

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 #60: Changing the State

Getting middle school students up and about during a 45-minute lesson is crucial because of their attention span. I've heard lots of different statistics on this. A good rule of thumb is to shift gears and "change the state" in your classroom every 11 - 15 minutes. You have probably read the very same statistics. Below are some ideas for getting students to physically move as part of your lesson design.

Group Work

Make time for group work including partners and small groups. Tired of simply numbering off your class and having kids forget what numbers they were assigned? You can have some fun when it comes to forming these groups. I love my oversized card deck from a magic store. I shuffle dramatically in front of the class and quickly "deal" out a card to every student. To form four large groups of 8, I might tell all the hearts to get together. To form several smaller teams of 4, I tell all the 7's to find each other, etc. Then I go one step further and say, "If you are the diamond in your group, you read first." Add some math challenge to forming groups and tell the prime numbers to work together, etc.

Prefer word play? To form groups of 4, brainstorm a list of common phrases that have four parts to them like

eenie/meeny/minie/moe. After Xeroxing at least 8 sets of these cards (for a typical class of 32), slice them a part, mix them up, and place them into a paper bag for kids to randomly pull. Then tell students to get up and find others who may be related to them in some way. Can they discover the connections? [Attached is a list of phrases that I have compiled for 4's for an adult training.](#) Screen it carefully! The same system can be done with 3's. Think of phrases like red/white/blue or sugar/spice/everything nice. 2's are easy, too, with combinations like salt/pepper, black/white, Ben/Jerry. In fact, get your class involved. Have them spend the week searching for these on their own, asking parents, etc. Then you can create permanent lists from which to refer.

Lining Up

The following technique is more time consuming but can provide you with some interesting insights. Challenge your students to line up in chronological order. Birthdays will help with this; however, do not allow them to talk. How can they communicate to someone when they were born? Once students think they are lined up correctly, have them announce their birthdays. Were they successful at lining up chronologically? Then group them based on where they are in line. "You four work together, the next four work



together, etc." Does working with others born in the same month make a difference? That might make an interesting discussion!

- #20 Fishbowl Discussions
- #37 Middle School Fair Tidbits (Leigh Abbott)
- #51 Bullying (see bullet point #6)

Cooperative Learning Strategies

Cooperative learning strategies are being used all around us. I love running into ones I have not tried before, and of course, I have some of my favorites that I use over and over again. This gives my students repeated practice so they can improve the strategy's effectiveness, and I can save valuable time not having to re-explain it each time. I recently stumbled upon a nice summary of [cooperative learning strategies](#) presented in a very visual way. Sometimes trying to understand the complexities of using a cooperative learning strategy can be difficult when described in a professional text. Attached is a [summary of ten cooperative strategies](#) that have a graphic for each showing the configuration to set up. These ideas were borrowed from a reading intervention program called *High Point* published by Hampton Brown. (Please do not reproduce them.)

Additional Tips

In the last couple of years, I have referenced other ideas for "changing the state" in the classroom. Please refer to the following email tips for additional ideas. If you do not have access to these previous tips, ask your language arts teacher. They were given hard copies of these tips in early September, and I am sure they would be happy to share!

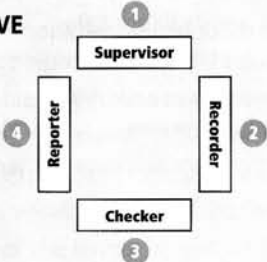
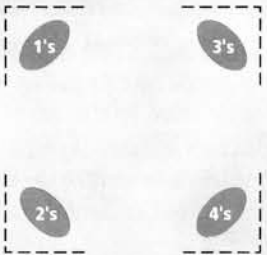
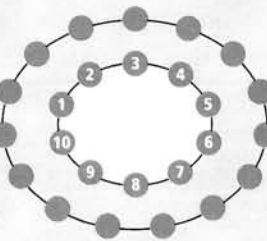
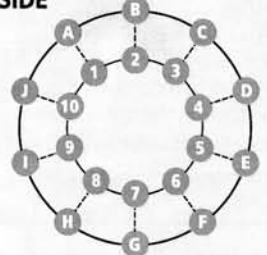
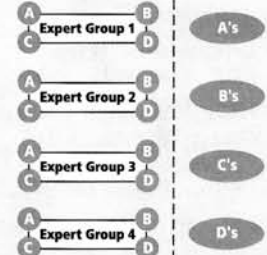
- #4 Pencils In
- #5 Cooperative Learning
- # 9 Jigsawing with VIPs
- #12 Open House and book Bits

