Problematic Situation

Fever 1793 by Laurie Halse Anderson

Context
This strategy is for use right after the teacher reads aloud Chapter 19 and the first half of Chapter 20. The stopping point is on page 154 at the section break. The students need the background knowledge of the previous chapters, and then chapter 19 and the first half of chapter 20 need to be read aloud because they are very dramatic and important events and conflicts are presented in them. This will help them personally connect to the text by investing their decision-making skills in a problem involving the novel’s main character. Allow two days to complete this strategy.

Purpose
This strategy utilizes problem solving and decision making skills. It allows students to approach the text from a personal perspective, creates interest in a story situation, and connects students to the main character, Matilda, by investing student interest in finding out what decision she makes after making their own decision. It will get students to keep reading to find out what happens next in the novel.

Directions
1. As the teacher, read aloud Chapters 19 and up to page 154 of Chapter 20. The students will have already read the half of the novel preceding these chapters, so this strategy will be used halfway through their reading of the novel.
2. Present The Background handout to the students after you have read the sections aloud, and let them think about it.
3. Give students the instructions for the task and go over the rules for coming to a consensus.
4. For homework that night, have the students pick their scenario and rank the order of their actions on The Scenario handout. At home they will have time to weigh their options alone, and come to their own conclusions uninfluenced by seeing what decisions their classmates are making. Hopefully this will prompt independent, original thinking.
5. The next day, form small groups of four students.
6. Remind students they are a group and as such have to come to a group consensus through a unanimous decision. Make sure you give a reminder and read over the handout about showing courtesy even when we disagree with others.
7. Give students time to discuss (approximately 20 minutes, but allow more if needed). Circle the room to make sure students are focused and being respectful, and to serve as mediator or to give suggestions if students get stuck.
8. Once the groups have chosen, have them write the reflection individually.
9. Next bring the class back together for a full discussion and have the different groups write their decisions up on the board. Lead a discussion about how the groups differed and let them explain their reasoning to each other.

Assessment
Take note of student participation during the group and class discussions. Grade based on evidence of thought on the reflection they turned in.

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The Background

We have been discussing the enduring issues of this novel as we read. Remember, they are:
1) When the lives of you and/or your loved ones are endangered, what is morally acceptable for you to do in order to protect them?
2) What sacrifices are you morally responsible to make in order to help save the lives or ease the pain and suffering of strangers?

In relation to these issues, re-read the following passage below from Chapter 15. Remember the dangers of life in Philadelphia at this time.

“They told of a small child found huddled around the body of her dead mother. As volunteers placed the mother in a coffin, the child had cried out, ‘Why are you putting Mamma in that box?’ They had to turn the child over to a neighbor and take the mother away for burial.

They told of the dying man who pulled himself to the window of his bedchamber and begged people to bring him a drink of water. Many passed by, hurrying away from the sound of his voice, until a brave soul entered the house to help him.

They told of thieves who crept in and stole jewelry off the dead and dying.

They told of good people who refused to take any money for helping strangers, even though they themselves were poor and near destitute.

They told of the mighty who had fallen ill: Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton and Dr. Rush himself. Both had recovered, though Dr. Rush’s sister had died. Hamilton had fled the city.

They told of terror: patients who had tried to jump out of windows when the fever robbed their reason, screams that pierced the night, people who were buried alive, parents praying to die after burying all their children.” (page 106)
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Instructions

1. For homework, read the Problematic Situation and decide what you would do in Matilda’s place. Weigh the positives and negatives of the various scenarios. After choosing what scenario you think best, rank the 8 most important things you need to do in order of importance.

2. Next you will meet with your group. Now you will have to compare your choices and come to a consensus about which scenario is best and rank the 8 important items. Read the rules below about how to come to a consensus before completing this part of the activity.

Rules for Coming to a Consensus

1. Avoid arguing for your own rankings. Present your position as lucidly and logically as possible, but listen to the other members’ reactions and consider them carefully before you press your point.

2. Do not assume that someone must win and someone must lose when discussion reaches a stalemate. Instead, look for a next-most-acceptable alternative for all parties.

3. Do not change your mind simply to avoid conflict. When agreement seems to come too quickly and easily, be suspicious. Explore the reasons and be sure everyone accepts the solution for basically similar or complementary reasons. Yield only to positions that have objective and logically sound foundations.

4. Avoid conflict-reducing techniques such as majority vote, averages, coin flips, and bargaining. When a dissenting member finally agrees, don’t feel that he or she must be rewarded by having his or her own way on some later point.

5. Differences of opinion are natural and expected. Seek them out and try to involve everyone in the decision process. Disagreements can help the group’s decision because with a wide range of information and opinions, there is a greater chance that the group will hit upon more adequate solutions.


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The Scenarios

Review the following passage which we just read as a class from Chapter 20, page 154.

“My feet moved, taking me up one street and down the next. I didn’t see another person for blocks, not even a grave digger or a physician. The sound of my shoes tapping across the cobblestones echoed down the street like a latecomer sneaking into church. I walked past the homes of people acquainted with my family. They were all deserted. My shift darkened with sweat. Surely I wasn’t the only person left in Philadelphia?

