



Gathering Blue Literature Guide
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Summary

Lois Lowry's book, *Gathering Blue* is fantasy story of a young crippled girl with an extraordinary gift. Kira loses her mother but quickly gains a new and important job in her village of being the robe-threader. Her ability to work with threads is rare magical artistry in the village. In order to take this important job she must also learn the skill of dying the threads. As Kira works hard to restore the singer's robe and learn the many plants for dying new questions about the village she lives in begin to surface. Something isn't quite right, and Kira becomes determines to answer her questions and do what is right and discovers many new things.

This story would work well as a read aloud book for a fifth grade class. The protagonist exemplifies strength, thoughtfulness, humility, and capacity. It is a character that may connect with students who are beginning to become aware of their own selves as individuals and their role and relationship in their community. The book has several themes such as disability & competency, the value of art, and societal structure. These themes could provide rich discussions that meet the necessary level of analytical ability required by common core standards. The audio-book version of the story is approximately 5 ½ hours , so if the story is read in 20 minute sessions not including time for discussion before and after, it would take 16 sessions.

Starting the journey

The initiating activity sets the tone and direction of the study of *Gathering Blue*. Since the story is going to be an academically driven read-aloud (not for pleasure during down-time) it would benefit students to let them know where they are going before they have begun. Gather the students comfortably together and tell them you will begin a book study of *Gathering Blue*:

“I will be reading the book aloud to you so we will all be able read at the same pace. It will also help us have book discussions right after reading. These book discussions can be helpful to help answer and questions we may have when reading. There will also be times that we practice different ways to become strong readers. Often I will give you post-it notes so you can mark down certain things as we read. Sometimes I will tell you what to listen for and mark down. You can always mark down ideas or questions or have, especially new vocabulary words. If there is ever a word you don’t understand we can go back to it in the book and figure it out together.”

Guiding Questions

The following open-ended questions can be used to initiate student discussions as you read the story. Discussions based on these questions do not need to happen after every read-aloud. It would be beneficial to have discussion closely related to any mini-lessons that have been introduced for that reading.

- What do you think is Kira’s most valuable character trait and why do you think it is more valuable than some others?
- Why do you think the author included the fact that women aren’t allowed to be taught reading and writing?
- How do you imagine the village? Where in the world do you think it would be?
- What are some ways the singer, threader and carver are being taken care of? In what ways are they having things taken away from them?

Picturing the village: A mini-lesson

This mini-lesson focuses on creating mental imagery to experience the story more fully and understand the text. A central theme of study while reading *Gathering Blue* can be how is the world in the story similar and different from our own world. Preceding mini-lessons would include activating our own schema (what do we know about our world), Venn-diagrams, character maps (keeping track of relationships and positions of power), and descriptive language. This mini-lesson would focus on the way in which the setting and environment of the village is represented. This min-lesson is intended to occur right before reading chapters 5 and 6, because these chapters include several descriptions of the setting.

Lay-out of lesson:

1. (Introduction- 2 minutes) Gather students to begin literature study. If possible have it be sitting on a rug with enough space for everyone to lay down. “As we have been reading we’ve been marking in *Gathering Blue* the places Lois Lowry describes the setting. We have been noticing descriptive language. Well, descriptive language is a powerful tool in creating mental images. It is a way for words to become more than just words but pictures in our minds. When an author uses descriptive words they are hoping to give us an image and this image can help us understand the story better but also make the story really rich, like we have been transported to another place and time.”

2. (Modeling/Think-Aloud- 4 minutes) “Last time we read, I made a mental image of the ‘Council Edifice’. I am going to re-read that part and as I read I am going to describe to you what image came to my mind. You’ll see how my image changes as I keep reading.” Read the paragraph in the middle of p. 22 that describes the building. At the end describe how you see it. “By creating a mental image, I am able to understand the story better. I can imagine what it is like for Kira to stand in front of this big building, that is so different than what she is used to. It would feel like it was very important. It also gives me clues about the history of the place Lois Lowry is writing about. This building makes me think of old stone churches with stained glass windows (activating my schema). Although the author never says it, it makes me think maybe the story is supposed to take place in the future of our world when everything has changed.”

