

The Wounded Classroom and Comedy

Patti-Brown Milstead
Westbury High School

INTRODUCTION

This year at the high school where I teach, two students were shot and killed in gang-related violence. Last year one of my students was shot and killed just outside of the school while another one was found dead at some apartments. She had been killed by her boyfriend. Another one of my students lost both of her parents in December; she has a child of her own. Many students are at least one to two years older than they should be for their grade, and, as a result, walk around with either a big giant chip on their shoulders or they are calmer and more peaceful than the rest. All of this and more shows a definite need for levity wherever possible to relieve some of the sadness and pain in these student's lives. Students often laugh at each other in a destructive way. This unit will attempt to turn that around and create an atmosphere where students can laugh from a healthy perspective.

Teaching reading in high school has challenges on several levels. Students do not read well because they do not read. They mostly come from homes where family members do not read; hence they were not sufficiently read to as young children. They are distracted by the typical teenage angst of figuring out social relationships and where they fit into the world. Some of my students are learning disabled, which does not mean they are dumb; it just means their abilities do not match their performance. Many are behind their peers in academics. This unit attempts to address the needs of reluctant readers through comedic texts which are generally matched to their age and gender. This will provide students with characters they can directly relate to that will hopefully hold their interest. These texts include the following: a variety of humorous quotes from many different sources; metaphors, alliterations, and clichés from *The Play of Words* by Richard Lederer; *Twisted* by Laurie Halsie Anderson; three short plays by Robin Rice Lichtig; two scripts from Fanny Brice; and selected poems from *Archie and Mehitable* by Don Marquis.

OBJECTIVES

The following objectives are written as stated on the Texas Education Association website: The student will:

- Be given the opportunity to read with confidence, competence and understanding.
- Have the opportunity to locate information in varied sources, to read critically, to evaluate sources and to draw supportable conclusions.
- Learn how various texts are organized and how authors choose language for effect.
- Use context clues, entry information in dictionaries and other sources to confirm pronunciations and meanings of unfamiliar words and expand vocabulary.
- Read with fluency and understanding in increasingly demanding texts.
- Read to complete a task, to gather information, to be informed, to solve problems, and for pleasure.
- Monitor his/her own reading and adjust when understanding breaks down by rereading, using resources, and questioning.
- Use previous experience to comprehend.

- Determine and adjust purpose for reading such as to inquire, to interpret, to enjoy, and to solve problems.
- Find similarities and differences across texts such as explanations, points of view, or themes.
- Construct images based on text descriptions.
- Organize, learn, and recall important ideas from texts and oral presentations such as note taking, outlining, using learning logs, rereading, scanning, and skimming.
- Summarize texts by identifying main ideas and relevant details.
- Make inferences such as drawing conclusions and making generalizations or predictions, supporting them with text evidence and experience.
- Analyze and use text structures such as compare/contrast, cause and effect, and chronological order.
- Practice using test-taking skills such as highlighting and making marginal notes
- Generate relevant, interesting and researchable question.
- Analyze aspects of text, such as patterns of organization and choice of language, for persuasive effect.
- Apply modes of reasoning such as induction and deduction to think critically.
- Read to increase knowledge of his/her culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of cultures.
- Determine and adjust purpose for reading such as to find out, to understand, to interpret, to enjoy, and to solve problems.

RATIONALE

There are several reasons why comedic texts will be good for my students. The first is that hopefully students will find so much humor in the text they will want to read what they are reading. That is half the battle when it comes to getting non-readers to read. I know I can't please all of my students all of the time, but if I can energize enough of them with humor, then perhaps the rest will be caught by the same wave of enthusiasm and be able to overcome their reading inhibitions. If I can accomplish this with this unit, then students will be improving their reading comprehension skills and vocabulary with a sense of enjoyment. To learn without realizing it sounds like heaven. Another benefit of this unit is that some of the texts will be in the form of dialogue, so they will have the opportunity to use reader's theater to read the same thing repeatedly which has shown to have good results for improving students' reading comprehension levels. This occurs because students improve their reading speed, which means they have to spend less time laboring over decoding and can concentrate more on comprehending. I also think that by having to read the text as a presentation, they will improve their confidence in not only their ability to read but also their ability to stand up in front of others. In order to improve at anything, a person has to be able to make mistakes. A comedic format will provide a safe place for this to occur in that laughter will be expected and perhaps appreciated. Maybe some students could learn to laugh at themselves as well. This unit will also include a variety of texts, so that if one type of literature does not capture a particular student, then perhaps another type will. All of the literature in this unit is thought-provoking and provides gateways to further exploration.

