

## **Novel Approach: Dealing with “Making Choices” for At-Risk Readers**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

*The more you read, the better you get at it; the better you get at it, the more you like it; and the more you like it, the more you do it. The more you read, the more you know; and the more you know, the smarter you grow. – Jim Trelease*

Getting our students to read, read more, and enjoy reading so they do more of it is one of my primary objectives as a classroom reading teacher. Jim Trelease is one of many people who have recognized that, by nature, people are pleasure oriented and tend to engage in activities that they find enjoyable. For all the students in my classes who do not get pleasure from reading, I have to ask myself what is it, then, that they find pleasure in doing?

For some students it is a matter of their time allocation outside of class leaning less toward reading, and more toward “other” activities such as playing video games, being with friends and hanging out, and talking on the telephone. Without question, today’s youth present additional challenges in the classroom that are beyond any of their glaring reading deficiencies that we may identify as teachers. Our teenagers face many non-academic “choices” on a daily basis; time allocation is only one area of choice. Far too often young people make choices without thinking about the serious consequences that come with those choices. The fact that juvenile crime, teenage pregnancy, gang involvement, suicide, and substance abuse still affect many young people can only mean that there are a number of students making harmful choices. The seriousness of poor choices being made by our youth becomes apparent when one looks at data regarding juvenile crime. The “Children at Risk” web site reveals that Harris County had 34,692 juvenile referrals in 1997, which included some juvenile repeaters. Comparing the juvenile referrals to the actual juvenile population shows that in 1996, three percent of the youth population in Harris County had some dealings with our juvenile system. I can only imagine that if the data were available for more current years, the results would be even more alarming.

As if dealing with those harmful choices mentioned earlier isn’t enough, teachers also have to keep an eye open for bullying and harassment so that inappropriate behavior can be stopped as early on as possible. It is only when our students feel safe and secure from persecution by their peers that we will have an environment conducive to learning, and can then begin our job of teaching.

I believe that my primary goal of strengthening students’ reading skills so they can extract meaning from their reading, while at the same time helping them gain pleasure from reading, will hopefully lead to them read more. I further believe this goal can be achieved while impacting my students’ choice-making skills by selecting materials through which character behavior and actions can be discussed and applied to real life situations.

Although I teach in the Houston Independent School District (which is the largest school district in Texas and the seventh largest in the United States), teachers outside our district can still use this unit with other at-risk students. Like other districts we are experiencing a growing Hispanic population, which presents an additional challenge in the classroom. According to national census data, Hispanic students' high school completion rates have been lower than those of Anglo and African Americans for the past 28 years! Though we strive to make improvements in education and incorporate more technology in the classrooms, we still have quite a way to go to meet the needs of our Hispanic population if we hope to see more Hispanic students graduate. Changing the trend will be no easy task, especially when you consider the fact that the year 2000 Hispanic completion rates were even lower than the 1997 rates. Just thinking about how the Hispanic population is experiencing growth simultaneously with declines in graduating makes me wonder about some of the choices these students are making and if their choice-making skills can be redirected to produce more positive outcomes for them in their academic and personal lives. Since 1990 my school district's student Hispanic population has surpassed all other student ethnic groups, and in 2003 the Hispanic student population reached 120,000. As an educator it is imperative that I take these factors into consideration when developing an effective unit.

To create an effective and meaningful unit for the diverse student populations I encounter, I made sure I take into account my students' backgrounds, and I also took into consideration my students' reading deficiencies to ensure that I included activities that would help strengthen their reading skills by drawing upon my own personal experiences as well as my educational and professional training.

Memories of my own reading experiences mirror those of my current students. One word—**STRUGGLE**—best describes the reading experiences I recall. That one single word also describes many of my students and their attempts at reading. To really struggle to read is a devastating problem that affects all educational success. Like so many of my students, at one time I was the type of reader that would complete the reading assignment, yet when I reached the last page, I had no idea what I had just read. I was unable to recall what I read, let alone retell it to someone, even after multiple re-readings. Needless to say, answering questions about the selection I had read was an act of random guessing.

Because of my struggle with reading, *reading for pleasure* was not a thought that entered my mind for many years. I was the type of reader who would read only if it was mandatory, assigned reading with a grade attached. Visiting the school library only occurred for me when the entire class visited. When I selected a book, it usually would be the one with the fewest pages.

As I glance around my class, I see myself in so many of my own students, but instead of feeling hopelessness for them, I am determined to help them evolve into competent readers like I have become. An assortment of books helped turn a reluctant reader like me into a reader. Books that I could relate to, connect with, escape through, dream with, learn from, and discover through, are what made all the difference to me and are what I want to pass on to my students.

My goal for this semester unit is to provide my inner city at-risk reluctant readers with opportunities to make connections with young adult literature that is interesting and relevant to them by presenting pieces of printed material that reveal situations where characters' choices can be discussed and applied to real life situations. During the course of my unit, I plan to use reader response journals, discussions, debates, and role-playing, coupled with specific reading strategies to strengthen reading skills. The grand finale project is a compiled collection of selected student work that will hopefully reflect the effectiveness of the unit. With this unit, I intend to empower my students as readers and as choice makers.

