

Beaver Country Day

- Founded in 1920
- Located in Chestnut Hill, MA
- Grades 6-12
- 468 students
- Independent and college preparatory



Authentic Engagement at Beaver

Beaver is a community of thinkers and doers whose graduates are ready to collaborate and compete in a world that is depending on them to make a difference. They believe in constantly looking beyond tradition and beyond the walls of the school to learn from and partner with the best.



Lisa Brown is the head of the English department at Beaver Country Day. She also teaches high school ELA classes. The goal of the English department is to constantly help students become better readers, writers, communicators and citizens of the world. “We focus on the new basics of collaboration and creative problem solving, rather than a drill and kill or stand and deliver teaching style.” The school emphasizes authenticity in everything students do. “We want the kids to feel that what they do matters and to see them own it.”

Creating Critical Listeners

An important part of teaching literature is the notion of perspective. This matters in all conflicts the students hear about, from riots in Baltimore to the Middle East. Lisa says listening brings something different to perspective. “Critical listening requires questioning what we are hearing, what we are not hearing, whose voices we hear first, and what does that say about privilege and power.”

But maintaining the student’s attention can be challenging. “We’re challenged by the fact that they have a million competing interests.”

She has found Listenwise helps by bringing a unique kind of engagement into the classroom with authentic voices. “Breaking these real life stories down to a three minute piece and making them think about the voices we are hearing and why makes them feel that what they are doing is meaningful.”

Connecting Literature to the World

Lisa likes to approach themes in literature over a period of time often circling back to them, repeatedly exposing students to ideas and concepts. Listenwise works well with this instructional approach.

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“I love the idea of exposing kids to, or connecting the literature or the content of the course to disparate ideas and the real world. When they go home, maybe they are not talking about Macbeth at the dinner table, but maybe they are talking about ISIS (The Islamic State). The more they are connecting to real world content, the more we get better citizens, who are able to talk more honestly, with better experience.”

Implementing Listenwise

Lisa started using Listenwise in the 2014-2015 academic year, and has been very pleased with the outcome. The diversity of stories and perspectives is particularly valuable to Beaver’s approach. Lisa herself has used stories from the Great Gatsby that’s a natural fit for the 10th graders, to a story on drought. Lisa uses public radio to have her students listen to many perspectives. “I love the breadth of the stories and they are terrific.”

As a result of using Listenwise, Lisa reports that her students are engaged, actively listening and inspired to do some work on their own. Lisa has observed that her students have become better listeners by using it. “Many of us feel like we have to do multiple things at once. Listenwise has helped my students focus on that skill of sitting, listening, and not being distracted.”

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