

Classroom Lesson Plan 5

Whole-Group Seminar Discussion

Teacher: Dorothy Franklin, DeWitt Clinton Elementary School, Chicago, Illinois

Grade Level: Seventh

Topic: Whole-group seminar discussion in response to a pairing of literary texts

Materials Needed:

- Short stories “Passing” by Langston Hughes and “Guests in the Promised Land” by Kristin Hunter
- Student Activity Sheets:
 - Suggested Seminar Rules and Participation Rubric
 - Venn Diagram: Compare and Contrast “Passing” and “Guests in the Promised Land”
- Teacher Tools:
 - Suggested Seminar Discussion Questions, “Passing”
 - Suggested Seminar Discussion Questions, “Guests in the Promised Land”
 - Suggested Compare and Contrast Essay Rubric

Background Information:

Prior to this lesson, students in Ms. Franklin’s class explored Black History through selections of literature from the time of slavery through modern history. Students have read excerpts from primary source documents detailing the struggles of slaves through the text *To Be a Slave* by Julius Lester, which includes spirituals, slave narratives, and letters. They have also read the short story “Guests in the Promised Land” by Kristin Hunter, and discussed it, using the seminar discussion format.

In this lesson, students get a glimpse of African American life in the 1930s by examining Langston Hughes’ short story, “Passing.” As they discuss the text in a seminar, students react and respond to the unique perspectives on equality and oppression presented in this story, and compare it with what they have discovered in reading other literature.

Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

- read for literary experience.
- participate in a whole-class seminar discussion to enrich their own understandings of the texts, considering multiple perspectives and alternative interpretations.
- compare and contrast how two protagonists cope with racial conflict in two different short stories.

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Expected Products From Lesson:

- Meaningful student conversation about the texts
- Rich understanding of the two short stories, as well as the dilemmas African Americans faced in the early 1930s
- An essay comparing and contrasting the two short stories, or other culminating activity

Instructional Strategies Implemented:

- Teacher-directed discussion
- Whole-group student-response seminar discussion
- Pairing of two literary texts
- Written responses

Lesson Procedures/Activities:

Prior to This Lesson: "Guests in the Promised Land"

- Read aloud the story "Guests in the Promised Land." Consider omitting the ending of the story and asking students to predict what happens. You may want to reveal the ending after the students offer their thoughts on this.
- Model a seminar discussion, using a group of students as a demonstration group. Talk about expectations you have for process and products, and establish rules for the seminar. Distribute the "Suggested Seminar Rules and Participation Rubric" to spur this discussion.

Seminar: "Passing"

- Tell students they are going to read the story, "Passing," which takes place during the same time period as "Guests in the Promised Land."
- Before reading "Passing" aloud, tell students questions will be posed throughout the reading. The class will stop to discuss throughout the reading.
- Read aloud "Passing."
- Seminar Discussion: Remind students of seminar participation expectations. Consider using sample discussion questions Ms. Franklin created for "Passing" and "Guests in the Promised Land."
- Assign follow-up writing activity either as homework or class work.

Follow-Up or Culminating Activities:

Compare and Contrast Essay

- Students will compare and contrast "Guests in the Promised Land" with "Passing," focusing on the protagonists, their actions, and motives. Consider additional class time for this writing activity, as well as writing as a homework assignment.

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- Familiarize students with the use of a Venn diagram as a prewriting activity. Ask some general lead-in questions to the class to open discussion, such as “Who are the protagonists of the stories? What makes them the protagonists? How do the authors use the protagonists to get their points across?” Encourage them to think about the protagonists’ actions, beliefs, and feelings.
- Provide time for students to brainstorm ideas for their Venn diagrams either in pairs or independently.
- Share student Venn diagrams. Make a list of traits specific to each character, as well as traits shared by the protagonists. Invite ideas from all students.
- Ask students to select the key differences and similarities from all the ideas presented. Tell students these are the key ideas they will focus on in their essays.
- Provide a writing rubric for students or create one with the students’ input. You can use “Suggested Compare and Contrast Essay Rubric” as a model. If students have not written a compare/contrast essay before, they may need guidance and modeling.
- Consider providing class time for students to draft, conference with peers, revise, edit, and publish in class.

Alternative Projects to the Compare and Contrast Essay:

Letter to the Character

Consider asking students to write a letter of advice to either Jack or Robert from the other character’s point of view. How would each character react to how the other dealt with his problems or his relationships with White people? What suggestions would each character offer the other about how to deal with their problems or life situations? Ask students to follow the format of a friendly letter. Utilize the following Web links to review the format for a friendly letter:

English Plus

<http://englishplus.com/grammar/00000144.htm>

National Adult Literacy Database

<http://www.nald.ca/CLR/Btg/ed/memories/mmasters/friendly.htm>

Create a Scene

Ask students to create a dramatic scene in which a character from one of the stories is transported to the other story. What might be the circumstances of their meeting? What might be the outcome of their meeting? Ask students to write a mini-play or act out the scene in class and write a reflection afterwards, explaining the significance of the scene and why they chose to craft it that way.

Sentence Collage

Ask students to create a sentence collage of best lines from both stories that reveal significant aspects of each character. As a companion to the collage, ask students to write one or two paragraphs explaining the collage’s significance.

Assessment:

- Teacher will score the compare and contrast essay “Guests in the Promised Land” and “Passing” using a content and use-of-language rubric.
- Teacher will use the “Suggested Seminar Participation Rubric” or the rubric created by the class to assess students’ participation in literary discussion. Students may also be asked to evaluate their own participation and submit a reflection on what they gained from the conversation with classmates.