Remodelling Language Arts Lessons

Introduction

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 conceptualizing and representing in language how people live and might live their lives. All three are significantly concerned with gaining command of language and expression. Of course, there is no command of language separate from command of thought and no command of thought without command of language.

Very few students will ever publish novels, poems, or short stories, but presumably all should develop insight into what can be learned from literature. Students should develop a sense of the art involved in writing a story and, hence, of putting experiences into words. At bottom is the need everyone has to make sense of human life. This requires command of our own ideas, which requires command over the words in which we express them.

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 reading apprehends it. Students lack insight into these processes. Few have command of the language they use or a sense of how to gain that command. Not having a command of their own language, they typically struggle when called upon to read literature. They often find reading and writing frustrating and unrewarding. And worse, they rarely see the value of achieving such command. Literature seems a frill, something artificial, irrelevant, and bookish, outside of the important matters of life. Reading, except in its most elementary form, seems expendable as a means of learning. Writing is often viewed as a painful bore and, when attempted, reduced to something approaching stream-of-consciousness verbalization.

The task of turning students around, stimulating them to cultivate a new and different conception of literature, of reading, and of writing, is a profound challenge. If we value students thinking for themselves, we cannot ignore, we must meet, this challenge. If a basic goal of
English classes is to instill lifelong reading, we must seriously confront why most students have little or no interest in literature. We need to think seriously about the life-world in which they live: the music they listen to, the TV programs and movies they watch, the desires they follow, the frustrations they experience, the values they live for.

Most teachers can probably enumerate the most common features and recurring themes of, say, students’ favorite movies: danger, excitement, fun, sex, romance, rock music, car chases, exploding planets, hideous creatures, mayhem, stereotypes, cardboard characters, and so on. The lyrics and values of most popular music are equally accessible, expressing as they do an exciting, fast-moving, sentimentalized, superficial world of cool-looking, athletic, sultry bodies. Much student talk consists in slang. Though sometimes vivid it is more often vague, imprecise, and superficial. Most quality literature seems dull to students in comparison.

Good English instruction must respect and challenge student’s attitudes. Ignoring student preferences doesn’t alter those preferences. Students must assess for themselves the relative worth of popular entertainment and quality works. Students 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, students typically ignore what they hear, read, and reiterate in school work and activity. They may follow the teacher’s request to explain why a particular classic has lasted many generations, but this ritual performance has little influence on students’ real attitudes. Critical thinking can help encourage students to refine their tastes, and we should encourage it with this end in mind. Nevertheless, under no conditions should we try to force or order students to say what they don’t believe. A well-reasoned, if wrong-headed, rejection of Shakespeare is better than mindless praise of him.

The Ideal English Student

In addition to the need to enter sympathetically into the life-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 in them. We must have a clear sense of the ideals we are striving for as teachers. Consider language itself and the way in which an ideal student might approach it. We want students to be sensitive to their language, striving to understand it and use it thoughtfully, accurately, and clearly. We want them to become autonomous thinkers and so command rather than be commanded by language.

As Critical Reader

Critical readers of literature approach literature as an opportunity to live within another’s world or experience, to consider someone else’s view of human nature, relationships, and problems. Critical readers familiarize themselves with different uses of language to enhance their understanding of and appreciation of literature. They choose to read literature because they recognize its worth. They can intelligently discuss it with others, considering the interpretations of others as they support their own.

Critical readers approach a piece of nonfiction with a view to entering a silent dialogue with the author. They realize they must actively reconstruct the author’s meaning. They read because there is much that they know they do not know, much to experience that they have not experienced. Thus, critical readers do not simply pass their eyes over the words with the intention of
filling their memories. They question, they organize, they interpret, they synthesize, they digest what they read. They question, not only what was said, but also what was implied or presupposed. They organize the details, not only around key ideas in the work, but also around their own key ideas. They not only interpret, they recognize their interpretations as interpretation, and consider alternative interpretations. Recognizing their interpretations as such, they revise and refine their interpretations. They do not simply accept or reject; they work to make ideas their own, accepting what makes most sense, rejecting what is ill-thought-out, distorted, and false, fitting their new understanding into their existing frameworks of thought.

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. When 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, some reflecting prejudices and mindless conformity. Because critical writers recognize 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 readers they recognize they must actively reconstruct an author’s meaning; as writers they recognize the parallel need to actively construct their own as well as the probable meanings of their readers. In short, critical writers engage in parallel tasks in writing to the ones in reading. Both are challenging. Both organize, engage, and develop the mind. Both require the full and heightened involvement of critical and creative thought.

As Critical Listener

The most difficult condition in which to learn is in 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 art 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 students can come to grasp the nature of critical reading and writing, they can also grasp the nature of critical listening. Once again, each of the understandings, attitudes, and skills of reading and writing have parallels in listening. There is the same challenge to sort out, to analyze, to consider possible interpretations, the same need to ask questions, to raise possible objections, to probe assumptions, 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.

What is more, our students face a special problem in listening to a teacher. For if they listen so as to take seriously what is being said, they may appear to their peers to be playing up to the teacher, or foolish, if they seem to say a wrong or dumb thing. Student peer groups expect students to listen with casual indifference, even with passive disdain. To expect students to become active classroom listeners is, therefore, to expect them to rise above the domination of the peer group. This is very difficult for most students.
The ideal English student, as you can see, is quite like the ideal learner in other areas of learning, in that critical reading, writing, and listening are required in virtually 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, and while helping our students to gain command of reading, writing, and listening we should see ourselves as laying the foundation for all thought and learning.

**Ideal Instruction**

Considering the ideal reader, writer, and listener paves the way for a brief overview of ideal instruction. In each case, we should utilize 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. The world of Charles Dickens is not the same world as that of George Eliot, nor are either the same world as that of Hemingway or Faulkner. Similarly, 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. In ideal instruction, we want students to discover and 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.

Unfortunately, most texts 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. Texts 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 coming to terms with the constructing and organizing of 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 meaning we are attributing to, 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. 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. It reminds us that there are established uses for all facets and dimensions of language, and that the reasons behind these uses can be made intelligible. 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 intelligible structure to be understood, our efforts are rewarded. Unfortunately, we face a special obstacle in accomplishing this purpose.

Typically, students treat the meanings of words as "subjective" and "mysterious." I have my meanings of words, and you have your meanings of them. On this view, problems of meaning are settled by asking people for their personal definitions. What do you mean by 'love,' 'hate,' 'democracy,' 'friendship,' etc.? Each of us is then expected to come forward with a personal definition. My definition of love is this.... My definition of friendship is that....

If we are to persuade students that it is possible to use words precisely, we must demonstrate 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 'rise,' 'arise,' 'spring,' 'originate,' 'derive,' 'flow,' 'issue,' 'emanate,' and 'stem.' They cannot be used in any way one pleases, with a merely personal definition in mind. Each of them has different implications in use:

'Rise' and 'arise' both imply a coming into being, action, notice, etc., but 'rise' carries an added implication of ascent (empires rise and fall) and 'arise' is often used to indicate causal relationship (accidents arise from carelessness); 'spring' implies sudden emergence (weeds sprang up in the garden); 'originate' is used in indicating a definite source, beginning, or prime cause (psychoanalysis originated with Freud); 'derive' implies a proceeding or developing from something else that is the source (this word derives from the Latin) 'flow' suggests a streaming from a source like water ('Praise God, from whom all blessings flow'); 'issue' suggests emergence through an outlet (not a word issued from his lips); 'emanate' implies the flowing forth from a source of something that is non-material or intangible (rays of light emanating from the sun); 'stem' implies outgrowth as from a root or a main stalk (modern detective fiction stems from Poe).

Or consider the words 'contract,' 'shrink,' 'condense,' 'compress,' and 'deflate.' Each of them, too, has definite implications in use:

'Contract' implies a drawing together of surface or parts and a resultant decrease in size, bulk, or extent; to 'shrink' is to contract so as to be short of the normal or required length, amount, extent, etc. (those shirts have shrunk); 'condense' suggests reduction of something into a more compact or more dense form without loss of essential content (condensed milk); to 'compress' is to press or squeeze into a more compact, orderly form (a lifetime's work compressed into one volume); 'deflate' implies a reduction in size or bulk by the removal of air, gas, or in extended use, anything insubstantial (to deflate a balloon, one's ego, etc.)

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 can make connecting our sentences together easier. Here, as above, students need to learn and respect this established logic.
### Group I

**Connectives**
- besides
- what's more
- furthermore
- in addition
- for example
- for instance
- in other words

**How they are used**
- To add another thought.
- To add an illustration or explanation.

**Examples**
- Two postal cards are often more effective than one letter. *Besides*, they are cheaper.
- There is no such thing as an "unlucky number." *In other words*, this idea is pure superstition.

### Group II

- in fact
- as a matter of fact
- therefore
- consequently
- accordingly

**How they are used**
- To connect an idea with another one.

**Examples**
- Last week I was ill, *in fact*, I had to stay in bed until Monday.
- The President vetoed the bill. *Consequently*, it never became a law.

### Group III

- of course
- to be sure
- though
- still
- however
- on the other hand
- nevertheless
- rather

**How they are used**
- To grant an exception or limitation.
- To connect two contrasting ideas.

**Examples**
- He said he would study all day. *I doubt it, though.*
- I like painting; *however*, I can’t understand modern art.

### Group IV

- first
- next
- finally
- meanwhile
- later
- afterwards
- nearby
- eventually
- above
- beyond
- in front
- in short
- in brief
- to sum up
- in summary
- in conclusion

**How they are used**
- To arrange ideas in order, time, or space.
- To sum up several ideas.

**Examples**
- First, drink some fruit juice. *Next*, have a bowl of soup. *Then* eat the meat. *Finally*, have some pie and coffee.
- Scientists say that we should eat food that has all the proteins, fats, and vitamins we need. *In short*, they recommend a balanced diet.
Common Problems With Texts

A critical thinking approach to language arts instruction, with its emphasis on helping students understand the logic of what they study, can provide a strong unifying force in all of the basic dimensions of the language arts curriculum: reading, writing, language, grammar, and appreciation of literature. Unfortunately, it is rare to find this unifying stress in most language arts textbooks. As a result, the emphases in reading, writing, language, grammar, and literature do not “add-up” in the minds of students. They don’t recognize common denominators between reading and writing. They don’t grasp how words in language have established uses and so can be used precisely or imprecisely, clearly or vaguely. Their lack of understanding of the logic of language in turn undermines their clarity of thought when reading and writing.

