



Teaching Fairy Stories with Dr. Junius Johnson

Lesson 7: Wonder in the Classroom

Outline:

Classroom principles

- It is easy to fall into a trap of reinforcing the boy/girl distinction with these kinds of texts. This is a missed opportunity, giving permission to the girls to not like certain texts and for the boys not to like certain texts.
 - It is important to not reinforce the stereotype.
 - Create a balanced syllabus. Our goal is that everyone interacts with all of the books on the syllabus.
- Always make the students support their claims from the text. Challenge the students about their claims with details from the text.
 - “Where did you get that from?”
 - “What about his hatred of dragons?”
 - This is not a debate. Offer the student additional data that their theory will need to take into account. Give the student time to process that and to revise the theory.
 - “How would you take this into account?”
 - We are after textual reasoning, which is one of the main outcomes of a literature class.
 - We want students to passionately discuss the text with one another (while remaining respectful).
 - We want students to think outside the box.
 - Tell me where in the text we see that.
- Make explicit connections to the canonical books you’ve read to things they’ve studied in history, science, and Latin. Make those connections to the central values of classical education.

Assessment and Activities

- Giving a test to make sure the students have done the reading is not the best way to make sure the students have done the reading.
- You’re less likely to have students have trouble getting through the reading assignments with this kind of book.
- We don’t need as many assignments to test the student’s knowledge of character and plot.
- Ask them to exercise their imagination and sense of wonder in their formal interactions with the story.
 - Classroom discussion
 - Classroom activities
 - Assignments



- Assessments
- Allow them to play in possibility. We don't wonder anymore, we look it up on our phones. We want the classroom to be a space for wondering.
- Assignment ideas:
 - Ask the students to write an alternate version of a scene.
 - Change something about the character's past, and then describe the character as he or she might be at the time of the story as a result.
 - Retell a scene from a different character's point of view. This is good for writers as well.
 - Write a backstory for a character who doesn't have one.
 - Ask questions that invite students to think about the text beyond the boundaries of the text. They still have to stay grounded in the text.
 - Ask the students to retell the story to the class in their own words (in lieu of giving a test).
 - What threads did you follow through the story?
 - Tell the story visually of the action of this chapter. Be thinking about insights you can bring to direct the artists.
 - It is so good and fruitful to let the students argue with each other about the character's choices. Proctor the arguments to make sure that they remain respectful.
 - Bring us back to the text in the case of ad hominem attacks.