## **RESEARCH SUPPORT FOR THE UNIT**

The reasoning behind my choice-making unit is based on the training and experience I have gained from eleven years of observing and instructing inner-city students in a reading classroom environment. However, the works of others in the field of reading and young adult literature also support my reasoning. The behavior altering effect that books can have is reflected in Hazel Rochman's comment that "[b]ooks can make a difference in dispelling prejudice and building community" (*Against Borders* 1993). I am hopeful that if we can help our students learn to accept others and build a sense of community, then any deliberate harm to others inflicted by words or actions is less likely to happen. In the February 2003 issue of the *School Library Journal*, Lee Bock stated that "children develop moral and ethical perspectives and values from books they read or that are read to them" (95). If, as a reading teacher, I can maneuver my students down a path that helps them develop moral and ethical notions in conjunction with reading instruction, they should become stronger readers and more empowered choice-making adolescents. My role in the classroom is primarily to act as a facilitator and to guide students so that they are able to **think** about what they are reading and use metacognition skills to examine how they derive meaning. By valuing students' thinking and rather than telling them what to think, I am more apt to create readers and rely on their own thinking.

The philosophy that directs the manner in which novels are used in my classroom mirrors that used by other advocates of reader response. Robert Probst, in his book *Response and Analysis Teaching Literature in Junior and Senior High School*, states, "Literature should strike a responsive chord." Probst continues by saying, "Preoccupation with self should make adolescents uniquely receptive to literature for literature invites their participation and judgment" (5). Similar to leading researcher Rosenblatt, Probst mentions the importance of the personal experience the reader has with the text by saying, "The ink on the paper is nothing until a reader picks up the page, reads and responds to it, and thereby transforms it into an event" (7).

Response journals will be used throughout my unit following each reading session. Students will date each entry and note the pages read for that particular session. Prior to discussions or activities, students will make entries in what I call a *Sketch & Reflect* journal. These journals will provide a medium through which students can digest the material they read, make note of any questions, record reactions, recall details, make comments on the reading and then sketch a picture that has some relevance to the reading just completed. The response journals will also periodically be used with response prompts that probe their thinking. In his book, mentioned earlier, Probst

categorized responses into four groups: Personal, Topical, Interpretive and Formal. With Personal entries students can connect their background and experiences and respond to the reading on a more personal, intimate level. Topical entries for my unit will consist of prompts that encourage them to think about choice-making issues that surface in the reading. Though Probst states that with topical entries “the teacher is likely to have little problem getting the students to speak out,” I plan to have students make a notation in the journal prior to discussion so that they can give some consideration to their thoughts prior to communicating them verbally (58). Interpretive entries can help students make judgments on the reading and consider different viewpoints that are demonstrated in the text. Interpreting the authors’ meanings will definitely come into play with the open endings that occur in *Monster* and *The Giver*. The fourth category Probst identifies is the Formal, wherein students focus on how the author achieves certain effects. For example, by referring back to the text, students should notice the lack of color in the earlier descriptions used in *The Giver*; the use of flashbacks in *Holes*, which helps describe three different settings; and the use of hand written journal entries and scripted court proceedings in *Monster*.

Though my unit consists of three novels, which will be read by the entire class students will also be reading texts that they personally choose from the school library. Their selections will be linked to our theme of “Making Choices.” Students will maintain a reading log for each of their self-selected books so that I can intercede if a student is getting behind or is confused with the reading. The first book selected will be fiction, while the second book will be a biography. Both genres relate to our theme of choices. Following the reading, students will create a flier advertising the book that captures the attention of potential future readers. Students will make copies of their fliers to distribute in class prior to their presentations. In addition to the flyers, there is a story box project for the fiction book and a bio-bag project for the biography. Details for both projects are included with this unit.

## THE UNIT'S NOVEL COMPONENTS

*Novel Approach: Dealing with "Making Choices" for At-Risk Readers* is a semester unit geared toward at-risk readers on the eighth grade level, but it can be adjusted to meet the needs of upper middle school to beginning high school grade levels. This unit is comprised of young adult books that are relevant and reflect problems many of these students deal with in their personal lives as well as situations that some will have to deal with in the future. Though this unit primarily focuses on three novels, it also utilizes oral readings of excerpts from different sources. Three novels, *Holes*, *Monster*, and *The Giver*, will each be read in three-week periods and presented in the sequential order listed. The poetry and short stories pieces that are included are thematically connected with choice-making situations where choice-making skills can be addressed.

I decided to start the unit with *Holes*, by Louis Sachar, because the novel's short chapters lend themselves to oral readings, while the other two novels are more serious in tone and complexity. By beginning the unit with this high-interest novel, students can apply reading strategies that strengthen their visualization and prediction skills. The scenes that are revealed while Stanley is digging holes are ideal for discussing the writer's use of flashbacks, and for identifying multiple settings. Stanley Yelnats is a character to whom students can easily relate and with whom they can empathize. The way Stanley is treated at school mirrors the experiences of real life bullied victims and leads the way for a discussion of harassment the responsibilities of those who witness such behavior. The choice between participating, witnessing yet doing nothing, intervening, and reporting the problem can be examined before exploring the victim's options for ending the torment.