By the same token, grammar seems to students to be nothing more than an arbitrary set of rules. Typically, texts take a didactic approach. They introduce principles or concepts, then provide drills. Specific skills are often torn from their proper contexts and practiced merely for the sake of practice. Yet, without context, skills have little or no meaning. An occasional simple reiteration of basic purposes or ideas is insufficient. Students need to see for themselves when, how, and why each skill is used specifically as it is.

Texts rarely even mention that most crucial distinction: well vs. poorly written. Students rarely, if ever, evaluate what they read. Students do not explore their standards for evaluating written material, or distinguish for themselves when a written work is clear or unclear, engaging or dull, profound or superficial, realistic or unrealistic, and so on.

Texts occasionally have a short lesson or activity on describing plot, identifying theme, and finding the main point. But students are rarely, if ever, called upon to describe the plots of selections, for example. Yet these basic concepts are worthy of frequent discussion.

Unfortunately, texts seldom have students examine work for themselves, discovering strengths and flaws, distinguishing main points from details, exploring the use of various techniques, formulating their conceptions of theses, plots, and themes. Texts occasionally have lessons on “identifying the main point” or on “plot.” These ideas are not taught often nor integrated into reading lessons.

Some questions to raise about the logic of language and grammar

Keeping in mind the idea that language and grammar are, on the whole, logical, we should ask questions that help students discover this.

“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? What are words for? What do they do? How? How are words alike? Different? How many - what different - kinds of words are there? How is each used? 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 me write? Read? When do I need to know this? How should I use this? How does knowing this help me as a writer? A reader? Why and how do different types of writing differ? What do they have in common?”
Some questions to raise about the logic of 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 method to it. The questions should lead students to discover how to come to terms with the logic of the story. In every case, we should have students support their answers by reference 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? What parts of the book gave you that idea? What has shaped the main character? How has this person shaped others? Why do the characters experience their worlds as they do? How do those 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? Is it a flaw in the work, or does it serve some purpose? What conflicts occur in the story? What is the nature of this conflict? What is its deeper meaning? What relationship does it have to my life? What meaning does that conflict have for the character? For me? Though the world, society, lifestyle or characters are obviously different than what I know, what does this work tell me about my world, society, life, character and the characters of those around me? What needs, desires, and ideas govern these characters? 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 conception of humanity and society present or implicit in this work? To what extent or in what way is it misleading? How does it relate to conceptions I’ve found in other works? How good is this work?

Some questions to raise about the logic of persuasive writing

Persuasive writing has a straightforward logic. In it, an author attempts to describe some dimension of real life and hopes to persuade us to take it seriously. We, as readers, need to grasp what is being said and judge whether it does make sense.

What parts of this work do I seem to understand? What parts don’t I understand? 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 counter-examples can be cited? What might the author say about my counter-examples? What are the basic parts of this work? How are the pieces organized? Which claims or ideas support which other claims or ideas? What beliefs does this claim presuppose? What does it imply? 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 his purpose? Given that this is what I think he means, how does this claim fit in? Could he mean this instead? Which of these interpretations makes more sense? How does he know what he claims to know? Have I good reason to accept his claims? Doubt them? How could I check, or better evaluate what he says? How are such questions settled, or such claims evaluated? What deeper meaning does this work have? What criticisms can I make? What has he left out? Distorted? How does he address his opponents? Has he been fair to his opponents? Does his evidence support exactly the conclusions he draws? If not, am I sure I understand his conclusions and his evidence? Where did he get his evidence? How should I evaluate it? What has he left unexplained? What would he say about it? Of all the ideas or concepts, which does he take to be the most fundamental or basic? How does he use these
concepts? To what other concepts are they related? How does his use of concepts relate to mine and to that of others? Should he have used other concepts instead? How can I reconcile what he has said with what others have said?

Some questions to ask while 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 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. Remember, disorderly thinking produces disorderly writing, and, conversely, orderly thinking produces orderly writing.

What do I want to communicate? Why? What am I talking about? What do I want to say about it? What else do I want to say about it, and why? What else do I know or think about this? How is what I am saying like and unlike what others have said? What am I sure of? What questions do I have? What must I qualify? How can I divide my ideas into intelligible parts? What are the relationships between the parts? How can I show those relationships? How does this detail fit in? How does that claim illuminate my main point? What form of expression best gets this idea across? Would the reader accept this? What questions would the reader have? How can I answer those questions? If I word it this way, would the reader understand it the way I intended? How can I clarify my meaning? How could someone judge this idea or claim? How can it be supported? How would others refute it? Which of those criticisms should I take into account? How can I reconcile the criticisms with my ideas? How should I change what I’ve said? Will the support seem to the reader to justify the conclusion? Should I change the conclusion, or beef up the support? What counter-examples or problems would occur to the reader here? What do I want to say about them? How am I interpreting my sources? How would someone else interpret them? How can I adjust or support my interpretation? What implications do I want the reader to draw? How can I help the reader see that I mean this and not that? Which of all of the things I’m saying is the most important? How will the reader know which is most important? Why is this detail important? Have I assumed the reader knows something he may not know?

Conclusion

As a teacher of 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 students will be much more apt to make this same discovery for themselves. Remember that students are not used to unifying what they are studying. They are, rather, used to fragmented learning. They are used to forgetting, for everything to begin anew, for everything to be self-contained.

Furthermore, they are not used to clear and precise language usage. They are usually satisfied with any words that occur to them to say or write. They are unfamiliar with good writing. Disciplined thinking is something foreign to their life and being. Therefore, don’t expect the shift from a didactic approach (“The teacher tells us and we repeat it back”) to a critical one (“We figure it out for ourselves and integrate it into our own thinking”) to occur quickly and painlessly.
Expect a slow transition. Expect the students to experience many frustrations along the way. Expect progress to come by degrees over an extended period of time. Commit yourself to the long view, to what Matthew Arnold called "the extreme slowness of things," and you will have the attitude necessary for success. Teaching in a critical manner with a critical spirit is a global transformation. Global transformations take a long time to achieve, but their effect is then often permanent. And that is what we want — 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.
Vitalizing Vapid Vocabulary

by Diane McCurly, Ursuline High School, Santa Rosa, CA

Objectives of the remodelled plan
The students will:
- have an increased understanding of words in their functional context through extended analysis
- think independently by making their own logical deductions of word meanings from their roots
- prepare for SAT examinations

Standard Approach

Every week students are given 10-50 words from an alphabetically arranged vocabulary book. They are to memorize spelling, meaning, and sometimes part of speech. At the end of the week, students are given an orally administered written quiz or a matching type ditto.

Critique

All English teachers are stuck with this repetitive, ritual rubric of vocabulary presentation. Memorization being the lowest form of learning, the weekly quizzes can be as tedious for the teacher as they are for the student. Whenever the spelling test type of format is adopted, cheating is rampant. Words studied out of context have little relevancy.

Strategies used to remodel
S-14 clarifying and analyzing the meanings of words or phrases
S-1 thinking independently
S-29 noting significant similarities and differences

Remodelled Lesson Plan S-14

Ten words from the vocabulary lists are put on the chalkboard. Derivations and stems are discussed. "Do you recognize any parts of words? Can you figure out what they might mean, or what they have something to do with?" After the etymologies have been discussed and verified in dictionaries, students can discuss...
contexts for using the words. "When would this word be used? Why? For what purpose?" Students are then assigned to write a logical, flowing paragraph of about two hundred words using the target ten words. Cheating is eliminated. S-1

**editor's note:** When making vocabulary lists, give students a group of related words, rather than randomly chosen, or alphabetically grouped words. Have students brainstorm, use dictionaries and thesauruses to list synonyms and other related words. Discussion and writing, then, can focus on distinguishing synonyms and exploring relationships between related concepts. "When would this word be used? What do these words have in common? What other words could we add to this group? When might any of these synonyms do equally well? When would this but not that be most appropriate, accurate, etc.? S-29 Would you apply these two words to the same thing? Ever, often, never? Would two people who were arguing use them for the same thing? What other words are similar or have related meanings? Do any of these words imply any of the others?"

*It should not be assumed that there is a universal standard for how fast teachers should proceed with the task of remodelling their lesson plans. A slow but steady evolutionary process is much more desirable than a rush job across the board.*
Vocabulary

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Objectives of the remodelled lesson
The students will:
• become more motivated to learn new words
• develop a disposition to investigate the significance of a word and its application
• clarify words by incorporating vocabulary terms into their experiences through Socratic discussion
• employ all thinking capacities in the attainment of new vocabulary
• apply new terms appropriately in real situations

Standard Approach
The student's task is to learn vocabulary terms. The words are presented with suggested systems for remembering their meanings. Visualization and imaging are modeled by the teacher. Sensory learning techniques are used. Students are invited to share their own techniques for learning vocabulary terms by presenting a new word not included in the list to the class. The teacher encourages the learner to incorporate the new terms into the learner's experiential world.

Critique
One of the blocks to vocabulary acquisition seems to be motivation. Learning new words is dull and dreary fare; in fact, the common approach to vocabulary learning is memorization through mundane methods. As a result, the student's underlying attitudes toward learning a list of words and their uses do not produce energy or high-level interest. The student typically responds in habitual patterns, by not integrating the new concepts with life experience.

But creative thinking techniques can be employed to enliven this process. If the learner can go beyond recall to discover insights about the words and even develop a personal connection to their significance, they will be more likely to retain the new knowledge. However, the terms must be more than manipulated, even if the perspective is new and unique. Real comprehension must be undertaken. Using critical thinking principles will enrich the student's experience as an active participant in the learning process as well as promote understanding and retention of concepts.
I chose to remodel a lesson with content not readily considered in terms of the critical thinking philosophy. I wished to experiment with the concept in an adverse circumstance.

**Strategies used to remodel**
- **S-14** clarifying and analyzing the meanings of words or phrases
- **S-35** exploring implications and consequences
- **S-4** exploring thoughts underlying feelings and feelings underlying thoughts
- **S-24** practicing Socratic discussion: clarifying and questioning beliefs, theories, or perspectives
- **S-23** making interdisciplinary connection

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**Remodelled Lesson Plan S-14**

The lesson could be organized to move from the molecular level to the molar level, then back to the molecular level for review. In this manner, the learner can experience the *gestalt*, through expanding understanding of content as well as experiencing helpful potent learning tactics.

The vocabulary list could be presented to the learner in a variety of formats (individual lists, overhead projectors, or chalkboards).

**The List**
- meretricious
- deleterious
- milieu
- cacophony
- euphemism
- collegial
- bellicose
- malaise
- sacrosanct
- concomitant

Before approaching the list, the students could be provided with or invited to supply action words that stimulate the mind to be open to new experiences. A list might be compiled:
- embellish
- transform
- magnify
- stimulate
- manipulate

What images do these words conjure in the learner’s experience?