UNIT BACKGROUND

Funny or humorous phrases will set the tone for this unit. The classroom itself will reflect a sense of lightheartedness for everyone who enters. Every year I give students a collection of quotes and proverbs and tell them to pick two or three that they like best or mean something to them personally. They re-write the quotes on large paper, and then we put them up around the room for them to read all year long. This provides something to read even if there are thirty seconds left in class and we are waiting for the bell to ring. This year I will only give them funny quotes to select from, so that anywhere they look in the room, they will see something which will make

them chuckle or smile. To extend this, students can present their selections and state why that particular quote grabbed their attention.

To continue the fun, I will use Richard Lederer's *The Play of Words* to make a fun game for the class to learn and enjoy. Lederer's book contains partial metaphors, clichés, and alliterations where the reader has to figure out what the missing words are. The answers are given in the back of the book. I will let my students try to figure out the missing words using each other and myself as a resource. When they have tried their best to fill in the blanks, we will go over each one and talk about what each phrase means and its general usage. I will then pick up their answers and divide the class into two teams. I will show each team a phrase on a card where they will have to verbally fill in the blank and state what the metaphor, cliché, or alliteration is used for and what it means. Each time a team is correct, it will score a point. At the end of the game, which is when I run out of cards, the team with the most points will score a 100 while the other team will score an 85. Students really enjoy games, and this one will give them the opportunity to laugh while they are learning.

Twisted

Twisted, by Laurie Halse Anderson, is a coming of age story that will definitely appeal to male students. Its humor leans toward the pubescent bathroom variety with numerous references to the male genitalia and the effects of a pretty girl. Most of my students are male so this will definitely give them something they can identify with. The protagonist is a senior male named Tyler who has been arrested for putting graffiti on school property. His punishment is to pay for damages and do community service. All of this happens prior to the beginning of the story, but it is important in that it sets the foundation from which the story grows. Tyler also has problems with his father, who is basically unplugged from his children and his family in general. This point of the story reminds me of so many parents I see and hear who seem to believe that their children do not need them involved in their lives as much because they are getting older. They believe their teenage children will make good choices without much guidance from them. Actually, adolescent kids need their parents just as much as they ever did. Tyler is rejected by his father; hence he rejects himself. Tyler blames himself for this rejection, but as the story progresses, we realize that his father has his own unresolved issues. Throughout the story Tyler makes references to suicide. I know that does not sound very comedic, but it is a coming-of-age story. Tyler has a heavy schedule, thanks to his parents, with mostly AP classes, but he feels that this load is too much. When he tries to talk to his father about it, of course, he is not heard. This is another common problem for kids. All too often they are not heard. This seems to be a fundamental need that we all share and yet, all too often, this need is not met, leaving a person feeling frustrated. Tyler escapes into a computer game which involves the character's descent into hell. This, of course, is representative of Tyler's life. Through the progression of the story he sinks lower and lower into a quagmire of pain.

