

# Book Study Questions

Learning is inherently social. Though sometimes we feel isolated as teachers, most of us know the benefits of taking time to engage with colleagues. It is in these conversations, or “teacher talk” as Regie Routman (1991) calls it, that we find our own ideas clarified and enriched. This is particularly true when new ideas, such as Response to Intervention, arise in education. Although there are many ways to structure a study group, it is most important to foster a climate in which teachers feel free and safe to participate in the ongoing conversations and exchange of ideas. Other guidelines can make book study more productive. Here are a few things you might consider. In addition to using these questions for discussion groups with practicing teachers, professors can use these questions to help preservice and student teachers understand and apply differentiated instruction with adolescent learners.

## Watch Group Size

You may want to kick off discussion with a general question and then break into smaller groups. Often the optimal number is four or six to ensure there is time for all to exchange ideas. The larger group can reassemble at the end to debrief.

## Use Study Questions

Some groups find it more comfortable to start with a few questions to get conversation going. There are various ways to use questions.

- Put three or four questions in an envelope and randomly pull them out for discussion.
- Create a chart with two or three starter questions and ask the group to generate more, tapping their own personal interests and needs.
- Decide on three or four questions and divide the group by interest in the various topics. This allows for a more in-depth study.
- Make copies of the suggested questions for everyone and invite discussion without deciding where to start.

## Create an Agenda

Make sure you have planned a beginning and ending time and always honor those times. Teachers are busy and knowing there will be a time to start and a time to end is important.

## Stay Focused on the Topic

Plan a procedure that is transparent. You might start by saying something like, “Let’s decide on a signal to use when we feel the discussion is drifting and then have everyone agree to help stay focused.”

## **Include Everyone**

Keep groups small enough so that even the quietest member is encouraged to speak. Active listening on everyone's part will help. Remember that periods of silence should be expected when people are thinking.

## **Share Leadership**

Rotate group facilitation. Identify several “duties” for the facilitator. Examples might include a discussion format, suggesting a big idea from a chapter or group of chapters, and synthesizing or summarizing at the end. Remember that in a study group, everyone is a learner. This isn't the place for an “expert”!

## **Create a List of Norms**

Simple expectations that are transparent often make study groups function with greater ease and increase potential for success. These can be simple and might include ways to invite a tentative member into the conversation, expectations about listening, start and stop times, and a procedure for refocusing.

## **Set Dates for the Next Meeting**

Always leave knowing when you will meet again and who will facilitate.

## **Engage in Reflection**

Stop from time to time to reflect on what you are learning and how you might make your group's interactions more productive.

## **Celebrate Learning**

Make sure you take time to enjoy one another and celebrate your learning.

The following questions relate to the content in each chapter. There are suggestions and many more concepts and ideas presented in each chapter. Enjoy!

## **Chapter 1: Adolescent Literacy and Differentiated Instruction**

1. In what ways has our definition of adolescent literacy changed over the past twenty years? How do you feel about this change in the definition? How can this changing definition be the basis for change in your teaching?
2. Several research reports have identified problems with adolescent literacy in the United States. What evidence of this have you observed? Comment on these problems or concerns relate to specifics about reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and the new literacies.
3. How do you see the National Council of Teachers of English's six key practices that support adolescent literacy reflected in your school or classroom? Which of these six key practices do you believe is practiced well in your school or classroom? Which of the six key practices would you like to support better in your school or classroom?
4. Discuss how differentiated instruction can be used to support adolescent literacy. Which aspects of differentiated instruction do you feel are most relevant to adolescent learners?

## **Chapter 2: Adolescent Literacy and Planning for Differentiated Instruction**

1. In your own words, how would you define differentiated instruction? In what ways are you and your colleagues already using instructional practices that support differentiated instruction? How did you develop your definition of differentiated instruction? Is your definition based on your own experiences, those of your teaching peers, your reading and studying, or prior workshops or professional development relating to differentiated instruction? Explain.

2. In order to differentiate instruction, teachers need to have clear goals. These clear goals begin with a basic understanding that all students must learn at high levels with teachers focusing on what is most important for all learners to know and be able to do. One model for clarifying goals is the Understanding by Design approach developed by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (2005). This model includes identifying enduring understandings and essential questions for each unit. Discuss how this model or an adaptation of it can be used when planning differentiated adolescent literacy instruction.
3. What challenges to implementing differentiated instruction do you see in your school? Why do you think these challenges exist? How can these challenges be overcome?
4. Discuss why you think differentiated instruction can benefit adolescent learners.
5. Are the differentiated unit and lesson planning models provided in this chapter useful to you? How can you adopt this model to your school or district's unit and lesson planning model?
6. Discuss what type of administrative help may be needed in order to support adolescent literacy and differentiated instruction in your school. What questions and suggestions related to this topic do you have for the administrators? What is your administration's belief about differentiated instruction? What do you believe your administration would say to you about differentiated instruction?

### **Chapter 3: Assessment and Differentiated Instruction**

1. It is sometimes said that differentiating instruction begins with assessment. How is preassessment the first step in differentiating instruction? What methods have you used to preassess learners? How have you used these methods to differentiate instruction?
2. Discuss how preassessing for interests and learning styles is as necessary as preassessing for readiness levels. What are some ways teachers can preassess students in these three areas? Categorize the methods you listed in question 1

relating to interests, learning styles, and readiness. Which category do you use most frequently? Which category of preassessing do you use the least? Why and how would you increase your use of any of the ways to preassess?

