Nothing makes sense to young Oskar Schell in post 9-11 Manhattan—his father’s death, his mother’s new “friend,” his Grandmother’s mysterious new renter, and the last mystery his father has left for him to solve with the only clue of a key. Using the detective skills that his father taught him, Oskar embarks upon his last “reconnaissance expedition” across the five boroughs of New York—an unconscious attempt to make sense of the loss of his father. Along the way, he accumulates a medley of friends and experiences that heart-wrenchingly and heartwarmingly assist Oskar through his grief as he unconsciously assists them with theirs. As Oskar’s tale unfolds, so do the tales of Oskar’s mute grandfather and his abandoned grandmother, both survivors of a WWII bombing. These three tales and perspectives weave together into one composite experience, sharing the components of grief, loss, and catharsis.

Told from three very unique perspectives, this story is excellent for an insightful class of high school juniors. The book makes deliberate departures from conventional grammar and punctuation. Characterization is largely delineated by distinct writing style and personal, stylized grammatical conventions.
Big Question: What is grief?

Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close is a testament to what it means to be human—to live, to love, but most essentially to grieve. Cast against the shadow of one of America’s most devastating tragedies, the novel offers answers but also further complicates the nature of grief. Within the question “What is grief?” lay extensions for readers to contemplate: where does it come from? How do we cope with it? What’s healthy about it? What does it do to us? How does it change a person, family or community? How does society view or treat those who are grieving?” Oskar’s journey of discovery explores some answers to these questions, uniting people together and lifting them out of their grief.

All of the characters within the novel are grieving. They are grieving for the loss of a father, a mother, a sister; they are grieving for a marriage that will never satisfy; they are grieving for the words they cannot say and the words they cannot hear; they are grieving for answers that will never be found. Though all of their griefs are different, each of them are brought together to grapple for meaning—the “why” of their grief—by the young and intrepid Oskar. For example, Oskar first embarks alone on his expedition to discover the meaning of the key his father left behind. One of the many people he meets along the way is Mr. Black. Though Mr. Black does not have the answer to Oskar’s mystery—which would have somehow given Oskar peace about his father’s passing—Oskar became a witness to Mr. Black’s grief, doing for Mr. Black what he could not have done for himself. It was Oskar who, after learning of Mr. Black’s deafness, thought of “something else. Something beautiful. Something true” (165). Turning on Mr. Black’s hearing aids for the first time in a long time, Oskar witnessed the depths of grief as he watched Mr. Black cry to hear his own voice. Grief, in this instance, is the realization of loss, the regret of moments missed, sounds unheard, and memories that will never be made. But grief is also the thing that unites us as humanity, giving us reason to reach out of ourselves and help others find their own peace; if it had not been for Oskar’s grief, his desperation to solve the mystery of his father’s death, Mr. Black would have continued living in the silent and lonely world he had created.

Grief is extremely loud—though it is often the thing we silence or refuse to
acknowledge--but it is also what brings us incredibly close. Foer's novel offers a variety of experiences and characters to answer the essential question, “What is grief?” making this inquiry valuable for literary study and self-discovery.

Background Information

September 11, 2001

On September 11, 2001, for American planes, hijacked by Al Qaeda terrorists, crashed into two extremely important American buildings—The Pentagon in Washington DC, and the World Trade Towers in Manhattan, New York. The fourth plane landed in the middle of a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania after being reclaimed by passengers.

Hijackers took the planes by force, noted to have employed mace, knives, and other weaponry in order to take control of the planes.

The attacks were devastating to the American nation, and damages to the World Trade Center were particularly extreme. Over 2000 people died in this attack alone, damage being most severe when the towers both collapsed, several hours after being hit. Dust, debris, burning paper, and mass clouds of smoke settled in the air for days as firefighters and police men fought to restore the site to order.

Not only did the attacks leave the nation in a state of terrible grief, it was also the catalyst for America’s War on Terrorism, launched by the Bush Administration. Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close takes place two years after the tragedy. The war is in full swing, but people were still grieving over their lost loved ones.
Dresden

While the book takes place largely in the present, there are also flashes back to WWII, in Dresden, Germany. Dresden was a city of intellectuals, an epicenter for German art, science, classical music, and culture. However, on February 13, 1945, the American air force bombed and annihilated the entire town. The attack was notable because the affected area was largely residential, while the military and financial centers were left unscathed. The attacks were controversially received by many participators in the war.

Thomas Schell and the grandmother both experienced the U.S. attacks on Dresden. While both lost the entirety of their families, these two characters offer an additionally troubling and affective perspective on the far-reaching effects of war and grief. For more background information from Dresden, look to pages 208-216.

The Autism Question

The conversation surrounding this book is both wide and varied especially on the topic of autism; many critics seem to suggest that Oskar is slightly autistic, exhibiting signs such as Mark Haddon's autistic protagonist in The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time, while other vehemently disagree.

There are many different levels of autism, and most medical sites express caution about making a personal diagnosis because of how varied autism can appear between different children. Some characteristics of autism include difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication and repetitive behaviors. Many readers conclude that Oskar is slightly autistic because of his high levels of intelligence combined with his inability to acknowledge social cues. For example, when Oskar meets Abby Black (who is forty-eight years old in comparison to Oskar’s “twelve”) he asks her, “Could we kiss for a little bit?” Abby,
of course replies, “I don’t think that’s a good idea” and despite all of her reasoning, Oskar can’t seem to understand the social logic behind her decision.

Though there is no concrete answer to the autistic debate surrounding this novel, an awareness that the debate exists gives readers more of the tools they need to read the novel and decide for themselves.

**Issues Related to the Study of Literature**

**Themes:**

*The Impossibility of Completely Understanding* – From the first page, it is clear that Oskar is an incredibly smart and voraciously curious little boy. He knows French, considers himself a budding entomologist, and talks circles around every other character in the book. Many of his intelligent exclamations seem to suggest he is incredibly intelligent for a boy his age; however, as he comes to discover some of the darker facts of life like women’s menstrual cycles, the insignificance of life, and the impossibility of knowing what you want to know most, Oskar longs for his father, positive “He would have been able to explain everything” (147). But he is dead, leaving Oskar without answers. Oscar strives to use his knowledge—the facts, the details, the evidence—to make sense of his world, to understand something, but soon learns that some explanations will never be discovered. The more we find, the less we understand.

*The Universality of Heavy Boots* -- One of the key phrases within the novel is “heavy boots” referring to Oskar’s feelings of sorrow or grief. He records that certain kinds of things give him heavy boots: “...domesticated animals, how I have a domesticated animal, nightmares, Microsoft Windows, old people who sit around all day because no one remembers to spend time with them and they’re embarrassed to ask

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people to spend time with them, secrets, dial phones...” (42). Central to the novel are the heavy boots he gets because of the death of his father; however, as Oskar journeys to find answers to lighten those heavy feelings, he finds that all of the people he meets have heavy boots, too--Mr. Black, the renter, Abby Black, Ruth Black, and even his mother. Though meeting these people did not give him the answers he sought for, the journey allowed him to share his heavy boots with them and become a witness to their heavy boots as well.

**Loss and Closure** -- Nearly every character in this novel is dealing with some element of loss: Oskar lost his father; Thomas Schell lost his childhood love, Anna, and with her their unborn child and later his ability to speak; the grandmother lost her husband, her son, her sister and her parents; Mr. Black lost his hearing; and William Black lost the key his father had left for him before he passed. Though not all of the characters achieve closure or understanding, so much of their lives are spent attempting to find some restitution or peace about what they lost. Oskar shares that the purpose of this last expedition--all of his journeys across the five boroughs of New York--“the whole point was to stop missing him” (255). Though Oskar never achieves the closure he sets out to find, he provides closure for William Black, returning the key that would give William the opportunity to say goodbye to his father.

**The Invention of Imagination** -- Not only is Oskar an extremely curious boy, he is also incredibly imaginative; however is imagination serves a specific purpose: he invents things to quell the tides of his grief. In the beginning, he “invented a special drain that would be underneath every pillow in New York and would connect to the reservoir. Whenever people cried themselves to sleep, the tears would all go to the same place, and in the morning the weatherman could report if the water level of the Reservoir of Tears had gone up or down, and you could know if New...
York was in heavy boots” (38). That imagination gives power to Oskar’s narrative, allowing readers to better understand the depth of his grief and the human tendency to avoid sorrow at all costs.

