

Workshop 1

Foundations

“When we read something, we build envisionments that help us make sense of the text. Our ideas grow and change and become more full or complex over time. In the classroom, we want our students to do the same thing.”

*—Dr. Judith Langer, Director, National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement (CELA),
State University of New York at Albany*

Introduction

During a time when much educational attention is on the importance of standards and high-stakes assessment tests, how can teachers justify spending generous amounts of class time on literature instruction? What are its values? What does it contribute to a youngster’s education?

The teachers in this workshop believe strongly in the power of literature to enrich and change lives. They believe it broadens students’ views of the world, introducing them to people and places far beyond the boundaries of their lived worlds. As they connect with the experiences presented by fictional characters, students are forced to evaluate the kinds of decisions and choices they might make. As they experience the power and beauty of literary language, they develop the potential of their own language use.

These teachers also recognize that as students discuss their understandings of texts with one another—confronting and evaluating points of view different from their own—they develop their perceptions and their analytical abilities. As Tim O’Keefe notes, “by having kids respond to literature, we’re doing way more than the standards that are expected.”

Key Points

- The four principles of an envisionment-building classroom are:
 1. All students are lifelong envisionment builders. Their background and experience helps them bring some knowledge to the text.
 2. Questions are at the heart of the literary experience. Students are encouraged to ask questions to deepen their understandings.
 3. Multiple perspectives also enrich a student’s understanding. Many points of view are encouraged.
 4. Class is a time to develop deeper understandings about literature. It’s assumed that students will leave class with a more sophisticated understanding about what they’ve read than they had when they arrived.
- Providing reading time in the classroom is important for many children.
- Many students need to be taught the strategies and behaviors for a good conversation about literature.
- Regular read-alouds are important in the development of students’ appreciation of literature.
- Envisionment-building teachers seek to help students love literature and make it an important part of their lives—in school and out.

- Students can make personal connections with literary texts as well as use them to learn about worlds and experiences very different from their own.
- Talking about literature helps students enjoy and appreciate it more fully.
- Many envisionment-building teachers find ways to use literature when teaching subjects other than English/language arts.
- Students may need help learning ways to reflect on their reading and make connections with their own lives.
- Some students need help learning to make mental images from their reading.
- Often teachers can use their own experiences as readers as a guide when designing ways to help their students become more effective readers.
- Think-alouds model strategies for making meaning and allow students to integrate them into their own repertoires.
- Effective readers often begin with a plan, a purpose, or a goal before they start to read.
- Learning to choose the right book is an important aspect of being an effective reader.
- Effective readers like to discuss their literary experiences with others.
- Students in envisionment-building classrooms feel comfortable and trust that their views will be respectfully received.
- Teachers in envisionment-building classrooms recognize the importance of giving students choices about what they read.

Learning Objectives

After participating in this session, you will be able to:

- Recognize the four hallmarks of envisionment-building classrooms.
- Understand the goals of envisionment-building classrooms.
- Identify a number of instructional strategies that encourage and support envisionment-building.
- Develop your own envisionment-building classroom.

Background Reading

In preparation for Workshop 1, read the “Preface” in Dr. Judith Langer’s *Envisioning Literature* from the Teachers College Press, 1995.

For additional online resources, visit the *Envisioning Literature* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature, select *Engaging With Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 3–5*, and look under Additional Reading for Workshop 1.

You may also be interested in the panelists’ professional biographies found in the About the Contributors section of this guide.

Workshop Session (On-Site)

Getting Ready (30 minutes)

In this introductory program, you will be introduced to Dr. Judith Langer's four principles of an envisionment-building classroom. In addition, you will listen as eight teachers who work in very different settings discuss ways in which they support their students' experiences with literature. As different as each classroom is, each of the eight shares a common goal: to make literature an important and integral part of their students' lives.

Site Leader: Use the questions below to spark discussion before viewing the workshop program. Participants may write answers to the questions in their workshop journals, as time permits. You may use all of the questions or select only a few. If you have Internet access, display the companion Web site to this workshop at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature, making participants aware of online resources and interactive opportunities.

Discuss:

Discuss the following questions:

- How is literature important in your life? Have there been times when it has been more or less important than it is now? Why?
- Who influenced your appreciation of literature? How did they do so?

Reflect in Workshop Journals:

Respond to the following in your workshop journal:

- What kinds of literary texts do you enjoy the most? What makes them so pleasurable for you? Do you have a favorite author or book? What makes it a favorite?

