

# Video Clip 9

## Discussion Strategies

Length:	18:55
School:	The Odyssey School
Location:	Bainbridge Island, Washington
No. of Students in School:	125
Teacher:	Barry Hoonan
No. of Years Teaching:	20
Grade:	Fifth and Sixth Cluster
No. of Students in the Classroom:	31

# About This Video Clip

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*"The genuine foundation is a love and passion for story and knowing that story brings about a place for kids to find their way in, a way of expressing themselves.... So I read good books and share them, and I listen to kids tell me about them. That's the natural element for a good discussion."*

—Barry Hoonan, Fifth- and Sixth-Grade Teacher, The Odyssey School, Bainbridge Island, Washington

How can teachers help students find their way into a piece of literature? The profession is familiar with stories of energetic and creative colleagues coming to class dressed as literary characters and acting out a particularly engaging scene or two. While such strategies certainly engage student attention, in all probability they cannot be replicated throughout the school year. Furthermore, the motivation they provide is external, dependent on outside forces for engagement.

One of the tasks of the envisionment-building teacher is to help students develop ways of approaching literary texts that they will be able to call upon independently throughout their lives. Experienced readers have innumerable such ways into texts that they are able to access almost intuitively. Their choices depend on a number of factors, including the genre of the piece, its complexity, and the personal inclination of the reader. As teachers identify the particular approaches they wish to teach students, they consider a number of factors as well; the age of the students, their previous experiences as readers, and the particular text at hand are a few.

When introducing students to such strategies, teachers use direct instruction, demonstrations, and guided practice to help students incorporate new approaches into their personal repertoires. However, as you will notice in this video, even with repeated assistance, students may not embrace new techniques immediately.

In this video, you will see Mr. Hoonan use student-directed mini-lessons to provide explicit instruction in a strategy using sticky notes that he introduced earlier. He hopes that the student modeling will encourage classmates to use the strategy when they begin reading and discussing a new text. He finds that although the students are willing enough to use it as readers, they are less likely to bring the strategy to their group discussion.

Understanding that the assimilation of new techniques takes time and repeated exposure, Mr. Hoonan turns to mapping—a strategy in which the group is experienced—to help them focus their discussion. He is confident that repeated exposure to the sticky notes technique will enable his students to incorporate it as one of a broad range of ways they approach literature.

Visit the *Engaging With Literature: A Video Library, Grades 3–5* Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature) to access the lesson plan Mr. Hoonan used to organize this classroom experience, as well as other related resources.

## Featured Text

*Stuck in Neutral* by Terry Trueman

Fourteen-year-old Shawn McDaniel suffers from such severe cerebral palsy that he cannot give the faintest sign that he is an alert, thoughtful, and intelligent human being with a powerful memory. Although he cannot even focus his eyes on his own, he is still happy to be alive. He loves the taste of smoked oysters and chocolate pudding, the scent of Comet in the sink, and his mother's hugs.

Shawn begins to believe that his father is planning to kill him as a way of releasing his suffering and Shawn has no way of communicating to his father the enormous pleasure he has in living. The ending is ambiguous, with Shawn and his father alone in the house.

Much of the power of this novel comes from the author's personal experiences; his teenaged son also suffers from cerebral palsy.

In choosing this text for his students, Mr. Hoonan considered a number of factors including accessibility, level of interest, and quality. Although *Stuck in Neutral* is Trueman's first book, it has won several awards and is generating a great deal of positive energy among teen readers.

Visit the *Engaging With Literature: A Video Library, Grades 3–5* Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature) for Web sites related to the featured text. Go to Additional Resources for this program.

# About This Video, cont'd.

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## Learning Objectives

If you are a teacher watching this video for professional development, you will be able to:

- Define one strategy students in the video used in engaging with a work of literature and explain the benefits it offers to other readers.
- Offer a suggestion of one other way in which students can use devices or writing to concretely interact with a text.
- Explain the benefits of having students create their strategies for interacting with texts.
- List several benefits of honoring student-created strategies.

# Viewing Suggestions

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## Who Should Watch This Video

**Teachers and teacher educators** can use it as a professional or preservice education tool that shows how one teacher helps students develop and focus thoughtful discussions around literary texts. Viewers might note how a teacher offers students concrete strategies for organizing their conversation, as well as ways in which effective teaching is responsive to student direction. The video might also assist teachers who reach out to families in the school community at back-to-school events. In these settings, the video can be a vehicle for demonstrating how student-centered literature discussions might work.

**Curriculum planners** can use this clip as a model for identifying points of instruction in the literature classroom and considering how various texts might be used to help students develop their abilities as environment builders.

