

Dear Rachel,

When I arrived at your classroom, a few minutes before your class started, I almost thought you weren't there yet because I could hear people talking in the room. But, to my surprise, you and your students were already engaged in conversation. Your class was talkative and seemed comfortable with each other and you, even before class started. You made an announcement about the drop date, which you also used to reassure your students of their ability to succeed in your class. You had a few students walk in late as you progressed with your lesson plan, but you never let it interrupt your teaching.

I really enjoyed the activity you did, writing the authors' names on the board and getting your students engage and articulate the different themes and issues each essay addressed. There were definitely some more talkative students, but you did a good job of calling on the quieter students who raised their hands less. Your students seemed really confident in this activity, and you did a great job of asking for more specifics, affirming their answers, but also beginning a good discussion and addressing any questions they had about the essays. You called them by name and they all seemed comfortable volunteering their answers and asking questions.

Your students were also very diligent note takers, even the kid who sat directly in front of me and browsed Twitter, still took notes when you wrote on the board. During the discussion of themes, one student started asking questions about MT3, which you patiently answered, and then another student brought the focus back to the task of naming themes. This made it seem like your students respect the work you're doing and wanted to stay on task. You responded very positively to their contributions and helped them to translate and articulate their ideas, which I imagine, helps give them the language to discuss these larger themes. When a student suggested "democratic," you kindly (and excitedly) said it wasn't quite the right word, but affirmed their contribution by praising the idea and redirecting the language.

The small group activity you assigned reinforced the importance of looking over the criteria. Many of the groups had questions and waited for you to come around and clarify. The only suggestion I really had for your class was in their small group work: perhaps giving them a step-by-step list (of questions or tasks) would keep the groups more focused. The group next to me talked about the assigned films briefly, and then, their assigned roommates. If they felt more accountable to share or answer specific questions, they might feel more pressure to stay on task. Of course, there's always that group that finishes early (there is in my class). One thing I've been trying, is giving them one extra task, like free writing, searching the text for evidence, or working on something towards the next assignment.

It was really nice to see your students so comfortable with one another and you. You've created a very safe classroom environment, which gives your students the freedom and confidence to speak up, make mistakes, and learn from them. You're working with some heavy texts and even though that one kid said "I hate Foucault," they seem to have a good grasp on the language and themes. Thanks for having me in your classroom. You gave me some great ideas to help engage my class in bigger discussions.

Sincerely,
Danni

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