



OPCE Creating Smart & Good Schools Newsletter

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Smart & Good "Spa": Strategies for Rejuvenation

This month's Smart & Good "Spa"—Strategies for Rejuvenation newsletter describes "Expert Groups" adapted from Janet Allen's "More Tools for Teaching Content Literacy". This strategy will help students become more responsible for their own learning and not as reliant on the teacher for providing all the background information for the topic of study. Using this strategy in your class will give all students responsibility, engage them each in active learning, as well as increase their confidence as they become the "experts".

"We must not, in trying to think about how we can make a big difference, ignore the small daily differences we can make which, over time, add up to big differences that we often cannot foresee."

—Marian Wright Edelman

Spa Treatment #7: Expert Groups*

PURPOSE:

Expert groups is similar to a Jigsaw, except that students (or pairs of students) are responsible for researching needed background information for a unit of study or whole class reading assignment. It is especially useful for literature assignments as background information is often critical to understanding a novel's symbolism or context. Using it regularly helps transfer responsibility for student learning to students, so that the teacher is not the only "expert" or source of information in the room. Students must take responsibility for helping their fellow classmates understand the unit or topic of study. This also helps build community in the classroom.

DEVELOPS PERFORMANCE CHARACTER TRAITS:

Responsibility, work ethic, self-discipline, cooperation, diligence, perseverance.

PREPARATION:

If you often find yourself stopping to explain words or topics students don't understand, this is an ideal

Sample "Expert Groups" Note Card

(front of note card)

I/we are experts on: Meat packing in in 1900's

Notes:

From the Civil War until the 1920s Chicago was the country's largest meatpacking center and the acknowledged headquarters of the industry because of the proximity to cattle producing farms and rail and water access. 12 million cattle/hogs processed by 1890.

Thoughts/connections:

Sinclair's The Jungle led to meat inspection act, labor unions

Important Names, Dates, Words: Union Stock Yard and Transit Company - 1865, Philip Armour, Gustavus Swift.

*adapted from Allen, J. (2008) *More Tools for Teaching Content Literacy*



For more information, contact
Lucy Frontera, Ph.D.
Executive Director
E-mail: lucy.frontera@charactereducationohio.org

Ohio Partners in Character Education
1169 Dublin Rd.
Columbus, OH 43215
Phone: 614-486-6531 ext 137
Fax: 614-486-6631



Spa Treatment #7: Expert Groups (con't)

strategy to use. Review your text, unit or topic of study, to assess what background information is needed to fully understand the material.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Text, note cards (at least 4x6)

PROCEDURE:

1. A week or so before the beginning of the unit or text assignment, provide students with a list of the background words or topics you have selected. Select topics of varying difficulty levels so that all ability level students can work on topics that they can be successful with.
2. Ask students to sign up to become experts on their chosen topic individually or in pairs. If you have selected words, make sure you have provided sufficient context so that the students research the relevant definition. Students then research the word or topic so that they are the “experts” and can present the needed information to the class. You can use any format for the students to prepare the information, a format for using 4x6 note cards is illustrated.
3. Begin the unit or text assignment. When you encounter an item on the list, ask the class “Who is our expert on ____?” The student(s) who have researched that topic give a 1-2 minute presentation to the class with the information about the topic and make connections to the text or unit.
4. Student presentations can be formal or informal, simple or more in depth, depending on the topic and how essential the information is to understanding the topic or the flow of the lesson. For example, if you are studying the Gettysburg address, it would be helpful to know how many “four score and seven years ago” is, and the “expert” student could provide this information to the class quickly. A more in depth “expert” report might be some information about the meat processing industry in turn of the century Chicago as a prelude to reading the poem *Chicago* by Carl Sandburg (see example on note card). Expert groups procedure differs from the jigsaw procedure in that the expert groups provide *background* information needed to understand the topic of study, rather than each group presenting one part of the entire topic.
5. Some teachers have posted the 4x6 cards on an “expert’s wall” to serve as a resource for reading.

Sample “Expert Groups” Note Card

(back of note card)

Illustration: *(students can create a drawing or chart if that would help them present information)*

Important points for presentation:

Chicago was center of meat packing industry at turn of century.
Problems associated with the smell and refuse of the industry affected political and labor struggles in the city for decades.

Sources/Citations:

<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/804.html>

FOLLOW-UP AND REINFORCING ACTIVITIES

- ⇒ The research students do for their expert group topic can be expanded into larger research projects if it sparks the student’s interest.
- ⇒ Emphasize how class success depends on each other and that all contribute.
- ⇒ Using single students or pairs helps all students participate and contribute. They can’t “hide” in a larger group.
- ⇒ Make sure students have topics they can be successful with—this will help them develop confidence and contribute to respectful relationships among students. Students learn they can depend on one another and that the teacher is not the only source of information in the classroom.