

Specific Reflections on Community Book Discussions Project 2011

Clearly successful

100% of community members and 90% of students think it should continue

There are some specific comments about what could be improved. Here are 4 possibilities for next year.

1. **More skill building earlier in the year:** The goal here is to read and think independently about a novel and then collaborate on critical and analytical ideas. It is evident from the agendas that many still confuse plot with conflict and theme. They don't know how to compose essential questions. The level of some of the comments was more complex, especially those that talk about the relationship between form and theme, but there aren't as many of these as there should be. Students should also be comfortable with the difference between personal reaction and analytical comments. This is the work of the English curriculum.

The use of a theme is really powerful. We did more curricular work in class than ever before, but it could be even stronger. Students should have the language and overarching issues of the theme in their vocabulary. For example, the theme was immigrant experience. We could have introduced some concepts, read an essay or two (in addition to the poem and blog we read), discussed the importance of this theme to the American experience more deliberately in class. Students would have more of a framework to discuss. This approach might also bring in the less abstract thinkers more easily.

2. **Change the format of the agendas or give multiple options:** They end up looking the same and feel kind of static. I would like to see greater use of outside resources, which is good preparation for the research project (there are obvious connections between these two projects).
3. **Draw in all participants:** Make the use of discussion protocols mandatory in the conversation. Give students many options to choose from but require that they organize their discussion around these protocols.
4. **Build excitement to increase engagement with students and community participation:** This goal is all in the marketing. Early in the year, I would like to hold a photo contest among students to get photos for the poster. We should distribute more of the posters, and they should be even more eye-catching and memorable. The marketing has gotten better every year, but I would like to keep improving it.