Walter Dean Myers

AuthorStudy

Grade 8
ASSESSMENT AND PROGRESS MONITORING
Responding to Literature (Pre-Assessment Prompt)
Scoring Guide
Responding to Literature (Post-Assessment Prompt)
Scoring Guide

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Responding to Literature

In literature, a theme is a big idea, moral, or message about life, living, or human nature that is implied by what happens in the story. In “Little Red Riding Hood,” for example, a theme might be the idea that talking to strangers is not safe.

Walter Dean Myers’ “A Christmas Story” reveals something about human nature. As you think back on the story, what big ideas, morals, or messages might he be sharing with his readers by telling this story?

When you have decided on a possible theme, write it down on a piece of paper and then quickly reread the story to collect evidence—incidents, conversations, and/or descriptions—to support your idea. Identify this evidence by placing sticky-notes in the book so that you can find your evidence quickly as you write your essay.

Finally, write a well-organized essay in which you explain what the story is about and why Walter Dean Myers might have chosen to share it with his readers. Support your explanation by referring to specific incidents, conversations, and descriptions that reflect this theme.
Scoring Guide

Student’s Name: ___________________________  Student ID: ________________

Read each of the statements below and circle the number on the scale that most accurately reflects your assessment of the paper.

   4 = strong  3 = satisfactory  2 = somewhat weak  1 = weak

1. The paper clearly introduces the story and its author. 4 3 2 1
2. The paper explains a theme of the story. 4 3 2 1
3. The paper cites several specific relevant incidents, conversations, and/or descriptive passages that clearly support the identified theme. 4 3 2 1
4. The paper shows how the incidents, conversations, and/or descriptive passages contribute to the identified theme. 4 3 2 1
5. The paper explains why this theme is important. 4 3 2 1
6. The paper is clearly organized. 4 3 2 1
7. The paper moves smoothly from one idea to the next. 4 3 2 1
8. The paper uses terms that clearly communicate its ideas and information. 4 3 2 1
9. The paper includes a concluding statement or section that reiterates the theme and may extend its “wisdom” into life beyond the story. 4 3 2 1
10. The surface features (spelling, punctuation, and grammar) are reasonably accurate. 4 3 2 1
In literature, a theme is a big idea, moral, or message about life, living, or human nature that is implied by what happens in the story.

Read “Part I: Doll,” which begins on page 117 of _145th Street: Short Stories_. Pay attention to the stories that Miss Pat tells Big Time when he comes to visit. When you finish the story, ponder what big ideas, morals, or messages Miss Pat might be sharing with Big Time by telling him these stories.

When you have decided on a possible theme, write it down on a piece of paper and then quickly reread the story to collect evidence—incidents, conversations, and descriptions—to support your idea. Identify this evidence by placing sticky-notes in the book so that you can find your evidence quickly as you write your essay.

Finally, write a well-organized essay in which you explain what these stories are about and why Miss Pat chooses to share them with Big Time. Support your explanation by referring to specific incidents, conversations, and descriptions that reflect this theme.
Scoring Guide

Student’s Name: ________________________________  Student ID: ________________

Read each of the statements below and circle the number on the scale that most accurately reflects your assessment of the paper.

4 = strong  3 = satisfactory  2 = somewhat weak  1 = weak

1. The paper clearly introduces the story and its author.  
   4  3  2  1

2. The paper explains a theme of the story.  
   4  3  2  1

3. The paper cites several specific relevant incidents, conversations, and/or descriptive passages that clearly support the identified theme.  
   4  3  2  1

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9. The paper includes a concluding statement or section that reiterates the theme and may extend its “wisdom” into life beyond the story.  
   4  3  2  1

10. The surface features (spelling, punctuation, and grammar) are reasonably accurate.  
    4  3  2  1
There are dreams to which we will always cling, which will always define the being we recognize as self. What we know of others are gathered memories, collages of events that live within us. In my life passages I remember the bridges that were my adoptive parents.

I was two and a half when the young woman who gave birth to me died, and not much older than that when I was sent to another family to be raised. I have no memory of the bus trip from West Virginia to Harlem, or of my first meeting with Herbert and Florence Dean, the only parents I have ever known. What I have known of these people, who I remember them to be, has changed over the years, coming most sharply into focus upon my father’s death in 1986.

