Just ASK's
Making the Common Core Come Alive!
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Creating Classroom Cultures for Thinking

Now that we are implementing the **Common Core State Standards**, we are not only building units and lessons, we are building cultures within our classrooms. In addition to the core academic content that is to be mastered by students, the standards also call for an integration of higher level thinking skills as a means for achieving college and career readiness. The thinking competencies required by students include critical thinking, reasoning, communication, and collaboration. Curriculum and assessments are focused around these competencies as well. Unlike the days of old, our students now need cognitive and social skills that will prepare them to deal with the complexities in our world.

In order to do the heavy lifting required by the **Common Core**, there needs to be a classroom culture where students can build their thinking muscles. The classroom needs to be a place that is energizing, collaborative, and inclusive. It needs to be a place where it is everyone's responsibility to contribute to the learning and to communicate effectively with one another. The ideas and thinking of others should be readily received with open minds. Students grow from the diversity within the classroom's four walls where learning is accessible to everyone, including those speaking a second language, those in poverty, and those students with disabilities. A classroom that is built for thinking has the infrastructure to support the demands of the **Common Core**. The building blocks for a classroom culture of thinking are outlined below.

Building Block #1
Nurturing Classroom Conversation
A classroom dominated with meaningful student discourse is one that values thinking. Students construct meaning of complex ideas through discussion with others. It is during these conversations that students reveal their misunderstandings, gain new insights, gather answers to questions, and make important connections. Rather than passively listening to the teacher talk, students are involved in merging new ideas with their prior knowledge and sharing their responses with others.

To maintain student engagement and interest, students have to contribute to the conversation. Not only do discussions with peers grant students time to process new learning, these discussions empower students to take ownership of the content.

If the classroom environment is such that students feel safe taking risks, they will be motivated to play a role in the discussion and will be eager to share fresh ideas and hunches. When a student shares a thought, they are engaging their brain with the content, and, therefore, constructing meaning of new ideas. It also affords the teacher an opportunity to eavesdrop and check for students' understanding. Whereas an idea might be confusing at first, in hearing others grapple with it and share insights, the meaning becomes clear.

In This Issue

Administrator Look Fors

- You will hear the students' voices as much, if not more, than the teacher's
- You will see students with time to ponder, deliberate, persist, investigate, and discuss with others
- There will be ample resources for students to indulge their curiosities
- There will be visible evidence of the thinking processes of students. Not everything displayed will be a final product, but rather documentation of the journey
- Students' questions will play an important role in the learning
- Students will be accustomed to working collaboratively with their peers

Nurturing Classroom Conversations

Stems students can use to keep the conversation thoughtful and moving during whole class, small group, and partner discussions include:

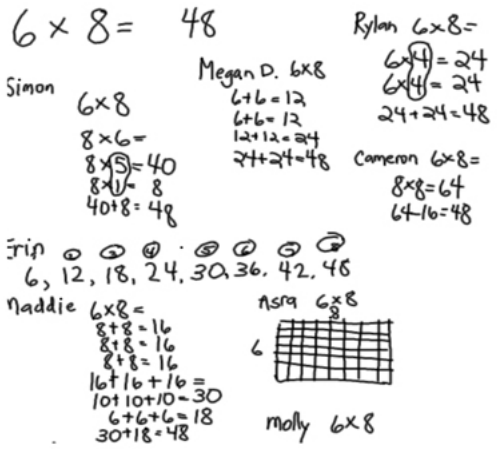
- I think that _____ means _____ .
- Some examples would be _____ . Some non-examples would be _____ .
- I think that _____, because in the reading (cite evidence).
- I agree with _____ because _____ . I disagree with _____ because _____ .
- I would like to add to _____'s thinking by saying _____ .
- One hunch I have is _____ because _____ .
- This is important in my life because _____ .

