

What's the Big Idea? Exploring Art, Artists, and Society in Book Clubs

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching is not my first calling in life. As a matter of fact, I entered the wild world of teaching at the ripe old age of thirty, against the vehement protests of my mother, father and sister. These three family members have a combined 56 years of teaching experience among them, and told me many times that teaching was just not for me. Unfortunately, after graduating from Pennsylvania State University with a degree in Journalism, I received rejection letters from CNN to ESPN to MTV. I couldn't even get a job with a Public Access television station here in Houston. Instead of journalism, I found myself working in the slightly less glamorous world of Corporate Communications.

By 2003, I was in a miserable dead-end job, and I finally decided that even the huge pay cut I was going to take would be better for me than crying every day before I set off for work. I started my teaching career as a long-term substitute at Walnut Bend Elementary, taking over mid-year for a kindergarten teacher who had to go on bed rest due to her pregnancy. Mrs. Abel's class and I had a great time that year, gluing and glittering, playing at centers and even visiting the zoo.

The principal offered me a job as a second grade teacher at the conclusion of the 2002-2003 school year. Thrilled, I quickly set to work planning my first classroom, from the border on the bulletin boards to the books in the library. I was devastated, therefore, when, due to the passage of legislation (known by many as No Child Left Behind) the job offer was rescinded. I didn't have enough coursework in my Alternate Certification Program yet to meet the newly enacted standards set by NCLB. That June, I found myself jobless and in a panic.

Fortunately, though, there was an opening at the only other school where I had ever substitute taught...and I had made a very good impression on the most important individual on any school's campus: the secretary! After two very quick interviews, I was hired as a sixth-grade literacy teacher at Sidney Lanier Middle School, which is located in the fairly affluent Montrose-Upper Kirby area of Houston. Lanier is a charter school and a magnet school for Vanguard Students with a very diverse and progressive staff and student population.

Statistically, Lanier has a student body of about 1360 sixth, seventh and eighth graders. According to HISD's profiles for the 2003-2004 school year, student ethnicity can be broken down as follows: 43% White, 31% Hispanic, 16% African American and 10% Asian. There has been a 0% dropout rate for the past 5 years, and an average 99% promotion rate during that same period of time.

Academically, however, the student population is not quite as diverse – most are very high achievers regardless of race, creed, color, nationality or gender. According to the Texas Education Agency, for the 2003-2004 school year, just under 900 of the 1362 students were enrolled at Lanier were in the Gifted and Talented program. In 2004, for example, 87% of sixth graders, 83% of seventh graders and 90% of eighth graders met standard (made at least the minimum passing score) on the TAKS Reading Test. Even more impressive, the Writing TAKS

Test, administered solely to seventh grade students, was passed by 99% of the students who took it.

The students are not the only high achievers at Lanier, though. The school is also a professional development charter school, so teachers and administrators are challenged constantly to find, to learn, and to train others in the “next big thing” in any given area of academia. Quite frequently, teachers from other schools both inside and outside of the district visit Lanier to observe and learn best practices.

The literacy department in which I work, in particular, has worked arduously with professional developers and by attending Teacher’s College at Columbia University in New York City to learn how to implement Reading and Writing Workshops in our classrooms. We even garnered a mention in literacy guru Donna Santman’s recently published book *Shades of Meaning: Comprehension and Interpretation in Middle School*. On page xviii of the acknowledgment section, Santman writes: “I am also blessed to have spent time in the classrooms of wonderful teachers across the country whose generosity and hard work have been an inspiration. I am particularly grateful to the teachers at Lanier Middle School in Houston ... who took on this work with a fury and reminded me that communities of teachers working together can transform schools.”

Despite the overachieving student body and faculty, the longer I teach at Lanier, however, the clearer it has become to me that many students have very little knowledge or understanding of the world around them. Most of their experiences are confined to the mall, MTV and the Internet. They do not realize that there is a huge world of vastly different experiences and viewpoints outside their zip codes, outside Houston, outside Texas. The majority of my students are only conscious of their own particular experiences. I feel it is my job to make sure they learn otherwise.

Through book clubs, students are able to delve deeply into books in a community of readers in order to discover and discuss experiences and issues facing many different types of people. If executed correctly, book clubs can improve not only literacy skills such as reading stamina and comprehension, but also can deepen students’ understanding of the world around them and, in the most ideal situations, cause them to act.

