

# Better Teaching<sup>®</sup>

Tips & Techniques to Improve Student Achievement

Secondary  
EDITION


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Making Success Our Business



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Technology

## Turn book reports into e-book talks

 By the end of the year, both you and your students are probably looking for a jazzier way to cover required content. Why not turn to technology?

Presenting e-book talks is a great way for your students to combine their technology skills with their reading and reflection on literature.

Have your students use online resources to research information related to the topic of the book they have read. Then have them use Power Point<sup>®</sup> or other presentation software to share that information with the class.

Students can work on this project individually, or you can assign them to work in groups of two or three to collaborate on the assignment.

Here's how you might use an e-book assignment for a book talk on *Tom Sawyer*. After they have read the book, have students:

1. **Choose a theme or topic** they wish to explore further in their book talks. In the case of *Tom Sawyer*, possible themes might include friendship, Mark Twain and the Mississippi River or Twain's use of humor.
2. **Use online resources** to select information that supports their topics. With younger students, you may wish to develop a list of appropriate websites. Older students will be able to do their own searching. This will give them practice in evaluating online websites for accuracy. Be sure they document the sources of their information accurately.
3. **Assemble the information** into an informative and entertaining book talk. The electronic presentation should be accompanied by a live talk before the class, followed by a discussion.

**Source:** Linda Lindroth, "How to ... Celebrate Reading—Electronically!" *TeachingK-8*, November/December 2005 (1-800-678-8793, [www.teachingk-8.com](http://www.teachingk-8.com)).

Making the Transition

## A smooth transition can set the stage for success in high school



It's time to say good-bye.

The first days of high school are just around the corner for middle school students. And they—perhaps their parents, too—may be feeling anxious about what's ahead.

What can you do? Try these ideas:

- **Schedule a visit** to the high school. Arrange for your students to shadow older students for the day.
- **Invite a panel** of high school students to share tips for succeeding in class and getting involved with extracurricular activities.
- **Give students copies** of the high school handbook. Invite a counselor to talk about attendance rules and other expectations in high school.
- **Suggest high school students** create a page on the high school website with information just for incoming freshmen. They could even include a blog where students can post comments and concerns as well as suggestions and solutions.
- **Help students establish** some social connections now. Start a mentoring program where high school students serve as big brothers or sisters, or as tutors for rising freshmen.
- **Keep parents informed.** Studies show that when parents stay involved during the high school years, students have higher achievement rates.

**Source:** Nancy B. Mizelle, "Helping Middle School Students Make the Transition to High School," ERIC Digest, [www.ericdigests.org/2000-1/high.html](http://www.ericdigests.org/2000-1/high.html).

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## Finding Your Balance

### Give yourself a pat on the back



As the school year draws to a close, you'll be looking back on the year with your students and celebrating their successes. But what about you? Consider the following as you focus on your own achievements throughout the year:

- **A portfolio.** Keeping a portfolio is a wonderful way to focus on your growth and successes as a teacher—and learner. Include lists of professional books and articles you have read, papers you have written, personal evaluations and other documents.
- **A smile file.** Gather notes from happy parents, cards from your students and even “you did a great job” sticky-notes from fellow teachers. Keep this file on hand for those days next year when you might be feeling low.
- **A scrapbook.** How many students have given you wallet-sized photos? Can you print out digital photos of classroom activities? Gather these and other mementos from the year and create a scrapbook. Don't forget to share it with your students. They may want to add photos and comments.

## Understanding Poverty: Part Two of a Three-Part Series

### Teach students school survival behavior



Students raised in generational poverty need one set of behaviors for survival on the street and another set that will help them be successful in school.

School behavior can also help students adapt to the world of work, so help your students learn and practice appropriate behaviors in school. For example, teach them about:

- **Rules of the game.** It is typical of students raised in generational poverty to laugh when they are disciplined. If that happens, teach your students how to act appropriately. You might say, “Do you use the same rules to play all your computer games? Of course you don't because that would be a sure way to lose.” Explain that rules for behaving in school are different from rules for behavior on the street. Mastering *both* sets of rules will help them “play the game” more successfully.