Watch the Workshop Video (60 minutes)

Watch and Discuss:

Pause at the title card "Katherine Bomer, Austin, Texas."

- What are some envisionments you remember experiencing (in literature or in life)? In what ways did your understandings evolve?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Pause at the title card "Literature in Life."

- How do you use conversations about literature in your classroom?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

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 needed, rewind and replay segments of the program so that viewers can thoughtfully examine all pertinent information. If you are watching a real-time broadcast, ask participants to 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.

Pause at the title card "Belini Teklu, Marietta, Georgia."

- What literary texts have been especially important to you? To your students? Why?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Workshop Session (On-Site), cont'd.

Pause at the title card "Tim O'Keefe, Columbia, South Carolina."

- How has literature changed you? Your students?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Pause at the title card "Memorable Experiences."

- How can teachers help students have valuable experiences with literature?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Pause at the title card "Latosha Rowley, Indianapolis, Indiana."

- What influences in your life helped you appreciate literature?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Pause at the title card "As We Read..."

- How have you used literature to teach subjects other than English/language arts? How might you?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Pause at the title card "*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*—A Think Aloud."

- What reflection strategies do you employ when you read? Have you shared them with students?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Pause at the title card "Jonathan Holden, Roxbury, Massachusetts."

- Would a think-aloud be helpful as part of your literature instruction? Why or why not?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Pause at the title card "Effective Readers."

- What strategies do Jonathan Holden and Rich Thompson use to help students connect to literature? How might they work with your students?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Pause at the title card "A Vibrant Classroom."

- What makes an effective reader?
- How can instruction help students become more effective readers?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

View program until the end.

- How can teachers create an atmosphere in which students can appreciate literature and the values it offers them?
- What goals do you have for your students as readers of literature?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Workshop Session (On-Site), cont'd.

Going Further (30 minutes)

Discuss:

Divide into four groups, each focused on one of the four principles of an envisionment-building classroom (see Key Points). In your group, brainstorm classroom activities that you might incorporate into your literature instruction that would support that principle. Share your list with the other groups, noting ideas in your journal that you find particularly engaging.

Between Sessions (On Your Own)

Homework Assignment

Journal:

Respond to the following in your workshop journal:

- Choose one or two of the teachers portrayed in this workshop program whose classroom you found particularly appealing. What made it so? Were there any behaviors or activities that you would like to incorporate into your own classroom? What and why?

Reading:

In preparation for Workshop 2, read “Literary Thought and Literate Mind” in Dr. Judith Langer’s *Envisioning Literature* from the Teachers College Press, 1995.

Ongoing Activity

Channel-Talk:

You are encouraged to participate in an email discussion list called Channel-Talk. Send comments and questions regarding the workshop to other participants around the country. Comments can also be viewed on the Web site. Go to www.learner.org/envisioningliterature, select *Engaging With Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 3–5*, and click on Channel-Talk.

Extension: Classroom Connection

Student Activities:

Try these activities with your students.

- Read-alouds. Choose a book that you think your students would enjoy, but that may be too difficult for them to read independently. Establish a regular time for reading and discussion. (Many teachers like to do this first thing in the morning or right after lunch as a way of easing the transition back to the classroom.)
- Think-alouds. Model this by choosing a book you haven’t read. Read some aloud, pausing to share your thinking with your students as you go. Pose questions, make connections, posit predictions. Demonstrate the ways you make meaning when reading literature. When you finish, ask students to discuss what they noticed you doing. (You may wish to record their observations on chart paper to post.)
- Use literature to support instruction in another subject area such as math, science, or social studies. Ask your librarian to help you find appropriate titles.

Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner:

What classroom activities observed in this workshop program did you find particularly appealing? How might your students respond if you incorporated them into your literature instruction? What support might they need to become successful?

