


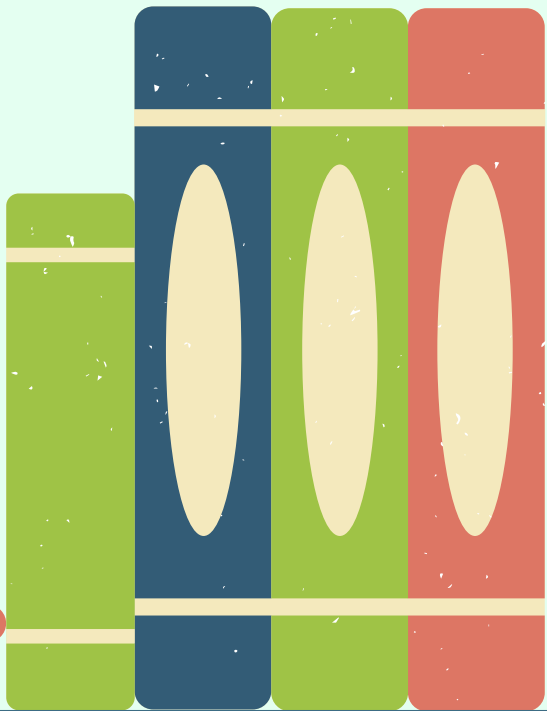
ENGAGEMENT & DIFFERENTIATION IN JR HIGH ELA

ESTCA 2026 - ELAC

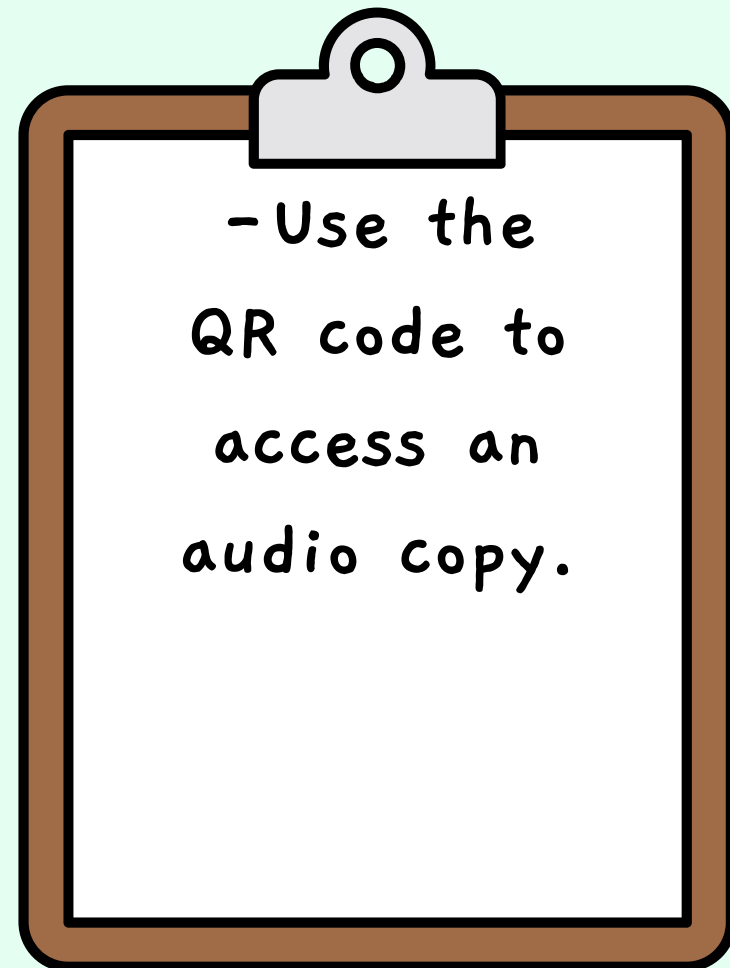
Alyssa Backs MLIS, B.Ed.



Grab a reading
excerpt.



Take a few moments to read your excerpt.



Done Early?

- Illustrate the text in the margins.
- Make an annotation connection to self, text, world.



DEFINITIONS

The Purpose of Engagement

Engagement is the necessary first step for learning (Cavanagh, 2019).

Students are unique and require various techniques to get them engaged in class. This requires intention and planning.

Make the purpose of engagement a means to:

- monitor student understanding
- uncover common misunderstandings or misconceptions
- facilitate deeper processing of the content

General Strategies

1. Make the material relatable and personal
2. Provide real-world examples and have students solve current issues related to the material
3. Create clear outcomes and get students excited about what they will achieve by the end of the class
4. Be yourself! Humanize your course. Students will respond to you and your personality.
5. Make yourself available.
6. Validate cultural backgrounds and differences.
7. Foster peer learning.

References

1. Cavanagh, S.R. (2019). How to make your teaching more engaging: Advice guide. Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved on Aug 10, 2020, at <https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-to-make-your-teaching-more-engaging>
2. DiPetro, M. (2021). How learning works: The Seven Learning Principles. Retrieved on July 16, 2021, at <https://cetl.kennesaw.edu/how-learning-works-seven-learning-principles>

“Where accommodation is about how instruction is delivered and modification is about what a child will learn, differentiation focuses on how a child will demonstrate learning.”

Blackwelder, A. (2018). Accommodation, modification, and differentiation; understanding terms. Spectrum Life Magazine.

ACCOMMODATION = FORMAT CHANGES

According to Lee Ann Jung, Ph.D., “Accommodations are adaptations that provide access to the general curriculum but do not fundamentally alter the learning goal or grade level standard.” [1] In other words, accommodations provide **access** to curriculum for students with varying abilities.

Some examples of accommodations are:

- Sign language interpreters.
- Oral responses in lieu of written.
- Access to a scribe or someone to read texts to the student.
- Large print material.
- Voice to text applications in lieu of typing.
- Extended instruction, such as video playlists or access to exemplars.
- Additional time to complete testing or homework.
- Alternate settings to complete tasks.

MODIFICATION = CURRICULAR CHANGES

“Modifications describe very fundamental changes in the curriculum. They may include altering the standard expectations for a course or assessment, as the student may be unable to learn all of the material, or particular portions of the material presented.” [2]

Some examples of modifications can include:

- Allowing fewer items to be completed.
- Leveled texts or adaptations.
- Rewording in simpler language.
- Allowing outlining instead of writing essays.
- Modified grades based on the goals.

