

# Video Clip 1

## Signposts

Length:	18:55
Schools:	Eight different schools
Locations:	Various locations throughout the United States
No. of Students in Schools:	Between 125 and 3,700
Teachers:	Various
Grades:	Third to Fifth
No. of Students in Classrooms:	Between 17 and 31

**Schools and Locations:** The schools in this video library are in geographically diverse locations throughout the United States. Some, like Jonathan Holden’s Roxbury, Massachusetts classroom or Latosha Rowley’s Indianapolis school, are in urban settings. Some are rural, such as Rich Thompson’s Montana school set at the edge of Glacier National Park and Barry Hoonan’s school on Bainbridge Island in Washington State. Others are in suburban locations. A wide variety of classrooms and teachers were chosen to help teachers everywhere see how envisionment building might apply in their own locations.

**Number of Students in Schools:** The schools in the video library run from the small and intimate (125 students at The Odyssey School on Bainbridge Island and 132 students at the Center for Inquiry in Columbia, South Carolina) to the 76-acre campus housing Punahou School in Honolulu, the nation’s largest independent school with 3,700 students in grades K–12.

**Teachers:** The teachers in this library reflect the diversity of their profession. Both male and female, they come from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Some are just beginning their careers; three are in their second or third year of teaching. Others have 20 to 27 years experience. All of them believe that every student is capable of learning and that it is their job to help learning happen.

**Grades and Subject:** All the teachers in this library teach language arts in grades 3–5.

**Students:** While some of the students portrayed in these classrooms come from comfortable economic backgrounds, a number qualify for free or reduced-price lunch; some children of migrant workers in Georgia may spend only a few months in any school before their parents leave the area to follow employment opportunities elsewhere. Students in these classes come with a wide range of ability levels and experience with school literacies. As is perhaps typical of the nation as a whole, most of the schools work with students from diverse ethnic, cultural, and even language backgrounds.

# About This Video Clip

---

*"In envisionment-building classrooms, students' ideas are right in the center of the discussion, so the role of the teacher is to help students find new and more complex ways to grapple with both the content and the ways of thinking about the content."*

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

Welcome to *Engaging With Literature: A Video Library, Grades 3–5*! Produced by Maryland Public Television with funding provided by Annenberg/CPB, this nine-part video library is designed to help language arts teachers in grades 3–5 enhance the literary experiences of their students. This series overview introduces Dr. Judith Langer's theory of literary envisionment and envisionment-building classrooms and invites us into real classrooms of real teachers to see how this theory plays out in practice with real students.

Like all good pedagogical theories, Dr. Langer's theory of envisionment building is philosophically concrete, yet allows for a widely diverse range of classroom practices. Grounded in key understandings about human beings as learners and as makers of meaning, the basic tenets of envisionment theory could productively underpin literature instruction in any classroom at any grade level.

Dr. Langer identifies four central characteristics of the envisionment-building classroom:

- **Students are treated as life-long envisionment builders.** Both teachers and students assume that students have been making sense all their lives. They have been hearing stories and creating stories. They have been building envisionments—worlds of images, questions, disagreements, anticipations, arguments, and hunches that fill the mind during every reading, writing, speaking, or listening experience—and they know how to create understandings. They know how to respond to pieces that they have heard, read, or seen. And their ideas are at the center of the envisionment-building classroom.
- **Questions are at the center of the literary experience.** These are real questions about things that people really want explained or want to know more about, encountered as they immerse themselves in a text. While some of these questions may come from the teacher, many of them come from the students themselves as they expand their understandings of the literature. Teachers and students in envisionment-building classrooms know that making sense in literature involves asking questions.
- **Students are expected to develop and expand their understandings.** Teachers and students assume that students come to class with understandings and interpretations based on the readings they did individually, but that these will not be final. Rather, these interpretations will be the beginning of provocative discussion that helps everybody develop richer and more complex understandings.
- **Students and teachers assume that multiple perspectives are useful.** Envisionment-building classrooms encourage different points of view because multiple perspectives enhance interpretation. They lead to the development of more complex understandings of the text than any one individual is likely to reach alone. In the envisionment-building classroom, respectful conversation is a tool for exploring and testing these multiple points of view. It is understood that it is not always possible to reach a complete consensus about a literary work, although the group will probably agree on a number of shared points. This is quite different from the literature classroom in which a push for consensus is the norm, and one "best" interpretation is valued above all others.