*The Inability of Speech* -- Though Thomas Schell physically represents an inability to say what you want to say, the entire novel itself is restrained in speech. This restraint or inability may result from a fear of the truth, but it also draws attention the things that need to be said versus the things that are actually said. Oskar comes face to face with this inability to speak during the Hamlet play. As Yorick - a floating skull - Oskar doesn’t have many lines; however, he imagines the courage to say the things he could never have really said: “Succotash my cocker spaniel, you fudging crevasse-hole dipshittake!” (145). His imagined outburst emphasizes the silent rage and grief so many in the novel experience; however, the novel doesn’t allow for the words to go unexpressed. Through alternative means, Foer utilizes images, close-ups, hyper-texts, and blank pages allowing the text to speak for itself not just in the words it says but in artistic meaning. Much like the words that come out of the mouths of the characters, the novel shows that there is much more lurking below the surface.

**Setting:**

This tale, told from multiple perspectives, spans time and continent. It predominantly takes place in Post 9-11 Manhattan, as Oskar travels across the five boroughs in search the “Black” possessor of his father’s key. Occasionally it jumps in a non-linear fashion back to the day or weeks before September 11th, back to a time before Thomas Schell dies.

In the grandfather’s chapters, we occasionally jump back to Dresden, where as a teenager, he fell passionately in love with Anna, and where Anna and her family dies. Though he sometimes writes while *in* Dresden, he is often reminiscing on the past from a different time in history.
The grandmother’s narrative seems to be rooted in New York, though she often recalls experiences in Dresden from her Manhattan apartment.

**Point of view/ narrative voice:**

As mentioned, the story focuses on Oskar Schell’s perspective, but jumps to his grandfather’s perspective, and occasionally his grandmothers. Each perspective switch is clearly delineated by chapter. The grammar, subject matter, and voice helps to clearly distinguish which writer speaks when.

**Characterization:**

The characters in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* are largely defined by tone, grammar, expression, and style.

**Oskar**

Oskar narrates very precisely. He holds back no thought, and says things aloud as he thinks them. He is also distinctly evaluative, liking his information and understanding to come extremely quickly. Oskar uses big words, largely in the scientific genre. He also occasionally slips French phrases into his vernacular. He is a quirky narrator, mentioning his fears, detailing every aspect of the things that anger and upset him. Oskar is easily identified by how he punctuates conversation. He converses in big chunk paragraphs, rather than starting a new paragraph each time a new person speaks.

Some phrases and words that Oskar often employs are:

“Raison d’etre”

“…which I know about, but wish I didn’t”

“Heavy Boots”

“Jose!”

“Extremely”

“Incredibly”

“I’m OK.”
Thomas

Oskar’s grandfather expresses himself through the written word. His accounts are not linear, and often start with the title “Letters to my unborn son,” which expresses his deep sense of regret. Since Thomas writes to express himself, he has books of common phrases that he often has to point to, which are interspersed throughout his narrative. Signifiers of Thomas’ character are phrases like, “Do you know what time it is?” and “I’m sorry I don’t speak,” written on an entirely blank page. Often these blank pages say more about Thomas than his words. He is filled with so much profound regret that words simply cannot convey his grief.

Thomas is also characterized by his large, block paragraphs and his tendency to ignore grammatical errors entirely when he is telling an intense part of his narrative. One gets the sense that there is so much that he hasn’t been able to say for years, that when he finally starts speaking, it is impossible to stop him.

Oskar’s Grandmother

Oskar’s Grandmother also narrates her tale in specific chapters entitled “My Feelings.” Her form of speech takes a formally staccato way of speaking. She ignores quotation marks, and loves puns, phrases, and American jargon. She often speaks in short sentences and paragraphs, bashful, and unaccustomed to sharing large details about her life. One gets a sense of her humility and self-consciousness as she honestly tries to tell her story and create her character.

literary terms

motif:

A motif in literature is a dominant idea or theme that consistently repeats, recurring at pivotal times during a story or narrative - the repetition drawing your attention to its significance. There are many different motifs within the novel Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, including the phrase of the title itself! Here is a list of other significant motifs to pay attention to throughout the novel.

• Key
• Doors Knobs

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• “Stuff that Happened to Me”
• War and violence
• Letters
• “Extremely and Incredibly”
• White and “Black”
• Searching for Blackness
• Heavy Boots

**Allusion:**

In literature, an allusion is often a casual or passing reference to something - another piece of literature, popular culture, movies, historical events, etc. Allusions are used to give credibility to a text and also to enter into a conversation with other texts as well. The use of allusions often significantly adds meaning to a piece of literature because readers are forced to see the text not alone but also in combination with other texts. It demands more of the reader but gives them tools for further literary analysis. In this novel, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, there is a significant allusion made to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the play that Oskar’s school is putting on for family and for the community. By looking at the novel in comparison to this great classic, similarities can be drawn between Oskar and Hamlet: both characters lost their father and both are willing to go to great lengths to make sense or uncover the truth about their deaths. Again, the allusion offers opportunity for comparison that gives the story greater meaning and purpose.

**Dialogue:**

The term “dialogue” refers to a conversation between two or more characters; traditionally, in literature, dialogues are set apart from the rest of the text by using quotation marks and making strategic indentations that allow the reader to distinguish changes between who is
speaking. However, in this novel, dialogue does not appear in this way. More often than not, whole conversations are compacted into a single paragraph and are not always marked off by “he said” or “she said” phrases. This tends to speed up the pacing of the novel and also force the reader to actively engage with the text to understand who is saying what. Perhaps the lack of this traditional convention emphasizes WHAT is being said over WHO is saying it, suggesting that not all rules need to be followed to make meaning.

**Foreshadowing:**

Foreshadowing in literature is a calculated hint or suggestion of things to come later in the book. Oskar writes both forward and backward, setting a lot of ideas into play. The book begins on the way to the funeral where they are going to bury an empty box supposedly to give closure to Oskar’s dad’s death. This opening foreshadows the close of the book, where the characters unearth the grave in order to get real closure to the tragedy. Foreshadowing also exists with the relationship between the mysterious “renter,” Oskar’s grandmother and his grandfather. Much of the actions the grandfather and the grandmother relate are shadows of things to come into being during Oskar’s narrative. Oskar tells us of the boroughs of New York, and that helps us understand reconnaissance expeditions. At Abby Black’s house, there are clues to suspect Abby of knowing something more about the key that meets the eye. Perhaps most compellingly are Oskar’s jewelry innovations that link us to the messages that he received on the last day of his father’s life. Little by little, he unravels the contents of the messages and how he translated them to Morse Code in order to make them into jewelry. Furthermore, Foer uses images of “Stuff that Happened” to [Oskar]” that keep occurring, but at different points in the novel, they mean different things. Foer uses atypical conventions to foreshadow, which makes it an exciting discovery for student readers.
Hyperbole:

Hyperbole is dramatic overstatement for a specific effect, something that the narrator frequently utilizes. His use of the adverbs extremely and incredibly are indicative to the effect that he lives his world. However, one gets the sense that Oskar really reads his world in this exaggerated way. Hyperbole is the method of the author to help us understand Oskar’s age, his autism, and his unmanageable despair. Often times the most poignant moments are when Oskar is speaking plainly, where he is not exaggerating his experiences but living them truthfully, that real emotion is truly sensed.

Tone:

Tone is the author or speaker’s attitude on the subject being treated or discussed. Tones can vary from formal, to informal, remorseful, jubilant, exhausted, playful, somber, etc. This book has an array of tones, and the author cleverly switches back and forth between each narrator. Oskar takes on an inquisitive, intellectual, at times naïve, and grieving tone, which are evidenced by his diction, hyperbole, and his actions. The grandfather’s tone is distinctly remorseful. One gets the sense that he is trying to justify his actions of old. The grandmother’s tone is explanatory and cathartic. Each varying tone weaves into a greater tone of the overall message—there is no right way to deal with grief. The tone of the book is ultimately cathartic.

Effective Issues

Every one has lost something, no matter how big or small, thus grief becomes a relevant theme that many of our students can comprehend and identify with. This book explores loss in a real way, so
even if a student didn’t personally lose a close friend or family member in September 11th, most will still be able to link this novel with something personal in their own lives. Oskar is engaging, so while he battles different battles than we may face, most readers still find him an extremely empathetic character. Since he is a younger protagonist, it is likely that students will take to him better than an aloof, adult protagonist. His struggles feel real and important. The permeating voice through the whole novel helps readers to feel a deep connection with him. This book might move some students to tears. Beyond grief and loss, some might identify with the relationships in the book—parent-child struggles, coping with a parent dating, divorce, or war. Many students will have been quite young or not born when September 11th occurred, but they might get a better scope of the magnitude of that single event, both on the personal and the community level.

The author, Jonathan Safran Foer uses rhetorical strategies in abundance to elicit emotions from his audience. He also explores how images create feeling and meaning within the text. It might be beneficial to explore his language in order to achieve catharsis.