DIFFERENTIATION = PROCESS/ PRODUCT CHANGES

“Differentiation promotes voice and choice in how learning takes place [or is demonstrated by the student] and uses whole-group, small-group, and individual tasks designed around the content to meet the needs of the learners whether they may be delayed, gifted or somewhere in-between. It makes learning applicable and promotes intrinsic motivation which helps instill deeper learning.”

Our grade 9 PATs are somewhat differentiated because students can be assessed on the same curricular outcomes whether they choose to write a narrative or an essay. In a classroom, you might also accept a speech, or a podcast episode, or a video essay, or a short play, or a gallery installation with artist statements.

CLASS OPENERS

- CREATE ROUTINES
- REINFORCE SKILLS
- PERSONALIZE LEARNING
- PROMOTE REFLECTION
- FOSTER INDEPENDENCE



STRUCTURE

Organize around a theme. Give a mentor text/model. Set time limit. Set assessment protocol.

5-15 min (build up).

Be consistent.

Scaffold.

Have a clear “why” and link to the real world.



READING Outcome 1

Each day in class you will read your independently selected novel for X minutes. As you read, please keep an eye out for the reading note of the day. After you identify the target element, add a reflection in your reading log.

Reflect on the setting of your novel. Consider physical, social, and historical contexts.

Ex. The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins

Setting: The setting of this novel is Panem. A dystopian North America organized into 12 districts. Katniss lives in District 12, one of the poorest regions known for coal mining. Based on the description, District 12 is quite rural. Currently, Katniss is on a train to the Capitol, the jewel of the nation where the President lives, and the richest and most urban district. One important context for the setting is that this year is the 74th annual “Hunger Games”, so tributes from each district are being sent to an arena to fight to the death.



I model creative, personal/analytical, and functional responses to texts so that students understand that class reading isn't passive.

Imagery: Select a sentence from your novel with compelling imagery. Imagery uses vivid description to evoke one or more of the five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch).

Ex. In *The FireKeeper's Daughter* by Angelina Boulley, one sentence with vivid imagery is, "When the cloud moves on and the sun reclaims her rays, a gust of wind propels me forward". I chose it because it reminded me of what it is like to walk through a field with the breeze and sun all around me. I can imagine the warmth of the sun and the push of the breeze.



I showcase a variety of texts from my classroom library to pique interest and reinforce diverse & culturally responsive texts.

Find a sentence in your novel which uses a Prepositional Phrase.

Prepositional Phrases

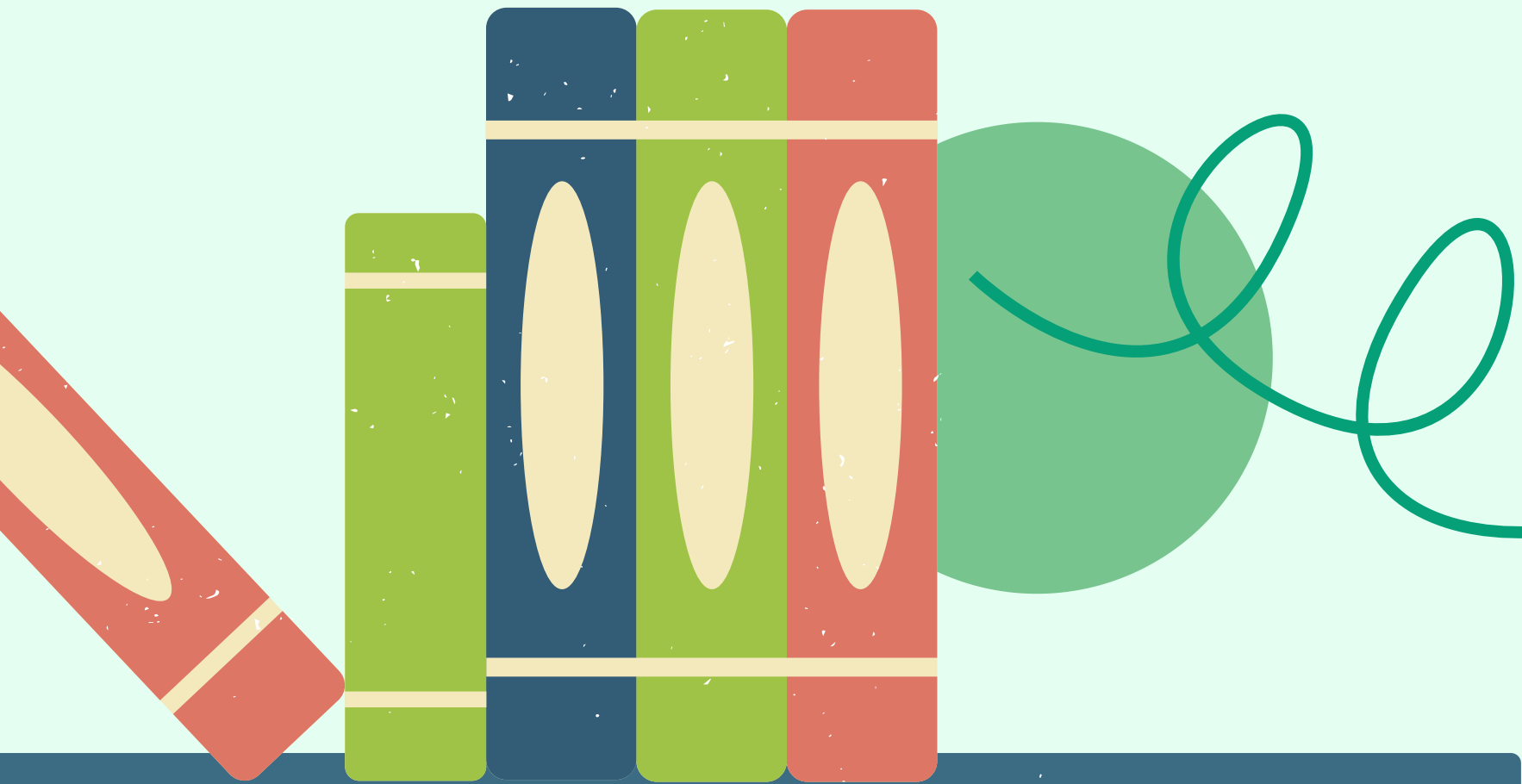
- In the beginning
- Before the fall
- After the brutal fight
- At school
- Down the aisle
- Across the street
- Inside your ear
- Outside the house
- Between two girls
- By chewing
- Behind the scenes
- On the wooden table
- By the sea
- Under the couch
- Around the bend
- Down in the sand trap
- Into the dark woods
- Against the wind
- Near the mouse
- Through the tunnel
- To school
- Like Larry's uncle
- Except my friend
- Over the rainbow
- Up the rough river
- Without a paddle
- With anger
- Toward the door

Ex. Furia by Yamile Saied Méndez. “On the opposite side of the field, the Royals in purple and gold warmed up, doing jumping jacks and stretches” (p. 10).



