

Developing Envisionments With Students

Envisionment-building classrooms depend on student questions—authentic questions about the real issues raised by their reading. Those questions become the center of discussions, which help students—individually and as a group—develop their understandings of the literature, and of the world in which they live.

However, many students are afraid of asking questions. Because questions reveal what they don't know or don't understand, students worry that they will look foolish or unprepared if they ask questions. Indeed, in some classrooms, questions are traps. Not having the right answer means nothing but trouble! If students are question-adverse, teachers may have to help them learn to value—and use—questions.

One way is to help students become aware of how they develop their understandings of the literature. As they develop a conscious recognition of how their perceptions of a literary piece change, develop, and grow throughout their reading and during discussion, they will begin to recognize the role questions have in that process.

Teachers can help students become aware of their developing envisionments by asking questions such as the following:

- What do you know now that you didn't know before?
- What do you think will happen (next..? because of...? to...?) ...?
- Now that we've talked a bit, how has your thinking changed? What made it change? Why has it stayed the same?
- When you first read the title of this piece, what did you think it would be about? Were you right? How did the title help you understand how to begin? (Or how did it get in the way of your initial understandings?)