TEACHING LITERACY

Reading literature within a classroom community is powerful because literature can help us escape the boundaries of ourselves. We feel less alone when we understand that our pain and joy are shared. Nelson Mandela has said that what kept him alive during his imprisonment were all the messages and names and memories scrawled and scratched into the walls of his tiny cell. When I think of the violence and the economic, social, and racial rifts in the world today, I know we need to read great literature together to help us live shoulder-to-shoulder on this earth. (Lucy Calkins, *The Art of Teaching Reading*, 14)

Making literacy relevant to teenagers in the twenty-first century is a challenge for even the most veteran teachers, let alone for a novice like me. Fortunately, however, I have been privileged to work with some of the country’s foremost literacy teachers and educators through Teacher’s College at Columbia University. These visionaries have given me (and thousands of other students of literacy instruction) insight into methods that really work, approaches to teaching literacy that empower students to find meaning and relevance for themselves.

Since I have been teaching, I have been striving for ways to make reading more palatable for those students who are loathe to pick up even the shortest of texts. I personally have always been a voracious reader for as long as I can remember, so it is difficult for me to understand and identify with those students who equate reading with some form of medieval torture. I learned

early on in the classroom that while some students share my love of reading and will read almost anything I throw their way, convincing reluctant readers to pick up a book takes more than my assurance that they're "gonna love this book!"

UNIT OVERVIEW

During this unit of study, a great deal of work will be done by the students in discerning the author/text's treatment of the idea of art/artist/society. The teacher will be responsible for the creation of supplemental mini-lessons for each class meeting during the unit of study. These mini-lessons will probably have two different and distinctive themes. At the beginning of the unit of study, many of the mini-lessons will be focused on how to work in a community of readers. Mini-lesson topics might include language to use when talking about books, how to create meaningful artifacts to guide book club talk, how to disagree constructively, and/or developing guiding questions that can be applied across a body of texts read in community.

Following these introductory "reading in community" mini-lessons, the mini-lessons will become more issues-focused. I envision these mini-lessons as overview lessons on particular issues that might be found in the books, with an emphasis on those artists and the time periods presented in the books in the unit of study. Mini-lessons at this stage of the unit might include discussions of artists including (but not limited to) da Vinci (*The Da Vinci Code*, *The Second Mrs. Gioconda*), Vermeer (*Chasing Vermeer*, *Girl with a Pearl Earring*) and Michelangelo (*From the Mixed-up Files of Basil E. Frankweiler*), as well as broader discussions of the poet as an artist (*Locomotion*) and an exploration of the art forms of pottery (*A Single Shard*) and weaving (*Gathering Blue*).

Toward the end of the unit of study, individual students or students working in small groups will complete and present reading/research projects. There is a wide range of ideas for these projects, but in the interest of increasing knowledge, however, I would be open to different ideas as long as the students can prove the relevance of the report. Some possible projects would include: papers responding to an art form, artist or what a student believes a text is saying about any of those things; a piece of original art created using a more famous piece of art as an inspiration; a collection of related texts with an introduction explaining a particular issue and why the texts are appropriate for this collection; dressing up in costume to present an artist, era or society that has been researched; and finally, working with *Girl with a Pearl Earring* as a mentor text, writing a story to explain a famous (or not-so-famous) piece of art.

A visit to both the Houston Museum of Fine Arts as well as the Contemporary Arts Museum would also be an integral part of this unit. And, because the two museums are so closely located to both each other and to Lanier, visiting both in one day is definitely feasible.

BOOK CLUBS IN THE CLASSROOM

Working in book clubs is one of the methods that has helped me in my goal of creating life-long readers in my seventh grade literacy class. Within the framework of the club, students are able to choose books themselves to read and discuss in community. Sharing ideas and interpretations with others often opens up the eyes of students to different ways of thinking and even living that otherwise they might never experience.

In a book club, students are tasked not only with reading different selections, but with making more of the book than what is on the page. I call this "Looking for the Big Idea." The concept of a Big Idea can mean different things to different readers. Some readers translate Big Idea to a specific issue, such as racism, classism, sexism, or family issues. Others prefer to look for a big idea in terms of a broader umbrella or "guiding question," such as "Who has power in this text?" or "What is the author trying to say through this text?" These different interpretations are valid, as long as the students can support their assertions with textual evidence.