The last winter snow had finally melted and the tops of the trees were showing the first signs of new life when it became clear that he was failing. Each day my wife and I coaxed our old Maverick out to the East Orange Veterans Hospital, the silence in the car was heavy with grief, for we knew that any visit might be the last. My wife had grown to care for my father, accepting his irascible ways and worrying about his diet much more than I ever did. Her visits to the hospital were selfless, filled with sympathy for both me and my father. My own concerns, viewed through the prism of distance, were not as pure. I, too, cursed the disease, which had consumed his strength, which had destroyed this Black man from within as nothing had been able to do from without, but there was also something that I needed from him, one last gift before he went on his way. I needed his final approval, his blessing, if you will, of the man I had become.

From my own maturity my father was an easy man to understand. Hard times were normal for Blacks in Baltimore, where he was born in 1907. By the age of 10 he was working full-time. His father was a tall, Bible-willed man who ran a horse and wagon hauling business, and when my father was a child his grandfather, in Virginia, still worked the land on which
he had once been enslaved. Like other poor children his age in those pre-World War I days, he found that good times and full bellies were few and far between. He developed a clear, useful wisdom. If you weren’t willing to work for something, you really didn’t want it. It was a philosophy, imprinted on him as he hauled wood through the streets of Baltimore, that both colored and shaped his life.

My Dad wasn’t a man to take a lot of nonsense. He found himself in court as a teenager for knocking down a White southerner who ordered him off the sidewalk as the man’s wife passed. He found himself in jail for shooting at a man who tried to cheat him out of a day’s wages.

My adoptive mother had to be the best looking woman he ever met. Or is that my memory? Half Indian, half German, from a little community near Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Florence Gearhart had worked as a cook’s helper from the time she was 13. What they had in common, I think, was the understanding of what it was to be poor in America, and the ambition to do better.

The decision to move to New York must have been an exciting one for them. My mother talked of her early days in Harlem as overwhelming. My father had done some work on the docks in Baltimore and quickly found the New York waterfront. It was easier for Blacks to get night work and he worked the docks when he could in the evenings and worked on one of the mobster Dutch Schultz’s moving vans during the day. Mama did day work, cleaning homes. She used to tell me about the first years of their marriage with an excitement that escaped me. I didn’t understand why my father would get mad because some piano player named Fats Waller paid Mama too much attention, or why she would get mad if he lost money gambling with a tap dancer by the name of Bojangles.
In my family there were no psychological inducements to behave properly. There were simply standards one learned by a tone of voice, a raised eyebrow, a significant pause.

You respected all adults you met. You did not associate with anyone unworthy of respect. In the home you refrained from backtalk — and backtalk included sucking one’s teeth, rolling one’s eyes, and fixing one’s mouth as if one wanted to say something fresh.

When my mother wasn’t out working she was working around the house. She seemed to be always washing, dusting, or ironing something. I would follow her from room to room, as she never seemed to tire of talking to me. In the afternoon, the work done and the dinner started, she would read to me from True Romances. The heavy bosoms didn’t mean much to me, but the sound of her voice in that spotless, sun-drenched Harlem kitchen did.

There was never a moment when a light bulb went off and I announced to the world that I could read. But somehow, by the time I was five, I was reading. I could handle True Romances all by myself.

By the time I reached Junior High School 43, I was officially listed as “bright.” The reading that had begun with True Romances and comic books expanded. I read voraciously. I had begun to write. I had also begun to grow farther and farther away from my parents.

Why? What happened between us? I had changed, had grown through books and reading in ways unfamiliar to my parents. High school brought new opportunities and new problems. My tenth-grade reading included Thomas Mann, Honoré de Balzac, Eugene O’Neill, and Dylan Thomas. Reading was excellent to me and so, increasingly, was writing. Dealing with ideas became an overt part of my consciousness. But there were other influences, viewed now from adult understanding, which
affected me greatly. My father was working as a janitor/handyman. Everyone in the
 tenement in which I lived worked with their hands at menial jobs.

My parents began to represent to me what I did not want to be. I began to find
my identity in the books and in the concept of myself as an “intellectual.” Being
“smart” became the refuge from the notion of the Black inferiority that was being
offered to me in school and in the general society and which I had, unconsciously,
accepted. I was crushed when I discovered that I would not be able to go to
college.

It had been a sacrifice for my parents to maintain me in high school, and they
simply could not afford to keep a growing young man in school, without help. In a
fit of teenaged angst, I dropped out of school. I welcomed the trouble to be found
in the streets of Harlem, deliberately defying the family tenets, rejecting the values I
felt had rejected me. In effect, I dropped out of my father’s world.

