

Heather E. Bruce

# Additional Strategies for Teaching Ursula K. Le Guin's "She Unnames Them"

Editor's note: In the January 2008 issue of *English Journal*, Heather E. Bruce briefly describes a lesson using Le Guin's story, "She Unnames Them" to discuss the power and complexity of naming. In this extension, Bruce outlines the lesson in more detail, sharing strategies and suggesting other texts as springboards to further discussion.

I have approached this story several different ways as well as through combined approaches. I draw on Sheridan Blau's *The Literature Workshop*. Blau directs readers to read a short text a couple of times, and then to do two things with it: "Identify any lines you are still having trouble understanding and write out your question or questions about them, and then pick the line you regard as the most important line in the poem. Copy out that line in your log and write a paragraph on why you think it's the most important line" (61). Following this activity, students first meet in groups of four, to share any problems they had with specific words or lines and to clear those problems up as quickly as possible, then to share the line each of them picked as the most important and to read what they wrote about why it is the most important line, and finally to talk about differences and similarities in their readings (62). Each group then reports out, focusing on any disagreements about interpretation. This approach with "She Unnames Them" helps students concentrate on variety and validity of gendered interpretive differences from the point of view of the "characters," Adam and Eve, as well as of themselves.

Alternatively, I ask students to read the text a couple of times, then to write a one-sentence assertion that states what they think the story is about. I provide the sentence starter "She Unnames Them' by Ursula K. Le Guin is a story about . . ." After reading and writing, students gather in groups of four and do three things: (1) Read your assertion aloud one at a time, one after another. (2) Take turns reading the assertion again; group members help each reader/writer to find three examples from the text to support each assertion. (3) When each group member has had a turn, work

individually to revise your assertion. We then conduct a readaround in which each student reads his or her assertion aloud. The collective effect is provocative and affirming. Finally, we discuss nuances of students' interpretations and their gendered implications.

Still another approach I use with this story draws on questions for social action developed in a collaborative project between The National Writing Project and the Centre for Social Action. The questions students consider are the following: (1) What is happening in the story "She Unnames Them"? (2) Do you see any connections in your life? (3) Why does it happen? (4) Where are you in this? (5) What, if anything, needs to change? Why do you think so?

Finally, I use a strategy "Take a line for a walk . . ." inspired by visual artist Paul Klee to spark critical thinking, writing, and discussion. With this strategy, readers choose one line from the text that strikes them, copy it out, and then continue it in their own words. Those who wish to may share aloud.

## Additional Texts

These strategies have worked well with other texts, also. For example, the first line of *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville; "My Name" from *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros; act 2, scene 2 from *Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare; the first six paragraphs of *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Dorothy Allison; the first two paragraphs of "Jesus Christ's Half-Brother Is Alive and Well on the Spokane Indian Reservation" from *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, Sherman Alexie; and the poem "If I had been called Sabrina or Ann, she said" by Marge Piercy.

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