

# Video Clip 2

## Voices in the Conversation

Length:	18:55
School:	Pleasant Hill Elementary School
Location:	Austin, Texas
No. of Students in School:	519
Teacher:	Katherine Bomer
No. of Years Teaching:	7
Grade:	Fifth
No. of Students in the Classroom:	19

# About This Video Clip

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*"The read-aloud in my classroom is the spiritual center of the day. It's a time when we have cried together. It's a time when we have laughed together. It's a time when kids have said, 'This is how life is for me.'...And to me those moments where one child says, 'I had no idea about what you're going through,' that's what education is all about...."*

—Katherine Bomer, Fifth-Grade Teacher, Pleasant Hill Elementary School, Austin, Texas

This video presents a close-up of Katherine Bomer using the daily read-aloud to help students learn how to think and talk about literature. Because this experience is central to Ms. Bomer's teaching, her approach is patient. She is careful to allow students time to experience the literature and tease out the meanings it has for them. The reading is unhurried and the conversation around the reading is thoughtful and respectful with students making direct connections to, and building on, comments classmates made earlier.

As you watch, pay particular attention to the ways in which Ms. Bomer models, encourages, and supports genuine conversation. She has taught students to use some explicit methods for effective conversation such as naming the person they are responding to and explaining what they are thinking in response. Additionally, her use of informal response writing to prepare for meetings between Conversation Partners encourages rich, thoughtful talk. She encourages her students' learning by explicitly celebrating what she observes them doing well, and, in so doing, gives them the confidence to continue to grow as envisionment-building readers.

The interactions between teacher and students reflect an interesting balance as well. Clearly Ms. Bomer is "in charge" and directing instruction. At same time, she is genuinely receptive to learning from her fifth graders, asking for help with the pronunciation of a Spanish word from one youngster and enlarging her understandings of the text from the observations of others.

Additional core components of Ms. Bomer's literature program (not portrayed on this video) are independent reading and Reading Clubs. Students are asked to read for 35 minutes a night and may choose whatever they wish to read for this independent reading. Ms. Bomer notes that at the beginning of the year, her students choose a lot of comic books to read during this time, but by the end of the school year, they progress to reading more appropriate texts.

On a typical day, read-aloud time is followed by Reading Club meetings where students meet in groups of five or six to discuss one of five novels from which they could choose. It is expected that they will apply the interpretive and conversational strategies demonstrated and learned during read-aloud time in these small groups as well. Formal evaluation is typically based on their work in these groups.

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 Katherine Bomer used to organize this classroom experience, as well as other related resources.

## Featured Texts

*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.

# About This Video Clip, cont'd.

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*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.

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.

## Learning Objectives

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

- Describe two ways in which students in the video were encouraged to participate in class discussion.
- Relate two observed benefits of using read-alouds to encourage class discussion.

# Viewing Suggestions

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## Who Should Watch This Video

**Teachers and teacher educators** can use it as a professional and preservice education tool that shows how one teacher centers much of her literature instruction around daily reads-alouds and the conversations surrounding them. Viewers might be especially interested to observe some ways in which teachers can model, encourage, and support genuine, thoughtful conversations about literary texts.

**Curriculum planners** can use this video as a starting point for considering what students need to know in order to participate in genuine, thoughtful conversations about literature, and how these skills might be taught. Curriculum planners might wish to develop a series of mini-lessons to help students expand their repertoire of conversational strategies.

**Administrators** can use this video to create a vision of the kinds of engagement students are capable of during discussion. Additionally, they might use it to spark a discussion of the feasibility of supporting literature and more thoughtful conversations in their schools.

## Before Watching

Before viewing this program, consider the following:

- What makes a "good" conversation good?
- Why is conversation an important part of reading aloud?
- How can students be taught to be good conversationalists?
- What is the value of reading aloud to students?

## Discussion Questions

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

- What are the benefits of reading aloud to students in the way portrayed in this video?
- What particular strategies did Ms. Bomer use to enhance the effectiveness of this read-aloud time for her students?
- What was the value of the conversation surrounding the literature for the students? For those who participated? For those who listened?
- What ideas from the video would you like to try in your classroom?
- What questions do you have about Ms. Bomer'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 ways in which the teacher encouraged conversation about the reading?
- How would your child respond to literary conversations such as the one shown in this video?
- Was there anything about the discussion that surprised or intrigued you? Explain.
- How can conversations such as these help students learn literacy—to read, write, and converse effectively?

# Viewing Suggestions, cont'd.

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## **Curriculum planners can discuss:**

- What is the value of informal response writing used to prepare for conversation? How might such writing be taught?
- What key strategies enable successful conversations? How might they be taught?
- Do the texts you offer provide rich content to support genuine conversations?

## **Administrators can discuss:**

- Do teachers have appropriate settings to encourage groups gathering for informal conversations such as the one shown in this video?
- How can physical issues (classroom size and configuration, teacher/student ratio, external distractions, number and types of books available to teachers, etc.) enable or prevent teachers from facilitating effective conversations?

## **Suggested Activities**

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

- Make a list of strategies you might teach students to help them become effective participants in literary conversations.
- Think about your classroom. Is its arrangement conducive to holding informal conversations? If not, what changes might you make to encourage such conversations?
- What are some books that you have found to be especially effective when read aloud to your students? Share their titles with your colleagues.

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

- Brainstorm or list: How can you help families teach their children to be effective participants in a conversation?
- Make a list of ways in which you might encourage families to read aloud to their children. Consider email messages, notes home, or a brief newsletter as possibilities.
- Video your students' literary conversations and use the video to center discussion at parent meetings.
- Invite family members into your classroom to observe a literary conversation.

### **For administrators:**

- Share this video with language arts teachers in your school. Discuss the value of conversational engagement around literary texts. 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 encouraging literature conversations.

# 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.

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.

Bomer, Randy and Katherine Bomer. *For a Better World: Reading and Writing for Social Action*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001. ISBN 0-325-0026-30.

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.

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.

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

Langer, Judith A. *Envisioning Literature*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1995. ISBN 0-8077-3463-0.

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: Literature Groups in Action*. New York: Scholastic, 1990.

Rief, Linda. *Vision and Voice: Extending the Literacy Spectrum*. Portsmouth, NH, 1998. ISBN 0-3250-0097-2.

Samway, Katharine Davies and Gail Whang. *Literature Study Circles in a Multicultural Classroom*. York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 1996. ISBN 157-110-018-0.

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.

Valenzuela, Angela. *Subtractive Schooling: U.S. Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999. ISBN 07-9144-322-1.

Whitin, Phyllis. *Sketching Stories, Stretching Minds: Responding Visually to Literature*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996. ISBN 0-435-08879-X.

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.