

12th ELA Socratic
Pre-Interview

Interviewer: All right so first question, why did you choose to teach this lesson?

Teacher: We will be doing a Socratic discussion on 'A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings' by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. It's kind of like the first Latin American piece of literature that we're doing for AP lit. We've been playing with the genre of classics as like the fallen hero. Here we're entering magical realism where we're going to push the boundaries of is this ... The second half of the title is called 'A Tale for Children' so we're going to push that boundary as far as genres go.

Interviewer: [crosstalk 00:02:35].

Teacher: ... Okay, sorry. The learning objectives?

Interviewer: Yeah, what are the learning outcomes for this lesson and how are they related to the larger learning sequence?

Teacher: I think one of the bigger scopes for AP literature is not only just have a passing score for the AP exam but also to connect with classic literature pieces as how it relates to our life, making the human connection. That's the bigger essential question. How is something that old or out dated or no action packed film made of this classic, how is that relevant to our society now. That's always been our bigger scope. How it fits in the learning objectives or the learning outcomes is that students have to be willing to take a closer look at literature so it requires them to read closer, to read critically. Which is why I love the Socratic discussions because it's an active learning.

[00:04:00] Before 'A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings' they just did Ernest Hemingway's short fiction piece 'Hills Like White Elephants' where it's a story that has no action. It's all conversation and dialog and yet the conflict has to be read closely between the lines. Seeing how they tie that narrative technique in this next short fiction piece will be very interesting to see how closely they read into the magical realism aspects and the implication is this man with wings. Is it a biblical, religious figure? How does it exceed or disappoint our expectation?

Interviewer: Interesting, cool. I like how you did ... You're piecing together the different novels of the different [inaudible 00:04:34] like that, that's interesting to hear.

Teacher: Yeah, it's fun. It's great because they never read these before.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Teacher: It's like, see, it's a good thing you took AP lit, huh?

Interviewer: Yeah, I don't think these are ... These are not often the books that people first grab at although they are great books. You hear about 'The Martian' which is a good book too.

Teacher: That student doing 'Paradise Lost' and 'Fortune Cookies', right?

Interviewer: Yeah, that's really cool. That's a creative idea, that's really cool. Just so you know, it doesn't really bother me but if you pick up your cell phone and move it around, I can see it in the shot. If you ...

Teacher: You can see it or ...

Interviewer: I can. Yeah.

Teacher: Oh, you can.

Interviewer: If you pick up your hand and stuff ...

Teacher: Oh, okay. Got it.

Interviewer: Either way, it's not a really big deal. I don't think anyone's going to care about that because it's your notes or whatever but just so you know.

Teacher: I know. One of my students, when they do their speeches they bring up their phones.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Teacher: At first I was like, hey wait, what's going on? Then I realized, oh, that's their notes.

Interviewer: I saw somebody doing that before too. I'm like wow, new note cards.

Teacher: New note cards.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Teacher: You have to be willing to be okay.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Teacher: Admins sometimes, they're all about ... Make sure the students aren't on their phones all the time. Make sure that class time is for class time. It's just a matter of a mind set of
[00:06:00] make sure you use technology for education.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Teacher: Cell phones have increased literacy in Africa, hello.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Teacher: We can definitely ... We should use them.

Interviewer: That's a good use for it, if used correctly. Yeah, definitely. I agree. It's different from somebody texting the whole time or something on their phone.

Okay, how would you describe this lesson as meaningful, useful or relevant for students? IE, communicating the importance of the content.

Teacher: Interesting ... I think for the students, it's not so much the content of the story but for each one of them when we have these Socratic discussion, they're always like, "Wow, that was great. That was like the best lesson we've had." Every time we have a Socratic discussion. Being able to lean on each other to help deconstruct the meaning of a text, builds their self confidence. I think that's probably the most important thing that they get out of reading these or challenging themselves when reading these difficult texts.

Interviewer: Cool, all right. What are the big questions you are using to drive student discussion?

Teacher: I set up the course where they have levels of questions. Level one question is something that the answer's found within the text. Level two question is more like an inference, it's not directly stated but you can kind of figure out why Cinderella's step-mom might be jealous of her. Level three questions are what we call helicopter questions where it hovers above or outside the text. Maybe talking about true love in Cinderella. Is there love at first sight? What are women's rights? What were their rights during that time? Were their only options to be married? Those are level three questions. The questions are prompted from the students so before they come into class they have to use a quote from the text and they have to post three level one, three level two, three level three questions to our online class. It's a discussion board where they can see everyone's questions and come prepared already thinking about these questions and how will they bring that to the table to discuss. Not debate, discuss.

Interviewer: That's really cool. It's interesting to me ... I guess I'm showing how long I've been out of high school now where it's more ... You used to only have the online environment in college. It used to be you start going in there having work groups and things like that. Now you hear more and more ... Even elementary school all the way through everybody's using. Whether it's like a G-mail app of some sort or black board or something like that, it's really interesting how it's matriculated its way down through all grades now.

