

## 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 #28: Think in Threes

*Think in Threes* is a graphic organizer developed by Jim Burke (high school English teacher in California), which helps students with prewriting a paragraph, an essay, or a speech. No matter what level your writers are at, teach them to think in threes.

If you are using the [Step Up to Writing](#) binder as a resource, you know that this formulaic paragraph structure is initially taught with an 8 sentence framework: topic sentence, three reasons with an explain attached to each, and a closing sentence. Getting students to think in threes will serve as a reminder to elaborate during paragraph writing. Elaboration is difficult for most students, so thinking in threes will ensure that they have a substantial plan before writing.

This leads quite naturally to essay writing. Thinking in threes will prepare the writer for the 5-paragraph essay with its three proof paragraphs in the body of the paper. This also transfers nicely to public speaking. Hearing a speech with three major points used for elaboration is an excellent organizational framework. It isn't too much information for the audience to digest yet provides enough substance for the speaker. Consider applying this strategy to answering simple questions in class. The student who can back up his/her thoughts with three major points is providing a thorough and well thought out answer. Kids can remember to think in threes and apply it to their daily writing and speaking.

[Attached is a blackline master](#) for your use and [a student example from Jim Burke's classroom](#). Thinking in threes also allows for students to consider three different points of view. This particular student is writing about the concept of power. He chooses to examine power in his literature study of Othello, in his history class by focusing on the power found in South Africa, and in his own life by looking at power within the confines of his own world. The box at the bottom of the page should be used as a synthesis paragraph forcing the student to pull together the three different perspectives. With this prewriting plan in place, the student should be ready to express his/her ideas in an essay or another literary form.

#### *Source*

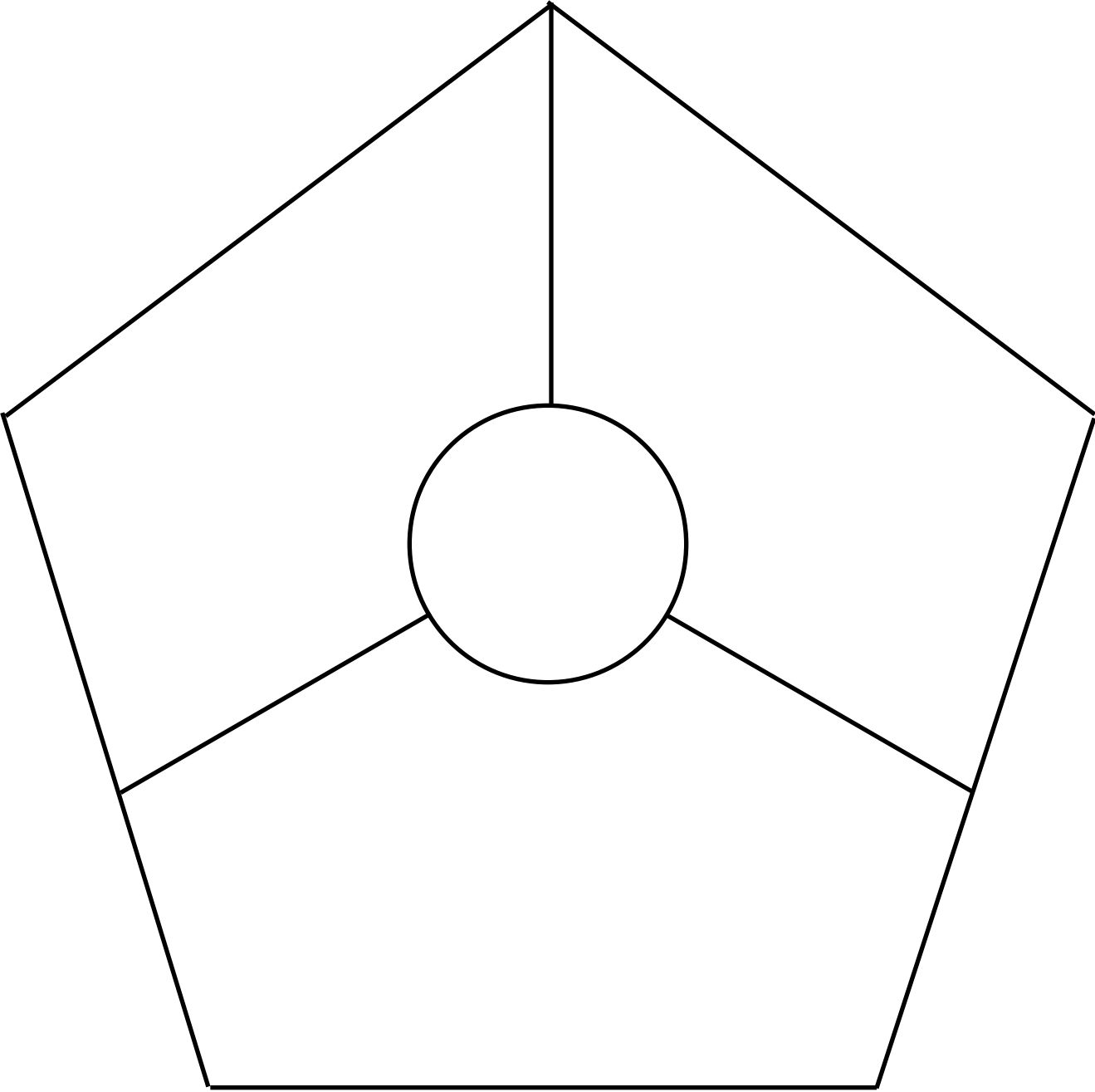
Burke, Jim. [Tools for Thought](#). Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2002.