Since many students either have first-hand knowledge or have heard about boot camps, this novel will pique the interest of my students, allowing them to easily relate to Stanley being sent to a boot camp. Students will also be able to make judgments about the conditions at Camp Green Lake and the treatment of the campers. Early on in the story, readers are led to believe that the campers are digging holes to build character. Initially Mr. Pendanski, a counselor at Camp Green Lake, comes across as a caring person who is trying to turn the campers' lives around. You can't help liking Pendanski when he says "I understand you've made some bad mistakes in your life. Otherwise you wouldn't be here. But everyone makes mistakes. You may have done some bad things but that doesn't mean you're a bad kid" (17). Discussing how boot camps attempt to turn around someone's mistakes will encourage students to recall details of the story that demonstrate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of Camp Green Lake. Mr. Pendanski's words, on the surface, give the impression that this boot camp might have a goal beyond digging holes, as shown in the following two quotations:

We're not going to be at Camp Green Lake forever. We need to prepare for the day we leave here and join the rest of society. (56)

I'm not saying it's going to be easy. Nothing in life is easy. But that's no reason to believe to give up. You'd be surprised what you can accomplish if you set your mind to it. After all you only have one life, so you should try to make the most of it. (57)

Further into the story it seems that Mr. Pendanski goes out of character and changes into a cruel person with words, as shown with these quotations:

You might as well try to teach this shovel to read! It's got more brains than Zero. (137)

He's a genius, all right...He's so stupid, he doesn't even know how stupid he is. (138)

At this point, readers are quick to cheer Zero when he acts impulsively, striking Mr. Pendanski with a shovel and then fleeing camp in a stolen water truck. Zero's action may seem justified to some readers, but this clearly is not an act of self-defense but rather assault and theft. At this point a discussion and analysis of choice making is warranted; coping skills can be applied to real life situations in which words may provoke a negative reaction that may have serious consequences.

Through Stanley my students can entertain the notion of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Students can then debate, discuss and examine situations where "choice" may actually have more to do with placing someone in the wrong place more so than random acts of events happening. By referring back to Stanley's string of events, other possible options for Stanley can be proposed. For example, though Stanley appears to be telling the judge the truth when he says the shoes fell from the sky, he is not actually telling the *entire* truth, which should have included the fact that he was walking home when the shoes fell on him from an overpass. Another choice issue for discussion is Stanley's choice of doing nothing about being bullied. For the many students who wouldn't want to snitch or tattle, it helps to have them propose other nonviolent options for Stanley and project likely outcomes to compare with the choice not to act that Stanley made. Though presented lightheartedly, *Holes* provides students with an opportunity to ponder the notion of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, the idea that telling the truth does not always prove one's innocence, the fact that more poor kids are sent to boot camps than wealthier kids, the idea that when larger kids are picked on by smaller kids they are not taken serious, and the concept of blaming others for what happens.

Like a beautifully woven basket, events in the novel are woven together by the end of the story. The stories within the story are linked together with happiness abounding for the good guys: Stanley (makes a friend, gains the respect of his idol, is found innocent and is freed at last), Stanley's family (Dad is a successful inventor, and money abounds), and Zero (is freed, will never be homeless again, and locates his mother). The fairy tale type ending leaves the reader feeling good, restores his/her faith that good wins in the end, and suggests that all dreams can be achieved. By having students explore other "what if" scenarios as possible outcomes, their own coping skills for less than perfect situations are sharpened for some of the curve balls life sometimes tosses out to them. The fairy tale like ending can also be used to create or introduce, review and rewrite some actual fairy tales.

Guiding students to focus on what has occurred during each class reading of *Holes* through journal writing, journal sketches, and class discussions will strengthen many students' abilities to make reasonable predictions about what will happen next. Students' visualization skills might be

more easily recognizable when they express their understanding through sketches and drawings following the readings. My students' comprehension should increase once they are able to visualize a picture of what was created by the printed words. Those students who happen to be poor writers should also be less hesitant to communicate their understanding using illustrations. Students use verbal and presentation skills in lively discussions, scene reenactments, and role-playing, which are additional activities linked to the readings.

By following this novel *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers, I will bring my students to the next level of my unit, which focuses on a more realistic situation where choices can indeed have serious consequences. *Monster* is a story about a young man facing a felony murder trial due to a robbery that resulted in a murder. Though Steve Harmon, the main character, wasn't involved in the actual shooting death of the drug store owner whose store was robbed, Steve was the one who entered the store first and checked it out before the robbery went down. The owner of the store is shot with his own gun during a struggle with the robbers, and is killed. Two of the robbers could get the death penalty; Steve, on the other hand, faces a possible life sentence for his role in the crime.

The novel *Monster* is a story portrayed with an eerie reality of what it is like to be in jail, the hardships placed on one's family, and the judicial system in action. Many of my students have had someone they know in jail, but unlike what they may have been led to believe, being in jail is far from being "cool." This book paints a more realistic picture of what it is like to be behind bars. I am confident that many of my students will benefit from the reality portrayed on these 281 pages, and even if only one student is deterred from a life of crime due to this book, that will be an added bonus.

The story begins with a glimpse into the harsh reality of being incarcerated. Reality starts with Steve Harmon informing the reader that when the lights go out people get beat up, and that going to the bathroom is done in front of strangers. Those in jail are scared; they cry when the lights go out hoping no one hears their cries but yet present themselves as confident tough guys in front of others. In his first journal entry, Steve writes about the fights and the blood and mentions that though they are all strangers, "they still find reasons to hurt each other" (3). Even though Steve has seen movies of life about prison, he is quick to write that nothing he ever saw is like the prison he is living in and that he is scared "all the time" (4). With *Monster*, Walter Dean Myers wrote a phenomenally realistic story on a serious matter, and did so without resorting to having characters use vulgar language or display obscene behaviors.

*Monster* is relayed like a movie unfolding before readers' eyes. Chances are pretty good that most students have seen more movies than they have read books, and into our classrooms they bring some of their movie background knowledge. This novel is written in a unique style: some of it is told using journal entries, while the murder trial parts are written like a movie script written, produced and directed by Steve Harmon. Camera-shots are done with fade-ins, fade-outs, and cuts. The judge, attorneys, and witnesses have their actual words told in script format, while background information such as appearances and movements are written apart from dialogue, similar to what is done with a movie script.

