Problematic Situation

Sense and Sensibility

By Jane Austen

Context: This assignment is to be used during reading, possibly near the beginning of the book to help students consider the theme.

Purpose: A thought-provoking activity to encourage students to consider the theme “When is it good to be passionate (sensible) about something and when is reason or logic (sense) the best response?” and how it applies to their own lives.

Rationale: For students to understand differing perspectives or problems within a text, the teacher can set up an imaginary situation that students must solve (Johannessen). This strategy utilizes problem solving and decision making skills, allows students to approach text from varying perspectives, creates interest in a story situation, and connects text to student priorities and values.

The theme studied in this novel is relevant to students and innately interesting, but when the ideas are applied to a realistic personal situation within the students’ lives, it takes on a whole new meaning. This assignment also encourages critical thinking and problem solving.

Directions: Explain the situation to students. Ask them to spend 5 minutes themselves considering a solution to the problem. Then place them in groups of 3-5 to discuss the same question. They must come to a consensus as a group about what the best solution would be. After about 10 minutes, have one student from each group come write their group’s solution on the board, and then have another student to present it and their rationale to the class.

Materials Needed: Student handout

Time: 10 minutes for set up, 15 minutes to discuss, 15 minutes for debriefing

Assessment: The problematic situation strategy allows the teacher to assess student participation in group activities, thinking/reasoning skills, ability to negotiate decisions, and general ability to make choices based upon priorities and values. It provides an excellent lead-in to a story situation, in that a student can live through the experience prior to or while reading about it.

As a class, discuss the solutions and their implications and consequences in real life. Each student should write at least a paragraph in their journal about their feelings related to the situation. They should compare what they initially thought and then how the small group and class discussions changed their thoughts and feelings. What does this mean to them?
Directions for the Problematic Situation

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“When is it good to be passionate (sensible) about something and when is reason or logic (sense) the best response?”

In your own life there are many situations where deciding when to use reason and when to use logic really affects your decisions. A classic example of this is complicated romantic relationships. Marianne is a perfect illustration of complicated relationships as she seems to be able to wrap numerous men around her pinky—Willoughby and Colonel Brandon for example. As we’ve read about her escapades you may have formed some opinions about the way she acts… what if it happened to you?

Scenario: Your best friend Lana is in love for sure. The problem: the boy she likes, named Drake, just thinks of her as a friend. They’ve always been just friends, but he definitely does think she’s cute. And from there it gets more complicated. Drake’s brother Holden is, and always has been, in love with Lana, but Lana confides in him about her crush on Drake, as he (Luke) is her best friend.

Personal Thought: Think about it. How on Earth would you solve this situation? Who should date who? What makes sense logically? What about their passions? Reflect individually in your journal.

Group Discussion: Get with your group and answer the same questions you answered on your own. How should this be solved? You must come to a consensus. Appoint someone in your group to write the group’s decision on the board and another person to explain your group’s reasoning to the class in one minute.

Class Discussion: As a class, we will discuss the solutions and their implications and consequences in real life.

Post-Discussion: Write at least a paragraph in your journal about your feelings related to the situation. You should compare what you initially thought and then how the small group and class discussions changed your thoughts and feelings. What does this mean to you?