

## 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 #48: Mining for Gems

As language arts teachers, we appreciate good writing when we see it. When we read a novel, we look closely at the way in which the author crafts his/her writing because that intrigues us. In turn, it makes our writing that much better because we use these writers as our models. We need to help our students learn to be this observant, too. How do we get teenagers to take the time to look at language in that way?

I use procedures called Language Scouting, Golden Lines, and Note & Quote in an effort to get students to learn from the masters. No matter what label I give it, I want my students remembering the way in which an author describes the sunset so magically or the way the author shows a character getting angry. Slowing students down and asking them to look at language closely will ultimately improve their own writing. Have students keep language scouting logs where they record these memorable moments as they read and watch movies.

When students finish writing pieces for me, I respond with specifics about what I like in their writing as well as point out a couple of skills they need to keep working on. Giving feedback to 120 students is always challenging, and next year's increased class size will only make this more difficult. Mardell Kiesel showed me a technique for pointing out positive feedback in an efficient manner. She uses a golden highlighter with that special

glitter ink to point out words, phrases, and lines she considers of golden quality. These golden lines then get transferred to a transparency with student names attached to showcase in the next day's mini-lesson. (I always make an effort to ask the writer first if I may use his/her writing.) When I used this technique in my classroom, word spread quickly throughout the team about whose writing was being showcased. Although they are not the first to admit it, our students love seeing their writing shared.

Pat Thomas published an article on this very idea in *Voices from the Middle*, December, 2000. Her twist on it is called "mining for gems." She teaches her students that a gem is a word, phrase, or sentence that is particularly remarkable or moving. The idea of gems and jewels is an easy one for our students to relate to. She models the gems that she finds as she reads her own books of interest. Sharing this process with her students reminds them that she is a reader, too, and that she continues to work at improving her own writing. She then moves students into creating their own Gem Journals (love that alliteration!) and keeps them digging away in an effort to build huge gem mines. [Attached is a two-page form](#) for guiding students with this activity.

After you have had some time to collect golden lines or gems from your own students, challenge them to write original poetry using each other's gems. Type up a collection of



student gems sorting them into common topics such as sunset, morning, silence, anger, sadness, etc. Let students choose one or more to include in a poem of their own. Students should place quotation marks around the gems that they borrow as they create these "found" poems.

Through an awareness of gems, students will discover the joy of crafting language and the power of words. Keep them digging for gems and allow them time to write. Pat Thomas sums it all up in her article in *Voices from the Middle* like this: "With purposeful sharing and authentic work, your students will experience new possibilities."

### ***Source***

Thomas, Pat. "Mining for Gems: The Making of Readers and Writers." *Voices from the Middle*. December 2000: 26-35.