Teacher: Yeah, I mean that's part of my job too as an educator, right? It's not just to teach them literature or how to read critically or how to write but also to incorporate technology. At every stage, yeah, they're going to always have to be as competitive as a globally competent person. They're going to have to know technology and not be afraid to try it.

[00:10:00]

Interviewer: Yeah, I agree. That's really cool. Okay, okay.

How are you planning to check for understanding and assess student outcomes?

Teacher: ... Planning for assessment. Part of it I check ... Previous to the discussion, I check whether students have read and posted the questions because it's not like you can just turn to the back of a book and look for answers. They'll have to have read it in order to come up or pose the questions. That's part of checking for assessment. We also have the students take turns taking notes of the discussion. That's a way for me to check collective as a group. Are they missing any of the universal themes? Were there some questions that we can relate back to the previous reading assignments or the other bigger pieces of literature. If I feel like they still have questions or they have extremely strong opinions one way or other, they can't hold space to just contemplate another person's opinion then I will have them try to voice it out with the individual. A one sentence assignment which they always find challenging.

[00:12:00] The one sentence assignment is to write the [mowel 00:11:34] and a thesis statement as they would in an AP prompt exam. The [mowel 00:11:39] is the meaning of the work as a whole. The equation is they have to pick one specific image or one phrase from the text and use that to direct themselves towards what was the meaning or the purpose of the short story. Then come up with a thesis that focuses on literary devices. Narrative point of view or imagery or symbolism to help support that opinion. They always find this one sentence assignment very difficult.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Interesting, that's cool. It's always tough to bring it all together, right? Sum it all up. Yeah.

Teacher: That's when they go, "Can we write more?"

Interviewer: Yeah.

Teacher: No. Actually for once, for English, just that once sentence.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's interesting.

How would you describe this lesson as engaging for students?

Teacher: Yup, it's right up there. I used to think I wish every class was a Socratic discussion. It's not about me bringing knowledge in and just being like a little skinny straw and saying, "Here it is." When you have the Socratic discussion you hear so many options and possibilities and voices and it's a ... you can see their minds kind of turning over all these possibilities, conspiracy theories, we have everything out there. No thought is wrong but we also have to then say, "Well, where's the evidence? What are you basing this on?" Let's go back to the text. Is it engaging? Highly. I don't think 100% of your classes could be Socratic discussion because at some point they do need terminology, they do need you to model how you deconstruct model. That takes places with our small group discussions and their presentations.

[00:14:00]

Interviewer: Great. We're thinking about the 15th is one of the presentation days, right? We're going to come back for it, it sounds like.

Teacher: That would be phenomenal.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Teacher: The 15th ... Oh my god. This morning, for my other AP class, this one girl presented and she wrote a modern musical to 'A Mid Summer Night's Dream'.

Interviewer: Wow, cool.

Teacher: And she sang ...

Interviewer: Wow.

Teacher: ... The different songs that she wants in the musical. The first song she sang was a duet, I forget, it was a modern music duet and she sang both the guy and the girl part up here in front of her peers, I cried.

Interviewer: That's a lot of talent to be able to write that and fit it in with the storyline, that's really cool ... And to sing it in front of everybody, perform [inaudible 00:14:38] like that, that's really cool.

Teacher: It was pretty great and there's a science standards in my non-book book report project, one of the science was it was a magic trick the rule of fourths, or something, because 'A Mid Summer Night's Dream' has the two couples falling in love so they're four. She did this magic trick with the singing.

Interviewer: Wow.

Teacher: Every time she pulled the fourth card it was a card that she had predicted. Everybody in the class was like, "What? How'd you do that?" She did explain the science behind the card trick. That was interesting how she got to tie that science standard with Shakespeare.

Interviewer: That's really cool. That's the kind of thing ... you were saying you got emotional. I imagine as a teacher you see that kind of work being, it's really impressive.

Speaker 3: Jimmy.

Interviewer: Really special, that's cool. Yeah.

All right, last one. How do you plan on managing student behavior through the lesson starting with expectations?

Teacher: [00:16:00] Developing the culture for learning. I think that's probably what I do best sometimes, maybe? Setting the expectations. For the Socratic discussion the students are reminded that it's not a debate and I think that's good. So many times when you read certain forums or articles online it takes, what, four replies before it becomes a personal attack, right? To have the students be able to suspend their belief, to just contemplate another person's opinion, is truly important, I believe. We set that expectation up. The pausing the ... Acknowledging that person's point of view or try to summarize what they say before just introducing your point. They don't always do it and so sometimes I'll have to interject to just keep that expectation. Yeah, I guess that's how.

Interviewer: That's another one of those skills they'll need for the rest of their life.

Teacher: Right.

Interviewer: Taking someone's opinion and thinking about, digesting it. Cool, that's great. I usually ask if there's anything you want to add to prepare for the lesson ... The questions do a pretty good job of covering most of it.

Teacher: Yeah, I think so. Yeah.

Interviewer: Cool, great. Thank you.

Teacher: Thanks.