My mind whirled. What to do? What to do? I should find a way to the Ludingtons’. No, that would be impossible. I should go to the orphan house; they would take me in. The compass spun wildly. No, I could care for myself. I was not a child. Bush Hill. Mrs. Flagg would see that I was fed, and I could help care for the sick. But the memories of that place were filled with the sound of Grandfather’s voice and the rumble of his laugh. Don’t borrow trouble, that’s what Eliza would say. Don’t borrow trouble. I’d go to the market for some food. Then I’d hole up at home and wait for the frost. No one had a duty to me, and I had no claim on anyone else. But it mattered not. I would see my way through.”

If you read a few more lines in your book, you will discover that the market is completely empty; no food, no farmers, no people.

Scenario 1: I would find a way to get to the Ludington’s farm, where my mother is supposed to be, and where there is sure to be food.

Scenario 2: I would go to the orphan house, where I could help take care of the young children, while being assured of adults around who knew what to do.

Scenario 3: I would go back to Bush Hill and find Mrs. Flagg. I could help nurse the sick, and contribute to easing their suffering, while being sure of a meal.

Scenario 4: I would try to find food in the city, then return home to Cook Coffeehouse and remain there secluded until frost came to kill the fever.

Items you need in order of importance: Rank them 1-8, with 1 being most important and 8 being least important.

- Firewood
- Food
- Shotgun and ammunition
- Clothing that fits, including shoes
- Drinking water
- Flint and steel (for fire)
- Find Mother and/or a friend
- Vinegar (for sterilizing cloth)
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Time to Resolve! Pick the Scenario and Rankings Individually!

Scenario 1: I would find a way to get to the Ludington’s farm, where my mother is supposed to be, and where there is sure to be food.

Scenario 2: I would go to the orphan house, where I could help take care of the young children, while being assured of adults around who knew what to do.

Scenario 3: I would go back to Bush Hill and find Mrs. Flagg. I could help nurse the sick, and contribute to easing their suffering, while being sure of a meal.

Scenario 4: I would try to find food in the city, then return home to Cook Coffeehouse and remain there secluded until frost came to kill the fever.

What Scenario would you choose (your own individual choice)?

Why?

Put the items in order. Rank them below by number with 1 as the most important, and 8 as the least important.

_____ Firewood
_____ Food
_____ Shotgun and ammunition
_____ Clothing that fits, including shoes
_____ Drinking water
_____ Flint and steel (for fire)
_____ Find Mother and/or a friend
_____ Vinegar (for sterilizing cloth)
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Time to Resolve! Pick the Scenario and Rankings with your Group!

Scenario 1: I would find a way to get to the Ludington’s farm, where my mother is supposed to be, and where there is sure to be food.

Scenario 2: I would go to the orphan house, where I could help take care of the young children, while being assured of adults around who knew what to do.

Scenario 3: I would go back to Bush Hill and find Mrs. Flagg. I could help nurse the sick, and contribute to easing their suffering, while being sure of a meal.

Scenario 4: I would try to find food in the city, then return home to Cook Coffeehouse and remain there secluded until frost came to kill the fever.

What Scenario did you choose as a group?

As a group, come to a full consensus and put the items in order. Rank them below by number with 1 as the most important, and 8 as the least important.

_____ Firewood
_____ Food
_____ Shotgun and ammunition
_____ Clothing that fits, including shoes
_____ Drinking water
_____ Flint and steel (for fire)
_____ Find Mother and/or a friend
_____ Vinegar (for sterilizing cloth)

Reflection: Now on the back of this paper, write about (1) why you made the choices you made by outlining your logic and then (2) write about how your decisions differed from your group’s. (3) Did your group cause you to change your mind, or do you still think your ideas were best? (4) Overall, make sure you show evidence that you have made thoughtful decisions, because that is what you will be graded on.
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This is definitely activity I have always thought would be really fun and effective and engaging, all at the same time! I like that we had this format for it though, because before I had heard of it but never known a detailed method of writing it all up. This was perfect for my novel because there are actually two or three truly survival-related situations the main character faces. I left the scenarios true to the novel, since it was such an inherently survival-based situation without me needing to creatively change it at all. I added the items to rank, but the scenarios are authentic to the novel. I wanted to keep it this way to use the after-effect of keeping the students reading. Halfway through a novel, some students may be struggling and finding it hard to stay motivated, even though this book is full of suspense and I loved reading it. But with this strategy halfway through the novel, the students will want to read on to see if Matilda chooses the same scenario they chose.

The teacher just needs to make sure the students understand what was expected for them to do, and that they are on task and engaged. I would also make interesting notes about what could be changed for the next time I used the strategy, since I have never used it before and would want to make sure I changed things if they didn’t work or seem realistic enough to engage the students.

The key lessons I want them to learn from this strategy are: to understand how to respectfully work with peers and to come to a cordial group consensus; to learn about arguing logically and clearly for your point of view; to learn to relate personally to the texts they read, and to become invested in the characters’ decisions, and making text-to-self connections.