If students cannot find a sentence which uses the target element, I have them create their own when reflecting on what they have read.

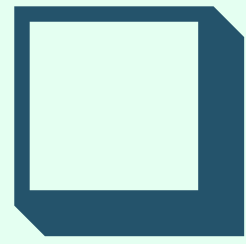
TARGETED TEACHING



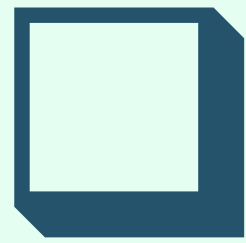
- Explore Text Features
- Identify and Analyze Narrative Elements
- Identify and Apply Grammar & Mechanics
- Make connections to self, text, world
- Practice close reading and annotation



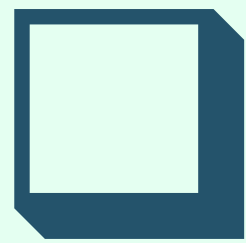
SET UP



Select Indp. Novel (or provide mentor text).



Target skills based on benchmarking data.



Model routines and offer accommodation

ASSESS

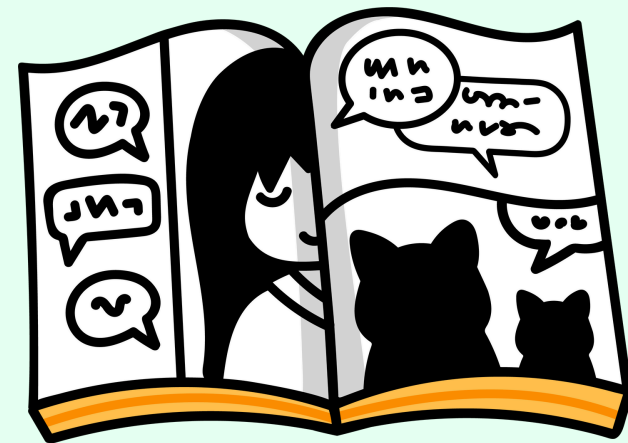
- Spotlight: Select 5 different students to share with the class.
- Peer review: partner off and share answers.
- Homework check: rove during work time and sticker or initial work (from yesterday's note) as you go.
- Spot check: Set a schedule and assess 5 random notes from everyone.

- Have a clipboard with student names so you can flag individual needs.

- Set a visual timer to help students (and you) stay on track.

READING DIFFERENTIATION

Graphic novels will have additional conventions. If a particular grammatical concept isn't present, have the students write a summary using the convention.



Format



Pair audiobook with physical book so that they can still see the spelling and punctuation

Process



Don't underestimate the power of body doubling. Book clubs are a thing for a reason!

Chatty students? Partner readers can be in different desks (or periods) and communicate through post-it annotation.



voice notes or speech to text can help to capture reflection and manage writing workload.

List as many as possible: how many different forms of writing do you use in your personal and professional life?



Creative Writing

Write the opening
lines of a story set
here.



WRITING Outcome 2

Each day you will journal for X minutes. You will learn more about journaling strategies and benefits, and hopefully improve your writing as well. Every day I will give you a new prompt, mentor text, or journaling style to try.



The Power Of Journaling And Why It Matters In Your Career

Journaling has emerged as a potent instrument for enhancing productivity, self-awareness, and success for professionals.

F Forbes / Aug 16, 2023



Begin by making clear connections to how this is useful in “the real world”.



Why Does Writing by Hand Promote Better and Faster Learning?

In a digital age, learning cursive and writing by hand could easily become obsolete. New evidence-based research illuminates why it's important for us to keep writing by hand.

PT Psychology Today / Jul 9, 2021



Students may be motivated if they can use the time to practice penmanship, learn cursive writing, or practice keyboarding more effectively.

Bullet Journaling.

<https://www.oprahdaily.com/life/work-money/a32155559/how-to-start-a-bullet-journal/>



Make a bullet journal to plan your self care routine, a study plan, your weekly schedule, or to track your goals.



Expose students to different styles of journaling so that they can find the right fit for them.

WHAT ABOUT AI?

An Ethics of Artificial Intelligence Curriculum for Middle School Students

Blakeley H. Payne, blakeleyhoffman@gmail.com

MIT Media Lab

Supervised by Cynthia Breazeal, cynthiab@media.mit.edu

August 2019



AI Literacy Lessons for Grades 6–12

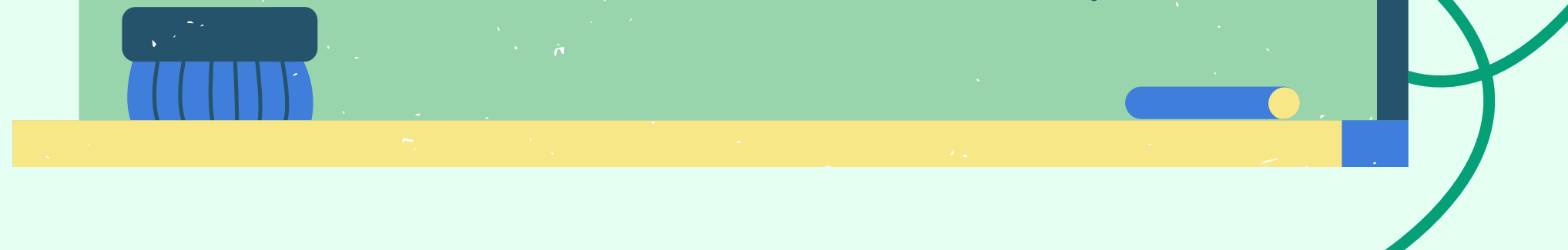
Quick, grab-and-go lessons to teach your students how to be ethical and empowered users of artificial intelligence.