Tyler is in love with a girl named Bethany. Her father is his father's boss, and her brother is a boy who has been bullying Tyler since middle school. Fortunately, Tyler's summer job has strengthened his muscles to the point where this is not such a problem anymore. Tyler is quite capable of protecting his physical self, but his emotional self is another matter all together. The conflict comes when Tyler has to temper his feelings and actions because to deal with this boy in a straightforward manner could cause problems for his father at work. Tyler's problems escalate when he attends a party which is against the terms of his probation. He finds himself alone with the love of his life, but she is drunk, and he does not want to express his feelings to a drunken girl. He knows it would be wrong and would not end well for either of them. This will be an interesting point of discussion for the class. Tyler is a senior, and my students are ninth graders. How many of them would take advantage of a drunken girl, and what will the girls in the class have to say about this possibility? Date rape drugs do exist. We can talk about that and what kind

of guy would use deception and drugs to get what he wants. I believe this discussion will inspire students to become more connected with the book and enhance their comprehension growth. Tyler's troubles escalate when someone takes pictures of Bethany naked and puts them on the Internet. Tyler becomes a suspect for both the taking of the picture and putting it on the Internet. The school suggests and he agrees to be placed in a room completely isolated from his peers. His teachers bring him his work. From here Tyler spirals down to the very brink of suicide, but the realization that he was trying to be something that he wasn't along with words from his English teacher echo in his head and not only save him but also give him the ammunition to fight for his life.

Twisted will be a great book for my students to read for several reasons. It is funny. The numerous references to male and female genitalia will awaken and surprise my students and have them laughing. Getting reluctant readers to read is difficult at best, but getting reluctant readers who are boys to read is next to impossible. This past year I was looking for the perfect book for my students to read next year. A male student who overheard me talking to another teacher told me, "Boys don't like to read, so I wouldn't worry about it, just get anything and tell them they have to read it." This would be okay, but I know that most of them will not read just any book. Most of them would rather get a failing grade than read a book that has been assigned even when we read as a class. I believe *Twisted* will really capture their interest, and with each page they turn, a seed of anticipation will be planted for the next chapter. I think many students will be able to relate to the protagonist Tyler on several levels. Tyler has had trouble with the law, with which, sadly, many of my male students have had a similar experience. Too many girls like "bad boys," so male students who have never been "bad" will sometimes try to portray that image to look good in the eyes of potential heartthrobs. When Tyler shows his true goodness with regards to the girl, I think many boys will act disappointed in him, but inwardly they might be pleased to see a role model that supports their ideals and self image. Tyler finds himself in a pit of absolute despair where he has absolutely no control over any aspect of his life. Even his own body betrays him (this is where much of the humor comes from) when he has unplanned and unwanted events. We, as the readers, will be able to laugh at something that can cause real anxiety for many young males. In laughing at Tyler's predicaments we will be able to talk about laughter as a way to deal with uncomfortable situations. This might in turn enable students to relax a bit more and allow each other to make mistakes with less emotional pain associated with the learning process. Tyler does eventually find himself and his self control. Tyler's character shows the reader hope as he makes choices which enable him to be victorious in the end. Students will experience a character who meets his problems head on. He becomes the captain of his own ship.

The layout of this book will also be helpful to my struggling readers. All of the chapters are relatively short, which will be less intimidating to students. Two hundred and fifty pages is a lot less intimidating when the chapters are on average four pages long. Before reading, we will discuss topics that everyone is familiar with but probably do not talk about much, like how important is it that you have your parents approval. What happens when you have disappointed your parents so thoroughly it seems like you can never recover the acceptance you once had? In a perfect world, kids are always unconditionally loved by their parents, but would a child feel as loved if their parents often had a look of disappointment in their eyes? Then there is the other side of the question. When you are very young, you see your parents as big, strong, and always right. What happens when you grow up and realize that your parents are just people too with faults, problems, and weaknesses like everyone else? These are common issues of teenagers and issues Tyler faces in *Twisted*. Once we have looked at some of these harder issues, we can look at how comedy helps us to cope. We can discuss what about ourselves and our parents we find funny. I think I will have to lead this discussion by citing my own examples. Exposing your funny or silly side can be scary. I believe that if I set the example, students might be less intimidated by the prospect of sharing that part of themselves with the class. At this point students will be given the

task of illustrating in some way some of the funny things that parents say and do. They will have a choice of making a sign with a quote from a parent that they thought was funny, drawing a picture depicting a funny incident, or writing a poem in free verse that tells of a funny incident. I will also have students write a short story with a partner. Their story will have to be about a boy with a problem. He can only have one problem, and the problem has to be solved. Once this is completed we will be ready to begin reading *Twisted*.

