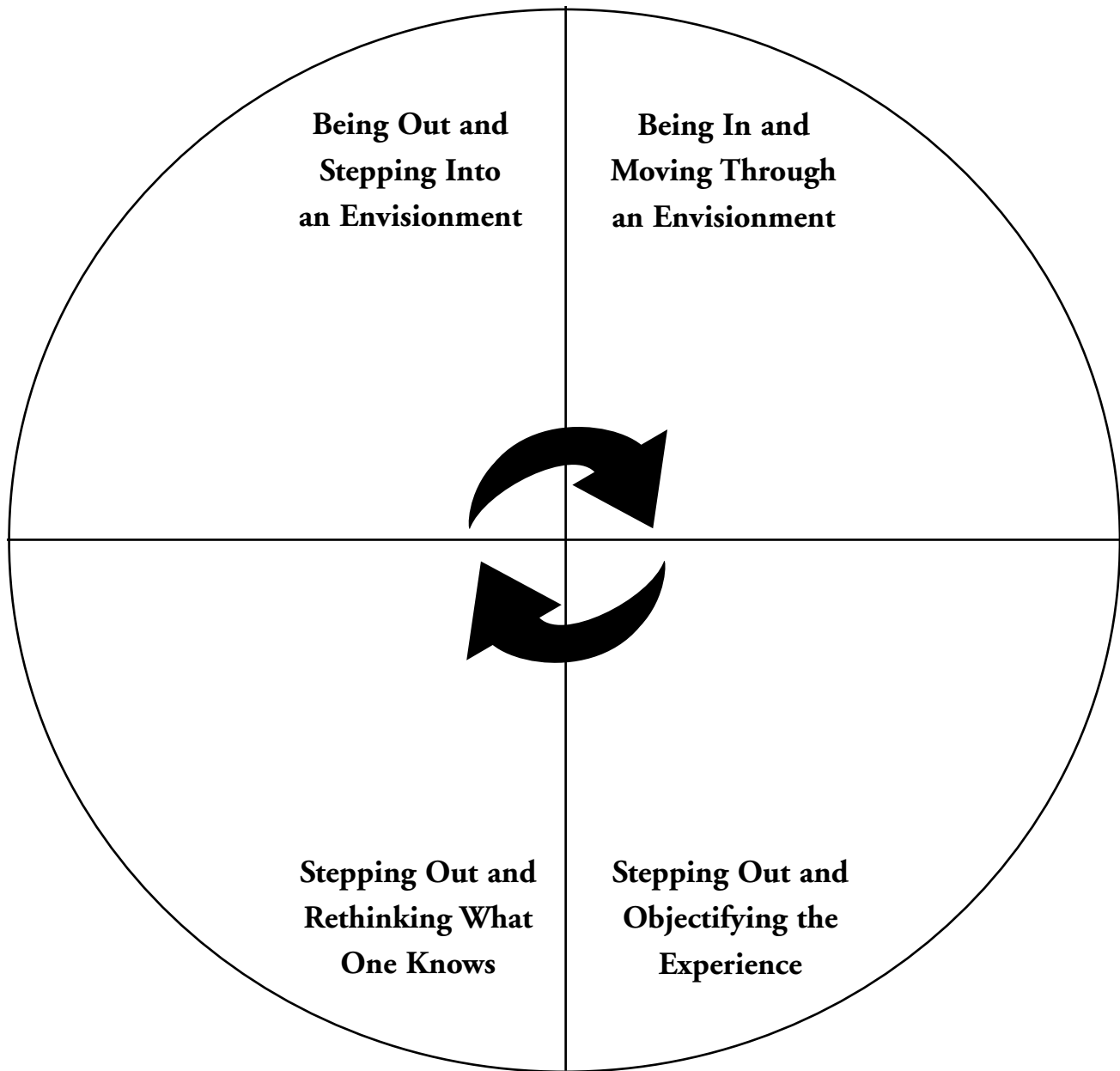
Using the Envisionment Building Stance Wheel, create questions specific to a piece of literature you are reading with your students. Use these questions to lead a whole-class literature discussion with your students or print a list of the questions generated from the wheel for use in small group discussions. These questions can be used as conversation starters for the students. Consider mixing up the order of the questions or lay them out on a piece of paper in a random format. Not only will students learn what “good” questions look like, they will also begin to pose their own thought-provoking questions.

Additional Reading

For other resources, look under “Additional Reading” for “Workshop 7. The Stances in Action” on the *Conversations in Literature* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/.

Activity Sheet: Envisionment Building Stance Wheel

A Recursive Process



Activity Sheet: Envisionment Building Stance Wheel Sample Questions

Being Out and Stepping Into an Envisionment

- 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 their 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?
- 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?

Being In and Moving Through an Envisionment

- What isn't being told? What would you like to still know?
- Who are these characters and are they like anyone I know?
- How do those people feel about their circumstances?
- How do I feel about...?
- What have I experienced in my own life that is similar to this? Different from this?
- What if the character...?
- What if it happened this way?
- What other texts have I read that inform this one and in what ways?
- How have the characters changed over time or across the story?
- What motivated the characters' behaviors or what led them to their actions?
- How would you describe the relationships of the characters in the text?
- How would someone from a different culture or background interpret the story?
- Do I like these characters? Does what they are doing make sense? Would I have done the same thing in this situation?
- How is the plot developing?
- What are the characters like? Are they acting as I expected?
- How do the characters feel about and relate to each other? How will this affect the story?
- How do I think the piece might end?

Stance Wheel Sample Questions Activity Sheet, cont'd.

Stepping Out and Rethinking What One Knows

- 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?

Stepping Out and Objectifying the Experience

- Are there any other texts that I have read that can inform my understanding of this piece?
- Why did the author choose that particular phrase, style, or organizational feature?
- How does the title relate to the construct of the story?
- How does the language and voice affect my understanding of the text?
- How does the author's voice contrast with my own perspective?
- Why did some of the word choices affect me so deeply?
- How can my understanding of literary elements (plot, setting, theme, characterization, and so forth) inform my envisionment?
- How would the piece differ if written, taken place, or read in another era or culture? How would I see things differently if I were from another culture, another era, or another's perspective?
- How do other interpretations of the text contrast with my own?
- What are some other ways I can react to the text? Consider other perspectives, such as critical, feminist, or political.

Notes
