



## SAMPLE MATERIAL

### Mark It Up! Questioning and Making Connections

Pocomoke Middle School, Maryland

**Topic:** Adolescent Literacy

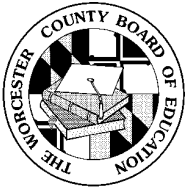
**Practice:** Engaging Text Discussion

Eighth-grade teacher Kelly O’Brien uses the “Mark It Up!” strategy to scaffold student text discussions. Her lesson plan outlines the text discussion assignment and includes plans for assessing student learning. The Strategies for Encouraging Discussion list shows how she supports small-group discussions in her classroom. O’Brien provides students with the Question Answer Relationships guidelines and Question Starters list to facilitate student text discussion and comprehension. Text Notes shows the “Mark It Up!” codes created by her students.

For a lesson on *Harrison Bergeron* by Kurt Vonnegut, O’Brien begins by giving students a list of questions to discuss as a group and asks them to mark up their texts. Students then select from a list the five themes that they think are related to the text and note specific events directly related to their selections. After this, students must make a judgment and form a statement about what this author is saying about the themes.

O’Brien then moves on to asking students to go through the same theme identification activity using the Common Themes worksheet for a text

they had previously read, *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. She concludes the lesson by having students do a Theme Analysis to make text-to-text connections between the two stories through a comparison of the authors' perspectives.

	Daily Instructional Lesson PlanWorcester County Public Schools	
	<b>Content Area(s)/Course/Grade:</b> Language arts, 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	<b>Unit:</b> Science Fiction
	<b>Lesson Topic:</b> Discussion of text	<b>Date:</b> February 3, 2009
	<b>Teacher:</b> Kelly M. O'Brien	<b>School:</b> Pocomoke Middle School
<b>Indicator(s)/Sub-Outcome(s)/Expectation(s):</b>		
<p>3.A.1.a. Listen to critically, read, and discuss a variety of literary texts representing diverse cultures, perspectives and time periods.</p> <p>3.A.6. Analyze and interpret important ideas and messages in literary texts.</p> <p>3.A.6.b. Analyze similar themes across multiple texts.</p>		
<b>Student Outcome(s):</b>		
<p>Students will be able to develop relative topics for discussion after reading "Harrison Bergeron" by Kurt Vonnegut (available in Junior Great Books 7)</p> <p>Students will be able to discuss in a large group setting their ideas and interpretations of the text.</p>		
<b>Context for Learning</b>		
<p>Students have been studying a tightly controlled "utopian" society in Lois Lowry's novel <u>The Giver</u>. The society is completely controlled by the governing body, and the prevailing attitude is that sameness is the way to live a harmonious life. "Harrison Bergeron" has a similar system of control and sameness; the difference is the way it is implemented in each society. Students will have read both <u>The Giver</u> and "Harrison Bergeron" prior to this lesson. Students will have already chosen discussion topics for this lesson from a careful reading of the day before the lesson. This is done by using text notes on copies of the text (see attached sheet for more info on text notes) and writing questions on post-it notes. Choosing good questions and observations requires front loading on the part of the teacher and practice on part of the student. A list of strategies for enabling good class discussion is attached.</p>		
<b>Instructional Delivery</b>		
<b>Opening Activities/Motivation:</b>		
<p>When opening a group discussion, I find it best to keep it simple. The students have their text and their questions ready. I look at them and ask, "Questions?" Students have learned that prompt means to raise a hand and give their question or observation about the text.</p>		
<b>Procedures:</b>		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I prompt students to begin the discussion.</li> <li>2. Students will offer the questions or observations in response to the reading. These are written in their text notes or on post-it notes.</li> </ol>		

3. As students offer topics, other students raise hands to answer the questions, comment on observations, or add their own thoughts to the topic at hand.
4. After students have had time to discuss their topics, I will pose the question “How are the societies from The Giver and “Harrison Bergeron” similar? Different? Conversation will ensue from there.

