Lesson 19

Using the Story Cube

SKILL: Facilitating Personal Response

CULTURE OF FOCUS: Japanese

Materials

Tea with Milk, by Allen Say (Houghton Mifflin, 1999)
Tagboard for patterns
12-x-18-inch sheets of good-quality white or light-colored construction paper
Pens and pencils
Art supplies
Overhead projector or chalkboard

Lesson Motivator

1. Construct an example of the story cube (see instructions at end of lesson) but leave the sides blank. Show it to the students and explain that it is an invitation to respond to a book. The blank sides need to be filled with thoughts and feelings about a special book.
2. Show the class what you mean by passing around a cube that you have completed based on a favorite picture book. Explain your reactions, both intellectual and emotional, as expressed through simple illustrations, a favorite quotation, a personal connection with the story, and your idea of why the author might have written the book, as depicted on various sides of your finished product.
3. Spend a short time discussing reader response with the students. Remind them that they are one critical piece in making meaning from a story. The author and his or her words, along with the illustrators and their artistic interpretation of a tale, provide additional pieces to the reading puzzle. What is important to remember is that readers bring their backgrounds of varied life experiences to a book and those backgrounds add a distinct flavor to the way a reader interprets the words penned by an author.
4. Tell the students that because reading is a transaction between the reader and an author, it is as if a slightly new version of the story is read every time a different person picks up that book. No wonder there isn't just one interpretation of a book, as many of us were once taught, because each of us sees the story cast in the light of our own life experiences. Remind the students that discussing stories based on individual perspectives can be enlightening for everyone in the class.
5. Emphasize to the readers that they are not to fear being right or wrong when offering their responses to what they have just read. Individual reflections will be honored in the classroom.
6. Focus the students' attention on *Tea with Milk*. Explain that it is based on Allen Say's mother's memories.
7. Ask students to listen for the differences and similarities between their personal cultural beliefs and those represented in the book. Tell them that you will be discussing their personal responses to this piece of literature, both intellectual and emotional, after the story is completed.

Suggestions for Teaching the Lesson

- Read the book to the class, pausing to let the listeners study the pictures for a short time. Once the story is done, encourage responses.

As students react, ask them to decide if their response is an intellectual one or an emotional one. Reinforce the fact that we respond to what we read in both ways. You might discuss the differences between Japanese cultural beliefs and those commonly held in the

United States. How might students feel if they were in May's shoes? Do they have similar conflicts between family cultural beliefs and what they believe is important? In their opinion, what is the best way to resolve such differences? *Tea with Milk* should prompt a lively dialogue between classmates.

- Draw the students' attention to the array of books assembled for their individual reading. Request help from the librarian or learning center director to gather thought-provoking, wonderfully written picture books. Highlight as many of them as time allows, then let the students browse. Each student should select a title that is personally appealing, return to a comfortable area, and read.
- Suggest that readers use scratch paper to record their responses to the book once it is completed. They could also work in pairs, discussing the titles they have read with another classmate and thinking out loud about what the book has to say. Then have them begin on their story cubes to take their personal responses from private to public in an attractive and perceptive way. Knowing that their thoughts and feelings will be published is one way to encourage students to stay fully engaged with their reading. Engagement is further facilitated because students are able to choose a book of particular interest to them and will have an opportunity to reflect upon its relevance to their lives. If they are not engaged in their reading, asking for quality responses from students is futile.
- When a number of the students are ready to create their cubes, present a brief mini-lesson using the chalkboard or overhead, on which you will have put the directions for completing the story cube. Have students take turns using a dozen or so previously prepared tagboard patterns to make their own cubes on construction paper of their choice. Students should lightly number the squares as designated:
  1. Title and author of the book the student has read
  2. Favorite scene or part
  3. Key quote or idea
  4. A brief answer to "What do you think the author was trying to say in this book?"
  5. A sentence or two about an experience the student has had that is similar to one in the book
  6. Reader's choice (have students complete this side as desired)
- Before cutting out the cube, students should fill in the squares as noted. They can add simple, appealing artwork before finally assembling the cube. After they cut out the square, have them fold along the lines to shape the cube. Next they should fold the tabs under and add a little glue or tape to hold the sides in place so that a cube is formed.
- Students may choose to discuss their cubes in small groups. An attractive way to display the completed shapes is to arrange five of them into a mobile, using hangers for the base and colored thread to attach the squares. Hang each completed mobile from the ceiling for optimal viewing. The squares can also be displayed attractively on a shelf so that class members can pick each one up and study it. In addition, each reader can briefly book-talk his or her book and share a favorite side of the cube with the class.

Evaluation

- Create a simple rubric for this activity based on class input. Because it is unfair to grade subjective responses, criteria can include neatness, the thought that went into the cube, the accuracy of spelling and sentence construction, and the quality of a short book talk if that becomes a part of sharing the cube with the class.

