PlayMakers' *Sense and Sensibility*: Guide for Instructors

To help instructors further bring this piece of literature to life for their students

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Timeline of Jane Austen's Life

1775: Jane Austen is born on December 16 in Hampshire.

1783: Jane, age 7, studies for a short time with Cassandra at a school in Oxford.

1785: Jane and Cassandra study in Reading for a short time, the return to Steventon where Jane will remain for much of the next 15 years.

1787: She begins writing a variety of works now known as her Juvenilia.

1791: She writes *The History of England* "by a partial, prejudiced, and ignorant Historian."

1792: She writes *Lesley Castle*, a short epistolary novel.

1794: She writes the epistolary novel *Lady Susan*, the last piece of her Juvenilia.

1795: She writes Elinor and Marianne, an early draft of *Sense and Sensibility*.

1796: She writes *First Impressions*.

1797: Her father offers *First Impressions* to a London Publisher; it is rejected without being read.

1797: She begins to revise *Elinor and Marianne*, retitling it *Sense and Sensibility.*

1799: She writes *Susan*. It is accepted by a publisher, but not published.

1801: Her father retires from the church and the Austens move to Bath, Somerset county.

1802: She receives and accepts a marriage proposal from a family friend, Harris Bigg-Wither, then changes her mind and retracts her acceptance the next day.

1803: She sells a revised version of *Susan* to another London publisher. He agrees to publish it, but never does.

1804: She begins to write *The Watsons*, but leaves it unfinished.

1805: Her father dies.

1806: Jane, Cassandra, and their mother move to Southampton, Hampshire county.

1809: Jane, Cassandra, and their mother move to a cottage owned by Edward Austen Knight in Chawton, Hampshire county.

1810: She finishes *Sense and Sensibility*.

1811: *Sense and Sensibilit*y is published in October and is moderately successful.

1811: She begins revising *First Impressions* into *Pride and Prejudice*.

1813: *Pride and Prejudice* is published on January 28. It sells very well and will be the most popular of her novels during her lifetime.

1813: She finishes writing *Mansfield Park*.

1814: *Mansfield Park* is published.

1815: She is praised by the Prince Regent, who invites her to dedicate a future work to him.

1815: *Emma* is finished and published and dedicated to the Prince.

1816: She or her brother Henry buys back the manuscript of *Susan* and she begins revising it into *Northanger Abbey.*

1816: She finishes *Persuasion*.

1816: Her health begins to fail.

1817: In a period of better health, she begins writing *Sandition*, left unfinished.

1817: She dies on July 18th and is buried in Winchester Cathedral.

Timeline of World Events During Austen's Life

1810- Mexico, Chile, Argentina, and Columbia declare Independence from Spain

1811- George III is declared insane and his son, the Prince of Wales, begins to rule in his place, officially beginning the Regency.

1811- Luddites, protesters against the unemployment brought about my mechanization, destroy factory machinery in Northern England.

1812- The War of 1812 begins between Britain and the United States.

1812- Napoleon's army captures Moscow, but is forced to begin retreat from Russia.

1813- Duke of Wellington's army forces the French out of Spain.

1814- Napoleon abdicates and is exiled to Elba.

1815- Napoleon escapes from Elba and returns to power in France. His army is defeated at Waterloo by British and Dutch forces under Wellington. He is exiled to St. Helena. Monarchy is restored to France under Louis XVIII

1816- Coleridge publishes “Kubla Khan.”

1817- John Keats’ poetry first published.

1818- Mary Shelley writes *Frankenstein*.

1820- George III dies and George IV ascend to the throne after a 10 year Regency.

Synopsis of Plot:

Upon the sudden death of Mr. Dashwood, his son John inherits his estate of Norland, and with it, a large fortune. John’s father gives him one command, to “provide for your stepmother and her daughters.” After John’s wife Fanny convinces him otherwise, the Dashwood girls sensible Elinor, romantic Marianne and the young Margaret and their mother are left nearly destitute. However, their sister-in-law does have one redeeming quality: her handsome, if shy, brother Mr. Edward Ferrars. The eldest sister, Elinor, quickly captures his attention.