#### **Assessment/Evaluation (Formative/Summative)**

Students are assessed in two ways:

To assess their conversation, I collect the questions/observations/topics they created for the class and look to see that they follow the guidelines for good discussion topics (see attached list of strategies). I also make note of each student who added to the discussion either through posing a topic or responding to a topic.

After the discussion of “Harrison Bergeron”, students will be asked to make a display that shows the similarities and differences in the societies of the two pieces of literature. They will also have to analyze the similarities and differences they found and create one theme statement that could work for both texts.

#### **Closure:**

Students will share their theme statements with the class. Students will have a chance to comment on whether the theme statement accurately reflects each text.

### Strategies for Encouraging Discussion

**“It is neither possible or necessary to educate people who never question anything.”**

**--Joseph Heller**

My freshman English professor, Dr. Keith Schlegel, had the best motivator in the world for encouraging discussion. He would come in, coattails flapping, coffee sloshing, and would perch on the edge of the table and stare at us. Then he would ask, “Questions??” in such a gruff and quick manner we weren’t sure he was asking us or telling us. He’d wait a beat or two and then say, “No questions? Then you are ready for the quiz.” He would give us the hardest quiz we ever had. We quickly learned that if we came prepared to talk about the assigned text, we could avoid the dreaded quiz.

I’ve adopted this strategy in my own class. Students always enjoy my stories about Dr. Schlegel and the quizzes. They also learned quickly that I expected them not only to answer my questions but to create their own. This does not come naturally to most 8<sup>th</sup> graders who are used to answering the teacher with a raised hand. Being asked to dominate a conversation about literature is something they are rarely asked to do. So, some frontloading is required. Here are the things I do to ensure that class discussion goes well:

1. **Talk about types of questions.** I review the Q-A-R (question-answer-relationship) protocol (I’ve attached the sheet I made, but this strategy is easily found on the internet) with them and practice writing and identifying each type of question. I usually do this with an easy text (sometimes even a children’s book) and build from there according to need. Encourage students to write more “Author and Me”, “Think and Search,” and “On Your Own” questions. “Right There” questions should be discouraged as they don’t really require much thought.
2. **Provide question starters.** I provide students with the beginnings of “good” questions to help them in their budding attempts to discuss literature. My list is attached, but it can always be built upon.
3. **Model good questions.** Spend time talking about why one question encourages more conversation than another and practice writing them.
4. **Encourage inquiry and trust.** Students need to know that their thoughts, questions, and ideas are encouraged and welcomed. This requires an atmosphere of trust in the classroom. Depending on the class, that can take some time. It is worth it to do some team building activities before engaging in a student-led discussion.
5. **Understand that it is worth the time it takes to front load.** The end result of building trust and teaching kids how to be observers and questioners is worth it. Yes, they have to pass a test. But they also have to pass in life. Life requires inquiry and the ability to discuss complex topics. This ability is something that does not come naturally for everyone. Taking the time to teach it is worthwhile.

Question Answer Relationships



Type Of Question	Where To Get The Answer	Key Starting Words
<b>Right There</b>	The answer is directly stated in the text. It is easy to find. Therefore, this type of question doesn't require much thought.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Who</li><li>• What</li><li>• When</li><li>• Where</li></ul>
<b>Think &amp; Search</b>	Combine the text and your brain. You might be able to find part of the answer in the text, but you also must INFER (take a logical guess based on the information you have) to get the answer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Why</li><li>• How</li><li>• Describe</li><li>• Explain</li><li>• Compare</li><li>• Contrast</li><li>• Analyze</li></ul>
<b>Author and Me</b>	In your head using your thoughts but combining it with logical text clues.	Why does the author...  The speaker's attitude...  What does the author mean...
<b>On Your Own</b>	These answers come from your brain. However, you must base your answer on what you know from the text.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Predict</li><li>• What if</li><li>• Would</li><li>• Could</li><li>• Suppose</li></ul>

