

Selected Guided Practice Activities for Teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Although I like to think that my students have been exposed to a wealth of pedagogical strategies during their participation in my Methods for Teaching English in the Secondary School class, they still ask questions about how one weaves these strategies together to help students interact with and make meaning from a longer work of fiction. Provided below are a sequence of selected guided practice activities one might implement before, during, and after the reading of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. They are culled from the suggestions of a number of Writing Project teachers--in particular Carol Mooney at Villa Park High School in Villa Park, California, Jerry Judd at Irvine High School in Irvine, California, and Jeff Elsten at Los Amigos High School in Garden Grove, California. They are presented in bullets as a skeleton plan for a literature unit rather than as a full-fledged demonstration lesson and they culminate with various options for writing without taking any specific writing task through the process to completion. (Note: Page numbers referred to are from the 35th Anniversary edition, 1995, Harper Collins.)

Prereading

- Before starting to read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, ask students to read "The Sneetches" by Dr. Seuss or, better yet, show the video. "The Sneetches" is the tale of how the Star-Belly Sneetches discriminate against the Plain-Belly Sneetches, excluding them from games and weenie roasts, and how Sylvester McMonkey McBean bilks the town out of all of its money by putting on and/or removing stars on the persons of Sneetches to the point that no one can any longer tell who's who. Ask students to do a quickwrite in reaction to the story. They may be reminded of the holocaust, write about prejudice in general, or focus on who the Star-Bellies are at their school. Have students share in small groups and then discuss the themes of the story as a whole class.
- Create a context for the novel by reviewing the time frame in which the novel was written (in the 1950s during the Civil Rights Movement) and the time frame it focuses on (the Great Depression of the 1930s). Scott Foresman (Lange, 1997) has an excellent Novel Works Kit on *Mockingbird* complete with biographical information on the author, memorabilia from the 1930s (including sheet music for songs, photographs, a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, an anti-lynching poster, newspaper articles on the Scottsboro case, etc.), color art transparencies, a time line, etc. Give small groups several documents each and have them teach the class what they have learned. After groups report, ask students to turn to a partner and relate what had just been shared to their reading of "The Sneetches."

During Reading

Chapters 1-8

- Read the first three paragraphs of Chapter 1 aloud.
- Ask students:
 - What kind of a narrator does this novel have? How do you know?
 - Do you agree that this story will be a flashback? Why or why not?

- You have already been introduced to five characters. Who are they and what is their relationship to one another?
- What events will the novel trace?
- How does the writer arouse your curiosity and build suspense?
- Have students stand and follow the description in paragraph one to imitate Jem's injury. This may increase their investment in finding out what happens.
- As students are reading Chapters 1-8, ask them to create character charts for Scout, Jem, Dill, Boo, Calpurnia, Atticus, and Walter. The character chart should include:
 - Character's name
 - A quote describing the character's appearance
 - A quote spoken by or about the character that shows personality
 - A one sentence description showing the reader's thoughts/ideas/reflections/speculations about the character
- After students read Chapter 1-8, have them reread the description of Maycomb on pages 5-6 and find other details about Maycomb from the subsequent reading. Then, ask them to draw a picture of Maycomb, using details from the text in their sketches. (Students can turn this sketch into a map when they read Chapters 9-10).
- Pose this journal activity:

Imagine you are Boo Radley at the end of Chapter 8. In his voice, write a diary entry of what is happening from Boo's point of view. Include mention of specific encounters between you (Boo) and the children. You will need to draw inferences about Boo's diction...keeping in mind the background information we have on him.

Chapters 9-16

- Ask students to make a Time Line of the events in these chapters.
- Give students these study questions to respond to:
 - Scout is involved in three altercations in these chapters. Two are physical, one is not. Describe each and explain their relationship to the larger context of the novel.
 - Why do the people of Maycomb resent Atticus for defending Tom Robinson?
 - How do Scout and Jem perceive their father?
 - What causes Jem and Scout to see their father in a new light? Interpret the significance of what happens.
 - Why is it a sin to kill a mockingbird? (Have students start keeping a record of every time they come across a reference to a mockingbird in the novel.)
- Give students the following paragraph quiz. Design a format for the following question as in the model on page 223 of this chapter.

