Introduction: Getting a Sense of the Whole

Language Arts are mainly concerned with skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These basic skills are practiced through reading and discussing stories and pictures, and learning elements of grammar. Yet these basic skills are conceived superficially by textbook writers: I listen and read in order to be able to recall facts and follow directions; I speak and write in order to present facts, practice using proper formats (for example, question marks) and state my preferences. Texts do not seem to appreciate how all four activities are really practice in thinking. I may not have to think in order to remember what is said or written, but I must think in order to understand, evaluate, and incorporate what I hear and read. Similarly with speaking and writing, I don't have to think (much) in order to speak or write facts, compose summaries, and describe preferences, but I must think when I evaluate, try to communicate an important idea or belief, answer questions I have not considered before, or explain why I hold my beliefs. In other words, speaking and writing offer me a chance to develop and clarify my ideas and understanding. Numerous extended discussions are crucial to developing both listening and speaking skills.

Many stories presented in Language Arts curriculum provide material for fruitful, exploratory discussion about ethics, problem solving, emotions, and important issues and concepts. The suggested discussion questions, however, fail to take advantage of the stories to provide students practice engaging in thoughtful discussion. Rather than focusing on and pursuing crucial ideas in depth, many lessons merely contain a jumble of questions, having little relation to one another. Rather than asking students to evaluate a character's behavior (and explain and defend their evaluations), texts tend to simply ask students which characters they liked best.

We recommend, then, that discussions about stories become occasions for students to practice developing and explaining their ideas, and listening and responding to the ideas of others.
Students should be encouraged to probe beneath the surface of issues and ideas found in stories, to take their own ideas, and ideas of others, seriously. They should have a chance to think aloud when talking, consider what others say when listening, organize and expand on their ideas when writing, and analyze and evaluate when reading.

Generally, Language Arts materials fail to take advantage of opportunities to have students think fairly-mindedly (except, occasionally, when they have students take the "points of view" of animals or inanimate objects). Especially when discussing issues important to children, for instance, common disputes between parents and children, students should be encouraged to seriously consider points of view that oppose their own. Whenever possible, discussion should foster insight into egocentricity. Students should consider such questions as, "Is it ever hard to listen carefully to ideas with which you disagree? Why?"

Text questions frequently ask students what an important concept or idea means. Yet they do not have students analyze it in depth. They do not have them compare examples with examples of opposite ideas, discuss values implicit in using some concept (such as 'good sport'), or explore the implications of applying the concept.

When discussing feelings, texts rarely ask students to consider the relationship between what someone feels and what he or she thinks.

When text questions do not require students to state the issue or problem, the teacher should do so. Text questions fail to ask students to discuss at length the requirements for settling an issue or problem (that is, "Do we have to clarify ideas? Do we need facts? Are we evaluating anything? etc."). They typically don't have students discuss the criteria for judging solutions, compare possible solutions, or describe what is wrong with bad solutions.

Texts discourage independent thought by presenting techniques and concepts as self-evident. Students are not required to consider alternative techniques or concepts. Nor do texts have students discuss the purpose of using a technique or concept.

Texts fail to teach critical vocabulary (such as 'infer,' 'relevant') even when such ideas are under discussion. Furthermore, the inferences students are asked to make are not distinguished from what they can observe or must guess. Students are asked to provide answers to questions even when the most appropriate response would be "I don't know" or "I can't tell." Furthermore, the texts lack valuable discussions concerning the potential problems caused by unjustified inferences.

**The Language Arts In Perspective**

Language arts, as a domain of learning, principally covers the study of literature and the arts of reading and writing. All three areas — literature, reading and writing — deal with the art of imagining, interpreting, and expressing in language how people do live and how they might live their lives. All three areas involve expression through command of language. Of course, there is no command of language separate from command of thought and no command of thought without command of language.

Very few children grow up to publish novels, poems, or short stories, but presumably all should begin to develop insight into the value of literature. Children should learn to enjoy the excitement of a good story. They should begin to see how stories can help us make sense of our lives. They should begin to learn how to express themselves clearly, precisely, and accurately. Through this process, they will begin to learn to think clearly, precisely, and accurately.
In words and ideas there is power — power to understand and describe, to take apart and put together, to create systems of beliefs and multiple conceptions of life. Literature displays this power, and skilled reading apprehends it. Unfortunately, most students leave school with little of this insight and skill. Few gain command of the language they use or even a sense of how to gain that command. To the extent that students have not achieved a command of the language in which they express themselves, they will struggle when called upon to interpret literature. They will find reading and writing frustrating and unrewarding. Because the foundations for such insights and skills are not typically laid in elementary education, it is difficult to develop them in students’ minds later on. It is necessary to build for insights and skills over an extended period of time, over years, not just months. It is crucial that K-3 lay a solid foundation for intellectual and emotional development.

Present standard practice, K–12, does not sufficiently emphasize the sense-making function of language. Students, as a result, do not approach the written word with an attitude that what they read should make sense to them. So, very often when they make a mistake, they fail to catch it. Many students have the idea that reading means starting at the first word and plowing on to the last period. They don’t realize that good reading means pausing, checking your understanding, skimming back and re-reading what was unclear, reading some sentences twice, etc. The way reading is taught causes students to put all writing into two categories: readable without problems or struggle, and impossible to read, so give up. They don’t learn that if something they read doesn’t make sense, there are things they can do to “crack the code”. The place to establish the right attitudes and habits of reading is from the beginning, K–3.

The task of laying foundations for love of literature and language and for the command of language that that love presupposes needs to be clearly conceived and systematically addressed. It involves cultivating a new and different conception of literature, of reading, and of writing. It is a profound challenge. However, if we value students learning to think for themselves, we cannot ignore, we must meet, this challenge. If a basic goal of English classes is to instill a lifelong love of reading, we must seriously confront why most students end up with little or no interest in literature.

We need to think seriously about the world in which they live: the music they listen to, the TV programs and movies they watch, the desires they pursue, the frustrations they experience, and the values that are embedded in their lives differently. We must design our instruction so that students systematically and critically confront how they are actually living their lives and how, if they can gain some insights and skills, they might live their lives. For example, we should help our students see through the superficiality of most popular TV programs in comparison to great works of literature.

Most teachers can probably enumerate the most common features and recurring themes of, say, many students’ entertainment: snugly animals, danger, excitement, fun, music, car chases, exploding planets, hideous creatures, mayhem, stereotypes, cardboard characters, all problems solvable in thirty minutes, and so on. The lyrics and values of most popular music are equally accessible, expressing as they do an exciting, fast-moving, sentimentalized, and superficial world of cool-looking “dudes”.

Good English instruction must respect and challenge children’s attitudes. Ignoring their preferences doesn’t alter those preferences. Children must learn to assess for themselves the relative worth of popular entertainment and quality works. Children need opportunities to scrutinize and evaluate the forms of entertainment they prefer. They need to assess the messages they receive from them, the conceptions of life they presuppose, and the values they manifest.

As instruction is now designed, children typically ignore what they hear, read, and reiterate in school work. They may follow the teacher’s request to explain why a particular story conveys an
important truth, but for most this becomes a ritual performance for the teacher's benefit, having little influence on the child's actual beliefs and values.

Critical thinking can help children to begin the process of refining their tastes and establishing a foundation for insights into language. We should teach beginning with Kindergarten with this end in mind. In any case, under no conditions should we try to force or order children to say what they don't believe. A well-reasoned, if wrong-headed, rejection of a "good" story is better than mindless praise of it.

The problem is not that we don't expose students to important "content"; it is that we do not design instruction, on the whole, so that children must think their way into and through the content. To see this more clearly, we should make clear to ourselves the guiding ideals we want to underlie our instruction. We should then start to monitor our teaching to see whether these ideals are actually being cultivated by how we teach on a day to day basis.

Think about the Ideal Student

In addition to the need to enter sympathetically into the world of our students, appreciating how and why they think and act as they do, we must also have a clear conception of what changes we are hoping to cultivate. Consider language itself and the way in which an ideal student might approach it. We want children to become sensitive to language, striving to understand and use it thoughtfully, accurately, and clearly. We want them to begin to become autonomous thinkers and so begin to command rather than be commanded by language.

As Critical Reader

Critical readers approach stories as an opportunity to live imaginatively within another's world or experience, to consider someone else's view of things. They come to realize that the same story can legitimately be understood differently by different readers. They become interested in how others read a story. This experience is analogous to the recognition that the same situation can be understood differently by different people who bring a different point of view and different experiences, to the situation. Young children need many opportunities to read and interpret not only stories, but their own experiences as well. They need to begin to talk to others about what this or that story, what this or that character, what this or that situation means.

Young readers must learn that a story does not explain itself, but must be "figured out". They must learn to try out different possible meanings. They must begin to listen to and consider what other students think about what a story or element of a story means. They must begin to learn the difference between passive, impressionistic reading and active, reflective reading. They must begin to learn to question, organize, interpret, and synthesize. They must not only begin to interpret, they must also begin to recognize their interpretations as interpretations, and to grasp the value of considering alternative interpretations.

Only as they come to recognize their interpretations as such, will they begin to see the need to test, revise, and refine their interpretations. Only then will they begin to make ideas their own, accepting what makes most sense, rejecting what is ill-thought-out, distorted, and false, thus fitting their new understanding into their existing frameworks of thought. The best way to do this is by discussions and assignments — including many small groups engaged in cooperative learning — in which students express and consider alternative interpretations.

Consider, for example, the classic story, The Deer-Slayer, by James Fenimore Cooper. It begins with the lines: "In upper New York state, along the Hudson and Mohaw old rivers, the warlike Iroquois
Indians were rampaging ... scalping, pillaging, massacring the white man who was trying to make a home in the wilderness that was part of America." As one reads on, one finds lines like: "mad to help any Indian .... Not one of them is a white man's friend", and "The Governor's raised the price on Indian scalps. Fifty pounds for each scalp you get." Throughout the story, one meets two kinds of Indians, good ones and bad ones. The "good" ones always work with and for the settlers. The bad ones are continually characterized as "savages" and "barbarians". They torture those they capture.

In this story, as well as others by Cooper (The Last of the Mohicans and The Pathfinder), a foundation is laid for many self-serving myths about early American settlers and Native-Americans. The foundation is laid for hundreds of Hollywood movies about cowboys and Indians and, in line with this same "good guys-bad guys" view of the world, hundreds of movies about cops and robbers, "Americans" and their evil enemies, etc. Children are quite familiar with this simplistic picture of the world from the cartoons they watch on Saturday and Sunday mornings. James Fenimore Cooper's stories are not taught K-3, but the stories written for this level often reflect a similar simplistic way of thinking. We should design our reading instruction so that children are encouraged to question it.

**As Critical Writer**

Command of reading and command of writing go hand-in-hand. All of the understanding, attitudes, and skills we have just explored have parallels in writing. Critical writers recognize the challenge of putting their ideas and experiences into words. They recognize that inwardly many of our ideas are a jumble, some supporting and some contradicting other ideas, some vague, some clear, some true, some false, some expressing insights, and some reflecting prejudices and mindless conformity. Because critical writers realize that they only partially understand and only partially command their own ideas and experiences, they recognize a double difficulty in making those ideas and experiences accessible to others.

As young readers, children need to begin to recognize they must actively reconstruct an author's meaning; as writers, they need to begin to recognize the parallel need to actively construct their own as well as the probable meanings given by their readers. In short, while writing, critical writers engage in tasks that parallel the ones they engage in while reading. Both are challenging; both organize, engage, and develop the mind; and both require the full and heightened involvement of critical and creative thought. The sooner we begin to cultivate these insights and skills by the activities that take place in our classes, the better.

**As Critical Listener**

The most difficult condition in which to learn is that of a listener. It is normal and natural for people to become passive when listening, to leave to the speaker the responsibility to express and clarify, to organize and exemplify, to develop and conclude. The art of becoming a critical listener is therefore the hardest and the last skill that students develop. Of course, most students never develop this art. Most students remain passive and impressionistic in their listening throughout their lives.

Yet this need not be the case. If we introduce young children to the arts of critical reading and writing, we can also introduce them to the art of critical listening. Once again, each of the understandings, attitudes, and skills of reading and writing have parallels in listening. Once again, we begin with basics. There is the same challenge to sort out, to analyze, and to consider possible interpretations, the same need to ask questions, to probe assumptions, and to trace implications. As listeners, we must follow the path of another person's thought. Listening is every bit as dialogical as reading and writing. Furthermore, we cannot go back over the words of the speaker as we
can in reading, so there is all the more reason to emphasize the need for and the nature of active listening. There are many ways to encourage active listening K-3.

