

The Revealers: A Middle School Language Arts Unit

Designed and implemented by Susan Stanaway-Maisel, while an eighth grade core teacher (language arts and U.S. history) at Cupertino Middle School, Sunnyvale, California. (Susan is currently teaching grades 5/6 at Discovery Charter School, a K-8 developmental parent-participation school in San Jose, California.)

The Revealers by Doug Wilhelm provided the opportunity for an outstanding, high-interest integrated Language Arts unit in my class. Students read the book over three weeks time, and the whole unit went for about five weeks.

We began with an in-class reading of chapters 1 and 2, then broke up into literature groups. Student groups met 2-3 times per week. Each group went at its own pace, knowing that three weeks was the deadline. Each member had a job for each time his/her “lit group” met:

Discussion leader

Summarizer

Passage picker-Literary Luminary

Connector (to other literature and real life)

Illustrator

Vocabulary Finder

The vocabulary, which was student-generated from the novel, became our spelling and vocabulary for the week. Every Friday we would meet again as a group and discuss the content of the book .

We did several team-building “games” related to inclusion. These came from the Anti-Defamation League, and I found them online via **www.the-revealers.com**.

We also watched the tape “Lets Get Real” (which I advise for only seventh and eighth graders and up), a raw look at the damage that bullying and name calling causes in kids own graphic words.

In addition to reading, we learned about interviewing strategies. The kids knew that they were eventually going to interview Doug and I wanted them to ask good questions. Students practiced the difference between open ended and closed questions with one another.

Then I gave a take-home final “exam.” This was technically an Internet search exercise based on the book and the author. They had a week two weeks in which to complete it. It was quite detailed, as they had to actually read and research as well as listen to an interview done with Mr. Wilhelm on public radio. The last part of the “exam” included questions that they would want to ask in our own interview.

After the “exam” students worked in pairs to come up with questions. After meeting in pairs and discussing the questions, each student then chose their best and made sure that

they were not repetitive. The most exciting day was the one that we actually called Doug and he was live on the other end discussing bullying and writing! The students sat with rapt attention as Doug patiently addressed their questions. We interviewed him for about 45 minutes.

We concluded our LA unit in letter writing. Each student was required to write a thoughtful letter to Mr. Wilhelm expressing some opinions about the book and asking those pressing questions that did not get answered in person. Doug was kind enough to respond and answered the rest of their questions in writing!

We followed up reading *The Revealers* with a dramatic reading of the Pulitzer prize winning play "The Diary of Anne Frank," and made comparisons and analogies about bullying in school and bullying in society. I can honestly say that these eighth graders rated this unit as one of the best they experienced all year. It was in-depth and opened many of their eyes to a spectrum of issues in middle school and to writing.