 Common Sense Education

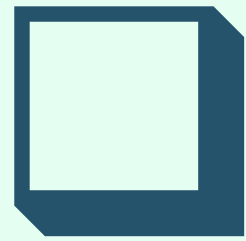
TARGETED TEACHING



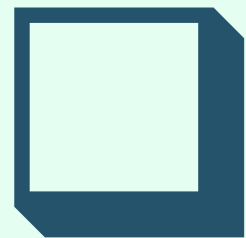
- Writing efficiency and stamina
- Brainstorming and drafting
- Personal, Analytical and Creative Response to Texts.
- Make connections to self, text, world
- Practice writing craft techniques.
- Apply grammatical structures.
- Ethical AI co-authorship.



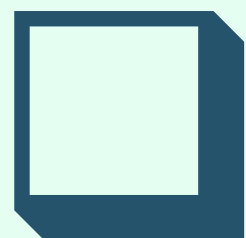
SET UP



Cater to student interests and showcase a variety of styles.



Add a link to an article and a one sentence prompt, each day.



Enforce a “no still pencils” policy. Have a “writer’s block” mentor text on standby.


ASSESS

- Start with writing volume goals. Compare word count from week to week.
- Ask students to share one sentence with you/ the class. (Copy it out on a post it).
- Self reflection and goal setting is key to this. Keep numbers and scores out unless it is tied to a concrete skill like grammar or typing speed.

- stand at a distance if students are reluctant to show private writing.

- Start with hard copy writing to avoid AI crutches. Then evolve.

DIFFERENTIATION



10 Ways to Create Authentic Writing Projects
Getting and keeping students engaged in writing projects, especially lengthy ones that require multiple versions and...

Whimsy and Rigor / Apr 17, 2021

A Collaborative Blog Post

Anonymous Peer Conferring



we will write

WeWillWrite — Ignite the urge to write!
Engage students with the collaborative writing game that boosts creativity and critical thinking. We help ELA teachers enhance literacy.

WeWillWrite

Weekly Reflection

Date	Class
What areas did I focus on this week? How did that go?	
•	_____
•	_____
•	_____
What were my strengths this week? What did I do well?	
•	_____
•	_____
•	_____
•	_____
What areas could I improve on? What did I find challenging?	
•	_____
•	_____

ink saving Eco

Self Assess/ Reflect

Using only one breath, explain your latest fixation to the partner next to you.

Optional Ideas:

- Latest hobby
- Tv show you love
- Trip you are planning
- Life event/milestone



Slam poetry

Conflict
Resolution &
Advocacy

Voice, tone
& emphasis

Speech &
Debate

SPEAKING

Class & Group
Discussion

Outcome 5

Stand up Comedy



Say It Another Way Drama Activity

Can you say the nursery rhyme, Humpty Dumpty, in the following ways?
(any nursery rhyme can be used as another text for the older classes)

the				
er.	er.	re	ry.	
				ng
un	t on			of to.

Say it as if you are in a hurry.

Say it as if you are telling somebody a secret.

Say it as if you are very tired.

Say it as if you are a police officer.

Say it as if you are a teacher.

Say it as if you are very excited about something.

Say it as if it was the most important bit of information you have.

ink saving Eco



Voice Games

25 drama activities designed to help your students practice projecting and articulating their voices. Elementary-High School. Downloadable PDF.

Drama Notebook / Oct 17, 2024



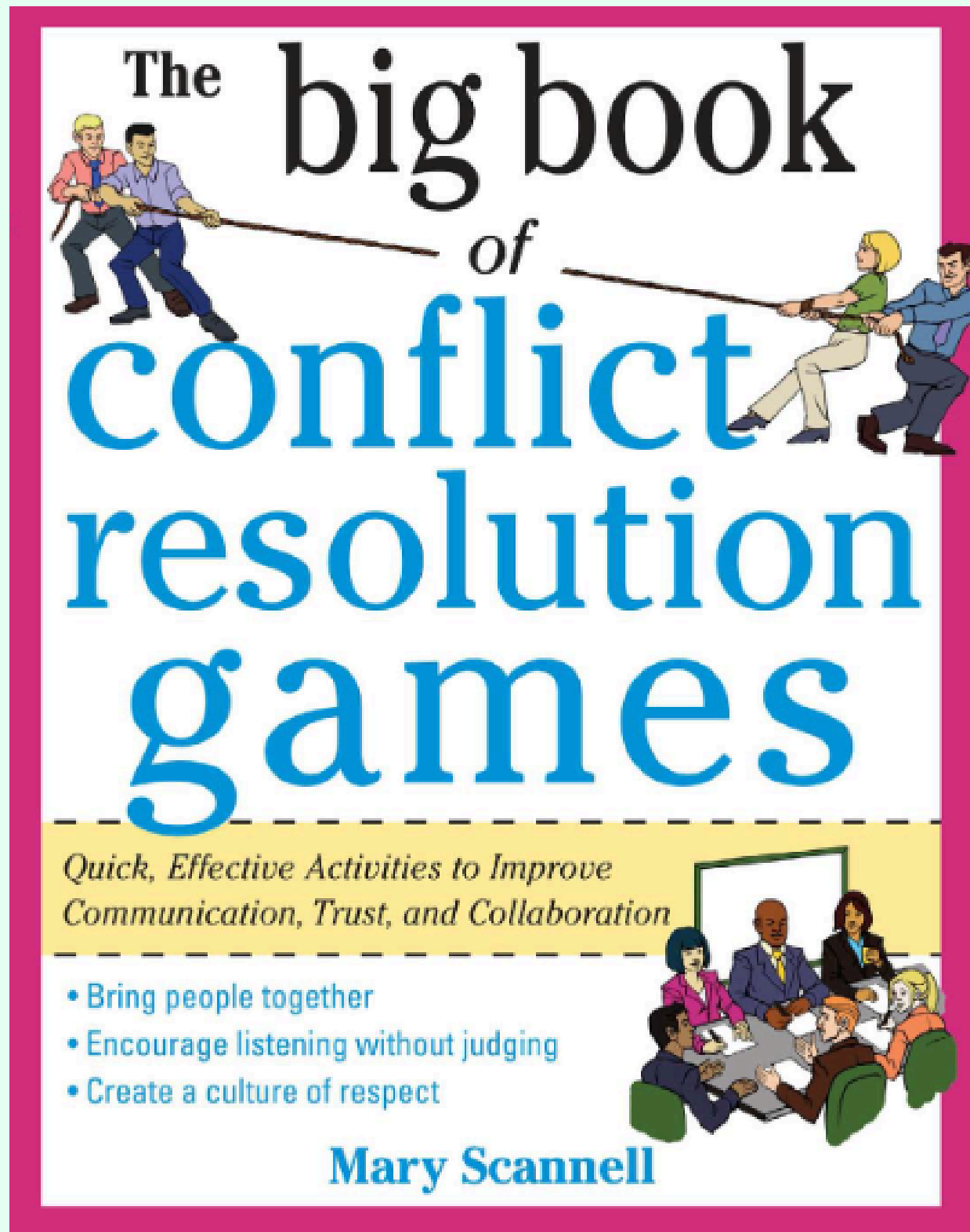
Good Afternoon | Vocal Warm Up Drama Game for Funny Characters

