

**Mrs. Arleatrice Winters  
Mary Passage Middle School  
Newport News  
Eighth grade**

Mrs. Winters knows that her students are competent with reading and discussing what they've read, at and beyond the literal level. *The Contender* by Robert Lipsyte, a contemporary novel at or below the students' independent reading level, will be assigned as homework in manageable portions, and discussed in Socratic Seminars in class.

Mrs. Winters is in the process of shifting the responsibility for asking questions and discussing literature to her students. Notice how she fades from prominence during the lesson.

**Setting the Stage for Comprehension and Appreciation**

Mrs. Winters knows that even competent readers need to be enticed to read a new novel, so she plans an "open house" activity to pique their interest, introduce the characters, and activate students' background knowledge of narrative structure.

**Sharing Ideas from the "Open House"**

The students, with the support of a familiar graphic, share ideas about the characters, setting, point of view, mood, conflicts, and plot of the novel. They make and share predictions before they are asked to read independently.

**Assigning Homework**

Mrs. Winters assigns independent reading for homework, and begins the process of relinquishing the formulation of the discussion questions to her students.

**Getting Ready for the Seminar**

Mrs. Winters thanks her students for submitting quality discussion questions, and gives them a quiz designed to determine which students are better prepared to discuss the story in depth. Following the quiz, she assigns them to either the inner or the outer circle.

**Moving to the "Hot Seat"**

Students in the outer circle may, when they feel they have something to contribute, move into the "hot seat" to participate in the discussion.

**Reviewing Expectations**

Mrs. Winters distributes the check sheets to the outer circle participants, and she reviews her high expectations for all the students.

**Beginning the Seminar**

After the students are seated, Mrs. Winters asks each inner circle participant to introduce himself or herself. Mrs. Winters' first question is designed to warm up the group.

**Moving into the Novel**

Mrs. Winters asks a second question designed to move the students from their own experiences into the experiences of the characters in the novel. When they feel ready to contribute, two outer circle participants join the discussion by moving into the “hot seat.” Notice that as the discussion progresses, a student refers to the characters in the novel and the discussion begins to turn in the direction of the story.

**Focusing on Characters**

Mrs. Winters asks questions designed to activate students’ background knowledge and to help the students focus on the characters in the novel. Notice that the students take over the discussion and even begin to refer to passages in the book to support their ideas.

**Relinquishing the Discussion to the Students**

Mrs. Winters asks one last question designed to focus on character development in the novel, after which the students discuss independently. Several outer circle participants join the inner circle to share ideas. Some students even argue, without being argumentative, and students refer to passages in the text to support their points.

**Discussing Independently**

The students discuss the novel, its characters, and its themes; moreover, they discuss without input from Mrs. Winters. Notice that they ask questions, answer each other with depth and courtesy, and continue to point to incidents in the novel to support their points.

**Finishing the Lesson**

Mrs. Winters compliments her students on a job well done, and gives instructions for the completion of the paperwork.