Additional Reading

- Bamford, Rosemary and Janice V. Kristo, eds. *Making Facts Come Alive: Choosing Quality Nonfiction Literature K–8*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon, 1998.
- Benedict, Susan and Lenore Carlisle, eds. *Beyond Words: Picture Books for Older Readers and Writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992.
- Carlsen, G. Robert and Anne Sherrill. *Voices of Readers: How We Come To Love Books*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1988.
- Cullinan, Bernice E., ed. *Invitation To Read: More Children’s Literature in the Reading Program*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1992.
- Daniels, Harvey. *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2002.
- Hansen-Krening, Nancy, Elaine Aoki, and Donald Mizokawa, eds. *Kaleidoscope: A Multicultural Booklist for Grades K–8*. 4th ed. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2001.
- Hart-Hewins, Linda, and Jan Wells. *Real Books for Reading: Learning To Read With Children’s Literature*. Markham, ONT: Pembroke, 1990.
- Holland, Kathleen E., Rachael A. Hungerford, and Shirley B. Ernst, eds. *Journeying: Children Responding to Literature*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993.
- Jenkins, Carol Brennan. *The Allure of Authors: Author Studies in the Elementary Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999.
- Jody, Marilyn and Marianne Saccardi. *Using Computers To Teach Literature: A Teacher’s Guide*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1998.
- Langer, Judith A. *Envisioning Literature: Literary Understanding and Literature Instruction*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1995.
- Moss, Joy F. *Literary Discussion in the Elementary School*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2002.
- National Council of Teachers of English. *Teaching Reading and Literature in Early Elementary Grades*. Standards Consensus Series. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1997.
- National Council of Teachers of English. *Teaching Reading and Literature, Grades 4-6*. Standards Consensus Series. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1996.
- Noe, Katherine L. Schlick and Nancy J. Johnson. *Getting Started With Literature Circles*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon, 1999.
- Pierce, Kathryn Mitchell et al., eds. *Adventuring With Books: A Booklist for PreK–Grade 6*. 12th ed. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2000.
- Rasinski, Timothy V. et al. *Motivating Recreational Reading and Promoting Home-School Connections: Strategies From The Reading Teacher*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2000.
- Russell, David L. *Literature for Children: A Short Introduction*. New York: Longman, 1991.
- Schmidt, Patricia Ruggiano and Ann Watts Pailliotet, eds. *Exploring Values Through Literature, Multimedia, and Literacy Events: Making Connections*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2001.
- Sorensen, Marilou R. and Barbara A. Lehman, eds. *Teaching With Children’s Books: Paths to Literature-Based Instruction*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1995.
- Stewig, John Warren and Sam Leaton Sebesta, eds. *Using Literature in the Elementary Classroom*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1989.
- Short, Kathy G. *Literature as a Way of Knowing*. York, ME: Stenhouse, 1997.

Additional Reading, cont'd.

Short, Kathy Gnagey and Kathryn Mitchell Pierce. *Talking About Books: Literature Discussion Groups in K–8 Classrooms*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998.

Tiedt, Iris McClellan. *Tiger Lilies, Toadstools, and Thunderbolts: Engaging K–8 Students With Poetry*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2002.

Zarnowski, Myra, Richard M. Kerper, and Julie M. Jensen, eds. *The Best in Children's Nonfiction: Reading, Writing, and Teaching Orbis Pictus Award Books*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2001.

Professional journals about literature instruction:

CELA Newsletter: The National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement, State University of New York, Albany, publishes a newsletter in the fall, winter, and spring addressing a wide range of issues concerning literacy.

The National Council of Teachers of English Journals: NCTE publishes many subscription journals including *Language Arts* for the elementary school level.

The Reading Teacher from the International Reading Association typically includes excellent articles about literature instruction as well as regular reviews of new children's literature titles.

Texts mentioned by teachers in this workshop program include:

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll

The Mouse and the Motorcycle by Beverly Cleary

The Jacket by Andrew Clements

I Have a Dream: The Story of Martin Luther King, Jr. by Margaret Davidson

One Grain of Rice: A Mathematical Folktale by Demi

Because of Winn-Dixie by Kate DiCamillo

My Side of the Mountain by Jim Dodson

Yolanda's Genius by Carol Fenner

"First Baseball Glove" by Donald H. Graves in *Baseball, Snakes, and Summer Squash*

Out of the Dust by Karen Hesse

The Color of My Words by Lynn Joseph

A Wrinkle in Time by Madeline L'Engle

Bad Boy by Walter Dean Myers

Rascal by Sterling North

Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck

Pink and Say by Patricia Polacco

War With Grandpa by Robert Kimmel Smith

Abel's Island by William Steig

Authors mentioned in this program include:

Laurie Williams

C. S. Lewis

Mary Elfin

For additional online resources, visit the *Envisioning Literature* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature, select *Engaging With Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 3–5*, and look under Additional Reading for Workshop 1.