

Gintare Radvila. Lesson Plan A: Wednesday, March 9

Title: Silent Conversations: Leaving the Rez. “Where is hope? Who has hope?”

Time: (50 minutes):

Setting: This classroom is an Honors Sophomore English class. The students are mature and capable of handling respectful class discussions. The demographics of this particular classroom are: 13 female, 12 male. 13 Whites, 5 African Americans, 4 Asian Americans, 2 Latinos (1 ELL Spanish), 1 Native American. One of the students has Asperger’s Syndrome. The school is a high school (grades 9-12) in an urban setting.

Theory into Practice Background:

I have seen the idea of a moving silent conversation in action during CI 402 and CI 403. There are a variety of silent conversations that are possible to conduct in a classroom to look into a topic at a more in-depth level. Jim Burke presents this idea as “written conversations.” He writes, “Students buddy up and trade journals with each other. Sean and Naoki read each other’s journal entry; then Sean responds in writing to the entry in Naoki’s journal, perhaps comparing it to his own or writing about the new ideas Naoki’s entry may have inspired in him” (Burke 247). After conducting further research to expand on Burke’s ideas, I found a website, www.facinghistory.org, that furthered the idea of written conversation. The theory presented from this website is as follows: “Having a written conversation with peers slows down students’ thinking process and gives them an opportunity to focus on the views of others. This strategy also creates a visual record of students’ thoughts and questions that can be referred to later in a course. Using the Big Paper strategy can help engage shy students who are not as likely to participate in a verbal discussion. After using this strategy several times, students’ comfort, confidence, and skill with this method increases” (“Big Paper—Building a Silent Conversation”).

Thus, the silent conversation becomes a way for the students to communicate with one another in a different way. I will be tweaking both Burke’s idea along with the “Big Paper” idea to create a different type of silent conversation. I want the students to respond to one another and to the text. Therefore, I will be pairing the students together. There will be poster-boards strategically placed around the room for the students to walk around to. Each of these boards will have a quote or a picture on it, labeled 1 through 5. The students will walk around to the tables, sit down, and have a silent conversation with their partner in their notebooks (rather than writing on the actual posters). This way, I will be able to assess each student’s participation, as I will know what the students wrote to each other. I have decided to choose the partners for this activity as to ensure the students work well with their partner.

Before this class, the students will have read up to p. 47 (up to the chapter, “Rowdy Sings the Blues”). This particular lesson will be focusing on why Junior decides to leave the Rez along with a discussion of “hope” and what hope means to Junior. The concept of

hope is very relevant to the opportunities that are available for those in poverty. Also, the discussion will be focused around self-exploration and how Rowdy and Junior's relationship changes once Junior decides to leave. As the students move from table to table responding to each other, they will further develop their own opinions about the assigned readings.

This lesson is linked to further lessons because it ties together the themes of these chapters with the themes of the unit as a whole. We begin to explore the idea of searching for one's identity and how finding that identity is not always the easiest path. The students will begin to see how the people on the rez, including his best friend Rowdy, react poorly to the thought of Junior exploring the world outside of the rez. Also, trying to see and understand the correlation between poverty and hope is another smaller theme that is examined here that will be addressed as the unit progresses. Particularly, on March 14, there is a lesson that deals with Junior's poverty in regards to his Halloween costume. The themes of poverty and hope are also present as Junior attempts to find a ride to and from school or pay for his date's pancakes after the dance.

Objectives:

1. During the silent conversation, the students will be able to explain (in written form) their opinions about the previous chapters read discussing issues of poverty, racism, and self-exploration.
2. The students will question why Junior makes the decisions he does—particularly why he chooses to leave his tribe to explore the world outside of the reservation.
3. Students will debate and/or examine their opinions and ideas against their partners, which will further their development of contextual themes and ideas.

Materials:

- 5 posters for student responses:
 - 1. "My school and my tribe are so poor and sad that we have to study from the same dang books our parents studied from. That is absolutely the saddest thing in the world" (Alexie 31).
 - 2. "That's how we were taught to teach you. We were supposed to kill the Indian to save the child." "You *killed* Indians?" "No, no, it's just a saying. I didn't literally kill Indians. We were supposed to make you give up being Indian. Your songs and stories and language and dancing. Everything. We weren't trying to kill Indian people. We were trying to kill Indian culture" (Alexie 35).
 - 3. Picture from p. 43 in text. (REZ...HOPE); "Who has the most hope?" "White people" (45).
 - 4. Why does Junior want to leave the rez? What is he looking for?
 - 5. What do you think is going to happen to Junior on his first day at Reardan (the school off of the reservation)?
- Copies of Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*
- Worksheets
- Silent Conversation example (from past lesson)

- Silent Conversation explanation

Preparation:

To prepare for this lesson, the teacher must place the desks into 5 sections, placing one poster in each group. Since this will be a silent conversation between partners, the teacher must thoroughly explain the expectations for the lesson. There must be silence during the writing. If the students have a question for their partner, they must write it. Also, if the students are not familiar with the silent conversation, it may be beneficial to provide some examples to give them an idea of what is required.