While we read, students can interact with the text by annotating as they read. Students can summarize, clarify vocabulary, re-read for understanding, infer what will happen next, and make personal connections with the text. We can discuss these points as we read. At the end of each chapter, we can pause so students can write questions that could be used on a test. These questions, along with a few of my own, will then be used to test students' comprehension of what they have just read.

Collected Scripts

“Gloom, Doom and Soul-Crushing Misery,” “Life 101,” and “Déjà Vu All over Again,” by Robin Rice Lichtig, and “The Brat,” by Fannie Brice, are short scripts which students will use to do reader's theater. All of these pieces will get students thinking, re-reading and at the very least smiling. I will start this part of the unit by explaining reader's theater to the students. I will put them into groups of three to four and they will have to practice the scripts until they can read them with feeling and expression. They will also have to develop three to four study questions for their script as well as create a poster as a backdrop to advertise what they are going to be presenting. Groups will consist of the people who will actually be reading the lines plus one person to organize the readers. This person would have the role of director. Each group will present their piece to the class and then lead a discussion about the piece using the questions they have developed as a springboard for their discussion. The students doing the presentation can then evaluate their peers on how well they participated in the discussion through either a quiz generated by the group or through observation. The class can evaluate the group using a rubric generated by the class that will include how expressive the presentation was and how thought-provoking they felt the questions were. Of course, I will oversee all evaluations and give the final grade myself.

“Gloom, Doom and Soul-Crushing Misery”

“Gloom, Doom and Soul-Crushing Misery” by Robin Rice Lichtig is a one-act play about a Russian couple who seem to be happiest, or perhaps I should say most comfortable, when they feel absolutely miserable. A small ray of sunshine threatens their existence, but they find a way to overcome this potentially life-altering problem, so they can continue on their chosen path. This play will provide a springboard from which we can discuss the concept of happiness. My students sometimes seem to exist in such a narrow, confined reality that they do not seem to question abstract concepts. They are so bombarded by pop culture and mainstream media telling them what will make them be okay, safe and happy that they do not stop to question what they are seeing or being told. After reading this play, the class can think about what happiness really is. It will be interesting to see what students come up with. Will they see the humor? Will this one act play cause anyone to stop and reflect on their own lives? Will they ponder whether or not they are on a truly self selected path or are they going where they think society wants them to go? I believe some will consider this, and then again, some will not.

“Life 101”

“Life 101” by Robin Rice Lichtig is a one-act play about the beginning of life: creationism vs. evolution. There are only two characters; one is an artist (the creationist) and the other is a scientist (the evolutionist). This play ought to produce some pretty lively discussions since

people generally have very strong opinions about this topic. The artist claims responsibility for the creation of the universe by painting it; meanwhile, the scientist claims that evolution is happening right under their very noses.

“Déjà Vu All Over Again”

This play will be particularly interesting to boys because it is about Yogi Berra at a point in his baseball career when he feels like he is no good anymore. He is in the locker room feeling sorry for himself when he is visited by Yolanda who is “The Oracle of the Yankees” (Lichtig 4). This short play is funny because it has Yogi Berraisms. I do not think most of my students have probably heard of the phrases that Yogi Berra is famous for. Discussion questions might center on Berra’s phrases or the plight of an older athlete who is faced with the time of retirement. So many boys want to grow up to become famous sports figures, and, as we all know, only a miniscule number actually attain this goal. Perhaps students will take a lesson from this play and a re-consider the value of their education.