Prior to reading the novel, some basic legal terminology will be introduced to ensure that students know which characters the prosecutor and defense represent as well as what constitutes a felony and possible sentences. A bulletin board will be divided, displaying the characters and their roles on one half and newspaper clippings of current juvenile cases on the other. The classroom will be set up like a courtroom to the extent possible, and roles will be assigned for each part, including camera directions and voice-over parts. Journal entries will be read with Steve Harmon stepping away from the courtroom and entering a mock cell area.

Following the reading of the novel, students will be divided into two groups that will present arguments rejecting and supporting the jury's verdict. *Monster* ends with Steve's final journal entry, an entry that is bound to keep readers wondering: "When Miss O'Brian looked at me, after we had won the case, what did she see that caused her to turn away?" (281). Students will then respond in their own journals to the question Steve Harmon wrote as his last four words in the novel "What did she see?" (281). Beyond the trial, the reader will never know for sure the future outcome for Steve Harmon, but discussions about the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of our criminal system in turning around the lives of juveniles can be discussed. The choices Steve Harmon made along the way set a chain of events in motion that took him straight into a murder trial. By reviewing some of the choices Steve made, my students can explore other options he could have taken and other possible outcomes as a result of those choices, thus strengthening their own choice-making skills.

After the reading of *Monster*, the unit will come to a close with *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. *The Giver*, unlike the previous novels, is a story where violence and choice-making are nonexistent within their community, but rules, order and routine are followed. Readers gain insight into the perfect community portrayed in *The Giver* through the eyes of Jonas, the twelve-year old main character. Family units are intact with both parents raising two children and every evening there is a ritual where they all communicate the "feelings" they experienced that day. Members in this community have been spared memories of pain, hunger, divorce, unhappiness, prejudice, unemployment, and even death. When members of this idealistic community reach twelve years old, they are given their assignments and they begin the process of learning their trade. Jonas is selected to be the next Giver, and gradually he discovers what it will entail to be the bearer of pain and holder of knowledge for his community.

Though Jonas is the youngest main character presented in my unit his age is of minor relevance other than for his upcoming assignment. What is noteworthy are Jonas' actions and communication skills, especially his precise use of language. The idealistic tendencies of my students' make the concept of a perfect community easily embraced, especially when they compare their own families with that of Jonas, where arguments don't happen and all members of the family are respected. Having this novel follow behind *Monster* gives some hope that life is not totally grim. Who wouldn't want a world where such things as violence and prejudice are nonexistent? As the story unfolds students will discover what some of the "costs" for a perfect community are, and from that revelation they may become more tolerant of differences and more apt to examine closely the choices that are available to them in their own personal lives.



Activities that accompany *The Giver* include some prompt lead journal responses and completing choice-making charts for their own lives and for the characters they have read about in this unit. Rituals and ceremonies will be discussed and compared with ones we practice in our communities such as birthdays, graduations and weddings. The ambiguous ending will lead to some great discussions and interpretations can be debated. My students will also discuss possible solutions that can help diminish problems like hunger, war, divorce, and violence. Following the reading of the novel, students will work in groups and create a happy “midway” community where they select the best from Jonas’ community and from their own community. Each group’s community will be named by the group and presented to the class along with a set of “rules” they derived for their communities.

My unit’s grand finale project will be a class collection of student writing, poetry, debated arguments, sketches, and community designs, all of which reflect the choice-making theme of this unit. Students can choose to write new pieces or select pieces from their portfolio to revise and submit for inclusion in our class bound edition of *The Choice is Ours*. Students’ work will be organized into categories, text will be typed, and pictures and drawings will be scanned.

## **PROJECT CLEAR AND TEKS LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

This unit aligns with H.I.S.D.’s curriculum project CLEAR (Clarifying Learning to Enhance Achievement results) and the Texas Essential Knowledge & Skills learning objectives. The oral readings, teacher led and student led, both meet the guidelines for the English Language Arts string of ELAR8.1b and TEKS 110.24.8.7 (student reads with fluency and understanding). ELAL.8.1, 8.2 and TEKS 110.24.8.1, 110.24.8.2 refer to students listening actively and purposefully and critically to analyze and evaluate a speaker’s message. In addition to oral readings meeting objectives, they serve multiple purposes in my unit. First, the oral readings will strengthen my students’ listening skills and elicits the use of visualization skills. Secondly, oral readings will expose students to an array of texts that may spark an interest in them and prompt them to select that piece as a future reading choice. Lastly, oral readings will give the teacher opportunities to make a story come alive while modeling good reading skills which may help motivate and excite weak and strong students alike to read more.

Using three texts allows students to use these texts to compare characteristics among the young adult novels. This activity is in alignment with ELAR8.5 and TEKS 110.24.8.10, which refers to students selecting and using a variety of strategies and criteria to comprehend and analyze texts. By learning from mini lessons for specific skill instruction, my students will be provided early opportunities to demonstrate their understanding of the strategies; any misconceptions or misunderstandings can easily be corrected with some minor re-teaching. Graphic organizers such as Venn diagrams and t-charts will be reviewed, and opportunities to practice using the many different organizers will occur during the course of this semester unit. By the conclusion of this unit, my students will have gained confidence organizing information and details from their readings using various graphic organizers. By making use of the organizers, my students will find that information is more easily recalled and located for discussion and analysis. Students’ comprehension skills will be strengthened with the use of response journals for this unit. By

guiding students in making connections to the text that they are reading, my students will be more easily able to analyze and discuss the material; identify characteristics of the texts; make judgments; make predictions; and make inferences as well as improve listening, writing, and speaking skills. To aid my students in making reader responses in their journals, I will introduce a list of writing prompts to assist them in writing responses. Gradually they will gain practice and confidence in writing their responses and won't need to rely on the prompts to make their entries. I also will model with some written responses I make after a reading, and copies of student responses will be used on a transparency so they can learn from each other.