Procedure:

9:00-9:05: (5 minutes): Ask the students to write a brief summary of what they read from the night before as a quick comprehension check. Collect this.

9:05-9:10: (5 minutes): Read “Rowdy Sings the Blues” out loud.

9:10-9:15 (5 minutes): Pair students. Provide examples of previous silent conversations if necessary. Explain what the students are expected to do. They must respond to the provided poster, placing the number of the poster before the conversation starts.

*They will each start their own conversation with a question or comment. Then, they will trade and respond to their partner’s idea or comment.

9:15-9:45 (30 minutes): Students will spend six minutes at each station, responding to the quote, picture, or question.

9:45-9:50 (5 minutes): Ask students what they wrote as predictions to what will happen to Junior on his first day of class. (Assign homework: Read p. 54-66.)

Discussion Ideas:

- Why does Junior throw his book at Mr. P?
- Why does Junior decide to transfer to Reardan?
- What does Mr. P mean when he tells Junior that he was trained to “kill the Indian culture?” Why do you think he encourages Junior to leave?
- What is “hope” for Junior? What is “hope” for you?
- Why does Rowdy get so angry with Junior when he tells him of his plans to go to school at Reardan? Do you agree or disagree with Rowdy?
- Have you ever made a decision that upset your friends? How do you think Junior felt when Rowdy reacted as he did?
- What do you think is going to happen to Junior once he leaves the Rez?

Bilingual/ESL and Englishes Accommodations:

As this lesson heavily relies on the students' abilities to communicate in a written format, an ELL/ESL student may struggle. Therefore, it would be greatly important that this student is paired with a partner that is sensitive to his struggles. Before class started, I would ask the student if he was comfortable participating in this activity. I could give him a few options for the class period. First, I would tell him that his writing will not be graded according to grammar and technicalities. Then, I could suggest whether he would be comfortable with being my partner or (if available) the teacher's aid's partner. Depending on the level of his writing, I could suggest that he responds to each of the posters on his own. I could then respond to them overnight, and we could discuss our written conversation on a day geared towards checking-in with the student's progress. Giving the student a few options may be the best way to help him successfully complete the activity with his classmates.

Lastly, I would tell this student that we are going to be reading "Rowdy Sings the Blues" in class. This way, if the student wants to, he can read this chapter before class to make sure he has a clear understanding of the plot.

For a student who speaks African American English, this would be a particular lesson where the students are allowed to write however they please. For example, the students are writing a "written conversation." Therefore, they are allowed to write as they speak (as long as it is 'school appropriate' and respectful). In assessing this worksheet, there will no be points taken off for any type of grammar or spelling. This will demonstrate that AAE is an appropriate and acceptable form of communication to these students.

Special Education Accommodations:

Since this lesson relies on the students' abilities to communicate with one another in written form, I need to make sure that the student with Asperger's Syndrome is paired with someone he is comfortable with. I also need to make sure that there are explicit directions handed out to him in written form. Next, I would make sure that the student understands where, when, and how he must move from station to station during the silent conversation. This is why each of the tables will be numbered.

Lastly, station #2 deals with figurative language that the student may have difficulty understanding. I would make sure to come by when the student is at this particular station to make sure he understands why the characters are speaking of "killing" Indians, and how they do not actually mean "killing."

Assessment:

The teacher will assign the students one of the station topics (1 through 4 only) to make into a one-page written response giving their viewpoints on the subject. The students are allowed to insert the views of their partners if their partners brought up any new ideas. This assignment will be double-spaced. (See attached assignment/rubric).

Extension Ideas:

Since the lesson today deals with poverty and how poverty has already affected this 14-year-old boy, the students could do a research project on poverty in America. The students could find articles that show poverty demographics or simply demonstrate how poverty affects people's lives. The students could then write a comparative analysis between the facts they discovered about poverty and how Junior is affected by his family's economic status.

Source of Activity:

I would like to thank Professor Willis for inspiring me to further explore the idea of a silent conversation. I would also like to thank Jim Burke and "Facing History and Ourselves" for their extensions on the ideas of a silent conversation.

