

Silent Conversation

TIME

This lesson is to be implemented in one 50-minute period on Monday, February 14, 2011.

SETTING

11th grade English classroom with 25 students

THEORY INTO PRACTICE BACKGROUND

1. There are a few different theories I considered when creating the activity for this lesson, which was first introduced to me in CI 403. I've modified the partner-oriented Silent Conversation into a class-wide conversation, which also encourages teacher participation. In her book *Multicultural Education: A Teacher's Guide to Linking Context, Process and Content*, Hilda Hernandez talks about the cooperative structure, where children "focus attention not only on personal achievement, but also on group performance and individual effort toward the common goal" (178). This activity requires each student's effort, but is only successful when everyone reads and responds to one another, creating a conversation that will ultimately help them create a useful study guide for their upcoming quiz. This common goal not only reminds students the importance of their own contribution, but encourages them to value others' responses, too.

Another strategy that this lesson is founded on is anonymity. I always found it useful when teachers would utilize anonymous writing, where students can freely say or ask what they wanted to without fearing that they would be persecuted for their thoughts. The Silent Conversation activity significantly reduces any kind of anxiety students may have about speaking out loud in front of their classmates; moreover, it asks every single student to say *something* in response to the question or to a classmate.

2. Prior to this lesson, students will have read up to Ch. 20 in the novel, and have already taken their second reading quiz on Ch. 7-12. The discussion questions that will be used for this lesson are ideas that students have been introduced to through reading quizzes and book discussions (Holden's sexuality, phoniness, preoccupation with ducks, relationships, diminishing emotional state, etc.). Through this lesson, they will get a chance to really grapple with the major themes and issues of the novel up until this point.
3. The Silent Conversation Packets will be used as a way for students to silently discuss some important aspects of the novel. The questions will ask students to engage in critical thinking, make interpretations, or make personal connections. Although these questions deal with student understanding of the reading up to now (Ch. 1-20), more emphasis has

been placed on Ch. 13-20 in preparation for the quiz on the following day. These packets will then be uploaded on to a PDF file by the end of the day, so that students can get access to them in preparation for the quiz the next day.

4. This lesson, which is primarily designed to prepare students for Quiz 3 on chapters 13-20, also serve to give them a better understanding of the major themes, issues and motifs within the novel. Moreover, the kind of analysis, interpretation and connections students are asked to make throughout this activity will help them as they write their essays on the novel, since students may choose to write on the ideas they discussed during this conversation. It is also suffused with questions that are intended to connect the novel with theme of this unit, identity. Also, this activity will significantly further their understanding of Holden's character, which will be beneficial when they listen to songs and identify characteristics of Holden in the lyrics (on Thursday, Feb. 17).

OBJECTIVES

After this class, students will be able to (1) think and respond to a number of engaging questions that ask them to think critically, offer interpretations, and make personal connections to themselves and society; (2) respond to each other's ideas through writing; (3) gain a better understanding of chapters 13-20 in preparation for the quiz.

MATERIALS

- *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger
- 26 Silent Conversation Packets (Worksheet #1)

PREPARATION

- Come up with 13 critical and engaging questions that can spur a variety of responses. Questions should further student understanding of the entire novel (mainly 13-20, but other important issues may be raised).
- Type each question on the top of a different page, and print two copies of each question (thus creating 26 Silent Conversation sheets). Staple a few blank sheets of paper for each Silent Conversation sheet and make them into packets with a lot of writing space.

PROCEDURE

Before Class

- Arrange the desks in a big circle. Place one Silent Conversation packet on each desk, but arrange it so that 13 consecutive desks receive 13 different questions, and the other half of the class receives the other set of those 13 questions (this is so that none of the students ever have to respond to the same question twice during the activity).

Introduction of Lesson: 10 min.

- *5 min* When students have settled in, introduce the Silent Conversation activity. Ask them to read the question on their packet and respond in the blank space below. Explain that each student should have a different question in front of them; these are the questions that I consider critical in their understanding of the novel from chapters 13-18. Their responses don't have to be anything formal—it can be anywhere from 2-6 sentences long, and does not have to be written in complete sentences. All responses are anonymous. They are free to use the book for reference, but are not required to include quotations in their responses. After they've written their response, they are to pass their packets to the **right**. As such, students will receive a new conversation to silently partake in after they're finished. Once the packets get passed around, students will get 5 minutes to quickly read through others' responses and write their own response. Their own response can directly answer the main question, or can respond to any of their classmates' responses. All of these packets will be photocopied and available to them online through a PDF file by the end of the day.
- *5 min* Students and I respond to the question on their respective packets.

Lesson Instruction: 40 min.

