

**Discussion Objective: Students will be able to analyze the theme of the short story “A Letter From the Fringe” through discussion and writing a found poem.**

Lead a discussion of the short story, starting first with some questions that are more literal in nature, to assess students’ basic understanding of the story and to clear up any confusions about basic events and characters:

- [Basic Stated Information] What is Sally eating when Booker approaches her and makes fun of her weight? What happened to Gil Mishkin’s car in the school parking lot? Who was the narrator (Dana) a lab partner with at one time?
- [Key Details] What’s special about the day that Booker tells Sally to lose weight? What is the biggest thing that’s helped the narrator cope with the anger she feels about the way ICI’s treat others? What did Parker tell Dana once that has changed the way she sees Parker? What finally motivates Dana to write the letter to Sally?
- [Stated Relationships] Why does Jewel think it would be a good idea for these unpopular kids to get cell phones? Why does Sally seem like a victim? Why does Dana talk about butterflies and nature in her letter to the popular crowd?

Next, I will break students into small groups (no more than four students per group) and have each group discuss these questions. In each group, all students will write out notes in response to the questions in preparation for a larger, group discussion about the questions. Give students about 15-20 minutes to complete the discussion; I will spend that time circulating and keeping groups on task as well as prompting/coaching them in their responses.

- [Simple Implied Relationships] Dana says a “gifted bully” uses partial truths; how does Booker use partial truths to hurt Sally and Dana? What does Dana learn about Parker from being her lab partner that helps her understand Parker and why she’s mean to others?
- [Complex Implied Relationships] The members of the “fringe table” all discuss the various ways in which they deal with or avoid trouble with the popular kids in school. As you look at each of their techniques, what do you see in common among the ways they deal with being made fun of? What do these techniques tell us about the people who bully and make fun of the members of the fringe table?
- [Author’s Generalization] What is this writer trying to communicate about why some people find it so easy to make fun of or hurt other people? What evidence from the story supports your opinion?
- [Structural Generalization] Why does the author have the stuffed animal Qantas spark Dana’s ability to write the letter? Why do you think the author chooses to have Dana write her thoughts in the form of a letter?

Bring the class back together and discuss their responses, being sure to call on as wide a variety of students as I can. Save the question about what the author is trying to communicate for last and then introduce students to the found poem assignment: “We are now going to write a found poem, which is a poem that we create based on words we find in another text. The text we’ll use is this short story, and I want you to carefully select at least ten words or phrases from the story that you think represent what the author is trying to communicate about why some people hurt others. For instance, I might choose the phrases ‘quiet voice’ and ‘my dad won’t let me’ to represent what Parker says to Dana and how the fact that Parker has little control over her own life might lead her to be mean to others. Once you’ve selected your phrases and words, you’ll arrange them in a poem form, with phrases and words purposefully placed in order and style on the page.”

I might have students do the found poem individually or in small groups (different from their discussion groups and perhaps even just in pairs), depending on how much support I think they need for the activity.