Resources and References:

Alexie, Sherman, and Ellen Forney. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*. New York: Little, Brown and, 2009. Print.

"Big Paper - Building a Silent Conversation | Facing History and Ourselves." *Linking History to Moral Choices Today | Facing History and Ourselves*. Facing History and Ourselves. Web. 09 Dec. 2010.
<<http://www.facinghistory.org/resources/strategies/big-paper-building-a-silent-c>>.

Burke, Jim. *The English Teacher's Companion: a Complete Guide to Classroom, Curriculum, and the Profession*. 3rd ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2008. Print.

"Lesson Plans - ReadWriteThink." *Homepage - ReadWriteThink*. Web. 09 Dec. 2010.
<<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/>>.

Illinois State English Language Arts Goals:

3.B.4a Produce documents that exhibit a range of writing techniques appropriate to purpose and audience, with clarity of focus, logic of organization, appropriate elaboration and support and overall coherence.

This standard was accomplished when the students were required to respond to one another to produce a coherent conversation about the topics. They had to create a logical conversation as they elaborated on specific ideas and topics that were of interest to them.

2.B.4c Discuss and evaluate motive, resulting behavior and consequences demonstrated in literature.

This standard was accomplished as the students were asked to decipher why Junior decided to leave the reservation. They "discussed" the motives and what they expect to happen to the protagonist next. Also, the resulting behaviors of both Junior and Rowdy are being discussed during the class.

1.C.4a Use questions and predictions to guide reading.

This standard was accomplished as the students are urged to pose questions to each other during the silent conversation. Also, in one of the stations, the students are asked to predict what they think will happen to the protagonist next. Lastly, there is a brief discussion about what the students think will happen to the characters next as they move into their reading assignments for the following night.

SILENT CONVERSATION INSTRUCTIONS

(adapted from www.readwritethink.org/lessons)

Partner 1: _____

Partner 2: _____

Both partners will begin a conversation on separate sheets of paper. You may respond to the question, quote, or picture as you choose.

You may:

- Bring up new questions
- Answer the questions
- Create your own opinions
- Make an observation
- Draw some connection to it

Once you both have finished your thoughts, switch papers and respond to your partner.

*All of this should be done WITHOUT speaking. If you do not understand what your partner is asking or saying, then write that into the conversation and get a response before you move on.

*You will not be graded for grammar, but make sure that your partner can understand your thoughts well enough to make their own response.

Response Assignment:

Name: _____

Directions: Circle which number you have been assigned to. Respond to the quote, picture or question in the form of a one-page, double-spaced, typed response. You may draw from your silent conversation in class, your partner’s thoughts, or you may formulate new opinions. Attached is the rubric. *There are essentially no right or wrong answers as long as you provide some textual support for your beliefs. The first sentence of your response should be your thesis statement.

1. “My school and my tribe are so poor and sad that we have to study from the same dang books our parents studied from. That is absolutely the saddest thing in the world” (Alexie 31). Why is this the “saddest thing in the world” for Junior? Do you think being poor is one of the reasons why Junior decides to leave the reservation?
2. “That’s how we were taught to teach you. We were supposed to kill the Indian to save the child.” “You *killed* Indians?” “No, no, it’s just a saying. I didn’t literally kill Indians. We were supposed to make you give up being Indian. Your songs and stories and language and dancing. Everything. We weren’t trying to kill Indian people. We were trying to kill Indian culture” (Alexie 35). Why were they trying to “kill” the Indian culture? Why is Mr. P telling Junior about this?
3. Respond to the picture from p. 43 in text. (REZ...HOPE); “Who has the most hope?” “White people” (45).
4. Why does Junior want to leave the reservation? What do you think he is searching for?

RUBRIC: (adapted from Rubistar.com)

	4: Above Standards	3: Meets Standards	2: Approaching Standards	1: Below Standards
Focus on thesis statement	The thesis statement names the topic of the essay and outlines the main points to be discussed.	The thesis statement names the topic of the essay.	The thesis statement outlines some or all of the main points to be discussed but does not name the topic.	The thesis statement does not name the topic AND does not preview what will be discussed.
Support for position	Includes 3 or more pieces of evidence (facts, examples, real-life experiences) that support the position statement.	Includes 3 or more pieces of evidence (facts, examples, real-life experiences) that support the position statement.	Includes 2 pieces of evidence (facts, examples, real-life experiences) that support the position statement.	Includes 1 or fewer pieces of evidence (facts, examples, real-life experiences).
Grammar and spelling	Author makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Author makes 1-2 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Author makes 3-4 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Author makes more than 4 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.