The teacher can encourage the student to express thoughts and feelings, indicating no convergent nor “right” response, but accepting all responses equally. The learner’s confidence in thinking independently can be elevated as the students share common reactions and as the class members are asked to explain and elucidate their reactions. Through this dialogical process, students may gain insights. One “Aha” experience fuels another. As students share and question — What do you mean exactly by ‘open-mindedness’? — they are pushed to clarify and define ideas. **S-14** At this introductory anticipation level of the lesson, the learner may have to explore the implications of each: Is there...
a value overtone to the act of manipulating? **S-35** Is it too mystical in a classroom setting to think about transformations?

The teacher can encourage retention of the vocabulary terms: What do you need to do to connect the word ‘collegial’ to your experiential realm? **S-14** What techniques work for you? Are you aware of techniques used by famous achievers that enabled them to be productive? What was Mozart’s composition technique? How did Einstein experience his ideas?

If the class is exploring the word ‘collegial,’ a dictionary definition might be provided, after students share their own understandings of the term. In committing to a definition, the process may become more personal, thus more meaningful. As the class members share their perceptions they may touch upon the connotative significance of the word. Further delving may encourage clarification of their ideas. This is an opportunity to address the feelings underlying definitions. Experiences of individual learners will begin to have meaning. Personal reactions to the word should be bounced off the dictionary meaning. **S-4** “Can anyone improve upon Mr. Webster’s position? What does Funk & Wagnall’s say?”

The students may choose which of the remaining words the class will explore together. The questions can be directed from learner to learner, while the teacher participates as a student, generating ideas. The leader’s role would involve policing the “I don’t know” responses, encouraging deeper exploration and more accurate identification. “What occurs to you? What impression do you have? Why? What else do you think? What words are related? How? How are they different? When do you think people use this word? For what kinds of purposes?” **S-24**

At some point, a solution or definition must be accepted by individual learners and the group as a whole. Generating potential solutions to the choices of definitions is perhaps the most germane principle of the lesson. A student might ponder, ‘How might the word ‘concomitant’ be used in the math classroom, in music, in the world of syntax or semantics? How might a minister use the word sacrosanct? What professionals rely on euphemisms to ensure congruity and security in their careers?” **S-23**

The students can select a word remaining on the list, or find a new word to present to the class. Integrating the terms into the learner’s repertoire is the ultimate goal.

Encourage the student’s active and critical participation. Their contributions need to be defensible. Learners need to feel ownership and exercise control over the concepts presented.

Concepts you tie to your experience are translatable to reality.
“The Dream Keeper”

by Odessa Cleveland, North Hollywood High School Zoo Magnet, North Hollywood, CA

Objectives of the remodeled plan
The students will:
- interpret the poem “The Dream Keeper,” by Langston Hughes
- assess the practicality of dreams
- discuss the use of created words for poem and figures of speech used

Standard Approach
The teacher reads the poem aloud. Students listen. Students read the poem silently. Then a volunteer reads the poem aloud. The poem’s main theme deals with dreams that need to be protected, because if they are not, they can be broken. Langston Hughes, the author, repeatedly says that dreams are valuable.

Most of the questions under comprehension probe interpretive understanding. One question requires a literal understanding: “To whom is the poem addressed?”

Critique
Questions in the original lesson require students to understand the meaning of dream keeper. Other questions are concerned with understanding and recognizing figures of speech: “The too-rough fingers/ Of the world.” There are no questions dealing with a discussion of the dream keeper not fulfilling dreams. If students are given a chance to discuss the opposite side of this view, then they will start to recognize that poetry can be appreciated more for its conciseness and literary beauty.

Strategies used to remodel
S-21 reading critically: clarifying or critiquing texts
S-17 questioning deeply: raising and pursuing root or significant questions

Remodeled Lesson Plan S-21
The definition of ‘dream keeper’ should be brainstormed on the board for extension. From selected choices made by students, they should be able to clarify the poet’s meaning of the words ‘dream keeper’ and to determine whether the pronoun ‘me’ refers to anyone with a dream.
For further exploration, ask questions like the following: Have you ever had a dream that you tried to make a reality? How do you deal with disappointment and frustration? Are dreams of any use? Do they ever help us? Why do illusions and delusions enter dreams? **S-17**

What two ideas are combined in each of these terms: cloud-cloth; heart melodies? What do they evoke? Could the poet have used different words and still had the same effect? Try out different possible substitute words.

Of course, during and after the discussion and note taking, questions should be encouraged. Afterwards, review and have students write a paragraph discussing whether dreams are useful, or on whether they agree or disagree with the poet's theme.

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*When texts teach a skill or concept, 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.*
The Quest for the Tragic Hero

by June Tinkhauser, Baldwin High School, Baldwin, NY

Objectives of the remodelled plan
The students will:
- research to review previously learned concepts and deeply question their application
- clarify and assess their beliefs about the tragic hero in Macbeth
- understand how a classical model works through the ages

Standard Approach
At the conclusion of the play Macbeth, it is of interest to see how some of the classical applications of Aristotle’s Poetics can apply to Elizabethan drama (in this case, Macbeth, and later to modern drama as with Arthur Miller and Maxwell Anderson.) After discussing Aristotle’s notes on aspects of comedy and tragedy, the teacher zeros in on the concept of the Tragic Hero, a character, mortal, yet towering over others, who goes from good to bad fortune as a result of a fatal flaw in his or her character. Lots of good Greek terms apply here: hubris, anagnorisis, catharsis. The teacher illustrates the concept of the Tragic Hero by drawing, or having a student draw, an architectural column on the board, adding a chink into the side of the column which ultimately spreads, undermining the column, causing it to fall. An analogy is drawn between the column and the Tragic Hero and Shakespeare’s Macbeth.

Critique
This lesson, the teacher’s own, is satisfying in some respects. Students are able to see a classical ideal operating in an Elizabethan context and should see this further developed when we read Miller’s Death of a Salesman. But students have difficulty seeing Macbeth, a bloody, murdering tyrant as a good man gone bad. Exegesis is offered from the text, but it’s the “Blood will have blood,” that sticks.

Strategies used to remodel
S-17 questioning deeply: raising and pursuing root or significant questions
S-1 thinking independently
S-13 clarifying issues, conclusions, or beliefs
Remodelled Lesson Plan

Let’s not trash the whole lesson. The column concept is a good, graphic illustration, but perhaps students could do their own research on Aristotle’s Poetics, since this is probably not their first introduction to the Tragic Hero. (They have studied other Shakespearean plays.)

Then have that artistic student draw that column and ask students to make the connections to the Tragic Hero, eliciting vocabulary: tragic flaw, peripetia, anagnorisis, catharsis if possible. If not, hubris and catharsis are probably the most useful. **S-17**

Now the quest for the Tragic Hero in Macbeth. Students will suggest Macduff, Malcolm, Banquo, Duncan and possibly Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. **S-1** For the next day, ask students to be prepared to role-play each of these characters, presenting their case for status as Tragic Hero. The teacher acts as facilitator, asking questions if necessary to clarify connections to the classical model. “Would you call this character ‘towering’? How so? More so than another? What was his or her tragic flaw? How is it exhibited?” **S-13**

Students can decide who makes the best case; the teacher again asks what convinced them. When students ask about the Tragic Hero, the teacher might tell them the Jean Kerr anecdote about her son who was playing Adam in a play about the Garden of Eden. One day he returned home, dejected. When asked why, he said, “The snake has all the lines.”

“Who, then, has the best lines in Macbeth?” No doubt about it, students can now consider and accept Macbeth as the Tragic Hero, and also realize the applications to many characters in literature and in life.
“Harrison Bergeron”

by Brenda McEvoy, Healdsburg High School, Healdsburg, CA

Objectives of the remodelled plan
The students will:
- analyze the concepts ‘equality’ and ‘justice’
- evaluate the policies of the government depicted in the story
- analyze and critique the author’s perspective
- use critical vocabulary while analyzing the story

Standard Approach

Kurt Vonnegut's satirical short story is about a future American society in which all people are made equal in every respect by making people wear handicaps; the graceful or athletic must wear weights; the intelligent must wear devices in their ears which transmit a sharp noise every twenty seconds, making sustained thought impossible; the beautiful must wear masks. Fourteen year old Harrison is stronger, more handsome, and more intelligent than anyone else; he wears the most handicaps. His parents watch on television as he rebels, tears off his devices, and declares himself Emperor by right of his extraordinary abilities. He challenges a group of ballerinas to join his rebellion. One does, and he removes her handicaps and dances with her. The woman in charge of handicaps appears and shoots the rebels, ending the brief moment of rebellion. Harrison's average mother and intelligent but handicapped father immediately forget what they have seen. Texts ask recall questions, have students describe the society depicted, and state the theme of the story.

Critique

This lesson was selected because the text makes so little use of a story which deals with ideas of immediate concern to adolescents: the concepts of equality and justice, and the idea of adult authoritarianism towards teen-agers. The text does not offer students an opportunity to practice critical thought.

Strategies used to remodel

S-14 clarifying and analyzing the meanings of words or phrases
S-20 analyzing or evaluating actions or policies
S-19 generating or assessing solutions
**Remodelled Lesson Plan**

Before reading the story, students could discuss the concept of equality. "What does it mean as a legal concept? What does it mean as a social concept? Why?" The discussion might be started by the teacher giving an example of equality, or lack of it, and then having the students explain why they agree or disagree with the example. The discussion could continue with students supplying further examples and analyzing them. *S-14*

After reading the story, the students could discuss Vonnegut's future society and discriminate between equality and justice. Was this society actually equal? Consider the people who imposed and enforced the handicapping. Were they equal? Compare that society's concept of equality with the concept meant in the American ideals of equality. *S-14* In this story does equality promote justice? Why or why not? Cite evidence from the text. *S-20*

If the students decide that Harrison lived in an unjust society, a written assignment might follow a brainstorming session on how a society could be remodelled to include both the concepts of equality and justice. *S-19*

After working with the content issues, the students could analyze the story itself. What statement is the author making in this satire? How do you know? How does he make his point? What would be the opposing point of view? What arguments could be used to support the opposing view? Explain the reasoning behind the handicapping system. Who would most want it? Why? *S-25* What effects does the system of handicapping have? What, exactly, is wrong with the society described? Does it seem right to you? What is wrong with how that society interprets the ideal of equality? Does this society bear any resemblance to ours? In what ways? Is Vonnegut trying to say something to us? What? Do you agree with the author's point of view? Why or why not? *S-21*

Critical thinking vocabulary could be integrated into the discussion sessions. "What evidence do you have for the point of view? What inferences can be drawn about the author's beliefs from reading this story? What conclusion can you reach after weighing the evidence? What is implied by Vonnegut's choice of satire as a means of expression?" *S-28*
The Crucible

by Sheree Shown, Vintage High School, Napa, CA

Objectives of the remodelled plan
The students will:
  • pursue root questions raised in the play The Crucible
  • analyze characters by exploring thoughts, feelings, and actions

Standard Approach

In this play, The Crucible by Arthur Miller, many characters have been accused of witchcraft by first one, and then several young girls of Puritan Salem. The girls have suffered mysterious “fits,” hallucinations, and visions before the public. One man, John Proctor is finally singled out by the leader of the girls, Abigail, as the cause of their suffering. John and Abigail had a brief affair earlier, but John had put an end to it for the sake of his marriage, believing his soul to be forever damned for the encounter. At the end of the play, Proctor refuses to confess to any crime, and is hanged with several dozen others as a “witch.”

