

DOINGWHATWORKS



Presentation

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Mark It Up! Scaffolding Text Discussion

Pocomoke Middle School, Maryland • February 2009

Topic: Adolescent Literacy

Practice: Engaging Text Discussion

Highlights

- Eighth-grade integrated language arts teacher Kelly O'Brien scaffolds text discussion by modeling strategies for thinking about text and making connections, providing student guidelines for organizing thinking and reading for meaning, and modeling participation in small group discussions.
- The Mark It Up strategy is used at Pocomoke to help students question and react to text, jot notes about what they are thinking, and identify text evidence to support their inferences, connections, and conclusions.
- Kelly uses a graphic organizer to help students examine a theme in a story, connect specific events in the text directly to the theme, and form a judgment about what the author is saying about the theme.
- This lesson features a graphic organizer related to making text-to-text connections that is used to help students compare the perspectives of two authors on the same theme and summarize their thinking based on text evidence.

About the Site

Pocomoke Middle School

Pocomoke City, MD

Demographics

49% White

47% Black

2% Hispanic

1% Asian

1% Native American

56% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

0% English Language Learners

12% Special Education

Pocomoke Middle School takes a schoolwide approach to meeting the needs of each of their students. Vocabulary instruction, comprehension strategies, and learning aids such as graphic organizers are a part of every content area classroom. Pocomoke staff work together to improve students' reading skills through:

- Adopting a schoolwide emphasis on vocabulary instruction;
- Training content teachers and implementing explicit literacy instruction across all subject areas, including science, social studies, math, and art;
- Using graphic organizers across the content areas to support the development of reading comprehension;
- Engaging students in text discussion to promote higher levels of understanding;
- Supporting staff collaboration through student work review discussions;
- Using assessment data to identify needs and inform instruction for struggling readers; and
- Providing reading interventions for students reading below grade level through targeted classroom instruction and supplemental reading classes designed to meet the needs of students requiring more intensive interventions.

Full Transcript

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Welcome to Mark It Up! Scaffolding Text Discussion.

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My name is Kelly O'Brien, and I teach eighth grade Language Arts at Pocomoke Middle School in Pocomoke City, Maryland.

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It's so important to discuss with students what they're reading. It's easy to hand a group of kids some questions and give them something to read, and they know instinctively how to pick out those answers. When you sort of put it on them to pick out topics for discussion, you know right away what it is that they bring from their reading, what they understand, what they don't understand, what they're treating as important.

Slide 4

One of the things I do explicitly teach them on how to comprehend what they're doing is the Mark It Up strategy that I use. I'll sit down with a piece of text, and I'll put it on the image projector. And we'll read a part of it, and I'll stop and just say, "You know, I'm wondering about this. This doesn't make any sense to me." And I'll put my question mark, and I'll write a little note so they see that I, as a college-educated teacher, still have to make meaning from what I read.

Slide 5

You hand kids a small stack of post-it notes and have them stick it next to something that is particularly interesting to them and have them write a question about that. And they like it; it seems to just create an organizational system for them. It forces them to stop and think. Eventually it gets less of me making them do it and more of it starts to become natural for them.

Slide 6

Today we read *Harrison Bergeron*, which parallels with a novel we're reading called *The Giver*. It has extremely similar themes of equality and sameness. So, I'll go with that first, what can I tie in to what we are already doing? And then I choose something that leads you to go, "What?!"

Slide 7

The first opening line is how I start with that one. "The year was 2081, and everybody was finally equal."

Before we start reading the text I put that line in isolation on the overhead. I'm like, "Okay, how is this possible?" And they start brainstorming a list of different ways that that could exist to kind of get them ready for what they're about to read.

Slide 8

What I might do is start the text with them, give them the provocative opening, have them ask the questions, and get them going. Maybe the first few paragraphs we'll do together, and they'll markup their text. And then I'll give them the last ten minutes in class to read, and so I can come around I will be like, "Oh, I see that you put an exclamation point. Do you have a question? Do you have something you can say? Put that on your post-it." So, that by the time they go home at night to finish it, they've got the ground work laid. So, I do try to scaffold them into that independent work.

Slide 9

O'Brien to class: Questions. You read this yesterday. You thought about it. You marked up your text, all the things that you have questions about, that you're surprised about, you agree, you disagree. Who wants to start it out today?

Student: How could you make everybody, like, look equal, like not better than anybody else?

Student: They don't want anybody that's smarter than each other because they might think that they might try to take over their government or something, and they don't want anyone to feel bad because someone looks better than them or someone is smarter or faster than they are.

Student: I think that everyone should be different and have their own opinions and have their own way of life and doing things. So I don't think it's fair that they should make everyone the same.

Slide 10

I had a list of theme topics; I said choose five off this list that you think relate to this text. From there, they would choose their favorite, and—maybe it's equality—they'd have to make a list of specific events in the text that relate directly to that theme topic.

Slide 11

And then the hard part comes where they have to look at all of those together and make a judgment—what is the author trying to say about equality here?—and then form a statement to go with that. And then it gets

harder because we would bring in the other novel, *The Giver*, and do a comparison, and they'd have to see what events can go with that, and do they think the authors agree on equality? I want them to start seeing that there are these big ideas that are relevant not just to the text but to our society and to other pieces of literature.

Slide 12

O'Brien to class: So equality not just among people but ---

Student: It's like in some seasons last longer than other seasons, and they might make them equal ---

O'Brien: So, somehow they've made the seasons equal?

Student: Yeah.

O'Brien: Does that echo true with another piece of text that we have read?

Student: It'd be *The Giver*, they try to control the climate, just everything that was happening around. They wanted everything to be controlled.

Student: Also on *The Giver*, they tried to control people's feelings so they couldn't feel jealously of each other.

Slide 13

I think kids do pick up on the big ideas more than we give them credit for. So they're good at getting the big ideas. They're just not sure what to say about them once they've got them. I want them to understand that the more they're questioning their world, the more that they're thinking. And that's the key to comprehension is think while you read.

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To learn more about Mark It Up! Scaffolding Text Discussion please explore the additional resources on the Doing What Works website.