Good Afternoon is a great vocal drama game that helps students think about expression and characterisation. Play it in class or online.

Silly Fish Learning / Mar 8, 2021



Voice, dialect, and intonation skills



33 Fun communication games and activities for teams | Surf Office

These teambuilding games are designed for in-person teambuilding, incorporating fun, communication skills to help you & your team spark spontaneous conversation

[S surfoffice.com](https://surfoffice.com)



communication skills

Interview pairs

'You know, I've always been inclusive.
Yeah, some cabbages are red, like me.
And some are green.
But so what?
We're ALL cabbages at heart.'

SNACK!

10 public speaking games - write-out-loud.com

Activities for public speaking: 10 superb skill building improv games

10 fun effective impromptu activities to build competent, confident public speaking skills. Suitable middle school up.

 write-out-loud.com / Mar 2, 2025



Public speaking and presentation skills

Interactive Public Speaking Activities and Games for Students



Interactive Public Speaking Activities and Games for Students

From Impromptu to Super Spies, there are many interesting public speaking activities and games. Know all and enhance your personality today.

 City One Initiative / Apr 2, 2025



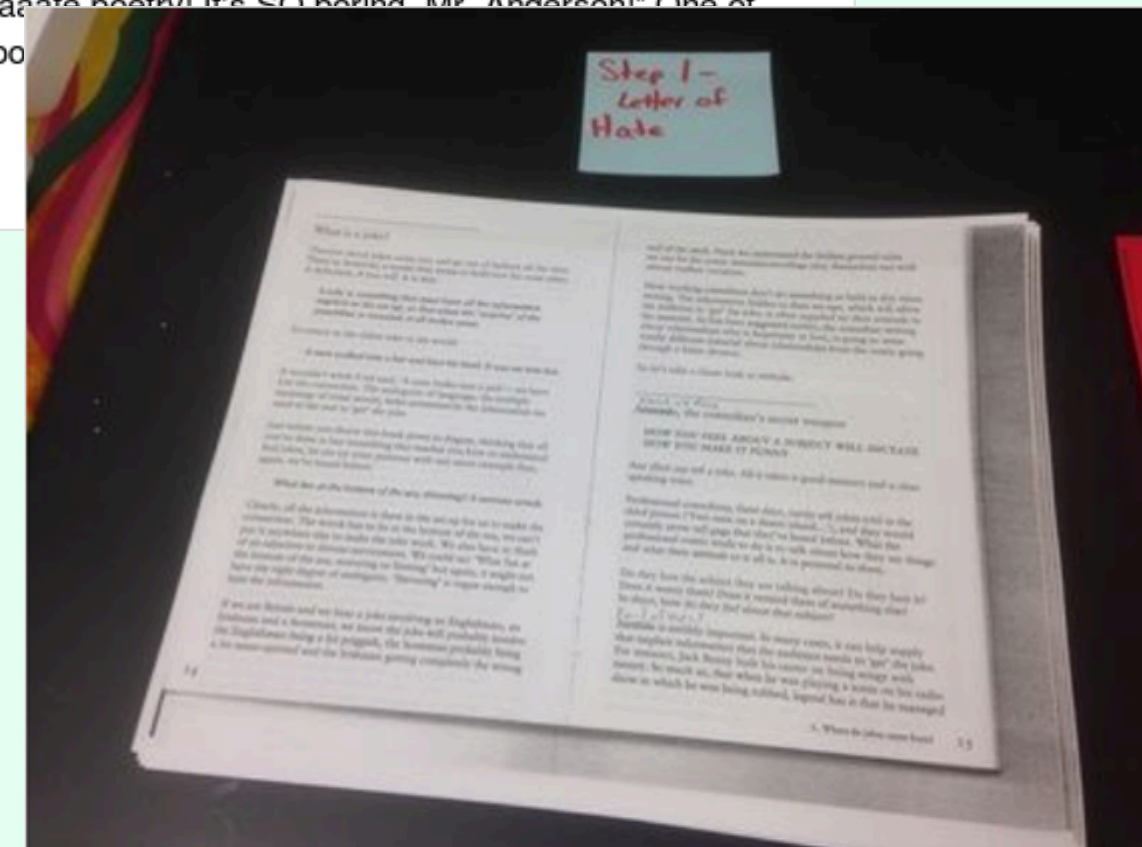
Your Turn

- In your 'English Writing' G.Doc (or notebook), put the date and title:
- Date: 1/31/20 Title: Honest Poem Draft
- Draft your own "honest poem" that introduces you to your audience.
 - I was born on _____. That makes me a _____.
 - I'm still learning how to _____.
 - Some people say I have a hard time _____.
 - I secretly get nervous every time _____.
 - I have an odd (strange) fascination with _____.
 - If my room could talk, it would say _____.
 - I enjoy _____.
 - I don't allow myself to _____ as often as I should.
 - My hobbies include _____.

Speaking Your Truth Through Slam Poetry: A Unit Overview

"We're doing poetry? I haaaaaaate poetry! It's SO boring. Mr. Anderson!" One of the easiest ways to make a room "poet..."

Mr / Apr 10, 2020



Unit 1: Observational Stand-Up

UNIT 1: STAND-UP! UNIT PLAN In this project we will explore stand-up comedy. Through careful observation of professional comedians and an exploration of our surroundings we will try to get at the...

