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**TMATE 2019-2020**

**Teacher Toolkit**

**Literacy Strategies**

**List-Group-Label**

This literacy strategy is a form of semantic mapping, or graphical representation. It encourages students to improve their vocabulary, categorization skills and helps them learn to organize concepts. Categorizing listed words, through grouping and labeling, helps students organize new concepts in relation to previously learned concepts. This is both a vocabulary and comprehension strategy.

**How it works:**

**1.** **Select:** Choose a main concept in a reading selection or a main concept to explore.

**2.** **List:** Have students assist you in brainstorming all the words they think relate to the topic and visually display student responses.

**3.** **Model:** Before splitting the class into groups, model the grouping step so they understand how it works.

**4.** **Group:** Divide the class into small groups. Each group will work together to arrange the class list of words into subcategories. As groups of words emerge, challenge students to explain their reasoning for placing words together or discarding them.

**5. Label:** Call on students to suggest a title or label for the groups of words they have formed. These labels should relate to their reasoning for the grouping.

**When to use:**

* After reading a book to reflect on the common vocabulary
* After watching an educational video to apply what was learned
* After reading a passage to work on comprehension
* In a science lesson to categorize vocabulary
* In a math lesson to categorize vocabulary
* To review main concepts before a test
* As a focus activity to see how much prior knowledge students know about a topic before it is introduced

**Variations:**

**1.** **Create:** Have students create their own drawings to go next to their words. Visualization always helps learners.

**2.** **Pre-choose:** Provide students with pre-chosen categories to help them in the process of grouping. This allows students to think about one thing at a time.

**3.** **Add:** Once in groups, allow students to add to the brainstormed list which may help them in the grouping process. Some ideas may come late so this gives students the opportunity to still contribute.

**4.** **Brainstorm on own:** Have students brainstorm their own list within their group. The teacher may walk around and help each group in brainstorming.

**Anticipation Guide**

This literacy activity is a pre-reading comprehension strategy that can be used across grade levels and content. Before reading, students listen to or read several statements about key concepts presented in the text; which are often structured as a series of statements with which the students can choose to agree or disagree. This strategy stimulates students' interest in a topic and sets a purpose for reading.

**How it works:**

**1. Construct the anticipation guide**. Construction of the anticipation guide should be as simple as possible for younger students. Write four to six statements about key ideas in the text; some true and some false. Include columns following each statement, which can be left blank or can be labeled yes or no.

**2. Explain:** Introduce the strategy to the students and explain its purpose.

**2. Model the process**. Introduce the text or reading material and share the guide with the students. Model the process of responding to the statements and marking the columns. Also be sure to model your thinking process so students have something to reference.

**3. Agree or disagree:** Read each of the statements and ask the students if they agree or disagree with it. Provide the opportunity for discussion. The emphasis is not on right answers but to share what they know and to make predictions.

**4. Read:** Read the text aloud or have students read the selection individually, depending on the class. If reading aloud, teachers should read slowly and stop at places in the text that correspond to each of the statements.

**5. Closure:** Bring closure to the reading by revisiting each of the statements.

**When to use:**

* Before a new topic is introduced in science class
* Before a new topic is introduced in math class
* Before reading a story to get students excited
* Before introducing an interesting topic to get students predicting and intrigued
* As a closure activity to get students excited for the next day
* Throughout reading a story to keep a constant flow. The teacher will stop right before she addresses each statement, will give students time to respond, and then will read the part that answers the statement.

**Variations:**

**1. Orally:** Anticipation guides can be completed orally depending on the level of the class.

**2. Modify:** The number of statements on the guide can be modified to fit the learners’ needs. Some may need more and some may need less.

**3. Vary reading:** Multiple texts/passages may be used for this activity depending on the reading level of the learners.

**4. Simplicity:** Make the sentences as simple as straight to the point as possible. Some students may struggle with excess words.

**Semantic Gradient**

This literacy strategy is a way to broaden and deepen students' understanding of related words. It is a vocabulary strategy that asks kids to think about what they know about words. Semantic gradients often begin with antonyms, or opposites, at each end of the continuum. This gives students a point of reference and a visual when brainstorming words. By enhancing their vocabulary, students can be more precise and imaginative in their writing.

**How it works:**

**1. Choose:** Select a pair of polar opposite words that students would be familiar with.

**2. Brainstorm:** Generate at least five synonyms for each of the opposite words. Depending on the grade level, these words will most likely be pre-chosen by the teacher. However, students are able to assist the teacher in brainstorming as well.

**3. Partners:** Pair up students and give them the materials needed. Students will then work with their partner to put the chosen words in order.

**Make continuum:** Arrange the words in a way that makes a bridge from one opposite word to the other. Continuums can be done horizontal or vertical, in a ladder-like fashion. Let the students get creative.

**Discuss:** Have students discuss their rationale for placing certain words in certain locations. Encourage a conversation about the subtle differences among the words.

**When to use:**

* Before reading a book/passage
* During reading a book/passage
* After reading a book/passage
* Before a test to review vocabulary
* Before introducing a heavy-vocabulary unit
* During stations as one of the activities

**Variations:**

**1. Group:** Depending on the class size or skill level, students may be grouped instead of paired. Grouping students allows for more ideas to move around and creates more conversation.