The Dashwood women are forced to leave their home at Norland for a cheaper cottage across England, generously provided by their boisterous cousin, Sir John. He introduces them to their new neighbors, including Sir John’s nosy but loving mother-in-law Mrs. Jennings, and the kind-hearted Colonel Brandon. It is evident to all that the Colonel is immediately taken with Marianne, but she does not share his affection because of his advanced age of 35.

After taking a fall during a walk, Marianne is rescued by Mr. John Willoughby, a suave and handsome young man. It is revealed that he is expected to inherit a large fortune from his aunt as well as her nearby estate. Willoughby begins to woo Marianne, much to her delight. Elinor keeps Willoughby and Marianne in check,

cautious of her sister's sensibilities and Willoughby's smooth-talking manner. Then, just when every sign points to an imminent proposal, Willoughby abruptly leaves for London on business for his aunt. The whole family — especially Marianne — is left confused and devastated. After a short visit from Edward Ferrars rekindles his and Elinor's affections, Mrs. Jennings introduces the sisters Lucy and Anne Steele. Lucy confides to her new "friend" Elinor that Mr. Edward Ferrars is actually her secret fiancé. Elinor must now keep Lucy's secret while also hiding her own love for Edward.

Mrs. Jennings offers to take the Dashwoods with her to London for the fashionable winter season. Marianne enthusiastically agrees, Elinor less so, but accompanies her sister to London anyway. Marianne finally finds Willoughby and discovers he is engaged to another, much richer, lady. While Marianne languishes, Colonel Brandon discloses the truth to Elinor: Marianne is not the only woman Willoughby has deceived — Brandon's young ward, the daughter of his childhood sweetheart, received Willoughby's affections as well. Marianne chooses to look past her lover's misconduct and continues to pine for Willoughby.

John Dashwood visits his stepsisters in London. He invites the girls to a party with the Steeles, where they finally meet Fanny and Edward's mother, the formidable Mrs. Ferrars. During the party, Lucy again confides in Elinor about her feelings for Edward. Then, scandal erupts. While on a visit to Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood, Anne Steele tells Fanny about Lucy and Edward's engagement. When Edward chooses to stand by the engagement, he is cast out from his family, and his inheritance is given to his younger brother Robert. Edward is befriended by Colonel Brandon, who offers him the vicarage on his estate. Soon, it is time to leave London and return home, but

Mrs. Jennings insists on a quick stop to visit her younger daughter's family, the Palmers. Marianne objects she is not only anxious to be home, but the Palmers' home is much too close to Willoughby. Colonel Brandon obligingly accompanies them so that the girls can have a chance to continue their journey homeward with a chaperone.

While at the Palmers' home, though, Marianne is caught walking in a storm and falls dangerously ill. When Brandon leaves to retrieve her mother, a drunken Willoughby arrives to see Marianne. He is stopped just in time by Elinor. He confesses to her that he truly loved Marianne the whole time, but felt too pressured to marry for wealth instead of for love. Elinor takes pity, but knows his very presence could shock her sister into even greater peril. Full of misery, Willoughby leaves the house and never sees Marianne again. Colonel Brandon arrives with Mrs. Dashwood and sees Marianne through her illness. Her feelings for Willoughby give way to affection for Brandon.

Edward arrives to reveal that, after his fortune was lost, Lucy Steele set her heart on his brother Robert and now the two are married. Edward is at last free to propose to Elinor, which she happily accepts. Marianne also accepts the Colonel's hand.

