

Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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Tip #19b: Concept ABC's

Janet Allen has written many professional books to support middle/high school literacy programs. A few summers ago, we were fortunate enough to be able to sponsor her institute here in Anchorage, which many of us attended at Goldenview Middle School. This week I am pulling an activity from Words, Words, Words. *Concept ABC's* will help you develop in students a deeper understanding of a word or concept that is central to a unit of study. Allen says, "This process models the ways we place new information into the context of what we already know and thereby extend our knowledge."

In 8th grade, many teachers are using the novel Nothing But the Truth by Avi. This book has many broad themes to it like truth, patriotism, and freedom. Perhaps one focus of the book could be examining personal responsibility. This will be the key concept from which I will model. Students should record this in the concept word box at the top of the form. (Attached are [a blank form](#) and [one that uses this example of personal responsibility](#).)

1. Although organized around the ABC's, start the class on the "B" step by **brainstorming** a list of words related to personal responsibility.

2. Below that box, now have students **bridge** the concept to other settings like personal responsibility at school, on the job, or in friendships.
3. Then go back to the A's. Have the students **analyze** the structure of the concept word to see other possible relationships. For example, the word "person" can be found in personality. "Response" can be found in responsibility. Ask the students to talk about those relationships to see if they are connected in any significant way.
4. Drop down to the apply box and have students do a quick write on a time they had to exhibit personal responsibility.
5. Finally, go to the **compare/contrast** boxes. In this case, ask the students to compare and contrast the characteristics of personal responsibility to family/community/global responsibility.

Your students should be better able to comprehend Nothing But the Truth having thought about the key concept of personal responsibility in advance. By frontloading the students with this kind of information, they can read with this concept in the back of their minds. You will find that your discussions



will go to a higher level since you have taken the time to bring everyone to the same point before reading.

Professional books by Janet Allen

[It's Never Too Late: Leading Adolescents to Lifelong Literacy](#)

[On the Same Page: Shared Reading Beyond the Primary Classroom](#)

[There's Room for Me Here: Literacy Workshop in the Middle School](#)

[Yellow Brick Roads: Shared and Guided Paths to Independent Reading 4 - 12](#)

[Words, Words, Words: Teaching Vocabulary in Grades 4 - 12](#)



Concept Word

A

Analyze:

Apply:

B

Brainstorm:

Bridge:

C

Compare:

Contrast:

Concept Word

personal responsibility

A

Analyze:

*response
person
personality*

Apply:

My parents always expect me to have personal responsibility. From a young age, they have trusted me to do that. Even at 5, I remember having to clean up after myself.

B

Brainstorm:

*behaving
following rules
norms
values
self-discipline
integrity
self-manager*

Bridge:

*on the job...

arriving on time
setting goals
asking questions
working beyond expectations
showing respect
being a team player*

C

Compare:

*taking care of myself is a subset of family, community, or global responsibility

this must begin with the individual first*

Contrast:

*others have to keep up their end in order to acquire family, community, or global responsibility

like a system - all parts have to work together*