**Lesson Plan for Tobias Wolff’s short story “Powder”:**

***Revised to Reflect Brain-Based Learning***

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| **Agenda** | **Details** | **Time** | **Rationale** |
| Warm-up | Journal Topic:  *“If you had one parent who did really fun, possibly dangerous things with you (take you to amusement parks, going surfing, etc.) but often let you down (didn’t come to your choir concert or basketball/volleyball game) and one parent who was the opposite, not that fun but very reliable, which one would you choose to live with?”*  1. Write for four minutes.  2. Discuss in your triad and be ready to share when called upon randomly. | 6-8 | Students learn best when their curiosity and emotions are stirred. I am expecting to build some controversy with the responses. Some students will choose the fun but dangerous parent, while others will choose the safe, responsible parent. Since the father in the story is the fun but dangerous one and the mother is the safe, responsible parent, this will invest them in the details and cause them to reevaluate the stance they’ve taken. Triads will, generally, have two students to meet/ exceed paired with one student who does not meet. Also, triads will not have close friends together. Also, because moderate amounts of stress over which the student has some control build perseverance, I will be randomly calling on kids to share something they said (rehearsed) in their triad. |
| Reading, group: | I will begin by reading the first two paragraphs out loud and thinking aloud, modeling active reading, active thinking.  “Who’s Thelonious Monk?”  “What does ‘He was indifferent to my fretting’ mean?”  “Why doesn’t the father just leave the mountain on time?”  The students will discuss, in their triad, one or more of these questions. | 5-7 | Modeling pace, pronunciation, volume, and pausing is important for learning readers. Even in the 8th grade, it still benefits many of them to have a small amount of their reading modeled. |
| Reading, independently | Students will read the rest of the six page story independently.  A quick reminder of several previously used reading strategies will be given. Here are the ones I will remind them of for this reading.   1. Slow down 2. Reread the passage 3. Learn a word that is getting you stuck (i.e. indifferent, fretting) | 20 | Though the text gives two guides for independent vs cooperative work, at one time saying that 5-20% of time should be in social groupings (97) and once saying that independent vs group work should be 50/50, at our school we encourage the bulk of student reading to be independent – and then to help provide the students with the skills and strategies for navigating challenging texts on their own. |
| First thoughts, independently | After reading, students will open the folder on their desk and answer the opinion-based question they find there in their journals.  Now that you’ve read “Powder” what do you think the mother should do? (From get back together with the father because he’s so great TO finalize the divorce and take away visitation rights because he’s too irresponsible, and anywhere in between, anything is okay, just defend your opinion with something from the text.) | 5 | I want to begin the analysis with students’ own opinions, unaffected by those around them. Though peer pressure is a useful tool when you are making learning and achievement cool, it is not useful in developing independent thinking. |
| First thoughts, shared in triads | In their triads, students will share their opinion. I will model and encourage students to embed one sentence from their journal entry into their presentation.  My Example:  *I think the father is not a great husband, but a caring, fun dad and as I wrote here “the mom should let him see the son at least once a month so the boy has some fun in his life.”* | 3-5 | Those “first thoughts” then are the basis for negotiating your opinion as compared to your social group peers who make you re-think and adjust your opinion based on new evidence or a different perspective. |
| Take a Walk | We will walk around the building to allow for some settling time. | 5 | Following the mantra of “Learn, discuss, then take a walk” we will allow for some settling time for passive processing before moving on to the final part of the day. |
| Role-play | Get up and move!  “In your triad, plan out the scene when the boy and father get home to the mother. One of you can be the father, one the mother, and one the son. You do not have to write a script, but it would be helpful to write down one thing you think the father would say to the mother about the trip, and one thing the mother would ask.”  “Be ready to have your group called upon randomly.”  Bonus: Defend each character’s words or actions based on something in the text. | 10 | With a room at the end of the hallway, I have many places for triads to disperse to and plan out their role-play scene.  Also, again, moderate amounts of stress over which the learner has some control are good for perseverance. I want students to work together as if they may have to present this to the class.  The truth is that I will run out of time and choose a volunteer group because, in my experience, there is usually one or two groups that will volunteer. I will let the members of this group leave class one minutes early, a free, random reward for demonstrating one trait: courage. |
| Role-play presentation(s) | One group will present to the class. I will call on students, randomly, to ask them if they agree with the presentation and to defend their agreement or disagreement.  “What in the text makes you agree that the (father/son/mother) would (say/act like) this?” | 5 | Along with the previous step of planning the scenes, this is rehearsing and incorporating their learning from the day. They are using what they have learned from the text to incorporate it into a new scene that does not exist in the story. |

This lesson will be followed by the students doing a second reading of the story. During that second reading they will be completing a T-chart with one side noting the good traits of the father and the other noting the bad traits of the father. There are secrets to this story that merit a second reading and only a close reading accesses these secrets. Chief among them is the prank phone call to the police that the father makes, though usually only one kid per class catches this small detail from the context clues. I plan, this year, on making a role-play of this scene as well to see if role playing it helps other students “discover” this detail.

In the end, students will be writing an essay about “Powder.” They will have some choices for topics: 1. EASIER: What kind of a father is the dad in “Powder”? 2. CHALLENGE: What kind of effect does the father have on the son? GENIUS: What is one of the messages of “Powder”?

Overall, I spend about seven days on “Powder” from the first day’s reading (here) to the submitting of the final essay.