



CLASSROOM VIDEO • VIEWING GUIDE

INTRODUCTION TO CONTRACTING

Overview

In this classroom video, English language arts teacher Alysha Bird is about to begin her unit on *To Kill a Mockingbird* with her eighth graders. Before they delve into the novel, Ms. Bird introduces contracting, the process of openly discussing with your students expectations about how classroom members will treat each other. Contracting is of particular importance when approaching a text like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, with its difficult language and themes of race, violence, and rape. Contracting is an effective strategy for making your

classroom a reflective community. Reflective classroom communities are places where explicit rules and implicit norms protect everyone's right to speak; where differing perspectives can be heard and valued; where members take responsibility for themselves, each other, and the group as a whole; and where each member has a stake and a voice in collective decisions. This type of classroom community is deliberately nurtured by students and teachers who have shared expectations about how classroom members will treat each other.

Questions to Consider

1. What has the teacher done ahead of time to prepare for this lesson? What scaffolding might you need to provide to use this lesson in your own classroom context?
2. At **1:57**, Ms. Bird explains to the students that “the contract you all will buy into is so that we can be safe with each other.” What does Ms. Bird mean when she says, “be safe”? Why is this important, particularly when preparing students to grapple with sensitive or emotionally challenging content? How does such a sense of safety allow students to ask questions and take intellectual risks?
3. What is the difference between a class norm and a school rule? Why does Ms. Bird have her students make this distinction?
4. In creating a reflective classroom, one of the challenges faced by educators is ensuring that a variety of student voices are heard. How do you promote equity in classroom participation?

Featured

Alysha Bird

Teacher

8th Grade

Maxine Smith STEAM

Academy

Memphis, TN

Video Goals

- **Witness** how to create a reflective classroom community, using contracting.
- **Observe** students taking responsibility for themselves and their expectations of each other.

Lesson Resources

- **Teaching Strategy: Contracting**