Language Arts Pre-Assessment

Kim Amador, One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, AP English

At the start of my spring work sample on *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, and then again after the students finished reading the novel, I gave thirty-three juniors in my AP Language and Composition class the same eight short-answer questions about their understanding of the following questions:

1. What is allegory?
2. What is symbolism?
3. What is characterization?
4. How might the mental hospital serve as a metaphor for larger society?
5. Are characters with mental disabilities marginalized in the novel? Give evidence either way.
6. Describe two characters in the novel. What might they be symbolic of?
7. How are different races represented throughout the novel? Give a specific example.
8. What are some of the attitudes towards women in the book? Describe a specific image of a woman.

As an entire class, and out of 16 points possible, the pre-assessment scores averaged 6.09, post-assessment scores were 14.57, and learning gains were 8.48. Throughout the unit, I spent a lot of time reinforcing the novel’s main themes of marginalization, freedom versus oppression, racism, sexism, etc., and defining Ken Kesey’s use of literary devices to help convey those themes. As the students read the novel, they were asked to find passages with metaphor or simile, characterization, and symbolism, and were asked to interpret the author’s intention of using those devices – and what overall message was conveyed through the author’s decisions. The students not only learned how these devices work in literature, but inferred deeper meanings based on those concepts. Analyzing the data in the pre and post assessments, I found the learning gains to be pretty significant, and I am happy that students were able to clearly show their learning not only in the short answers assessment, but also in the other unit activities, critical thinking assignments, Socratic Seminar, and final essay writings.