

LESSON 1: FOCUS

Use this activity to introduce students to the Letters about Literature theme that books are more than entertainment, they are windows to understanding our society, other cultures, and ourselves.

MATERIALS

- Level I: Worksheet A—Books Give Us Wings
Level II: Worksheet B—Books that Make You Think, Books that Make You Feel
Level III: Worksheet C—A Letter from Lois Lowry

PROCEDURE

- Warm up by asking students to list a book or books they remember reading as a very younger child, or book they remember an adult reading to them. List these on the chalkboard or overhead projector. Ask students to comment on the books. Which were funny? Which were scary? What feelings do they associate with the reading experience—pride in being able to read the book? affection from a parent or guardian who took time to read to them?
- Next, explore how their reading experiences have changed over time. For example, do they now read to a younger child? Do they prefer a different type of book than when they were younger? No doubt some children and young adults will complain that reading, while once fun, is no longer so. Explore why this may be the case.
- Distribute the reading worksheet identified for each level. Read, then discuss the questions. Answers will vary but recommended answers are provided below.
- Conclude the activity by explaining the LAL assignment: Each student will write a personal letter to an author—living or dead—explaining how that author’s work somehow changed their view of the world or self.

ANSWER KEY

LEVEL I: Books Change Lives

1. Harry’s final paragraph sums up what he has learned. Students will express his ideas in their own words which may include the following: He discovered that living without loved ones would not be living; living in secret would be like dying; and most importantly, at every stage of life there is something wonderful to experience and he wouldn’t want to miss those experiences.
2. Focus your discussion on diverse reading

experiences and ensure students comprehend the concept of “wings”.

LEVEL II: Books that Make You Think, Books that Make You Feel

In discussing Pynn’s letter should identify these emotions: confusion, fear. Thoughts triggered by the book was a realization that the story itself was a warning of what the future might be if society had such things “release” and forced conformity. In discussing Lindsay’s letter, the students may identify curiosity as an emotion. However, the main focus here is on thoughts, specifically that life exists on other planets.

LEVEL III: A Letter to Lois Lowry

1. They were mythical creatures, not real people.
2. Answers will vary but should include the main idea that in creating a book authors continue to exist and readers can revisit the time and place of a book—and therefore access authors—by rereading. The words remain alive.
3. (a) Lowry’s choices begin with children’s books and themes of courage and loss. As she ages, the titles become more mature and focus on her identity. (b) The books that matter most to us will change as we ourselves grow and experience many of life’s conflicts and rewards.
4. The authors’ gifts varied, depending on the author and the book. At times it was a gift of understanding herself and realizing she wasn’t the only one in the world who felt a certain way. At other times the gift was comfort or solace, even excitement of viewing another character’s life that was so different from her own.
5. Because each person is an individual, they bring to the reading experience something unique to themselves. No two persons may enjoy or experience the same book in quite the same way.