

Amy Doerner
Unit two Writing Assignment
ED 800

Vivian Paley, a teacher turned author, thought she had it all figured out after nearly three decades of teaching. All figured out until one day, a young free spirited little girl named Reeny came bopping into class, and into Vivian Paley's life. Paley mentions how at one time she was not fond of the works of Leo Lionni, and had even considered discontinuing the use of his stories in her classroom. Little did she know it would be these stories that would change her as a teacher, and as a writer. Paley proved that even young students (kindergarteners) could be taught to be great thinkers.

In the story *The Girl with a Brown crayon*, young Reeny befriends a brown, stubborn little mouse named Frederick. Reeny compares herself to Frederick, much to Paley's dismay who could not fathom how a young innocent child with a heart of gold could be anything like a stubborn mouse that shares nothing with his friends. However, listening to Reeny's explanation, Paley quickly is drawn to Reeny's love for asking questions and making sense of events that were occurring. Paley noticed that how she was interpreting the stories was different than the message the children were receiving. This allowed Paley to prove that even kindergarteners could be successful in an inquiry based classroom with deep meaningful classroom discussions. It was during this school year and through the works of Lionni along with Paley's self reflections that she learned so much about herself as a teacher and writer, as well as a person in general.

In *Tico and the golden wings*, Paley viewed the situation as cruelty toward others, yet through a discussion with Reeny and a few other students, Paley reflected on her original thoughts and the message the students had perceived. The students did not see the situation as Tico being treated in a cruel manner when he simply wanted to feel special, but more so what the others in the story thought Tico was doing. It was interesting to hear about how at one time Paley avoided Leo Lionni stories altogether, and here these were the stories that set precedent for her journey into writing.

Another one of the stories that really stood out to me was the chapter titled. "*Walter*". Walter was a young boy who was seeking a sense of belonging. He longed to do what

others were doing at the time, yet when Paley asked him about his painting he simply stated, "I can't do it". After questioning Walter and receiving a short answer, she would then witness Walter quietly carrying on a quiet conversation with Reeny. A statement made by Paley portraying what every single child sitting in class must be wondering. "Do I belong here? Does someone care about me?" Paley discusses looking at the whole child, and how each piece must fit together in order for the child to be successful. These classroom discussions based on student questioning and inquiries are what opened new doors for Paley and led her on a mission of self-discovery and thus changed her curriculum for that school year.

Through using Leo Lionni stories, Paley realized students were learning about moral issues occurring in everyday life. Stories discussed acceptance and belonging, identity, race and death. These concepts are very difficult for young children to grasp, and adults, and here they were learning about them through literary pieces and classroom discussions. Paley would use the classroom discussions and self reflections to assess student understanding and push for higher order thinking/deeper meaningful classroom discussions, a great skill that will prove to be a valuable asset through life's journey for her students.

Paley was a huge proponent of self-reflection and journaling. She believed journaling and writing down your every thought to be much more effective than reflecting in a collaborative environment. At least through written reflections you could get all of your thoughts down on paper and be as critical of yourself as possible without others interrupting or interjecting. You can use what you write down to gain insight and deeper understanding of her instructional methods and content being taught. She would use her notes and journals to look back on and reflect. Sometimes she saw a situation or discussion that had occurred in the classroom in a totally different manner than when it originally happened. Not only did Vivian Paley use self-reflection and journaling as an inquiry based teaching style, she is publishing her thoughts and ideas for others to use. Through her readings and using her self reflective inquiry based teaching I can learn more about myself as a professional educator, and as a person in general. Hopefully I can many "great fit" years as well.