

Morse High School

Literacy Reminders

Tools, Tips, and Techniques

Key Message:

Name that Strategy!

The Literacy Committee wants to try an experiment on Tuesday, April 28. Let's have every teacher use Think-Alouds in their classrooms. In each period students will have the opportunity to see, hear, and use this strategy. We chose this particular strategy because most teachers do this strategy without realizing it. What is important on this day is that you name the strategy. Imagine the shock on the students faces when each of their teachers use and name the same strategy.

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Literacy Strategy of the Month: Think-Alouds

Thinking aloud is the process of allowing others to see what you think by narrating how you think as you read a text and discuss an idea. Students often do not know what good thinking about their reading looks like, so we must constantly model it for them.

Use Think-Alouds to demonstrate what students should do and how to do it, reflect on what they read, help them comprehend their reading, and develop their internal reader. You can do think alouds on paper, in your head, in a group, and as a class. Use this technique when assigning reading to class so that you can model how you want them to read it. This clarifies their purpose and directs their attention.

When we use the think aloud technique we do the following:

- Predict

- Describe
- Compare
- Make connections
- Monitor and correct
- Question
- Clarify
- Apply new knowledge
- Identify what is important
- Trouble shoot
- And speculate

Let's use *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as an example. For speculating the teacher could say "I think that Huck's father is going to come back into the picture since Huck has all that money."

For guessing, "I guess Miss Watson is just the Widow Douglas's sister: she probably came to live with her after Mrs. Douglas's husband died."

For wondering: "Things back then don't seem so different than they do now. I wonder

if it's true when people talk about the good ol' days. I wonder if things were really better back then?"

Think-Alouds work in all subjects. In math, simply think out loud how you would solve a problem—talk out what's in your head, saying what steps you would take to solve this problem. In science, when doing a lab, think out loud about the steps you would take in order to prove a hypothesis. In social studies, make connections between two events. In foreign language, think out loud about unfamiliar words within a sentence, how could you go about making an educated guess at the word's meaning?

As you can see, teachers do Think-Alouds every day in class. The important thing to remember is to name that strategy!

Brain Research

The US is witnessing a growing student engagement crisis with recent surveys showing that students are bored in school. A crucial first step in promoting student engagement is to rethink literacy for the 21st century. Digital me-

dia can enhance the learning of traditional print literacy in all content areas. To level the potential of digital media to transform classrooms and motivate students, teachers must become tech savvy. (continued on page 2)





*“There is an art of reading, as well as an art of thinking, and an art of writing.”
Isaac D’Israeli*

Three Criteria of Effective Content Area Reading and Writing Assignments:

1. To deepen and reinforce understanding of the content through student engagement
2. To improve students’ reading, writing, and critical thinking skills
3. To tap into the literacy and learning needs of adolescents

For example in math:

In groups students select test problems to meet a set of criteria and develop a study guide for how to solve them; the guide becomes a source for the class to use.

For example in health:

Students use a jigsaw technique to read parts of a chapter on the physical impact of drugs and alcohol, compare what the chapter says with information provided by two other sources, complete a discussion web graphic organizer and prepare for a class debate.

For example in art:

Students select a famous piece of art from a specific era, read and code a critique of the piece, write short critiques related to an aspect of the painting just studied in class, post a representation of the painting and their critique on a blog, respond to other students’ critiques, and revise their critiques based on feedback.

“Reading without reflecting is like eating without digesting.”

Edmund Burke

For Discussion: The Problem with Being a Hard Grader

In an effort to motivate students to take assignments more seriously, some teachers take points off for late work or assign zeros for work not turned in. In some classes, if students have more than a certain number of “bad grades” or zeros in the first half of the semester or term, they cannot get a good grade even if they try in the last half of the

course. Many students who have difficulty with reading, writing, or both decide that putting effort into it is not worth it because they are going to fail no matter what.

How might this grading policy actually decrease student motivation? What is the message you want to send to students through this policy? What is the message that students get? Are these the

same? What can we do differently to make sure grading practices do not decrease student motivation to read and write.

These questions are not meant as a criticism, but as away to re-evaluate whether our current grading policy is effective.

Brain Research (cont.)



Teachers who are newcomers to the world of technology-based learning should seek out and participate in ongoing professional development programs on the web. Here is list of websites that contain helpful resources:

www.wiki.classroom20.com provides resources for teachers

as well as free workshops.

www.21stcenturyskills.org/route21 contains ways to implement technology and improve student achievement.

www.edutopia.org contains best practices and classroom tips.

www.edcommunity.apple.com/ali

enables educators to share lesson collections, tips and tricks.

The first step is not to worry about becoming an expert, but to see what young people are doing, and to think about how to use those existing practices to develop 21st century skills in schools.

From the Classroom of Carolyn Nichols: This seems to work well with reading sections in a chapter. Students then break into four groups and compile the key points for their section on a group white board.

Hierarchy of Knowledge Template

NAME _____

Chapter _____

As you read, take notes on your individual chart. List page number next to each note.

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Key topics, themes or ideas</p> | <p>Essential knowledge: Things you must know</p> |
| <p>Examples related to the essential knowledge</p> | <p>Not major information, but interesting</p> |