Source: https://www.guthrietheater.org/globalassets/pdf/study-guides/senseandsensibility_studyguide.pdf (pp3-4)

Other Study Guides: https://www.bard.org/study-guides/synopsis-sense-and-sensibility

Themes for Discussion & Activities:

Society and Class:

The world of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* is a complicated one, in which everyone fits neatly into minute little pigeonholes in the incredibly stratified, hierarchical class system. Imagine this system as an enormous card catalog, in which every single person we encounter fits somewhere and moving them to another place is quite a big undertaking, that involves shuffling everyone else around slightly and getting them all used to it. Her characters are all painfully, obsessively aware of their individual positions in society, and all of their relationships are marked distinctly by their varying amounts of power within the social system. Some questions to reflect on:

Most of the characters we encounter in *Sense and Sensibility* fall in the vague category we call the middle class. Can you differentiate between them? If so, how? What kind of impact do society and social convention have upon the various characters in Austen's novel? Is there any single "correct" take on social convention here? If so, what is it? Is social class a limiting factor here, or do characters manage to get around it?

Source: https://www.shmoop.com/sense-and-sensibility/society-class-theme.html

Love:

Love is a many splendored thing, sure, but it's also a many troubled thing, if you ask Austen. In *Sense and Sensibility*, she shows us dramatically different facets of this crazy little thing we call love, from the euphoric to the life-threatening. While love is

certainly the driving force of the various plots we see in this novel, it's not always a good thing — in fact, more often than not, there's an edge of danger or tragic potential in it. Love, asserts this book, is wonderful and beautiful and all, but there's always a chance that it'll creep up behind you and stab you in the back. Some questions to reflect on:

What different kinds of love do we see in *Sense and Sensibility*? What aspects contribute to the love relationships we see here? In your opinion, do you think the characters view love differently than modern readers do?

Source: https://www.shmoop.com/sense-and-sensibility/love-theme.html

Communication:

Communication and miscommunication are both central to *Sense and Sensibility* — the novel is full of moments of misunderstanding as a result of what is said (or notably not said). The characters are constantly in discourse with each other, whether in person or in letters, but that doesn't mean that they're always clear with one another. Actually, sometimes it's the surplus of language that makes things unclear — Austen shows us that more words don't necessarily help explain anything. Rather than simply talking and talking, the important thing is to make sure that you're actually understanding each other — something that our characters aren't always capable of. Sound familiar? It should, because it's frequently true in real life. Some questions to reflect on:

Does the necessary elements of propriety and convention in characters' speech contribute to clear understanding, or to misunderstanding? Do you think that any of

these plot lines could have been resolved earlier by changing the ways in which the characters communicate with each other? Why or why not? If your answer to the above question was yes, how do you think they could communicate differently?

Source: https://www.shmoop.com/sense-and-sensibility/language-communication-theme.html

Wealth:

Money is nice, and we all want to have it. We know it now, and Austen knew it back in the nineteenth century. For this simple reason, money is a motivating factor in a lot of the decisions that we see unfold in *Sense and Sensibility*. Wealth and inheritance create systems of control and power here, that profoundly influence the personal choices and options of our characters; most of the young people Austen introduces to us are financially dependent upon parents or other relations, and therefore obliged to submit to them, according to the rules of the day. Maybe it's not right, but it's just the way things work in the world of the novel and we see them attempt to balance the pragmatic need for wealth with their emotional demands throughout the book. Some questions to reflect on:

Can money buy happiness for any of these characters? How significant is it that all of these various plotlines take place within the confines of the middle class? What is the relationship of wealth to power in the relationships we see here?

Source: https://www.shmoop.com/sense-and-sensibility/wealth-theme.html

Sensibility:

The dichotomy between "sense" and "sensibility" is one of the lenses through which this novel is most commonly analyzed. The distinction is most clearly symbolized by the psychological contrast between the novel's two chief characters, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood. According to this understanding, Elinor, the older sister, represents qualities of "sense": reason, restraint, social responsibility, and a clear-headed concern for the welfare of others. In contrast, Marianne, her younger sister, represents qualities of "sensibility": emotion, spontaneity, impulsiveness, and rapturous devotion. Whereas Elinor conceals her regard for Edward Ferrars, Marianne openly and unashamedly proclaims her passion for John Willoughby. Their different attitudes toward the men they love, and how to express that love, reflect their opposite temperaments.

