“Seeing the Future”

Bridge to Terabithia
Katherine Paterson

Context:
This is a writing prompt originally published by Gary Soto. It is a prompt that requires application to the issues of the text as well as hypothetical thinking. This particular strategy should be used after reading the entire novel, preferably before a big assessment, as a means of reviewing the novel and helping the students recognize Jess’s learning and growing experience at the end of the book.

Purpose:
This strategy will help students grapple with the tragedy that occurs towards the end of the novel. It will connect with past discussions, including a discussion on the 5 stages of grieving. The prompt specifically is: “Write about a time when you made an important discovery or decision about your future.” This goes perfectly with the essential question of the unit which is, “What qualities will help me to grow up and become who I really am?”

Directions:

Step 1: Review with the students the information text about the 5 stages of grieving. Help them to remember the things talked about, and help them to connect that grieving process to what Jess goes through toward the end of the novel when he is without Leslie. Once you have reviewed with your students how the grieving process works, help them to see that Jess finally is able to reconcile what has happened, and even makes a proactive step in moving on. Jess takes what Leslie taught him and applies it to his life, leaving Jess better off than he was before he knew Leslie. One way that the reader sees this is through building the bridge and introducing Terabithia to MayBelle.

Step 2: Introduce the writing prompt to the students. “Write about a time when you made an important discovery or decision about your future.” Help them see that this is what Jess did: he realized that he could move on and build the bridge, he could be friends with May Belle, and he could make an impact. Share an experience with your students about a particular time when you felt that your perspective changed about the future, and when you got the courage to make an important decision.

Step 3: This is meant to be a level 1 or 2 write, meaning that it does not need to be perfectly polished. Rather, this prompt should allow students to grapple with the issue before them and allow them to express themselves. It also allows them to make a connection to the text with themselves, hopefully preparing them for a final assessment to check for understanding. As the students are writing, walk around the room to be sure that they understand the prompt; they may
need some ideas to get them going.

Step 4:
After you have given them around 20-30 minutes on their writing, have those that feel comfortable sharing read theirs for the class. Perhaps you saw a particular student that really showed an avid interest in the topic and you could ask them to read theirs.

Assessment:
The sharing of the stories could be an assessment, as well as walking around the room to make sure that the students are understanding the prompt given them, making sure they are able to make the necessary connection to the text. As a more formal assessment, you could simply collect the papers for a grade.
Fanciful Worlds: Personal Response to Text

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Context:
After the book is over to help the students make a personal connection to the text. This activity takes two days. It will take 20 minutes for discussion and the rest of the class period for creating the posters. The second day is sharing and discussing how their worlds can help them become who they want to become. What qualities does this world help you develop?

Statement of Purpose:
Help the students create a magical world of their own. What morals do they learn from this fanciful world? What fears have they overcome because of it? Who would they invite to be in their world and why?

Directions:

Day 1

Step 1: In class list characteristic of Jess and Leslie’s imaginary World: Terabithia. What monsters did they encounter, did they go to Terabithia just to hang out or were they trying to avoid something, or solve something?

Step 2: On a separate sheet of paper ask students to list some characteristics they would want in their imaginary world.

Step 3: Hand out a sheet of chart paper to each child. Ask them to draw or write what their world would be like. You will get all sorts of responses, to keep them on track I suggest asking them what they want to get out of their world. Send them back to the text and ask what Jess got out of going to Terabithia with Leslie?

Day 2

Assessment:
Step 4: Have time for class to finish up their worlds and explanations (about 15 mins)
Have them put their butcher paper on the wall and share with a partner what they learned from their world.
Have five volunteers present to the class.
Discuss qualities we want to develop as we are growing up as a class.