My intention is to implement this unit during the 2003-2004 school year and realistically, I do expect that there will be adjustments and modifications made along the way. Teachers wishing to implement this unit may need to make adjustments and shape it according to the needs of their students, their class schedules (45 or 90 minutes blocks) and the unit length (semester or six week span). May any and all teachers who do decide to use this unit find this unit relevant and useful in meeting the needs of their students.

## **LESSON PLANS**

### **Activity: Oral Readings from Excerpts**

To help guide my students in making journal responses and get them thinking about the theme of "choices," my unit begins with oral reading excerpts to help students practice using good listening skills. To help my students *tune* into the readings, I will inform them beforehand that they will be answering questions following the reading and they will be able to use their notes for the mini quiz. Taking some kind of notes will be expected of the students; however, the method they use for taking notes will be of their choice. Students will be encouraged not to take notes using complete sentences, but instead to jot down what they *feel* may be important. For some students, taking notes will be overwhelming and they may feel unsure of what to do. Therefore, I will inform them that they can opt to make a list or can write the five W's (who, what, where, when, why) so that as the story unfolds they can write their notes next to the appropriate heading. I will remind students that they should not become so overburdened with taking notes that they get behind with their listening. By having my students take notes, I also may be able to gain some insight into any gaps in their listening skills as well as their perceptions of what is important. By practicing with four excerpts they should gain confidence with listening, note taking, responding, and sketching.

Using one sheet of colored copy paper and five sheets of plain white copy paper, students will make their journals by folding the paper in half and then stapling along the folded side on the edge. On the front cover students will write their names, class period and "Volume One Sketch & Reflect Journal" notation. Once students have filled all the pages in their journals, they will create another journal and label it "Volume Two," and so forth for this unit. They will be allowed to design their covers to reflect a pro-reading message, slogan, or quote. A few examples will be provided to help guide some students.

The four excerpts I selected to start my students in their journals will be followed by a few questions that have students recalling details, making judgments and evaluations, and connecting multiple excerpts of texts to make responses. The four excerpts allow students an opportunity to get comfortable with making journal entries before we move into novel length selections. Following each of the excerpts there is a mini-quiz, and students will sketch something that they recall about the selection read because as mentioned earlier in the unit, weaker writers can communicate their understanding through sketches. The sketches may also reveal if students have comprehended the reading but need more practice with answering specific questions.

### **Oral Readings Activity**

#### ***Objective***

Use listening skills, make judgments and connect texts read orally.

#### ***Instructional Note***

Read the excerpts orally then have students sketch and reflect in their journal prior to answering the accompanying questions for each selection.

Day One: *Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis, pages 26-28

Questions:

1. Does the man in charge of the line treat Bud fairly? Use your notes to support your answer with a detail in the story.
2. What do you see as a bad thing about the way Bud's pretend family treats Bud?
3. What do you see as a good thing about the way Bud's pretend family treats Bud?
4. Draw a character or an event you recall from this reading. Be prepared to explain why you chose to make this drawing and what it represents.

Day Two: *Thank You, Ma'am* by Langston Hughes (entire short story)

1. Compare the boy in this story with Bud in *Bud, Not Buddy*. What's interesting about both boys?
2. Compare Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones with Bud's pretend mother. Which mother do you like better and why?
3. What lessons does each of the boys in each story learn?
4. Sketch a detail or details from this reading. Be prepared to explain why you chose to make this drawing and what it represents.

Day Three: *The Lottery Rose* by Irene Hunt, pages 5-8

1. How does Georgie's mother treat him?
2. List all the characters who knew how badly Georgie was being treated.
3. Why does Georgie keep Steve a secret?
4. Think of all the characters you heard about this week. Which one has the worst situation? Why?

Day Four: *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul* by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, and Kimberly Kirberger, pages 306-307 (“Teenager’s Bill of Rights: Our Rights with Friends, with Parents and other Adults, with Everyone”)

1. Which right did you think was most important? Why?
2. What right(s) would you add to the list of rights in this selection?
3. What rights were violated for each of the characters we’ve met this week?

Day Five: Review selections read on days one through four.

1. Which selection did you enjoy most and what was it about that selection that made it stand out for you?
2. Choose one of the selections and write a letter of advice to a character in that selection.

### **Activity: Response Journal Starters**

#### ***Objective***

Students practice making journal responses by applying journal starters to passages (oral reading excerpts and novels) read in class.

#### ***Instructional Note***

Model some responses by applying a few of the oral reading excerpts to a few of the starters. The journal starters should act as a guide, and when students gain confidence they should be encouraged to make entries without using these starters.

