

Literacy Tips



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

Contact: Amy Goodman
Middle School Literacy Support
907-267-0221
goodman_amy@asdk12.org
www.asdk12.org/MiddleLink/LA/

Tip #49: More Openers

It's almost the end of 3rd quarter and spring break is right around the corner. Are you tired of your bell work/daily opener/sponge activity? Hopefully this email tip can provide you with some new ideas to get kids motivated, on task, and practicing language arts skills the minute they walk into your room.

Opening Moments and Closing Codas

The "new teacher" binder (actually called *Teaching Middle School Language Arts* because the intended audience is for all middle school LA teachers) has a section devoted to this in tab 6. [Attached is that information for easy access.](#)

Sponge Activities and Their History (Madeline Hunter and more!)

<http://coe.sdsu.edu/people/jmora/MoraModules/vocabularydev.htm>

www.inspiringteachers.com/tips/packet/sponge.html

http://atozteacherstuff.com/Tips/Sponge_and_Transition_Activities/index.shtml

Car Talk Credits

This idea comes from Debbie Tice, a language arts teacher at Central. *Car Talk* is a really humorous radio talk show that airs on

Saturday mornings here in Anchorage. To give you a flavor for their humor, read the following description out loud to yourself. Get it? Hee, hee!

Cartalk.com is a production of Dewey, Cheetham and Howe. Contents © 2004, Dewey, Cheetham and Howe.

Debbie uses the official Car Talk Credits as bell work in her classroom. This activity relies heavily on oral discussion and word play so students can discover the humor, and we know humor is a research-based, brain-compatible instructional strategy that helps improve long term memory. Use the following link to "The Conclusive, Definitive, Official Dewey, Cheetham, & Howe Staff List" to make your students think. Display a couple a day and see if your students get a chuckle out of them. Please remember to preview these first to make sure they are appropriate for your students and politically correct! Then challenge your students to start writing their own.

www.aug.edu/~sbadnm/mgt563/cartalk.htm

Wuzzles

Am I the only one who has never heard this term before? LouAnn Balensiefer from Central sent me this bell work idea. She uses visual puzzles, mindbenders, to get her students thinking and talking to one another



when they walk into the classroom. I have seen these visual puzzles and have used them a lot with students, and they do love them. I just never knew they were called Wuzzles and why they were called that. Here are two easy examples for you:

NOON GOOD = "Good afternoon"

LINE READ LINE = "Read between the lines"

Who invented Wuzzles? The following link has a brief history for you and is a good place to order an inexpensive book of Wuzzles for Kids written by Tom Underwood.

www.ameritech.net/users/decker/wuzzles.htm

I also found the following web site of games for kids. They have six chapters of Wacky Wuzzles that you can use with students. Unfortunately, I could not get my web browser to show me the answers, but I also know you can probably figure these out on your own! (I have emailed the web master asking for an answer key, and will send that out if I get a response.)

www.kidwizard.com/games.asp

The Reading Teacher's Book of Lists
(Edward Bernard Fry et al, 2000)

www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0130405868/qid=1078953931/sr=12-1/002-6454291-6588852?v=glance&s=books

This book is available to you through the Literacy Lending Library that I house in my office. List #172 contains Wacky Wordies, which is really another example of Wuzzles reproduced with permission from Games magazine. Level A contains 48 easy puzzles, level B contains 42 more difficult ones, level C contains 42 even "more diabolical" puzzles, and wait until you try to solve level D's 42

puzzles! Fortunately, the answers do appear on pp. 413-414 of this resource book.

Here is one from level D:

T R A
F A L
G A R

Solution? Look below.

Trafalgar Square



Opening Moment and Closing Coda

It is important to establish routines in your classroom. This helps the students know what to expect the minute they walk into your room. It will improve student time on-task, and you will be surprised how much more material you can cover in a typical class period. Your opening moments and/or closing codas can come from a variety of sources and should last between 5-10 minutes. Letting students plan some of these activities is a good choice, too, but make sure you have developed a comfortable community within your classroom before you give ownership over to the students. Ask your department chair whether any of the following materials are at your site.

Daily Oral Language Plus (Great Source Dailies)

This program is a way to introduce and reinforce the skills associated with the conventions of writing. Weekly units are written around content area themes. Two sentences are displayed on the overhead projector and students find the errors. Many teachers have devised ways for students to record the sentences on paper; however, this can frustrate learning disabled students and copying incorrect information is not a good use of time. Using it as an oral discussion is best practice. Many teachers do not find that the skills introduced and reinforced transfer to student writing.

Sentence Composing (Great Source Dailies)

This program has been written for students in middle school to improve sentence fluency. Students learn how to chunk, unscramble, combine, and imitate sentences. Model sentences in the program are all taken from authentic young adult literature. A professional resource book available is *Sentence Composing for Middle School* by Don Killgallon. He is also the author of this Great Source program.

Daily Analogies (Great Source Dailies)

This program helps improve student vocabulary and thinking skills. Students solve verbal and figurative analogies after being taught the common relationships like whole to part, synonyms, cause/effect, etc. *Elements of Literature* published by Holt also has a vocabulary supplement to it where you can find additional practice with analogies. You might consider participating in a national vocabulary contest called WordMasters Challenge. Students are tested on vocabulary through analogies. Get more information from their web site: www.wordmasterschallenge.com.

Sentence Combining

Use the *Write Source 2000* (p. 93-96) to teach how to combine sentences. Create your own sentences for students to combine in order to improve sentence fluency. An excellent professional resource book is the *Writer's Toolbox: A Sentence Combining Workshop* by William Strong. A student workbook and answer key has been also published by this same author.

Political Cartoons

One of the most difficult reading skills to teach is inference. Use comic strips to teach how to locate important clues and combine information to make an inference. Then move onto political cartoons. Make sure you have students show their thinking. What clues do they find? What kind of background knowledge is necessary for them to understand the cartoon?

Quote of the Day

Get your students into deep thinking by displaying a quote of the day. Ask students to write about its meaning as well as how it might connect to their own lives. A good source for quotes is quoteland.com, brainyquote.com, heartquote.com, and Bartlett's at bartleby.com/100. Perfection Learning publishes an excellent resource called *Quotes Plus*. (They have four books themed around American Literature, British Literature, Multicultural Voices, and Young Adult Literature.)

Poetry Break

Display and read aloud a favorite poem. Ask students to respond in writing about how the poem makes them feel. Ask them to also identify any poetic devices they can uncover: simile, metaphor, personification, imagery, etc.

Quick-Writes or Fast Writes

Having students write on demand to a topic is another good way to begin class. Provide a prompt or allow free choice. Time students to keep this activity just a snapshot of their writing. Students can keep a word or line count if you are trying to improve fluency. Some common prompts are: I am most afraid when, music is for, when I was little, if I could, etc. You can also use a poem or a quote as a prompt. Sometimes highlighting one line of a poem makes for an excellent seed from which to write. Be on the lookout for the soon-to-be-published Linda Rief book, *101 Quick Writes*.

A.W.A.D. (A Word a Day)

Introduce new vocabulary through www.wordsmith.org. Have students complete a K.I.M. entry on each word. (K = key vocabulary word, I = information/definition of the word, and M = mnemonic device/illustration of the meaning)