# Think in Threes

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Topic \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_



# Think in Threes

Name Omar Khayat	Date
Project	Page

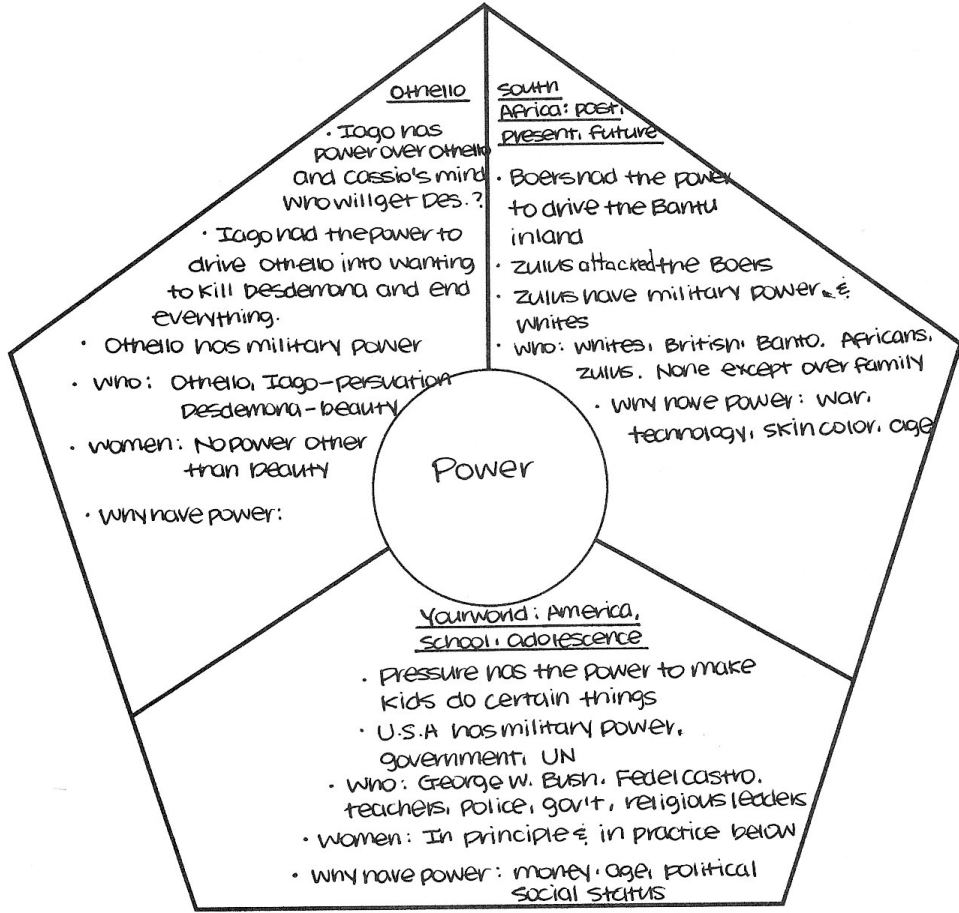


FIGURE 22.1 These Think in Three notes prepared Omar to write his essay at the end of the semester.