

## Engaging Junior Students in Literacy Instruction

**“Engaged reading is a merger of motivation and thoughtfulness. Engaged readers seek to understand; they enjoy learning and they believe in their reading abilities.”**  
**Guthrie, 2001**

The Arts are a powerful way to engage students in literacy activities that will broaden their understanding, deepen their comprehension and stimulate their critical thinking skills.

Teachers can specifically engage students by:

- ☑ Establishing high expectations for everyone;
- ☑ Establishing meaningful contexts for teaching and learning;
- ☑ Enticing students into wanting to know about what is being taught;
- ☑ Exploring materials with students in active ways;
- ☑ Extending the experience so that the curriculum becomes more focused and reflective; and,
- ☑ Evaluating the learning that happens in the classroom.

### **Activity One: I See ... I Remember ... I Imagine ... (p. 35)**

Required Materials - one large file card for each student

Show the students an intriguing image. This image could come from a specific piece of text or from another source like the Internet. Have the students write the phrases, *I see ... I remember... I imagine...* on their file cards and then provide 5-10 minutes for them to record their responses to these three prompts.

This writing strategy utilizes a simple graphic organizer that allows students to break down their feelings and thoughts into three sections. It offers them a way to be objective, then reflective and finally imaginative about what they are learning. The structure makes the writing task more manageable and helps those students who have difficulty organizing their thoughts to tackle the job more confidently. The strategy can be used in various contexts to help students organize their feelings and thoughts so that effective discussion can happen as a whole class, in groups or in partners. The strategy also allows students to gain some distance from the material that they are considering. It affords them an opportunity to experience what it is like to be a “fly on the wall” or to have a “bird’s eye view.”

### **Activity Two: Role on the Wall (p. 50)**

Required Materials – one large sheet of paper and markers

On the chalkboard or a very large sheet of paper, have a volunteer draw a large abstract picture or figure representing a character from the text. Encourage the students to quietly

walk to the chalkboard or large sheet of paper and record words that describe the character on the inside of the figure. On the outside of the figure, ask students to identify the pressures that the character is facing. People who are supportive of the character could also be listed around the figure.

Role on the Wall is a very versatile activity that can also be used to compare and contrast characters. This activity promotes thinking and language acquisition. Students are encouraged to “find their own words to describe a character and the conflict that he she is facing”.

### **Activity Three: Lists (p. 33-34)**

Required Materials – one small file card/sheet of paper for each participant or group

This activity has participants generate a list of items that connect to the story. Everyone in the group should contribute an idea. As the students work together, it is important for them to come to agreement about the items to be included on the list. The students use oral language to defend their opinions and negotiate with each other to find consensus. One or all of the items are then shared with the class by a group spokesperson.

Students are encouraged to be very mindful of other group members so that everyone is able to contribute ideas and be heard. This activity counterbalances the tendencies of some students to dominate group work and thereby prevent others from getting discouraged and shutting down.

The previous engaging activities are reproduced with permission from *What do I do about the kid who ...?*

### **References**

Gould Lundy, K. (2004). *What do I do about the kid who...? Fifty ways to turn teaching into learning*. Markham: Pembroke Publishers Limited.

Guthrie, J.T. (2001, March). Contexts for engagement and motivation in reading. *Reading Online*, 4(8). Available at [http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art\\_index.asp?HREF=/articles/handbook/guthrie/index.html](http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art_index.asp?HREF=/articles/handbook/guthrie/index.html).