Students have read the text of the play and have gone through several discussions and worksheets concerning the various characters in it. Students are told to write a three page paper analyzing one character through his actions, and in so doing, find a theme for the novel. Background for the paper comes from class discussions and journal entries.

Critique

Although the original lesson asks students to analyze, the assignment asks them to do this on their own, without any formal structure to go by. Papers received in the past have been marginal, lacking depth and focus. The lesson places blinders on the students, in that they examine only one character without any relation to another, yet it is the interaction of the characters that produces conflict and brings the theme into focus.
Strategies used to remodel
S-21 reading critically: clarifying or critiquing texts
S-17 questioning deeply: raising and pursuing root or significant questions
S-4 exploring thoughts underlying feelings and feelings underlying thoughts
S-32 making plausible inferences, predictions, or interpretations
S-20 analyzing or evaluating actions or policies
S-8 developing intellectual perseverance

Remodelled Lesson Plan S-21

As an introduction to this paper, students will have become familiar with the terms 'motivation,' 'conflict,' and 'theme' through various group exercises and discussions. In a large class discussion, students will be asked "Have you ever become jealous? Have you ever wanted something you could not have? Can a person be totally honest all of the time? What does it mean to be a good person? When has the truth hurt you? When has a lie hurt you?" S-17

Students will examine these question both orally and in informal "free-writing" that is ungraded and shared voluntarily. Next, students will be asked to fill in a small chart on three characters they feel comfortable analyzing: S-4

character predominant emotions 3 major actions possible motivation result

They will then break up into small groups of three to five and share their work, discussing the similarities and differences they found. These cooperative groups will report their findings to the class. Students will be asked at this point to choose one character for their papers. Groups will be organized by the character selected.

Each group will build a "resource map" to be used as a study resource aide for their individual papers. The resource map consists of six "cells," or categories:

portrait of character and physical description:
descriptive words with clarification:
quotes from the character which show an aspect of personality:
quotations about the character and their sources:
a motto the character might choose to live by and at least three metaphors for the character; S-32
major actions of the character, possible motivations, and the results of those actions; S-20

Each student shall be responsible for at least one cell on the map, but it would be the responsibility of the group as a whole to complete the task and evaluate it.

When complete (one week), the groups share their work. All maps would be tacked up in the room and discussed. Only now would students be given the actual writing assignment on character analysis. Students would be free to use not only their own resource map, but others as well, to complete their essay. Thus, students would be familiar with the material, have a means of organizing it, and have the resources necessary to feel confident of their information. S-8
To Kill a Mockingbird

by Janis Key, Vintage High School, Napa, CA

Objectives of the remodelled plan

The students will:
- recognize their own sociocentricity by discussing school cliques
- examine the nature, causes, and consequences of their assumptions about other groups
- develop intellectual courage by examining social pressure to agree with one’s group
- understand stereotypes and be able to identify examples in their own lives
- transfer insight into their sociocentricity to that described in the novel

Standard Approach

To prepare students for To Kill a Mockingbird, a novel of social injustice in the South during the Depression, background information is given in a lecture covering the author, Harper Lee, and facts about the Depression. Students should be aware of the quasi-autobiographical nature of the novel, references such as FDR, blue eagle, WPA, and John Dewey, as well as the social and economic climate in the South during the Depression.

Critique

This novel presents an excellent opportunity for students to explore stereotypes and prejudice while examining their own sociocentricity. Although background information enhances the understanding of the novel, students have a deeper understanding of the issues presented in this novel and the relevance of these issues in their own lives by sharing a more active role in the gathering and evaluation of the information. The background information will be more meaningful if presented after students are engaged in the above issues and if they play an active role in gathering that information.

Strategies used to remodel

S-2 developing insight into egocentricity or sociocentricity
S-3 exercising fairmindedness
S-4 exploring thoughts underlying feelings and feelings underlying thoughts
S-35 exploring implications and consequences
S-6 developing intellectual courage
S-11 comparing analogous situations: transferring insights to new contexts
Remodelled Lesson Plan s-2

Students are to bring to class a definition and an example of stereotype. In small self-selected groups, students identify the social groups at Vintage High School. They list several characteristics and several values of each group. Students discuss the following questions. To which group do you belong? Which other groups do you or would you associate with? Which groups would you never associate with and why? What characteristics or values do these groups have that conflict with yours? Do those groups feel the same way about your group? Explain. S-3 Why does each group hold these views of the other? Why do you have these feelings about different groups? S-4

A representative from each group shares the group’s observations and conclusions with the entire class.

The class discusses the implications of these observations and conclusions. “What happens when people make these kinds of assumptions about others? What are the positive and negative consequences of identifying yourself with a particular group and excluding yourself from other groups? S-35 What forms of group identification are legitimate? Which are unjustified? Why do people make such unjustified distinctions? Why is it hard to express attitudes that conflict with those of your group? How do group members respond to dissent? Why? How do you feel about those who disagree with the rest of the group? How does the group members’ response make the dissenters feel? Why?” S-6

Then, as background preparation for reading, students could do their own research about the Depression and the South, sharing their results.

editor’s note: When the book is finished, students can discuss the social class distinctions made in it: What groups of people are covered in this book? (Townspeople, Blacks, people like the Cunninghams, the Ewells.) “What are Aunt Alexandra’s distinctions, and attitudes about others? Why did she feel this way about each group? Was she fair? Why or why not? What were Jem and Scout’s theories on class distinctions? Why did they come up with these theories? Why did the theories make some sense to them? How reasonable were they? Where did they miss the mark? Where does Boo fit in? Would he have been treated differently if he had been from another class?” S-2

Students can compare the social distinctions in the book to those of their school. “How are the social distinctions made at school like and unlike those in the book?” The class can take specific points made in the two sets of discussions, and see if they apply to the other context. (For example, if, when discussing the book, students note that people in the book were born into their classes, they could discuss whether they chose their groups.) Students can discuss the consequences of the differences between the two “societies,” and the justification of the social systems and the kinds of behavior it allows and even encourages. S-11
The Grapes of Wrath

by Janis Key, Vintage High School, Napa, CA

Objectives of the remodelled plan
The students will:
• apply insights into dust-bowl refugees to other groups
• recognize unfounded beliefs they may have about the homeless
• explore significant similarities and differences between the situation in The Grapes of Wrath and that of the homeless, Mexican migratory farm workers, or immigrants
• clarify the meanings of tolerance and concern for humanity and apply them to the situation of the homeless
• develop insight into sociocentricity by examining attitudes toward and treatment of oppressed peoples

Standard Approach

After the students finish reading The Grapes of Wrath, a novel by John Steinbeck about the Okie migration to California during the 1930's and the difficulties they encountered, students discuss the development of the following themes in the novel: toleration, concern for humanity, social reform, and survival. As the discussion progresses, the teacher writes important ideas on the board under each theme heading and students copy these for use in a paper or essay exam.

Critique

Although this lesson provides an opportunity for students to begin to consider the major issues present in the novel and explore how they are developed, there is no opportunity to draw conclusions about these issues or to identify them independently. There is also the likelihood that only a few students will participate in the discussion. Students are not asked to examine the lack of tolerance in their society or in themselves, nor are they asked to find relevance in the novel to their own society and times.

Strategies used to remodel
S-11 comparing analogous situations: transferring insights to new contexts
S-2 developing insight into egocentricity or sociocentricity
S-35 exploring implications and consequences
S-1 thinking independently
S-29 noting significant similarities and differences
S-23 making interdisciplinary connections
Remodelled Lesson Plan S-11

The students individually list the qualities and characteristics of the homeless. “What do you assume a homeless person is like?” Students share items on their lists to generate a class list on the board. If some students disagree with an item, it is checked and reasons for the disagreement are voiced. The students are asked, “Where did you get these assumptions? Is there good reason to question them? How could these claims be verified or disproven? What characteristics listed on the board are positive or negative? Why? Why do people react in these ways?” S-2

Students read two articles on the homeless, such as, “What Can Be Done?” Tom Mathews, Newsweek, 3/21/88 and “The Homeless and Their Children,” Jonathan Kozol, The New Yorker, 1/25/88.

In small groups, students discuss the answers to the following questions as well as asking questions of their own: What does this situation imply for the future of these people, particularly the children? S-35 Have you changed any of your ideas about the homeless or possible solutions to the problem? What led you to do so? Students, in their groups, discuss the situation of the homeless, create a new list of characteristics and qualities and develop possible solutions. S-1

Students discuss the similarities and differences between the problems of the Okies in The Grapes of Wrath and those of the homeless in America today. “In what ways are these two groups alike? Unlike? What do the differences imply? Does this difference effect conclusions or judgments about them? How? Why?” S-29

Individual writing assignment: Compare and contrast the situation of the Okies in The Grapes of Wrath to that of the homeless today. Examine particularly the attitudes toward these groups by outsiders and the causes of the situations. S-2 If you think Steinbeck offered a solution to the problems of the Okies, discuss whether or not that solution would work for the homeless. Use specific examples from the articles and the novel.

editor’s note: What kinds of things about the dust-bowlers did Californians dislike (ridicule, resent)? What other people are disliked (ridiculed, resented) for similar reasons? Why do people respond to others these ways? How did negative images help rationalize the ways they were treated? S-2

An even closer comparison can be made between dust-bowl refugees and Mexican migratory farm workers. Some students might research this group. The class can compare problems each group faced, and attitudes others have toward them. S-29

Another set of comparable groups would be the various waves of immigrants coming to the U.S., throughout its history. Perhaps social studies classes could be coordinated with this unit. Such a project could have the added benefit of exploring more long-range consequences of attitudes and policies. “What problems did this group face? How did they respond? What images did others here have of them? Why? What was done about their problems? What results did that have?” S-23
“Charles”

Objectives of the remodelled plan
The students will:
- compare the short story to other genres through writing and Socratic discussion
- probe the motives for a character’s actions
- evaluate a story
- discuss the effect knowing the ending has on the experience of reading a story
- explore consequences of adding another character or changing the setting

Standard Approach
This lesson is based on “Charles,” a short story by Shirley Jackson, which is frequently anthologized in literature texts at this level. The story concerns a boy named Laurie, who starts kindergarten and comes home each day to tell stories about a bad boy in class named Charles. The end of the story reveals that there is no child in the class named Charles, and implies that Laurie was describing himself. Students respond to such questions as, "Why did Laurie make up the stories about Charles?"

