

# Better Teaching<sup>®</sup>

Classroom Ideas to Improve Student Achievement

Secondary  
EDITION

Compliments of  
Northwest MAP Regional Center



Bringing Lessons to Life

## Have students 'map out' self-portraits



The students in your classroom could have grown up anywhere around the world—or just around the corner. But they all carry with them a little bit of their home town.

Here's a fun art activity that can also reinforce some knowledge of geography. You'll need a world atlas or access to an online mapping program (such as Google Maps). If many of your students grew up nearby, you might also get copies of your state road map, usually available for free from the state government.

For this art project, have students:

1. **Locate detailed maps** of the places where they grew up. Tell them that these maps are to be incorporated into a self-portrait.
2. **Research self-portraits** done by various artists. Be sure to include artists who have worked in a variety of genres. Pay special attention to

artists who used printed papers in their art. Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque and Robert Rauschenberg are among those who created fantastic collages using the rich designs of printed papers.

3. **Use mirrors, digital cameras** or even their fingers to explore their own faces. What facial characteristics do they have? What makes them unique? How will they depict them?
4. **Design their portraits** using their maps as the basic medium.
5. **Create collages** using different portions of their maps to portray their facial features.
6. **Include details** that are reminiscent of home.

When they are displayed, their portraits should tell a story of who they are—and where they have come from.

**Source:** Sara Schmickle Kirker, "Where in the World ART You From?" *School Arts Magazine* (Davis Publications, 1-800-533-2847, [www.schoolartsonline.com](http://www.schoolartsonline.com)).

College and Career Readiness

## You can motivate your students to set higher goals



In just a few years, your students will be working to support families of their own. They will be making meaningful contributions to society. Or will they?

Research shows that many won't be ready for either the demands of higher education or the workplace.

Students often fail to complete post-secondary education because they weren't prepared when they began. And employers report that many new employees are deficient in important basic skills.

No matter what your content area, you *can* make a difference. To motivate your students:

- **Expect their best**—and don't let up! Maintain rigorous standards for achievement.
- **Believe in them.** One student said, "... hearing someone tell you that you can do it, it makes you think: 'She thinks I can do it. I *must* be able to do it.'"
- **Offer to help.** You may not be a counselor, but you are more likely to notice when a student starts to fall behind. Offering after-school remediation, finding a tutor or showing parents how to help may be the first step toward getting a student back on track.

**Source:** Daria Hall, "College- and Career-Readiness: From Research to Policy to Reality," The Education Trust, [www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/4930458F-B94D-4DB4-8D5D-E131C7CB59A0/0/TSC08session6.ppt](http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/4930458F-B94D-4DB4-8D5D-E131C7CB59A0/0/TSC08session6.ppt).

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## Research

## Use free online tools to survey your students



Standardized tests assess student performance in your content area. Your own final exams also document student progress. This year, consider adding a third evaluation tool: a student survey. Discover how students measure their own success and your teaching strategies.

Some free online surveys that allow students to submit responses on their own time include:

- **Survey Monkey.** Create a 10-question survey for up to 100 respondents. This user-friendly service requires no installation of software. ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com))
- **Survey Gizmo.** You can quickly design, edit and launch your survey. Helpful tutorials will get you started. ([www.surveygizmo.com](http://www.surveygizmo.com))
- **Fluid Surveys.** Create surveys and analyze results. The site offers a demo and a sample survey. (<http://fluidsurveys.com>)

Examine sample surveys for the best ways to frame questions. Determine what would be the most helpful information to you. Also consider asking students to submit possible questions.

Response to Intervention: Part Three of a Three-Part Series

## What all teachers should know about RTI



Response to Intervention (RTI) is a new approach to providing support for students. The goal is to reduce “over-referrals” to special education. All teachers should know that RTI:

- **Involves all teachers.** To be successful, RTI requires all teachers to assess student needs, develop interventions and then monitor student progress. That means every teacher in a building is involved with RTI.
- **Is not just for special education students.** This is the biggest reason many teachers have come to support RTI. It creates a way to meet the needs of students who may not quite qualify for special education, but who are still struggling.
- **Still allows teachers and parents** to refer students for special education if they believe the student needs an evaluation.

- **May reduce the numbers** of minority students or English Language Learners who may be inappropriately referred to special education. These students may be struggling, but they are not necessarily special education students. RTI can provide the help they need in the general education classroom.
- **Does not reduce the need** for special education teachers. In fact, these professionals are essential to the success of any RTI program. They will collaborate with general education teachers. They will also serve as resources, helping general education teachers learn about interventions that can help students master challenging material.