One of our most important responsibilities is to model active listening in front of our children. If a child says something, we must demonstrate by our response that we are "actively" engaged in a thoughtful process of figuring out, or at least trying to figure out, what the child is saying. We should draw the students into this process.

To sum up, the ideal English student, as you can see, is quite like the ideal student in other areas of learning: critical reading, writing, and listening are required in all subject areas. Yet the language arts are more central to education than perhaps any other area. Without command of one's native language, no significant learning can take place. Even other domains of learning must utilize this command. The ideal English student should therefore come close to being the ideal learner. While helping our children to gain command of reading, writing, and listening, we should see ourselves as laying the foundation for all thought and learning. The time to begin cultivating these ideals is as early as possible. The later we begin, the further away from the ideal will we end.

Ideal Instruction

Considering the ideal reader, writer, and listener paves the way for a brief overview of ideal instruction. In each case, we should use our understanding of the ideal as a model to move toward, as an organizer for our behavior, not as an empty or unrealistic dream. Reading, writing, and listening, as critical thinking activities, help to organize and develop learning. Each is based on a recognition that, if we actively probe and analyze, dialogue and digest, question and synthesize, we will begin to grasp and follow alternative schemes of meaning and belief.

Each of us lives in a somewhat different world. Each of us has somewhat different ideas, goals, values, and experiences. Each of us constructs somewhat different meanings to live by. And we do this from the early days of our lives, not only when we grow up. In ideal instruction, we want our children to discover and begin to understand different worlds so that they can better understand and develop their own. We want them to struggle to understand the meanings of others so they can better understand their own meanings. We want all children to begin this struggle, but each within the context of the stories and experiences that they are capable of understanding.

Unfortunately, most instructional guides in the language arts do not have a unified approach to this goal. They are often a patchwork, as if constructed by a checklist mentality, as if each act of learning were independent of the one that precedes or follows it. They typically lack a global concept of literature, language, reading, writing, and listening. Even grammar is treated as a separate, unconnected set of rules and regulations.

This is not what we want, and this is not how we should design our instruction. Rather, we should look for opportunities to tie dimensions of language arts instruction together. There is no reason for treating any dimension of language arts instruction as unconnected to the rest. Thus far, we have talked about reading, writing, listening, and literature as ways of constructing and organizing meanings. We can now use this central concept to show how one can tie grammar to the rest of language arts instruction, for clearly grammar itself can be understood as an organized system for expressing meanings.

Each "subject" of each sentence, after all, represents a focus for the expression of meaning, something that we are thinking or talking about. Each "predicate" represents what is said about the subject. All adjectives and adverbs are ways of qualifying or rendering more precise the
meanings we express in subjects and predicates. By the same token, each sentence we write has some sort of meaningful relationship to the sentences that precede and follow it. The same principle holds for the paragraphs we write. In each paragraph, there must be some unifying thing that we are talking about and something that we are saying about it.

To put this another way, at each level of language arts instruction, we should aim at helping the student gain insight into the idea that there is a "logic" to the language arts. That is, that all the elements of the language arts make sense, and make sense not only in relation to each other, but also in relation to our everyday experience of the world.

This is a key insight that builds upon the idea of constructing and organizing meanings; it makes even more clear how we can tie all of the language arts together. Basic grammar has a logic to it, and that logic can be understood. Individual words and phrases also have a logic to them and, therefore, they too can be understood. When we look into language use with a sense that there is an intelligible structure to be understood, our efforts are rewarded. Unfortunately, we face a special obstacle in accomplishing this purpose.

Typically, young children treat the meanings of words as absolute and univocal. On this view, problems of meaning are settled by asking an authority for "the" meaning. Children have difficulty believing that the same word can have different meanings. We need to cultivate this recognition. But that is not all. We also need to foster their recognition that when we say something our words have implications that we should be responsible for. If we say "I promise", we have, for example, made a commitment that we should recognize.

To persuade children that it is possible to use words precisely, we must begin the process of demonstrating to them that all of the words in the language have established uses with established implications that they must learn to respect. For example, consider the words 'friend' and 'acquaintance'. If I call some people my friends, I imply that I know them well and am fond of them. If I call others acquaintances, I merely imply that I have met them, not that I know them well, not that I am necessarily fond of them. If I say that a country is democratic, I imply that the people rule that country. Each word in the language has established meanings which we must help students to learn to respect.

There is a parallel insight necessary for understanding how to arrange sentences in logical relationships to each other. Our language provides a wide variety of adverbial phrases that make connecting our sentences together easier. Here, as above, children need to begin to learn and respect this established logic. We need to look for opportunities to start this process.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connectives</th>
<th>How they are used</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>besides</td>
<td>To add another thought</td>
<td>Two postal cards are often more effective than one letter. <em>Besides</em>, they are cheaper.</td>
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<td>what's more</td>
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<td>furthermore</td>
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<tr>
<td>in addition</td>
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<tr>
<td>for example</td>
<td>To add an illustration or explanation.</td>
<td>There is no such thing as an &quot;unlucky number.&quot; <em>In other words</em>, this idea is pure superstition.</td>
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<tr>
<td>for instance</td>
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<td>in other words</td>
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</table>
**Group II**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connectives</th>
<th>How they are used</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in fact</td>
<td>To connect an idea with another one.</td>
<td>Last week I was ill. <em>In fact</em>, I had to stay in bed until Monday.</td>
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<td>as a matter of fact</td>
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<td>therefore</td>
<td>To connect an idea with another one that follows from it.</td>
<td>The President vetoed the bill. <em>Consequently</em>, it never became a law.</td>
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<td>consequently</td>
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<td>accordingly</td>
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<td>of course</td>
<td>To grant an exception or limitation.</td>
<td>He said he would study all day. I doubt it, <em>though</em>.</td>
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<td>to be sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>though</td>
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<tr>
<td>still</td>
<td>To connect two contrasting ideas.</td>
<td>I like painting; <em>however</em>, I can’t understand modern art.</td>
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<td>however</td>
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<td>on the other hand</td>
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<td>nevertheless</td>
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<td>rather</td>
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<tr>
<td>first</td>
<td>To arrange ideas in order, time, or space.</td>
<td><em>First</em>, drink some fruit juice. <em>Next</em>, have a bowl of soup. <em>Finally</em>, have some pie and coffee.</td>
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<td>next</td>
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<td>finally</td>
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<td>meanwhile</td>
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<td>later</td>
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<td>afterwards</td>
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<td>nearby</td>
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<td>eventually</td>
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<td>above</td>
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<td>beyond</td>
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<tr>
<td>in front</td>
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<tr>
<td>in short</td>
<td>To sum up several ideas.</td>
<td>Scientists say that we should eat food that has all the proteins, fats, and vitamins we need. <em>In short</em>, they recommend a balanced diet.</td>
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<tr>
<td>in brief</td>
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<tr>
<td>to sum up</td>
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<td>in summary</td>
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<tr>
<td>in conclusion</td>
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**Asking Key Questions**

**Language and grammar**

Keeping in mind the idea that language and grammar are, on the whole, logical, we should ask questions that help children begin to discover this. What follows in the next paragraph is a variety of questions that ought to be raised in a variety of contexts. You would not, of course, raise them all at once. Some may be the basis of a series of cooperative learning activities in which student groups develop their own answers to one of these questions and report their answers, and how they came to these answers, to the class as a whole.
“What is a sentence? How is it different from a group of words? What is a paragraph? How is it different from a group of sentences? Why are some ways of using a word right and others wrong? What different kinds of sentences are there? When and how should each be used? Why follow the rules of grammar? How does punctuation help the reader? How does knowing about grammar help you to write? Read?”

**Literature**

Stories have their own logic. Events don’t just happen. They make sense within the meanings and thinking of their authors. When we ask a question, there should be a method to it. The questions should lead students to discover how to come to terms with the logic of the story, at least to the meaning that they are giving to the story. In every case, we should have students support their answers by referring to passages in the story. It is not their particular answers that are of greatest importance, but rather how they support their answers with reasons and references to the story.

“What happened? Why? What is the author trying to convey? Why is this important? What is the main character like? How do you know? How do their experiences relate to my experience or to those of people around me? How realistic are the characters? How consistent? If they aren’t [realistic, consistent], why not? What conflicts occur in the story? What is the nature of this conflict? What relationship does it have to my life? What meaning does that conflict have for the character? For me? What does this work tell me about the people and everyday life around me? Can I identify with them? Should I? How does the view presented in this work relate to my view? To what extent do I accept the way this story represents people? Are they like the people I know? To what extent or in what way would I change it to make it more ‘lifelike’? How does it relate to ways of looking at things that I’ve found in other stories?”

These categories of questions would need, of course, to be formulated in different ways to be intelligible to students at different grade levels. In many cases you would have to build up to them with particular preparatory activities. None of these questions are intended as ready-made for this or that classroom. They are intended merely to stimulate your thinking about the general kind of questions that, sooner or later, in one form or another, must be raised.

**Persuasive writing**

All people spend a good deal of their time trying to persuade others to accept or believe something or other. Young children often develop considerable skill in persuading their parents to allow them to do this or that or to buy this or that. Persuasive writing, like all persuasion, has a straightforward logic. In it, a writer attempts to get the readers to take on the writer’s perspective on something. We, as readers, need to grasp what is being said and judge whether or not to accept it, whether or not it makes sense to accept it. Young children need to be introduced into the art of rational persuasion. They need to learn how to express themselves clearly (If we don’t know what they are saying how can we be persuaded?). They need to learn how to back up what they are saying with good reasons, with evidence, with relevant examples and illustrations from their experience, and with intelligible explanations.

They also need to learn to respond to the persuasive appeals of others with basic critical thinking tools. Television ads, television programs, peer groups, and adults — all attempt to persuade them. Children need to begin to learn how to develop their own persuasive appeals at the same time that they begin to learn how to rationally assess the persuasive appeals of others. As
always, we need to learn to continually model these processes for them, finding ways to engage them in small groups carrying these processes out for themselves. In general, we need to help children begin to think analytically and reasonably.

"What, exactly, is the author trying to say? Why? How does the author support what he is saying with reasons, evidence, or experiences? What examples can I think of to further illuminate these ideas? What are the consequences of believing or doing as the author says? What kind of writing is this? How has the writer attempted to achieve her purpose? Have I good reason to accept what is being said? Doubt it? How could I check, or better evaluate, what is being said? What has been left out? Distorted? How do these ideas relate to mine?"

As always, these questions are meant to be merely suggestive, not necessarily to be the actual questions that you will ask this or that student. There are many possible reformulations of these questions which would render them more accessible, more understandable to young children. And, as always, children learn to be comfortable with analytic questions over time. We must be ever vigilant not to overwhelm them with more than they can take in at any given time.

Writing

Writing has a logic. Good substance poorly arranged loses most of its value. Whatever the principle of order chosen, thought must progress from somewhere to somewhere else. It must follow a definite direction, not ramble aimlessly. In the entire piece, as well as in each section and paragraph, ideally, each sentence should have a place of its own, and a place so plainly its own that it could not be shifted to another place without losing coherence. Children need to begin to discover that disorderly thinking produces disorderly writing and, conversely, orderly writing enhances orderly thinking. They need to change their misconceptions about the writing process: good writers begin with the first sentence and write each sentence perfectly until they get to the end. Children need practice pre-writing rough notes and increasingly refining their work until they are writing final copy.

We need to introduce children to the art of orderly, logical writing. We need to model this process for them. This can be done in a number of ways. If the students have a sufficient reading vocabulary, we can work with the class as a whole writing a short paragraph, asking for suggestions from the class as to how we might begin. Then, once a sentence is on the board we might ask if the sentence is clear, how we might express it more precisely. Then, we can ask for suggestions for a follow-up sentence, for one that elaborates further on what is said in the first sentence. Then, once satisfied with the formulation of that sentence, we might ask for an example to illustrate the point made in the first two sentences. And so we might proceed, working with the class to develop the paragraph. In this way, students can observe minds at work doing the labor of writing. A follow-up to this process might be to have the students work in groups, each group developing its own paragraph on a common main point. Then each group could choose a spokesperson to read its paragraph to the class as a whole and the class could then get both further experience in this process while gaining insight into how others think their way through a writing project. Over time we want students to become habituated to ask questions that help them develop their writing.