- I am like the character \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_
- The character \_\_\_\_\_ reminds me of \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_
- What I liked best about the character \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_
- I felt \_\_\_\_\_ after reading \_\_\_\_\_
- The character \_\_\_\_\_-has some good qualities. Explain.
- I really liked how the writer wrote “\_\_\_\_\_” because \_\_\_\_\_
- My reaction to \_\_\_\_\_ was \_\_\_\_\_
- I think what is going to happen next is \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_
- The advice I would give character \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_
- I changed my opinion of character \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_
- I recall from reading today \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to the oral reading excerpts, week one activities also include some foundation for identifying choices. Including some choice-making activities will help students critically examine the choices made by characters in texts and the consequences of those choices. By having students initially examine some choices available to them in their lives should help them in becoming better choice makers. The choice of using violence to solve a problem, the choice to possess a weapon, and the choice to use drugs are only three examples of some choices facing students on campuses

across the United States. Based on the 2002 national survey of 15,000 teenagers conducted by the Josephson Institute of Ethics, the results for middle school boys alone revealed:

- 39% don't feel safe at school.
- 37% believe it is OK to hit or threaten a person who makes them angry.
- 15% took a weapon to school at least once in the past year.
- 31% said they could get a gun if they wanted to.
- 27% said they could get drugs if they wanted to.

**Activity: Choice/Consequence and Attitude/Action Identification Charts**

**Objective**

Students will identify and categorize choices and consequences applicable to home and school then completes an attitude and actions chart. Students will examine the role one's attitude and actions play in the choice-making process.

**Teacher Note**

Students will make what I call a C&C chart (choice and consequence) and categorize some choices they feel they have at home and at school. Some choices at home may include doing chores and meeting curfews. School choices may include doing assignments, following dress code, and following rules. Discussions will lead into the choices we have in how we treat others. Prior to presenting some created scenarios, students will have practiced using the C & C and A & A charts.

	<u>Choice</u>	<u>Consequence</u>		<u>Attitude</u>	<u>Action</u>
Home			Situation One		
School			Situation Two		

Scenario One: Someone calls you a name and puts you down. At first you ignore it, but then that person says that they are going to get you after school. What are your thoughts and feelings about what has happened? What do you plan on doing about the threat?

Scenario Two: Others have told you that another student is saying a lot of bad things about you behind your back. What are your thoughts and feelings about being talked about? What do you plan on doing about this situation?

Scenario Three: You have noticed that others are treating another student badly. You don't really know the student who is being picked on and laughed at. What are your thoughts and feelings about this situation? What do you plan on doing?

Discussions will direct students to realize that they do have control in three basic areas. They **control** the choice in the **attitude** they decide to possess in different situations, the **actions** that

they decide to take, and their personal **beliefs** that they hold. To get young people to accept responsibility for their actions, they need to recognize that they alone are responsible for their actions. *Action vs. Reactions* takes practice, but knowing who is in control may help them remember that others cannot *make them* do something. Students will apply this information to the C & C and A & A charts with all three novels in this unit.

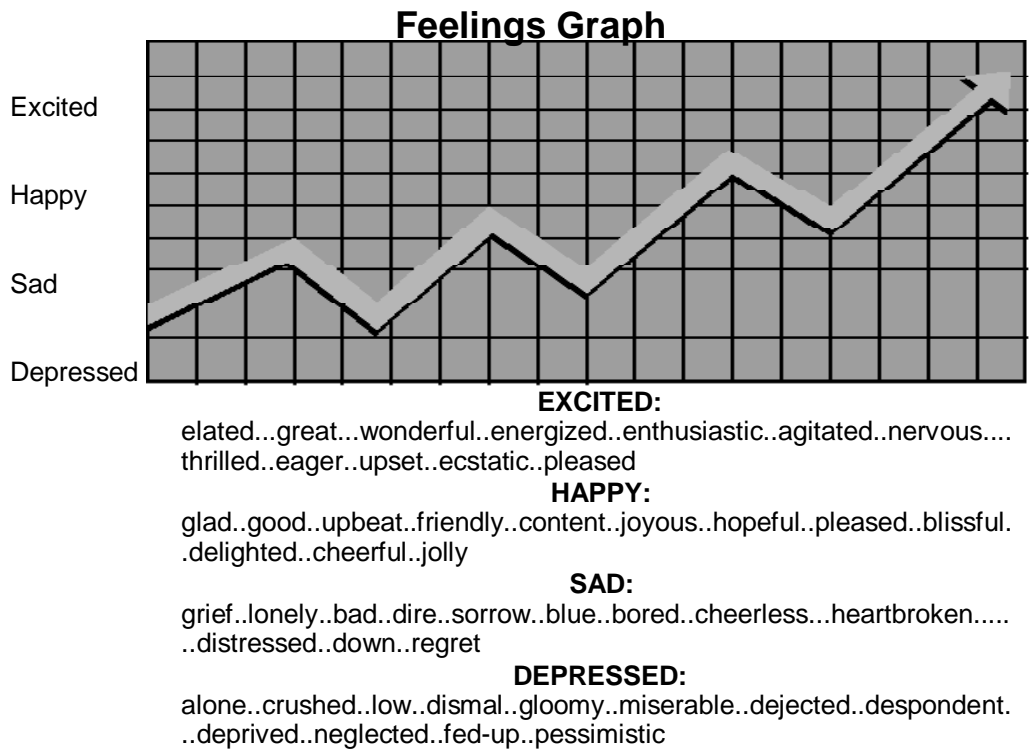
**Activity: Identifying and Charting Feelings**

**Objective**

Students will expand the feeling word list and gauge the differing degree of meanings by plotting the words along a graph that represents high and low feelings.