- On a sheet designated for each student, make anecdotal notes about the effort and quality of thinking that was exhibited during this response activity. Note whether the student is able to work through this type of activity independently or if he or she achieves better results by talking through thoughts with a classmate. You are not making a positive or negative assessment but rather just noting insights about the student as a reader.

Meet individually with students to discuss observations and abilities that each student is acquiring. Make personal evaluation a part of the conference by asking the reader to assess his or her progress. Build additional strategy development for students from this growing base.

Extensions

- Take this activity to the lower grades. Older students can partner with younger students, read a book together, and complete the cube. The upper-grade student is there for guidance rather than to interpret the book or alter a child's personal response to it. Have students share the results with the rest of the class.
- Give students who like to talk about what they are reading an opportunity to read a novel together and use "buddy" journals. In these journals, they write back and forth to each other about their reactions to what they have read during silent reading in class or at home the night before.
- Have each student keep his or her own journal in which to record thoughts. Have students exchanges journals and write back to their partners, then return the journals to the owners. This reading-responding cycle should continue.
- If buddy journals are used on a wider scale, gather a few journals at a time to monitor the reading-writing process. Jot down a constructive, positive comment on an appropriate page periodically and date your entries. This monitoring process shows that you find journaling to be a valuable use of time. It also tends to keep the written conversation focused on the book at hand.
- In a response journal or as a piece of narrative writing, have students pen thoughts about a personal experience triggered by one of the books read recently.

Suggested Titles for Independent Reading and Research

Bahous, Sally. *Sitti and the Cats: A Tale of Friendship.* Illustrated by Nancy Malick. Niwot, Colo.: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1997.

Berkeley, Laura. *The Seeds of Peace.* Illustrated by Alison Dexter. New York: Barefoot Books, 1999.

Coerr, Eleanor. *Sadako.* Illustrated by Ed Young. New York: Putnam, 1993.

Davol, Marguerite. *The Paper Dragon.* Illustrated by Robert Sabuda. New York: Atheneum, 1997.

Fleming, Virginia. *Be Good to Eddie Lee.* Illustrated by Floyd Cooper. New York: Philomel, 1993.

Hearne, Betsy. *Seven Brave Women.* Illustrated by Bethanne Andersen. New York: Greenwillow, 1997.

Hoffman, Mary. *Amazing Grace.* Illustrated by Caroline Binch. New York: Dial, 1991.

———. *Clever Katya: A Fairy Tale from Old Russia.* Illustrated by Marie Cameron. New York: Barefoot Books, 1998.

Howard, Elizabeth Fitzgerald. *Virgie Goes to School with Us Boys.* Illustrated by E. B. Lewis. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

Lacapa, Kathleen, and Michael Lacapa. *Less Than Half, More Than Whole.* Flagstaff, Ariz.: Northland Publishing, 1994.

Lears, Laurie. *Ian's Walk: A Story about Autism.* Illustrated by Katen Ritz. Morton Grove, Ill.: Albert Whitman, 1998.

Matthews, Caitlin. *The Blessing Seed: A Creation Myth for the New Millennium.* Illustrated by Alison Dexter. New York: Barefoot Books, 1998.

Mayer, Mercer. *Shibumi and the Kitemaker.* New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Harlem.* Illustrated by Christopher Myers. New York: Scholastic, 1997.

Polacco, Patricia. *The Bee Tree.* New York: Philomel, 1993.

Robb, Laura. *Music and Drum: Voices of War and Peace, Hope and Dreams.* Illustrated by Debra Lill. New York: Putnam, 1997.

Savageau, Cheryl. *Muskrat Will Be Swimming.* Illustrated by Robert Hynes. Flagstaff, Ariz.: Northland Publishing, 1996.

Shange, Ntozake. *White Wash.* Illustrated by Michael Sporn. New York: Walker, 1997.

Sikundar, Sylvia. *Forest Singer.* Illustrated by Alison Astill. New York: Barefoot Books, 1999.

Soros, Barbara. *Grandmother's Song.* Illustrated by Jackie Morris. New York: Barefoot Books, 1998.

Wood, Douglas. *Grandad's Prayers of the Earth.* Illustrated by P. J. Lynch. Cambridge, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 1999.

Wyeth, Sharon, Dennis. *Something Beautiful.* Illustrated by Chris K. Soentpiet. New York: Delacorte, 1998.

Story Cube Pattern

Enlarge pattern to easily fit a 12-x-18-inch piece of construction paper. Each square will measure $3\,^1/_2$ inches by $3\,^1/_2$ inches. Tabs to be folded under for construction will go at the top and on the side squares. Tabs measure $^1/_2$ inch each. Fold along the solid lines to create a cube shape.