Students in book clubs read a variety of texts in a variety of genres and styles dealing with myriad topics. The club should not ever focus, however, on only one particular book at a time. The aim of the group is to create a shared body of texts and determine the issues hiding in them.

If reading Orwell's *Animal Farm*, for example, it would not be acceptable for students merely to move through the novel, discussing chapter after chapter in linear style. Conversely, the club is expected to make connections to the book from their personal lives, their knowledge of "the world" or "mankind," and other texts read either individually or in community. As Donna Santman states in *Shades of Meaning*, "This reading history allows each individual in the group to deepen his or her ability to think not only "inside of" a book but also across books. When a group builds history it creates more intertextuality. More intertextuality – more looking across texts and letting one text get you to think about others—allows for more well-developed, more nuanced thinking. It is this complexity of thought that allows kids to find new ways to see, think and act in the world" (22).

The subject of this particular HTI Seminar, "How People and Cultures Define and Value the Arts," is a perfect "Big Idea" to be explored in the context of a book club. For this unit of study, students will be able to choose from a variety of books that I have already determined lend themselves to this topic to read and discuss in community -- or they may choose another book that they feel will fit with this topic. Several of the books selected for this unit also have film versions, which may add to student comprehension or interpretation. At the same time, though, viewing and discussion of these films may also heighten student ability to critique a cinematic presentation of a piece of literature.

For a teacher who has not used book clubs in the classroom before, putting students into club might be a daunting task. There are several different ways this task can be accomplished, however. Some teachers have students write detailed letters to help the grouping process. This usually means one class has to be devoted to a lesson detailing how a letter is written. In order to be effective, these letters must contain very specific information, such as who a student would like to work with and why, who a student would prefer NOT to work with and why and several books that the student might like to read within the club and why.

Students usually are very excited to write the letters at first, but lose steam quickly when they realize that letters require actual thoughtfulness and reflection. One of the most memorable letters I got reads as follows:

Dear Ms. Keating,

You are a nice and reasonable teacher. You are so cool. As the smartest person I know, it is a blessing to be in your presence. Even though you are already the coolest teacher in the world, I would love it if you allowed me to be partners with Cederick J. and Marcus D. This is because they are swell guys. They are friendly and responsible. They do their homework and are great readers that will agree to read anything.

Your Loyal and Humble Student,

Ben O.

PS: Did I mention that you are cool?

Letters like this, though of course flattering, do little to prove a student's point. (I made Ben rewrite his). The letters should be very specific. If they want to work with someone, the reason can't just be because they are friends; it should be something expressing why they would make a good club. For example, "Mikey and I have different reading interests and I'd like to know more about her reading interests/ideas," or, "Laura and I have worked together in other classes and always seem to do well together."

Similarly, there have to be good reasons to support NOT working with another student: “Chris and I are partners in social studies and science class already and I would like to work with someone else.” “I carpool with Joe and he stinks,” conversely, is not enough.

Once the letters are collected, students can be grouped accordingly. There are always a few students whom no one wants in their groups, but this can be overcome by using good judgment and approaching another group to see if they will accept one more member. Students are almost always up to the challenge of accepting a new member, especially if they are pleased with their group and feel they have helped create the club in the first place.

In the past, when time was of the essence and the letter-writing method was too cumbersome, I have also grouped students based on approximate reading levels. I would make sure to avoid putting very high-level readers with very low-level students, as this sort of grouping tends to promote animosity and embarrassment. Successful groups must contain a variety of genders, politics, religion, etc., to ensure the possibility of meaningful book talks.

When students are grouped, there is then a question of whether students should have specific roles and responsibilities within the book club or if they can work without them. If I have a group of students that is not very familiar with clubs, I would definitely have them use specific roles in the group.

There are many different roles that would be appropriate in book clubs. Harvey Daniels’ book *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* provides an extensive list of roles and role sheets for use by book club members. Some of these include the summarizer (prepares a summary of reading), researcher (digs up background information on any topic related to the book), “word wizard” (notes and looks up unfamiliar words), and the questioner (writes up questions for the group to answer). As the groups get more familiar with the structure and dynamics of the book club, members might decide they want to forego role assigning, but there are some clubs that will keep the roles because they like the structure they provide.

