



Literacy Connects

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Using Journals to Learn Content

“The more the content is manipulated [by students], the more likely it is to be remembered and understood. In general, any kind of written response leads to better performance than does reading without writing....” -- Langer & Applebee, 1987.

Journals, or learning logs, are among the most worthwhile types of reflective writing. When used purposefully, with instructional objectives in mind, journals allow students to think on paper, thus promoting the development of ideas and content knowledge. Journal writing enhances creativity and organization skills, while developing critical thinking skills through the interpretation and synthesis of the ideas presented. Journal entries are informal and can be used flexibly in all subjects. They can be collected and read or simply acknowledged as completed; they can focus solely on thought process or can be revised and developed into more formal writing assignments. Journal writing is easy to implement; students need only a notebook and the opportunity to write. Try setting aside 5 -10 minutes several days a week.

Following is a list of possible ways to use journals in your classroom:

To initiate learning: Introduce a topic, build background, access prior knowledge

- ✓ Thematic or relevant quote/pivotal quote from text
- ✓ Key concept: “What do you know about...?”
- ✓ Picture: “What is this?” “Describe what you see.”
- ✓ Music: “Describe what you hear” “Where does this take you?”

To record thought:

- ✓ Notes: “What questions do you have about...?”
- ✓ Reflections: “What do you think about...?” “I wonder....” “What if...?”
- ✓ Summaries: current events, reading, class activities...
- ✓ Observations/inferences: “What do you see? What does it mean?”

Explore the thought process:

- ✓ “How do you solve...?”
- ✓ “Describe the steps...”

Personal journal:

- ✓ Self-discovery: “How does this relate to you?”
- ✓ Meta-cognition
- ✓ Reflections

Play with thought & language: Create, fantasize, imagine

- ✓ Stories
- ✓ Poetry
- ✓ Quotes

Pre-write & pre-read:

- ✓ Explore ideas—who, what, when, where, why, and how?
- ✓ Develop thoughts
- ✓ Predict outcomes

“All Knowledge is related; the journal helps clarify the relationships.” --Fulwiler