This dichotomy between "sense" and "sensibility" has cultural and historical resonances as well. Austen wrote this novel around the turn of the eighteenth century, on the cusp between two cultural movements: Classicism and Romanticism. Elinor represents the characteristics associated with eighteenth-century neo-classicism, including rationality, insight, judgment, moderation, and balance. She never loses sight of propriety, economic practicalities, and perspective, as when she reminds Marianne that their mother would not be able to afford a pet horse or that it is indecorous for her to go alone with Willoughby to Allenham. It was during the Classical period and its accompanying cultural Enlightenment that the novel first developed as a literary genre: thus, with the character of Elinor, Austen gestures toward her predecessors and acknowledges the influence of their legacy on her generation.

In contrast, Marianne represents the qualities associated with the emerging "cult of sensibility," embracing romance, imagination, idealism, excess, and a dedication to the beauty of nature: Marianne weeps dramatically when her family must depart from "dear, dear Norland" and willingly offers a lock of her hair to her lover. Austen's characterization of Marianne reminds us that she was the contemporary of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Walter Scott, the luminaries of the English Romantic literary scene. Austen's depiction of Elinor and Marianne thus reflects the changing literary landscape that served as a backdrop for her life as a writer.

However, this novel cannot simply be understood as a straightforward study in contrast. Elinor, though representing sense, does not lack passion, and Marianne, though representing sensibility, is not always foolish and headstrong. Austen's antitheses do not represent epigrammatic conclusions but a starting- point for dialogue. Although Austen is famous for satirizing the "cult of sensibility," in this novel she seems to argue not for the dismissal of sensibility but for the creation of a balance between reason and passion. Fanny Dashwood's violent outbreak of feeling towards the end of the novel reveals that too little feeling is as dangerous as too much. Both Elinor and Marianne achieve happiness at the end of the novel, but they do so only by learning from one another: together they discover how to feel and express their sentiments fully while also retaining their dignity and self-control. The novel's success is not a result of the triumph of sense over sensibility or of their division; rather, we remember *Sense and Sensibility* as a conjunction of terms that serve together as the compound subject of Austen's novel.

Source: Sparknotes

People:

Cowper: [pronounced Cooper] William Cowper (1731-1800), English poet who was one of Jane Austen's favorites. He was descended from poet John Donne through his mother, and was known to have a mental illness, which resulting in at least one nervous breakdown and several suicide attempts. He recovered under the care of several friends and patrons, and thereafter spent the bulk of his adult life in "rustic retirement," though he had several more breakdowns until late in his life. He had a bit of gloomy outlook in general, a result of his religious mania and general feeling that he was irrevocably damned. Most of his significant writing happened or was published after 1780, including a series of essays in couplets, the heroic ballad "John Gilpin's Ride," the long poem "The Task," and a translation of Homer (in contrast with Pope's "artificial" version from an earlier generation. "His poems celebrate rural life and the beauties of nature in a way that influenced later Romantic poets, though he tended to be less fervent in his enthusiasm." He's also quoted in Austen's *Mansfield Park*. His 1,500-line poem "Hope," Marianne's favorite poem, was written during the 1870s and published in 1782 in Poems by William Cowper; it was one of a series of "verse discourses" that became known as the *Moral Satires*.

"Cowper!" "Yes. I daresay that Scott or Pope is a more serious-minded answer, but I am afraid that Cowper is my favorite poet of our time." (Marianne, Willoughby, act one)

Curate: the lowest rung among the clergy, below a rector and a vicar (but all clergy were considered members of the gentry). Curates were often hired to assist the clergyman who held a living to do his duties within the parish, either because the clergyman has retired and the duties have become too much for him or because the clergy serves multiple parishes and needs assistance. They were usually poorly paid.