Daniels cautions, however, about allowing clubs to become dependent on roles and pre-made role sheets. He writes, “Once they have experimented with this assortment of roles and had a few successful group meetings, you can phase the role sheets out, replacing them with a reading log. After all, the goal of literature circles is to have natural and sophisticated discussions of literature—and once that is happening, you want to remove any artificial elements immediately” (99).

These are the basic parameters for setting up book clubs structurally in the classroom. Of course, more time will have to be spent later on in the unit developing “ways of being” in a book club. These lessons include how to talk in a book club (language that helps vs. language that hinders), how to prepare to talk to your book club (creating artifacts), how to make assignments for reading and, finally, how to turn the book club’s work into a project.

Students must be told explicitly how to act and talk within the book club. For example, in order for a book club to be considered “working,” in my classroom, all the members must have the current text, literacy notebook and any artifacts prepared based on the reading assignment. Students must all be seated in a way that allows them to see all the members and that places them in close enough proximity so that they can talk conversationally as opposed to screaming at one another.

Similarly, there is a vocabulary of book clubs that must be taught in order to promote meaningful conversations. Stems of conversation starters, followed by “thought extenders” should be taught, modeled, and repeated until they become part of the fabric of the club. Some conversation starters include: “I wonder why _____,” “This reminds me of _____,” “I can make a connection to _____,” and “I think _____.”

“Thought extenders” are also important and must be taught and re-taught. Club members should often ask other members, “Can you say more about that?” Similarly, when a member makes an assertion, other members might respond by saying, “Could you show me a place in the text where you started thinking that?” Members might also explore other viewpoints by saying something like, “I see things differently. I think _____.”

It is also important for students to understand exactly what the purpose of the book club is. Many kids have already worked in clubs, and might have a general understanding of how to work within one, but I never assume that another teacher has taught them my personal expectations. It is important to make very clear that there is more to the book club experience than retelling – that good readers have predictable questions they bring to texts they read and that the purpose of the club is to decide the answers to these questions and develop more insight into each text that is read.

In *Shades of Meaning*, Santman refers to these questions as “Critical Questions That Extend Our Thinking” and provides a list of examples. Some of her suggestions include: “What might the writer believe in order to have written the text this way?”; “How does the text compare with others that explore the same issue?”; “What values or assumptions underlie this text?”; “Who benefits from this thinking?”; “Whose voices are missing from this text and how does that affect the telling?”; and “What are some alternatives to this thinking?” (116)

In this particular unit of study, in addition to the questions listed above, students will also want to delve into ideas about art and artists in society. This is, after all, the purpose of this unit of study! I will work with the students to develop a class list of art-related questions suitable for this unit. Some examples might be: “What type of art form is presented in your text and how does the text want you to think about it?”; “What kinds of art appear to be valued by society in this text and which are not?”; “How does the treatment/value of the art/artist in this text compare to what I know about how art/artists are treated/valued today?”; and “Would I want to be an artist in this society and why?”

BOOK CLUB BOOK CHOICES

The books I have selected for use in this unit of study range from books suitable for sixth-to-seventh grade level readers to those appropriate for students who need a greater challenge. Although the books are very different, they share the common thread of art and/or the artist’s life. Books to be used in this unit of study are as follows:

Chasing Vermeer, by Blue Bailliet

Reading level: Ages 9-12

Length: 272 pages

ISBN: 0439372976

Two Chicago sixth graders find themselves embroiled in an international art scandal following the disappearance of a Vermeer painting. The two must use their problem-solving skills, intuition and knowledge of the artist to unravel a mystery that has left even the FBI baffled.

The Da Vinci Code, by Dan Brown

Reading Level: high school to adult

Length: 454 pages

ISBN: 0385504209

This best-selling book seeks to unravel the mysteries behind the hidden meanings in the paintings of Leonardo Da Vinci and the existence of an ultra-conservative wing of the Catholic Church. Because of its length and some mature subject matter, this book is more suitable for advanced readers.