**Vocabulary Issues**

*Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is a fairly easy text with which students can negotiate. The novel itself is set in the immediate years following 9/11 which is still linguistically relevant and relatable to many students in school today. In many instances during the novel, the story is told from Oskar’s perspective – a young, inquisitive boy – and the language of his narration reflects his age as well as his curiosity. By writing in such a way, the text is highly engaging and clear, thus lessening the need for a large amount of explicit vocabulary instruction; however, Oskar’s insatiable thirst for knowledge often invites brief, confusing phrases that students may need explained or clarified along the way. For
example, repeatedly throughout the novel, Oskar refers to his “raisons d’être,” a French phrase that translates to mean “reasons for living or existing” (1). This definition can be easily deduced from the context clues surrounding the phrase, but such vocabulary is almost guaranteed to be foreign to students. By drawing their attention to these tier 3 vocabulary words or phrases, as well as by having them make personal connections and meaning with the phrases themselves, teachers can avoid troublesome vocabulary comprehension issues and help teach students valuable reading and inquiry strategies.

The grammar of the novel may be more challenging for students to cognitively grasp. The novel prides itself on the alternative forms presented – pictures, blank pages, single sentences upon a page – but these alternative forms may be unfamiliar and somewhat problematic for students that are unfamiliar with this modern style of writing. It may be useful to have brief pauses during reading periods to bring attention to the way the grammar of the novel – or anti-grammar – is working and its inherent purpose, especially with Thomas Schell’s (the grandfather’s) narration. As an example, the reader’s first acquaintance with the mysterious mute grandfather begins with a single sentence that spans 14 lines, has 27 commas, 3 appositives phrases, and finally ends with a period (16). There are many different thoughts captured within that single sentence, many of which, traditionally and grammatically, would or should have been set apart, and yet they are not. In this way, Foer shows his readers how to create and understand meaning in alternative or unfamiliar formats or forms.

Implications for Students of Diversity

This text is presented from a largely white euro-centric perspective. Though there are several minor characters with racial diversity, the protagonists are white Americans. Good ways to include ethnically diverse students may be to define a collective American identity as a class, and then explore how September 11th, WWII, and war in general,
affects us all. It might be beneficial to explore violence and its impact on a community, or how grief transcends all racial boundaries.

However, many have suggested that the narrator of the book is autistic, that he namely has Asperger’s Syndrome. While it is never mentioned, it may be beneficial to examine Oskar’s autism and help students understand the syndrome a little better. As a class, we might look for ways to empathize and assist those who have the ailment. We might identify the sameness between the protagonist and ourselves. Specifically, there is a scene in which Oskar feels particularly bullied by a boy in his class named Jimmy Snyder. A teacher might use this passage on page 144 to target bullying, or how people with Asperger’s or similar mental disorders may be feeling.

**gender**

Though issues of gender may not be the most prominent of issues throughout the novel, a deeper analysis of the relationships between the grandmother and the grandfather offers new insight and opportunity for investment into the text. Though many of the other characters enjoy the gender equality of the twenty first century, the relationship between this couple offers a new perspective on gender and how gender affects marriage. In multiple scenes, Thomas plays sculptor and the grandmother plays muse; however this dynamic in a marriage seems to suggest that the husband can exert a certain power and control over his wife, bending and flexing her to be what he wants; however, throughout the novel the grandmother can’t seem to fit the mold Thomas has in mind for her. When Thomas leaves her – pregnant and alone – there seems to be a hint of despair and hopelessness in the grandmother, but that despair is short lived. The grandmother proves herself to be self-sustaining and independent, and this independent attitude is maintained even when Thomas apologetically returns. What is most interesting about this particular relationship is the way they view marriage and love: “All
anyone wants from anyone else [is] not love itself but the knowledge that love is there” (130). It isn’t a matter of husband loving wife or wife loving husband but rather a matter of content coexistence with the knowledge that someone else cares. This is a completely different view of marriage from a modern day perspective, allowing students to reflect on their own ideas of love and marriage while analyzing the perspectives of the text.

**Research Issues**

- The Hero’s Journey in the modern novel
- The historical effects of 9/11
- Characteristics of Autism and other mental disorders
- Multi-genre texts as literature

**Project Ideas**

- Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close Journals: As a during reading activity, students could keep a journal to document their thoughts and ideas while reading the novel. They could use pictures, drawings, single sentences, etc - using the novel itself as a model - to explore the use of different mediums to tell a story and convey a thought.
- “Heavy Boots” Boots: As a during reading activity, students could meditate and reflect on some of the things in their lives that give them grief or provoke feelings of sadness. The teacher would have, at the front of the room, a pair of boots; everyday, students could write some of those “Heavy Boot” things on a small sheet of paper and place them in the boots. This allows them to make personal connections to the text and better understand the feeling of Oskar’s “heavy boots.”
- Silent Day: Students are welcomed into the room by a projector greeting that explains the rules of the day: no talking, only writing.
Discussions are in written form on the board, and students can only converse by writing notes in their journals. This activity is a great opportunity to emphasize not only the lack of speech in the novel, but also to have students experience the restrictions of a life like Thomas Schell while learning that what gets said under these restrictions has to be the BEST words.

**Text Sets**

- **September 11**
- **CNN First Five Minutes**
- **Frank Brown**
- **Plot Synopsis**
- **9-11 Songs** -9/11 songs
- **Alan Jackson, "Where Were You"** - Alan Jackson, “Where were you”
- **Tell Your Story** - A “Tell Your Story” website
- **Can You See Me Daddy? September 11th, 10 years later**

Book: A Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night
KWHL Chart for Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close
(A Before Reading Strategy for Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close
First Mariners Books Edition 2006)

Context: This is a great before-reading strategy to help scaffold your students toward a complex understanding of September 11th. It may be beneficial to pair this activity with discussion groups and text-set circles. Ideally, students will not yet have picked up the books when they come to this activity.

Statement of Purpose: This activity is especially helpful, since many of our students were very young, or not yet alive when September 11th occurred. It is helpful for literacy because it gives students some ideas to look out for while reading the text. If they already understand some of the historical impact of this tragic, they will be able to make connections between it and their personal lives.

Directions:

Step One: Explain to students that you will be reading a novel that revolves around September 11th, and that many scenarios will only make sense if the reader has an understanding of the events and the aftermath of that day. Also, since they will be exploring grief, it is important that they understand the scope of the event, and how much turmoil it caused. Distribute the KWHL charts to every class member.

Step Two: As a class, brainstorm what the students know about September 11th already. Have them record their observations in the first column. It may be helpful for you to have a large chart displayed on the wall where students can conveniently view this information. It is likely, that since this is fairly recent, students will already have a decent grasp of the facts. Invite the students to explore the implications of the event. Instead of just asking what happened, probe a little. Figure out who it happened to, why it happened, who did it, and what was the result?

*If you are linking it with specific text sets, you may choose to play/read/examine these at this step. Ask the students what they know about September 11th after engaging with these text sets.

Step Three: Give students a minute to brainstorm ideas for the second column—what they want to learn. Have students pair-share their quandaries with their neighbor. Have their neighbor ask probing questions so that students think deeply about what they would like to learn.

Step Four: Discuss as a class ways that they might go about learning the things that they are hoping to learn. Have them write this down in their third column. You may guide them to specific sources—many of the news reports are very helpful. Remind students that it was a
very violent day, so some of the videos they could find might be mature content with disturbing images. They are not required to watch those videos.

**Step Five:** Have students share what they would like to learn with the class, and allow others in the class to answer these questions if they know any of them. Make sure to establish an atmosphere of trust within the classroom.

**Step Six:** Invite students to finish the worksheet for homework, the column marked “what we have learned.” Discuss any questions students might have, and help them get a feel for what it was like to be alive and old enough to remember this day in history.

**Follow Up Activity:** An excellent follow up activity is listed as a before reading strategy with text sets on Novelinks.

**Assessment:** Informally, this assignment is extremely helpful in assessing what students already know about September 11th, and what ground you need to cover in later lessons. It may also be helpful as you assess student’s sensitivity level. Ultimately, one aim of the unit is to build more sensitivity to those who suffer, so you can gauge what ground you will need to cover there as well.

*You may also choose to give participation points or a homework grade for completing the chart.
### KWHL Chart September 11th

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do I already know about September 11th?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do I want to learn about September 11th?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Can I Find This Out?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What have I learned?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Linked Text Sets

Instructional Routine Guide
(A Pre-Reading Strategy for Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close
First Mariners Books Edition 2006)

Context: This instructional routine is a great Pre-Reading Strategy to introduce ideas or themes of the novel with which the students may be unfamiliar at first. Utilized before students begin reading the novel, this strategy gives them multiple encounters with the topic of 9/11; thus, when they begin reading they have an increase of texts and ideas to relate the reading to in meaningful ways. In addition, students engage in informal journal writes regularly at the beginning of class, so step 2 refers to classroom journals students already use.