Source: “What Is This Thing Called RTI?” *American Teacher*, September 2008 (American Federation of Teachers, 202-879-4400, [www.aft.org](http://www.aft.org)).

## Teaching Tips

## Use TV as a tool to practice taking notes



Teaching students how to take notes is one of the most valuable skills you can impart. But unless you plan to give lecture after lecture, they may not find enough opportunities to practice their new skill.

That’s where TV can help. The History Channel, public television, and even C-SPAN are all good choices. Do this activity along with your students:

1. **Choose a five-minute segment** (increase to 10 minutes later).
2. **Have students watch** the program and take notes as they watch.
3. **Tell them to fill in any blanks** they left as soon as the time is up. That’s also the time to note what

their shorthand abbreviations meant.

4. **Have students share their notes** in small groups. Did they miss any important content?

5. **Share your own notes.**

Start with programs that will be of high interest to your students. Later, you might show them a short segment on a subject that is less interesting. After all, they need to know how to take notes whether they are fascinated or not!

Assign this activity for homework. Have students start with short segments, doing more than one a day.

Source: James Roberts, *How to Take Great Notes in Class and From Textbooks*, ISBN: 9781-8917-0709-4 (Lawrence House Publishers, 1-800-533-8681, [www.budbooks.com](http://www.budbooks.com)).

## Keeping Students on Task

### 'Sketch to stretch' keeps students engaged



Research indicates that student brains store information in both verbal and nonverbal forms (images). Using nonverbal strategies can be effective not only in boosting retention of information, but in keeping students engaged, as well.

Try using this visual "sketch to stretch" technique. Here's how:

1. **Have students read a selection** independently. This strategy works well for literary texts, but could be adapted for content area textbooks, current events articles and other assigned reading.
2. **Ask each student to draw** a sketch that illustrates the selection. Remind them that it's not an "art" project—stick people are fine!
3. **Group students in pairs** and ask pairs to exchange their sketches.

4. **Have each student write** what he sees in the other's sketch.
5. **Allow students time to discuss** their observations. How are their sketches similar? Different?
6. **Have each pair create** a joint sketch.
7. **Post all the sketches** and invite additional observations.
8. **Suggest that visualizing** the sketches can be a great way to recall information in the selection.

This sketching activity forces students to look more closely at the text. It engages them in writing and speaking about it. They'll even find it fun—and you'll find it has improved their comprehension and recall.

**Source:** Donna M. Ogle, "Make it Visual: A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words," a chapter in *Creativity and Innovation in Content Area Teaching*, ISBN: 1-929024-13-4 (Christopher Gordon Publisher, Inc., 1-800-934-8322, [www.christopher-gordon.com](http://www.christopher-gordon.com)).

## Resources



Open the National Wildlife Federation's website for teens ([www.nwf.org/climateclassroom/teens](http://www.nwf.org/climateclassroom/teens)) and you'll see the headline "Global warming is not cool!" Below it is a question: "What Can You Do?" The site is filled with ideas from throwing a climate-change party to volunteer activities to planning a career in conservation work. The site also offers educators a way to "connect with students using activity-oriented scenarios and cooperative projects."



Looking for a great source of scientific evidence for what works in education? The U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences What Works Clearinghouse (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>) is a trusted source for research-based articles offering successful strategies used by educators across the nation. You'll find current articles in a "What's New" section, a 12-month archive and topics such as Middle School Math, and Dropout Prevention.



The free EasyBib website may mark the end of the 3 x 5 card. Students can choose the source (interview, website, book) for a paper. They fill in a template with requested information. The site automatically formats everything as a Word document in MLA style. Bib4School, available by subscription, offers teachers additional tools to track students' progress as they write research papers. ([www.easybib.com](http://www.easybib.com))

## Technology

### Create individual student grading rubrics



Teacher Jim Falbo has found a quick way to share information about grades with students, counselors and parents. He uses Google Docs, a free service that allows his students to create a grading rubric online. For a quick introduction, view "Google Docs in Plain English" on YouTube.

To get started, go to [www.google.com/accounts/ManageAccount](http://www.google.com/accounts/ManageAccount). Then:

1. **Establish gmail accounts** for yourself and your students. Tell students to use "Last Name First Name" @gmail.com. (They will log in using this name.)
2. **Create a rubric** using the option for creating a spreadsheet.
3. **Use the option to share** your rubric with students as "viewers."