Conclusion

In order to foster basic learning in the language arts, it is essential that you develop for yourself a clear sense of the logic of language and of the unity of the language arts. If you model the insight that every dimension of language and literature makes sense, can be figured out, can be
brought under our command, can be made useful to us, your children will be much more apt to make this same discovery for themselves. Remember, children are not used to unifying what they study. All too soon they become used to a steady diet of fragmented learning. They become used to forgetting, to studying the same thing over and over, and to everything being self-contained. On the whole, they do not learn organization skills.

Furthermore, most students do not learn the value of clear and precise language usage. Rather they learn to be satisfied with any words that occur to them to say or write. They do not become familiar with good writing. Disciplined thinking typically remains something foreign to them.

If you are to set in motion a new way to learn, a new set of attitudes and insights, a new unified, motivated basis upon which later teachers can build, you must develop patience with your own learning. You must be willing to have your own teaching strategies develop over time. Learning to teach in a critical manner takes a long time, but the implications are then significant—students who learn to use language clearly and precisely for the rest of their lives, students who listen and read critically for the rest of their lives, students who become critical and creative persons for the rest of their lives.

Everyone learning to deepen her critical thinking skills and dispositions comes to insights over time. We certainly can enrich and enhance this process, even help it to move at a faster pace, but only in a qualified way. Time to assimilate and grow is essential.
Evaluative Thinking

(Kindergarten)

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:

- practice evaluating actions through role-play
- explore the relationship between a person's thoughts and feelings in particular situations
- develop criteria for evaluating people's behavior

Original Lesson Plan

Abstract

The students are put in groups of two or three and assigned a role-playing situation to act out while the rest of the class observes. A discussion follows which includes imagining what would have happened if any part of the situation had been changed, how the students felt about the situation, and whether they have had any similar experiences. The suggested role-play situations included these: a child who is nervous being in front of the class forgets the answer and another child laughs, two children agree to share a toy, and a student shouts a warning as another child starts to run into the street without looking.


Critique

This lesson is a confusing introduction to evaluative thinking because none of the questions asked call upon the students to evaluate anything. To evaluate accurately and fairly, students should understand what they are evaluating, and why. Critical thinkers are conscious of the standards they use when evaluating so that these, too, become objects of evaluation. Although reasonable people can disagree, making standards or principals themselves objects of evaluation makes rational discussion and agreement more likely.

Although the stories in the original lesson clearly suggest evaluative conclusions, neither the process of evaluation, standards of evaluation, or evaluative conclusions are elicited by the questions. Furthermore, this lesson encourages absolutistic (that is, "all or nothing") thinking, by using stories which describe cases of "all right" or "all wrong" whereas most real-life cases involve at least some degree of shared blame. The value of these exercises, as they stand, lies in showing how our behavior has consequences, and that changing our behavior can change the situation we are in.
Strategies used to remodel

S-20 analyzing or evaluating actions or policies
S-4 exploring thoughts underlying feelings and feelings underlying thoughts
S-15 developing criteria for evaluation: clarifying values and standards
S-35 exploring implications and consequences

Remodelled Lesson Plan S-20

The questions used in the original lesson can be used to elicit situations that the children are familiar with. However, since they don't require students to evaluate, we suggest that they be followed by questions which first call for an evaluation, then clarify what is being evaluated and why.

You might begin discussion of each situation by having students discuss what the characters felt and thought and why. "What happened? How did M feel about it? N? Why? What was each thinking? Why? What makes you think so?" S-4

To elicit and probe evaluations in the first situation, the teacher could ask, "Was it better for the second child to have laughed, or to have looked encouragingly? Why? What are we evaluating in this situation? Why is this important?"

The teacher could point out any standards of evaluation the students use. For example, if a student states "It was mean because it hurt his feelings," the teacher could say, "You used the standard of not hurting other people's feelings to conclude that this was wrong." S-15

If a variation is introduced, such as, "He wrote a funny answer on purpose when he forgot the right answer", the teacher can say, "Now we have a different story. How is this story different, and what do we want to say about it? Does this change make you think differently about this? Why or why not?" S-35
Listening Ears
(Kindergarten)

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:
- begin to develop insight into the importance and difficulty of listening to understand
- practice critical listening by restating other students' positions
- discuss how egocentricity can interfere with listening

Original Lesson Plan

Abstract
This lesson introduces the idea of listening by first asking students to sit quietly and listen to the sounds they hear, and then to discuss what they heard. Next, the children look at pictures of a mother rabbit with her babies (ears up and listening), a boy talking to his dog (ears up and listening), and students listening to a crossing guard. The teacher asks questions about who is listening and why, and why it's important to listen.

This is followed by a discussion in which students recall personal experiences of times it was important to listen. Finally, the teacher conducts a listening game of giving directions, and asking a student to follow them.

from Let's Talk and Listen: Yellow Level

Critique

Although the objective of "Listening Ears" is to learn the importance of listening carefully, discussion is limited to the importance of listening to authorities for instruction and safety. A critical education requires that students be encouraged to listen to new ideas, and other points of view. Unless we understand a position well enough to present it ourselves, we cannot rationally agree or disagree with it. Since no one person can know everything, we should listen to others, distinguish what they know from what they don't know, and adjust our beliefs to accommodate what we have learned.

The original lesson doesn't distinguish listening as hearing from listening as understanding, and therefore ignores the difficulties of listening to understand. Children should begin to develop the insight that listening requires more than just hearing; it requires a sincere attempt to grasp what is said; listening is active. The biggest difficulties of listening arise from the complexity of the process of understanding, and our natural resistance to ideas different from our own. Listening is hardest when we don't want to listen.
Strategies used to remodel

S-22 listening critically: the art of silent dialogue
S-3 exercising fairmindedness
S-7 developing intellectual good faith or integrity
S-2 developing insight into egocentricity or sociocentricity

Remodelled Lesson Plan S-22

We believe that it is crucial to practice incorporating the aforementioned insights about listening into the solutions of genuine problems that arise at school. We encourage teachers to take advantage of as many problems, decisions, and disputes as possible. When students claim to disagree with each other, have them state each other’s views fairly and accurately. Ask questions of clarification to elicit points overlooked. Later, you could facilitate a discussion in which students describe any problems they had in trying to listen, and why it was important to listen. S-3

Following is a list of questions the teacher can ask to further encourage students to think about the importance and difficulty of listening:

• Why should we listen to other people? Has anything bad happened to you because you didn’t listen? When? Why should we listen to friends? Family? Classmates? Teachers? etc.

• When is it hard to listen? Why? Can you think of a time when you weren’t listening to someone? Who was trying to talk to you? Why didn’t you listen? What were you thinking? Why? S-7

• Do you ever act as though you are listening when you aren’t? What’s the difference between listening and pretending to listen?

• How do you feel when people don’t listen carefully to you?

• Is it easy or hard to listen a] when you are angry, scared, or excited? b) to someone you like? c) to someone you don’t like? d) when someone says something that sounds dumb or crazy to you? e) when someone says something that you think makes sense or is similar to what you think f) when you don’t understand?

• How can you tell if someone is listening? What are the differences between being a good listener and not being a good listener? S-2
“Corduroy”
(K-1)

by Judy Calonico, Calaveras Unified
Schools, Pine Grove, CA

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:
- compare perspectives of a mother and daughter in a story
- explore the thoughts underlying the feelings regarding what makes things valuable
- generate and assess solutions
- clarify values and develop criteria to evaluate toys

Standard Approach

A Teddy bear named Corduroy sits on a shelf at a large department store. A little girl sees him and wants to buy him, but her mother says no because they are out of time and the teddy bear is missing a button. After the store closes, the bear searches for his button because he wants to be bought by the child. He looks all over the store and finally ends up in the bed department where he sees a button on a mattress and tries to pull it off. He falls off the mattress, knocks over a lamp and the night guard finds him and returns him to the toy department. The child returns, buys him, sews on the button and Corduroy happily joins her family.

Students are asked questions like the following: Who is Corduroy? Where is he? How did he get his name? Does anyone know what the material called corduroy looks and feels like? (Pass around a piece of corduroy.) Why did Corduroy go out into the store? Why was it important to find his button? Where was he when he tried to pull one up? Why couldn’t he get it? How did the story end?

Critique

The original lesson focused on a lot of factual recall and a narrow line of questioning. No other point of view was suggested, nor was there any personal tie-in.

Strategies used to remodel

S-25 reasoning dialogically: comparing perspectives, interpretations, or theories
S-19 generating or assessing solutions
S-15 developing criteria for evaluation: clarifying values and standards
S-4 exploring thoughts underlying feelings and feelings underlying thoughts
S-26 reasoning dialectically: evaluating perspectives, interpretations, or theories
Remodelled Lesson Plan S-25

To lay the foundation for exploring thoughts underlying feelings and comparing perspectives in the story, the teacher could first set up a role play in which several children are wearing pictures of toys while a mother and child walk past shopping for the best toy. After a few minutes, stop and ask the toys how they felt, then ask the child how he or she was choosing, then ask the mother how she was choosing.

Read the story aloud and ask the following questions to encourage students to explore the story’s meaning and assess Corduroy’s solution:

What was Corduroy doing in the store after it closed? Why did he think it was important to find the button? Do you think it was important for him to find the button? How else could he have solved the problem of the missing button? Was it really necessary for him to have a button in order for him to be bought? S-19 Do you think an adult would buy a teddy bear with a button missing? If not, why not? Why do you think the girl bought him anyway? S-15 What would you have done? How did the girl feel after she bought Corduroy? Why? How do you know how she felt? What do you think Corduroy felt? Why? How do you know? S-4

“Can you think of a different way to end the story? If your favorite animal could think, what would he or she have thought while being bought?”

editors’ note: The teacher could extend the discussion on the differences between the perspectives and standards of the girl and her mother (a common sort of difference between children and grown-ups). “Why do some people care about things like missing buttons and other people don’t? How important was the missing button to the mother? Why? What reasons could she have? The girl? Why? Corduroy? Why? What was the most important thing about Corduroy for the mother? The girl? Why did the girl want Corduroy? Why didn’t the missing button alter her feelings? Would the missing button have stopped any of the girl’s plans for Corduroy? Why or why not? What does this difference between mother and daughter tell us about their values — what they think is important? Do you think the missing button is important? Why or why not? What’s your best reason? What’s the best reason on the other side? S-15 Have you ever seen or experienced a similar disagreement? How was it similar? What do you think of it? What does that tell us about your values?” S-26

- With whom do you identify? Who do you understand? Who are you rooting for? Why?
“The Gingerbread Man”
(K-1)

by Pamela Lane-Stamm, Mattole Union
School District, Petrolia, CA

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:
• discuss the nature of what is real and not real
• practice suppositional thinking
• engage in dialectical thinking by evaluating the perspectives of the gingerbread man and
  the lady
• develop intellectual good faith by discussing the problem of selfishness

Standard Approach

The teacher reads the classic story about the gingerbread man to the class. A lady makes up a gingerbread cookie batter, forms the gingerbread man and
cooks him in the oven. But as she opens the oven door to take the gingerbread
man out, he leaps off the cookie sheet and runs out the front door calling,
“Run, run as fast as you can. You can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man!”
The lady, then a rabbit, and later a bear all try to catch the gingerbread man.
But he outruns them all. The gingerbread man reaches a river that he must
cross in order to stay ahead of his pursuers and a fox offers to take him across
on his tail. As the river gets deeper, the fox coaxes him to climb onto his back
and then his nose. Then the fox eats the gingerbread man.

After listening to the story the children make pairs of gingerbread men out of
construction paper and play a matching game. For an art project they can
make rubbings of them. In addition, the children can take pictures of events in
the story that are mixed up and sequence them into the same order in which
they occurred in the story. They may also bake gingerbread.

Critique

Although the after-reading activities are a nice “hands-on” experience with gingerbread men
and sequencing the pictures is a valuable way to recall the events that took place in the story,
the story isn't discussed after the reading. Discussion should include the children's ideas
concerning the realism of the story and the characters in the story. This topic alone would take up
an hour or more and the children's thoughts on this matter suggest an evaluative as well as a
descriptive judgment. It points to what the child considers to be serious and genuine, authentic
and actual. From there, another discussion can take place from the position of assuming the
events and characters are real, then what would have happened if ...? and present various situ-
ations and problems for the class to solve. The other activities could occur after these discussions.
Strategies used to remodel

S-14 clarifying and analyzing the meanings of words or phrases
S-18 analyzing or evaluating arguments, interpretations, beliefs, or theories
S-35 exploring implications and consequences
S-26 reasoning dialectically: evaluating perspectives, interpretations, or theories
S-7 developing intellectual good faith or integrity

Remodelled Lesson Plan

After the story has been read, the teacher can initiate a discussion about the concept of 'for real' with questions like these, "Was the gingerbread man 'for real'? Was the lady 'for real'? Were the rabbit, bear, and fox 'for real'? Is your desk, your head, a cartoon show, a hole in the ground, a hole in the air 'for real'?" Be ready for lots of unexpected answers and additional questions. After this, baking gingerbread men could be an additional activity, allowing the kids to smell, touch, and taste the ginger and molasses and perhaps discussing their realness as you go. S-14

On the following day, after rereading the story or using another text for retelling the story, initiate another discussion by asking about the differences and similarities of the two stories, if two texts are used. You might then talk about assumptions and ask, "Assuming these stories are 'for real', why did the gingerbread man think nobody could catch him? What was the gingerbread man assuming? (That he could trust the fox.) What were the fallacies in his thinking? S-18 Could the gingerbread man have avoided being eaten? What would have happened if he hadn't been caught and eaten?" S-35 After this, cutting out pairs of gingerbread men and playing a matching game would be a nice extension. Pairs of the other characters may also be made for the game.

Editors' note: Students could also explore and assess the points of view of the gingerbread man and the lady. "Why did the lady feel that she was justified in wanting to eat the gingerbread man? What do you think her reasons were? Why did the gingerbread man feel that the woman shouldn't eat him? What do you think his reasons were? Do their reasons make sense to you? In what ways is the lady right? In what ways is the gingerbread man right? Why?" S-26

By discussing the selfishness of the lady, the students could recognize their tendency to judge others more strictly than they judge themselves. Ask the students, "How was the lady selfish? Would you have behaved differently towards the gingerbread man? Why or why not? Would it have been easy to behave unselfishly in this circumstance?" S-7
"Goldilocks and the Three Bears"

(K-2)

by Jim Georgevich, Billie Forman, Karen Holub, and Betty Allen, Greensboro Public Schools, Greensboro, NC

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:
- through Socratic discussion, clarify and explore the differing perspectives of storybook characters
- examine how people feel when their rights have been violated
- explore the feelings that underlie anger
- evaluate story characters’ actions

Standard Approach

After reading the story, the teacher asks students about factual information to check for comprehension.

Critique

Students are rarely given a chance to think about how the different characters in this fairy tale would respond differently to the action of the story, and how those different responses are, in part, determined by different points of view. Students miss a valuable opportunity to think about, verbalize, and share ideas concerning different points of view and how different people will interpret the same sequence of events in different ways.

Strategies used to remodel

S-24 practicing Socratic discussion: clarifying and questioning beliefs, theories, or perspectives
S-4 exploring thoughts underlying feelings and feelings underlying thoughts
S-20 analyzing or evaluating actions or policies

Remodelled Lesson Plan s-24

The teacher will read the story to students and discuss with them how and why Goldilocks enters the Bears’ house. They will discuss the events from Goldilocks’ viewpoint: What reasons could she have for entering a stranger’s house without permission? What do you think about these reasons? Discuss how Goldilocks might have felt when the bears came home and why.

Then, they will discuss events from the Bears’ standpoint. Role play how the Bears felt finding an intruder in their house. “How did they feel? Why?
What do you suppose they were thinking? Why? **S-4** What actions did they take against Goldilocks? Were their actions justified? What are some other possible actions? What consequences resulted from the course of events? **S-20** How does this differ from real life?*

*The reader should keep in mind the connection between the principles and applications, on the one hand, and the character traits of a fairminded critical thinker, on the other. Our aim, once again, is not a set of disjointed skills, but an integrated, committed, thinking person.*
"Goldilocks" II
(K-1)

by Judy Calonico, Calaveras Unified
Schools, Pine Grove, CA

Objectives of the remodelled lesson
The students will:
• practice fairmindedness by examining the bears' perspective through a similar experience and through discussion
• evaluate Goldilocks's behavior
• discuss significant differences between their experience and that of the bears

Standard Approach
Read the story aloud to the class and ask simple recall questions (chronology), role-play the story, and discuss the specialized vocabulary and the origin of her name. Then ask questions about whether or not she should have done what she did.

Critique
The questioning was based on factual recall, vocabulary development, and a simple discussion of right and wrong.

Strategies used to remodel
S-3 exercising fairmindedness
S-20 analyzing or evaluating actions or policies
S-29 noting significant similarities and differences

Remodelled Lesson Plan S-3
Read the story aloud just before a recess break, then have student helpers lay out snacks for all students. Explain to the students that the treat is not ready, but that it will be after recess. During the time they are out, remove some of the chairs and a portion of each child's snack. Leave evidence like crumbs or smears of peanut butter. Allow the children back into the room, let a minute or so pass, then ask them:

What do you think happened here? How do you know this? How do you feel about this? Why? Is there a reason that this might have happened? We just finished reading the story "Goldilocks". What happened in that story? In what
ways are the bears like you? How do you think they felt? Were they right in feeling upset? What do you think Goldilocks was thinking as she explored the house of the bears? How did she feel? Was she right? What other choices might Goldilocks have made besides going into their home? What do you think this story is trying to teach us? S-20

Editors' note: The teacher could also have students compare their experience with that of the bears. “How was this like what happened to the bears? How was it unlike it? How important are those differences? Why? Would the differences between the situations lead to different feelings and reactions? Why or why not?” S-29

Every trivial lesson you abandon leaves more time to stimulate critical thinking.
"A Toy for Mike"

(1st Grade)

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:
- practice suppositional thinking
- practice stating and clarifying the problem under discussion
- compare different solutions
- explain why some proposed solutions are not good

Original Lesson Plan

Abstract

Students read a story about Pat and Ann who have a problem. While they are trying to wrap a ball as a present for their friend Mike, the string breaks. They are in a hurry to go. Pat solves the problem by putting the ball in a bag they have decorated. Students are asked if they think Pat’s plan was a good idea.

In the second section, entitled “Think About It”, children read three problem statements (“Dad gets a flat when he is leaving for work”), and put a check next to two of the three solutions presented. (“Dad will ...Walk to work; Fix it; Wait for the rain to stop”. ) Then they discuss their choices and suggest other solutions.

from Tag In And Out All Around,

Critique

Although students are asked if they think Pat’s solution is a good idea, they are not asked to state the problem, discuss the criteria for a good solution, or compare the solution to other solutions. The students should reflect on solutions and how to evaluate them, and begin to develop well thought-out, practical ideas about choosing good solutions. The “Think About It” activity is a classic work-book approach with two good answers and one absurd (or potentially dangerous) possibility. It is a “decode the words” lesson masquerading as a problem solving lesson. It could be improved with questioning and discussion.

Strategies used to remodel

S-19 generating or assessing solutions
S-13 clarifying issues, conclusions, or beliefs
S-31 distinguishing relevant from irrelevant facts
Remodelled Lesson Plan S-19

First, after the students read the story, we suggest asking, "What was Pat and Ann's problem? Why was it a problem? S-13 How could they have solved it differently? How can we decide which solution is best? What facts are relevant? Why? What would a good solution involve?" S-31

Then, for each problem in the "Think About It" section, you might ask "What is the problem? What would you need to know to decide on a good solution? S-13 What facts are relevant?" (Distance from work, availability of other transportation, availability of a spare tire.) S-31 Encourage the use of "if, then" statements when describing the desirability of the solution ("If work is near home, then it's best to walk."). Discuss the solutions in the text that the children did not choose. Ask, "Why do you think this solution was a bad one? Does it make sense? What do you think would have happened had the person chosen this solution? Why?"

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The critique should inform the remodel; the remodel should arise out of the critique.
“Moving Day”
(1st Grade)

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:
- explore the relationship between the thoughts and feelings about moving by examining a story character’s assumptions and change of feelings
- practice Socratic discussion about moving and other major changes
- exercise fairmindedness by realizing that people often have very different feelings about major changes

Original Lesson Plan

Abstract
Students discuss their feelings about moving and read a story about Jud. Jud is unhappy about moving into an apartment, away from his friends and home. But when he moves, he discovers that he likes the elevator in his building, makes a new friend, and his feelings change.

Students are asked to describe Jud’s feelings and explain his behavior, order story events, and find sentences in the story which answer a number of questions.


Critique

Although students discuss how Jud first felt about moving to his new home and that he felt differently after he was there, they are not encouraged to recognize how the change in Jud’s feelings arose from the change in his perception of his new situation. This lesson is a missed opportunity to have students practice seeing the relationship between thoughts and feelings and explore the character’s assumptions. With practice they can begin to see how thoughts and feelings influence each other.

Strategies used to remodel

S-4 exploring thoughts underlying feelings and feelings underlying thoughts
S-30 examining or evaluating assumptions
S-3 exercising fairmindedness
S-24 practicing Socratic discussion: clarifying and questioning beliefs, theories, or perspectives
Remodelled Lesson Plan s-4

After reading the first half of the story, entitled “Moving Day”, you might ask the following questions: How did Jud feel about moving? What did Jud think that made him feel sad? Angry? etc. (He would miss his friends, he would miss his house, it wasn’t his decision.) What did he assume about his new home? (He wouldn’t have any friends.) Could he have thought of something that would have made him feel less sad? What? (He will make new friends; it might be fun to live in a new place.) S-30

After completing the last half of the story, entitled “The Apartment”, you could ask: What changed toward the end of the story? What did Jud learn that made him feel better? What makes you think so? Why would that make him feel better?

As an extension, the class could have a Socratic discussion: Does everyone feel the same about moving as Jud did? Why might someone else feel excited about moving? Afraid? etc. How do you feel about moving? Why might someone feel differently than you? S-3 How can one person have so many different feelings about one event? Is moving an important event? Do people often have different, even opposite feelings about an important event? What are other important changes that people experience? Is that change like moving in some ways? How? Different? How? How might that affect our feelings about it? S-24
Susan, Tom, & Betty
(1st Grade)

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:
- practice Socratic discussion by learning how to distinguish and ask different types of questions
- practice making good inferences by evaluating the evidence in pictures
- distinguish cases in which they can make good inferences from those which they must guess or make up an answer, thereby developing intellectual humility
- make interdisciplinary connections by applying their categories of questions to questions in other subjects

Original Lesson Plan

Abstract

Students discuss three rows of pictures in which children are portrayed engaging in different activities: chasing a dog that took a jacket, coming home after a skating accident, getting the newspaper from the lawn, fixing a bike, meeting father at the airport, knocking over a can of paint while painting a wagon, receiving a dress, bringing flowers to the teacher, eating an ice cream cone. Students are asked to describe events preceding and following the scenes pictured, make judgments about the characters' personalities, and make up short stories about them.


Critique

This lesson lacks a firm purpose. It could be given an important objective such as teaching students that there are different kinds of questions. To take advantage of the hodge-podge of questions in this lesson, the remodel will focus on this task.

The section of the original lesson entitled "Interpreting the Pictures" provides four different kinds of questions without distinguishing them. Such lack of discrimination may lead students to believe that they can be equally certain in all cases. Some of the questions, such as, "Where is Tom in this picture?" and, "Is father just leaving or returning?" call upon students to make good inferences from pictures. Others, such as, "What do you think the dog will do with Susan's clothes?" and, "What do you think will happen after Susan gets in the house?" have more than one reasonable answer. (The dog might chew the clothes or bury them; Susan might clean her arm, or her mother or a babysitter might clean it.) Some questions, such as, "How can Tom get the paint off the floor?" (which assumes that he split the paint on the floor, as opposed to the
ground or driveway) contain questionable assumptions — "How can Tom clean up the paint?" would be better. Still others can be answered only by guessing or making up a story "Where do you suppose Tom's father has been? Do you think someone suggested that Betty bring the flowers to her teacher or that she thought of it herself?"