In Chapter 11 of *Mockingbird*, after Jim has learned that Miss Dubose has died, he becomes hysterical after opening a box that she has sent containing a "white, waxy, perfect camellia." Consider the camellia and

Jem's response to it. What are some possible meanings of the camellia? Comment on their significance.

- Add two more study questions:
 - How does Mrs. Dubose represent courage in this novel?
 - Explain why the mob disperses at the end of Chapter 15.

Chapter 17-22

- Ask students to pick a judge, prosecutor, defense attorney, defendants, jury, and courtroom observers. Design a Reader's Theater and have the class re-enact the trial.
- Show the clip of the trial from the film version of "To Kill a Mockingbird," starring Gregory Peck, up to the point where Reverend Syke's says, "Miss Jean Louise, stand up. Your father's passin'."
- Give students an Open Mind form. (A blank Open Mind is included on the Companion Website). In the persona they assumed during the re-enactment of the trial, students should fill out the Open Mind, drawing pictures, images, and symbols to represent their thoughts and feelings. They can also use single words and phrases to capture what was going on in their character's mind at the time. On the back of the Open Mind, ask students to explain the meaning of their graphic representation.
- Assign student groups to create a Talk Show about the trial, the verdict, and the reaction in Maycomb County. A script for getting the show started and guidelines for the students who role play the characters written by UCI Teaching Credential Candidate, Diana Schlecht, is included on the Companion Website.

Chapters 23-31

- Have students keep a Dialectical Journal of the final chapters of the book (see Chapter 5). Have students select quotes that they feel have a special meaning, interest or impact and record them in the left hand column of their journal. On the right side, they should record their thought, feelings, responses, or reflections. Ask students to label their responses in terms of the cognitive strategies they are using (tapping prior knowledge, predicting, making connections, visualizing, revising meaning, and so forth). They can use the Reader Response Starters in Chapter 2. Ask them to be sure to discuss Sheriff Tate's remark on p. 318 in regards to arresting Boo, "Well, it'd be sort of like shootin' a mockingbird, wouldn't it?"
- Have students create a Split Open Mind (see Chapter 4) for the character of Scout for the portion of the novel before and after she is attacked by Mr. Ewell, recognizes Boo, and realizes that her father is right, "...you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them." Then have them show this telling sentence:

The Scout we meet at the beginning of the novel has changed by the end of the novel.

After Reading

To Kill a Mockingbird lends itself to a variety of options for writing. A few ideas for prompts (rather than complete prompts) are provided below. Additionally, students could arrive at their own topics.

- Atticus tells Scout that you “never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view – until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.” Become one of the following characters and narrate a specific event from the novel in his/her voice and from their point of view:

Boo Radley	Tom Robinson
Atticus	Mayella Ewell
Mrs. Dubose	etc.
- Create a game board tracing Scout and Jem’s journey through *To Kill a Mockingbird*. At the various spaces players land on which are pivotal to events in the text, such as Mrs. Dubose’s house, write a card in which you question the player about what Scout and Jem learned at that place on the board. Accompany your game board with an explanation of how your game reflects the plot, setting, characters, and themes in the novel.
- Atticus says, “Mr. Cunningham’s basically a good man; he just has his blind spots.” Discuss and analyze the blind spots of at least four characters in the novel. What do they share in common?
- Atticus hopes that his children won’t catch “Maycomb’s usual disease.” Using *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a point of departure, write a reflective essay on the disease of prejudice, how it spreads and how it can be stopped.
- Scout and Jem have inherited a legacy of values from their father. Project either character into adulthood and write a letter thanking Atticus for the specific lessons you learned from him.
- Become Scout and create an annotated scrapbook of at least 10 pages. On each page, paste in something that reflects some aspect of Scout’s experience growing up. Make sure that at least two items are written--for example a letter from Dill, a newspaper article, or a diary entry. Annotate each entry as Scout, explaining why she is saving this item.
- Speculate about what would happen if Boo Radley was put on trial for the murder of Bob Ewell. Would he be found guilty or innocent? What would the key arguments of the prosecutor and the defense attorney be?
- In small groups, write two front pages of *The Maycomb Gazette*--one just after the trial of Tom Robinson and another after the death of Bob Ewell. Include a news article, feature, editorial, advice column, and illustrations with captions.