**Administrators** can use this clip to generate awareness of strategies for using and facilitating student-driven mini-lessons as a way to expand students' literary sophistication.

## Before Watching

Before viewing this program, consider the following:

- What are the characteristics of a “good” discussion about literature?
- How can you prepare students to cope with difficulties such as unexpected forms, unknown contexts, or difficult vocabulary that they encounter as readers?
- How can you help students focus their discussions productively?

## Discussion Questions

**Teachers involved in professional development and preservice education may want to discuss:**

- What are some ways this teacher helps students cope with the complexities of a new literary text?
- As viewers, did you think the use of students to present mini-lessons to the class was an effective strategy? Why or why not?
- Mr. Hoonan talks about the importance of considering context when assessing student performance, mentioning the example of allowing a normally quiet student an extended opportunity to share his views during the discussion. What examples of this can you share from your own classroom?
- What ideas from the video would you like to try in your own classroom?
- What questions do you have about Mr. Hoonan’s instructional practices?

**Teachers holding PTA meetings and back-to-school events might use these questions to start group discussion:**

- What was your response to the strategy of having students present some of the instruction to classmates? Explain.
- How would your child respond to small-group discussions such as the ones portrayed in this classroom?
- Was there anything about the discussion that surprised or intrigued you? Give examples.
- How can discussions such as this help students learn?

# Viewing Suggestions, cont'd.

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## **Curriculum planners can discuss:**

- What key strategies do effective readers use when approaching difficult literary texts? How might they be taught?
- Do the texts we offer provide a balance of traditional, canonical works and more contemporary offerings appropriate to the needs of our students and their community?

## **Administrators can discuss:**

- Do teachers have appropriate resources (book sets, for example) to enable small-group discussions?
- How can physical issues (classroom size and configuration, teacher/student ratio, external distractions, etc.) enable or prevent teachers from facilitating effective discussions?
- What professional development is available (or might be made available) for teachers who wish to develop their skills as discussion facilitators?

## **Suggested Activities**

### **For teachers involved in professional development and preservice education:**

- Make a list of strategies you might teach students to help them cope with the complexities of unfamiliar texts.
- What strategies have you found effective to help students focus discussions? Share them with your colleagues.

### **For teachers reaching out to families:**

- Make a list of ways you can help families support their child's daily reading and their experiences with literature. Consider using brief notes, email, a newsletter, or a course Web site to keep families informed about texts and activities their children will experience in class.
- Invite family members into your classroom to observe, and—if they have read the text—perhaps even to participate in a literary discussion.

### **For administrators:**

- Share this video with language arts teachers in your school. Discuss the value of student-centered discussion in literature instruction. Ask teachers to consider ways in which this lesson succeeds, and to suggest ways in which it might be strengthened. Provide time for teachers to share their strategies for facilitating literature discussion groups.

# Additional Resources

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The classroom lesson plan, student activity sheets, teacher tools, and links to related resources are accessible at the *Engaging With Literature: A Video Library, Grades 3–5* Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature).

## You may also be interested in the following texts:

Allen, Janet and Kyle Gonzalez. *There's Room for Me Here: Literacy Workshop in the Middle School*. York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 1998. ISBN 1-57110-042-3.

Ash, Barbara Hoetker. "Student Made Questions: One Way into a Literary Text." *English Journal* (September, 1992): 61–64.

Bayer, Ann Shea. *Collaborative-Apprenticeship Learning: Language and Thinking Across the Curriculum, K–12*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1990. ISBN 0-87484-882-2.

Beers, Kylene and Robert Probst. "Classroom Talk About Literature or the Social Dimensions of a Solitary Act." *Voices From the Middle 5.2* (1998): 16–20.

Berghoff, Beth, Kathryn A. Egawa, Jerome C. Harste, and Barry T. Hoonan. *Beyond Reading and Writing: Inquiry, Curriculum, and Multiple Ways of Knowing*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2000. ISBN 0-8141-2341-4.

Bridges, Lois. *Creating Your Classroom Community*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 1995. ISBN 1-571-1049-0.

Brozo, William G. *To Be a Boy, To Be a Reader: Engaging Teen and Preteen Boys in Active Literacy*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2002. ISBN 0-87207-175-8.

Buehl, Doug. *Classroom Strategies for Interactive Learning*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2001. ISBN 0-87207-284-3.

Commeyras, Michell and Georgiana Sumner. "Literature Discussions Based on Student-Posed Questions." Ed. Jamie Metsala. *The Reading Teacher*. (November, 1996): 262–265.

Daniels, Harvey. *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups*. 2nd ed. York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2002. ISBN 1-57110-333-3.