Dr. Langer developed her understandings of envisionment building and how it might play out in literature classrooms through years of research during which she and her colleagues looked at how good readers—including adults—grappled with, and made sense of, literary texts. In addition, the researchers went into the classrooms of teachers around the United States—in urban, suburban, and rural schools—and tried to identify common characteristics of effective instruction. What they learned is distilled into the four tenets of envisionment-building theory listed above.

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 used to organize these classroom experiences, as well as other related resources such as a Lesson Builder and Lesson Builder Template. These may be useful as you incorporate envisionment building into your curriculum.

# About This Video Clip, cont'd.

---

## Featured Texts

The classrooms shown in this clip—and throughout this video library—use a number of different texts. Those listed below are mentioned in this video. The remaining videos in this library may feature additional texts. Refer to the appropriate sections of this guide for additional information about the texts used in each classroom.

Often the students in these classes are asked to make their own reading selections. They may be given complete free choice as in Ms. Teklu's class, or they may choose from a selected list as portrayed in Mr. Hoonan's, Mr. Thompson's, and Ms. Rowley's classes. When choosing or recommending books for students, all the teachers profiled here seek titles that will engage students and challenge them in some way to think about their own lives and about the world they live in.

*Sounder* by William Howard Armstrong

This Newbery Award-winning novel portrays the lives of a family of poor southern sharecroppers. To feed his family, the father resorts to stealing food and is hauled off to jail for stealing a hog. During his capture, Sounder, a coon dog that the man has raised since he was a pup, is shot and disappears, reappearing later tattered and emaciated. The son is forced to take on a man's work to help support the family. He searches for his father who has been sent to do hard labor, eventually finding him. After being maimed in an accident, the father eventually returns before he dies.

*The Breadwinner* by Deborah Ellis

Set in the early years of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, this novel tells the story of 11-year-old Parvana who has rarely been outdoors since the Taliban gained power in her country. Barred from attending school, shopping at the market, or even playing in the streets of Kabul, Parvana is trapped inside her family's one-room home. After the Taliban arrests her father and takes him to prison because he is a scholar, Parvana realizes that with her older brother dead, she has to become the "breadwinner," supporting her mother, two sisters, and baby brother. She disguises herself as a boy and earns money by providing a reading service for illiterates.

*Just Juice* by Karen Hesse

School lessons are a mystery to nine-year-old Juice, who simply cannot manage to understand numbers, letters, and reading, although she likes to explore and learn and has a talent as an apprentice metalworker in her Pa's makeshift shop. In spite of her family's persuasions, Juice avoids school as often as possible, choosing instead to work with her father who has been laid off from his work at the mine. Pa keeps it a secret that he can't read either, and because he can't deal with the official papers regarding past-due taxes, the family could lose their house. When her diabetic mother gives birth, Juice is the only one home. She forces herself to read the sugar monitor, does so properly, and saves her mother's life.

"As I Grew Older" by Langston Hughes

In this frequently anthologized poem by Langston Hughes, the speaker talks about how he lost the dreams of his youth and appeals to his hands to break through the darkness and smash the night so he can recover the power of that dream.

*Cold and Hot Winter* by Joanna Hurwitz

In this sequel to *The Hot and Cold Summer*, best friends Derek, Rory, and Bolivia are reunited during Bolivia's week-long visit to her great-aunt and great-uncle over the Christmas school break. The three fifth-graders play games, ice-skate, and build snow people (which they move from one house to the other in the dead of night). Things begin to disappear—Bolivia's new Swiss army knife, Derek's hamster and the money from his bank—and their friendship is tested by mistrust, especially when Derek's suspicions of Rory's dishonesty threaten to tear the trio apart.

# About This Video Clip, cont'd.

---

*The Color of My Words* by Lynn Joseph

Twelve-year-old Ana Rosa Hernández wants to be a writer so much that when she has no paper she takes her brother's notebook and fills it with her words. From a lofty perch high in her gri gri tree, she looks over her small seaside village in the Dominican Republic, oblivious at first to the developing political turmoil of her island nation. First she must confront more personal issues—her parentage and what it means to be part of a family and a community. Gradually she comes to understand the power of her words in a country where words are often feared. When the government tries to steal the villagers' land, Ana Rosa's writing is what enables her to transcend the tragedy of her beloved brother's murder.