3. (Guided practice- 4 minutes) Read the paragraph over again. Have the students close their eyes as you read and imagine what the council edifice looks like, tell them just like a dream try to make a picture in your mind. Then ask the students if they imagined it differently, or added anything to the image. Discuss how you may imagine things the author didn’t include in the description, such as the color of the building. “Why do you think it is helpful to make mental images while we read?” Keep track of the students thinking by recording it on a large piece of paper.

4. (Rest of literature block/read-aloud-15 minutes) Today as I read the author describes Kira walking through town, she describes the weaving shed, she describes Kira’s old home, as well as more of the inside of the council building. While I am reading I want you to try make a mental image of one of these places. After read-aloud is over I am going to have you all draw a picture of the mental image you created, it maybe just a room or a map.

5. (Drawing mental images- 15 minutes) Allow students to spend time drawing their images. As they finish, have them pair up with someone and talk about their drawings and compare. Gather around again to conclude the lesson by just asking the students again, “Why do you think it is helpful to make mental images while we read?” Try to hear from each student.

Assessment: The drawing the students create can serve as one piece of an assessment tool. It will show the level of detail in which they were able to create the mental image. The drawings shouldn’t be judged on their artistic ability but the amount of the detail that it captured from the book. Another crucial part will be listening in on the partner conversations as well as noting the comments at the end of the lesson.

Extending the story: Building on our schema

As Kira learns the process of dying the threads, the students too will need to learn a new skill. As an extension project of *Gathering Blue*, the students will be presented with three different crafts that they need to choose to learn how to do. If it is a small and self-driven group, you could consider having the children come up with their own skill to practice. Otherwise it would be a good idea to have three pre-determined skills and learning materials available. Embroidery, dying, and carving, would be a great three options because they are all included in the text, others could be weaving, basket making, sculpting, sewing, knitting, or knot tying. By learning a new skill students can be building

upon their own schema. These direct experiences can become text-to-self connections that allow for great empathic understanding of Kira.

This extension would be the most rich if worked on over time. Follows is a brief outline of one way to guide the students through this process and make it relate meaningfully to the book.

1. Introduce the extension activity and the three skills students can learn. Provide a brief explanation of the crafts and the process. Then allow students to browse books, tools, and products. By the end of the session each student should have chosen and craft and reason behind their choice. Talk about how Kira didn't have a choice. Do they think Kira wants to learn the dyes? What makes them think that?
2. The next session should be a broad overview of the crafts. In their small groups they will be learning about the materials and techniques. They can practice some techniques. Have them notice what is difficult about learning a new craft? What makes it easier? Then when reading see if any of their knowledge about learning a craft connects with Kira. Let them know by the next session they will be picking out a project to complete in their craft.
3. This session should be dedicated to just starting a project. Be sure they choose a reasonable goal that can be complete in a few sessions. Let them know, just like Kira this will be their work and responsibility to do the best they can. Give them a deadline to finish their project. How does it feel to have a set timeline? How do they think Kira feels about her the pressure of her work?
4. Provide a few more work session (1-3), however many scheduling can allow and is needed for the size of projects.
5. Present their project to the class. One meaningful way to do this is to have each student create a small (one-two paragraph story) about their object. The stories could be something like the ruin song in the book, in that the object signifies another story or history. It could also be just the story how it was made and what the process was like for the maker. Give time for each student to sit in the makers chair and present their story and object to the rest of the class. How does it feel to be recognized for your work? How does it feel to have spent careful time on something and then be finished? How was Kira feeling at the ruin song? How is it similar or different to how you are feeling? This final presentation and story also provides a means of assessment for the teacher.

Common Core English and Language Arts Standard being addressed:

Grade 5- Reading standards for Literature-

1. Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

5. Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.