Elliott, Joan B. and Mary M. Dupuis, eds. *Young Adult Literature in the Classroom: Reading It, Teaching It, Loving It*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2002. ISBN 0-87207-173-1.

Evans, Karen S. *Literature Discussion Groups in the Intermediate Grades: Dilemmas and Possibilities*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2001. ISBN 0-87207-293-2.

Finney, Susan. *Keep the Rest of the Class Reading & Writing...While You Teach Small Groups (Grades 3–6)*. New York: Scholastic, 2000. ISBN 05-906856-X.

Golub, Jeffrey. *Making Learning Happen: Strategies for an Interactive Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2000. ISBN 0-86709-493-1.

Golub, Jeffrey. *Activities for an Interactive Classroom*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1994. ISBN 0-8141-0046-5.

Graves, Donald H. *Build a Literate Classroom: The Reading/Writing Teacher's Companion*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991. ISBN 0-435-08488-7.

Hoonan, Barry. "Drawing on the Artist's Perspective: Ventures Into Meaning." *Literature Circles and Response*. Ed. Bonnie Campbell Hill, Nancy J. Johnson and Katherine Noe. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 1995. ISBN 0-926-684-248 X.

Keane, Nancy J. *Booktalks and Beyond: Thematic Learning Activities for Grades K–6*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2001. ISBN 15-795006-25.

# Additional Resources, cont'd.

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- Krogness, Mary Mercer. *Just Teach Me, Mrs. K.: Talking, Reading, and Writing With Resistant Adolescent Learners*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995. ISBN 0-435-08815-7.
- Kutz, Eleanor and Hephzibah Roskelly. *An Unquiet Pedagogy: Transforming Practice in the English Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991. ISBN 0-86709-277-7.
- Langer, Judith A. *Envisioning Literature*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1995. ISBN 0-8077-3463-0.
- Langer, Judith A., ed. *Literature Instruction: A Focus on Student Response*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1992.
- Lewis, Valerie V. and Walter M. Mayes. *Valerie and Walter's Best Books for Children: A Lively and Opinionated Guide*. New York: Avon, 1998. ISBN 03-807943-81.
- Morgan, Norah and Juliana Saxton. *Asking Better Questions: Models, Techniques, and Activities for Engaging Students in Learning*. Markham, ONT: Pembroke, 1994. ISBN 155-138-0455.
- Noe, Katherine L. Schlick and Nancy J. Johnson. *Getting Started With Literature Circles*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon, 1999. ISBN 0-926842-97-8.
- Peterson, Ralph and Maryann Eeds. *Grand Conversations (Grades 2–6)*. New York: Scholastic, 1999. ISBN 05-907342-29.
- Phelan, Patricia, ed. *Literature and Life: Making Connections in the Classroom*. Classroom Practices in Teaching English Vol. 25. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1990. ISBN 0-8141-2962-5.
- Power, Brenda Miller. *Taking Note: Improving Your Observational Notetaking*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 1996. ISBN 1-5711-0035-0.
- Rief, Linda. *Seeking Diversity: Language Arts With Adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992. ISBN 0-435-08598-0.
- Rief, Linda. *Vision and Voice: Extending the Literacy Spectrum*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. ISBN 0-3250-0097-2.
- Rief, Linda and Maureen Barbieri, eds. *All That Matters: What Is It We Value in School and Beyond?* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995. ISBN 0-4350-8848-3.
- Routman, Regie. *Conversations: Strategies for Teaching, Learning, and Evaluating*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000. ISBN 0-325-00109-X.
- Routman, Regie. *Invitation: Changing as Teachers and Learners K–12*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991. ISBN 0-435-08836-X.
- Ryan, Concetta Doti. *Authentic Assessment*. Westminister, CA: Teacher Created Materials, 1994. ISBN 1-55734-838-3.
- Short, Kathy Gnagey and Kathryn Mitchell Pierce, eds. *Talking About Books: Literature Discussion Groups in K–8 Classrooms*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1990. ISBN 0-325-00073-5.
- Soter, Anna O. *Young Adult Literature and the New Literary Theories: Developing Critical Readers in Middle School*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1999. ISBN 0-8077-3880-8.
- Strickland, Kathleen and James Strickland. *Reflections on Assessment: Its Purposes, Methods, and Effects on Learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. ISBN 0-86709-445-1.
- Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. *You Gotta BE the Book*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1997. ISBN 0-8077-3566-3.
- Yokota, Junko, ed. *Kaleidoscope: A Multicultural Booklist for Grades K–8*. 3rd ed. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2001. ISBN 0-8141-2540-9.

# Notes

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