The next section, entitled "Drawing Inferences", contains a number of leading questions such as, "Do you think Susan is thoughtful, careless, or careful?" and "In what ways might she have helped herself in these pictures?" Such questions discourage suspending judgment, and encourage questionable assumptions. (They could be reformulated or dropped.)

We suggest that discussion focus on distinguishing four kinds of questions: the answer is right there, the answer is implied (if we think, we can figure out the answer), there is more than one sensible answer (we have to make an answer up or make up a story), and questions with questionable assumptions (there is something wrong with the question).

**Strategies used to remodel**

- **S-24** practicing Socratic discussion: clarifying and questioning beliefs, theories, or perspectives
- **S-33** giving reasons and evaluating evidence and alleged facts
- **S-5** developing intellectual humility and suspending judgment
- **S-13** clarifying issues, conclusions, or beliefs
- **S-30** examining or evaluating assumptions
- **S-23** making interdisciplinary connections

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**Remodelled Lesson Plan S-24**

You might begin the lesson by saying, "We're going to talk about these pictures. I'll ask you some questions about them and we'll talk about what kind of questions they are. You can ask more questions and we can talk about what kind of questions you asked." During the rest of the lesson, periodically ask students what questions they can think of. When they have been asked and answered, students can explain what kind of question it is.

Ask a question and have students answer (if they give different answers, let them argue a bit). "How did we answer this question? What did you do? Is this question asking what you know, or asking you to invent a possible answer? Can you see it right there, or did we have to figure out or infer the answer? Can we be sure? How? Is one answer more likely than others? Why? **S-33** Can we rule out any of these answers? Which? Why?* **S-5** As the questioning proceeds, you or the students could start to group the questions. "How did we answer this one? Were there any others like it?* **S-13**

"Is this a 'see it there' question, a 'figure it out' question, or a 'make up a story' question? Is there one obvious answer, or more than one answer that makes sense, or could we give any answer we want? Can we be sure of the answer? Why or why not? Does this question have a problem with it? Does it assume anything that we don't know for sure? What? Why don't we know that?* **S-30**

In subsequent lessons, you could have students use these categories to analyze the questions in their texts in other subjects as well as language arts.
"Do you remember when we talked about different kinds of questions? What different kinds of questions did we talk about? What kind of question is this? Why do you say so?" S-23

For a later, follow-up assignment, you could have the children hunt questions in their textbooks in small groups. They could copy each question and write what kind it is, and share and discuss their lists. Students could also compare questions within and between the categories and within and between subjects. S-23

The same can be done in discussions or in listening activities.

Macro-practice is almost always more important than micro-drill. We need to be continually vigilant against the misguided tendency to fragment, atomize, mechanize, and proceduralize thinking.
"Help for the Hen"

(1st-2nd)

by Elizabeth Sanders, Diane Shope, and
Kim Dodgen, Greensboro Public Schools, Greensboro, NC

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:
- clarify story characters' reasoning through Socratic discussion and critical vocabulary
- make interdisciplinary connections by researching an animal and figuring out what kind of story character it could be

Original Lesson Plan

Abstract
A hen asked different animals to help her, but none agreed, for various reasons. The bird finally told the hen to ask the fox for help. The hen asked the fox and the fox helped the hen eat the muffins. Questions were factual, in sequential order, and very detailed.

Critique
For this story, we would use Socratic questioning to help the children explore the characters' reasoning.

Strategies used to remodel
S-24 practicing Socratic discussion: clarifying and questioning beliefs, theories, or perspectives
S-28 thinking precisely about thinking: using critical vocabulary
S-23 making interdisciplinary connections

Remodelled Lesson Plan S-24

- Why didn't the hen tell from the very beginning what kind of help she needed?
- Why didn't the animals ask what the hen needed before refusing?
- Are the animals assuming that she is asking them to work?
- Did the way she made her request imply work? Is that what you thought?

Why or why not?
- Does the illustration of the fox imply stereotyping? S-28

Follow-up: Think about another animal that you picture to be a villain. Pick a kind of animal that most people have bad feelings about (for example, snakes) and read about them. Then check to see if the assumption about the animal is accurate. If it wasn't accurate, what sort of character would the animal be? S-23
Messages Without Words

(2nd Grade)

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:
- practice reading critically by distinguishing main points from supporting details, providing more examples to support the text, and analyzing the implications of "Messages Without Words"
- explore the consequences that might result from making incorrect inferences about a person's non-verbal communications
- practice Socratic discussion of their text concerning non-verbal communications

Original Lesson Plan

Abstract
Students read and discuss a passage about how we receive "messages" from people through facial expressions and body movements. The discussion questions ask students to find main ideas of pages, make and justify inferences from pictures, discuss their own examples of non-verbal communication, and summarize the passage in one sentence.


Critique

The strength of this lesson lies in its subject matter, making inferences from body language. It encourages students to think about the many subtle clues that they take into account when drawing conclusions. The lesson does a poor job of teaching "finding the main idea". The first time students are asked to find the sentence that gives the main point, the "answer" is a question, not a statement. Students find a main point on each page, but don't look at how each is related to the passage as a whole. "Finding the main point" is done, according to this lesson, when students have located the sentence expressing it. Students aren't asked to consider what it means or why the passage was written. Deeper critical reading is possible with this selection.

Strategies used to remodel

S–21 reading critically: clarifying or critiquing texts
S–35 exploring implications and consequences
S–24 practicing Socratic discussion: clarifying and questioning beliefs, theories, or perspectives
Remodelled Lesson Plan S-21

The original asks, “Read the sentence that tells the main idea of these paragraphs”. Since there is no sentence on page one that states the main point, students can be helped to formulate the main idea. “What is this page about?” If students answer with the phrase, “messages without words”, you could ask, “What does that mean? What about messages without words?” If they give the first sentence, they could reformatulate it as a statement. If they give a detail or example, you could ask, “What is that example for? What is its point? How could we tell someone the most important point or main idea of this page?” Encourage students to think up questions concerning the meaning of the text as they read. The class can then discuss the students’ questions.

Discuss the different ways of sending nonverbal messages mentioned in the text as well as other examples. You could have students brainstorm examples or raise your own examples. “How do you say, ‘I don’t know,’ without words?”

Ask the students if all of the people in the examples intended to send a message, or were some of them just reacting without especially intending to communicate. (For example, the boy who runs probably isn’t trying to communicate even though we can get the message.) “Does ‘messages without words’ imply that the ‘sender’ means to send messages? If so, what would be a less misleading phrase? Why would that be better? Does it reflect the passage?” S-35

Students can also discuss the problems that can be caused when non-verbal communications are mis-interpreted. For example, “What might happen if you thought that your friend’s expression meant that she was angry with you when she wasn’t?” Solicit possible consequences from the class. Students could then think of other, similar situations. Then discuss with the class how one might prevent the negative consequences of mis-reading non-verbal messages. Students could play act these situations. S-35

After the selection has been read and discussed, the class could pursue its deeper meaning and purposes: What is the main point of this selection? Why was it written? Why is this idea important? How can it help you think about things differently? In what ways are messages without words similar to messages through words? Different? What accounts for the similarities and differences? S-24

Also, the students could perform field research: noticing and writing down examples of non-verbal communication. These lists can be shared and categorized or analyzed by small groups of students.
Sentences That Ask

(2nd Grade)

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:
- learn the mechanics of writing questions correctly, by formulating and writing appropriate questions
- practice inferring facts about other students from their choice of questions
- practice fairmindedness by writing questions their parents might ask
- discuss how changing an issue can change which questions are appropriate and which facts are relevant

Original Lesson Plan

Abstract
First, students read two sentences in their textbooks: "Think of your pet or a pet that you would like to have. Talk about your pets." The teacher then encourages the students to discuss their pets by asking each other questions.

Next, the students read, "This sentence asks a question: What is your pet?" Students each think of three questions about pets. The teacher writes some of them on the board, calling attention to the question mark and to the fact that all sentences begin with a capital letter. Finally, the children copy three or four of the board questions. The teacher stresses the punctuation rule before work begins.

from Language for Daily Use, Level 2
Red, Dorothy S. Strickland et al. 1973

Critique

This lesson over-emphasizes drilling the mechanics of writing questions (begin with a capital letter; end with a question mark) at the expense of exploring the necessary function of questioning. Children need to learn to formulate appropriate questions, and to see the ways in which these questions can elicit useful responses. The lesson can be expanded so that asking good questions becomes the topic, and learning the correct form is a by-product.

In the lesson, students are asked to think of any three questions they could ask about a pet, but they are given no guiding purpose for formulating them. This approach misses the opportunity to show students the ways in which their needs and purposes determine their questions, and is therefore an incomplete introduction to questions.

We have added extensions which give students practice distinguishing relevant from irrelevant information and practicing fairmindedness.
Strategies used to remodel

*S-31* distinguishing relevant from irrelevant facts
*S-32* making plausible inferences, predictions, or interpretations
*S-3* exercising fairmindedness

Remodelled Lesson Plan

First, instead of having students ask any three questions about pets, the teacher can ask them to think of at least three questions they might ask a pet seller to determine if a particular animal would be a good pet for them. This will give students a guiding purpose, though any reasonable purpose will do for formulating appropriate questions. "What would you want to know? What facts about the animal seem relevant or important to you? Why would you want to know that?" *S-31*

After the students have listed their questions, and have corrected any mechanical errors such as forgetting a question mark, the teacher can write one student's questions on the board so that the class can discuss what that student wants in a pet. "What can we infer about what Sue wants in a pet? Can we tell what animal she's referring to? Why or why not?" *S-32*

Then, when a number of students' responses have been covered, have the students imagine that they are going home to ask their parents if they can have the pet they want. "What questions do you think your parents would ask? What facts would *they* think are relevant or important to know?" *S-31* (Students could trade papers to double-check the mechanics. "Does each question begin with a capital and end with a question mark?") The class could then discuss the things that most concern the parents and why. This activity gives the students practice in fairmindedness as well as more practice formulating and writing questions properly. *S-3*

Next, to give students practice seeing how changing a problem slightly can change the nature of the pertinent questions, students could imagine that they have moved (from a house with a yard to an apartment, for instance) and list questions that they would now ask when choosing a pet. "How did your questions change when the situation changed? Why are different facts relevant? Did you have to change your mind about the pet that was best for you? Why or why not?" *S-31*
"Two Ways to Win"

(2nd Grade)

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:
- use analytic terms such as assume, infer, and imply to analyze and assess story characters' beliefs
- clarify 'good sport' by contrasting it with its opposite, 'bad sport' and exploring its implications

Original Lesson Plan

Abstract
Students read a story about a brother and sister named Toby and Cleo. They are new in town and worried about making new friends. They ice skate at the park every day after school, believing that winning an upcoming race can help them make new friends (and that they won't make friends if they don't win). Neither wins; Cleo, because she falls, Toby, because he forfeits his chance to win by stopping to help a boy who falls. Some children come over after the race to compliment Toby on his good sportsmanship and Cleo on her skating.

Most of the questions about the story probe the factual components. Some require students to infer. Questions ask what 'good sport' means and if Cleo's belief about meeting people is correct.

pp. 42-46.

Critique

The original lesson has several good questions which require students to make inferences. Since the text does not explicitly state that the children had just moved, the question, "Have Toby and Cleo lived on the block all their lives?" is a good one. The text also asks students if they know who won the race. Since they do not, this question encourages students to suspend judgment. Although 'good sportsmanship' is a good concept or phrase for students to discuss, the text fails to have students practice techniques for clarifying it in sufficient depth. Instead, students merely list the characteristics of a good sport (a central idea in the story) with no discussion of what it means to be a bad sport or sufficient assessment of specific examples. The use of opposite cases to clarify concepts helps students develop fuller and more accurate understandings. With such practice a student can begin to recognize borderline cases as well — where someone was a good sport in some respects, bad in others, or not clearly either. This puts students in a better position to develop criteria for judging behavior.
Strategies used to remodel

S-18 analyzing or evaluating arguments, interpretations, beliefs, or theories
S-33 giving reasons and evaluating evidence and alleged facts
S-14 clarifying and analyzing the meanings of words or phrases
S-7 developing intellectual good faith or integrity
S-30 examining or evaluating assumptions
S-28 thinking precisely about thinking: using critical vocabulary

Remodelled Lesson Plan S-18

Where the original lesson asks, "What does 'a good sport' mean?", we suggest an extension which has students analyze the concept at length. The teacher can make two lists on the board of the students' responses to the question, "How do good sports and bad sports behave?" Students could go back to the story and apply the ideas on the list to the characters in the story, giving reasons to support any claims they make regarding the characters' sportsmanship. S-33 In some cases there might not be enough information to determine whether a particular character is a good or bad sport. Or they might find a character who isn't clearly one or the other, or has some characteristics of both good and bad sports. Again, students should cite evidence from the story to support their claims. The students could also change details of the story to make further points about the nature of good and bad sportsmanship. (If the girl had pushed Cleo down in order to win the race, that would have been very bad sportsmanship.)