Statement of Purpose: From this classroom and text collaboration, students should strengthen their abilities to analyze texts in different forms (videos, poems, pictures, songs, newspaper articles, etc). From the multiple texts available, students will focus on several of the informational text reading standards from the common core: specifically, RI.11-12.7, evaluating and integrating “multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.” Students should also acquire a greater ability to make personal, text and world connections. from this discussion and from the included assignment. The design of this activity will also allow students to collaborate with their peers for additional ideas regarding each individual text and the relationship between the set of texts in general. As they explore the different texts regarding the events and responses to 9/11, they ought to gain a greater understanding of the effects of that event on them personally, on other texts and on the world.

Materials Needed:
- 1 School laptop if available (If unavailable, students could use a teacher computer or simply have a computer image projected onto a screen.)
- Designated Text Sets (these are online links, but it may be best for students if these texts were printed for their discussions):
  - CNN News Coverage (video can be displayed on laptop or computer)
  - “Where Were You When the World Stopped Turning?” by Alan Jackson
  - Biographies of the victims on Flight 93 during the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.
  - 9/11 artwork and poem
  - September 11, 2011 timeline
  - Newspaper Article detailing the specifics of the 9/11 attacks
- Desks (arranged to allow for group work, possibly 5 different groups)
- Student Worksheets (text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections)
Directions:

Step 1 (Classroom Set Up): Set up the classroom to arrange for 5-6 stations for each of the different texts within the given text set. It would be best to make these stations as physically separate as possible to discourage distractions between different groups. Assign each text to a station and develop a system of transition (i.e. color code each station according to “rainbow” organization (ROYGBIV) so that students who start at the red station know they move to the orange station and then to the yellow station, etc.). Decide how many minutes students should spend at each station (according to class period time ranges). If necessary, assign students to specific groups to begin with and project those assignments on a screen so they are visible when students first enter the classroom.

Step 2: Begin by having students complete a brief, personal journal write in answer to the prompt: “Where were you on September 11, 2001? Where was your family? Describe the specifics of that day as closely as you can remember.” Choose a few students to share their journal entries with the class.

Step 3: Show the clip of CNN Coverage on 9/11. Model a process of analysis, answering the question, “What are some effects of the 9/11 attacks on me? On other texts? On the world?” Handout student worksheets that prompt the same questions and explain the activity. Students will be examining some of the effects of the 9/11 attacks through a variety of different text sources. They will have ________ minutes at each station. During that time, they will read the texts as a group, and fill out their worksheets accordingly. The goal of this activity is to enrich their understanding of the 9/11 attacks and discover the effects of that day in terms of self/text/world connections.

Step 4: Use a timer to keep students on track. Observe the groups as a whole and individually. Allow for them to talk freely about their experiences and share thoughts that the different texts may provoke. Encourage them to make connections between the different texts as they move around the classroom. Allow students free reign over this activity, permitting the texts and student collaboration to do the instruction. If groups are off-task or struggling with the assignment, consider providing more explanation or monitoring more closely.

Step 5: Once students have completed the activity, bring them together and have them share some of the lessons of their experience in a brief class discussion. Explain that students will be starting a new novel, Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, that deals with the attacks of 9/11 and the effects thereof in a very personal and interesting way. Students are required to turn in their worksheets at the end of class.

Assessment: This text set activity invites students to make personal discoveries from their analysis individually and in group collaboration. Evidence of their learning can be gained from class observation (an informal assessment) as well as their worksheets (attached) which will be collected at the end of class.
9/11: Making Connections

During this “Text Set” activity, you will have the opportunity to explore the 9/11 experience through a variety of different mediums. You are responsible for being an active participant in your group discussions for each of the texts you examine. During your discussion, make notes on this worksheet of your thoughts or your peers’ comments in answer to the following questions. This will be turned in at the end of class. :D

How did/do the attacks of 9/11 affect….

…me?

…other texts? (Think of all the connections you can make between the different texts used in this activity!)

…..the world?
Silent Board Discussion
Instructional Routine Guide

(A Free Choice, Pre-Reading Strategy for Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close
First Mariners Books Edition 2006)

Context: This instructional routine is a great Pre-Reading Strategy to prepare students to experience the novel by limiting them to written speech, much like Thomas Schell, the grandfather in the novel. Following previous group discussions about the 9/11 attacks, this activity extends student thoughts about the attacks themselves to personal application. Utilized immediately before students begin reading the novel, this activity allows for students to encounter some of the novel's themes so that they are better prepared to valuably engage the text. Again, students engage in informal journal writes regularly at the beginning of class, so the attached directions refer to classroom journals students already use.

Statement of Purpose: From this class discussion, students are introduced to the some of the themes of the novel and asked to enter into a classroom discussion about the identified themes. This particular activity targets some essential reading literature standards, specifically RL.11-12.2: Determine two or more themes or 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 account. By grappling with the themes in this way, students are able to evaluate their own opinions and perspectives on the topic as well—a valuable exercise in preparation of reading the novel.

Materials Needed:
- White Board/Chalk Board
- Dry Erase Markers/Chalk
- Computer + Projector/Overhead Projector
- Class Roll or list of students
- Individual student copies of the novel

Directions:

Step 1 (Classroom set up): On the door into the classroom, hang a page of simple instructions that state, “[You] don’t speak, I’m sorry” (from page 262 of the novel). Using an overhead or computer projection, project the classroom directions for this activity (attached) so that students see it as soon as they walk in the door. As a preemptive precaution, print out phrases and statements that may be necessary to maintaining order in the class (i.e. “Please,
no talking.” or “Do you have a question?”) and have other blank pages handy to write any other statements that may be necessary.

**Step 2:** Having been warned previously that this class period was going to be a little different, students will enter the classroom silently and sit down. On a projector screen in the front of the classroom, students read the class directions for this activity (directions are attached that can be used as an overhead slide). As the students complete the first reading, flip to the next projector image to continue instructions.

**Step 3:** Begin the silent white board discussion by placing a question, quote or scenario on the board. Below are some possible suggestions:

- What is the value of speech?
- What is grief?
- “The more I found, the less I understood” (p. 10). Is this true?
- What is “invention”?
- What does it really mean to “know” something? What defines knowledge?

**Step 4:** According to the directions displayed earlier, students form a line of three and begin writing their responses to the questions on the board. Students are not limited to responding to the question but can also respond to other students’ responses.

**Step 5:** As the discussion continues, identify particularly provocative responses. Ideally, these compelling responses can serve as a new discussion prompt to further the discussion in a new direction. If some discussions seem less energetic, choose another prompt or revise the first question. Hopefully, students are in control of the discussion, but some teacher guidance may be necessary.

**Step 6:** Continue this process with several different prompts, giving the students an opportunity to explore several themes of the novel. Pay attention to the students writing and mark their participation appropriately.

**Step 7:** After students have thoroughly exhausted planned discussion topics, instruct the students (in writing!) to take out their books and turn to the first page. Standing at the front of the classroom, begin reading the novel—OUTLOUD! This dramatic difference in sound will be “extremely loud and incredibly close” for the students. Read as much as the rest of the class period will allow, though getting to the last paragraph on page 3 would be useful to make a valuable connection to previous discussions about 9/11. Assign homework: chapters 1-2 of the novel (p. 1-34).

**Assessment:** Because of the nature of this activity, the activity itself is an assessment. By marking down student participation, the teacher can observe student engagement and informally assess individual students.
Silent Board Discussion Directions:

“[You] don’t speak, I’m sorry” (262).

Welcome to class, silent students!

Like I said last class, we’re going to be doing something a little different. Before we begin, here are some class rules for today:

1. Absolutely NO talking. If there’s something you need to say, write it on a piece of paper. It might be useful to get out your journals now.
2. R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Though you can speak to the people around you by writing notes, I will not tolerate any evidence of disrespect. Got it?!
3. Have fun. This activity is designed to help you experience the themes and story of the novel. This may not end up being your favorite class period, but please be willing to try it out. Embrace the uncomfortable!

(Next page for directions)
Today we will be doing what I like to call the Silent Board Discussion.

Yes, you are required to participate. Here’s how it’s going to work:

- I am going to write a prompt on the board. These prompts deal with some of the themes you will notice in our reading of the novel, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, so pay attention!

- After I finish writing the prompt, you will respond by coming up to the board and writing your response out. No more than 3 students will be allowed at the board at once. If you have something to say and there are already 3 students writing, be patient and wait until one of them are finished.

- You are not just limited to respond to the prompt. If you feel so inclined, respond to one of your peer’s responses. Again, be respectful. The goal is not to shoot down the opinions of other students. The goal is to pull together our resources and have a richly diverse discussion.

- You are required to participate. Though I will not limit the amount of responses you can make, you DO have to make at least 2 comments on the board. I will be watching for those 2 comments and noting who does and who does not participate.