Building Block #2
Making the Invisible "Visible"

Our children are full of many complex ideas, hunches, perspectives, and novel ways of solving problems. Very often, they struggle to share that thinking in ways that are understood by others. We've all seen it. Whether it is lack of clarity in their verbal explanations or lack of supporting visuals, there are instances where other students are just checked out when hearing a peer's or teacher's line of thinking. One way to alleviate this confusion and to grow the thinking that exists, is to find ways to make the thinking public. By exposing it, our students have a chance to ponder, reflect, and use it to develop, revise, or abandon their own ideas.

The displays of student thinking serve as an invitation to make new discoveries and to explore ideas. There are a myriad of ways to make thinking public and accessible to others. Some ways to do this are by creating class anchor charts, displaying students' ideas and wonderings using sticky notes, projecting students' work for all to see, and having students in cooperative groups co-construct charts of their ideas.

Here is an example of a teacher's recording of several students' strategies for solving a multiplication problem:



This mind map shows evidence of students' pondering a question raised by an ELL student during the reading of Ralph Fletcher's ***Hello, Harvest Moon***.

Classroom Cultures That Emphasize Thinking

- Provide *all* students exposure to rich conversations, even if texts are out of reach, concepts are challenging, or language is difficult
- Provide students with social experiences that will prepare them to interact effectively with others outside of the classroom walls
- Prepare students for a global world by continually exposing them to multiple viewpoints and a variety of perspectives
- Allow students to lean on different strengths, such as oral language versus written language

Building Block #3
Letting Students' Wonderings Drive Their Discoveries

Make the learning irresistible. Present topics in such a way that students can't wait to think about them more deeply or learn the answers to the questions that may be troubling them. A classroom environment built on thinking emphasizes the students' questions and sees them as the driving force. Teachers may worry that student questions will take them off the beaten path, but you can be assured that framed in the right context, they will indeed lead you just where you want to go.

Consider, for instance, a classroom studying environmental issues. After activating students' prior knowledge on the issues that plague our world today, global warming rises to the top. Students begin to ask:

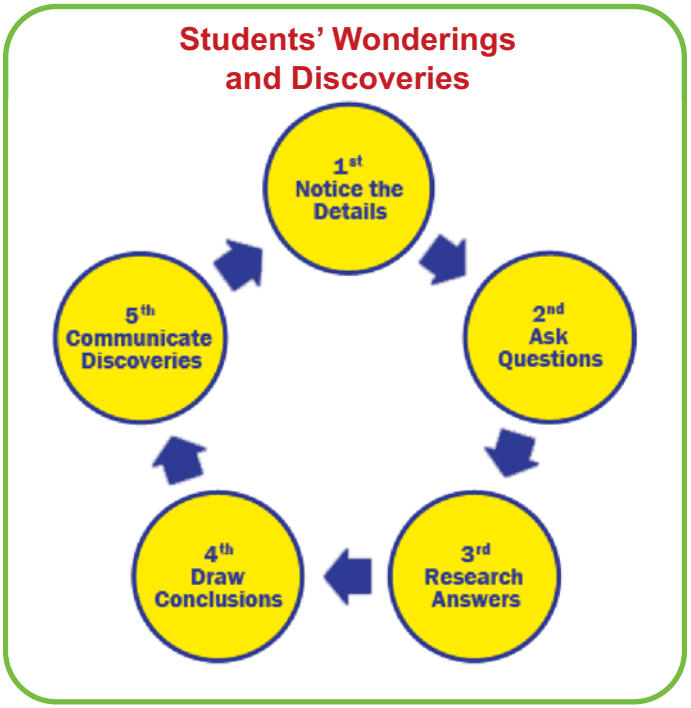
- How does global warming affect the animals in the Arctic?
- If the ice keeps melting at such a rapid pace, what will happen to the water levels?
- How are our Presidential candidates dealing with the issue of global warming?
- Is global warming real?
- What are both sides of the issue on global warming?

And there you have it. Students' questions are now fodder for the careful reading of a variety of non-fiction resources (both print and online), and the basis for informational or persuasive writing tasks, classroom debates, and mathematical work with geometry, statistics, and probability.

