



## Adapting “List/Group/Label” to Literature

This classic pre-reading exercise is a fun, hands-on way to students to “activate schema” and grapple with vocabulary about a topic before they read. By sorting, categorizing and speculating about a series of key words and phrases chosen from a text before they read the text itself, students begin to construct ideas about the words’ relationships and meaning. Used as a strategy for literary works, list/group/label can help students approach a text that might otherwise be daunting, and build a sense of connection and anticipation that enhances the reading process, even as it supports learning and retaining new vocabulary.

**Step One:** Choose a fairly dense or slightly difficult text as this is an unthreatening “way in” for students; select 20 – 25 words and/or short phrases. These should be a mix of easy, difficult or unfamiliar words that are important to the content of the reading. The words should provide hints to help students predict the topic of the text.

**Step Two:** Type these words in a large font and make as many copies of the words as there will be groups in your classroom. Cut the sets of words into individual words and put a set of each into an envelope, one envelope for each group.

**Step Three:** Place students in groups of 4-5 and give each group an envelope. Tell them that when you say, “GO,” they will take the words out and sort them into categories that they will determine and name themselves. They should think about the meanings of the words and their relationships to each other. As long as groups can justify their categories, there are no wrong answers. Some categories may have only one word; other words may fit into more than one category. Students may use the text, dictionaries or any other resources to help them determine the meaning of the words.

**Step Four:** When all groups have put all their words into categories, invite students to walk around the room and look at the way other groups have categorized their words. You can give each student a sheet with the heading “Most interesting or surprising categories” and “Patterns I see” and ask them to take notes as they go around. What did other groups do that was different from what they did themselves? What commonalities do they see among the groups?

**Step Five:** Ask the groups, “Based on these words, what do you think the text will be about?” Discuss their ideas and, if you want, have them write questions about what they are about to read or simply have them read the text.

*Activity adapted from Classroom Notes Plus, NCTE 2009, by Katherine Schulten*