**2. Visual:** Allow students to draw a picture for each word on the continuum. This adds a creative and imaginative aspect to the activity.

**3. Create:** Students can be asked to create their own list of words based on what they have read or recently worked on. The teacher will walk around and guide students as they work together to form their list.

**4. Discuss:** Start a class discussion which will generate ideas. Then, let the students decide as a class what they want their anchor words to be. When students feel empowered, they are more likely to be motivated to complete the activity.

**5. Vary:** Teachers may vary the amount of synonyms used.

**Listen-Read-Discuss**

This strategy helps students comprehend text by applying what they have read. Before reading, students listen to a short lecture delivered by the teacher. The students then read a text selection about the topic. After reading, there is a large group discussion or students engage in small group discussions about the topic. During the discussion, students compare and contrast the information from the lecture with the information they read. This activity lets students decompress with others on what was read in hopes of a better understanding.

**How it works:**

**1. Listen**: Present information to students about the book they will be reading. This can be in the form of a short lecture on the topic or however the teacher pleases.

**2. Read**: Ask students to read the text selection. The content should be similar to the material presented during the "listen" portion of the lesson.

**3. Discuss**: Lead a classroom discussion of the material. Encourage students to reflect on any differences between their reading of the content and your presentation.

**When to use:**

* Before a standardized test to work on comprehension
* When introducing a new genre/unit of reading
* When introducing a new topic in science class
* Before a test to review content
* As a collaborative activity before starting a hard unit

**Variations:**

**1. Visual:** Use a graphic organizer to present the information to the students.

**2. Student-led:** Have a student lead the classroom discussion instead of the teacher.

**3. Group:** Break students into groups to discuss the material just read. Have the group select a team leader to share their ideas with the other groups.

**4. Read sections:** Have students read the text in their groups. Each student will be required to read a portion of the text and then listen to other group members read their sections.

**Exit Slips**

Exit slips are written student responses to questions teachers ask at the end of a class or lesson. These quick, informal assessments enable teachers to quickly assess students' understanding of the material. As well, it allows students to reflect on their comprehension of the material and assess where they stand with it.

**How it works:**

**1. Introduce:** At the end of your lesson ask students to respond to a question or prompt. There are generally three categories of exit slips.

* Prompts that document learning:   
  — Example: Write one thing you learned today.  
  — Example: Discuss how today’s lesson could be used in the real world.
* Prompts that emphasize the process of learning:   
  — Example: I didn’t understand…  
  — Example: Write one question you have about today’s lesson.
* Prompts to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction:   
  — Example: Did you enjoy working in small groups today?
* Other exit prompts include:  
  — I would like to learn more about…  
  — Please explain more about…  
  — The thing that surprised me the most today was…  
  — I wish…

**2. Prompt:** State the prompt orally to your students or project it visually on an overhead or blackboard.

**3. Materials:** Distribute 3 x 5 cards for students to write down their responses.

**4. Reflect:** Review the exit slips to determine how you may need to alter your instruction to better meet the needs of all your students.

**5. Assess:** Collect the exit slips as a part of an assessment portfolio for each student.

**When to use:**

* After a topic is introduced
* After a test
* After group work
* After a project
* After a guest speaker
* After class, before a test

**Variations:**

**1. Variety:** Have a variety of exit slips and differentiate which students get which ones.

**2. Choice:** Present 3-4 prompts and allow students to choose 1.

**2. Collaborate:** Allow students to work on their exit slips in pairs or small groups

**3. Verbally:** Allow students to verbally express the information to the class by raising their hand.

**Word Maps**

This literacy strategy is a visual organizer that promotes vocabulary development. Using a graphic organizer, students think about terms or concepts in several ways. Most word map organizers engage students in developing a definition, synonyms, antonyms, and a picture for a given vocabulary word or concept. This activity enhances students' vocabulary, which is extremely important in developing their reading comprehension.

**How it works:**

1. **Introduce:** Present the vocabulary word and the map to the students.

2. **Show:** Teach students how to use the map by putting the target word in the center box.

3. **Brainstorm:** Ask students to suggest words or phrases to put in the other boxes which may ask the following: "Definition in your own words" "Synonyms" and "Use it meaningfully in a sentence” and “Draw a picture of it”. The boxes can vary depending on the template used.

4. **Helpful tools:** Encourage students to use synonyms, antonyms, and a picture to help illustrate the new target word or concept.

5. **Model:** Model how to write a definition using the information on the word map.

**When to use:**

* When new vocabulary words are introduced
* When a new topic is introduced
* Before a test to review information
* After reading a story to understand some words included in it
* When trying to understand different mathematical terms
* When trying to differentiate between words

**Variations:**

**1. Pair up:** Give students the chance to work with a partner to help brainstorming.

**2. Color:** Allow students to get creative with their pictures by offering coloring materials.

**3. Vary words:** Adjust the number of words students need to map. The number of words may depend on the student.

**4. Sentences:** Provide students with sentences each containing the target word. This will provide context clues for students.

**5. Resource:** Offer the dictionary as a resource for students and an aid in completing their word map.