My father and I became cautious friends when I reached my mid-20s, and closer
friends after my mother died. But still there was a gap between us, a distance
between us that I couldn’t understand. I had overcome my juvenile hostility and
rebellion, and it was my father who now seemed distant. In particular I felt that he
wasn’t pleased with my writing. Yet, as I began to be published, that’s who I was,
and how I identified myself.

Still, we got on. He seemed
to enjoy my company. We
spent holidays together, and
he helped me with a hundred
household repairs. But he never
mentioned the books I wrote.

Then he was ill. Then he was dying. Then I was sitting by his hospital bed, seeking
the last approval, seeking the last blessing.

I brought my new books to the hospital room. I brought him stories of what I was
doing. I said the words “I love you,” and punctuated them with my tears. When he

... I wanted to ask him if he also
loved my books, if he also loved the
writer I had become.
returned my declaration of love, I wanted to ask him if he also loved my books, if he also loved the writer I had become. I never did. Words seemed inadequate. What did “I love you” mean when the words were so expected? What did they mean when they echoed from antiseptic hospital walls but missed the uneasy contours of our relationship?

Sitting in my father’s empty house after his death was hard. There were a thousand reminders of special moments gone by. The old cowboy belt he let me play with as a child but would never give me. The New Testament he had given me when, on my 17th birthday, I had joined the army. But it was his papers that fascinated me most. As I went through them I was shocked. I looked at them over and over, turning them in my hands, wondering why I had never guessed his secret before.

I remembered him coming to my house, asking me to read some document to him, saying that he had misplaced his glasses. I recalled him sitting at a table asking me to check if an insurance form was “filled out right” or if he had “signed in all the right places.” My father couldn’t read well enough to handle my books.

When I was a child my father talked to me, told me absurdly wonderful stories. It was these stories that allowed me to release the balloon of my imagination, and to let it soar. It was his stories, and those of my grandfather, that gave me permission to tell stories myself, to think it was the thing I wanted to do. I was allowed to take the world of the imagination and make it my own. It was my mother, reading her magazines, that furthered that imagination, gave it order, defined it more in words than pictures. Herbert and Florence Dean were bridges I have crossed over. Bridges from the harder time they knew to the better time they did not know. They were willing to take me to the shores they weren’t able to manage themselves, and bid me Godspeed.
I wish I had known my father couldn’t read while he was alive. I would have told him my stories. I would have read to him the stories I had written, the same stories that he had once told me. But those times have passed and I’ll take from them, and from what I have learned from them that I, too, have stories to pass on and advice to give and a critical eye grounded in my own time and space.

My youngest boy was going for an interview recently. He’s quite the young man now and fairly sure of himself. Despite my best intentions not to, I gave him all the advice I had promised myself I would withhold. “I think you’re getting old,” he said smiling. “You’re sounding a lot like Grandpa.”

It was one of the nicest things he’s ever said to me.
### Class Reading Chart

Dates: _____________ - _____________

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<th>Student’s Name</th>
<th>Book/Page</th>
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# Weekly Reading Log

Name: _______________________________________________________________

Quarter: (Circle one) 1st 2nd 3rd 4th

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Sun Date:</th>
<th>Mon Date:</th>
<th>Tues Date:</th>
<th>Wed Date:</th>
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Reflecting on Reading

- I read _______ and it made me think about _______.
- I was surprised when _______.
- I was disappointed when _______.
- I understood _______, but I did not understand _______.
- I did not understand why _______.
- I was moved by _______.
- I expected _______ but _______.
- I was angry when _______.
- I got lost in the text when_______.
- I do not understand why the writer _______, because _______.
- I liked the way the writer _______ because _______.
- If I were the writer, I would have _______.
- I was struck by these words from the story: _______. They made me think _______.
- I was interested in _______ and would like to know more about _______.
- At first I thought _______, but now I think _______.
- I wonder _______ because _______.
- I predict _______ because _______.

Author Study: Walter Dean Myers
Talk about the setting

- Where does your book take place? How do you know?
- How is the information about the setting of your book similar to the information about the setting in *145th Street: Short Stories*?
- How is it similar to the information about Harlem?

Collaborate on a reading schedule

- Decide how many pages or chapters your group will read before the next Book Discussion Group meeting during Lesson 9.
- Then decide how many you will read by Lessons 11, 14, and 18.