- **Structure.** It is important for children raised in generational poverty to have structure at school. Predictability and organization are often lacking in the home. You can help by teaching students simple methods for organizing their papers and their work. Use a five-finger strategy to help them remember what they have to do the next day.
- **Respect.** It is also important to teach students about the importance of showing respect for adults. Tell them that disrespect and aggressive behaviors are *not* choices in school. Instead, model for students the tone and voice they can use.

Give all your students a chance to practice these behaviors *before* they need them.

**Source:** Ruby Payne, Ph.D., *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, ISBN: 1-929-22948-8 (aha! Process, Inc., 1-800-424-9484, [www.ahaprocess.com](http://www.ahaprocess.com)).

## Maintaining High Expectations

### Keep seniors focused during the final weeks



Spring is in the air. Are your seniors showing signs of the “slump”? To keep them motivated:

- **Allow seniors to take a class** at a community college.
- **Encourage them to complete** a self-designed “senior project.” Link it to a course of study or career they expect to pursue in the future.
- **Allow seniors to tutor** younger students. This is a great way to reinforce their basic skills.
- **Share information** about placement exams. Many colleges require freshmen to take placement exams before enrolling in core courses.

- **Warn seniors** that colleges will be looking at their second semester grades. Some colleges may withdraw acceptances if students fall below the grade.
- **Promote internships.** Students have worked in newspaper editing rooms, law offices, hospitals and a host of other locations. Work with your community to set up a variety of internship opportunities. Students who let up during the second semester of their senior year may continue that trend in college. Take steps now to get them on track for first semester success in the fall.

**Source:** Michael W. Kirst, “The Senior Slump: Making the most of high school preparation,” National CrossTALK, [www.highereducation.org/crosstalk/ct1000/voices1000-kirst.shtml](http://www.highereducation.org/crosstalk/ct1000/voices1000-kirst.shtml).

## Workplace Preparedness

### Tell students about the rewards of hard work



Do your students raise the age-old query, “Why do we need to know this?”

When you answer with information and statistics about the workplace, you’ll not only motivate your students, you’ll boost achievement, too.

*Learndoeearn.org*, a website created by the business community, poses this challenge, “Imagine how much we could do for students if we all worked together to create an inescapable message to every teenager in the country: Learn More Now. Do More Now. Earn More Later.”

Share the following statistics:

- **Future jobs** (about 70%–80%) haven’t even been invented yet. The best preparation is a solid foundation in academics.

- **Students who complete** high school may increase their annual wages by 25%.
- **College graduates** may earn up to \$23,000 more per year than high school graduates.
- **A good attendance record** often makes the difference in securing an entry-level job.
- **Students who develop** a strong work ethic, who show up for class on time every day and who work hard to do quality work are more likely to be effective employees—and more likely to be rewarded for their efforts.

**Source:** “Our Message to Your Students: Learn More Now. Do More Now. Earn More Later,” <http://learndoeearn.org/for-educators.asp>.

## Resources



Will most of your students be working this summer?

Alert them to tips for safety on the job offered by the United States Department of Labor’s “Teen Summer Job Safety” site. They’ll find information on jobs from life guarding to construction to restaurant work. In addition to safety suggestions, they’ll find a section on their rights and responsibilities. Direct them to [www.osha.gov/SLTC/youth/summerjobs/rightandresponsibilities.html](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/youth/summerjobs/rightandresponsibilities.html).



Foster safe driving practices for your students this summer with a free video produced by Liberty Mutual. Featuring a discussion by adolescents and parents, it addresses topics such as seat belts, speeding, driving at night and driving under the influence. For a free copy, call 1-800-4-LIBERTY. Their website also offers twenty tips on safe driving and an auto safety quiz. See more information on the Liberty Mutual Teen Driving Safety Kit at [www.libertymutual.com/omapps/ContentServer?cid=1138338467654&pagename=PersonalMarket%2FPage%2FmktContent&c=Page](http://www.libertymutual.com/omapps/ContentServer?cid=1138338467654&pagename=PersonalMarket%2FPage%2FmktContent&c=Page).

## Teaching Thinking Skills

### Teach students thinking skills with WHAM



Here’s a four-step process for teaching students the skills they need to analyze challenging material. It moves students from watching the skill as you demonstrate it to practicing it themselves. An easy way to remember the steps is to use the acronym WHAM.