Critique
Short stories are commonly studied in high school, but in-depth analysis is rare. A format used in many classrooms involves reading the story, discussing the story, answering factual questions, learning new vocabulary and perhaps writing about some aspect of the story. This method is tedious for both the teacher and the students. Students know what to expect when the lesson begins, realize that not much is expected of them intellectually and become bored or lose interest. New texts do include questions beyond the factual and comprehension level, but teachers who embrace the principles of critical thinking can even go beyond this and use the short story form to clarify students’ thinking and challenge them academically.

By the time students reach this level, they no doubt have been exposed to the short story form many times and often with the elements of the short story such as setting, character, plot, point of view, and theme. If these elements are presented as definitions, separate from the genre itself, they not only lose meaning, but give students the mistaken idea that literature involves formulas. As with any specialized terminology, we use these terms to discuss the subject (fiction) clearly and insightfully. The usual lackluster approach places students in a passive role and preempts discovery which involves real learning.

Standard lessons often miss the point of stories, and include little discussion of the themes or significant issues raised in them.
Strategies used to remodel
S-1 thinking independently
S-29 noting significant similarities and differences
S-35 exploring implications and consequences
S-21 critical reading: clarifying or critiquing text
S-24 practicing Socratic discussion: clarifying and questioning beliefs, theories, or perspectives

Remodelled Lesson Plan

The short story form S-29
Teachers who teach literature critically will invite students to generate the definition and elements of the short story. S-1 Open a unit on the short story by having the students work in pairs and respond to questions like the following in writing:
List some characteristics of short stories besides their length.
Compare short stories to novels. Do not consider the facts of specific plots.
List differences and similarities in general.
Compare the short story form to poetry.
Compare the short story form to plays.
After students have completed their lists, regroup them into groups of 4-6 and have them compare notes. Ask them to combine their answers into a paragraph or more describing the form of the short story and using the ideas on their lists. Then ask a representative from each group to read their answers. At this point, the teacher can clarify any points the students may be confused about or rephrase some of their terms to fit the traditional elements. For example, if students say that stories must have people in them, then the teacher could remind them that some stories involve animals and that a general term for all of them is ‘characters.’

“Charles”
The next part of the lesson will involve the short story the teacher has chosen to study. The teacher should select stories carefully, since different stories provide different opportunities for analysis. Teachers should clarify in their own minds what the possible themes of the story are. Even though I will be using “Charles” as an example, the method will work for any story.

If the class needs help describing the plot, this could be done as a class facilitated by the teacher, or in small groups. Or, students who have that skill can model it (in pairs or small groups) for those who don’t. Later, the other students can practice, guided by the first. S-1

In order to practice discussing the entire story, students could rank incidents according to their importance. What was the outcome of each incident? Identify the emotional reactions of the characters involved. S-35

To take advantage of the twist in this particular story, you might ask, "What did you think was going on? What was Laurie’s attitude towards Charles? Now that you know the end, why do you think he had that attitude? Discuss the mother’s reaction."
"Why did Laurie do those things? Make up Charles? Do you think he believed in Charles? Evaluate Laurie. Evaluate this story. Is it readable, interesting? Would you recommend it? Why or why not? Was it realistic, or did the characters seem phony?" **S-21**

Another activity that could be done after reading the story involves having students think about the concept of truth or evading responsibility. Students could participate in a large group discussion which addresses the following questions:

- Do you always tell the truth?
- Under what conditions would you lie? Why did Laurie lie?
- In your opinion, is lying ever necessary?
- Do all people receive the same message from the same statements, i.e., do some see lies where others see truth? Give examples.
- Can something be totally true or totally false? Give examples. **S-24**

Stories with surprises can be fruitfully read a second time, and discussed with questions like the following: How is reading the story different this time, that is, now that you know the ending? How was the author able to keep the secret? Now that you know the ending, were there hints and clues that you missed before, that foreshadow the ending? Did you enjoy the story more the first or second time?

As a writing exercise for closure, students could be asked to think about the themes of the story and then write about a minor theme that has not been discussed in class. Students would be expected to provide support from the text for their ideas.

**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.**
"Spring and Fall"

Joan F. Barry, Staff Development
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Objectives of the remodelled plan
The students will:
- brainstorm a reference list of words which describe thought
- understand the universality of the experience expressed in the poem (the nature of loss, the process of mourning)
- compare Hopkins's poem to modern music and ads
- understand the distinction between emotional responses that fit the experience, and sentimentality
- develop hypotheses about the purpose and nature of poetry

Standard Approach

The focal point of the lesson is the universality of sorrow and loss, and the distinction between emotional responses that are fitting and sentimental responses that are self-indulgent. The author's attention is on a young girl, Margaret, who is mourning the loss of summer and that season's abundance. It is fall; the leaves are dying and dropping from the trees. It is a time of loss, of death. The poem is the author's silent conversation with Margaret as he watches her. He advises that, as she grows older, she will not be moved by such turns of nature. Her heart will grow callous; perhaps because it will need to in order to survive. She will have more serious tragedies to mourn over. For the first nine lines, the author laments over the loss of innocence that the passing of time brings to each of us. Margaret's tender heart seems to be admirable.

In line ten, however, the author makes a dramatic shift in point of view. Hopkins makes the case that all pity is self-pity, all mourning, self-mourning. No matter what the catalyst, no matter what the event in the outside world (loss of summer, disappointment in work or love, or loss of a loved one) what we really mourn for is ourselves. The author now seems to believe Margaret's emotions are sentimental, silly, and self-indulgent.

I begin the lesson by reading the poem aloud to the class. I then ask clarification questions to determine the author's literal meaning. ("What is Margaret watching? What is the meaning of 'Goldengrove,' 'wanwood,' 'leafmeal'?"
I ask student to summarize lines 1 through 9. Then, I point out the shift in point of view and "give" them the author's interpretation of loss, sorrow, and mourning. That is, I tell them (in a didactic approach) the author's point of view: "All pity is self pity, all mourning, self-mourning." I then cite the text and critical essays
for support of my claim. I point out that, like many human emotions, the author is of two minds in his reaction to Margaret. He both admires her innocence and respect for life, and, at the same time, believes that her mourning reflects self-pity and self-indulgence. Her emotions, therefore, are silly and sentimental even while they are admirable and he envies them.

I further point out how the genre of poetry makes possible the expression of conflicting simultaneous emotions. The precision of poetic language makes the expression of universal emotions possible. The beauty of the poetic expression makes possible the reflection of intense, conflicting emotions.

Critique

The obvious flaw in the scholastically dominant approach to teaching this poem is that it does not let the students discover for themselves. It does not allow them to undergo the struggle and the joy of discovery that is inherent in an appreciation for and excitement over the study of poetry.

Because the teacher, as the "knower of truth" about the poetic experience, interprets the experience for them, they are denied the intellectual stimulation of discovery. In addition, I have limited the group's interpretation of the poem, because I have supplied the "right" answer up front. Thus, not only has the individual student's thinking been stifled, but the group is denied the synergistic response to the beauty of the poem.

The remodelled lesson plan is student-centered rather than content and teacher-centered. It replaces the scholastically dominant theory of knowledge, learning, and literacy with the emerging critical theory of knowledge, learning, and literacy.

Strategies used to remodel

S-9 developing confidence in reason
S-1 thinking independently
S-12 developing one's perspective: creating or exploring beliefs, arguments, or theories
S-17 questioning deeply: raising and pursuing root or significant questions
S-15 developing criteria for evaluation: clarifying values and standards
S-29 noting significant similarities and differences

Remodelled Lesson Plan s-9

The lesson is divided into five parts. Part one occurs before the students see the poem. We brainstorm thinking. I ask them to think of any words that describe thinking. I write them on the board. A class member records them on paper. We adhere to all the rules of brainstorming. We record everything everyone says without making judgments and without editorializing. The recorder records exactly, asking only for repeats if he or she does not hear or understand. We work for a prescribed period of time. After the list is complete, we sep-
arate cognitive and affective thinking strategies to create two lists. I then ask for additions to the lists. The final lists are displayed in large print on easels visible to all members of the class as we complete the remainder of the unit.

The students complete part two of the unit individually. I give them a written copy of the poem that is divided into couplets, and one sestet. The right half of the page is blank, leaving room for student responses. I ask them to record one question and one comment about each of the couplets. This activity takes approximately twenty minutes. **S-1**

Part three involves sharing questions and comments. Since students have had an opportunity to record their questions and comments, I call on folks at random. As a question is given, I repeat the question and wait for students to suggest answers. All questions are handled first. Then comments are shared and a discussion ensues. If someone from the group does not ask about or comment on the author's shift in point of view at line 10, I will ask the group about it. It is likely that the question will emerge from the group. Also, if no one poses the question of the author's feelings about and attitude toward Margaret's emotional response, I will pose it. Again, it is likely that the issue will surface from the group. "What is the poet's response to Margaret's attitude? Does he approve of her? Why do you say so? What is the poet trying to say? What's the difference between being emotional and being sentimental? How can you tell which one applies to a particular response? **S-12**

This is the point where we will spend some time talking about the nature of poetry and the poetic expression. This discussion will continue as we get involved in the next day's assignment. **S-17**

Part four of the unit asks the students to bring examples to class of modern poetry in any of its modern forms: written, as lyrics in music, in advertising. As a group we will compare and contrast the feelings expressed and the style of expression. "Is one poetry and the other not? How do we define poetry? Is one form of expression more valuable than another? How do we determine the value of poetry? **S-15** Does one reflect a higher level of thinking than another?" **S-29**

Each student will given a five minute oral report on a poem of choice, reading the selection, then responding to the assigned questions. After five minutes, the class will spend ten minutes reacting. This exercise will be completed while the class remains seated in a circle. The purpose of the exercise is not to arrive at conclusions or right and wrong answers, but to involve the group in the joy of inquiry.