*Rascal* by Sterling North

Set in a small Wisconsin town during World War I, this Newbery Honor Book presents a first-person account of North's boyhood and his relationship with a raccoon he discovered as an abandoned kit. For a year Rascal and North's good-natured St. Bernard, Wowser, bounce from one adventure to the next. Trouble with neighbors over the raccoon's antics forces a reluctant North to cage him. When the raccoon reaches adulthood and is able to fend for itself, North sends him safely back into the wild.

*A Family Apart* by Joan Lowery Nixon

Based on the true history of the Orphan Trains (which ran between 1854 and 1929 and transported 100,000 children to the west for resettlement and adoption) this book follows Frances May Kelly as she and her five brothers and sisters are sent west to new homes. Recently widowed, their Irish immigrant mother tried to support her children by working nights cleaning in an office building. When her older son Mike is arrested for stealing, the mother realizes she can no longer keep her children safe and decides to send them away. Frances cuts her hair and dresses as a boy in order to protect her younger siblings and enhance her chances of adoption. She anguishes as her brothers and sisters are sent to different homes but settles in under the care of Jake and Margaret Cummings. Accidentally she discovers two runaway slaves hiding in the barn and realizes that her new home is a link on the Underground Railroad. Eventually it is up to her to enable their escape to the next way station.

*Maniac Magee* by Jerry Spinelli

Jeffrey Magee's parents are killed in a trolley accident when he is three, and he is sent to live with his Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan. His aunt and uncle won't speak to one another, using Jeffrey as their go-between. After eight years, Jeffrey has had enough. He screams "Talk to each other!" and runs away—literally. He runs, searching for a real home, eventually ending up 200 miles away in the town of Two Mills, a community divided by race into an East and a West End. Jeffrey becomes "Maniac Magee," a legend in the town—a boy who can outrun dogs, hit a homerun off the best pitcher in the neighborhood, and untie the knot no one else can undo. In his search for a place to belong, he begins to unite the town by forcing at least some of the Blacks and Whites to know each other.

*Dangerous Skies* by Suzanne Fisher Staples

Growing up together, Buck Smith and Tunes Smith's families share generations of connected history on Virginia's eastern shore. However, their youthful companionship changes when Buck, the son of the white farm owner, and Tunes, African American daughter of Kneebone Smith, find the floating body of a migrant worker. Twelve-year-old Buck is horrified when Tunes becomes a suspect. Sure that the real killer is prosperous, respected Jumbo Rawlins, Buck urges Tunes to tell her side of the story. Instead, Tunes disappears. Buck finds her and is horrified to learn that Rawlins has been abusing her physically and sexually. Although Tunes doesn't think her word will be believed against that of a prosperous white man, Buck's naïve belief in justice persuades her to come out of hiding. As predicted, she's arrested and tried while Rawlins remains untouched. Though not convicted, Tunes moves away and drops out of Buck's life forever.

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 texts. Go to Additional Resources for this program.

# About This Video Clip, cont'd.

---

## Learning Objectives

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

- List and explain the four characteristics of an environment-building classroom.
- Examine your own classroom practices to see how they are different from and similar to those where environment building is practiced and celebrated.
- Create a list of goals you would implement to introduce some of the principles illustrated here into your own classroom.

# Viewing Suggestions

---

## Who Should Watch This Video

**Teachers and teacher educators** can use this video as a professional or preservice education tool to introduce the principles of an envisionment-building classroom. The program enables viewers to see the roles played by students and teachers in such classrooms. Viewers might connect what they see with the four key tenets of envisionment building: 1) students are life-long envisionment builders whose ideas are at the center of the classroom; 2) questions are essential to envisionment building; 3) students come to class after reading equipped with understandings about the literature. It is assumed that they will develop those understandings during class discussions; and 4) multiple interpretations of literary texts are to be expected and are helpful, both to the individual and to the class as a whole.

The video might also assist teachers who reach out to families in the school community at PTA meetings or back-to-school events. In these settings, the video can be a vehicle for demonstrating how an envisionment-building classroom might look.

**Curriculum planners** can use this clip as a way of inspiring discussion about ways in which literature might figure in the language arts curriculum and how it can be integrated with instruction in writing, speaking, and listening.

