For the first time ever, the Great World Texts program has the opportunity to welcome the author of the current text to the Spring Student Conference, and students from all over the state will have the rare opportunity to interact with the author of the novel they’ve been studying. This interaction will be the heart of the Spring Student Conference, and our keynote presentation will consist of A Conversation with Arundhati Roy, during which students will ask questions of the author.

Meeting the author is an amazing, exciting event, but also one that brings special considerations to how we approach the text and our projects. How do students act around the author? What kinds of questions should they ask? How can they best prepare for this meeting? What should teachers do if students are disruptive or rude?

**Objective:** Prepare students to make the most of the Spring Student Conference through active, engagement with the author; and to provide tips to build confidence, address concerns, and set expectations for decorum and behavior during the conference.

**Preparatory Materials:**
- Preparing for the Great World Texts Spring Student Conference
- Guidelines for Student Conference Presentations
- Presentation Proposal form
- Presentation Summary form (due by March 6, 2013)

**Additional Readings and Resources:**
- “The Short Story #8: Meeting the Author” youtube clip (starts at 2:30) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pY9IH61bpyY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pY9IH61bpyY) Fun clip to show students and break ice about issues they might be concerned about
- “How to talk to a writer” by Suzanne Roberts. [http://the-how-to.tumblr.com/post/32877145596/how-to-talk-to-a-writer](http://the-how-to.tumblr.com/post/32877145596/how-to-talk-to-a-writer)
- CCBC’s tips for meeting an author: [http://www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/authors/tips.asp](http://www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/authors/tips.asp)
Handouts/Presentation Materials for Students:

- Meeting Roy: How to Talk to a Writer
- Guidelines for Presentations
- Presentation Proposal form
- Presentation Summary form (due by March 6, 2013)

Lecture Points:

- **Prepare your students for meeting Arundhati Roy the person.** Emphasize that, like all people, she could be nervous, excited, happy, sad, shy, in a good or bad mood, etc. Show clips of her doing interviews (The “Invitation to World Literature” piece is a good place to start) and show the class her photograph so they can think of her as an individual from the start.

- **Emphasize being courteous and respectful:**
  - Always greet the author, thank him/her for coming, and introduce yourself before jumping into your question.
  - Use polite language
  - Try to make eye contact and be conscious of body language
  - Avoid overly criticizing parts of the book you didn’t like or saying you “hated” the book
  - Thank the author for his/her time (and for writing the book if you enjoyed it!)

- **Help students avoid anxiety and feeling nervous:**
  - Focus on the experience, not the “performance” or “act” of talking to the author
  - Take a deep breath. It’s ok to be nervous, but the author is just another person – he or she came all the way to Wisconsin just to talk to us, which might make you feel nervous, but it should also make you feel confident that she thinks you have something to say that is worth hearing.
  - This is a chance for dialogue. **Dialogue means both voices matter.** The author wants to hear from you as much as you want to hear from the author. Sharing your ideas and reactions to her book will make it easy to start a conversation. Thinking about our interactions with the author as a chance for conversation takes the pressure off our own performance and lets us focus on the chance to learn.

- **Encourage them to be SPECIFIC:**
  - Don’t just say “I love this book!” Say what you loved most about it. What inspired you? What made you think? What challenged you?
  - Avoid yes or no questions (Was it hard to write this book?) and ask questions that allow room for thought and interpretation (What was the biggest challenge you faced when writing this book?).
  - Consider the “lead in” to your question. Give a little context to let the author know where you’re coming from. For example, “Why did you choose [x]?” would be a much more interesting question if the speaker first explained WHY [x] is interesting or confusing to him/her. “I loved this character, but was confused by some of his choices, such as [give example]. Why did you choose to have him do [this or that]?”

- **Be prepared:**
  - Think about how the author might react to your questions. Role-play possible answers.
  - Prepare a list of possible follow-up questions if she does/doesn’t answer a certain way.
• **Know the consequences.** This conference is a serious academic affair and a lot of planning has gone into this event by teachers, students, and UW staff. The people in attendance have all traveled far and spent weeks and months preparing and getting excited for the conference. Being disruptive, discourteous, or disrespectful to the speakers or your peers during the conference is unacceptable, and teachers whose students do not follow the decorum guidelines will be expected to remove students immediately from the room.

**Discussion Questions:**

• How would you like to be treated (or not treated) if you were the author?

• What questions do you most want answered? What do you want to know about the author that the book can’t tell you?

**Assignment and Project Ideas:**

• **Role play: Meeting the Author.** Have students prepare questions for various authors and practice asking and answering them. What questions got the best (or worst) answers? Why?

• **Brainstorm: productive questions.** Ask students to get in groups and write down every single question they can think of to ask the author. Then switch questions with other groups and discuss the questions, then select the best ones. Did any groups have the same questions? How do we decide what “good” and “bad” questions are? Hint: “bad” questions are ones that are too easy to answer, very obvious, or could be easily answered by anyone who read the book.

• **Research the author.** Students can get excited about the author’s visit by doing research into her life, background, hometown, and body of work. Learning more about who Roy is, why she’s famous, what makes her interesting to others, will get students excited to meet her and inspire interesting questions.

• **Writing exercise:** ask students to write, and revise their questions independently and in groups. Have them work together until they feel the question is worded perfectly so that it is clear, direct, and interesting to both the author and the audience.

**Suggestions for expanding this unit:**

• Apply the author visit guidelines above to other author visits or assemblies the students have attended or will attend. Have them compare or assess how “well” that speaker was received, and why.