- *35 min* When students have finished writing up their responses, ask them to pass the packets to the right. Keep repeating this process for 40 minutes (each person should have partaken in nine different conversations). Although I am participating in this activity, I should be aware of the time and remind students to pass their packets when five minutes is up. Ensure that the class as a whole passes the packets all at once (every 5 minutes) so that every student makes most of their time and no one feels rushed.
- *5 min* Discuss how students felt about the activity. Did you feel like you were actually conversing with your classmates? How is this similar to or different from traditional discussions we have out loud? Which do you prefer?

Closure/Wrap-Up

- Collect Silent Conversation Packets. Ask students to put their desks back into their original formation. Remind them of their reading assignment for the following day. Dismiss students.

DISCUSSION IDEAS

- Is Holden guilty of being a phony? What makes you think this way?
- In your opinion, what is at the root of Holden's problems?
- In what ways can you identify with Holden as a person, and in what ways can you not?
- What do you think is the explanation for Holden's preoccupation with ducks?
- As the novel progresses, in what ways is Holden losing control of himself? What is the explanation for this?
- J.D. Salinger wrote this book in the 1950's. Based on your reading thus far, do you think this novel transcends time? Why or why not?

- If you were Holden's shrink, what advice would you give him?
- In Chapter 17, how did Holden go from telling Sally he loved her to telling her that she's a "royal pain in the ass" (173) in one date? Who's at fault—or is anyone at fault?
- How does Holden's memory of Jane affect his view of / relationships with other girls he meets?
- In Chapter 19, Holden freely talks about his sexual frustrations with Carl Luce. Why do you think Holden is unable to have sexual relationships with all of the girls that he's sexually attracted to?
- What is it about the museum that appeals to Holden?
- As widely as this novel is taught, it is also one of the most frequently challenged books in schools and libraries. Based on your reading thus far, would you be for or against banning / censoring this book?
- What are 4 adjectives you would use to describe Holden's character? What are 4 adjectives you would use to describe teens in general? What are 4 adjectives you would use to describe yourself?

BILINGUAL/ESL AND ENGLISHES ACCOMMODATIONS

Spanish

- The ELL whose L1 is Spanish will be accommodated in these following ways:
 - ✓ Spanish-English and English-Spanish dictionaries will be provided in the classroom as his L1 resource. He may refer to these whenever necessary.
 - ✓ During the Silent Conversation activity, I can sit next to this student so that he may ask me questions regarding the activity or any words he may not know from the questions.
 - ✓ If he needs more time reading and writing the responses, he can choose to skip every other conversation and pass them to me. This would provide him with 10 minutes to contribute instead of 5.

African American English

- Students who speak African American English will be accommodated in these following ways:
 - ✓ Students will be free to contribute to the Silent Conversation activity in whichever dialect that is comfortable for them. The purpose of this activity is to converse with one another, so there is no need to require SWE.

SPECIAL EDUCATION ACCOMMODATIONS

"*Asperger's disorder* is characterized by severe, sustained, and often lifelong impairments in social interactions and the development of restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, and activities" (Rosenberg et al 263).

- The student with Asperger's disorder will be accommodated in these following ways:
 - ✓ Student will be provided with an agenda of the day's lesson, which outlines the instructional activities, so that they know what to anticipate when they come to class.

- ✓ Student will receive all of the questions for the Silent Conversation activity in advance.
- ✓ When introducing the activity, I will use language that is direct and literal, avoiding unnecessary idioms and irony, which may cause confusion.
- ✓ I hope this silent conversation activity will serve to more or less give him a break from all the social interactions that he is thrust into when he comes to school. This will ideally be a good way to recharge and engage in critical thinking and discussion with his classmates in a way that doesn't emphasize or magnify his disability.

ASSESSMENT

- Students will be informally assessed on their participation during and contribution to the Silent Conversation activity. I will periodically look to see if students are using the entire 5 minutes to read and write in their packets.
- Because I'm making these contributions anonymous, there is no way to formally assess them on the content of their contribution. This is really for students to get a chance to "free-write" as a class in preparation for their quiz and in review of the reading thus far, so all students will receive 5 points for participating in the activity.

EXTENSION IDEAS

- On the following day, students can get a chance to analyze the pattern of the responses from the activity, discussing the reoccurring themes and ideas as well as some unconventional thoughts of their classmates.
- Instead of modifying the silent conversation as a class-wide activity, I can have students pair up do this activity while reading Chapter 19.
- Students can be broken up into two big groups instead of one big circle—although if done this way, the teacher probably cannot participate in the activity.