**Flip this page over for some good QUESTION STARTERS.**



## Question Starters

1. How would you describe...?
2. How would you explain...?
3. Compare and contrast...?
4. How would you rephrase the meaning of...?
5. What facts or ideas show...?
6. What is the main idea of...?
7. How would you summarize...?
8. What evidence can you find to show...?
9. How is...related to...?
10. What are the effects of...?
11. Why did...?
12. Why do you think...?
13. How are...and...alike/unlike?
14. Do you agree with...? Why?
15. Describe the (setting, mood, actions of a character, attitude of character towards another)...
16. Explain why the experience was good/bad for...
17. Through what actions does the author show the feelings of...?
18. Describe the character of...
19. What examples from the text show that...?
20. What is meant by...?

## Text Notes

Students in my class are often given copies of the text even if they have a textbook so that they can “mark up” their text with notes that will help facilitate conversation. My students created the code below and use it while reading. \*

\*I've used clip art for this document, but my students just draw their own.



A smiley face means, “I like this” or “I agree with this.”



A frown means, “I don't like this” or “I don't agree with this.”



A frazzled face (usually eyes and a squiggly line for a mouth) means, “I don't get this!”



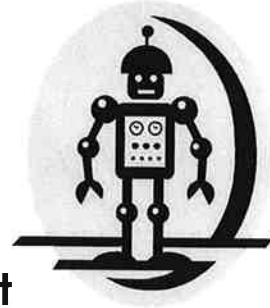
An exclamation point means, “I am surprised by this.”



A question mark means, “I have a question about this.”



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## **“Harrison Bergeron” by Kurt Vonnegut**

Discuss the following questions in your group and jot down notes for a class discussion to follow.

1. How did the government bring George's intelligence down to average?	
2. Why were the ballerinas masked and weighted?	
3. Why was Harrison Bergeron arrested?	
4. How did Harrison Bergeron die?	
5. What is the climax (turning point) of this story? Why?	

6. What is the setting of this story?	
7. What is the main conflict in this story? What type of conflict is it?	
8. What is the point of view in this story?	
9. What is this story trying to say about equality? (theme)	
10. How are the ideas in this story similar to the ideas in <u>The Giver</u> ?	
11. Vonnegut mentions that Hazel Bergeron has a strong resemblance to Diana Moon Glampers, the handicapper general. Aside from appearance, what other possible resemblances could there be?	
12. What is your opinion of total equality for everyone?	

## Common Topics for Themes

childhood

family

identity

nature

race relations

truth

fear

freedom

independence

courage

self-improvement

memory

patience

growing up

justice

peace

self-reliance

equality

death

hate

violence

patriotism

success

love

fame

helping others

war

faith

hope

loyalty

prejudice

trust

adversity

**The Giver**  
**Common Themes**

- **Theme = the message**
- **Theme is** an idea the writer wishes to give about a subject
- **Theme is NOT** a single word, the moral of the story, or the problem in the story
- **Theme topic + story events = theme**

Theme Topic	+	Events in the story that relate to the theme topic	=	Theme
Memory	+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The community has one person hold the memories.</li><li>• No one else in the community has the memories.</li><li>• Only Jonas and The Giver have access to the memories.</li><li>• The memories give them wisdom.</li><li>• The memories help them to see the world differently.</li><li>• The memories help them to feel love and other emotions.</li><li>• Without the memories, everyone else is not truly experiencing life.</li></ul>	=	Memories, good and bad, are to be cherished and not forgotten. It is only through memories that we truly understand love.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Theme Analysis: The Giver and "Harrison Bergeron"**

<b>Ways the stories are alike</b>	<b>Ways the stories are different</b>
<b>Theme topics in both stories:</b>	
<b>Theme statement that could work for both stories:</b>	
<b>Examples from <u>The Giver</u> that relate to the theme statement:</b>	<b>Examples from "Harrison Bergeron" that relate to the theme statement:</b>