- I reserve the right, at any time, to change the prompt and start a new discussion or use one of your responses as a new prompt. This means I will be erasing the board periodically. Please don’t take it personally. By erasing the board, I am not saying that your responses were not good enough; I am simply making room for additionally rich topics to be discussed.

- Any questions? (Remember! Write them down!)

Let’s BEGIN!
Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close Journals
(A During-Reading Strategy for Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close
First Mariners Books Edition 2006)

Context: There is an extremely overpowering pattern of writing in this novel—a seemingly
daily occurrence for Oksar, Thomas, and even the grandmother: Oskar writes letters,
Thomas writes everything, and the grandmother writes her life story. This during-reading
strategy is an opportunity for students to write frequently, also. Intended to be introduced at
the beginning of this novel unit and continued throughout the reading schedule, these
informal journal writes allows students to keep track of their thoughts and analysis while
reading the novel as well as make personal connections throughout the text. In addition,
students engage in informal journal writes regularly at the beginning of class, so this strategy
is a themed extension of those journals that are already in use.

Statement of Purpose: This routine is designed to inspire quality analysis of the novel while
giving students an opportunity to engage in writing tasks on a daily basis. These informal
writes target most all of the 11-12 writing standards, demanding students to analyze, inform,
describe, reflect, and so on and so forth. This routine will also prepare students for the final
writing assignment—a “heavy boots” narrative—and give them valuable experience to develop
stronger writing skills.

Materials Needed:
• ELIC Journals
• Personal copies of the novel
• List of ideas for journal prompts

Directions:

Step 1: On the day that students will begin their reading of the novel, have them take out
their class journals, open to the next blank page and write “Extremely Loud and Incredibly
Close Journal.” Explain that students will participate in informal journal writes on an almost
daily basis to analyze readings in the novel, explore themes, and make personal connections.
Establish your qualities of judgment for their informal writing; for example, “Because these
journal entries will be informal writes that are connected to our reading of the novel, correct
spelling and punctuation are not the most important quality. However, I should still be able to
read your writing without overexerting my concentration. You must have some writing—a
good journal entry should be at least half a page in your notebook—and that writing must be in
connection to the journal prompt. I will be reading your entries; however, if you feel something
is too personal for me to read, simply fold in the page onto itself and I will skip over it. However,
you are only allowed to do this once over the course of this novel unit, so don’t abuse this
opportunity.”
Step 2: As a first prompt, which should be placed on an overhead, computer projector or written on the board, direct students to respond to this: "What do you think the difference is between something that is 'Extremely Loud' and something that is 'Incredibly Close'? Make a prediction about what you think it will mean in the novel." Students should be given at least ten minutes for this first informal write. Select specific days for these informal writes over the course of the unit; use the list of ideas for journal prompts (attached) which correspond certain kinds of prompts or certain ideas with the events or themes of the chapters students read.

Step 3: Collect journals periodically. Choose whether or not you would like this collection to be something the students know about or if you’d like it to be more up in the air. Announcing the dates of journal collection helps students prepare, but some students may put off their writing until the last minute, making these informal write less effective as a whole. Not announcing journal collection ensures that students are accountable for the work they do in class, though more students may be unprepared on that day. Remind students of the qualifications of a good journal write (see step 1 for ideas).

Step 4: Have students use their informal writing from the journals as catalysts for their final writing assignment—the personal narrative. During the reading, provide prompts such as, “What gives you ‘heavy boots’?” to provoke student thought about the final assignment. Encourage students to return to their journals for ideas as they think about the final writing assignment.

Assessment: By collecting the journals periodically, teachers can assess student participation and product simultaneously. Feedback may be given one-on-one when the situation necessitates it.
Teacher List of Ideas for ELIC Prompts

Pre-reading Prompts:
- What is the difference between something that is “extremely loud” and something that is “incredibly close?” Make a prediction about what you think those terms will mean in the novel.
- Imagine you were a small child in New York City on September 11, 2001. Describe your thoughts and feelings—as a child—after learning about the planes crashing into the twin towers.
- “I want to know everything” (2). What are the things you know? Is there anything you know that you wish you didn’t know? Why?

During-reading Prompts:
- Chapters 1-2: What are some of your raisons d’etre? (pg. 1)
- Chapters 1-2: You’re the mysterious mute man. You only have three pages of paper and you can only write one sentence on a page? What are the three sentences you would write? Why those choices?
- Chapters 3-5: Turn to pages 60-61. What would you put there to fill in the blank?
- Chapters 3-5: Think of a problem—a big one. One without an easy solution. Like the need for bigger pockets (pg. 73-74). Invent an “Oskar Invention” to fix the problem. Don’t forget the details!
- Chapters 3-5: What gives you “heavy boots?” (pg. 42-43)
- Chapters 6-10: Turn to pages 121-123. What do those pages mean to you?
- Chapters 6-10: “I’ll never be your father, and you’ll always be my child” (135). Is this possible? What does Thomas mean?
- Chapters 6-10: Turn to pages 157-159. Pretend you are Mr. Black. Write a card for every person you know (or as many people as you can think of). Define them with one word.
- Chapters 6-10: On page 165, we encounter the title of the book for the first time. Why do you think this was the most appropriate situation to introduce the title?
- Chapters 11-end: “What’s your story?” I asked. ‘What’s my story?’ ‘Yeah, what’s your story?’ He wrote, ‘I don’t know what my story is’” (238). What’s your story? Write it.
- Chapters 11-end: Stephen Hawking finally wrote back and quoted Einstein: “Our situation is the following. We are standing in front of a closed box which we cannot open?” What does this mean? How do you know?
- Chapters 11-end: Pages 327-end. Why?
- Chapters 11-end: Why does the (backwards) story of the sixth borough conclude the novel?

After-reading Prompts:
- Flip back through the novel and note the different images included. Why did Foer include these images for the reader?
- This book is not like the others. Make a list of ways this novel differentiates itself from other books you’ve read. Choose one of the ways you listed and explain why that choice was important for this novel.
- What is grief? How do we cope with it?

For reference:
- Chapters 1-2: pages 1-34.
- Chapters 3-5: pages 35-107
- Chapters 6-10: 108-223
- Chapters 11-end: 224-326

Think Aloud for Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close

Brown, Penrod, BYU 2011
Think Aloud

(A During Reading Strategy for Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close
First Mariners Books Edition 2006)

Context: This instructional routine is best used as a “during” reading strategy. It is excellent foregrounding for students who are preparing to write a final narrative piece, which is why we focus on a later passage in the text. Teachers may adapt this assignment as they see fit, however. Some may find it better to help students toward the beginning of the book so that students can have an idea of how to best approach Foer’s prose.

*Since we are preparing students to write a final narrative paper, we introduce the think-aloud a little later in the book. We specifically use pages 214-216.

Statement of Purpose: Think-alouds often help students grapple with difficult passages in the text, and they often help students learn how to approach a text. While the segment is not difficult to understand, students may not fully appreciate the stylistic choices Foer employs. This activity will help them gain a better understanding of grammar and writing conventions, and may give them ideas as they approach a final essay.

Materials Needed:
Overhead of the text selection
Marking device for overhead selection
Individual handouts with text selection for each student

Directions:

Step One: Scan, project, or copy a selection of the text (p.214-216) onto the board in front of the class and distribute the think-aloud handout.

Step Two: Ask a student to foreground us in the novel.
  • What is happening during the time of this selection?
  • Who is speaking?
  • What are they speaking about?
  • Who are they speaking to?

Step Three: Begin to examine the text with an analytical eye. Allow yourself to fumble through the text. Take moments to pause and think. Demonstrate this process for several sentences. Mark the edges along the sides of the overhead and invite the students to take notes.

  *You might find it helpful to at first notice the red markings on the page. Ask questions like:
• Who is circling this?
• Why?
• Are these errors?
  *The teacher should note that many of the circled words and punctuation markings are incorrect. Ask the students why Foer would include such a thing.
  • Why does the speaker write this way?
  • What does it say about the speaker of this segment?
  *Guide students to see that some of the circled words are “wrong” ideas, though they are grammatically correct.
    • Why would the editor circle those?
    • Who does that make you think the editor is?

Step Four: Once the students have grappled with some of the formalistic elements of the text, ask them to explore this segment for content. Discover themes with them.
  • What themes are present?
  • How does the author express these themes

Step Five: Open the floor up to casual discussion of the text.
  • How can students capture a technique to help them convey a message in their own writing?
  • Is this good writing?
  • Is Foer breaking all the rules? Is this a good thing or a bad thing?

Step Six: Have students write a quick exit card about what kinds of strategies they would like to use in their own writing in the future.