To further probe the concept of good sportsmanship, ask questions like the following: How did Toby impress the other children? Why did they think he did a good thing? If you had seen the race, what would you have thought of Toby? Why do we value the kind of behavior we call 'good sportsmanship'? Why don't we like bad sportsmanship? S-14 Why are people ever bad sports? Is it easy to be a good sport? Why or why not? S-7

There are a number of places in the lesson where the teacher could introduce, or give students further practice using critical thinking vocabulary. Here are a few examples: What can you infer from the story title and picture? What parts of the story imply that Toby and Cleo will have some competition in the race? What do Toby and Cleo assume about meeting new people and making new friends? Is this a good or a bad assumption? Why? Why do you think they made this assumption? Have you ever made similar assumptions? Why? S-30 What can you infer that Cleo felt at the end of the story? What evidence do you have? S-28
“Marvin’s Manhole”

(2nd Grade)

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:
- develop, consider, analyze, and evaluate interpretations of a story
- evaluate the evidence for and against each interpretation
- practice reasoning dialectically in an essay

Original Lesson Plan

Abstract

The students read “Marvin’s Manhole”, a story about a boy who rejects his mother’s explanation of the purpose of a manhole and decides that there is a “scary thing” living under his street. Marvin tries to make contact with the thing, but fails. One day he finds the manhole open. After looking for the thing, Marvin climbs into the manhole, has a scare, and meets a workman who confirms his mother’s explanation.

Students are asked to recall details, discuss Marvin’s personality, discuss parts of Marvin’s reasoning, read an emphasized word as Marvin would have said it, discuss some of the pictures, discuss Marvin’s feelings, and describe what may have happened after the end of the story.

pp. T222–T231.

Critique

This lesson fails to take advantage of the ambiguous nature of Marvin’s story. It is unclear whether Marvin really believes in the existence of the “scary thing,” or is merely pretending to believe in it. Much of Marvin’s behavior can be interpreted either way. This lesson misses the opportunity to have students argue for one interpretation over another, or see how each interpretation affects the readers’ understanding of the details in the story.

Early in the story, when Marvin hits the manhole cover with his baseball bat and runs away, the reader could interpret his actions as bravely trying to get the scary thing to come out, or as part of a game. The faultiness of Marvin’s reasoning (for example, when he concludes that the scary thing eats the bread he leaves on the street overnight) suggests that he’s pretending or playing. Yet, when he discovers that the manhole cover is open, he behaves as though he believes in the thing.

The suggested questions do nothing to explore the possible different points of view. Only one question raises the issue of Marvin’s belief, “How strongly do you think Marvin believed in the scary thing by this point in the story?” Another assumes his belief in the thing, “Do you think Marvin finally believed what his mother had told him about the manhole?” The different interpretations, then, could become the main focus of the lesson.
Strategies used to remodel

S-18 analyzing or evaluating arguments, interpretations, beliefs, or theories
S-28 thinking precisely about thinking: using critical vocabulary
S-33 giving reasons and evaluating evidence and alleged facts
S-26 reasoning dialectically: evaluating perspectives, interpretations, or theories

Remodelled Lesson Plan s-18

The process of sorting out the different interpretations of the story can begin with Marvin's claim that he thinks there is a scary thing in the manhole. The teacher might ask the students, "Why do you think Marvin said that there was a thing in the manhole?" Encourage a discussion of the question. Then focus on the issue, "Does Marvin really believe in the scary thing?"

Keep raising this issue as the students discuss various parts of the story and allow discussion. "Does this part of the story support, or weaken your interpretation? S-28 How? If you think he does believe in the thing, why do you think he did this? If you think he doesn't believe in the thing, why do you think he did this?" S-33

Accept any position a student may maintain. The possibilities include: Marvin believed the thing the whole time; Marvin believed part of the time; Marvin was pretending to believe in the thing; Marvin believed in the thing, but didn't really think it was scary.

Encourage the students to use "if, then" statements when discussing the implications of their ideas — "If Marvin really believed in the thing, he made a questionable inference when he concluded that the thing ate the bread." Finally, after the story has been read and discussed, review the different positions taken, and assign a writing exercise. Have the students evaluate the interpretations. "Which interpretation is strongest? Support your position with details from the story. Explain the weaknesses of another interpretation." S-26
"The Camel and the Jackal"

(3rd Grade)

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:

- discuss the moral of the story by evaluating the actions of the characters
- develop intellectual good faith by discussing the concept of revenge
- practice intellectual perseverance by discussing the difference between justice and revenge in depth
- practice giving reasons for moral judgments

Original Lesson Plan

Abstract

Students read a story about two animals. The jackal wants to cross the river to get crab to eat, but he can’t swim. So he tells the camel that there is sugar cane (which the camel loves) across the river. After they cross the river and the jackal has eaten his fill, he runs to the sugar cane field and laughs and sings, catching the attention of people nearby. He hides while the people attack the camel and chase him away. The jackal explains to the camel, "I always laugh and sing after dinner." The camel takes him back across the river. Halfway across, the camel says, “I always roll over after dinner.” He does so, and the jackal falls into the water.

The students are asked to recall story details, decide which animal is smarter, and which they like the most.


Critique

The questions in the text fail to probe into the moral nature of the story, and fail to lay a foundation from which the students can apply the moral to their own lives. This lesson is a missed opportunity for discussing the concepts of revenge and justice.

Strategy used to remodel

S-20 analyzing or evaluating actions or policies
S-7 developing intellectual good faith or integrity
S-8 developing intellectual perseverance

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Remodelled Lesson Plan s-20

In order to take advantage of the moral nature of the story, the class can discuss and evaluate the actions of the animals. The teacher could interrupt the story after each deception or trick and ask, "Was this fair? Why or why not? Could he have done something better? What? What makes you think that would be better?"

At the end of the story, ask, "Is this the best way for the camel to have taught the jackal a lesson? Why or why not? Did the jackal purposefully attract the people's attention? How can you tell? If not, does it make you feel differently about the camel's reaction? Why or why not?"

To have students begin to develop intellectual good faith, the class can discuss what they would have done if they were the camel: If you had been in the camel's place, would it be easy for you not to pay him back? What would you have thought of the camel if he hadn't tricked the jackal? Why? S-7

The teacher could also lead an extended discussion about the relationship between justice and revenge, which will be a good experience for developing intellectual perseverance. Encourage them to give examples, "Do you think the camel was being fair (seeking justice) or getting revenge (paying the jackal back)? Why? What is the difference between these two things? Is revenge ever OK, or is it always bad? Why or why not? Was the camel justified? Why or why not? What is the difference between teaching someone a lesson and two wrongs? In your own life, how can you decide if paying someone back would be right or wrong, smart or foolish?" S-8
"Friends"
(3rd Grade)

by Marilyn Barnes, Claremont U.S.D., Claremont, CA

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:
• explore a problem story characters have and discuss solutions
• think independently by creating a different ending to the story or predicting a new problem
• develop criteria for friendship by clarifying their values
• make interdisciplinary connections by using their knowledge about animals to imagine new stories

Standard Approach

Students read Helme Heine's story "Friends" which is about three friends: a rooster, a pig, and a mouse. The three begin each day with one another, play together, and eventually try to spend the night together. After swearing to be friends forever, they run into the problem of where to sleep: a small hole in the wall, a pigsty, or a chicken coup. None suit all of the friends, so they each vow to dream about each other since they can't sleep in the same place.

Critique

The teacher asks students to list qualities of a good friend (the main idea of the story) without discussing the qualities of people we don't want as friends. Thus, the lesson fails to assist students in understanding how people develop criteria for evaluation. The teacher neglects to ask students what happens to friends when they can't agree on something. By having students write a different ending for the story, students will begin to practice independent thinking.

Strategies used to remodel

S-19 generating or assessing solutions
S-1 thinking independently
S-15 developing criteria for evaluation: clarifying values and standards
S-23 making interdisciplinary connections

Remodelled Lesson Plan S-19

One of the most interesting things a teacher can do with this story is to have the students identify with the characters in the story and analyze the qualities of their friendship.
While discussing qualities of a good friend, students could also explore qualities of those they would not like to be friends with.

The problem arises when the friends cannot find a suitable place to sleep together. Question the students as to why the sleeping arrangement was a problem. Then have the students work together to come up with another agreeable solution.

Asking students to create a new ending, or better yet, another conflict, and then solving this new conflict encourages students to think for themselves. S-1

Editors' note: When discussing friends, the teacher could ask the students to explain why they chose the particular qualities that they wanted and did not want in a friend. "Why is this a 'good friend' quality? Why is this one undesirable? Do people, like the animals in the story, need to spend all their time together to be good or best friends? Why or why not?" S-15

This lesson also offers a good opportunity to make interdisciplinary connections. The students can relate what they've learned about animals in science (the study of animals) to this story idea. The class could pick other animals and students could predict what problems their differing needs might cause in a friendship. For example, fish and rabbits might have problems being friends because fish need to live in water and rabbits need to live on the ground. S-23
"The Horse Was in the Parlor"

(3rd Grade)

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:
- practice examining perspectives and assumptions
- discuss story characters' evaluative assumptions about root questions concerning snobbery and superiority
- develop their perspectives on judging people and being judged by them

Original Lesson Plan

Abstract

The students read a story about Pat and Nora, who move into a new, nicer house. They decide to use their old house as a barn for their animals. Nora's aunt, a snobbish woman who had angered the couple by "looking down her nose" at them, writes to say that she will visit again. Nora works hard to make everything ready. When the aunt arrives, not knowing they have moved, she enters the old house. She thinks that Pat and Nora are living with their animals and says that she will never visit again. After she learns of her mistake and sees the new house, she becomes friendlier toward the young couple.

After reading the story, the students are asked to recall details, describe the characters' personalities, say who they liked the most, and reread the funniest parts of the story.


Critique

This lesson misses the opportunity, that the story offers, to have students evaluate the main characters, and explore perspectives. It also fails to explore the problem of snobbery and questions about "the right sort of person". By filling in the missing pieces in people's reasoning, we can better understand what they think and why.

Strategies used to remodel

S-17 questioning deeply: raising and pursuing root or significant questions
S-30 examining or evaluating assumptions
S-34 recognizing contradictions
S-33 giving reasons and evaluating evidence and alleged facts
S-12 developing one's perspective: creating or exploring beliefs, arguments, or theories
Remodelled Lesson Plan S-17

The teacher can take advantage of the ethical nature of the story by having students evaluate the characters and explore their beliefs and underlying assumptions. The class could be split into groups, each of which could brainstorm two lists: What Aunt Bridget thinks, What Nora thinks. The groups would then organize the lists into two columns, putting opposing beliefs next to each other. They can then fill in the missing pieces and check for internal consistency.

The class can use the following questions: What does it mean to “look down your nose” at someone? What did Aunt Bridget think of Nora and Pat? (She is more important than they are.) What was she assuming? (You’re a more important person if you have a nicer house.) S-30

• What did Nora think of Aunt Bridget’s attitude? Did she agree with her Aunt’s reasoning, or the assumption that your house shows how important you are? How do you know? How did Nora try to change her Aunt’s opinion of her? What does that assume? (Although Nora criticizes her Aunt for her pride, she seems to accept the assumption that your house shows how important you are.) S-34

• What did Aunt Bridget assume when she went into the old house? How did she feel when she learned of her mistake? Why? How do you know? S-33

The class could also discuss Aunt Bridget’s assumption of superiority, whether they agree with it, why or why not, why they think Aunt Bridget has that belief, and what reasons she might use to justify it. S-30

The class could relate the ideas in the story to their own experiences. “Have you ever worried about what other people thought of you? What assumptions were the people making? Do you agree with those assumptions? Do you use those assumptions when you form opinions of others? When is it important to worry about what other people think of you? When is it not important? What makes some people better than others? In what ways are some people better? Why?” Discuss at length. S-12
"Aha! A Sleuth!"