“The Brat”

“The Brat,” performed by Fanny Brice, is not actually a play but an old radio script about a little girl who gets into trouble and her father who tries to get and keep her out of trouble. I think students will benefit from this reading experience from several perspectives. It is historical in that it is pre-television. For my students this will be ancient times, but they will get a first hand understanding that kids of that time were not so different from themselves. Brice’s character Snooks gets into trouble with the neighbor and then tries to hide it from her dad when he comes home. There is also some vocabulary that I do not think my students are accustomed to which will give them another learning opportunity. The ensuing discussion might focus on the comprehension of the script itself simply because it is longer than the first three. I believe that students will definitely find the piece to be funny simply because of its age. They will also most likely be able to identify with the character Snooks because she gets into so much mischief.

In the second Fanny Brice piece, Snooks is trying to get into a school where she has to take a test to see if she will fit in. She totally befuddles the principal, and we are left knowing that she will not be going to that school. This too is a funny piece because there is a lot of play on words. Students might discuss how words are twisted around to produce a funny result. This will be great for my students because I really do not think they are accustomed to manipulating language to make humor.

Archy and Mehitabel

Archy and Mehitabel, by Don Marquis, is listed as “humor, poetry.” Most of the pieces do read like poetry, but some read like very short essays. They are sometimes humorous, sometimes thought-provoking, and usually both. The premise of the book is that it was created by a cockroach named Archy whose soul is actually that of a human poet, but for some reason his soul transmigrated into the life of a cockroach. His only avenue to express his literary self is to jump onto the keys of a typewriter using the paper left in the typewriter by Don Marquis. My students will not know what a typewriter is. The idea of a cockroach being literary and having a need to write is humorous simply because it is so very unexpected. Mehitabel is Archy’s friend and often the subject of his prose. She is also a cat, and like Archy, she too has a transmigrated soul. Where Archy is thoughtful and considers life from a philosophical perspective, Mehitabel is a party animal and likes to go out and about with many different toms. Students will enjoy reading *Archy and Mehitabel* initially because it will remind them of a time when they were young and read books, or had books read to them, where the characters were animals and insects and being read to was fun. If their parents did not read these stories to them, then at least their elementary school teachers did. An example of one of these stores is *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. Most

kindergarteners have had either this story or one very much like it read to them, and I believe most high school students can remember story time as a pleasant and non-threatening experience. With this in mind, I think they will come to the page with a good attitude toward what they are about to read. As the class reads through some of Archy's pieces, they will discover a new perspective from which to view the world around them.

Another interesting aspect of this book is that none of the text has capitals or punctuation. The problem for Archy is that he can't hit the shift key and the letter at the same time, and since it takes so much effort to hit the letters at all, he would not want to waste energy hitting punctuation keys. We all take capitalization and punctuation for granted and our students are some of the worst at using both the way they should. I have had students say, "Well, you know what I mean, so it is okay," when they did not capitalize or punctuate a sentence on the board. They do not quite seem to understand the value of this convention. Reading Archy's work can really bring that idea home. The reader has to work and sometimes re-read to understand what exactly is being said, especially where Archy uses dialogue. Forcing students to read text in this way will enable them to see from personal experience the value of proper punctuation and capitalization. They will also be forced to re-read simply to understand what is being said. I will model this for them as we read. *Archy and Mehitabel* will genuinely illustrate the value of re-reading for understanding.

Students will not read the whole book but only selections which I think students can most easily understand and relate. Since this book was first published in 1916, I feel that some of the pieces are just too time sensitive for the average student to readily appreciate. The first selection that students will read is "The Coming of Archy," which introduces Archy and explains how he comes to be writing on Don Marquis' typewriter in the first place. In "Mehitabel Was Once Cleopatra," Archy introduces Mehitabel and implies that Mehitabel may not be telling the truth about her past. These two pieces will give students a sense of Archy's perspective. I think some students will have a difficult time with Pythagoras' theory of "the transmigration of souls." Some students will have to go around their personal feeling or beliefs to be able to accept the premise of this book. This should produce a lively discussion from the class. I believe once we can get past that and set aside our personal beliefs for the sake of the story, then we can move on to enjoy the rest of the pieces. This, in and of itself, will be a good experience for students because, for one thing, having to set aside their personal feelings is not something students are necessarily good at. So many fights get started because someone stepped on someone else's sense of right and wrong. They can always use the practice of using words to iron out their differences and agree to, disagree with, or lay aside their differences to achieve a higher goal. We might also discuss transmigration or reincarnation on a personal level to give students the opportunity to consider what they might have been in the past or what they might become in the future. This assumes that most students are open to such a discussion.