Remember:
You must finish the entire book by Lesson 18
# Lesson 6 • Book Discussion Group 1

## Reading Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Number of Chapters</th>
<th>Number of Pages</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson 5</th>
<th>Today: Lesson 6</th>
<th>Lesson 7</th>
<th>Lesson 8</th>
<th>Lesson 9</th>
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<tr>
<td>Review books to identify openings, setting, etc.</td>
<td>Begin book and establish Reading Schedule</td>
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<td>Book Discussion Group Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<th>Lesson 10</th>
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<td>Book Discussion Group Meeting</td>
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<th>Lesson 15</th>
<th>Lesson 16</th>
<th>Lesson 17</th>
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<td>Post-Assessment: In-class Writing Day</td>
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Last Book Discussion Group Meeting: Book Must Be Finished
Book Discussion Calendar

Book Title ____________________________________________

We plan the following goals for our meetings:

By Lesson 9, we will read through page _____ to the end of chapter _____.

By Lesson 11, we will read through page _____ to the end of chapter _____.

By Lesson 14, we will read through page _____ to the end of chapter _____.

We will finish the book by Lesson 18.

Group Members: ____________________________________

_______________________________________

_______________________________________

_______________________________________

_______________________________________

_______________________________________
## Theme Cards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moving</th>
<th>Music</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Stanzas</strong></td>
<td><strong>Stanzas</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>3, 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>13, 14</td>
<td>17, 18, 19, 20</td>
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<tr>
<td>24, 25 (with the Music person)</td>
<td>24, 25 (with the Moving person)</td>
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<tr>
<td>26 (Harlem.)</td>
<td>26 (Harlem.)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things Happening Outside</th>
<th>Things Happening Inside</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Stanzas</strong></td>
<td><strong>Stanzas</strong></td>
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<td>9, 10</td>
<td>11, 12</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>26 (Harlem.)</td>
<td>26 (Harlem.)</td>
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<tr>
<th>The Colors of Hope</th>
<th>Feelings</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Stanzas</strong></td>
<td><strong>Stanzas</strong></td>
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<td>5, 6, 7, 8</td>
<td>21, 22, 23</td>
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<tr>
<td>26 (Harlem.)</td>
<td>26 (Harlem.)</td>
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Book Discussion Group Tasks II

• Each person should read his or her summary aloud; then, collaborate to be sure that everyone’s summary is up to date and includes the setting, the characters’ names, and the major incidents and conversations that have occurred thus far.

• Share your perceptions of the main character. Each member of the group should read the word or phrase that they chose and then read the descriptions, conversations, and/or incidents from the book that show their perception to be valid. Be sure to tell the page numbers, too, so that the group can read along.

• Talk about the setting. How is the setting of your book similar to the Harlem described in Myers’ poem?

• Choose the page and lines from *Harlem: A Poem* that most accurately reflect the setting of your book. You should be prepared to read this page aloud to the class and explain its connection to the book that you are reading.
Book Discussion Group Reflection I

Reflect on your meeting by listing:

3
New Insights

Share three insights you gained about Walter Dean Myers’ writing. These may be insights into his characters, setting, language, plot, or themes. They may also be about the ways in which his writing connects with the other short stories or Harlem or with movies or television shows or with real life.

2
Questions

List two questions you now have about the book you are reading, about Walter Dean Myers, or about his writing.

1
Risk

Describe one risk you took in the group. For example, you may have been unsure about asking a question, sharing your opinion, or making the prediction about the end of the book. You might have disagreed with someone and yet found a way to share the disagreement and still maintain a comfortable conversation. You might have been confused about something in the book and yet found a way to ask for help and still feel comfortable.

Book Discussion Groups are places to take risks. Without everyone taking small risks, the conversations just get boring.
Book Discussion Group Tasks III

Create a Chain of Events for your book.

- Each member of the group should use two full pages of his or her Reader’s Notebook to draw a Chain of Events large enough to contain the events of the entire book.
- Work together to write the important incidents and conversations into the rings on the chain.

Add arrows to your chain.

- Work together to show which incidents and conversations caused or affected later events.

Add notes about the main character.

- Work together to recall how the main character reacted to the various incidents and conversations and decide what this reveals about this character’s personality, values, and changes. Write notes next to your Chain of Events to record your insights.

Copy your chain, arrows, and notes onto chart paper.

- Help others see what is happening in your book.
  Your chart should include:
  - The Chain of Events (what has happened so far)
  - Arrows showing how early events affect later ones
  - Notes about the main character’s personality, values, and changes
  - The book’s title
  - The number of chapters and pages your group has read
Book Discussion Group Reflection II

• Think back on your last Book Discussion Group meeting to recall what you said.
  - What did you say at the beginning of your meeting?
  - What did you say next?

• Write a list of the comments you made. (Be as complete as possible.)