(3rd Grade)

by Dr. Judie Davie, Mary E. Weinberg,
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Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:
- clarify and analyze the meaning of 'sleuth' by synthesizing what they know about popular sleuths
- clarify and analyze the concept of a mystery through deep questioning
- gain insight into how they engage in sleuth-like behavior themselves by transferring the concept to everyday contexts
- make interdisciplinary connections by applying the concept 'sleuth' to academic disciplines that require sleuth-like behavior

Original Lesson Plan

Abstract
The reading unit was an introduction to a unit on mysteries. At the end of this lesson, students will be able to describe what a sleuth is and identify who he is. They were to identify other detectives that they knew, identify synonyms for 'sleuth', and describe traits that sleuths have. Based upon the title "Aha! A Sleuth", they next predict what the story is about. After reading the story, they name persons, places, and things that might help detectives find clues to solve mysteries.

Critique

The original lesson was a literal assignment. The plan did not provide an opportunity to discuss sleuths or mysteries. The questions were not probing and did not stimulate critical thinking. The lesson fails to encourage students to relate these ideas to their own lives or to other disciplines.

Strategies used to remodel

S-14 clarifying and analyzing the meanings of words or phrases
S-17 questioning deeply, raising and pursuing root or significant questions
S-11 comparing analogous situations, transferring insights to new contexts
S-23 making interdisciplinary connections
Remodelled Lesson Plan S-14

The teacher could introduce the lesson by having photos of sleuths hanging in the room and the lesson title written on the board. Here are some trigger questions:

- Can you identify these people? How do you know who they are? What do they do?

  Introduce the term 'sleuth' and ask, "What is a sleuth? What are other terms for sleuth? What makes a sleuth a sleuth? What is the job of a detective? How do we know this?"

- If a sleuth solves mysteries, what is a mystery? How do you know a story is a mystery? (Explain related topics on how this title suggests that it may be a mystery.)

Read the text. Then discuss the following questions: What is the mystery in “Aha! — A Sleuth”? Is a crime always a mystery? Is a mystery always a crime? Who commits crimes? What would you do to stop a crime? What would you have done differently than the sleuth? How would you have solved the crime? S-17

**editors' note:** To help students relate the lesson to their own lives, have them discuss how we all engage in some sleuth-like behavior in everyday life. ("Oh, Mom must have gone to the store, because she and the grocery list are gone." "My sister must be home, because her purse is on the table." etc.) "Can you think of times you reasoned from 'clues' to figure something out? (You might supply your own example first.) Was there a 'mystery' or question? What clue or clues did you notice? What did you conclude? Were you right? Was your reasoning strong? Why or why not? What should you have concluded? How is this like or unlike the principles of good sleuthing?" S-11

This lesson offers a great opportunity to assist students in making interdisciplinary connections. Ask students what other jobs, besides a detective, require sleuth-like behavior or skills (automobile mechanic, doctor, or scientist). Ask the students to name ways that a scientist is a sleuth. Call attention to the fact that because they have studied science in school, they have, in some ways, been scientists. Finally, ask them to recall some of the experiments they have performed and to determine how they acted sleuth-like while designing, doing, and interpreting those experiments.

If the students have studied any history, they could compare sleuthing to figuring out what happened in the past. S-23
“Poor Little Puppy”
(3rd Grade)

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:
- explore the nature of pride and shame by exploring thoughts underlying feelings and clarifying values
- examine story characters’ assumptions

Original Lesson Plan

Abstract
Students read a story about Sam and Sally who have a new puppy, Lady (a dachshund), of which they are very proud. One day a big boy comes by and makes fun of Lady — “She’s two dogs long and half a dog tall. She’s good for play, but that’s about all.” Sam and Sally begin to compare Lady to other people’s dogs and realize that there are many things she cannot do. They try to teach her several new tricks, to no avail. The children feel ashamed of their puppy. This makes Lady sad. Sam and Sally have given up in dismay when a little boy comes by and loses his ball down a deep hole. Lady saves the day by digging the ball out. Sam and Sally are again proud of Lady.

Students are asked to answer factual questions about the story and discuss the following questions: What kind of boy was the big boy who made fun of Lady? What would you have said if someone had made fun of your dog? Why did Lady not learn to do the tricks that Sam and Sally tried to teach her? Why was digging for a ball a trick she did not have to learn?


Critique

This lesson fails to have students evaluate the characters’ assumption that you can only be proud of your dog if it can do tricks. The characters hold this assumption through most of the story including the end, but its justification is never questioned. This is an important point because it is this assumption that leads to the shame the children feel towards Lady, and their dissatisfaction in turn hurts Lady’s feelings. The discussion, then, should be focused on the feelings of the characters, how their assumptions affected their feelings, and when we should feel pride in or shame toward our loved ones.
Strategies used to remodel

S-4 exploring thoughts underlying feelings and feelings underlying thoughts
S-30 examining or evaluating assumptions
S-15 developing criteria for evaluation; clarifying values and standards

Remodelled Lesson Plan S-4

In order to probe the central ideas of pride and shame, when the story has been read, the teacher can supplement the original questions with the following: How did Sam and Sally feel about Lady at first? Why? What happened to make them ashamed of Lady? What did they assume? (Dogs aren’t good unless they can do tricks.) Is it a good assumption? Why or why not? Why do you think they made that assumption? (Discuss at length.) S-30 How did they act toward Lady when they felt ashamed? How did that make Lady feel? Why? How else could they have reacted to the boy’s teasing? Why did they become proud again? What changed? Why? (They learned about something Lady could do well. Their assumption didn’t change.)

The students can then clarify their values and explore reasons for pride and shame. “What reasons should people have for being proud of their puppies? Ashamed? (Compile lists and compare.) Would everything on the ‘proud’ list have to be true of your pet for you to be proud of it? Why or why not? If [item on pride list] would make you proud of your dog, what does that tell us about your values? If [item on shame list] would make you ashamed of your dog, what does that tell us about your values? Why are these things important to you?” S-15
“Kate and the Big Cat”

(3rd Grade)

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:

- practice reading critically by making inferences and analyzing the concept of being treated like a baby
- practice thinking fairly by considering parents’ views on “being treated like a baby”
- compare relevant and irrelevant facts for two distinct questions

Original Lesson Plan

Abstract

Students read a story about Kate, who has just moved to a new apartment. Kate has two problems. First, she feels that her parents treat her like a baby. She is discouraged when they hesitate to leave her alone in the new apartment. Her second problem arises while she is alone. As a circus caravan passes by her apartment, a cage door swings open and a tiger jumps out. Kate, after being frustrated by a disbelieving police officer on the phone, devises an ingenious plan for trapping the tiger.

Before reading the story, students are asked to imagine a story that they might write to go with the unit and story titles. Then students read part of the story and state Kate’s problem and how they would solve it. Later students are asked to distinguish important from unimportant details concerning what the police would need to know to capture the tiger; predict what Kate will do after the policeman doesn’t believe her; and distinguish true from false statements. 

from Air Pudding and Wind Sauce,

Critique

Two exercises in this lesson give students valuable critical thinking practice: one has students distinguish relevant from irrelevant facts; another (Rereading Section), requires students to make inferences, rather than simply finding facts in the story.

This lesson, however, fails to have students probe the all-important concept of ‘being treated like a baby’, or practice fairmindedness by taking Kate’s parents’ point of view on the subject. Furthermore, in some cases, this lesson leads students to confuse their pure imaginings with good inferences.

Strategies used to remodel

S-21 reading critically: clarifying or critiquing texts
S-32 making plausible inferences, predictions, or interpretations
Remodelling Language Arts Lessons

**Remodelled Lesson Plan S-21**

In the "Story Motivation" section, rather than asking students to pretend that they are the author who will write the story to go along with the titles, we suggest asking them "What can we infer that this story is about? Why?" Have them distinguish what they are sure of, from what is merely possible. (They can infer that there is a big cat; a tiger; someone named Kate; and that the tiger and Kate will have an interaction involving a trick, a trap or a deal. It is fairly safe to assume that the cat is on the loose.) **S-32**

In the "Guided Reading and Comprehension" section we suggest that after the children have described Kate's problem, they discuss what being treated like a baby means. "What does it mean? Why doesn't she like it? How would Kate rather be treated? Give examples. Why would she want to be treated like this?" **S-14**

The teacher could also have students consider Kate's parents' point of view: How would her parents describe their treatment of Kate? Why were they reluctant to let Kate stay at home? Did they think they were treating her like a baby? Why or why not? Discuss at length. **S-3**

Instead of having students mark the important things Kate should have said to the police when calling for help, we suggest asking of each detail cited, "Is this most relevant for informing the police about the tiger? Why or why not?" Then change the problem, and repeat the process for the new problem so that students can see how different problems require different facts. For instance, the teacher may point out that the policeman probably didn't believe Kate because it seemed unlikely that a tiger would be wandering near an apartment. "If this is true, which of these facts would have helped Kate convince the policeman that she was serious? Why? Why is that more relevant than this? Why did changing the focus of our discussion change which facts are most pertinent?" **S-91**

In the "Story Motivation" section preceding part two, students are asked to say what they think Kate will do about the tiger. In order to discourage students from confusing guesses about the story with inferences, we suggest adding a question such as this, "Do we have any way of knowing what Kate might do?" (The students have good reason to conclude that Kate will trap the tiger, but no reason to conclude that she will use any particular method.) **S-5**

The "Rereading" section asks students which statements in a list are true. We suggest asking, "Did the story say this or did you have to infer it?" Have students either tell where they found the answer or explain how they figured it out. **S-33**
Adjectives
(3rd Grade)
by Dale Russell & Hazel Farmer, Greensboro Public Schools, Greensboro, NC

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will
- begin to more deeply understand parts of speech
- think independently when writing sentences using adjectives to describe a food
- guess what food another student was describing
- consider adjectives in relation to the other parts of speech, noting significant similarities and differences
- discuss the importance of being able to identify parts of speech, thereby pursuing root questions

Standard Approach

Students use adjectives to complete sentences on a worksheet. "I saw a _______ bird yesterday."

Critique

Students may not truly understand what an adjective is from this drill. Students' independent thinking is limited.

editors' note: Because the standard approach teaches each part of speech in isolation from the rest, most students fail to understand the relationships of different kinds of words in sentences. Thus, they can't use their conceptions of the parts of speech to read or write more clearly, precisely, or grammatically.

Strategies used to remodel
S-17 questioning deeply: raising and pursuing root or significant questions
S-1 thinking independently
S-29 noting significant similarities and differences

Remodelled Lesson Plan s-17

Make three lists of adjectives on the board. Use the following headings: describe a bird, describe a race car, describe an apple. The teacher will add irrelevant words or non-adjectives to the lists, and later ask students if any words don't belong.
The teacher will do a balloon mapping activity on the board with the class using a food as the subject. Students will suggest adjectives that describe four characteristics of the chosen food.

**Looks**

**Feels**

*(in your mouth)*

**Food**

**Smells**

**Tastes**

Independent assignment: In a bag, have names of foods written on slips of paper. Each student chooses one. Give each student a sheet with a balloon map on it. Students fill in the name of the food they chose, then write adjectives and attach them to the appropriate characteristic (looks, feels, smells, or tastes).

Students then use their maps to write sentences describing the food they chose without saying what it is or whether they like it. *S-1*

One student will read his or her sentences, and classmates will guess the name of the food and whether it was liked or disliked. Those who correctly guess will explain how they came to their conclusions. "How did you figure that out? Did one adjective tip you off, or was it the combination?"

The teacher then asks, "What is an adjective? What do adjectives do for us? How do adjectives make sentences better? More interesting, precise, vivid?" *S-1*

**editors' note:** These questions could also be asked: Could all of those adjectives have applied to another food? If so, what adjectives could we add to this to make it describe only the food meant? Which adjectives were most helpful for figuring out which food was meant? Why?

"Why can it be helpful to know what kind of word each is? Why do we need to know if a word is an adjective?" The teacher could discuss how modifiers should be next to the words they modify. Students could find sentences with adjectives in their texts, rewrite them so that the modifier is in a wrong place, and compare them with the original sentences. "What does it sound like this sentence means? Why? Why did the author place the adjective in the place that he did?"

