



Students Ask Questions (Prep for Live Workshop)

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ABSTRACT

Students Ask Questions is a workshop session which models enquiry-based learning in the creative writing classroom, with a focus on prose. The two conference tracks it addresses are 1) Pedagogy and 2) Diversity and Inclusion. The liminal space this workshop examines is the student writer as beginner—the start of looking at other students’ writing, and the start of looking at one’s own. In the beginning of writing, somewhere during the time when an awareness of the process of writing is at its highest, the student learns to ask questions of the story on the page. How does this process of enquiry begin, and what questions are likely to bring about helpful results, both short-term and long-term? (Deignan 2009) In asking whether or not the enquiry is ‘helpful’, there are multiple players to consider: the student whose work is being queried, the student who is querying, and the future selves of both students, who, as their writing and editing skills have progressed, we hope, will have integrated a framework for questioning the writing on the page. (Vanderslice 2008) The workshop will also address assumptions. This is not a lore-based approach, but rather, an approach that actively examines the questions we ask when we evaluate writing, and in turn, how we begin to teach students to evaluate their own work and that of their peers. (Matthews 2019) How do we frame questions of the story on the page? How to encourage students to ask questions that open the student critic and the student writer to the process of writing? For example, questions such as the following might ‘open’ students to writing: 1) What questions does the opening bring to mind? Do you want to read on? 2) Does the ending feel satisfying and surprising? What questions from the opening does the ending answer? 3) If this story is arguing something about the way the world works, what is that argument? If this story is arguing for some kind of change in the world, what is that change? In terms of diversity and inclusion, some of the following are examples of questions that might encourage students to examine their own assumptions as they examine the questions they are asking of the story: 1) Do questions about character development make sense when critiquing a high fantasy novel-in-progress? 2) Does a bilingual character need to contextualise foreign phrases? 3) Does a story or a character or a setting need to be made less alien or strange for readers? If we teach student

writers to look at issues of craft and structure knowing that there are, or are likely to be, underlying assumptions, (Saleses 2019; Cruz 2017) we can enable students begin to ask better questions of the work at hand, and we can teach them to question the questions.