"He is the curate of the parish, I dare say?" (Mrs. Jennings, act one)

Honorable Miss Morton: "Honorable" is a courtesy title given to children of viscounts and barons, the lowest ranks among the peerage. With her fortune of £30,000, Miss Morton outranks everyone else in the play in status and money together.

"… his mother has determined she will give him his independence just as soon as he marries the Honorable Miss Morton." (John Dashwood, act two)

Alexander Pope: Pope (1688-1744), English poet and satirist, of a generation before Cowper. His works include "Rape of the Lock," translation of Homer's *Iliad*, the three-volume *Dunciad*, and three volumes of *Miscellanies*, published with fellow satirist Jonathan Swift. Pope really is not in line with Marianne's taste.

"Cowper!" "Yes. I daresay that Scott or Pope is a more serious-minded answer, but I am afraid that Cowper is my favorite poet of our time." (Marianne, Willoughby, act one)

Sir Walter Scott: Scott (1771-1832), Scottish novelist, poet, historian and another favorite of Jane Austen. He not only created the genre of historical novel, but his writings were so influential as to invent a national culture, history and identity, and his work was highly influential on almost all poets and novelists that followed him. Among his notable works are "The Lady of the Lake," (1810), *Waverley* (1814) and *Ivanhoe* (1820). His work is also discussed and admired in Austen's *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion.*

"Cowper!" "Yes. I daresay that Scott or Pope is a more serious-minded answer, but I am afraid that Cowper is my favorite poet of our time." (Marianne, Willoughby, act one)

Sir John: A man with the title "Sir" is either a knight (an honor bestowed for his service and is not hereditary) or a baronet, the lowest rung on the British aristocratic ladder, which is hereditary. He is a member of the gentry, "a gentleman of consequence and property," but not a peer/member of the nobility. When we meet Sir John Middleton's wife, she is referred to as Lady Middleton, a title befitting the spouse of either a knight or baronet. It also means that she has gained the title through marriage; if she had the title through birth, she would be Lady "first name," ala Lady Catherine in *Pride and Prejudice* or Lady Mary in "*Downton Abbey.*"

"I am writing to our cousin, Sir John Middleton. He may have a cottage available for us in Devonshire."

Things:

Banns: The Marriage Act of 1753 outlawed clandestine weddings in England (though not in Scotland) so engagements and the intention to marry were very public. Couples could be married in two ways: publishing the banns, which meant the local clergy would announce the couple's intention to marry on three successive Sundays or holy days, giving the community enough time to voice any objections, and the couple could marry within the next three months. The second option was to get a license, which came with an expense, either from a local clergyman which would allow you to marry in a parish where either member of the couple lived or a special license that allowed for a marriage any time any place.

"Mum's the word until the banns are read, 'ey?" (Mrs. Jennings, act two)

Chaise: a four-wheeled carriage that had one forward-facing seat that could seat up the three people (as opposed to a coach, that had two three-person seats that faced each other). (Thomas, act two)

Constantia Wine: Wine from grapes grown on the Constantia farm near Cape Town, South Africa.

"I recollected that I had some fine old Constantia wine in the house … My poor husband was fond of it whenever he had a touch of his gout." (Mrs. Jennings, act two)

Curricle: a two-person open carriage driven by two horses (as opposed to one) so it can go very fast

"It is Mr. Willoughby's curricle outside! I told you, he DID visit her!" (Margaret, act one)

Fifty Thousand Pounds: Miss Gray's fifty thousand pounds is much larger than any other female character's fortune in Austen's novels. This suggests the Gray family fortune is not tied up in land or an estate, but may come from commerce. She can raise her own and her family's social standing by marrying into a family with an estate, which may be in need of ready cash on hand because of debts (in Willoughby's case) or because the wealth is all tied up in the estate. If Miss Gray herself was already part of the aristocracy, her wealth would land her someone of much higher status than Willoughby.