SOURCE OF ACTIVITY

I would like to thank Professor Willis for introducing this activity to our CI 403 class. The worksheet she used was adapted from www.readwritethink.org, so I acknowledge this website, as well. I would also like to thank Kelly Spicer, who contributed to the modifications of this activity.

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

Hernandez, Hilda. *Multicultural Education: A Teacher's Guide to Linking Context, Process, and Content*. NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall, 2001. Print.

"Illinois State Board of Education: Illinois Learning Standards." *ISBE.com*. Illinois State Board of Education, 2009. Web. 5 Dec, 2010.

Rosenberg, M.S. *Special Education for Today's Teachers: An Introduction*. NJ: Pearson, 2010. Print.

Salinger, J.D. *The Catcher in the Rye*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951. 277. Print.

ILLINOIS STATE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS GOALS

- **Goal 1: Apply reading strategies to improve understanding and fluency.**

1.B.5a Relate reading to prior knowledge and experience and make connections to related information.

- ✓ Students fulfill this state goal as they participate in the Silent Conversation activity. Some of the questions ask that students make personal connections to their understanding and experiences, while others require students to recall information they read and discussed earlier in the novel. Using all of those things, students will respond to these questions by thinking critically and making interpretations.

- **Goal 2: Read and interpret a variety of literary works**

2.B.5a Analyze and express an interpretation of a literary work

- ✓ Students accomplish this goal, again through the Silent Conversation activity; many of the questions will ask students to give their interpretation of both specific parts as well as the overarching themes and motifs of the novel. Students will not only respond to the question, but are encouraged to analyze and express an interpretation of their classmates' responses.

- **Goal 3: Communicate ideas in writing to accomplish a variety of purposes.**

3.C.5a Communicate information and ideas in narrative, informative and persuasive writing with clarity and effectiveness in a variety of written forms using appropriate traditional and/or electronic formats; adapt content, vocabulary, voice and tone to the audience, purpose and situation.

- ✓ Students achieve this goal by writing for a very specific audience for this activity—to each other. This is not the typical audience for most of students' writing, so it makes for an interesting activity. The 13 different questions encourage students to convey their ideas through narrative and informative. Many of these questions ask them make personal connections and offer interpretations of the novel. The kind of voice and tone will be relatively casual, as they are conversing with one another—albeit silently.

Silent Conversation

(Worksheet #1)

Today we're going to have a 35-minute conversation, with one rule: **no one is allowed to talk**. You are to respond to the question below in 2-6 sentences—or however long you can write in about 5 minutes. After you have responded, everyone will pass their packets to the ***RIGHT***. Then, you can either **respond to the question, respond to your classmates' response, or a combination thereof**. Remember that you are not required to write in any kind of complete sentences—but you should still write legibly and coherently so that other people can read your comment and respond to it. Feel free to underline, *star*, agree/disagree, or comment on any of your classmates' responses; in fact, I encourage it! You do not have to write your names next to your response—this is strictly anonymous. You are welcome to use the book for reference, but there is no need for you to include any quotations.

You will get 5 minutes in total to read and respond on each packet. Use this time wisely! Please don't write "I agree!" to something and be done with it. The more you contribute, the richer this conversation will be. 😊

The actual Silent Conversation sheet should only have one question below. However, I will include all 13 on here as a way to save space and paper.

- 1) Is Holden guilty of being a phony? What makes you think this way?
- 2) In your opinion, what is at the root of Holden's problems?
- 3) In what ways can you identify with Holden as a person, and in what ways can you not?
- 4) What do you think is the explanation for Holden's preoccupation with ducks?
- 5) As the novel progresses, in what ways is Holden losing control of himself? What is the explanation for this?
- 6) J.D. Salinger wrote this book in the 1950's. Based on your reading thus far, do you think this novel transcends time? Why or why not?
- 7) If you were Holden's shrink, what advice would you give him?
- 8) In Chapter 17, how did Holden go from telling Sally he loved her to telling her that she's a "royal pain in the ass" (173) in one date? Who's at fault—or is anyone at fault?
- 9) How does Holden's memory of Jane affect his view of / relationships with other girls he meets?
- 10) In Chapter 19, Holden freely talks about his sexual frustrations with Carl Luce. Why do you think Holden is unable to have sexual relationships with all of the girls that he's sexually attracted to?
- 11) What is it about the museum that appeals to Holden?
- 12) As widely as this novel is taught, it is also one of the most frequently challenged books in schools and libraries. Based on your reading thus far, would you be for or against banning / censoring this book?

13) What are 4 adjectives you would use to describe Holden's character? What are 4 adjectives you would use to describe teens in general? What are 4 adjectives you would use to describe yourself?