Assessment: Students will write an exit card explaining what they have learned and how they will apply it in their own personal writing and reading of the text.
Finders Keepers
Instructional Routine Guide
(A Vocabulary Strategy for Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close
First Mariners Books Edition 2006)

Context: Since Oskar is such a curious boy, embarking on adventurous expeditions to find the meaning behind the key, this “Finders Keepers” vocabulary strategy allows students to embark on a vocabulary expedition of their own. Because Oskar is such a knowledgeable little boy, he often uses words like “raisons d’etre” and “entomology”—both tier 3 words that students will not understand with one or two encounters. This strategy puts them on the hunt for these words and makes vocabulary instruction self-directed and exciting. This strategy is ideally designed and most appropriate when introduced at the beginning of the novel and completed continuously throughout the students’ reading.

Statement of Purpose: This activity will give students an opportunity to discover words in an engaging and accountable way. It also takes into account the differing levels of students’ vocabulary; rather than developing a universal vocabulary list for all students, the words they choose as they read will be much more advantageous to their learning. This strategy targets many of the Language standards, specifically L.11-12.4,5,6: (standard 6) acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

Materials Needed:
• Finders Keepers Worksheets
• Personal copies of the novel

Directions:

Step 1: On the day that students will begin their reading of the novel, send them home with their first Finders Keepers Worksheet and directions for the assignment (both are attached). Encourage them to come to the next class with questions if they have any.

Step 2: At the beginning of class the next day, have some students volunteer unfamiliar “Finders” words that they came across in their first reading of the novel. Write them on the board. Some possible words may include “raisons d’etre,” “entomology,” “mausoleum,” “oeuf,” or “borough.” With the class, choose one of the words and follow the “Finders
“Finders Keepers” instructions for that word. In this way, students can voice their questions, clarify any misconceptions, and volunteer some of the definitions and examples that they created when completing the assignment on their own.

**Step 3:** With the class, decide how often these “Finders Keepers” assignments should be turned in. One for every reading assignment seems reasonable, but it may become overwhelming for the students as other assignments come up. One “Finders” sheet a week may be more doable for a larger class. Have students schedule “Finders Keepers” due dates in their planners.

**Step 4:** Place a “Finders Keepers” calendar in a high-traffic area of the classroom so that students see it frequently and are reminded of upcoming due dates and quiz dates. On the classroom door or at the front of the classroom are useful spots. Also, provide students with a personal copy of this calendar so they can be held accountable for their learning.

**Step 5:** Continue modeling examples of “Finders Keepers” word throughout the unit. Observe student weakness and strengths in the assignments they turn in and address those specifically during future modeling. For example, if students are struggling to really grasp how to enrich a sentence with context that really demonstrates their knowledge of the word, emphasis the sentence creation in your modeling. Invite the students to help you improve your sentences to make them more context rich. (i.e. “I used a ‘bidet’ for the first time in a restroom today” (word taken from pg. 170). Students could help you improve this sentence by adding knowledge of gender—a bidet is more typically found in a male restroom—and adding knowledge of purpose—to wash oneself after using the restroom. This may not be the greatest example, but it explains how to apply the gradual release of responsibility model to this activity of vocabulary instruction).

**Step 6:** Quiz students on their knowledge of the words they have found. The original paper giving students instructions about the “Finders Keepers” routine outlines the details of the quizzes.

**Assessment:** Indicated on the directions paper that students receive at the beginning of the novel unit is a notice that students will be quizzed on their knowledge of their “Finders” words. Students aren’t responsible for memorizing all of the words, but they will need to write down at least 2 of their words from a specific “Finders” assignment and write a creative narrative focusing on that word. The narrative must demonstrate their experience and knowledge of the word through context and description.
Oskar Schell is an extremely precocious and intelligent little boy. His French phrases, scientific terminology and trade-specific words can be overwhelming to a reader not willing to join him in his adventure. Yes, class! This is your first Vocabulary Expedition! During your reading, it is your mission to find and write down foreign words. They may be literally foreign or simply unknown to you. It is your responsibility to make a guess as to what these words mean, look them up in some kind of dictionary source, and write a context-rich sentence that proves to me that you OWN that word and you’re never going to lose it. Additionally, for each “Finders Keepers” assignment, you get to choose 1 of your 5 words and go on a hunt! Find some outside source or text (maybe a song, poem, news article, encyclopedia entry, or even a Facebook status update) that uses that 1 word and attach it to your assignment.

Confused yet? Here’s an example. There are four parts (excluding the 1 outside source for one of your words, of course! For that word, there’s five parts!):

Finders Keepers:

1. **Finders word underlined in context:** “…making her happy is one of my **raisons d’etre**” (7).
2. **My guess at meaning:** Raisons d’etre are things that make you happy.
3. **Dictionary Definition:** Reason or justification for being or existence.
4. **My richly contextual sentence:** An artist’s raison d’etre is art; a ballerina’s raison d’etre is dance; a teacher’s raisons d’etre are her students; but my raison d’etre, the thing that makes my life worth living, is food—without which I would die.

You’ll see that as you consciously look to find new, cool words as you read, you will understand the text better, increase the size and grandeur of your vocabulary, and become even more adept at understanding words in their original context!

**Warning, brave, expedition-bound students!** You will be responsible for KEEPING the valuable knowledge you gain after finding your new words. You will turn in your finders assignments to me; we will decide together in class how often these assignments should be completed, and it must be more than once. You will also be quizzed on your Finders Keepers words after handing in each assignment. Don’t worry, though. For the quiz, all you will need to do is pick 2 of the 5 words you found in your search and write an engagingly detailed and context-rich narrative about each. This will help you gear
Now, go out and search!

**Finders Keepers**

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<td>My guess at meaning:</td>
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<td>Dictionary definition:</td>
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Brown, Penrod, BYU 2011
Remember: choose 1 of these words and find another text that uses it! Attach it to this assignment!
Fishbowl Discussion
Instructional Routine Guide

(A Discussion Strategy for *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*
First Mariners Books Edition 2006)

Context: This instructional routine should be considered a “during reading strategy,” and should be utilized when students are more than halfway through the book. If students are using the First Mariners 2006 edition, they will need to read through page 173 (or through the Chapter entitled “Heavy Boots/ Heavier Boots”).

Statement of Purpose: Students should acquire a variety of skills from this discussion. The discussion is multi-faceted, allowing students to follow through with several key speaking and listening standards, but also develop writing skills and rapid critical thinking skills. As they explore the nature of grief throughout the book, they ought to understand a bigger picture of humanity. They ought to see the perspectives that others take on this subject, and apply it to a deeper understanding of what it is to cope and how others go about it.

Materials Needed:
- School laptops if available (If unavailable, each student should use a sheet of paper that they will pass to their peers every three minutes)
- Marker to designate who is the Moderator
- Desks
- Student copies of the books

Directions:
Step 1 (Homework from night before): As a homework assignment, have students highlight sections of the book that show a character grieving, coping (or not coping), or suffering. Have the students annotate these sections, and make sure each student brings their book the day of the fishbowl discussion. Furthermore, each student should prepare a list of three pivotal thought questions for their peers in case they are “The Moderator.” Also ask each student to sign up for Liveblog.com (or find another private, suitable chat room).

Step 2 (Classroom Set Up): Set up the classroom with five chairs in the middle, set up in a circle. Set the surrounding chairs up in a larger circle around it. Check out laptops from the library for the students on the outer circle. Have the laptops charged and ready to go before the students arrive.
Step 3: Have four students sit in the inner circle (if your class struggles with discussion, ask students who are likely to volunteer sit in the moderator’s seat). Explain that you will simply be observing and monitoring participation, and that the students will be responsible for steering the conversation in the inner circle. Each student must participate at least twice before they can leave the inner circle. The moderator is primarily in charge of asking questions, but may also participate. They may feel compelled to play the devil’s advocate.

Step 4: Students on the outer circle will respond on the live blog to the discussion happening in the inner circle. They may start their own conversations as a result, and this is encouraged, as long as they also demonstrate evidence that they are also listening to the inner circle as well.

Step 5: The empty seat in the inner circle is for members of the outer circle to become part of the inner circle. Whenever they opt in, another member of the inner circle (who has already participated twice) must voluntarily leave. If the moderator leaves, the person on their right becomes the moderator (it may be helpful to have a little sign for the desk that indicates who the moderator is).

Step 6: Allow the students free reign of the conversation, with as little involvement from the teacher as possible. Ideally they should have at least fifty minutes of uninterrupted discussion. If discussion goes well, and students seem to want to discuss further, you may want to allow for another day of fishbowl.