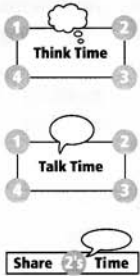
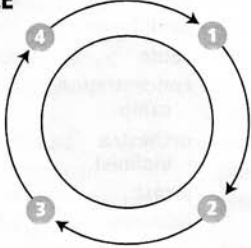
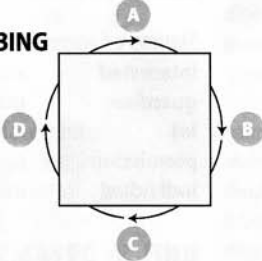
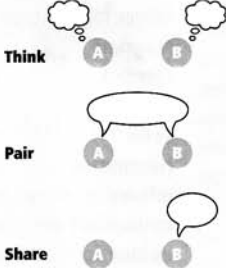
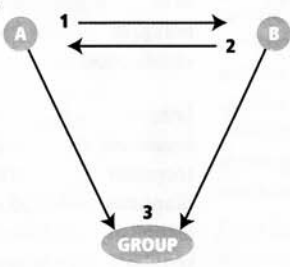


1. Winter, spring, summer, and fall
2. North, south, east, and west
3. Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young
4. John, Paul, George, and Ringo
5. Eenie, meenie, miney, moe
6. First base, second base, third base, and home plate
7. Simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex
8. Diamonds, spades, hearts, and clubs
9. Masters, PGA, US Open, and British Open
10. Famine, hell, war and death
11. Bob, Carol, Ted, and Alice

Cooperative Learning Strategies

High Point's cooperative learning activities involve students of varying language proficiencies in content-rich activities.

| STRUCTURE & GRAPHIC | DESCRIPTION | BENEFITS & PURPOSES |
|--|---|---|
| <p>ROLES FOR COOPERATIVE GROUPS</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form groups according to the number of topics or aspects to be studied. Assign roles, such as: Facilitator Reporter Researcher Materials Monitor Illustrator Scribe (recorder) Assign task or project. Allow time for project completion. Have groups present their projects. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When used with heterogeneous groups, roles can be assigned based on language abilities. Roles can be assigned according to skills or strengths of individuals or to stretch students' skills and abilities. Assigning roles teaches cooperation and coordination skills. Assigning roles enhances organizational skills of the group toward task completion. |
| <p>CORNERS</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corners of the classroom are designated for focused discussion of four aspects of a topic. Students individually think and write about the topic for a short time. Students group into the corner of their choice and discuss the topic. At least one student from each corner shares about the corner discussion. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By "voting" with their feet, students literally take a position about a topic. Focused discussion develops deeper thought about a topic. Students experience many valid points of view about a topic. |
| <p>FISHBOWL</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One-half of the class sits in a close circle, facing inward; the other half of the class sits in a larger circle around them. Students on the inside discuss a topic while those outside listen for new information and/or evaluate the discussion according to pre-established criteria. Groups reverse positions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focused listening enhances knowledge acquisition and listening skills. Peer evaluation supports development of specific discussion skills. Identification of criteria for evaluation promotes self-monitoring. |
| <p>INSIDE-OUTSIDE CIRCLE</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students stand in concentric circles facing each other. Students in the outside circle ask questions; those inside answer. On a signal, students rotate to create new partnerships. On another signal, students trade inside/outside roles. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talking one-on-one with a variety of partners gives risk-free practice in speaking skills. Interactions can be structured to focus on specific speaking skills. Students practice both speaking and active listening. |
| <p>JIGSAW</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group students evenly into "expert" groups. Expert groups study one topic or aspect of a topic in depth. Regroup students so that each new group has at least one member from each expert group. Experts report on their study. Other students learn from the experts. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Becoming an expert provides in-depth understanding in one aspect of study. Learning from peers provides breadth of understanding of over-arching concepts. |

| STRUCTURE & GRAPHIC | DESCRIPTION | BENEFITS & PURPOSES |
|--|---|---|
| <p>NUMBERED HEADS</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students number off within each group. • Teacher prompts or gives a directive. • Students think individually about the topic. • Groups discuss the topic so that any member of the group can report for the group. • Teacher calls a number and the student from each group with that number reports for the group. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group discussion of topics provides each student with language and concept understanding. • Random recitation provides an opportunity for evaluation of both individual and group progress. |
| <p>ROUNDTABLE</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seat students around a table in groups of four. • Teacher asks a question with many possible answers. • Each student around the table answers the question a different way. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging elaboration creates appreciation for diversity of opinion and thought. • Eliciting multiple answers enhances language fluency. |
| <p>TEAM WORD WEBBING</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide each team with a single large piece of paper. Give each student a different colored marker. • Teacher assigns a topic for a word web. • Each student adds to the part of the web nearest to him/her. • On a signal, students rotate the paper and each student adds to the nearest part again. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual input to a group product ensures participation by all students. • Shifting points of view support both broad and in-depth understanding of concepts. |
| <p>THINK, PAIR, SHARE</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students think about a topic suggested by the teacher. • Pairs discuss the topic. • Students individually share information with the class. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The opportunity for self-talk during individual think time allows the student to formulate thoughts before speaking. • Discussion with a partner reduces performance anxiety and enhances understanding. |
| <p>THREE-STEP INTERVIEW</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students form pairs. • Student A interviews student B about a topic. • Partners reverse roles. • Student A shares with the class information from student B; then B shares information from student A. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewing supports language acquisition by providing scripts for expression. • Responding provides opportunities for structured self-expression. |