**Teacher Note**

The initial word list serves as a starting point and students’ use of dictionaries and thesauruses will help expand the list. Using a word wall to display the feeling words will be beneficial for this unit. This activity will encourage students to use precise descriptions when communicating about personal and character feelings. Increasing students’ awareness of their own feelings should impact them in making more productive choices when it comes their attitudes, actions and choice-making decisions. Their heightened awareness should also impact students’ critical analysis of the characters that are presented in this unit.



Using a thesaurus and the word bank under the graph, students will increase their awareness of words that express feelings and notice varying degrees of feelings that have been listed in four categories: Excited, happy, sad and depressed.

**Activity: Recording “Feeling” Experiences using Log entries**

***Objective***

Acting as observers, students will record first their personal feelings in different situations, and then observe others and record feelings experienced in their log.

***Teacher Note***

Students can use notebook paper for their logs.

Once students have completed their word lists and graphs, they will become observers of feelings using a feelings log. Using the log, students will record a descriptive feeling word that reflects what they felt during a specific incident for a period of a week. The following week students will observe others around them (at home or at school) and select a feeling word that might describe the feelings of another person. Students’ log entries will follow a format that will include headings in their notebooks as follows:

**Feelings Log**

<b>Date/Time/Place</b>	<b>Feeling</b>	<b>Word</b>	<b>Action/Event</b>

**Activity: “Feeling” Discussion Sessions**

***Objective***

Students will verbally communicate and discuss personal and character feelings during Feeling Sessions.

***Teacher Note***

Model for the students some statements that reflect analysis of feelings. Encourage students to participate but do not “make” them do so. Gradually, reluctant participants will become comfortable with doing this activity.

To further extend the feelings activity, I plan on having each class begin and end with some sharing of feelings being experienced. For example, I might start off by saying, “This morning I felt unsure and yet eager just thinking about what our sharing of feelings session was going to be like.” Students will record feelings of characters during the readings of the three novels in this unit. Our feeling sessions can then include comments about characters and appropriate feeling words. For example, Zero in *Holes* may feel embarrassed and ashamed that he can’t read or write. It takes courage for him to ask Stanley to teach him. Steve Harmon in *Monster* was probably feeling petrified and terrified when the lights went out each night he was in jail. By the time students are reading the third novel, *The Giver*, they will have a greater understanding of the main character Jonas’ attempts in describing his feelings during the family’s nightly feeling discussions. A feelings word wall list can be maintained throughout the unit, and students can add words to the list after introducing the word, explaining the meaning and giving an example of a situation that might elicit the feeling. By having the word listings visible for all students in the room, students can refer to it when making journal responses or when participating in discussions (class and group).

This three novel unit allows students to: respond to questions of varying levels of difficulty; recall details from earlier readings; identify details that describe the way a character is treated; identify within the passage details relating to events; make an inference using details from the passage; make judgments; support responses with text referencing; relate text to personal experiences; and make multi-text connections.

My unit deliberately controls the novels read in class; however, students will also select one novel and one biography from the school library to read. The guideline for their selection is that their selection must be tied to our theme “making choices.”

### **Book Activity: Story Box Project**

The story box project reflects the students’ creativity, imagination and understanding of a book that they have read. Following the selection and reading of a fiction book from the school library, the student completes this project and connects it to the theme “choices.”

#### ***Materials***

A shoebox and some paper to cover the outside of the box.

#### ***Directions***

1. Students are to cover their boxes and then write the title and author’s name on the outside.
2. Design the outside of the box to reflect events or scene from the book.
3. Students may also use meaningful quotes or passages from the book.
4. Design the inside of the box so that it recreates a scene(s) or event(s) of the book.
5. The contents of the box should contain at least five objects representative of the book.



6. Attach to the inside of the box one index card that includes: Student's name; Title and author; Listing of the five objects contained in the box and an explanation of the role "choices" played in the novel.

### ***Presentation***

Promotional flyers will be distributed prior to presentation. Students will select an excerpt up to two pages of the novel that will captivate an interest in the novel for possible future reading. Following reading their excerpt, their story box project will be presented and explained.

### **Book Activity: BioBag Project for Biographies**

Following the selection and reading of a biography from our school library, students will complete this project for the nonfiction activity with a connection to the theme "Choices."

1. Using a regular brown bag, students will design the front of the bag to reflect the life of the person in their biography book. A picture of the person may be pasted on the front of the bag. Student name and class period also will appear on the front of the bag.
2. The backside of the bag will contain highlights of the life of the subject of the biography and can be used as a guide in the oral presentation of the bag.
3. The contents of the bag need to include five objects (pictures, etc.) that are meaningful to the person in their biography.

### ***Presentation***

Promotional flyers will be distributed prior to presentation. Students will present three to five minutes about the person in their books, highlight the person's life, explain the objects in their bags, and discuss one choice (our unit's theme) the person made.

### **Activity: I AM Feelings Poem**

#### ***Objective***

Students complete the poem keeping the first two words in each line

#### ***Instructional Note***

Have students complete the following poem, either themselves as the subject in the poem or completing it in another persona. For example, they may decide to write poems in the persona of someone else such as I Am a Soldier; or I Am the Beaten. Students may also complete their poem in the persona of a character in a selection read. Students present their poems to the class in a poetry reading session.