Caitlin's Drama Classroom



A Mini-Unit on Joke-Telling

It is often said that great comedy good joke-teller anticipates how to adjust each joke to the audience f

TWO WRITING TEACHERS / F

BBC COMEDY CLASSROOM

HAVING A WRITE LAUGH

Comedy Classroom - Welcome to Comedy Classroom for secondary schools

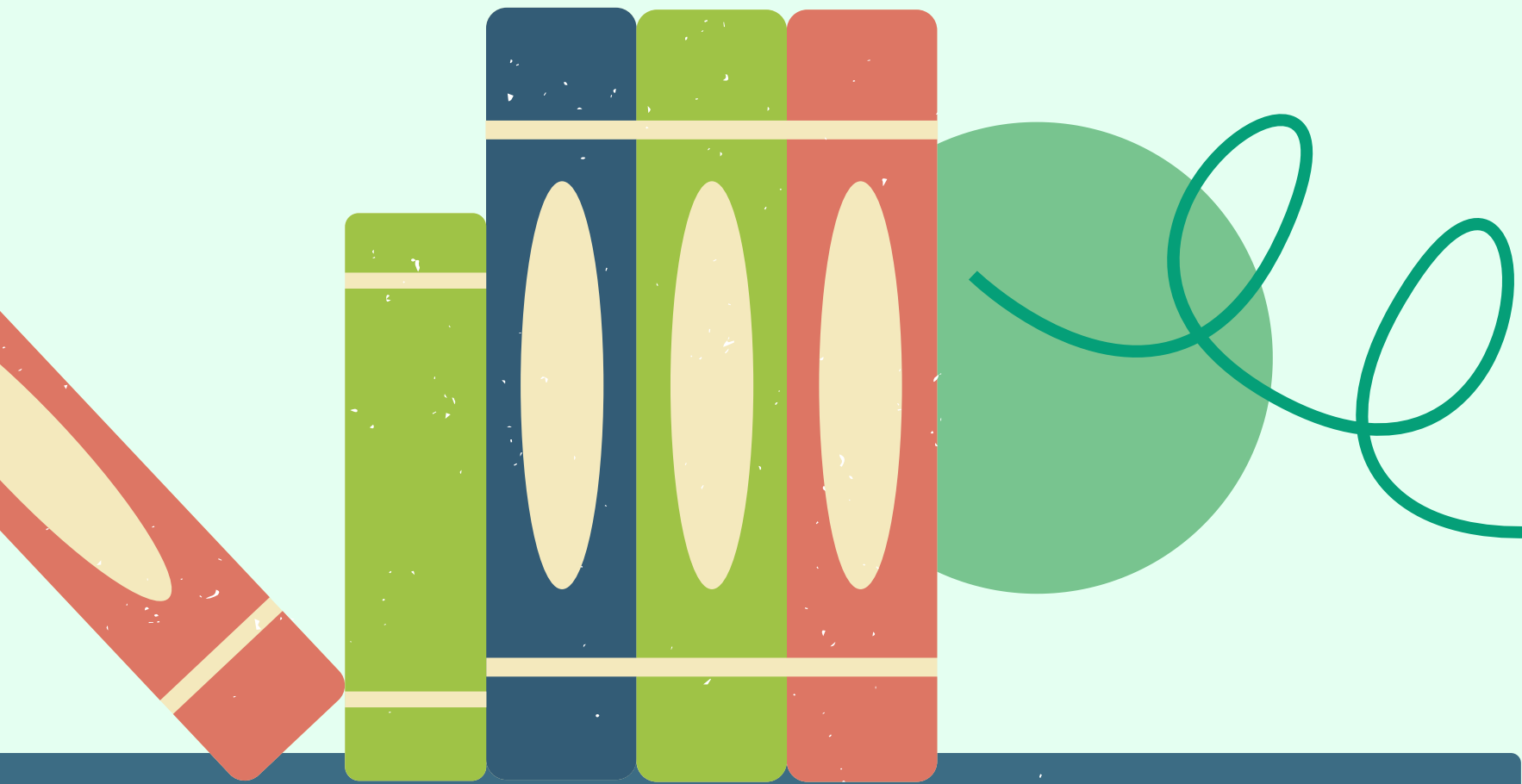
draft version for legacy site

BBC

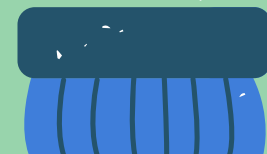


Slam Poetry & Stand Up Comedy

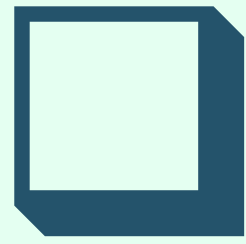
TARGETED TEACHING



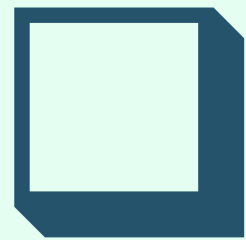
- contributing to class discussion
- speaking volume and tone
- Meeting structure and group conversation.
- sharing connections to self, text, world
- Practice speech and debate techniques
- Apply grammatical structures.



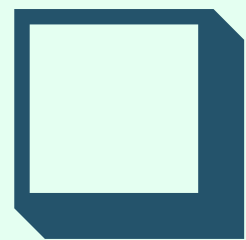
SET UP



Main goal is to encourage communication & public speaking.



ALWAYS pre-view your video content in advance if you show an exemplar.



Start small and build. Move from 30 seconds of speaking time.

ASSESS

- Focus on two or three students per day.
- Self and group reflection is key
- Activities like “ball of yarn” make it clear who might be hogging the spotlight or avoiding the conversation.
- Feedback styles like 2 stars and a wish help to balance positive and constructive criticism.

Consider accommodations for shy students/other ways to participate: Communication can be recorded or focus on non-verbal communication.

Some students may appreciate advance notice or a sign up method in order to manage anxiety.