1. **W—Watch.** Demonstrate the skill yourself as students watch. For example, read a paragraph aloud as students read it silently. Then model the process of finding the key idea.
2. **H—Help.** Assist students in understanding the skill. Next, have students “help” you as you apply the skill. “Can anyone help me find the most important idea in this paragraph?”

3. **A—Apply.** Using examples that you have developed, have students apply the skill themselves. In this process, you can check to make sure students understand what is expected of them. You can also help students who are still struggling to apply the skill correctly.
4. **M—Master.** Once students have applied the skill in class, let them demonstrate it independently. The WHAM model is predictable and structured. Students move gradually from your instruction to their own mastery of the thinking skills. At each step, they assume more responsibility for their own learning.

**Source:** Tim Clifford, *The Middle School Writing Toolkit*, ISBN: 0-929-89575-4 (Maupin House Publishing, 1-800-524-0634, [www.maupinhouse.com](http://www.maupinhouse.com)).

## Tell us what you think!

We’d love to hear your ideas on how we might make your *Better Teaching* newsletter even better at helping you improve student achievement.


Which topics would you like to see covered more/less? Are there issues we are not addressing now that you would like to see included?

Other suggestions? We’d like to hear from you. Complete the brief survey online at [www.teacher-institute.com/survey](http://www.teacher-institute.com/survey), or send your ideas to *The Teacher Institute*, Editorial Dept., P.O. Box 397, Fairfax Station, VA 22039, 1-800-216-3667 (fax), or email [betterteaching@teacher-institute.com](mailto:betterteaching@teacher-institute.com).

## Focus on: Reading

Building Reading Skills

### Look for what is most important

 Understanding the key idea in any reading passage is an important reading skill. But most reading assignments include extraneous details that may be distracting for some students. Here's a way to help them focus on what's most important. Have students identify:

- **A word.** Assign a short passage. Tell students that while they are reading, they should look for the most important *word*. When they have finished reading, have them write at least three details that support the word they have selected as the most important.
- **A sentence.** Later, have students do the same by looking for the most important *sentence* in a passage. Again, they should list three details that support their choice.



Illustration by Bob George

- **A paragraph.** Finally, have students find the most important *paragraph* in a longer reading assignment. Helping students look for the most important word, sentence or paragraph will focus their attention on the overall meaning of the passage.

Source: "Analytic Reading," Glencoe Teacher Tips, [www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/weekllytips.phtml/25](http://www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/weekllytips.phtml/25).

Reading

### Involve students in summer reading



There is no question that students who read during the summer months are more likely to arrive in classrooms next fall ready to begin work at grade level. During the last weeks of school, involve students in a fun activity that will promote summer reading.

You can do this by having students create their own lists of summer reading favorites.

Here's how:

1. **Offer several reading lists** as resources. The American Library Association compiles lists of student favorites. Many school districts also post summer reading lists online.
2. **Set aside time for students** to visit the library to check out some of these books.
3. **Help students focus** their lists. They can choose a genre such as mysteries, then perhaps limit selections to mysteries occurring during the summer months.
4. **Have them create** catchy titles for their book lists. Examples might include "I Know What You Read Last Summer: Suspense Novels" or "Beach Bag Books."
5. **Have students create** and publish brochures to distribute to their classmates for their summer reading plans.

Source: "Authentic Persuasive Writing to Promote Summer Reading," ReadWriteThink, [www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson\\_view.asp?id=312](http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=312).

Improving Study Skills

### Help students use textbooks for test review



With summer just around the corner, your students may be feeling overwhelmed by the number of final exams coming up. To relieve their stress, remind them that they don't have to reread every word in their textbooks as they study.

- Instead, encourage them to:
- **Review vocabulary.** Have them write each bold-faced vocabulary word on the front of a file card and the definition on the back. Give them class time to quiz each other using their cards.
  - **Turn section headings** into questions. If the heading is

"Causes of the Civil War," then the question is, "What were the causes of the Civil War?"

- **Answer the questions** at the ends of the chapters. If possible, give students time in class to answer the questions with a partner.
- **Reread chapter introductions** and conclusions.
- **Review illustrations** and graphics. Have students explain to one another why an illustration or graphic was included. Start reviewing early and your students will feel more confident and do better on content-area exams.