The final part of the unit, part five, asks the students to do projects of their choice, capitalizing on their own skills and talents. The only guideline is that the project must deal with loss. Students can do another oral report, a
paper, an artistic illustration (painting, sculpture, pencil sketch,) they can
write their own poem or song, or create another kind of project. The project
must deal in some way with loss and personal response to loss. S-12

The students are evaluated on their five-minute oral reports, and on their
final projects. The brainstorming and sharing of questions and comments is not
graded, but serves as the interest generator for the reports and final projects.

We learn how to learn by learning, think by
thinking, judge by judging, analyze by analyzing;
not by reading, hearing, and reproducing princi-
ples guiding these activities, but by using those
principles. There is no point in trying to think for
our students.
Testing for Thinking: The Outsiders

Objectives of the remodelled plan
The teacher will:
- recognize weak testing methods
- identify student assumptions about subject mastery
- develop new techniques for short quiz questions which require critical thinking
- restructure test questions to allow students to take and defend positions on novels read
- modify tests to include critical vocabulary

Standard Approach
Testing methods in the middle grades may take a variety of forms: true/false, objective, multiple choice, and essay. Most teachers agree that the essay form is best educationally. Close on the heels of this statement is the reality a workload of 150 students or more imposes. Teachers simply do not have the time to grade essay exams whenever they need an evaluation of a student’s progress. Sometimes a teacher only wants to confirm that a student has done the reading. In these situations, the recall test is a common tool. In a five to ten question quiz, the student will be asked to supply facts from the literature, often including such questions as: Where did Mercy leave her necklace in Chapter Six? What was Harold’s adopted brother-in-law’s step son’s name? How much did Sabella pay for her new condo?

For a model, we have used the book, The Outsiders by S. E. Hinton.
For the first chapter, a test might include the following questions:
- What were the two gangs called? (Greasers and Socs)
- What do you know about the gangs? How?
- Who were Ponyboy’s two brothers? (Soda and Darry)
- Which group did Ponyboy belong to? (Greasers)
- Where was Ponyboy coming from at the start of the chapter? (movies)
- What did the Socs do to him on the way home? (cut his hair, assaulted him)
- Who was described as the “real character” of the Greaser gang? (Dally)

Critique
Recall quizzes do test the reader’s ability to regurgitate information from the reading. But they do something more insidious as well. They give the students two messages. First, that the point of reading a novel, play, or short story is to memorize the facts presented therein. In this way,
students are almost discouraged from ruminating on the ideas of the book. Instead they are using valuable reflection time to commit the nuts and bolts information to memory. The second questionable thing about recall exams is that they give students the notion that if they master the facts, they have mastered the book. Most teachers have experienced reading nothing but information recall in response to an essay question that specifically asked for synthesis, evaluation, or other higher level skills. At the very least, recall tests, if they must be given, should stick with the key facts, and events, and not ask for randomly selected details.

Other modes of testing present problems as well. One may construct sophisticated true/false statements, but the test has a 50% guess factor. Multiple choice questions also have the potential for critical composition, but they take some time to compose and the potential for cheating is great if the test is reused. They also limit the responses of the students, who may have some genuine insights to convey about the book.

Strategies used to remodel
S-29 noting significant similarities and differences
S-32 making plausible inferences, predictions, or interpretations
S-30 examining or evaluating assumptions
S-17 questioning deeply: raising and pursuing root or significant questions
S-20 evaluating actions or policies
S-21 reading critically: clarifying or critiquing texts
S-35 exploring implications or consequences
S-4 exploring thoughts underlying feelings and feelings underlying thought

Remodelled Lesson Plan

For teachers interested in moving away from the recall test, we offer a variation which gives students the opportunity to use their thinking skills. If you ask students to keep the responses brief, a few words or one sentence, grading will not be difficult. Below is a sample of questions and possible answers.

- State two ways in which Ponyboy differs from his brother, Soda. (Pony reads and seems more interested in school; Pony’s younger; Pony behaves like a brother, but Soda acts like a father.) S-29

- What can you infer about the emotional state of Pony at the opening of the book. (Happy, reflective — thinking about his brothers; he’s a bit anxious about walking alone.) S-32

- Both of the gangs introduced in Chapter One are guilty of oversimplification. Give examples from each gang. (Socs think all Greasers are dirty, rough, stupid. Greasers think all Socs are rich snobs, aren’t cool, fight without justification.) S-30

- Speculate on the reasons that these two groups exist (difference of social class; macho tendencies; makes them feel grown-up; makes them feel close). S-17

- Characterize the relationship between Pony and Soda in three different ways (parental, siblings, adoring, blind, overprotective). S-32

- Do you think the attitude toward women expressed by the Greasers is fair? Why/why not? (No, they call their girls broads and admire the Socs’ girls. It’s contradictory. No, they criticize them harshly. Yes, Greaser girls are just as misguided as the boys are.) S-20
• What factors led to conflict? Who bears primary responsibility for this event and why? S-20

This quiz requires students to use critical thinking skills to answer the questions. If the teacher uses this type of quiz frequently, students will develop the habit of reading and reflecting on the concepts presented.

If you wish, students may exchange papers and grade the quizzes. Various answers are volunteered by students. The teacher can then ask, “Does anyone have an answer that differs from those we have discussed?” The teacher may ask for the reasoning behind the answer to determine if credit will be given. Discussion may result. The process of giving and grading a quiz such as this deepens understanding for the whole class. Quizzes given later in the book can have students evaluate characterization for consistency or realism.

Having students write a short description of the plot requires more than recall, since students have to select the most pertinent details to recall and describe. Requiring students to describe plots of everything they read develops the concept of plot much better than the standard method of teaching the concept in a few lessons over the course of the year.

Episode Analysis S-21

Another method of testing, which also could be used instead of the rote quiz is moving away from the question format altogether. At a Language Arts conference, Dr. Robert Calfee of Stanford University presented some critical analysis methods from Project Read. One of these, termed “Episode Analysis” is a preprinted page which could be used as a testing device. It is set up like this: S-35

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Emotional Response</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The students are expected to fill in each category. If the outcome is as yet unknown, then instruct the student to predict the outcome. For example:

Pony gets attacked by the Socs  
Scared  
Pony gets cut  
Resentment against the Socs builds

The teacher may have students analyze more than one episode analysis.

An alternative format might be: S-4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event/Situation</th>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Assumption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If the students have had exposure to critical vocabulary, the teacher could compose a quiz which asks students to list some assumptions made by the characters. S-30

Any improvement on the recall test will produce a more stimulating and interesting test to grade. Because students are given the opportunity to think in ways which motivate them to be inventive, teachers may even gain insight into material they have taught many times.
Writing Argumentative Essays

Objectives of the remodelled plan
The students will:
• develop their perspectives through dialectical exchange, writing, and argument analysis and evaluation
• clarify issues and key words
• evaluate evidence
• practice critical thought by writing and revising argumentative essays

Standard Approach

Students pick an issue or position and find reasons to support their conclusions. Sometimes students are told to state and refute opposing arguments. They research their topics, noting facts supporting their positions. Sometimes texts introduce fallacies and a bit of logic as preparation. Students write an argumentative essay, defending their positions.

Critique

Though this handbook mainly focuses on incorporating critical thinking into other lessons, lessons specifically on critical thinking can also be useful. Generally, texts' treatment of argumentation suffer from many serious flaws and misunderstandings, display fuzziness of thought, misuse terms, and lack critical insight. As a whole, texts downplay evaluation of reasoning. (Where mentioned or suggested, they give little guidance and often use confusing language). They rarely suggest evaluating the relevance of support to conclusions.

Texts mainly focus on how to defend opinions, not how to shape them more reasonably. Though they address the importance of giving reasons for beliefs, they often neglect the importance of considering opposing views, or strengthening one's reasoning by weeding out or altering unjustified beliefs. Presenting good reasons, though valuable, is only half of a discussion. The standard approach allows reactions that are too often impressionistic and based on prejudice or lack of understanding.

Rather than teaching argument analysis and evaluation, texts generally have students attempt to distinguish fact from opinion. Though the motive of having students distinguish questionable from acceptable claims is worthwhile, the usual approach does not accomplish this purpose. It produces an unquestioning attitude of acceptance for statements that seem factual, though factual (empirical) claims are not necessarily reliable, and students can't necessarily tell if so-called facts are true. Facts, when used in an argument, may not be complete or relevant. Since statements students are called on to judge as opinions are given without context, students cannot rationally judge whether they are mere whim or can be well defended. Rather than using the
fact/opinion distinction, students can distinguish questionable from acceptable claims and fact from interpretation and judgment.

This remodel illustrates a way of orchestrating cognitive strategies to reason dialectically.

Strategies used to remodel

S-26 reasoning dialectically: evaluating perspectives, interpretations, or theories
S-12 developing one’s perspective: creating or exploring beliefs, arguments, or theories
S-28 thinking precisely about thinking: using critical vocabulary
S-31 distinguishing relevant from irrelevant facts
S-34 recognizing contradictions
S-18 analyzing or evaluating arguments, interpretations, beliefs, or theories
S-3 exercising fairmindedness
S-13 clarifying issues, conclusions, or beliefs
S-15 developing criteria for evaluation: clarifying values and standards
S-14 clarifying and analyzing the meanings of words or phrases
S-16 evaluating the credibility of sources of information
S-33 evaluating evidence and alleged facts

Remodelled Lesson Plan S-26

Introduction

We have written these lessons as a unified unit culminating in a well-thought-out argumentative essay. Similar units, repeated over the course of the year, can greatly improve both reasoning and its expression.

Class discussions can be used to introduce and clarify aspects of critical thought through the analysis and improvement of two opposing arguments selected as models. The models should address the same issue from different perspectives, be fairly strong, but require some improvement. Small group discussions allow students to develop and clarify their positions on issues of their choice, and argue between opposing views.

For their essay and discussion groups topics, students could brainstorm issues of interest to them. Each group must share an issue about which group members disagree. The issues from which they choose should not be questions of mere preference but should call for reasoned judgment.

Each student then picks an issue and writes an essay. Students should state their positions and support them with their best reasons. This is the first draft of their argumentative essays. S-12

Beginning Argument Analysis S-28

The teacher might develop students’ use of critical vocabulary by having them rephrase the model arguments into explicit premises, assumptions, and conclusions. To have students identify the conclusion of each model, ask, “What is the conclusion? What is the point of the argument? What statement is this argument trying to convince you to believe? Is the conclusion stated or implied?” Then ask, “What reasons are given? Is the reasoning complete, or is there a hidden claim, or assumption?”
Students could then begin to analyze and evaluate the arguments in a class discussion. You could have them give reasons for their evaluations, or guide discussion with questions like the following: “Does it present evidence? What? Are the claims clear? What do they mean? Could they mean something else? Are they ambiguous? Questionable? Complete? What is left out? Is this reason relevant — should it affect our conclusion? Why or why not?”