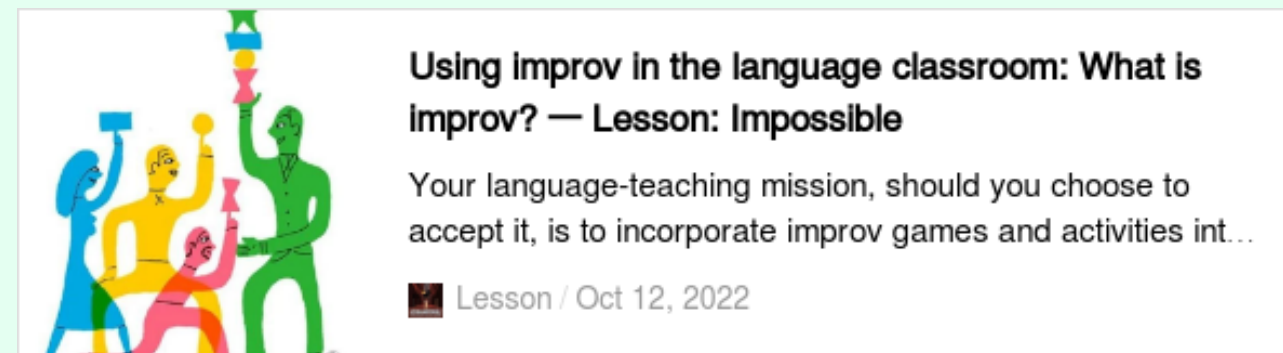
DIFFERENTIATION

Asynchronous



Students can record their contributions rather than presenting live. They might even add voice filters.

Use improv to focus on the process not the product.



Improv

Remember that communication isn't always verbal.



LISTENING

Outcome 1

Empathy

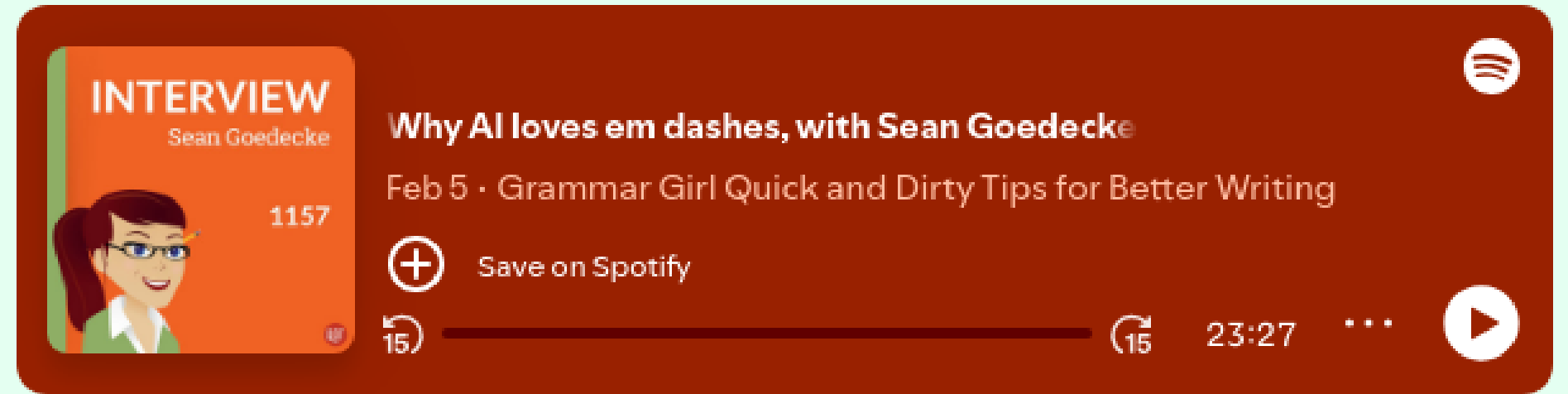
Attention and Recall

Hone “ear” for mood/tone



A Way with Words

A Way with Words, a fun radio show and podcast about
An upbeat and lively public radio show and podcast about language through culture, history, and family.
from A Way with Words



INTERVIEW
Sean Goedecke
1157

Why AI loves em dashes, with Sean Goedecke
Feb 5 · Grammar Girl Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing

Save on Spotify

23:27



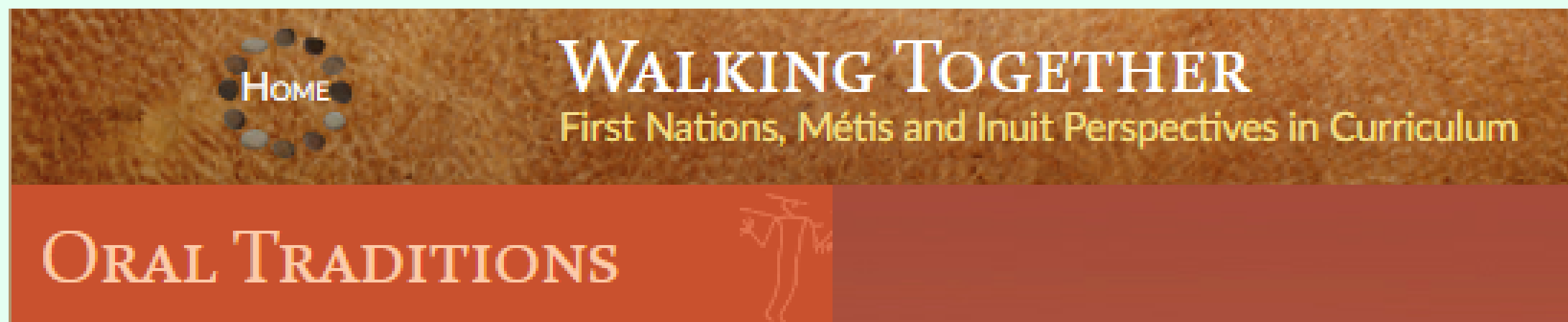
The Students' Podcast
Teachers and students, got something to say? Put on your headphones and get ready to hit record! The folks behind NPR's Student Podcast Challenge made this handy guide on how to make a podcast in the classroom. We'll talk about how to...
NPR / May 22, 2024



The Show
99% Invisible 99% Invisible is a sound-rich, narrative podcast hosted by Roman Mars about all the thought that goes into the things we don't think about — the unnoticed architecture and design that shape our world.
99% Invisible



Podcasts that cater to a student's niche interest could be approved by guardians.



