

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 #74: VIPs and Sum It Up! (High Five Strategy #5)

I can't believe we are nearing the end of the Middle School High Five. Thank you so much for giving your students a lot of practice using Read Around the Text, KIM, two-column notes, and reciprocal teaching. During these last two weeks before spring break, we will be focusing on the after reading strategy called Sum It Up. We will use VIPs as a vehicle to get to this final step.

Background Information

Summarizing is a comprehension skill we taught students during reciprocal teaching, and they will rely on this skill once again as we ask them to write effective summaries from what they have read. You have probably already observed firsthand how hard it is for some students to pull out the main idea of a paragraph, and students must have a good understanding of these main ideas in order to write a logical summary. So what can we do to help them with this?

VIPs in Action

VIPs (Very Important Points) is a tactile way to go about pulling out main ideas. Model VIPs using the overhead projector with a piece of text that you personally find somewhat challenging. Make your think-aloud as authentic as possible so students really see what you do as you try to comprehend. Take a large-sized sticky note and fringe it into 6 separate pieces. Read

aloud the first paragraph of your demonstration passage thinking out loud about what you are reading. When you feel you have discovered a main idea, use a sticky note strip and place it by the main idea in the text. Keep reading and try to find more main ideas. Because the sticky note is moveable, take time to demonstrate changing your mind. This is so much easier than students permanently highlighting text.


Point out that proficient readers track down the important information and evaluate its importance. When you are done "highlighting" six main ideas, take a moment to record a few words onto each sticky note strip. Then challenge the class to help you narrow it down to only three main ideas. Which three sticky note strips do they think you should remove and why? Again this exercise forces students to evaluate the importance of the information they are reading. Gradually release the responsibility to students and have them try VIPs as small groups and finally as independent practice.

Source: *Make It Real* by Linda Hoyt (2002)

Prewriting

Now that students have a tool to help them pinpoint main ideas, they are ready to organize and write an effective summary. What do most of our students do when they write a summary? They begin this way:



 This article/book was about...
(Turn this phrase into an oversized circle with a red slash through it indicating not to do this.)

A We can strengthen their writing by providing them a formula for their topic sentence. Getting started is always a challenge for writers; a formula leads students straight into success. [Distribute the A + B + C blackline master](#). Discuss the A section. Go over the various ways to identify what has been read and talk about the reason why including a complete title and author is good practice.

B To help students avoid depending on the verb "to be," show them how to select verbs from the word bank of strong verbs. Asterisks are used to identify the verbs commonly used. From past experience, I can forewarn you that students will enjoy playing with language and choose verbs they really don't understand completely. They want to sound sophisticated and mature in their writing and do so by picking out the "big words." Help them understand the shades of meaning associated with some of the more difficult verbs such as entices, illustrates, and proposes.

C Part C of the formula takes a bit more thought on the part of the students. They need to think of the overall big idea and attach it to the end of their topic sentence. Students should reflect back on the three pieces of sticky note fringe to help them come up with this big idea. An example of a completed topic sentence might look something like this:

The Middle School High Five by Amy Goodman provides teachers with strategies to improve comprehension.

Sum It Up!

Now that students have a topic sentence, juices should be flowing. Have them revisit the sticky note fringe pieces that they selected as main ideas of the passage. Encourage them to order them in various ways on their desks by actually moving them around. Have them decide on an order that sounds good when read aloud. As you circulate, ask students why they decided on a particular order - order of importance, chronological order, comparison/contrast, etc. Then students should begin adding on to their topic sentence using a paragraph format. After stating each main point, students should add on an explain sentence for elaboration. When students come to the end of the summary, they should avoid using any kind of closing sentence. Too often closing sentences lead to opinions, and summary writing should be based on facts only. For example, I would not want to end my summary paragraph of the Middle School High Five by saying:

Truly, the Middle School High Five changed my students reading behaviors 100% and should be used across the United States.

Source: *Step Up to Writing* by Maureen Auman (2002)

Thanks so much for participating in the 2005 Middle School High Five. Should we do this again in 2006 with five new strategies? A staff survey of the High Five will soon be posted on MLP, and I hope that you will find a few minutes to complete it.



WRITING EFFECTIVE SUMMARIES

A. Identify!

You can identify what you are summarizing in a variety of ways. The following are okay, better, and best ways to identify what it is you are summarizing.

OK: The book
 The film
 The article

BETTER: *Painless Public Speaking*
Forrest Gump
“Going Under the Light”

BEST: *Painless Public Speaking* by
 Sharon Bower
 The movie, *Forrest Gump*
 “Going Under the Light” from
 Newsweek, October 2, 1995

B. Select a Verb!

acknowledges	evaluates
adds	explains*
advises	explores
answers	expresses
asks	features
asserts	furnishes
assures	gives
blames	identifies
captures	illustrates
clarifies	invites
classifies	judges
compares*	lists*
confirms	misjudges
confronts	names
confuses	offends
contrasts	praises
considers	predicts
critiques	presents*
demonstrates	proposes
defends	provides
defines*	recommends
denounces	shows*
depicts	simplifies
describes*	solves
discourages	suggests
encourages	supports
endorses	teaches
entertains	tells*
entices	traces

C. Finish Your Thought!

The final part of the topic sentence is easy if you just ask yourself:

- What is the big idea?
- What is the big concept?
- What is the main idea of the item that I am summarizing?

Keep in mind that this is just your topic sentence and that you will be adding all of the facts in the body of your summary paragraph.

Step Up to Writing by Maureen Auman
<http://www.sopriswest.com>

*Verbs commonly chosen.

A + B + C = TOPIC SENTENCE *Painless Public Speaking* by Sharon Bower provides a number of practical hints for people who are afraid of speaking in front of a group.

BODY: Create a fact outline. Then add those facts to your paragraph in sentence form.

HELPFUL HINTS: Use transitions only if they help. Summaries do not need a formal conclusion. If you force a conclusion, it might sound awkward. Also formal conclusions include opinions - you do not want an opinion in a summary.