



Teaching Higher-Order Thinking Skills

By Beula Postlewait, Communications Representative

The easiest test questions for a teacher to write involve simple recall of answers. Teachers spend most of their time trying to help students, third grade and up, to develop their thinking skills and use them as tools to process their thoughts. It is less important for students to master information and recall. It is more important for students to use their minds to synthesize and analyze the information. All students need higher-order thinking skills to succeed in their future careers.

Bloom's Taxonomy originally listed these skills: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. A revised version lists the skills as verbs (not nouns): remember, understand, apply, analyze, design, and create.

Teachers are concerned about helping students succeed on state and national assessment tests. Teachers can help students by introducing them to the higher-order questions that the tests demand. It is important to train the students "how to think" rather than to merely repeat rote-memory answers. Teaching students to understand, apply, analyze, design, and create should be a part of their everyday experiences as they mature. Students should not limit their use of these skills for an assessment test. These skills need to become a way of life.

Here are some activities presented by Karen Tankersley in her book, *Literary Strategies for Grades 4-12*. The activities encourage students to use higher-order thinking skills.

A Position Paper—Provide articles for the students to read on a specific topic. The articles should present two sides of an issue. Students should take notes on points made by both sides. Then, with a partner, have students choose a side and defend their stance. Students could pretend to be senators

and cast ballots for or against a proposed bill. They could write a message to constituents defending their stance and stating how they think the bill will affect people in the future.

Script Writing—Select a scene from a story and ask students to develop a reader’s theater script. Provide time for students to rehearse the script and present the performance for the class.

Quick Write—Ask students to write for 5-10 minutes, describing what they know about a topic, what aspects of the topic they do not understand, and how they can learn more about those concepts.

Have You Seen the Movie?—Find a novel or historical text that has been made into a movie. Have students read the novel and watch the movie. Have students compare and then contrast the two versions of the information. Have the students look for agreement and for inaccurate statements.

Diaries—Ask students to describe “a day in the life” of a historical figure or a fictitious person who lived during the years they have studied. Students must include cultural and historical information, reflecting on the political issues and events of that time. Discuss the current events that might shape the political or social views of the person. Compare how that person might or might not have a different opinion today.

Book Symbols--Ask students to bring to class five items that represent a book they have read, show the items to the class, and describe what each item represents and why.

To find more ideas and additional information on this topic see *Literary Strategies for Grades 4-12*, by Karen Tankersley, published by ASCD, 2014.

Beula Postlewait is a former public school teacher and a retired employee of Children’s Ministries at the Global Ministry Center. She is the communications representative on the NEW Council. You may reach Beula at bpostlewait@kc.rr.com.