Assessment: Fishbowl allows students to speak diplomatically with one another, explore themes, and respond to one another verbally and in writing. As such, all aspects should be assessed with a formative assessment. A rubric is attached.
# Individual Grading Rubric Fishbowl Discussion

Student Name: _____________________________

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<th>Subject</th>
<th>Positive Points</th>
<th>Negative Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participation</strong></td>
<td>Student contributes meaningful and at least twice, both in the verbal and the</td>
<td>Student does not meet the requirement for verbal and/or written discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>written discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td>-1 - 2 - 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diplomacy</strong></td>
<td>Student responds respectfully to other’s opinion.</td>
<td>Student is critical, sarcastic, unkind, or judgmental of others comments or opinions. Student distracts others from discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td>-1 - 2 - 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Thinking</strong></td>
<td>Student demonstrates critical thinking ability, develops unique stances and</td>
<td>Student piggybacks off the comments of others, does not engage with the reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>responses, cites instances from the text</td>
<td>material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td>-1 - 2 - 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Written Response</strong></td>
<td>Student responds thoughtfully to conversation of the inner circle. Grammar and</td>
<td>Student responds flippantly or lazily simply to obtain the quota. Grammar and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>punctuation reflects care and thought.</td>
<td>punctuation is non-existent or very poor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td>-1 - 2 - 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibility</strong></td>
<td>Student completed the homework and has read/engaged with the text. Student has</td>
<td>Student has not completed/skimmed the material being discussed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>prepared thought questions for the class.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td>-1 - 2 - 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Points:**

____/15 possible

Additional Comments:

Brown, Penrod, BYU 2011
**Student Instructions for Fishbowl Discussion**

Tomorrow, each and every one of you will be responsible for teaching class. We will be having a fishbowl discussion, where you will respond verbally and in writing to the book *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*.

**To prepare, you must:**

1. Critically read through page 173, highlighting or sticky noting poignant passages that deal specifically with our unit question: What is grief?
2. Write down at least three thought questions that you want to explore from the novel.
3. Sign up for a Liveblog account at liveblog.com
4. Review the rubric so you know what you will be held accountable for in tomorrow’s discussion

**Instructions for the Day of the Discussion**

**Come quickly to class and find a place to sit**

Tomorrow, the classroom will have five desks in the middle for students to verbally discuss the book. One student will be randomly selected to be the moderator, in charge of directing the discussion.

Students that are in the outer circle will respond on the live chat to the inner circle. This discussion will be monitored.

Each student will be required to participate at least twice. Then, students on the outer circle can sit in the one empty chair in the inner circle.

One student must voluntarily vacate their spot in the inner circle when a new person comes into the circle.

I will not be participating in discussion. You must generate discussion amongst yourselves.

If you have questions, feel free to email me tonight.
Heavy Boots: Group Discussion

Context: From the beginning of the novel, Oskar uses the phrase “Heavy boots” to describe the physical imagery of his grief and his sadness. This routine asks students to think about this phrase and make personal connections by writing down the things that give them “heavy boots.” This strategy would ideally start at the beginning of the novel unit and continue through the reading; however, the discussion would not take place until after a completed reading of the novel. It is a great segway into the final writing assignment: the personal, “heavy boots” narrative. It is also an incredibly powerful bonding activity for the class. Be prepared for a very high level of emotion.

Statement of Purpose: This routine is designed to get students thinking about the novel in a powerful and personal way. It demands that students follow the theme of “heavy boots” throughout its development in the novel (a specific core standard: RL.11-12.2) while forcing them to look through the lens of their own understanding of grief and sadness. Again, this strategy prepares students for the final writing assignment of the unit.

Materials Needed:
• A pair of Boots
• “Heavy Boots” strips of paper
• Personal copies of the novel
• ELIC Journals
• Notecards

Directions:

Step 1 (Routine Introduction): After students read chapters 3-5, specifically pages 42-43, place the boots at the front of the classroom and hand out the “Heavy Boots” assignment (attached). Read the explanation of the assignment at the top of the page and invite students to begin by writing 1 thing that gives them “heavy boots” and putting it in the class boots.

Step 2: Throughout the reading of the novel, remind and invite students to continue to fill the boots. Model when necessary. This personal sharing of trials and adversities should encourage students to do the same and recognize some of the “heavier” parts of their lives.

Step 3 (Classroom Set Up): After the students have finished their novels, choose a day to set aside for the “Heavy Boots” discussion. On that day, push all of the desks/chairs/tables to the
sides of the classroom to form a large circle that the students will sit in upon entering the classroom.

**Step 4:** Explain to the class that this is the “heavy boots” day. It is important to note with students that this may be a more emotional class period; therefore, it is even more important to establish a law of behavior (i.e. There will be NO teasing. There will be NO jokes at the expense of someone else and what they have shared. There will be no sarcastic or derogatory comments. This classroom is a free and safe space always, but especially today).

**Step 5:** Read pages 94-96 (starting with the second paragraph on page 94). Discuss the importance of sharing joy and sadness, celebration and grief with other people by drawing attention to the special relationships between elephants and the relationship created by Oskar and Abby Black.

**Step 6:** Before beginning to share some of the “heavy boots,” encourage students to take out their ELIC journals and write some of the thoughts they have while the heavy boots are passed around the classroom. Then, take the boots and pull out a single slip of paper, reading the writing out loud. Pass the boots to the next person in the circle and have them do the same. Continue until the boots have been emptied.

**Step 7:** Have the students briefly write a reflection in their journals about what they heard. Afterwards, encourage class members to share things that surprised them, things that they learned, things that they felt, things that they thought, things they could relate to, etc. Allow the students to share freely; provide prompting only when necessary.

**Step 8:** Share this quote from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: “There is no grief like the grief that does not speak.” It is important here to thank the students for their participation and for their respect. Pass out individual notecards and instruct students to write 1 lesson they learned from the novel or from this activity. Collect these notecards as “exit cards” as the students leave.

**Assessment:** The exit cards act as an assessment of the students’ engagement with the activity and with the novel. It highlights any personal connections made and personal analysis of the novel’s themes in a casual but effective way.
Heavy Boots

For the majority of the novel, Oskar has “heavy boots”; he is weighed down with many different kinds of sorrows and comes into contact with many other individuals who share a similar heaviness. As he continues to share himself with others, he lightens many of their boots simply by being a witness to their sorrows and their tragedies.

What gives YOU “heavy boots?” What are some things—big or small—that give you grief or bring you sorrow? Continue to think about these questions over the course of our reading. As these “heavy boots” come to you, write them down on one of the slips below, tear/cut it off, and place the slip of paper in the boots at the front of the classroom. These “heavy boots” are anonymous, so there is no need to put your name on them. After we finish our reading, we will have the opportunity to share these “heavy boots” with the class. By so doing, I hope that we can, like Oscar, lighten each other’s loads and develop a new understanding of what it means to cope with grief.

____________________________________
My Heavy Boots:

____________________________________
My Heavy Boots:

____________________________________
My Heavy Boots:

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My Heavy Boots:

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My Heavy Boots:

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My Heavy Boots

____________________________________
My Heavy Boots

Brown, Penrod, BYU 2011
Characterization Activity: Getting Ready for the Narrative Essay
(An After Reading Strategy for Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close
First Mariners Books Edition 2006)

Context: This is an excellent after-reading strategy towards the very end of the unit, since the end of this unit culminates in a narrative writing assignment as a synthesis of some of the reading techniques they have explored in the novel. The students will have just been dwelling in some of the “heavier” aspects of the book, so this activity is designed to help them find catharsis through writing, while also preparing them for their final paper.

Statement of Purpose: This activity is to give the students a little relief from the exploration of grief, while helping them analyze writing strategies Foer uses. Ideally they will look specifically at characterization so they can apply it to their own personal narrative. This assignment helps not only with reading ability, but writing ability as well.

Directions:

Step One: Watch a film clip of a modern, popular comedy actor. Ask the students to look for ways that the film clip establishes character. (If Jack Black is still relevant, you may consider using this School of Rock trailer). Have a discussion with students about the ways that the film clip established character. How did we know about Dewey’s character? Discuss how you can translate some of these techniques to writing.

Step Two: Have each student pick two of their favorite characters from the book. This list is not exclusive, but remind them that they can choose more than just Oskar, the grandmother, or the Renter.

Characters: Oskar, Grandma, Mrs. Schell, Ron, The Renter, Thomas Schell Jr., the jumper from the sixth borough, the lovers on the sixth borough, Toothpaste, The Minch, Buckminster, Mr. Black, Abby Black, Abe Black, the lady at the top of the Empire State Building, Stan the Doorman, Anna, Jimmy Snyder, Steven Hawking, Gerald Thompson (the Limo Driver)

Step Three: Have the students make a list in their notes (they may want to title these notes “Characterization”) of why the character is their favorite. Then have them find three specific sentences in the text that help them get to know that character. Have them write the page numbers down and highlight/sticky note the sentences in their books. Turn to their neighbor and explain their decisions.

Step Four: Guide students’ findings even further. First have them take notes of the following ways to establish characterization, then have them look for and record instances in the text that display:

• Physical characteristics (or lack thereof).
• Interaction with other characters.
• Interaction with his or her environment.
• Internal thoughts and/or philosophical outlook.
• Revelations about his or her past.
• Dialect or way of speaking.