To help students pinpoint the conflict between the model arguments, you might ask, “Do these reasoners disagree about the facts? (Which facts?) Their interpretations of the facts? (On what theories do they base their interpretations?) Do they disagree about values? About how to realize those values? About which of two values is most important?”

Students could suggest ways to make each argument stronger. The teacher may also model improving the arguments and their expression during this and future class discussions.

When assigning discussion groups, emphasize the importance of listening carefully and openmindedly to other arguments. Students can take notes on, and include, opposing views in their essays. Students should argue their positions (that is, give reasons to convince the others to adopt their conclusions). The groups could note assumptions, pinpoint contradictions, and look for strengths and weaknesses in the arguments given. Each group could recap the main points of their discussion to the entire class. Encourage the groups to find some points of agreement.

You may want to have students argue each other’s positions. Students can then evaluate each other’s presentations of their arguments.

Have students rewrite their papers.

Clarification
Another lesson could be used to develop students’ ability to clarify issues and concepts, again using the model arguments previously mentioned. How would this arguer state the issue? The other arguer? How could we state the issue in words both sides would accept? How could this issue be settled? What concepts do we need to clarify? Is something being evaluated? (What? Why? What standards are most appropriately applied?)

The teacher can have students identify the key terms in the model arguments. Ask students to describe examples to which the key words or phrases in the model arguments would properly apply. Then ask for examples of their opposites. Also ask what phrase could apply to both kinds of cases. Students should then discuss features common to each kind of case, and make the standards they use to judge such cases explicit. Why is this a case of X? What does the word imply? Why does this arguer characterize the situation as X?

Then each group can meet again to clarify the key claims and terms from their discussion groups. Have students distinguish those terms which all agree apply from disputed terms. They should then clarify the disputed terms or claims by
using examples of terms, opposites, and other cases. The standards used for applying the terms or claims should be clarified, the facts required to justify evaluations made explicit.

**Evaluating Claims and Evidence**

You may want to focus the next section directly on distinguishing claims which need further support from those which are acceptable without further support. You may use questions like the following: Does anyone know whether or not this is true? How do you know? Is there reason to doubt this statement? Why or why not? Accept it? What would support it Undermine it? S-13 Stress that one can't judge truth or reasonableness of a claim from its form or appearance. A statement alone doesn't tell us how much or little thought, or what quality of thought produced it.

For each model, students can evaluate the evidence cited by considering questions like the following: Where did this information come from? How could the source know this? Is this source reliable? (Do they have a good track record? Anything to lose or gain? Are they in a position to know?) S-16 Is this evidence relevant? Is relevant evidence left out? S-31 Would that evidence require the reasoner to change the conclusion? Why or why not? S-33

Students can then expand and revise their essays. They should give their new positions and arguments, supporting claims which require support. Stress that the strongest arguments take the strengths of other points of view into account. S-12

Students could trade their papers with other members of their groups. Students can comment on the papers requesting clarification or evidence, pointing out where the relevance of claims is unclear, or facts or assumptions are questionable, and correcting distortions of opposing points of view. Students can use the comments when revising their essays.

The teacher could have students write group papers, instead of individual papers giving all sides of the disagreement and clarifying points of disagreement.

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*Judgment is best developed, not when told what, how, and why to judge, but by repeatedly judging and then assessing those judgments.*
Interview on Ethics

Objectives of the remodelled plan
The students will:
- examine aspects of the interview process
- engage in Socratic discussion regarding ethics
- identify belief systems and generate interview questions
- practice Socratic discussion by conducting interviews
- evaluate interviews

Standard Approach

Texts address the design of interview questions, i.e., what types of questions can be asked to elicit the desired information, for example, biographical. They also recommend how the interview can be written up in one of two desired formats, question and answer, or in this case, biographical essay or story format, which allows the student more creative embellishment.

Some questions considered in this lesson might be: "What were you like as a child? What was it like to grow up in such-and-such a time period? How were you similar to or different from other children?"

Critique

A lesson on interviewing can be a valuable teaching tool in that students learn a variety of questioning techniques and engage in extended discussion with people outside their peer group. A well-formulated lesson provides an opportunity for students to ask clarifying and probing questions, listen actively, and organize and synthesize what they hear.

A common lesson, the biographical interview, is an interesting choice because of its biographical concentration which is "safe" territory for interviewing, especially at this level. Most people will supply information about their past with little provocation. This type of questioning would surely elicit responses that would give students enough information to formulate a history for biographical background, but would probably give little understanding of the person being interviewed. It is too likely to elicit a simple chronology. The student would have collected a number of interesting facts or stories, but any deeper insight would be gained only by inference. Such lessons assume a didactic theory of knowledge and thought in which one needs only discover details. A critical approach would focus on the structure of another’s ideas — how beliefs are linked to each other, how some beliefs are more basic, how individual beliefs form a system, how systems of belief differ.
The following remodeled lesson plan focuses on the belief systems of those being interviewed, which would not only challenge the student presenting the questions but would also allow the interviewee to give a more thoughtful and introspective interview. To illustrate, we’ve chosen ethics as a topic. Furthermore, the student will begin to think critically about how belief systems are formed, how they differ, and how such systems affect our daily judgment.

Strategies used to remodel

**S-22** listening critically: the art of silent dialogue

**S-29** noting significant similarities and differences

**S-24** practicing Socratic discussion: clarifying and questioning beliefs, theories, or perspectives

**S-12** developing one’s perspective: creating or exploring beliefs, arguments, or theories

**S-8** developing intellectual perseverance

**S-15** developing criteria for evaluation: clarifying values and standards

Remodelled Lesson Plan **S-22**

### Introduction

The teacher can begin this lesson by asking how an interview differs from ordinary conversation. (A conversation with an individual is unstructured; may take several turns and cover any number of topics; is two-way since usually — or, at least, ideally — both participants offer their ideas. One may have a vague objective in mind like, “Getting to know Mr. Williams.” Interviews are more structured insofar as they begin with a prescribed set of questions; are one-way, insofar as one participant answers, the other asks; often have a narrower purpose.) **S-29**

Then, ask the students to think of different types of interviews. They may offer such responses as these: college interviews, job interviews, celebrity interviews, or interviews which probe the position of those running for elected office. Some of these interviews have specific objectives: Would this person perform well at our university? Would this person be qualified for the position? Would this person represent the people of the community on the city council?

The teacher could then assign cooperative groups the task of composing questions that would accomplish these tasks. Afterwards, one person of the group could serve as the interviewer (admissions director, employer, newspaper reporter) and another as the interviewee. The mock interviews should be conducted in front of the entire class. When the interview is over, the class should critique the process by pointing out which questions provided the best information and adding any questions that were left out.

Students could study some printed interviews, evaluate them, and formulate probing questions and follow-up questions which could have been asked. **S-21**

By now the class has begun to think about the interview process. They have witnessed a few models and have had some experience composing questions. They also will have seen how the type of questions asked depends on the objective of the interview.
Preparation for the interview

To introduce the students to their interview assignment, the teacher may ask students to consider how many different points of view on questions of right and wrong are represented in the class. Someone could take notes on the following Socratic discussion, or it could be taped.

Ask, “How do you know when something is right or wrong? When is it hard to tell what’s right? Why do people do wrong? When do you blame people for doing something wrong? Not blame them? When did you first learn right from wrong? How? What do your beliefs assume about human nature? How does this assumption affect how you act? How you judge others? Should people have their own ideas of right and wrong, or should they accept the judgment of authorities? Can you think of something that would be wrong in one instance and right in another? Can you think of something that is absolutely wrong, regardless of the circumstances?”  

The teacher could then ask the students to frame more specific questions about what they believe.

Recap the main points made in the above discussion. The idea of organized belief systems can now be raised. The class could group the responses by similarities among the perspectives. Ask students to think about which views expressed by the others most resemble their own and which differ most from their own. Have them try to characterize the similarities and differences among these perspectives, distinguishing major from minor differences.

By now the students have begun to identify their own belief systems and are now ready to begin the interview assignment. They can begin by thinking about how the questions will be framed for a “Belief System Interview.” Suggest that they use some of the questions previously posed: How do you know when something is right or wrong? When did you first learn right from wrong? Did someone teach you?

The students should know that a good interviewer will ask clarifying questions like, “What exactly do you mean by that? Can you give me an example? How would you respond to this idea (give an opposing view)? What led you to that belief?” etc.

Next, the students can frame more questions. The entire class may work on this project and then choose the best of the lot. By practicing on other students first, students may better develop a sense of good follow-up questions.

Assign the interview. You may want students to tape record the interview (with permission of the interviewee). Or you may want them to develop note-taking skills and record the responses that way. The class could evaluate various ways of presenting their interviews.

Students could show their work to the interviewees for confirmation and further clarification, and then revise their reports.

When the interviews have been shared, the class can relate points made in them to the previous discussions by comparing the perspectives expressed in them with their own, and evaluating the questions raised.
If the teacher wishes to repeat the lesson, other topics which interest students and lend themselves to analysis could be chosen:

**Religion** How would you define ‘religion’? Do religions have anything in common? If so, what? How do religious authorities decide what is right/wrong? Can a person know right from wrong without religion? How? Are all religions equal? If not, why not? How much does religion affect what you believe? Does a person have to accept religious laws without question? Why or why not?

**Prejudice** How is it defined? Does it exist in our community, school, home? When were you first aware of prejudice? Why do you think prejudice exists? How could we solve some of our race problems?

**Sex Education** What should sex education consist of? At what age should it be taught? When did you first learn about sex? Was this a good way to get information? Should birth control be taught? Why/why not? What issues are most relevant for sex education today? Can you think of ways of discouraging teenage pregnancies?

The interview process requires careful preparation in the classroom with specific instructor intervention regarding the types of questions asked, as well as the process of clarifying information. The students not only learn to examine their own beliefs, they learn to analyze the types of questions asked, consider conflicting opinions, and evaluate the answers given. The value in this lesson is not only the interview process, but the critical evaluation of the topic. The students gain confidence in their critical thinking skills and enjoy the process as well.