Girl with a Pearl Earring, by Tracy Chevalier

Reading Level: high school to adult

Length: 240 pages

ISBN: 0452282152

More appropriate for higher-level readers, this novel purports to tell the story behind the titular Vermeer painting. Sixteen-year-old Griet goes to work in the household of the famous 17th century painter, eventually serving as his muse for the famed portrait.

From the Mixed-Up Files of Basil E. Frankweiler, by E.L. Konigsburg

Reading Level: Ages 9-12

Length: 168 pages

ISBN: 0689711816

Konigsburg won the Newbery Award in 1967 for this book in which two kids run away from their suburban New York home and hide out in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. While there, they become fascinated by a statue of an angel that is said to have been sculpted by Michelangelo. The children become amateur detectives to try and prove that the statue is indeed one of the famed artist's.

The Second Mrs. Giaconda, by E.L. Konigsburg

Reading level: Ages 9-12

Paperback: 160 pages

ISBN: 0689821212

This book seeks to answer why Da Vinci painted The Mona Lisa. Like *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, this book purports to tell the story behind the well-known painting and is told from the perspective of Salai, one of Da Vinci's servants.

Gathering Blue, by Lois Lowry

Reading level: Young Adult

Length: 240 pages

ISBN: 0440229499

The much-anticipated sequel to *The Giver* (a whole-class novel suggested for sixth grade classes in HISD's Project CLEAR curriculum) follows the experiences of Kira, a crippled orphan in a futuristic society whose life is spared because of her innate talent for coloring and weaving yarn. In this society, children with remarkable artistic abilities are taken from their parents and cared for by the state, at times against their will.

Locomotion, by Jacqueline Woodson

Reading level: Ages 9-12

Length: 128 pages

ISBN: 0399231153

This book, written in poetry, tells the story of 13-year-old Lonnie, an inner-city kid who is separated from his younger sister when their parents are killed in a tragic apartment fire. Lonnie expresses his anguish and emotions by keeping a poetry journal, which creates problems for him with some of the other youths in his classroom.

A Single Shard, by Linda Sue Park

Reading level: Ages 9-12

Length: 192 pages

ISBN: 0440418518

Set in twelfth-century Korea, this Newbery Award-Winning book tells the story of Tree-Ear, an orphan who becomes fascinated with the work of a master celadon potter in his village.

Despite his lowly social standing and lack of formal education, Tree-Ear dreams of making a pot of his own some day.

Choosing books in a book club, like placing students in a book club, is also something that requires some negotiation. Sometimes—make that most times—it is difficult for students to agree on a book that all of them would be interested in reading. For this reason, I always teach that book choice is a matter of “what you can live with” as opposed to “what you have to have.” I might have club members make a list of books they are interested in reading and then have them negotiate based on the list.

While this method usually works, there are always those children who are not going to be happy reading anything they do not pick themselves. It is vitally important that all children, but especially the consistent complainers, feel a sense of ownership in their club and in their choice of books. The letter writing promotes ownership of the club, since students can, with a well-written letter, determine with whom they work.

If a student or book club is unhappy with the selection of books, I always encourage them to find other texts to use instead. If they are unsuccessful finding a novel on the topic, I would point them in the direction of other genres of texts, such as pieces of non-fiction, short stories, or collections of essays. If they are successful in locating additional texts, it not only gives them a sense of success and ownership of their book club experience, it also benefits me, the teacher, by adding to my classroom library and the resources available for all the clubs.

I might also consider, as another mini-lesson, taking the entire class to the library to use the resources there to locate books that might be suitable for either this topic (art, the artist and society) or any other specific topic. While I am usually able to find many resources for my students, any additional help is always welcome, especially if it results in more books and resources for my library. Additionally, it would probably be useful for the students to bone up on their research skills in the library.

SAMPLE LESSONS

Lesson One: Creating a Rubric

As stated earlier, a large portion of this unit of study will rely upon the foundation built in the first stages of the unit. These lessons will revolve mainly around how book clubs function. In a class that already functions as a workshop environment, these lessons may be reduced or deleted, but they are integral to the unit if a class is new to the idea of the book club.

I have found that providing a rubric for students early on in a unit of study really helps clarify expectations and cuts down on both student and teacher frustration. While this might not be the first mini-lesson in a unit, the earlier in a unit of study a rubric is provided, the better. Simply providing the rubric to students is really not enough, however. Allowing students to assist in the creation of the rubric ensures that children will be more invested in the unit and its end product.