Many of the pieces regarding Mehitabel use her voice. She talks a lot about being footloose, carefree, and her motto is "toujours gai toujours gai" (22). I can hear my students now cracking up over the term gay. They do not know this word in its original definition; they only know it for its modern interpretation, so this will be a good example of how the language grows and changes over time. My students like to say "move around" to mean "go away." This is definitely a new interpretation of these words, and if a person was not familiar with the jargon of the kids, then they would surely think they were being given some odd instructions to move their body.

Archy writes several poems on one creature eating another. He writes from the perspective of both the diner and the dinner. I think my students will enjoy these pieces because they have, in the past, talked about eating worms, not because they have actually eaten worms but because they have eaten something else, like chicken, that has eaten worms. They sometimes have a funny way of looking at things. Hearing a story from two different points of view at the same time

opens the way for many different discussions. High school students for the most part seem to have a hard time with this concept, or at least many of mine do. I think this is because it is a naturally narcissistic time of their development, and they are so concerned about fitting in so much of the time. Nevertheless, being able to see or appreciate two different points of view at the same time would be a good point of discussion. I will simulate this in class by having one half of the class having a contrived power over the other half for a week. I will do this by using colored paper and pens/pencils. For the specified week one half of the class would decide which color of paper and which color of writing utensil the whole class will use. These are incidental concerns in the grand scheme of things, but for many of the students I can imagine this being important as control is control; power is power. The next week the roles will be reversed so that each side of the dynamic can be understood by everyone. Students will have the opportunity to know what it feels like to have power over their peers as well as what it feels like when other students have the same power over them. From this, students can express what they learned and felt from the experience through a means of their choice. I will have a list of choices which would include writing a short story, creating a poster, making a cartoon, or writing a poem. Perhaps from this experience they will look at the world with a more balanced perspective.

Another point that Archy makes is how humans enjoy the beautiful insects like butterflies and ladybugs, but with the more ugly or plain-looking insects people are often all too ready to go out of their way to squash such an insect. This can lead to a discussion regarding beauty and human behavior. Researchers say that “beautiful” people have a natural edge over average looking people. We can decide for ourselves whether or not we think this is true. Actually I have seen this in the classroom. If a student looks out of the ordinary, he or she is a lot more likely to be ostracized by the other members of the class. We can look at this and ask ourselves whether this is the right way to be and, if not, how we could change. What is it we are really valuing?

The last point regarding this book would be the vocabulary of the text. Before we begin reading this book, students will be given a list of vocabulary words, people, and places, and they will have to find the definition of each. We will review this in class together to make sure everyone understands. We will write people and places mentioned in the story on poster board and leave that up for the duration of our reading, so we can refer to our list when we need to remember. This experience will give students an opportunity to read non-fiction and supports the concept of wide reading. There are also many historical figures mentioned as well as literary figures. Reading these pieces will give students insight as to who these figures were and how they or their work was viewed by society at that time. This will help them both in their literature classes in the future as well as in their history classes.

As we conclude this part of the unit, students will have the opportunity to either write their own poem or create a cartoon which would have to be from an animal’s or insect’s perspective. This will allow them to have some fun while they show what they have learned regarding point of view. They will also be able to show confidence and competence in their creation.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan 1: *Archy and Mehitabel* (pre-reading)

Objectives

The student will have the opportunity to locate information in varied sources, read critically and evaluate sources. The student will read to complete a task, gather information and be informed. Students will also generate relevant, interesting and researchable questions.