Step Five: Give students a moment to ponder their own narrative that they will be writing. Have them pick a character (it can be themselves if need be, but preferably another character in their personal story), and begin writing them down. Tell them to at first focus on some of the techniques Foer uses (grammar, images, allusions, letters, creative adjectives, dialogue, etc), then let them break out of the mold and expand upon these characterizations. Share their writing with their neighbors. Some questions that they might want to address in their description of their character:
- Physical description and age
- Behavioral traits (shy, self-confident, outgoing, socially adept, etc.)
- Body and facial language habits (toss of the head, raised eyebrow, etc.)
- Fashion traits (conservative, trendy, etc.)
- Prevailing linguistic characteristics (formal, informal, heavy use of slang, satirical, witty, a jokester, recurring use of images, erudite references, etc.)
- Favorite flower
- Favorite music
- Special talents (musician, artist, actor, writer, scientist, mathematician, etc.)

Step Six: Have each partner give feedback (they may use the included feedback sheet). The evaluating partner may want to ask questions about the subject of the paper. Sometimes verbalization is an excellent way to help students organize their thoughts.

Step Seven: Ask volunteers to share their characters with the class. As a group, discuss what techniques the volunteer author used to bring their character to life.

Step Eight: Give the students the remainder of the class’ time to work silently on their narrative. They may use this time to ask the teacher questions to clarify the narrative assignment.

Homework: Continue working on the narrative. Remind them they will only have one more class period to work on it before it is due.

Assessment: Informally evaluate participation in discussions. Have the students include their rough draft of their characterization writing with their final draft, where you can check participation and understanding of the concept.
**Peer Writing Evaluation Form**

1. Do you feel like you know this character yet? Why or Why not?

2. What ways did the writer establish character?

3. What specific techniques did you see in the writing?

4. What are the major strengths of this writing sample?

5. How could the writer help us get to know this character better? What techniques might they use that would be especially relevant to their character specifically?
At the end of the novel, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Oskar ripped the pictures of the falling body out of his *Stuff That Happened to Me* book and reversed the order: the man was flying through the air up into the sky rather than falling from the building to the ground. Though this imagery is beautifully exquisite it its meaning for the rest of the novel, it reminded me of the construction of this project. In designing this kind of a novel Unit plan, it’s important to work backwards—to distinguish the end from the beginning—giving us, as teachers, a better understanding of the necessary steps that need to be built to help our students achieve the standards and objectives of the Unit. Let’s face it, there are always more steps needed than our original thoughts can usually account for.

But that’s the reality of creating a unit plan, isn’t it? There are so many different elements involved: objectives, materials, assessments, directions, rubrics, handouts, precautionary measures, and so on and so forth. This project gave us the opportunity to practice creating all of these different kinds of elements; we thought about what we can teach, how we can teach it, how much time this teaching will take, and even where we want our students to make the discoveries and learn for themselves. Though we both felt a little uncertain about guaranteeing the success of this unit—because so much of a successful unit is built around the needs of the students, and we didn’t have any real students to prepare the unit for—it gave us a great opportunity to practice the skills of identifying a unit question, unpacking the standards, anticipating student reactions, and making our instructional routines exciting, important, and lasting for our imaginary students.

Specifically, the construction and scope of this assignment better prepared us both to ask the questions of teacher and student; we didn’t stop our thought processes at “Does this routine effectively teach standard a, b, and c?” but expanded our thoughts to include, “If I were a student, what materials would I need to understand the goal of this assignment?” or “If I were a student, would this routine be relevant to me?” This habit of including student and teacher thought in the planning of a lesson was particularly useful in the creation of the Silent Board Discussion Routine. As a teacher, it is important to think ahead and plan for the personalities and habits of your students; in the routine guide for this before-reading strategy, we outlined directions in our steps for teachers to create precautionary written directions such as “Please, no talking” and “Do you have a question?” with rules dictating respect in any written comments. These instructions anticipate the personality of 11th grade students and work to prevent any potential problems from occurring during the class period.

Overall, this project allowed us to better understand how difficult planning a unit can be but also how strategies and instructional routines aid the effectiveness of a unit. By using these time-tested and teacher-tested instructional routines, we became trained to make students accountable; we provided instruction sheets and rubrics for our students to use as reference as they complete their work. This was something both of us felt was beneficial for us as teachers—we have something to reference in our assessment that relates to our objectives for the routine—as well as beneficial for our students.

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Though we felt our unit was successful in achieving the aims of this assignment, it was incredibly overwhelming. We have had some limited experience in the classroom teaching mini-lessons or—if we were lucky—teaching an entire class period; however, looking at the Unit as a whole, this is something we’ve never tried before. We’ve never created a unit that we could say was a success in our classes because we’ve never had those classes; however, by following the theories we learned in class about different instructional routines and standards unpacking, we feel that with a little adaptation for the needs of a classroom, our unit ideas would successfully achieve the established objectives.

As we completed the unit plan, the thought dawned on us: “We just did what we want our students to do. Break things down! Look for patterns! Experience the text!” And we created assignments that allowed them to do those kinds of things. More and more we realized that we’re not just teaching reading or teaching writing, but we’re teaching students ways to look at the world around them and find greater meaning. Sierra said, “I think that’s why people love the humanities. It’s a way of thinking that allows me to feel the spirit in my classes.” Cali agreed. We feel this was truly the accomplishment of our unit. Though we gave large attention to the instructional routines that would best help our students improve their reading/analytical skills as well as their writing/descriptive skills, our project strove for something more: to teach students about grief and about the power of making connections with others. To us, it was more than just an English unit.

That’s not to say that it’s a perfect unit—if there’s anything we’ve learned about teaching, we’ve learned there’s no such thing as a perfect unit. There are several weaknesses, the majority of them reflecting our inexperience as teachers. We’ve never tried the unit out before. We created some opportunity for variation in the our strategies to make deviations for the needs of individual students; however, it was difficult for us to specifically devise our routines for individual students (multicultural students, students with disabilities, students with lower/higher reading levels). This would be where any lack of detail comes from. We don’t have a classroom to create our unit around, so it was difficult to make specific adjustments for students.

In other weaknesses, we felt as though we may not have struck a balance in the emotionality of our unit. Repeatedly we ask our students to grapple with “heavy” topics such as grief and death and silence; our routines capitalize on the experiences of the novel to help students make a deeper connection to the characters; however, as we put the finishing touches on the project we were struck by the lack of balance we felt. We had deeply emotional activities but failed to include opportunities for uplifting and energizing lessons. We had ideas for some catharsis activities—perhaps having students embark on an expedition, like Oskar, to create an “invention” that would solve some of the world’s larger problems. We felt our project could have benefited from a little more emotional balance.

On a different note, we felt our project exhibited strength in the depth and creativity of our instructional routines. Our 9 strategies included a large range of activities, from discussions to journal writes, from think alouds to vocabulary searches. With each of our routines, as mentioned earlier, we worked hard to anticipate problems for teachers or student concerns and include precautionary measures for both. But overall, we felt the greatest strength of our project was in our evident collaboration. Oftentimes our ideas or our
creativity did not come until we had discussed our different mental pictures of certain routines can combine them to achieve a more holistically driven strategy. This also motivated us to be more thorough in our Concept Analysis and in our routine guides because we had someone else at our side asking us questions to provoke further thought and consideration.

Lastly, in regards to strengths, we took great care to incorporate methods and routines from our own readings about teaching theories into our unit. For example, the Elish-Wold reading about Linked Text Sets was the inspiration for our Linked Text Set instructional routine. From those readings, we knew how important it was to use a large range of different genres and perspectives to allow our students to gain a greater understanding of the topic at hand, as well as to appeal to students who particularly connect with one kind of genre or medium over another. Much of the theory applicability that comes from our project was a product of our collaboration. It’s true when they say that two heads are better than one!

Overall, this project helped us realize that teachers are learners. As we look forward to the future opportunities we will have to create units for our classrooms and our students, we’ve realized the importance of organization. One of the most useful activities within this assignment was the Unit outline. We were able to more effectively break down the standards, and organize our instructional routines in a timely and beneficial way that allowed us to see where we would be addressing specific standards, where we would need supplemental materials and where we would want formative assessments to evaluate student progress. We have vowed to never attempt a Unit without ever using these kinds of unpacking and organizational techniques. Also, this outline allowed us to reflect on the kinds of routines we had chosen and modify our plans to engage different kinds of learners. A Unit should be diverse and appealing for all kinds of students; this usually means you have to try different things!

Though we have no guarantee that our unit will be successful, we are increasingly grateful for the process of reflection and the opportunity for revision. When we get the opportunity to take our unit out into the classroom, we understand—better than ever—the need to modify and adapt according to the needs of our future students and we feel better prepared because of this practice to do so.