It is easy to allow students to be deeply involved in creating rubrics for each unit of study. For this unit of study, a teacher might, for example, have the class create a list on chart paper of what would make a successful book club, and then turn that list into the rubric. If your students have been in book clubs before, another idea would be for students to work in small groups to create two lists: “What Works in Book Club” and “What Doesn’t Work in Book Club.” The groups could then share their lists with the whole group, and a master list could be created and then turned into the rubric for the unit.

A word of caution in developing student-driven rubrics: plan ahead! It is absolutely paramount that the teacher does the work on the front end so that he or she may guide the student in their creation of a rubric. The teacher’s work in the rubric-creating process is not just to let kids

run the show, but to guide them in the creation of a document. Failure to plan ahead will inevitably result in a rubric that is irrelevant and does not fit the objectives you had planned on covering in the unit.

A rubric that might be suitable for a book club unit of study is as follows:

Exceeds Expectations (5)	Meets Expectations (4)	Approaches Expectations (3)	Below Expectations (2)	Area of Concern (1)
Always reads to assigned page	Usually reads to assigned page	Sometimes reads to assigned page	Rarely reads to assigned page	Never reads to assigned page
Always brings notes/artifacts to class	Usually brings notes/artifacts to class	Sometimes brings notes/artifacts to class	Rarely brings notes/artifacts to class	Never brings notes/artifacts to class
Reads more than one book every two weeks	Reads one book every two weeks.	Sometimes reads a book every two weeks	Rarely reads a book every two weeks.	Never reads a book every two weeks.
Makes excellent use of BP time	Makes good use of BP time	Rarely slow to start or off task	Often slow to start or off-task	Always slow to start or off-task
Always comes prepared with meaningful conversation starters	Usually comes prepared with meaningful conversation starters	Sometimes comes prepared with meaningful conversation starters	Almost never comes prepared with meaningful conversation starters	Never comes prepared with meaningful conversation starters.
Always uses strategies learned in class	Often uses strategies learned in class	Sometimes uses strategies learned in class	Rarely uses strategies learned in class	Does not use strategies learned in class
Always contributes to conversations	Usually contributes to conversations	Sometimes contributes to conversations	Rarely contributes to conversations	Never contributes to conversations

Lesson Two: Creating Artifacts

Bookmarks

As we have already established, a book club cannot function unless all the members have brought their artifacts to a meeting. An artifact is simply some writing done in response to the reading. Artifacts can take many forms, from entries in a literacy notebook to post-it notes throughout the text to a series of bookmarks of double entry diaries.

There are actually countless different bookmarks that may be created for this mini-lesson depending on how much (or how little) time can be devoted to the creation of artifacts. Since I think these are very useful, I would probably spend at least two mini-lessons on them. At any rate, these bookmarks can be created very easily and stored in the classroom so that any student who wishes to use them has easy access. Fortunately, however, they are so easily created that if you are in a school that restricts copying students can easily create their own based on the template you provide.

The purpose of this mini-lesson is to drive home the point that the work of reading in literacy class is to STOP reading work often to write in response to what has been read. Some students get in the habit of doing all their writing at the end of a chunk of reading; however, this is not actually reflective of the thinking process. When good readers read, they stop often to think about

what they have read and to reflect on how what they have read recently fits into the context of the book as a whole.

To encourage students to stop, think, and record their thoughts, I will provide them with bookmarks that include several prompts:

Title of Book:	Title of Book:
I notice...	I'm wondering why...
I think it's because...	I think it's because...
So I want to talk to my club about...	So I want to talk to my club about...

I will also have an overhead made of several of the bookmarks so that I can demonstrate how I would use them in my own reading. For the demonstration portion of the mini-lesson, I would read aloud either a new piece of text or even perhaps something that I am currently reading on my own. As I read the text to the students, I will interrupt my reading to think aloud to the students and tell them what is going through my mind about what I am reading. I would then write my thoughts on the overhead in appropriate spaces on the bookmarks I created.

After the mini-lesson, I would encourage the students to at least TRY using the bookmarks themselves for one or two reading assignments. The students place the marks in the text wherever they stopped and created them, and when a book is finished all the bookmarks are placed in the literacy notebook in an orderly and organized fashion.

