

## Reflecting and Proclaiming / Essential Questions and Audience

Glen Young, Petoskey High School, Petoskey, Michigan

Designed for Advanced Placement Literature Students / Grade 12

### The Demonstration

**This lesson demonstration is meant to support my contentions that:**

- Students need to “lean into” their education, through the use of essential questions
- Important essential questions include, “What does it mean to be educated;” “What are the responsibilities of the educated;” and “How has education, or the responsibility of the educated changed over time?”
- Essential Questions allow students to explore the development of their own questions about culture, literature, and language
- Teachers need to give students an opportunity to reflect on their essential questions, including those about how values and beliefs change over time; when it is appropriate to challenge the beliefs of society, and how beliefs shape and reflect culture
- Students need to recognize the influences of different audiences as a reader, a writer, and a critical thinker.
- Students need to analyze what is in the text, and ask questions about what is, purposely sometimes, not in the text
- Reading multiple genres on a shared subject is important to recognizing the ideas shared and not shared and the notion that what is in the text is important, but so too is what is not in the text
- Discourse is a method of discovery
- Discourse is critical to good teaching; teachers must create time and space for such discourse
- Universal truths are best conveyed by the local; enduring questions can be identified and discussed at a personal level
- Developmentally, high school seniors live in a self-centered environment
- Personal experience can be powerful and persuasive and must be evaluated for its
- Students must leave school prepared to continue their examination of essential question

### The Step-by-Step Lesson Development:

**Note:** This exercise/invitation would take place near the conclusion of a close and critical reading of Thomas Hardy’s *Jude The Obscure*. Students have taken three weeks to read the novel independently.

- The essay by Mark Slouka and the accompanying study questions were passed out last week and will serve as a frame for our discussion this morning
- We will begin with a “secret prompt.” There are half a dozen prompts handed out, all dealing with questions of education, and some referencing the articles. Students spend a few moments in contemplation and composition in response to the prompts. I introduce the song that will play in the background as students are composing. Sam Cooke’s song *What A Wonderful World* plays softly in the background. (Ten minutes)

### The Step-by-Step Lesson Development continued:

- Students now search for a partner or two who has responded to the same prompt. Students share some of each response. (Five minutes).
- I will reference prior essential questions, such as, “How do your decisions now define you in the future?”, and “Is morality relative,” which we have discussed as part of other extended reading assignments.
- I will now redirect attention to the Slouka essay. I will ask students to take out highlighters, and while rereading the essay, highlight significant statements or conclusions. Pay attention also, to how he communicates his message. What “writer-ly” techniques does he employ? Where? To what effect? Do these help or impede his overall message? (20 minutes).
- The next step is a brief pair-share of the highlighted passages. Did you lift out the same pieces? Why? Why not? Did the highlighted passages say the same thing even if they were different sections? Did the highlighted passages provoke or affirm your own beliefs? (10 minutes).
- Next, we will revisit the essay by Theodore Roosevelt entitled *What College Graduates Owe America*, published in 1894. Questions that follow the reading include: Who is Roosevelt’s audience? What is his purpose? How has the world changed between Roosevelt’s time and Slouka’s time? Would Roosevelt and Slouka be likely to agree with each other? Ultimately, what do the educated now owe their neighbors? Do we owe beyond our own borders? Is Roosevelt’s message written for all college graduates in 2012? Beyond?
- Next, I introduce a brief passage from Andrew Delbanco’s new book *College: What it is, Was, and Should be*.
- The next step invites students to write in response to the texts. (20 minutes for writing, 10 minutes for sharing)
- I will close with the Edna St. Vincent Millet Poem “First Fig.”

### Writing Invitations:

- A commencement address exploring the purpose of education
- A letter to your 9<sup>th</sup> grade self, examining what you have learned about the purpose of education
- A letter to the local school board president, explaining how the curriculum could be reconfigured to better suit the objectives of the purpose of education
- A letter composed to Mark Slouka or Theodore Roosevelt explaining any reactions to their conclusions.
- A “This I Believe” themed response to the questions raised in our discussions.
- A personal version of “High school: what it is, was, and should be.”

## **Bibliography:**

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- Kittle, Penny. *Write Beside Them: Risk, Voice, and Clarity in the Writing With Students*. Heinemann Publishers, 2008.
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## **Possible Lesson Extensions and Adaptations:**

- Student responses could be published in a class collection
- Students might host a public debate of the compelling topics within the texts and invite younger peers into the audience
- Students might podcast their "This I Believe" essays for the community
- Students could perform their "This I Believe" essays for the community or their peers
- Students could vote on their top three commencement speeches and ask that they be included the spring commencement ceremony

## **Affect Demonstrated Throughout the Lesson and Described by Your Students**

- Your demeanor and stance was calm, yet commanding as well as captivating
- Your presence and extensive knowledge exuded expertise throughout the lesson
- Your humor and wit was effective and invited us into the lesson...and kept us involved; your entire presentation connected us to you as your audience
- Your lesson was entertaining and humorous—this also kept us engaged

## **Best Practices Modeled in this Lesson:**

- Engaging hook
- Compelling texts that challenged students' intellect
- Inviting and engaging topic of relevance to students' lived lives
- Time to share with partners and whole group
- Honored and affirmed everyone's thinking
- Appealed to multiple intelligences and learning styles
- Students were given time and choices for their writing

## Common Core State Standards for the English Language Arts Embedded in the Lesson:

- RI 1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain
- RI 2 Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.
- RI 7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- W 1.A Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
  - a. Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
- W 9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
  - a. Apply *grades 11–12 Reading standards* to literature (e.g., “Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics”).
  - b. Apply *grades 11–12 Reading standards* to literary nonfiction (e.g., “Delineate and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts, including the application of constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning [e.g., in U.S. Supreme Court Case majority opinions and dissents] and the premises, purposes, and arguments in works of public advocacy [e.g., *The Federalist*, presidential addresses]”).
- W 10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.
- SL 1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues*, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
  - a. Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well reasoned exchange of ideas.
  - b. Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.
  - c. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

**Common Core State Standards for the English Language Arts Embedded in the Lesson continued:**

- SL 1 Continued:  
d. Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.
- SL 2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.
- SL4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.
- SL 5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.