

## 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 #72: Reciprocal Teaching (High Five Strategy #4)

Hope you are enjoying the Middle School High Five so far. I can't believe we are already starting strategy #4 next week; this means we are really close to Spring Break! Your students have practiced Read Around the Text and KIM; they understand the importance of before reading activities. Over the last two weeks, they practiced two-column notes as a during reading activity. The focus strategy for the next two weeks is another during reading activity called Reciprocal Teaching. The name for it is a mouthful and doesn't really give students a clear picture of what it might be. An APU practicum student at Romig suggested we rename it "The Board Room." I bet we have many students (and some teachers like myself) who can make connections to The Apprentice!

#### *Some Background*

Reciprocal teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1985) is a strategy that relies on the following four comprehension skills: summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting. Students must become adept with these skills because they, in turn, teach the information to a partner. We know that the most effective way to teach content with a high degree of retention (90%) is by teaching others, which causes the immediate use of the learning. In contrast, the weakest way to teach content with the smallest retention rate (5%) is through lecture. Reciprocal teaching not only

helps students explore the content but also demands that they explain it to other students.

#### *Materials*

Your LA department chair has a set of reciprocal teaching cards for you to use. Ernie Ting in the Admin. Print Shop did an awesome job preparing these for us. He also reproduced the High Five layered booklets. Your deck has four different color-coded cards made out of sturdy tagboard. If you think this is an activity you will use a lot, you might want to take the time to laminate the cards. Each color represents a comprehension skill: summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting. On the back of each card is a list of directions for students to follow as they read an assigned passage. Your card deck has 32 cards with 8 cards for each skill. Hopefully your class size falls within this range.

#### *Introducing the Skills*

The four comprehension skills should be modeled in advance before students can be expected to successfully use them. One way to do this is to give the responsibility to the LA teacher on your team. Won't he/she be happy! Another way to do this is for each content area teacher to emphasize a comprehension skill on a designated day. For example, my team decides to start this on Monday. We each decide in advance which



comprehension skill will be responsible for and use it repeatedly in whatever lesson that is already planned for Monday. Be explicit about its use.

"Today we are going to be working on graphing coordinates. I am going to stop a lot and ask you to summarize what you are learning. Summarizing is a comprehension skill. Who can tell me what you should do when you summarize?"

So Monday unfolds with students using summarizing during their math period, predicting during science, clarifying during social studies, and questioning in language arts. Within a 1-day time frame, students are introduced to all four comprehension skills. This approach also reminds students that reading comprehension is a core component of all classes. Now all of you are ready to use the reciprocal teaching cards on a passage you want your students to read within your own class.

### ***Reciprocal Teaching at Work***

Shuffle the reciprocal teaching card deck and distribute cards randomly to students. Have them quickly form a reading group of 4 by finding others with different colored cards. As a reading group, they will help each other read and comprehend the assigned material. Divide up the reading selection for the day into manageable chunks and tell all students to read the first section of the text silently using the roles they have been assigned. (This is not meant to be a jigsawing activity where everyone reads a separate section.) When all group members are done reading silently, students have a discussion using their assigned roles.

Some argue there is no particular order in which to proceed. A logical way to start might be with summarizing. The summarizer

explains what he/she believes the first section is mostly about. The questioner poses "I wonders" to the group with everyone chiming in responses. The clarifier points out parts that he/she found confusing or asks others about their confusions with certain words and/or concepts. The group members all try to help sort through the confusion. Finally, the predictor makes reasonable predictions about what the next section might be about.

Others argue that the first step must be prediction. This gets the entire group motivated by discussing their prior knowledge and sets a purpose for reading. The role card can then be modified so the predictor reads to confirm the group members' ideas. Otherwise an 8th grade predictor may feel that he/she has already done the assignment - why read on?

Continue using reciprocal teaching until the entire selection has been read and discussed. Tell students to shift their role cards to the right each time so they get exposure to all of the skills.

### ***Assessment and Reflection***

As students become more skilled with the strategy, the less you will have to use the role cards. Groups of four can be reduced to triads or partners where all of the skills are used simultaneously. The ultimate goal is for the comprehension skills of summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting to become automatic so students can read and discuss with ease. Ask students periodically to reflect on the strategy and how they are applying it in different classroom settings and during their own independent reading.

Palinscar, A.S., & Brown, A.L. (1985). Reciprocal teaching: Activities to promote "reading with your mind." In T.L. Harris & E.J. Cooper (Eds.), *Reading, thinking, and concept development* (pp.147-158). New York: College Board Publications.

