Chalk Talk (Discussion Strategy)

Text
Number the Stars, by Lois Lowry. Published by Yearling, New York City, 1989.

Context
This discussion strategy will be utilized in the unit when the students are over halfway done reading the novel; in this unit, the strategy will be used after the class has read to page 82 in order to discuss the meaning of the title and of the symbol of the Star of David. However, this strategy will work well anytime after the students have come across a topic in their reading which you wish to explore.

Statement of Purpose
This instructional routine supports literacy acquisition by helping students to, not only understand the semantics and plot, think critically about what they read and form opinions which can be supported by passages from the text. Such an exercise will help students of all literacy levels because all students can be successful and challenged in a discussion that is run by their peers which will naturally result in different depths and breadths. There are many different versions of chalk talk, but we have modified this from Dr. Sirpa Grierson (2012).

Directions (for the teacher)

Main Idea
Students, particularly of this age group, are not usually accustomed to keying in on texts much below the surface of the plot and need to be taught how to explore and discuss subtextual, metaphorical, and abstract aspects of a text to deepen their understanding. In Number the Stars, it could be easy to glance over the title of the novel itself and what the Star of David symbolizes. This strategy is designed to help students practice just such critical thinking.

Materials Needed
Whiteboard
Several white-erase markers

Time
40-50 minutes

Step 1: Priming the Pump
Instruct students to take out a piece of paper (or their writing journals) and pencil to free-write answering “What does the title Number the Stars mean?” You may also want students to address what the star symbolizes in the text. Allow students three to five minutes.

Step 2: Instructions
Write “What does the title Number the Stars mean?” in the middle of the white board and if you desire to put a few other probing questions. Instruct students that they will all have to write a specified number of comments with which they will sign with their initials. Students
will take turns with the markers, and everyone will be silent during the activity.

**Step 3: Monitoring**
Monitor the students’ activity and occasionally add your own questions and comments to push student thinking to make sure that big topics, such as the Psalm, the necklace, etc., are discussed. Make sure that everyone remains on-task.

**Step 4: Debriefing**
In the last few minutes of the period, talk as a class about what they found interesting or what you feel needs to be emphasized or addressed. In the next class, refer back to what was discussed and connect it to that day’s material.

**Assessment**
You can determine the successfulness of this activity through the quality of discussion and the level of participation of the students. If the strategy was successful, students will have pushed beyond the surface meaning of the text and begun making connections and claims based off of the text. To add another layer of assessment, have students write for the last few minutes of the period or for homework about the same questions given at the beginning of the period, and then collect both responses and compare depth and insight.