3. Differentiating assessment products can be controversial. Discuss why this can be a positive practice and consider ways it can be accomplished. Be sure to address ideas relating to equality and equity in your answer. Think of your response as an answer to parents, students, or other teachers.
4. Adolescents need to take more ownership of their own learning. Discuss how varying assessment products can help accomplish this goal while still being a reliable way for students to demonstrate learning. Consider how choice of assessments appeals to learners and how teachers can accommodate this appeal.
5. Discuss how formative assessment differs from summative assessment and why each is important. Consider how both can be used in differentiating adolescent literacy instruction. How do teachers make students part of both the formative and summative assessment processes?
6. Rick Wormeli reminds us that “fair isn’t always equal” (2006b). Fair is giving each student what that person needs in order to progress. Discuss how this applies to differentiated assessment.

## Chapter 4: Reading and Differentiated Instruction

1. In differentiated instruction, teachers vary the content, process, and product based on students’ personal interests, readiness levels, and learning styles. Discuss how reading instruction, including the reading of fiction and nonfiction, might be differentiated.
2. Share your experiences with and views on having students read different texts within the same unit. How can a teacher select differentiated texts so that they are connected in some way? What specific texts might you use and why have you selected these texts?
3. In order for students to comprehend better what they are reading, teachers often use small-group and whole-class discussions. Socratic Seminars and

literature circles are two ways to promote true discussion. Share your experiences with these two models and discuss how they can be used to differentiate instruction.

4. Consider your own students. How might graphic novels be used to help them become more literate?
5. Share any experiences you have had with reading or teaching graphic novels.
6. Discuss your experience with and views on using electronic texts for reading in the classroom. If you have not used electronic texts, find out if other teachers you know have used them. What are their experiences? If you do not know any teachers who have used electronic texts, consult the Internet to find others who have used these texts. What do you think of their experiences?

## Chapter 5: Writing and Differentiated Instruction

1. The element of choice is an important component of adolescent literacy and differentiated instruction. Share how you build choice into your writing instruction. Consider why it is important to provide adolescents choice for their writing.
2. The writing process lends itself to practices in differentiated instruction. Discuss how differentiated practices can be used at various stages of the writing process. Consider how differentiated instruction can help adolescents improve their writing.
3. Consider Lucy Calkins' model for different types of writing conferences. How can this model support adolescent literacy and differentiated instruction? Think of ways to adapt it to fit your classroom needs. Consider questions you might ask students during a writing conference. Consider how you can have adolescents take ownership of writing conferences.
4. Discuss how writing folders and portfolios can be used to differentiate instruction. Detail your own experience with folders and portfolios. Have you ever used a writing portfolio as a process collection or as a showcase? How do students learn to collect, select, and reflect?

5. Consider the benefits and the challenges of using new technology in writing instruction. How can the new technology support differentiated learning? What do you need to learn about using new technology so that you can better help your learners?
6. Discuss which of the examples presented in this chapter you use or you would consider using in your classroom and share your reasons for choosing them. Also tell about which of the examples you might have difficulty using. How might you adapt this example? What would you have to learn and do to adapt this example?

## **Chapter 6: Speaking, Listening, and Differentiated Instruction**

1. Discuss why listening and speaking are considered essential literacy practices for adolescents. What are some of the challenges teachers face when addressing speaking and listening in the classroom?
2. Share speaking and listening assignments you have used. Discuss how these examples can be differentiated based on students' readiness levels, personal interests, and learning styles.
3. Consider ways in which technology can be used to support differentiated instruction in speaking and listening. What would you have to learn or do to use technology to support differentiated instruction in speaking and listening?
4. Share which of the examples presented in Chapter 6 you have used or plan to use and explain why.

## **Chapter 7: Viewing, Multimedia, and Differentiated Instruction**

1. Multimedia can encompass a wide range of practices. Discuss your understanding of media literacy and its importance to adolescent literacy.



2. Discuss ways in which adolescents can become more critical viewers. What specific ways can you as their teacher help adolescents to become critical viewers?
3. Discuss ways teachers can differentiate content, process, and product when planning media literacy assignments. What are the challenges to planning and implementing such lessons?
4. Schools do not have to be high-tech to help students become more critical viewers. Share some ways teachers can instruct adolescents in critical viewing without using high-tech equipment.

## **Chapter 8: The New Literacies and Differentiated Instruction**

1. Teachers sometimes feel left behind when it comes to developments in technology. Discuss how your faculty and administrators can support each other in this area, especially as it affects adolescent literacy.
2. Discuss what is meant by the term *new literacies*. Debate the necessity of addressing the new literacies in the English language arts classroom.
3. Podcasts, wikis, blogs, and book trailers are a few examples of new technology that can be used in classrooms to support literacy and differentiate instruction. Consider the specific examples presented in this chapter and discuss how you can use or adapt them for your own students.
4. Share your own experiences with using new technology to support adolescent literacy learning in your classroom.
5. Discuss how the new technology could be used to differentiate assignments in an English language arts classroom.

## **Chapter 9: Adolescent Literacy and Differentiated Instruction Beyond the Classroom**

1. Discuss what role English language arts teachers can play in promoting literacy across the curriculum. What challenges do they face in doing so? Brainstorm some solutions to these challenges.

2. When considering ways to differentiate instruction to promote adolescent literacy, it is helpful to think beyond the school. Brainstorm community resources available in your area that can be used to promote adolescent literacy.
3. Middle and secondary teachers are less likely than elementary teachers to consider parents or guardians when planning lessons or activities. Discuss ways your students' parents or guardians can play a role in their adolescents' literacy development.