**Administrators** can use this clip to offer teachers, parents, and other administrators a vision of literature classrooms that encourage authentic engagement with texts while supporting the development of interpretive and thinking skills.

## Before Watching

Before viewing this program, consider the following:

- Why is literature important in students' lives?
- How can teachers use instruction to help students appreciate the value literature brings to their lives?
- How does talking about literature help readers appreciate it more fully?

## Discussion Questions

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

- How do the teachers in this video encourage student discussion of their reading?
- As viewers, what evidence did you find that these are envisionment-building classrooms? Give specific examples.
- What ideas did you glean from the video that you would like to try in your classroom?
- What questions do you have about envisionment-building classrooms?

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

- How might your child respond to literature discussions such as those portrayed on this video?
- Did any of the student comments or responses surprise or intrigue you? Give examples.
- How can talking about literature in these ways help students learn?
- How can you support this approach to literature instruction at home?

# Viewing Suggestions, cont'd.

---

## **Curriculum planners can discuss:**

- How does Dr. Langer's theory of envisionment building fit into your existing curriculum?
- What additions or changes might you have to make to develop a curriculum supportive of envisionment building?

## **Administrators can discuss:**

- How can physical issues (classroom size and configuration, teacher/student ratio, external distractions, etc.) enable or prevent teachers from encouraging envisionment building in their classrooms?
- Do teachers have appropriate resources (book sets, for example) to enable them to develop envisionment-building literature instruction?
- How can this video library help your teachers develop envisionment-building instruction?
- What other professional development resources are available (or might be made available) for teachers who wish to develop envisionment-building instruction?

## **Suggested Activities**

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

- Make a list of activities you might use with your students to support their developing envisionments of literary texts.
- Make a list of texts, authors, or topics around which you might develop envisionment-building experiences for your students.
- Discuss or write in your journal: How might what you see in this video library be integrated into your existing curriculum?

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

- Make a list of ways you can help families support their children's 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.
- Brainstorm or list: What might you do to help parents understand and support envisionment-building instruction?
- Consider videotaping your students talking about literature and using it as a springboard for discussions with parents.

### **For administrators:**

- Share this video with language arts teachers in your school. Discuss the value of envisionment-building literature instruction. Ask teachers to consider ways in which these classrooms succeed and to suggest ways in which they might be strengthened. Provide time for teachers to discuss their observations.

# Additional Resources

---

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:

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 1-57110-49-0.

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.

Busching, Beverly A. and Betty Ann Slesinger. "Authentic Questions: What Do They Look Like? Where Do They Lead?" *Language Arts* (September, 1995): 341–343.

Commeyras, Michelle 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, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers, 2002. ISBN 1-57110-333-3.

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.

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

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

Langer, Judith A. "Discussion as Exploration: Literature and the Horizon of Possibilities." *Exploring Texts: The Role of Discussion and Writing in the Teaching and Learning of Literature*. Ed. George E. Newell and Russel K. Durst. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 1993: 23–43. ISBN 0-926842-24-2.

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.

Langer, Judith A. "A Response-Based Approach to Reading Literature." *Language Arts* 71 (1994): 203–211.

McMahon, Susan I. and Taffy E. Raphael with Virginia J. Goatley and Laura S. Prado. *The Book Club Connection: Literacy Learning and Classroom Talk*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1997. ISBN 0-807736-14-7.

Mills, Heidi and Amy Donnelly. *From the Ground Up: Creating a Culture of Inquiry*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001. ISBN 0-325-0026-73.

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, Kathlerine 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.



# Additional Resources, cont'd.

---

Raphael, Taffy E., Susan Florio-Ruane, and MariAnne George. "Book Club *Plus*: A Conceptual Framework To Organize Literacy Instruction." *Language Arts* 79 (2001): 159–168. (Note: for the full text of this article, visit the *Engaging With Literature: A Video Library, Grades 3–5* Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature). Go to Teacher Tools for Video Clip 5.)

Short, Kathy G. and Jerome C. Harste with Carolyn Burke. *Creating Classrooms for Authors and Inquirers*. 2nd ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996. ISBN 0-435-08850-5.

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.

Trelease, Jim. *The Read-Aloud Handbook*. New York: Penguin Books, 1995. ISBN 0-1404-6971-0.

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

---