Materials Needed

Paper, pen/pencil, list of names/places to identify (Oriol, Sir Author Conan Doyle, Carnegie Hall, Madagascar, Jonah, Tutankhamen, Egyptian scarab, Yorick, Hamlet, Nirvana, Horatio, Cleopatra, Emperor Valerian, Pythagorean theory of transmigration of souls, Luxembourg Gardens, Gargoyles of Notre Dame, Francois Villon, Ichneumon, cetacean, boreas), Internet access, library books, Smart board, poster board, colored pencils or markers.

Procedures

With list in hand and in pairs, students will go to library to find all of the items on the list. They will have one class period to find all of the items on the list and one class period to prepare their presentations. This might be extended or reduced depending on the pace of the students. Presentations and the assessment should take one and a half or two more class periods depending on the size of the class.

Activity

Once students find the items they will have to write down in their own words what each is. They will have to show on a map where each item originated, give the history of the item, describe in writing what each item looks like, be able to state the purpose or role of each item and state how each item has had an effect on society through time, and one question about each item. Questions must be written on a separate piece of paper. Although each pair will have to find all of the items, they will only have to present to the class a few items depending on the size of the class. Presentations will have to include some sort of visual aid along with the information. Students will have the option of using the Smart board for their visual aid or a more conventional poster board.

Assessment

The questions that students generated while completing their activity will be used to assess students' understanding of their research. Duplicated questions will, of course, be eliminated.

Lesson Plan 2: *Archy and Mehitabel* (during reading)

Objectives

Students will learn how various texts are organized and how authors choose language for effect. Students will monitor his/her own reading and adjust when understanding breaks down by rereading, using resources, and questioning. Students will also use previous experience to comprehend and construct images based on text descriptions.

Materials Needed

Copies of "The Coming of Archy," "Mehitabel Was Once Cleopatra," "Pity the Poor Spiders," "A Spider and a Fly," "Freddy the Rat Perishes," "The Robin and the Worm," "The Lesson of the Moth," "The Froward Lady Bug," "The Hen and the Oriole," and "Mehitabel Meets an Affinity."

Procedures

Whole class reading

Activity

Everyone will have a copy of all of the texts. One student will read the text while the rest follow along. Each piece will be read without interruption. Once we finish a piece, we will reread but this time students will use a red pen to add capitalization, punctuation, and definitions in the margin for any confusing words. After we have made these annotations, we will read the piece for a third time to see what a difference these changes have made for our understanding. After

the third reading, we will discuss the poem and the points that have been raised by Archy. These discussions will range from understanding the premise of the book to Archy's unique perspective on the world vs. student's perspectives.

Assessment

After reading three to four poems, we will pause to take a quick assessment to see how well students comprehend the text. Each assessment will include four to six questions about the text, plus they will have to draw a quick illustration of one of the poems.

Lesson Plan 3: Collected Scripts (during and after reading)

Objectives

Students will: be given the opportunity to read with confidence, competence and understanding; learn how various texts are organized and how authors choose language for effect; read with fluency and understanding in increasingly demanding texts; apply modes of reasoning such as induction and deduction to think critically; organize, learn, and recall important ideas from texts and oral presentations such as note taking, outlining, using learning logs, rereading, scanning and skimming; make inferences such as drawing conclusions and making generalizations or predictions, supporting them with text evidence and experience.

Materials Needed

Copies of scripts, paper, pen/pencil, poster board, markers or pictures

Procedures

Students will be put into groups of three to four. Each group member will get a copy of the play. We will talk about what a discussion is and what a good classroom discussion might look like. Students will be made aware of the assessment at the end of this activity. Students will have one to two class periods to prepare their presentation and approximately 20-30 minutes to give the presentation and have their discussion.

Activity

Once students are in groups, they will begin deciding who will have which part. They will be instructed that they have to read the play several times, so they can read it with expression and believability. After they have read the piece enough they will have time to develop four discussion questions as well as a poster that represents their piece. At least one discussion question will have to begin with "why" and one will have to begin with "how." This assumes that students have never had to develop discussion questions before and may not know how. Once this is completed students will present their work to the class by reading the scripts with their posters displayed behind them. Once they are finished, they will attempt to lead a discussion on the contents of the script as the experts. They will use their pre-written questions as a springboard for their discussion.