Post-It Notes

As with bookmarks, students must be taught an appropriate means of collecting their thoughts on Post-Its. For this I would again probably use two separate mini-lessons and explicit demonstration using a short, easy-to-understand picture book to demonstrate this strategy. One text that would be appropriate for this lesson would be *My Name is Maria Isabel* by Alma Flor Ada.

For the first day's mini-lesson, I would simply read the book aloud to the class, stopping whenever I had a thought to write down on a Post-It note and thinking aloud to the class. On the overhead, I would either have copies of actual Post-It notes I had written beforehand, or simply an overhead with blank Post-Its copied onto it. I could then write my thoughts on the overhead Post-Its as the lesson progressed. It is important to note that I would not read the entire text and think aloud all the Post-It note ideas. I would only model three or four, and then provide students

with Post-Its of their own so they could take their own notes to be added to the overhead. We would want our Post-It notes to use the stems and prompts already developed in previous classes, of course.

The second day of the lesson would be devoted to taking inventory of our Post-It notes in order to discern some issues we might be able to talk about in our book clubs. To do this, I would simply go back over the Post-It notes I had created about *My Name is Maria Isabel* during the previous class and then think aloud some issues that I might be able to pull out of the text to foster discussion. After I had gone over my own Post-It notes and shown the students the issues I came up with, I would then have the students do the exact same thing with the Post-Its they created during the prior class.

To further illustrate, the story *My Name is Maria Isabel* deals with a girl who has recently immigrated to the United States and must attend a new school. Her teacher, a bit insensitively, suggests that Maria Isabel go by the name “Mary” because there are already “too many Marias” in the class. So on the first day’s Post-Its, I might write down things like, “I can connect with Maria because people always mispronounce my name when I first meet them, too,” or, “I think it must be really hard to be new to the country and in a brand new school.” Then, during the next day’s mini-lesson, I might read over those two Post-Its and come up with some broader issues to talk about such as cultural differences and/or who has the power in this situation and how we know it. And then we could turn and talk about the issues with a partner and share our responses with the class.

Stretching Talk

While students must provide evidence of their reading work by presenting their artifacts at meetings, it is also important that they are provided with numerous prompts/stems to help them lengthen their talk. I want students to have long conversations about their books and the issues in them, not just to spout out what they think about particular parts in no particular order.

For this lesson I would provide students with the following overhead and then model how each prompt can be used to stretch talk. After I have shown/modeled all the examples, I would then ask them for more examples, and add them to the overhead to create a class list of ways to stretch talk.

Stretching Your Talk

1. Ask your partner what s/he thinks.
Example 1: When you were reading what were you thinking?
Example 2: I think _____, what do you think?
2. Ask your partner questions about the story.
Example 1: Why do you think (a certain character) acted that way?
Example 2: Why does (a certain character) keep saying that?
Example 3: How would you feel?
3. Ask your partner questions about what they said.
Example 1: What does that mean?
Example 2: Can you say more about that?
Example 3: Why do you think that?
Example 4: Can you give an example from the book?
4. Share with your club when a character reminds you of a person in your life.
5. Share with your club when the book or something in the book reminds you of your life.

6. Share with your club when one character reminds you of another.
7. Share with your partner when something in the book reminds you of another book.
8. (Use student examples)
9. (Use student examples)

Lesson Three: Creating Questions about Art & Society for Clubs

Just as we need to give students vocabulary for starting and lengthening conversation about books in general, we also need to give students the vocabulary for talking specifically about art and society in the context of their books.

An easy way to do this is by having the class generate ideas for art-related questions they can bring to their texts. For this mini-lesson I would simply ask the students to turn and talk about some art-related issues they might have found in texts so far, and how they might get to these issues in their books. Once again, I would have the questions I am looking for prepared in advance so that I can give examples to prompt them if they are slow to start and also to ensure that the students cover all the areas I want them to cover.

After they have talked with one another, I would take volunteers and write the responses on a poster-sized Post-It note. I would probably only include 5-7 questions on the poster, but encourage students to add to the poster over the course of the unit of study. The Post-It poster with the questions and markers will then be placed in a prominent location in the classroom so that students can easily refer to the list for prompting when meeting with their club or so they may add to the list when they discover/create a new question/idea.

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