Dragons in a Bag

Written by Zetta Elliott

RANDOM HOUSE
CHILDREN'S BOOKS

LESSON FOCUS

Show don't tell

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

The author's ability to create a picture using words is critical. In this lesson, students will evaluate portions of text from various chapters in *Dragons in a Bag* and determine what is being shown and what the author meant to convey by it. Students will then create their own show versus tell scenes.

LEARNING TARGETS

1. Students will be able to determine what the author is showing instead of telling.
2. Students will create two original show don't tell examples.

MATERIALS NEEDED

1. *Dragons in a Bag* pages 1, 2, 31, 57, 59, 65, 103, 141, 147
2. Show Don't Tell worksheet with quotes from *Dragons in a Bag*

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

Step 1: Introduce *Dragons in a Bag* by Zetta Elliott.

Step 2: Introduce the concept of Show Don't Tell. Explain to students that authors do not always have to directly tell the reader how a character feels. They can show the reader instead. Students need to be aware of when authors do this in a piece of writing. It can reveal more about a character and help readers go beyond superficial explanations.

SUMMARY

When Jaxon is sent to spend the day with a mean old lady his mother calls Ma, he finds out she's not his grandmother — but she is a witch! She needs his help delivering baby dragons to a magical world where they'll be safe. There are two rules when it comes to the dragons: don't let them out of the bag and don't feed them anything sweet. Before he knows it, Jax and his friends Vikram and Kavita have broken both rules! Will Jax get the baby dragons delivered safe and sound? Or will they be lost in Brooklyn forever?

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION (cont'd)

Step 3: **Determine the SHOW vs. the TELL**

Students will be reading selected quotes from *Dragons in a Bag*.

- Students should complete the Show Don't Tell worksheet.
- Students should team up with a partner and discuss the Tell. Did each student evaluate the Tell the same? Did each student interpret the Show the same?

Step 4: **Practical Application**

- Students will be provided with the Tell and they will need to provide the Show.
  HINT: Students are NOT allowed to use the words from the Tell in their Show.
- Students should team up with a partner and read their Show. Can their partner guess which Tell they are describing?

SHOW DON'T TELL WORKSHEET

Directions: Read the quote provided on the left from the book *Dragons in a Bag*. Consider how the author, Zetta Elliott, shows how her characters feel. On the right, explain the Tell. What is the author trying to show through actions instead of telling us directly?

Quote from *Dragons in a Bag* — The SHOW	What is the TELL? What is the author trying to show the reader?
"Ma pulls a chair out from the dining room table, sinks onto it, and covers her eyes with her hand" (Elliott 31).	Example: The author could have said that Ma was frustrated or even tired, but she doesn't. She takes the time to show the reader through Ma's actions: pulls out the chair, sinks onto it, and covers her eyes. These are signals to the reader of just how Ma feels: frustrated or tired.
"A heavy body shuffles toward the door. Mama and I wait patiently as at least three locks are turned. The chain stays on and lets the door open just a crack" (Elliott 2).	
"Mama strokes my cheek with her finger before pressing the doorbell. I feel tears pooling behind my eyes, but I will them not to fall" (Elliott 1).	
"I swallow hard and take a few deep breaths" (Elliott 57).	
"I swat at the biggest mosquito I've ever seen. My clothes are sticking to my skin, but I'll get eaten alive by bugs if I take off my shirt" (Elliott 59).	
"Ma backs toward the guardhouse and then steps inside. We pull the door shut and huddle together, breathing hard in the dark" (Elliot 65).	

Marvelous
MIDDLE GRADE READS