Assessment

To assess this activity I will create a rubric which measures the fluidity and expressiveness of the readers, how thought provoking the questions are and the aesthetics of their poster. The class will also be assessed by how well they participated and facilitated with the discussion. I will look at whether or not they respond to the questions given, whether they come up with any original thoughts about the piece, and/or if they appear to be paying attention.

Lesson Plan 4: *Twisted* (pre-reading)

Objectives

The student will: determine and adjust purpose for reading such as to find out, to understand, to interpret, to enjoy and to solve problems; and apply modes of reasoning such as induction and deduction to think critically.

Procedures

The class will discuss the conventions of a story in terms of setting, plot, characterization, and tone. Students will be assigned partners and then given a parameter to complete the activity.

Activity

In groups of two, students will write a four to five paragraph story about a boy with a problem. Students must explain the setting and develop the character of the boy giving him a background and personality. His problem must also be developed and through the course of the story his problem must be solved. I will ask students to try and make their story humorous, but that will not be mandatory. They must also write one question about their story that they will ask the class once they are finished. Once students have finished, they will present their stories to the class and ask their one question. The class in turn must write the names of the presenters on a piece of paper and then write a response to the question given by the presenters.

Assessment

Stories will be assessed by whether or not they have a plot, how well developed the characters are, and originality.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works Cited

- Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Twisted*. New York: Penguin Group, 2007.
This coming of age story is geared toward boys but would be enjoyable reading for either gender.
- Brice, Fanny. "The Brat." In *There's Laughter in the Air! Radio's Top Comedians and Their Best Shows*. Ed. Jack Gaver and Dave Stanley. New York: Greenberg: Publishers, 1945.
This is a collection of scripts from old radio shows that not only has historical value but also reminds its readers that people do not really change so much over time.
- Lederer, Richard. *The Play of Words: Fun & Games for Language Lovers*. New York: Pocket Books, 1990.
What a fun book for anyone who enjoys words and games.
- Lightig, Robin Rice. "Déjà Vu All Over Again." *Dramamama*. 2007. April 2008.
<<http://dramamama1.homestead.com/scripts.html>>.
Funny short piece about Yogi Berra.
- . "Gloom, Doom and Soul-Crushing Misery." *Dramamama*. 2007.
April 2008. <<http://dramamama1.homestead.com/scripts.html>>.
This play makes you stop and think about what happiness is all about.
- . "Life 101." *Dramamama*. 2005. April 2008. <<http://dramamama1.homestead.com/scripts.html>>.
Creationism vs. evolution from a different perspective.
- Marquis, Don. *Archy and Mehitabel*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1973.
Funny and thought provoking poems from a unique point of view.
- "Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)." *Texas Education Agency*. April 2008.
<<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/teks/>>.

Supplemental Sources

- Brunetti, Ivan, Ed. *An Anthology of Graphic Fiction, Cartoons, & True Stories*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.
This has interesting adult cartoons.
- Bartlett, John, Ed. *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations: A Collection of Passages, Phrases and Proverbs Traced to Their Sources*. Boston: Little Brown, 1992.
This book has quotes for all occasions.
- Christing, Adam, Ed. *Comedy Comes Clean: A Hilarious Collection of Wholesome Jokes, Quotes, and One Liners*. New York: Crown Trade Paperbacks, 1996.
This collection is suitable for the whole family.
- James, Steven. *Drama for Real Life: 16 Scripts about the Choices that Shape Us*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006.
This has short plays with a religious message for young people.
- Kammerman, Sylvia, Ed. *The Big Book of Comedies: 25-one-act Plays, Skits, Curtain Raisers, and Adaptations for Young Actors*. Boston: Plays, Inc., 1989.
This book has many good plays.
- Osgood, Charles, Ed. *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the White House: Humor, Blunders, and Other Oddities*. New York: Hyperion, 2008.
Fun to read especially in an election year.
- Saffron, Robert, Ed. *Great Farces*. New York: Collier Books, 1966.
This book contains five classic farces.