

## 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 #4: Facilitating small discussion groups

This week's tip is about facilitating small discussion groups. Most of you know how much middle schoolers love to talk, so I am sure you frequently put them in groups in order to discuss a piece of literature, a strategy, etc. Can you picture that mouthy kid who dominates the group? Does your heart go out to that very introverted student who barely ever speaks? "Pencils In" is a strategy that will keep discussion groups balanced.

#### *Pencils In*

1. Give each discussion group a plastic cup large enough and stable enough to hold pencils. (Yes, cups that tip over and the noise of the rolling pencils on the desktops drive me nuts!)
2. Tell students that when they have expressed their opinions, they should put their pencils in the group's cup. In other words, each student gets a turn to speak before they can go again. When all group members' pencils are finally in the cup, students can have another turn to speak.

3. Putting a pencil in a cup is a good visual reminder to the shy student that his/her turn is going to come up eventually. The shy student has sufficient thinking time in order to develop something to say as those pencils are being put in the cup. The vocal, dominating student is slowed down knowing he/she has to wait until all pencils are in the cup before going again.

#### *Source*

**Snapshots** Literacy Minilessons Up Close by Linda Hoyt

Excellent tips and resources on her web site at <http://lindahoyt.com>