"The lady then is very rich?" "Fifty thousand pounds, my dear." (Elinor, Mrs. Jennings, act two)

Gout: inflammation of joints, especially in the big toe, brought on by a diet overly rich in purines (uric acids); much more typically found in men than women

"Very gouty, poor fellow, and never comfortable in the least bit of damp." (Mrs Jennings, act one)

Guinea: a coin worth a pound plus a shilling; 50 guineas is a comparatively large sum approximately what each of the Dashwood girls earn a year from interest on their £1,000.

"I would lay fifty guineas that Brandon invented this trick to get out of our gathering." (Willoughby, act one)

Living: a living is the position and property of a clergyman in the Church of England. Although some livings were awarded directly by the church, many were "in the gift" of private landowners or of royalty, meaning that those individuals could give those positions to whomever they chose. A living would include a house, a plot of land and revenue from tithes drawn from the income of all the agricultural land in the parish. The yearly value of a living could vary greatly depending on the size and richness of the parish. A clergyman's better income at the time would have probably been between £600 (Mr. Austen's living from two parishes circa 1801) and £1,000 (about James Austen's living from three parishes) a year.

"The living of Delaford is vacant, and mine to appoint. Would you be willing to tell him that I would name him as rector …" (Colonel Brandon, act two)

Parish: the smallest geographical subdivision within the Church of England which also served as a governmental unit. Each parish was part of a deanery, which was part of an archdeanery, which was part of a diocese headed by a bishop. A clergyman (perhaps assisted by a curate) would serve a parish, which could vary in size; some parishes had a series of "chapels of ease," which would allow for local services within a parish. In its secular capacity, the parish collected and distributed local charity to the poor of that particular parish.

"He is the curate of the parish, I dare say?" (Mrs. Jennings, act one)

Pianoforte: a piano, first brought to England in the late 18th century from Germany. Unlike in a harpsichord, strings on a piano are struck by a hammer rather than plucked, and therefore require less maintenance and create a louder sound. John Broadwood, a Scottish carpenter and joiner, held several early patents on

mechanisms that improved the working of the pianoforte. By 1790, he was manufacturing 400 square and 100 grand pianos a years. He was acknowledged to be one of the best piano manufacturers in England, and English pianos were considered the best in the world. Most accomplished young ladies were taught to play the piano, music being perfectly suitable for women, but it wasn't considered gentlemanly for a man to know how to play.

"Next to my pianoforte. You may spy on the neighbors!" (Marianne, act one)

Pointers: Before guns became lightweight enough for hunters to shoot birds on the fly, the tactic was for a pointer to find a sitting bird, terrify the bird enough to keep its position, and point it out to its master who would shoot the bird as it was sitting still. As guns became lighter, pointers were replaced with retrievers, to collect the birds flushed out from the brush and shot out of the air, though some pointers could be trained to retrieve as well.

"Thank you, ma'am, but my pointers are outside. A little more water will not melt me." (Willoughby, act one)

Queen Mab: The horse Willoughby gives Marianne is from *Romeo and Juliet*, in which Mercutio has a long speech about Queen Mab, the fairies' midwife.

"But, Marianne! … Queen Mab is still yours, Marianne. I shall keep her only till you can claim her for your more lasting home." (Willoughby, act one)

Rector: a rector is the clergyman who has exclusive rights to the tithes from his parish (as opposed to a vicar, who receives only some of the tithes, or a curate, who is employed by a rector to fulfill some or all of the clergy's duties.)

"The living of Delaford is vacant, and mine to appoint. Would you be willing to tell him that I would name him as rector …" (Colonel Brandon, act two)

A Thousand Pounds: Women's fortunes (or lack thereof) are noted as lump sums; the thousand pounds John first proposes giving his sisters would be one thousand pounds each, invested with an approximate rate of return of 5% (or $50 a year actual income). Men's fortunes in Austen novels are noted as annual incomes. Currency equivalencies can be tricky, but roughly speaking, a thousand pounds is about £30,000-£70,000 ($40,000 90,000) in today's money.