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*When the powerful tools of critical thinking are used merely at the service of egocentrism, sociocentrism, or ethnocentrism, then genuine communication and discussion end, and people relate to one another in fundamentally manipulative, even if intellectual, ways.*
"A Modest Proposal"
by June Tinkhauser, Baldwin High School, Baldwin, NY

Objectives of the remodelled plan
The students will:
  • infer the motivation for writing "A Modest Proposal"
  • recognize the importance of point of view
  • see how satire uses shock and irony to promote change
  • read critically as they analyze the structure of Swift's Modest Proposal

Standard Approach
"A Modest Proposal" is a good introduction to the works of Jonathan Swift in any British Literature survey course. The usual procedure involves dramatic oral reading or playing a well-read recording. Historical background on the English-Irish situation that precipitates the proposal is explained, and students write Modest Proposals of their own.

Critique
The original is a dry lesson in the "what" of Swift's Modest Proposal. The why and how, the juice of this absurd piece of persuasion is lost.

Strategies used to remodel
S-33 evaluating evidence and alleged facts
S-32 making plausible inferences, predictions, or interpretations
S-21 reading critically: clarifying or critiquing texts
S-23 making interdisciplinary connections
S-12 developing one's perspective: creating or exploring beliefs, arguments, or theories

Remodelled Lesson Plan
In Literary Satire, a senior English elective, we have remodelled this lesson as follows: We start with the student, then go to Swift. We ask students to make a list of serious problems that really bother them and that they would like to change. Then we read the proposal aloud in class. Next, we analyze structure of the proposal. The dialogue runs something like this:
How do we begin?

Student: State the problem.

Is it a real problem? How do we know?

Student: The problem is clearly stated and supported by facts and figures.

Facts? Figures? How do you know these are facts and figures? S-33

Student: They seem plausible. It coincides with what we know about the Irish situation then and now.

Now?

Student: Well, maybe not exactly, but that's what the situation is all about in Northern Ireland. Belfast and all that.

Do we all agree on this? Remember Mayor Koch came back confused. He said recently that England was the peace-keeper, not the oppressor. But then later, he changed his mind. Why was that? S-32

Student: He remembered the large number of voters in NYC of Irish background.

Mmm, In Satire is it important to remember where your writer is coming from?

Student: Not just in Satire.

Why?

Student: As you say, — Where you're coming from is where you'll be trying to take me.

OK, that's Part I. (Writes on board: State the Problem legitimate). What's next on Swift's agenda? Let's look at the text. S-21

Student: Then he drops it on you. His proposal.

Is it modest? (Writes on board: State your solution. Then adds, Outrageous!)

Student: Are you kidding? It's outrageous: Selling the babies like a commodity!

Is his tone reasonable or outrageous?

Student: It sounds reasonable; that's what's so outrageous.

How does he make it seem reasonable? S-21

Student: More facts and figures.

So facts are not always facts? Figures, not always figures? Liars figure; figures lie, says this English teacher. That's point of view, too.

What's Swift's next step? Is this an exercise in fatuity?

Student: Stupidity?

No, but close to the same thing. Look it up.

Student: (Hopefully) Negative. Satire has a serious purpose: to change things.

Let's stay with this .... What does Swift want to change? Why? S-21

Student: England's predatory policies regarding Ireland.

Student: Swift was Anglo-Irish, sympathetic to the Irish.
Let's keep our perspective about this. What's the year here?

Student: It's right here: 1729.

What's going on in the world in the 1730's? The new world?

Student: Colonization. Before our revolution.

So the attitude at that time was that colonies exist solely to accommodate the Mother country? **S-23**

Student: But we rebelled and Ireland is still at it.

**OK, Back to our proposal. What's all this italics? "Let no man talk to me of other expedients ..." etc. Plausible? **S-21**

Student: Sounds like what he really wants the English and Irish to do to solve their problem. But he says it negatively.

**Why does he do this? **S-32

Student: Because people tend to reject common sense.

**Example? **S-12

Student: Like us with pollution, race relations, nuclear warfare, etc. So Swift resorts to absurdity and irony to give us a kick in the head.

**(Teacher writes on the board: Part III Reject Valid Solutions)**

Student: Don't forget facts and figures, but these should make sense.

Swift does something interesting at the end. What does he claim?

Student: It's like a Letter to the Editor — "I'm just a good citizen with nothing to gain, just trying to help his country."

**(Teacher writes on board: Part IV Deny Self-Advantage.)**

What do you think people thought about this "Letter to the Editor"? Did they take it seriously? Would you? **S-32**

Student: (Varied replies.) People who know Swift's game would recognize the satire. Others tend to believe anything they see in print.

**OK, that's the spirit of "A Modest Proposal"; Pair up — two heads can be sharper than one. Share your problem sheet, dream up solutions absurd and realistic, don't forget facts and figures (absurd and realistic), deny the realistic and tout the absurd, deny self-advantage and write your own Modest Proposal using our structure.**

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**It should not be assumed that there is a universal standard for how fast teachers should proceed with the task of remodelling their lesson plans. A slow but steady evolutionary process is much more desirable than a rush job across the board.**
"Clothe the Naked"

by June Tinkhauser, Baldwin High School, Baldwin, NY

Objectives of the remodelled plan
The students will:
- read critically as they go beyond plot line and the state theme
- make judgments and inferences based on dialogue, writing techniques, and actions
- empathize with situations beyond most students' experience
- test their own responses to the handicapped

Standard Approach

Students are asked to read and take notes on Dorothy Parker's short story, "Clothe the Naked." The usual aspects are discussed: setting, characters, characterization, conflict, theme, stated in the introduction as "Heartbreak in a new suit of clothes." The author's background and relationship to the story, as well as her reputation as a satirical writer are also worth exploring.

Critique

This approach oversimplifies what this teacher feels is a trenchant commentary on values: people who are reputed to do good and those who really do. An opportunity to view the world through the sensitivities of the handicapped is also missed.

Strategies used to remodel
S-21 reading critically: clarifying or critiquing texts
S-4 exploring thoughts underlying feelings and feelings underlying thoughts
S-33 evaluating evidence and alleged facts
S-32 making plausible inferences, predictions, or interpretations
S-1 thinking independently

Remodelled Lesson Plan S-21

The remodelled lesson picks up where the traditional lesson leaves off in an effort to explore Dorothy Parker's "slice of life" in a small southern town.

Let's focus on Mrs. Delabarre Ewing. Why do you think Dorothy Parker chose a name like that? S-4

Student: Maybe she was based on an actual character.
With that name?

Student: A name’s a name; what’s the big deal?

_How does it sound to you? What does the name suggest? Connotation, remember? S-4_

Student: Well, she sounds important.

_is she?

Student: Well, it says here, “Mrs. Ewing was a personage in the town. When she visited Richmond or when she returned from viewing the azalea gardens, the newspapers always printed that fact.”

_Important fact, eh?

Student: It’s a small town sooo ...

_OK, let’s find out more about Mrs. Ewing. What does the text say about her sense of “noble obligation”?_

Student: Reads “She was a woman rigorously conscious of her noble obligation; she was prominent on the Community Chest committee and it was she who planned and engineered (!) the annual Bridge Drive to raise funds for planting salvia around the cannon in front of D. A. R. headquarters.”

_Big deal, eh?

Student: What’s Salvia? What’s D. A. R.?

_Let’s look these up.

Student: So she’s a do-gooder.

_is that bad?

Student: No, but she thinks she’s hot stuff; so good and generous as she tells Big Lannie.

_Big Lannie, Dorothy Parker calls her.

Student: Yes, she is physically big and big-hearted.

_How do we know that? S-33_

Student: The way she gives up everything to take care of her blind grandchild.

_You believe this? On what evidence? S-33_

Student: She quits her jobs, makes ends meet as best she can, makes Raymond feel good about himself so he feels he’s really contributing to the family.

_Now, how does Big Lannie feel about Mrs. Ewing? S-32_

Student: Says right here: “It was Mrs. Ewing ....”

_Mmm, read that last part over. What does that mean? S-32_

Student: Mrs. Ewing doesn’t need prayers or intercessions, she’s directly connected.

What did Mrs. Ewing do for Lannie?

Student: She took Lannie back as her laundress.

_Why did she do this? Because she was soft-hearted? “A regular little old easy mark,” as she says?_
Student: Maybe. But it also says Lannie was an excellent worker and Mrs. Ewing was very fussy.

So maybe Mrs. Ewing is not as kindhearted, altruistic and philanthropic as she says she is?

Student: (Hopefully) Yes, but don't forget she gives Lannie clothes for Raymond.

Good point. Let's role play this scene. We need Lannie, Mrs. Ewing, and a director. It begins past middle, page 95.

(Students play the scene, depending on their point of view: humble Lannie, generous Mrs. Ewing, or humble Lannie, haughty Mrs. Ewing)

Let's look at the dialogue here, What do you make of all of those "she saids"? Notice Parker does the same thing on page 94. S-32

Student: Various answers

Mmm. How does this "he/she said" change this statement? "He dates her for her great personality," he said."

or

"The test was easy, she said. (She's the brightest girl in the class.)"

Student: In those examples, it means that's what he/she said, but it's not so; it's not so; it's sarcastic.

An indication of verbal irony, perhaps?

(By this time students have had it with delving and they want to know what actually happens to Raymond in that tricky final scene.)

Student: What did happen to Raymond? Did a dog attack him? Or what?

OK, let's role play again: You are Raymond. What kind of kid are you? What's your mood? "His anticipation was like honey in his mouth." What do you do? Let's go down the stairs. You're blind, remember. S-1

Student director, following the text, takes over...

Student: Turn your face "to the gentle air." Guide yourself by the fence. Call out to the folks "so that he would hear gay calls in return, he laughed so that laughter would answer him." (You) hear it.

What is it? (Audience, cued by teacher, laughs derisively.) What happens? Raymond, show us. Remember, you are blind. You rely heavily on other senses. OK, Raymond, drag yourself home.

What has Raymond discovered? About life? About what is means to be poor and handicapped? Does it matter that he's black? S-32

Student: Why did they laugh? Who were "they" anyway?

See Parker's last line. Visualize Raymond's appearance after a prolonged absence in Mr. Ewing's coat. What kind of coat is it? An over-sized, long, tall coat from the over-generous Mrs. Ewing, eh?

Student: (Responses will probably range from classmates' sarcasm and mocking laughter in response to a wrong or naive answer, to a friend's callous response to your emotional outpouring to some students' response when "special students" try to navigate their way across the commons to the snickers of some of the student body.)
All the various strategies explained in the handbook are couched in terms of behaviors. The principles express and describe a variety of behaviors of the 'ideal' critical thinker; they become applications to lessons when teachers canvass their lesson plans to find appropriate places where those behaviors can be fostered. The practice we recommend helps guard against teachers using these strategies as recipes or formulas, since in each case good judgment is required in the application process.