You can think of students' wonderings and discoveries as a cycle. First, we train students to spend time noticing and paying attention, with no judgments attached. For instance, students might view news footage, newspaper clippings, and videos on Hurricane Sandy. Among other things, they notice New Jersey was among the places hardest hit by the storm. That observation then leads students to wonder:

- How do the people of Atlantic City begin to rebuild?
- What is the economic impact?
- How long will it take?
- What is the socioeconomic status of the people who were hardest hit?
- What support will our government provide?

Students prioritize their questions and choose a meaningful one with which to grapple. After researching and learning more about their question, students draw conclusions and attempt to answer their own question using evidence of their findings. Students in turn share their line of thinking with others, who then take the time to notice the details, poke holes in their theories, ask connecting questions, and the cycle continues.



Future Issues of *Making the Common Core Come Alive!*

- Meaningful Questions: Engaging the Mind
- Uplifting Conversation: Promoting Meaningful Discourse
- Navigating Unchartered Waters: Close Reading of Complex Texts
- Thinking Outside of the Box: Fostering Creativity
- And the Winds Changed Direction: Using Data to Inform Practice
- Catching a Falling Star: Designing Quality Interventions
- Mirror, Mirror, On the Wall: Promoting Reflection

Building Block #4
Making Resources Available

In your classroom, have ample resources available to support students with their inquiries. For instance:

- Maintain a well-stocked classroom library, post relevant newspaper clippings and magazine articles.
- Provide measurement tools and math manipulatives, share magnifying glasses, maps and globes, curriculum related artifacts, and photographs. Make accessible to students a variety of writing paper and writing tools.
- Harness technology's great potential by offering informative websites, intriguing video clips, virtual experiences, and interactive possibilities.
- Create listening areas with iPods or CD players, share a digital camera, or hook a reluctant learner with an electronic reader.
- Whatever you choose, having resources at students' fingertips will help them to bring their learning to life in ways that are innovative and collaborative.

Parents as Partners

When working with your child at home, bear in mind the journey is just as important as the destination. If you are struggling with ways to help your child, rather than attempting to re-teach the classroom content the way you remember learning it, focus instead on asking the right questions. Encourage your child to document their strategies and thinking, and help them to show evidence that they "gave it a go." Some questions to ask that have relevance in any subject area include:

- When have you done work like this before?
- What are strategies that have helped you when completing similar tasks?
- What can you try?
- How will you demonstrate that you've tried? How will you show your thinking?
- What's easy? What challenges you?
- What do you need to get through any roadblocks?
- What will be the plan for communicating your challenges to your teacher?

Just ASK consultants are ready to help you develop new or refine old units to align with the **Common Core State Standards**. For more information contact us at www.justaskpublications.com/ccparty

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Print Resources

Harvey, Stephanie and Anne Goudvis. ***Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension for Understanding and Engagement***. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers. 2007.

Ritchhart, Ron, Mark Church, and Karin Morrison. ***Making Thinking Visible: How to Promote Engagement, Understanding and Independence for All Learners***. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass. 2011.

Rutherford, Paula. ***Instruction for All Students***. Alexandria, VA: Just ASK Publications. 2012.

Rutherford, Paula. ***Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners***. Alexandria, VA: Just ASK Publications. 2010.

Thishman, Shari, David Perkins, and ***Eileen Jay. The Thinking Classroom: Learning and Teaching in a Culture of Thinking***. Boston, MA: Pearson Education. 1994.

Zwiers, Jeff and Marie Crawford. ***Academic Conversations: Classroom Talk that Fosters Critical Thinking and Content Understandings***. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers. 2011.

Web Resources

www.pz.harvard.edu/vt/VisibleThinking_html_files/VisibleThinking1.html
Harvard's Project Zero is a research group at the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University. Visible thinking is a research-based approach to integrate students' thinking with content. Central to visible thinking are "thinking routines" that encourage the active processing of content.

www.p21.org/storage/documents/P21CommonCoreToolkit.pdf
The toolkit presented here is designed by the Partnership for 21st Skills to support the implementation of the Common Core in ways that strengthen critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration, communication, creativity, and innovation.

Just ASK's common language and concept system make the Common Core come alive!

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