4. **Include the following directions** in the email that goes with the invitation:

*Write the directions below in your notebook, then complete each step:*

- ♦ Click "file."
- ♦ Click "create a copy."
- ♦ Rename the sheet "Last Name First Name Name of Rubric."
- ♦ Share the sheet with me as your collaborator.
- ♦ Close the sheet.

You now have a rubric for each student. They will be aware of your grading standards and get immediate feedback when you enter their grades. Parents, counselors and others can see the information as "viewers."

**Source:** Jim Falbo, Electrical Instructor, Grundy Area Vocational Center, Morris, IL, [jimfalbo@gmail.com](mailto:jimfalbo@gmail.com).

## Share an Idea!

Do you have an idea to improve student learning that should be in this newsletter?


Send your ideas to **Better Teaching**, Editorial Dept., P.O. Box 397, Fairfax Station, VA 22039, fax to 1-800-216-3667 or go to [www.teacher-institute.com/ideas](http://www.teacher-institute.com/ideas).

Full credit will be given with each article published. Materials sent cannot be returned.

## Focus : Motivating Students

Capturing Attention

### Get students excited about learning

 Some days, your students look like they are about to fall asleep. (Some may even doze off in your class.) What can you do to make them more involved in your lessons?

They will enjoy learning and remember more of what you taught them if:

- **They get to move their bodies.** Sitting quietly in class after class can put anyone into a daze. Activities that involve movement will always be a hit.
- **They can create visuals.** Many students are visual learners. Let them create posters, PowerPoint® presentations or time lines.
- **The lesson includes music or sound effects.**

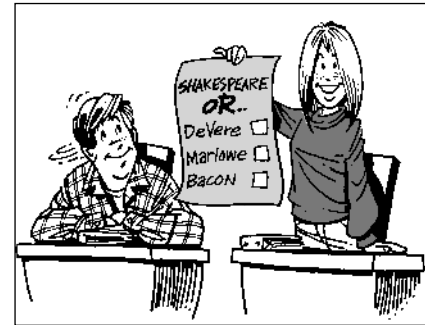


Illustration by Bob George

- **They can work collaboratively.** Let groups of students debate the authorship of Shakespeare's plays. When you add a little "interest" to a lesson, students pay more attention—and they *talk* about it, increasing their memory of the content.

Source: Richard Allen, *Green Light Classrooms: Teaching Techniques That Accelerate Learning*, ISBN: 9781-4129-5610-9 (Corwin Press, 1-800-233-9936 www.corwinpress.com).

Encouraging Participation

### Use CU KAN to engage students



The CU KAN framework gives you a way to plan lessons that meet your objectives and give students choices to demonstrate mastery. Here's how it works:

**C Concept.** Begin with a big idea—the overall goal you want to teach. Ideally, you should be able to narrow it down to a single word.

**U Understanding.** Think about the underlying principle that is key to what you are teaching. In math, it might be, "Understand that everything is made up of wholes and parts."

**K Know.** What key facts must students know? What vocabulary do they need to master to understand the subject?

**A Able to Do.** By the end of the lesson, students should be able to do something specific, such as "gather and interpret data." This will be the basis for assessing students. You may design a rubric to do this.

**N Now You've Got It.** Create a chart of activities (design a model, create a puzzle, do odd numbers on page 208). Let students choose how to demonstrate mastery of the skills and knowledge.

Source: Kathleen Kryza, *Inspiring Middle and Secondary Learners: Honoring Differences and Creating Community Through Differentiating Instructional Practices*, ISBN: 9781-4129-4903-3 (Corwin Press, a SAGE Publications Company, 1-800-233-9936, www.corwinpress.com).

Overcoming Apathy

### Stave off the end-of-the-year 'blahs'



Student apathy is always a concern, but as the days grow warmer and vacation draws nearer, you may feel it's more of a challenge than ever. To keep your students "fired up" during the final days, try:

- **Drama.** Divide students into small groups. Give each group a specific content-related topic to "teach" with a short skit. (Be sure to designate a time limit.) Add a bag filled with crazy props to make their presentations even more fun. Providing a grading rubric will ensure that all the fun is part of an actual learning experience.

- **Humor.** Whatever your content area, you can probably find a few funny anecdotes, jokes or comics to share. Post them on a bulletin board. You may even find students coming to class early just to check them out.
- **Competition.** Kids love review sessions based on TV shows such as "Jeopardy," "Family Feud" or "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire," but who has time to create them? Invite your students to become producers and directors. You'll be amazed at their creativity. And the competition will keep them on their toes.