

Activating Prior Knowledge: Strategies

Anticipation Guide

The teacher writes a number of statements to elicit a response to a topic. Students write an initial response to the topic and then discuss responses in small groups or in class. Students then listen to a lecture, watch a film, have a debate, or complete a reading. Afterwards, students write a response indicating why their opinions changed or were strengthened.

Brainstorming

Getting preliminary thoughts and ideas down in print or electronic form (e.g., in a Concept Map, web diagram, list) can bring thoughtful expressions of ideas into view for students. Some organization and clustering can be accomplished from an initial set of ideas. Many teachers are moving this task to students, and are using software aids (e.g., Inspiration®) as a way to help students organize ideas.

Clustering (Word Webbing, Word Splash)

Clustering helps students to survey subjects and to see the connections between various associations. Students

- write a “nucleus word” or draw a central image in the centre of a sheet of paper
- record all the words and/or sketch all the images that come to mind around the nucleus
- circle each word as it is placed on the page and draw a line to the item to which it most closely relates
- examine the cluster for closely related words or images that could form the topic for a unit, or allow for discussion of a concept

KWL(Know–Want to Know–Learned)

Using the KWLstrategy and a three-column chart, students identify what they already know, what they want to know, and what they have learned in the lesson or unit. Concept Maps may be used to organize information within the columns, providing a summary and review of the information.

LINK (List–Inquire–Note–Know)

The teacher puts a concept or question on the board or overhead. Students write down their thoughts and ideas. In the class discussion that follows, students ask questions of each other while the teacher notes responses (e.g., on a Concept Map). Information is concealed and students write down what they remember (e.g., recreate Concept Map). Students then note what they have learned and what they need to know or learn.

Listen–Draw–Pair–Share

Students draw and label a diagram illustrating what they know about a topic. They share and

compare their drawing with another student and then with the class. The teacher presents new information, such as an assigned reading, a lecture, or a film, and students alter, adapt, or redo their drawings. Students share their “before” and “after” drawings, discussing changes and differences.

Picture Puzzle

The teacher finds a picture (photograph, drawing, diagram) in which the subject is not obvious or is unfamiliar to students. Students discuss what the picture could possibly represent.

Rotational Cooperative Graffiti

A Rotational Cooperative Graffiti activity is often used as a group brainstorming strategy to expose and examine students' prior knowledge (under very limited time frames) of a topic, an idea, an issue, or a science concept. It is particularly entertaining and useful when the class is making a transition to a new component of the curriculum. One way to keep the enthusiasm elevated is to have groups rotate large sheets of paper upon which the ideas have been sketched out. The brainstormed ideas can exist as “paint splashes” (random positioning on the page), organized into lists, or drawn as pictures or cartoons. The strategy may be adapted as purposes require.