

clubs: the chance to acquire knowledge as we read for meaning and express and compare our thoughts and perceptions with others. An entire education can be built on these innately satisfying activities.

Teaching Vocabulary

Before the reading of a text, always be sure to teach any vocabulary that could impede understanding. This simple step can often make a seemingly inaccessible text accessible to all. Learning just a few words or unfamiliar concepts can make a text more accessible by a factor of years—and way more interesting.

Once done, we can move to purpose setting (which overlaps with the concept of anticipatory set).

Establishing a Purpose for the Reading

To create interest in the content of the text, we will want to share some background information about the topic, read an interesting selection from the text, or help students to connect it to recent or previous learning.

Then comes the main event: a question or prompt, linked as often as possible to intellectual skills, such as those Conley (2005) recommends (making inferences/drawing conclusions, analyzing and forming arguments, resolving/synthesizing conflicting opinions, or problem solving). We do these things because students, *regardless of grade level*, will read with greater interest when we get their attention and when we give them a clear, legitimate task or purpose for their reading. For example, author and practicing teacher Kelly Gallagher always gives his students their final exam question *before* they begin reading an assigned novel (2009).

Here are some examples of prompts or questions that establish a purpose for different subject area texts; they also serve as end-of-unit learning targets or writing tasks. All should be posted prominently at the beginning of a lesson or unit and thoroughly clarified before the reading.

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- **Science.** Compare and contrast the functions of the digestive and respiratory systems; meiosis and mitosis; the arguments for wind versus solar energy; the case for or against global warming.

- **English.** Make inferences about a character or his/her development, such as Jack in *Jack and the Beanstalk* or Amir in *The Kite Runner* (based on thoughts, words, and actions); identify similarities and differences between two characters—such as Old Dan/Little Anne in *Where the Red Fern Grows*—as you draw inferences about the author's message.

- **Social Studies.** Make arguments for why you would prefer life as a Mayan or an Aztec, or as a U.S. or Canadian citizen, with references to both (using textbooks and current publications).

- **Mathematics.** Argue for which solution to a problem is most complete and accurate; weigh the quantitative arguments in two opposing article(s) about federal spending (e.g., Paul Krugman on the left versus George F. Will on the right).

- **Art/Music.** Compare and contrast or argue the merits of one artist or musician over another, or of two conflicting reviews of an art show or musical performance in a magazine or newspaper.

The quality and availability of good questions is essential to engagement and interest as students read, discuss, and write. Forgive the repetition, but once again I must emphasize: Teams should make the development and refinement of *good text-based questions among their highest priorities*—creating banks of temporary and permanent collections of questions readily available to all teachers, trying the questions, and then discussing results (Which questions worked? Which bombed?).

Once we are sure that students grasp the question (by conducting a brief check for understanding), we then tell them how their work will be assessed. Assessment can be done in any of the following ways: