

Introducing New Units and New Books

Anna J. Small Roseboro, Liaison from Secondary Section to Conference on English Leadership

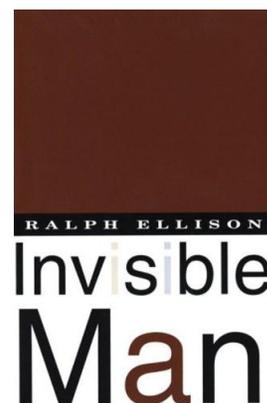


Motivation is the key to engagement. What strategies can we share with our new teachers for getting students curious, if not excited, about starting new units and reading new books? Here are three of mine using art, video, and student selected passages from randomly chosen pages of the text.

1. **Set the tone** for a new unit **with posters** hung on the classroom door and around the room. You could create a bulletin board with headlines from the news that connect in some way to the pieces of literature you plan to study. Design and print from your computer **collages** of artwork from books and/or photos of authors you plan to study together and those you'd recommend students read on their own. Consider playing "mood" **music**, too.
2. **Play video clips** on the topic. For example, preview a unit on the theme of TOLERANCE, look at issues of race, religion, gender, LGBTQs, physique, regionalism, language, age, and socio-economics. For a unit like this you could show video clips from DVDs or downloaded from the Internet. In addition to the literature you plan to study together, you could request materials from the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#), which are offered at no cost to teachers. When teaching this unit to Freshmen, we used clips from such SPLC resources. With YouTube and [TED Talks](#), you can find lots of short clips to jump start a unit and focus student attention on issues your unit will explore.
3. To introduce a new book, you could invite students to **preview the book** in one or both of the ways that follow.
 - a. Distribute the books or have students turn to the first page of the work in their anthology. Ask them to look for two minutes at the **artwork** on the cover or the opening page of the work in their text. Then ask what they surmise from the images, design, colors, font and other graphics. What do they anticipate or predict about the story, characters, plot, etc.? Invite them to write their thoughts in their journals and then later return to those initial expectations to see whether students would modify those statements in any way.
 - b. On the board, write the beginning and ending page numbers of the literary work you'll be studying together. Ask the students to write on a piece of scratch paper any ten (10) pages numbers within that range of page numbers.



Next, invite them **to skim the pages** they've chosen and **to copy into their journals any thought-provoking or puzzling sentence or phrase** from at least five (5) different pages from their list. What do they notice about the names, vocabulary, sentence structure, etc.? Give the students a few minutes to share with a partner one or two of these copied sentences or phrases. Conclude with a brief discussion about what students noticed and what they can expect to unfold as they read. Be sure to return to these opening **observations and predictions** later in the book study. Were they right?



Students usually are motivated to find answers to their own questions and to validate their own observations. Introducing a unit or new book in ways that evoke curiosity can be a way to engage students in reading, writing, and talking about what the fiction and non-fiction, digital and print media they study.

What are some of the strategies you share with your new teachers?

Please post your ideas on the CEL Connected Community Website at this address:

<http://ncte.connectedcommunity.org/cel/home>

Shared during Round Table at NCTE 2014

<http://www.teachingenglishlanguagearts.com/>

