

12th ELA Socratic
Materials Interview

Interviewer: The instructional materials you're using for this lesson.

Teacher: Sorry. The instructional materials I use for this short fiction piece ... Was I had them read a short fiction of Very Old Man with Enormous Wings. They had to post levels of questions online via Edmodo. Before the night, before the discussion, to check for preparation. And then ... What other [inaudible 00:00:39]? I guess basically that's it, but it's definitely tied to what they read before, which is another short fiction, Hills Like White Elephants. So ...

Interviewer: Why did you choose these particular materials?

Teacher: So, the Socratic discussions asked for the students to take accountability for their learning. And these short stories, which almost 100% of them have never read before, intrigues them. Or they can find ways to connect with it. Versus I've had students say, [inaudible 00:01:23] I didn't like that other story. The bigger unit, I think for A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings looks at magical realism and how that colors or shapes our perception of literature and our world. Whereas Hills Like White Elephant is a short fiction piece with no back story. You just have character dialogue. And so by juxtaposing those two stories and narratives really asked them to look for specific symbolism and themes.

[00:02:00]

Interviewer: One second, I'm going to turn off these ... I like that. I mean, that's good. You're like here's a piece without it, and here's a piece with it. You can use this piece in the context that surrounds it. Even in this case, where there's the context [inaudible 00:02:18]. So it's cool that he brought up the idea of the ... Columbia. And you actually had the information.

Teacher: (laughs) Right?

Interviewer: And people that know. And I was like, yeah that makes sense. I mean ...

Teacher: And I like that, that they ... Right, so they take control of their learning, which is so much better than the old school way of teaching where supposedly the only knowledge comes from the teacher standing in the front of the class. Right? And they each bring with them ... Their technology, looking up the date it was published, and trying to make the connection. And that's what we should be doing. You know?

Interviewer: What is it in particular that you like about these materials?

Teacher: Besides how beautifully Gabriel Marquez writes (laughs). And the weird symbolism in the spider woman or the bird man. I like that the kids like these pieces. I like that they always leaves my classes where like, "that was like the best class." And they say that at the end of every class. And so then I know I did my job.

Interviewer: Are there any changes that you would make to these materials?

Teacher: [00:04:00] No. I think this unit on the format of the Socratic discussion is a great tool. I also do the individual assessment, where they have to turn in their homework, craft one sentence that summarizes this story's main ideas. Or try to verbalize it. And that's how I can check for individual assessment. And I've had some students who are extremely quiet just by nature. But their sentences that they write, it blows me away. I think they totally got it. At the end of class they were taking pictures of the students' notes on the board, so they review or compare their notes with another student's notes before they craft this one small sentence. A powerful sentence for me. So ...

Interviewer: I like the crafting of the one sentence.

Teacher: (laughs)

Interviewer: I do that too. And then finally, how would you describe these materials as meaningful or relevant to the students' lives?

Teacher: I'd say the practice of Socratic discussion ... Asks them to suspend their beliefs. And to acknowledge another person's point of view. It practices patience and tolerance, which are life skills, beyond just going back and pointing out a specific paragraph. What English teacher wouldn't love that? "But it says at the end of the second paragraph." Close reading, specific evidence. But the laughing, the culture, the community, the sense of community I think is also important. I think that's what education can be.

[00:06:00]

Interviewer: Anything in particular about the Marques piece that you feel is relevant to the students' lives? Or reading in that way, or ...

Teacher: The style of the magical realism. So it takes the familiar, and it throws it into an unfamiliar, fantastical environment, where there're certain roles that are understood or expected. And I think it's important as a reader to be aware of when this conflicts with your expectation of the genre, of what a short story should be, or how that an angel should appear. Or what do we expect of a religious system? And I think this piece challenges that for the students.