

Teaching Stance

1st pg Window into Practice: Before

As you read this vignette, think about what Mrs. Green's actions suggest about her beliefs and assumptions about students. What do you notice about her stance toward students and learning? What's your hunch about how that stance shapes student learning? At the end of Part 1, you'll return to her classroom to see what changes occurred after her stance shifted.

As the twelve boys sauntered in the room, Mrs. Green, their special education teacher, welcomed each of them.

"Good to see you, Michael."

"Jonathan, I hope you got your homework done for math. Your math teacher stopped by to talk to me about your missing assignments." Jonathan nonchalantly nodded at her as he plopped into his desk. The desks, arranged in four neat rows, faced her desk. On the bulletin board was a list of the class rules and tips on how to read a short story. When the bell rang, she pointed to the assignment on the board and then read it to them. "Open your books to 'The Monkey's Paw' on page 62."

"I'm going to start reading, and then it'll be your turn." She started, "Without, the night was cold and wet."

While she read, Michael looked down at his cell phone, which was tucked behind his opened book. Quickly he sent a text message. Mrs. Green's voice rattled him. "What's the main character called? What's the term for it? Michael, what do you think?"

He shrugged.

"You know it. We talked about it yesterday."

When he shrugged again, she gave him a hint. "It starts with a *p*. Pro . . . Come on, you know it."

Lionel hollered out, "Protagonist."

She smiled at him and nodded. "Who can tell me the name of the protagonist in this story?"

Silence.

"Jonathan, who do you think is the protagonist?"

He shook his head and looked away from her.

"Take a look at what I just read to you. Who do you think it might be?"

He continued looking away.

Lionel raised his hand and then blurted out, "The father."

"And what's the father's name?"

"Mr. White."

"Good," praised Mrs. Green. "And who is the father talking to?"

When no one answered, Mrs. Green called on Lionel, whose hand was again waving madly. The other boys were either slumped

in their desks with heads on their arms or staring into space. "His son."

"Good. Who can tell me what time of day it is? In order to understand the story, it's important that you know this."

When no one answered, she told them that the story took place at night and then called

on Brandon to read. Brandon glanced up from his hoodie and haltingly started to read.

The class continued with the students taking turns reading, Mrs. Green posing questions about the plot to make sure they understood, a few students reluctantly answering, and Lionel's hand waving away.

The Just-Right Challenge by S. Quate
and J. McDermott (2013)



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Window into Practice: After

As you read the following vignette describing Mrs. Green a few months after the vignette that opened Part 1 on teacher stance, what do you notice about her stance? What evidence is there that it's changed? Consider her language, the room arrangement, and the work that the students are doing.

When students ambled into Mrs. Green's classroom that spring, they no longer sat in rows. Instead, the students were in a circle. For this particular day, Mrs. Green was outside the circle.

"I'm betting you're all ready to talk about *The Giver*. Yesterday it looked as though you had gathered quite a few notes for the seminar, so let's get started. Michael, would you remind us of the norms for a seminar?"

"We can't interrupt each other and we have to use evidence from the books. Is that right?" He looked at her for approval.

"Jonathan, what do you think? Would you help Michael out?"

"We have to listen to each other too, and we can't talk too much. We have to share the airspace."

"And who's going to start?" Mrs. Green asked.

As Michael kicked off the discussion, Mrs. Green sat down behind her desk and listened. She noted that the students stayed grounded in the book and explored issues within this novel.

She smiled and nodded in approval, pleased that they were engaging in text better than they had all year. She knew that her work at providing strategies to support their thinking was working and was pleased that she was able to shift her stance from a rescuer to a caretaker of their intellects. It had been hard work on her part and hard on their part since they were used to her doing a good share of the intellectual work for them. But they were having fun and trusting that they could actually do the thinking.