Students could examine a few sentences with adjectives and discuss the purpose of each adjective (to tell us which one, because without it, it could mean the other one; to tell us more about it so we can picture it clearly — imagine it better).

Students could compare noun, verb, and adjective forms of the same root: Salty, the salt, to salt your food. "How are these words alike? Different? What does your dictionary say about each? Give me a sentence for each. How does each word fit in with the rest of its sentence?" *S-29*

It would be a good idea to refer to adverbs and explain that another reason for knowing if a word is an adjective is to know how it should end: 'graceful' modifies 'girl', but she "walks gracefully".
Listening Game

(3rd Grade)

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:

- practice critical listening skills and develop insight into critical listening by discussing listening, comparing listening to reading, comparing active to passive listening, and discussing ways to listen actively and accurately
- explore the implications of changes to a story retold five times
- discuss how to judge the accuracy of conflicting versions of a story
- recognize when to suspend judgment
- explore how one's point of view can shape one's interpretation of events

Original Lesson Plan

Abstract

In this lesson, five students are asked to leave the room. Next, the teacher reads the story "The Dizzy King" asking that the remaining students listen very carefully. When the story is finished, one student from class brings in student #1 and retells the story. Then student #1 tells the story to student #2, etc. After all the students have been told the story, the class discusses how the details of the story changed. "Were details left out? Added?"


Critique

Although this lesson is about listening clearly and carefully, it doesn't discuss or teach strategies for skilled listening, such as self-regulation and correction, or the need to test oneself by reiterating a sensible version of what one has heard. This lesson oversimplifies the difficulties of listening carefully and fairly. The only kinds of mistakes it refers to are altering details, leaving details out, or adding new ones. It fails to address the effect these changes have on the meaning of what was heard.

This lesson addresses only the problem of remembering a number of details from a story. Since the story doesn't involve, or appeal to, anyone's self interest, the lesson overlooks the motives people have for changing stories. Although listening to remember details is an important skill, children face more profound problems when listening carefully to understand the story as a whole: distinguishing credible from un-credible sources of information, recognizing contradictions, determining the effect of point of view, and suspending judgment when they don't have enough information to know.

The lesson could also increase students' insight by relating listening to reading, writing, and speaking.
Strategies used to remodel

S-22 listening critically: the art of silent dialogue
S-35 exploring implications and consequences
S-9 developing confidence in reason
S-11 comparing analogous situations: transferring insights to new contexts
S-8 developing intellectual perseverance
S-16 evaluating the credibility of sources of information
S-2 developing insight into egocentricity or sociocentricity
S-34 recognizing contradictions
S-5 developing intellectual humility and suspending judgment

Remodelled Lesson Plan S-22

The class could first have a discussion about the differences between active listening and passive listening. Students could also compare listening to reading. “If someone is talking and you’re interested in what he or she is saying, do you listen differently than usual? In what ways? Why? How does that compare to times you weren’t really listening? Why do people sometimes not listen carefully? How is listening easier than reading? Harder? Why? What do these two have in common? Why? What can you do to listen better?”

Then, after playing the original game and discussing how the story changed, the teacher could add the following questions: Was anything in a rearranged order? Was something important left out of some versions? What? Why was it important? Did each version of the story make sense? Did any of the changes affect the meaning of the story? Which changes? How did they change the meaning? Why did some changes not affect the meaning of the story? S-35

• How was student #2’s version affected by the changes made by student #1? Did any of the distortions from the first re-teller show up in the last version?

Then, to develop insight into careful listening, students could explicitly discuss listening: What were you doing as you listened? While you were listening, did something not make sense? Did you ask for clarification? Why or why not? What question or questions could you have asked? S-9

• Do you listen differently when you know you will have to remember and repeat what you are hearing? How? Why? Do you read differently when you know you’re expected to remember what you read? Do you speak or explain things differently when your audience has to understand and remember what you say, than you do when you’re just talking for normal purposes? How? Are there ways speakers can make it easier for listeners to understand and remember what they say? What? Why would that help? How do writers help their readers follow, understand, and remember the key points? Could speakers use any of these techniques? Which? Why? How would that help? S-11

The experiment could be repeated after this discussion. Encourage students to stop the teller to ask questions or to get clearer explanations as they listen. “What was different this time? Did thinking about listening help you listen better?” S-8

Students could retell TV shows and correct each other.
Extension S-16

The teacher could extend this lesson to stress the importance of determining credibility.

We suggest adding a detailed discussion of the motivations people have for changing or distorting stories. "Did you ever hear two or more different versions of the same story?" If you need examples to get the students on track, mention how siblings might explain a quarrel differently to their parents.

After getting a number of examples, have students discuss them. You could use questions such as these: Why do you think the people told different stories? (To avoid blame; to make one's self or friend look good; to make someone else look bad; because they saw different parts; because they made different inferences.) S-2 Could all of the versions of the story be true? Why or why not? Which part of that version contradicted the other version? S-34 Could you tell if any particular version of the event was true? Were parts of the story true but not other parts? Can you always find out the truth? Tell us about a time you had to suspend judgment, and why. What could you do to find out what really happened? S-5

Though everyone is both egocentric and critical (or fairminded) to some extent, the purpose of education in critical thinking is to help students move away from egocentricity, toward increasingly critical thought.
"Any Old Junk Today?"
(3rd Grade)

Objectives of the remodelled lesson

The students will:
- engage in dialogical reasoning by comparing two perspectives on what gives things value
- pursue root questions by distinguishing relevant from irrelevant story details and clarifying values
- pinpoint contradictions between opposing perspectives

Original Lesson Plan

Abstract

Students read a story about Eddie Wilson and his father. Eddie collects things that he calls "valuable property", but his father calls "junk". One day, when the family goes to an antique store, Eddie buys two things. At first his father is angry and wants to throw them away. But then he decides he wants one of the objects, and buys it from Eddie. Eddie's mother buys the other. Eddie's father is proud of the profit Eddie has made, and suggests that they go into business together "selling junk".

In the discussion questions, students are asked to do the following things: recall story details; guess Eddie’s mother’s attitude; list objects found in antique stores; make and justify inferences; describe the difference between junk and antiques; calculate Eddie’s profit; and select a sentence which expresses the main idea of the story. ("What is the Main Idea? Write X before the group of words that best tells the main idea of ‘Any Old Junk Today?’ 1. Eddie’s father did not like Eddie’s junk. 2. Eddie took a collection to school. 3. Eddie bought a coffee grinder. 4. Eddie found something that was valuable both to him and to his father. 5. Eddie had an enjoyable day.")

from Air Pudding and Wind Sauce,

Critique

This story describes a clash of two perspectives. The disagreement between Eddie and his father provides an excellent model for many conflicts. It includes a specific issue ("Does Eddie collect junk or valuable property?"); two sets of incompatible concepts applied to the same things; and two lines of reasoning based on contradictory evaluative assumptions (objects which look interesting or appealing are valuable; only those objects which can be used or sold for profit are valuable). Yet the suggested questions fail to take advantage of the story.

Students are not required to engage in careful critical reading of the story, analysis of the reasoning, or evaluation of the assumptions or arguments implied by numerous details. Although
students are asked "What is the difference between junk and antiques?", they do no detailed clarification of concepts, nor apply their insights to the issue. In short, the text misses an ideal opportunity for students to engage in dialogical thought on a topic on which adults and children often disagree: grown-ups' inexplicable value system.

Most of the inferences required by the lesson only ask students to make calculations about the financial exchanges. The text identifies the key concepts for the students, thereby discouraging independent thought: students should practice identifying key concepts. The authors assume Mr. Wilson's point of view by referring to Eddie's collection as junk, thereby discouraging openmindedness.

**Strategies used to remodel**

- **S-25** reasoning dialogically: comparing perspectives, interpretations, or theories
- **S-3** exercising fairmindedness
- **S-1** thinking independently
- **S-35** exploring implications and consequences
- **S-31** distinguishing relevant from irrelevant facts
- **S-17** questioning deeply: raising and pursuing root or significant questions
- **S-34** recognizing contradictions
- **S-13** clarifying issues, conclusions, or beliefs
- **S-15** developing criteria for evaluation: clarifying values and standards
- **S-12** developing one's perspective: creating or exploring beliefs, arguments, or theories
- **S-8** developing intellectual perseverance

**Remodelled Lesson Plan S-25**

Rather than using the questions in the original lesson, we suggest that the teacher make the disagreement between Eddie and his father the focus of discussion. After students have read the story once, ask, "How would you describe the dispute between Eddie and Mr. Wilson through most of the story? What is the issue? (Is Eddie's collection junk or valuable property? Should Eddie keep collecting things? What makes some things more valuable than other things? etc.)" If students give a one-sided formulation ("Why doesn't Eddie's father like that 'swell' stuff?" "Why does Eddie collect all that 'junk'?"") ask how the other side sees the issue. Insist on a fair formulation; one that doesn't favor either side. **S-3**

"What are the key terms? How does Eddie describe his collection? What is it from his father's point of view?" **S-1** Students could then clarify the terms ('junk', 'valuable property', 'rubbish', 'antique', etc.) — at least one term from each point of view. Ask them for clear examples of each concept. Have them discuss disputed and unclear cases. (Keep lists.) Ask them what calling an object 'x' implies about it. (For example, junk or rubbish should be thrown away.) **S-35**

While rereading the story, students could note every detail relevant to the issue; anything that sheds light on the points of view of the main characters. **S-31**

**Relevant details:**

- Eddie collects what he calls "valuable property".
- Mr. Wilson calls Eddie's collection 'junk'.
- Eddie says, "I had a very enjoyable day today" whenever he collects something.
Mr. Wilson says, "This junk collecting has to stop. Every week the neighbors put out all their rubbish, and every Saturday you bring most of that rubbish to our house."

Mr. Wilson says that the telephone pole was "different. I could use that pole." He says that the pole was the "only thing we were ever able to use."

Eddie disagrees with his father's characterization of his collection of "junk."

Mr. Wilson explains to Eddie that "antiques are old things."

When his father tries to explain 'antique', Eddie asks, "You mean junk?"

Mr. Wilson says, "Certainly not! Antique things are very valuable. They sell for a lot of money."

Regarding antiques, Eddie says, "Looks like junk to me."

Eddie thinks he can find valuable property in the antique store.

Eddie thinks the carriage lamp looks like valuable property.

Eddie buys a grinder with "swell wheels."

Eddie looks at a "swell old" rusty lock.

Mr. Wilson calls the rusty lock "junk."

When he hears Eddie say he had an enjoyable day, Mr. Wilson inferred Eddie had bought "junk", got mad, and stopped the car.

Eddie defends his purchases by saying, "Please, Dad. That isn't junk. It's valuable antique property."

Mr. Wilson starts to dump Eddie's purchases in the rubbish can.

Mr. Wilson says, "Say! This could be a good carriage lamp!" and pays Eddie for it.

Eddie says, "When I grow up, I'm going to sell junk. I can make a lot of money selling junk."

Mr. Wilson says, "How about us selling junk together?"

When they have finished, let them share the details and discuss their significance.  
S-17 Students can clarify the issue, point out contradictions between Eddie's beliefs and his father's and any inconsistencies or changes of mind within each perspective. "What does Eddie assume? His father? Where, exactly do they disagree? What beliefs of Eddie contradict his father's beliefs?  
S-13

The students can then explore their own perspectives. They might review the lists of objects made when clarifying terms and discuss and compare the criteria they used with those of the characters. Ask, "What is your point of view on the assumptions we found? What do you think gives objects value?" Discuss at length.  
S-15 The teacher may want to split the class into pairs or small groups for discussion.  
S-12

Finally, students could write an essay or dialogue in which they present arguments about the issues and ideas covered in the discussion.  
S-8
When texts teach skills and concepts, they describe how to use it (and when and why), but the practice is drill: Perform this operation on, or apply this distinction to, the items below. (Of the sentences below, rewrite those that are run-ons. What is X percent of Y? Put your results in the form of a bar graph using the following headings .... Locate N on the map on page 63.) Even when students can produce the correct results and repeat the explanations, they don’t necessarily understand the functions and purposes of the skills and concepts, and so fail to use or apply them spontaneously when appropriate.