#### **I AM**

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I wonder \_\_\_\_\_

I hear \_\_\_\_\_

I see \_\_\_\_\_

I want \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I imagine \_\_\_\_\_

I feel \_\_\_\_\_

I touch \_\_\_\_\_

I worry \_\_\_\_\_

I cry \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I understand \_\_\_\_\_

I say \_\_\_\_\_

I dream \_\_\_\_\_

I try \_\_\_\_\_

I hope \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

Different versions of the “I AM” poem have been around for years, but this particular version I discovered among stacks of old discarded resources from past teachers. Though I could not locate the original source for this poem or any citation for credit, the format of this particular version ties nicely with my unit and prompts students to examine and analyze feelings. I plan on having students complete one poem with themselves as the topic subject, and additional poems for characters presented in the class readings and from selected library books. Having poetry reading sessions will provide students additional presentation opportunities to carefully and deliberately select particular word choices for expression. Conducting Friday Poetry Reading sessions during the last fifteen to twenty minutes of the period will become the routine method for focusing on a genre format that warrants a concise and precise use of language. Student-created works and published poetry can be shared during these sessions.

## Sample Lesson Plan

### *Novel One: Novel Approach Dealing with “Making Choices” for At-Risk Readers*

#### *Holes*

#### **Resources**

#### **Student Objectives**

Plain paper to make into  
Response Journals

Make and Design Response  
Journals.  
Practice making a Response  
Entry over readings.

*Holes* by Louis Sachar

Apply listening skills from oral  
readings of class novel.  
Make predictions of future  
developments based on the  
reading.  
Sketch & Reflect in Response  
Journals

#### **Instructional Notes**

Chapters 1-10 are tentatively planned to be covered the first week of the unit (adjustments can easily be made so long as each novel in the unit is read within four weeks for this unit to be completed in one semester). Vary the reading of the novel with oral readings, partner readings and group readings. Introduce the unit’s theme and model various types of journal entries for students. Provide some leading prompts to help them get used to making journal responses, and then share some student entries with the class. Facilitate discussions on boot camps by having students first make personal response entries where they comment as to why some kids are sent to boot camps, what happens at boot camps, and whether or not boot camps can turn a kid around to being a well adjusted kid. Weekly quizzes over chapters read will help monitor students’ understanding. Periodic reviews of their response journals will help monitor students’ use of the journals and their comprehension of the text. Having students make a journal entry to share with other students for input should help them learn from each other. The comments the reader of the journal makes should be meaningful (model what you expect and inform students negative comments are not to be made but rather suggestions are permitted along with positive comments). Students should become aware of different settings and events being presented through flashbacks (review flashbacks and settings).

Pacing the reading of the first novel will aid in completing the reading within the four weeks. Adjusting the number of activities to apply to each of the three novels in the unit will provide the flexibility needed in completing the unit in a semester.

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Canfield J., Hansen M, and Kirberger K. *Chicken Soup For The Teenage Soul*. Florida: Health Communications, 1997.

A collection of pieces including poems written by teenagers that lends itself to oral readings. Through the writings decisions being made about friendship, love, and life are communicated.

*Ethics of American Youth*. 2001. Josephson Institute. 17 May 2003.

<<http://www.josephsoninstitute.org/Survey2000/violence2000-pressrelease.htm>>.

Curtis, Christopher Paul. *Bud, Not Buddy*. New York: Delcorte Press, 1999.

A young boy searches for his father, after being on his own. The food line experience in Chapter 6 (pages 45-52) is great for oral reading and discussion.

Hunt, Irene. *The Lottery Rose*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1986.

A fictional story of child abuse that has the reader wanting to help the five-year old main character.

*Juvenile Crime/Punishment Statistics*. 17 May 2003.

<<http://crime.about.com/library/blfiles/bljuvstats.htm>>.

Lowry, Lois. *The Giver*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1993.

Jonas is the chosen one of his community and is the only one who will possess knowledge and the ability to see color. Though the perfect community has appeal on the surface level, the lack of individuality and not having choices makes this community far from perfect. The ending leaves the reader wondering what really ends happening to Jonas and his baby brother.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster*. New York: Harper Collins, 1999.

A realistic portrayal of being behind bars. 16-year-old Steve Harmon is considered a monster for the role he played in a robbery that resulted in a murder. Is Steve a murderer or victim of circumstance? Through court scenes and Steve's journal, the reader can judge for themselves Steve's innocence or guilt.

Probst, Robert. *Response and Analysis Teaching Literature in Junior and Senior High School*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1988.

An excellent source for information on response based teaching. The book focuses on secondary students and is divided into three parts: Part 1 The Logic of Response-Based Teaching, Part 2 The Literature, and Part 3 The Literature Program.

*Referrals: Juvenile Probation*. 2001. Children at Risk. 17 May 2003.

<<http://www.childrenatrisk.org/indicators/s23.html>>.

Sachar, Louis. *Holes*. New York: Scholastic, 1998.

Stanley Yelnats (name spelled the same frontward and backwards) is sent to a Texas boot camp even though he claims he didn't steal the sneakers. The judge doesn't believe the sneakers, which were going to be auctioned for \$5,000 to help the homeless, happened to fall from the sky as Stanley stated. Digging holes and staying clear of yellow spotted lizards makes survival a challenge. The ending raps up all loose strands of the story together.

*The State of Juvenile Probation Activity in Texas. 2002.* Texas Juvenile Probation Commission. May 2003. <<http://www.tjpc.state.tx.us/publications/reports/Statistical%20Report%202001.pdf>>.

Trelease, Jim. *Read All About It*. New York: Penguin, 1993.

A collection of pieces that lend itself to oral readings. Included in the collection is the short story *Thank You Ma'am* by Langston Hughes where a young boy attempts to steal an old woman's purse. The lesson the boy learns is about making choices.