"I think that I will give them a thousand pounds apiece to start their new life!" (John Dashwood, act one)

Additional Class Activities:

1. "Teach Each Other Discussion"

Multicultural Strategy

Context: This strategy should be used during the novel as an assessment of student thought and perspective on ideas within the novel. Not only will it allow students to show their knowledge, but it will expand and develop their opinions.

Purpose: This strategy is a form of discussion group in which the teacher becomes a shadow while the students teach one another. The discussion is based on a common reading of set of statements. Unlike traditional discussion groups in which the students look to the teacher for answers and guidance, in this discussion the students have complete ownership. It allows students to express their views in light of their own personal cultural background. This is a way to increase student involvement in talking and participation and allows the teacher to observe and take notes on who participates and how often. This type of discussion is also advantageous as it informs the teacher of the students' interests, thoughts, and confusions and so may help in future lesson planning that will be more student-defined and culturally responsive.

Rationale: Students have many and varied opinions about the several themes in Sense and Sensibility that are influenced by everything around them background, culture, experience, etc. Because of this, it is valuable to give students time to express and therefore more fully develop their thoughts and opinions. This strategy allows students to comment on their beliefs and listen to others' in order to help them reevaluate and possibly redefine their own. It is a

meaningful way for students to make opinions and draw conclusions about certain concepts.

Directions:

1. Introduction

Introduce the strategy by asking how a class discussion usually works. Ask students to comment on aspects of usual class discussion (not everyone talks, looking to the teacher, etc.). Talk about the reading selection that they will discuss today. Explain that today the object of the discussion will be to teach each other. Place the following rules on an overhead or write them on the white board.

a. Courtesy: in order for each student to feel comfortable, courtesy is essential.

b. Do not look at the teacher: this discussion is for your benefit, not the teacher's.

c. Tolerate silence: it takes time to think of what or how to say something.

2. Reading

Pass out the cue sheets. These will help each student decide how to personally contribute to the discussion. Read over the examples with the students and discuss appropriate comments.

2. Problematic Situation

Context: This assignment is to be used during reading, possibly near the beginning of the book to help students consider the theme.

Purpose: A thought-provoking activity to encourage students to consider the theme "When is it good to be passionate (sensible) about something and when is reason or logic (sense) the best response?" and how it applies to their own lives.

Rationale: For students to understand differing perspectives or problems within a text, the teacher can set up an imaginary situation that students must solve (Johannessen). This strategy utilizes problem solving and decision making skills, allows students to approach text from varying perspectives, creates interest in a story situation, and connects text to student priorities and values.

The theme studied in this novel is relevant to students and innately interesting, but when the ideas are applied to a realistic personal situation within the students' lives, it takes on a whole new meaning. This assignment also encourages critical thinking and problem solving.

Directions:

Explain the situation to students. Ask them to spend 5 minutes themselves considering a solution to the problem. Then place them in groups of 3-5 to discuss the same question. They must come to a consensus as a group about what the best solution would be. After about 10 minutes, have one student from each group come write their group's solution on the board, and then have another student to present it and their rationale to the class.

Materials Needed: Student handout

Time: 10 minutes for set up, 15 minutes to discuss, 15 minutes for debriefing

Assessment: The problematic situation strategy allows the teacher to assess student participation in group activities, thinking/reasoning skills, ability to negotiate decisions, and general ability to make choices based upon priorities and values. It provides an excellent lead-in to a story situation, in that a student can live through the experience prior to or while reading about it.
As a class, discuss the solutions and their implications and consequences in real life. Each student should write at least a paragraph in their journal about their feelings related to the situation. They should compare what they initially thought and then how the small group and class discussions changed their thoughts and feelings. What does this mean to them?