

READING WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES

Identifying Theme Through Close Reading Video Transcript

Kelly Johnson:

Today we're going to do a close reading of this book.

The purpose of today's lesson was to determine the theme in the opening chapters of our book that we're reading in "Breath, Eyes, Memory," and then ultimately be able to write about that theme.

Who are our main three characters so far that we've heard from? We're really going to determine the theme and start to really identify some of the theme as it relates to the characters. So as a refresher, I'm going to pass out a baggy to your table. There are descriptions of these characters and phrases that will help you understand these characters.

A tangible, hands-on type of activity where we engage with words that were on the slips of paper and match those to the characters would give the students the language they ultimately need for the lesson, and then also help them, with their writing of the theme and the characters.

Where should the slips go and under which character?

Some of the words on those slips of paper were words that they don't normally use. "Persistent" is not a word that's familiar to them, for example.

Student:

Persistent? But isn't it Sophie? I think she is persistent because wasn't she trying to give her the Mother Day's card and she didn't want it?

Student:

Oh, yeah, and the ticket to the airport.

Johnson:

I think it's helpful if they say them in their small groups, and then eventually hopefully it will transfer into their writing.

Okay, let's come back as a group. Let's talk about this. Anybody have a struggle with any of these? Irving, talk to us about that.

Irving:

We put persistent because both Tante Atie and Sophie are persistent people.

Johnson:

Because what makes them so persistent?

Irving:

Because like...

Johnson:

Because they've got that base of characterization and they thought it would be natural to talk about what is starting to emerge as a theme of this book.

All right, so we're getting a sense of these characters. Here's what I want you to pay attention to as I read chapter three today. What's the theme? What theme is beginning to emerge? It's sometimes hard to identify theme when you haven't read a big chunk of the text yet, but let's really pay attention to what's starting to emerge as that main message.

There's a big range of readers in this classroom, so sometimes I am the only voice of fluent reading that they get to hear during a day.

"The trip to La Nouvelle Dame Marie took five hours in a rocky van."

So to be that model of fluent reading for them, pausing to ask them questions.

I want to stop right here. We're talking about theme, we're thinking about theme. As I give you your close reading passage I want you to think, what is this about?

And then ultimately moving into the close reading.

That's your first read.

Student:

When we have to read a piece of text, we have to find out about what we have to do on our own instead of the teacher reading it to us and telling us info about it.

Johnson:

By letting them closely read the text quietly the first time, struggle with it a bit, it helps them think, "Oh, I could do this. "I don't always need the teacher to be that guide on the side or asking those questions."

So as you read I would like you to annotate this. Highlight, make your margin notes. What's telling you what this is about?

And I think that it helps me just assess where they are in this process. They don't all understand things at the same level.

Don't forget, if margin notes help you, to make some margin notes.

As I'm walking around. I'm noticing their highlighting and their annotations. I can then guide the rest of the lesson based on what I'm seeing, what I'm hearing.

Anyone want to share what they think the passage was about or what some of their tablemates have said?

Student:

I put that it talks about a group of people in Guinea who carry the sky on their heads.

Johnson:

"Carry the sky on their heads" -- what does that mean?

Student:

It means that if you have, like, a lot of trouble in your life, you were chosen to carry a part of the sky on your head.

Johnson:

Okay.

Student:

So it's like a burden.

Johnson:

A burden, okay, nice.

I know some students are going to have the answers and jump to understanding the theme much quicker than others. If I want for the good of the

group to move along nicely, knowing who to call on and when. I also know that for some students, a small group is going to be needed. So, really differentiating the instruction to meet the needs of the students.

You're getting kind of the gist of the passage as your first read. We want to connect that to what we're talking about today in terms of theme. So during your second read right now, I want you to pay close attention to what is telling you the theme.

I think knowing when they need you, that's probably the hardest piece.

So during your second read, mark up what are some words, phrases, circle things, make your margin notes.

Sometimes reading the text again is the scaffold they need.

What text evidence is telling you that this theme is... (blank)?

I provided a language frame for them, so for those students who needed that support, they could use the frame that I had up on the board.

How do you know the theme? The theme of this book is, or appears to be...

Student:

I use sentence starters most of the time when writing a summary or a sentence about a particular thing. Like as in today in class, "The theme of this book is strength. I know this because..." anything else.

Irving:

I think the theme is that Sophie will be carrying part of the sky like because she's a strong person.

Johnson:

So is it a book about struggles?

Student:

I think it also has to do something with the paragraph three where it says, "A horse has four legs but can fall anyway."

Johnson:

"A horse has four legs, but it can fall anyway." What does that mean?

Student:

I just think even though, like, if you're in the perfect condition, you could still, like, you know, like, have...like, fall or, you know, anything like that.

Johnson:

I think you're pulling out a great phrase from the book. So it's not always perfect. And so these burdens or these struggles, they happen.

And I think there's a sense of accomplishment when they're... you know, "After I read this the second time, I am starting to get this," and I think they really start to feel good about themselves as readers.

Let's chat at your tables. "The theme of this book is (blank), and I know this because..." Because in a minute you're going to do a writing activity with this and I want to make sure that this theme is clear in your mind.

Student:

I think the theme is about people having to face adversity, like having to face something that's hard for them and having to overcome it because they all kind of have a certain thing. Like we don't know what happened with her mom, but I'm guessing leaving her child was pretty hard.

Student:

Yeah, I think so, yeah. And even though the mother says she has to give away the carrier, so the carrier is Sophie and she's leaving to Newark. Like the mother leave her first and now she's going back to her real mom.

Johnson:

I liked the engagement, I liked the conversation.

Student:

Well, I think the main idea of this book is about perseverance or strength.

Johnson:

They had annotated on their close reading papers, so I am definitely going to go through those. That will give me some sense of how much they understood the theme, and if they had the evidence to back up why they chose that as a theme.

I want you to think about what character did you want to assume?

Tomorrow I will have them write from a perspective of the characters.

So you're going to introduce the character in your book -- what's his or her name? I wrote, "Hi, I'm Sophie and I'm in a book about..." and then state your theme.

When we get students to read about it, and write about it, and think about it, and talk about it, and listen to it, it seems natural because kids learn by doing all of those things.

Yes, thank you, guys.