• Read your list of comments and circle those that were inspired by the comments of someone else in the group.

• Once again, read your list of comments and put stars next to those that inspired someone else in the group to talk.

• Groups work well when all of the members contribute and the focus stays on the task at hand (in this case, creating the Chain of Events for your book, both in your Reader’s Notebook and on the chart). If the score of 5 represents an excellent performance within the group and a score of 1 represents either non-participation or a lack of focus, give yourself a score as a member of yesterday’s Book Discussion Group.

• Finally, how could your Book Discussion Group improve its performance?
Reading Short Stories

1. Decide whether you want to read the story silently or read it aloud.

2. Read the story to identify the main characters and find out what happens. Remember—in these stories, Harlem is the setting and it deeply affects the characters, their choices, and what happens to them.

3. When everyone has finished the story, talk about how Harlem affected the characters and their thinking, actions, and interactions.

4. Work together to create a Chain of Events for the story. Each person should copy this Chain of Events into his or her Reader’s Notebook, and the group should also create a chart for display.

5. Add arrows to the chain to show which early incidents and conversations affected those that came later.

6. Write notes about the main character’s reactions to the incidents and conversations and how he or she changed through the story.

7. Decide what a reader might learn about life from reading this story. Write your idea in a sentence: “From reading this story, a reader might learn ______.”
Presenting Short Stories

1. Display the Chain of Events graphic organizer that you have created for your story.

2. Tell the name of your short story and the page on which it begins.

3. Refer to your graphic organizer to explain the sequence of events and the main character’s reactions to them.

4. Read your sentence about what a reader might learn from reading this story and explain why your group decided that this might be a theme of the story.
Book Discussion Group Tasks IV

For each of the following four tasks, talk as a group and then write notes in your own Reader’s Notebook that capture both your ideas and those of the group.

For Task 2, be sure to update the chart you created when your group last met.

1. Talk about the effect of the setting in your book. How would the main character’s life and decisions have been different if he or she lived in your community, attended your school, and spent time with the people in your life?

2. Work together to complete the Chain of Events up to the point at which you have stopped reading. Be sure to add the arrows to show how earlier incidents and conversations affected later ones and include notes about how the main character reacts and changes.

3. Finally, decide what a reader might learn about life from reading this story. Write your idea in a sentence: “From reading this story, a reader might learn ______.”

4. Make a prediction. What will happen before the book’s end? As you share your predictions, be sure to explain your reasoning, referring directly to information from the book.
Wisdom of Stories

To discover the “wisdoms” embedded in Walter Dean Myers’ writing, reflect on the book that you are currently reading and answer the following questions in your Reader’s Notebook:

• How did the setting help the main character in your book?
• What challenges did the main character(s) face?
• How did the main character(s) decide what to do?
• What “wisdoms” might this book provide its readers? What might a reader learn from reading it?
At the end of the fable, the people in *The Story of the Three Kingdoms* realize that they are the only ones who have “the gift of story and the wisdom it brings.” Reflect upon your reading of Walter Dean Myers’ works these last few weeks—the stories in *145th Street: Short Stories, Harlem*, and the book you have read with your Book Discussion Group. You have received the gift of many stories. What wisdoms might they bring?

Write an essay in which you explain one of the wisdoms that has been shown in at least two of the pieces that you have read. In your essay, explain the wisdom and show how each of these stories or the poem or the book have shown you the wisdom and “warmed in [your] mind.” Explain Myers’ writings in enough detail that your reader will be convinced that this wisdom is valid both in the stories and in real life.
Writing an Introduction

The introduction to any paper has two purposes:

- To capture the reader’s interest
- To let the reader know the topic of the paper

The introduction to this paper should include:

- Walter Dean Myers’ name
- A brief explanation of the particular “wisdom” that your paper will present
Book Discussion Group Tasks V

• **Talk about the end of the book:**
  - How did it end? Summarize it.
  - How did the ending compare with the predictions that you made during the last Book Discussion Group meeting?
  - Was it a good ending? Why?
  - How did the setting affect the characters? The action?
  - How did the character(s) change from the beginning of the book to the end?
  - On reflection, what might a reader learn from reading this book?

• **On a scale of 1–10 (with 10 representing a GREAT book), what score would your group give this book? Why?** (Be ready to share this evaluation and rationale during the closing.)

• **Talk about the “wisdoms” that the group members are writing about:**
  - How does this book provide evidence for each of these wisdoms?
  - What specific incidents, conversations, or insights might each writer use in the paper? (Writers: take notes here!)