Interviewing: An Essential Experience in English

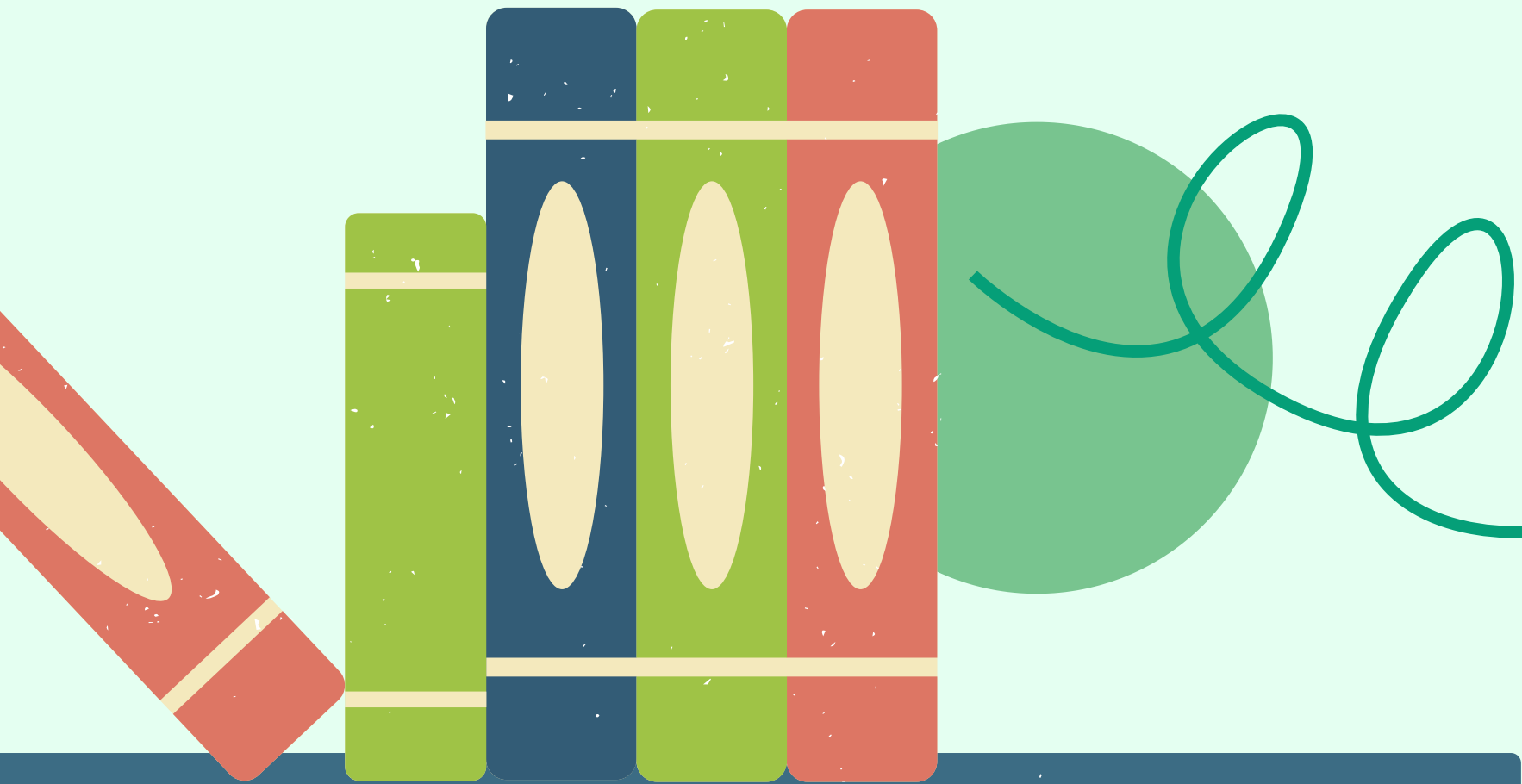
So much of our communication is brief or in passing. Think about quick text messages, Snapchats deleted in seconds, messages limited to characters.

Ethical ELA / Feb 10, 2019



An excellent opportunity to foster community engagement and incorporate Oral Traditions.

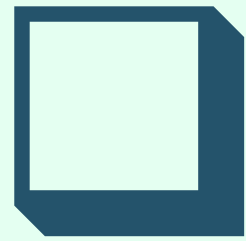
TARGETED TEACHING



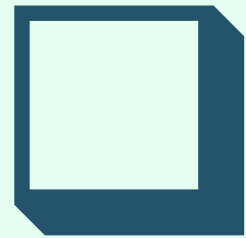
- Hone an “ear” for tone
- Promote empathy
- Improve auditory recall and attention to detail
- Consider multiple perspectives.
- Active listening.
- Patience and remembering questions.



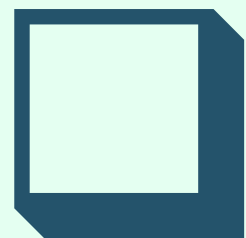
SET UP



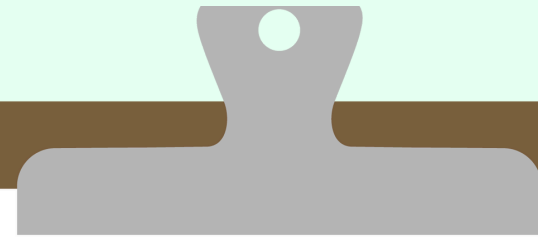
Teach students effective written, visual, and shorthand note-taking.



Pre-teach effective questioning and active listening skills.



Sentence starter prompts and script structures help.

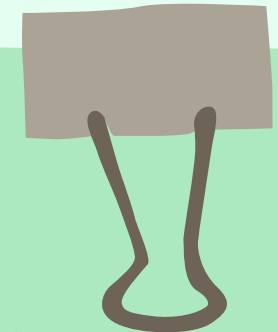


ASSESS


Peer

- Start by asking students to paraphrase, then move on to position taking.
- Peer feedback should go through you before it reaches the speaker.
- Use subtitles to accommodate EAL students and those with auditory processing difficulties.

- connections to jobs like court stenographer or therapist make this skill more relevant.



- Invite a guest speaker for the most engagement.



VIEWING/ REPRESENTING

All Outcome

Artistic Creativity

Visual Analysis

Graphic Elements and Design



10 Ways to Develop Visual Literacy in the ELT Classroom

This blog post shares creative teaching ideas to develop visual literacy skills in the English language classroom. It suggests classroom ideas for using infographics, sketchnotes, diagrams, charts, graphs, graphic organizers, icons, signs, symbols,...

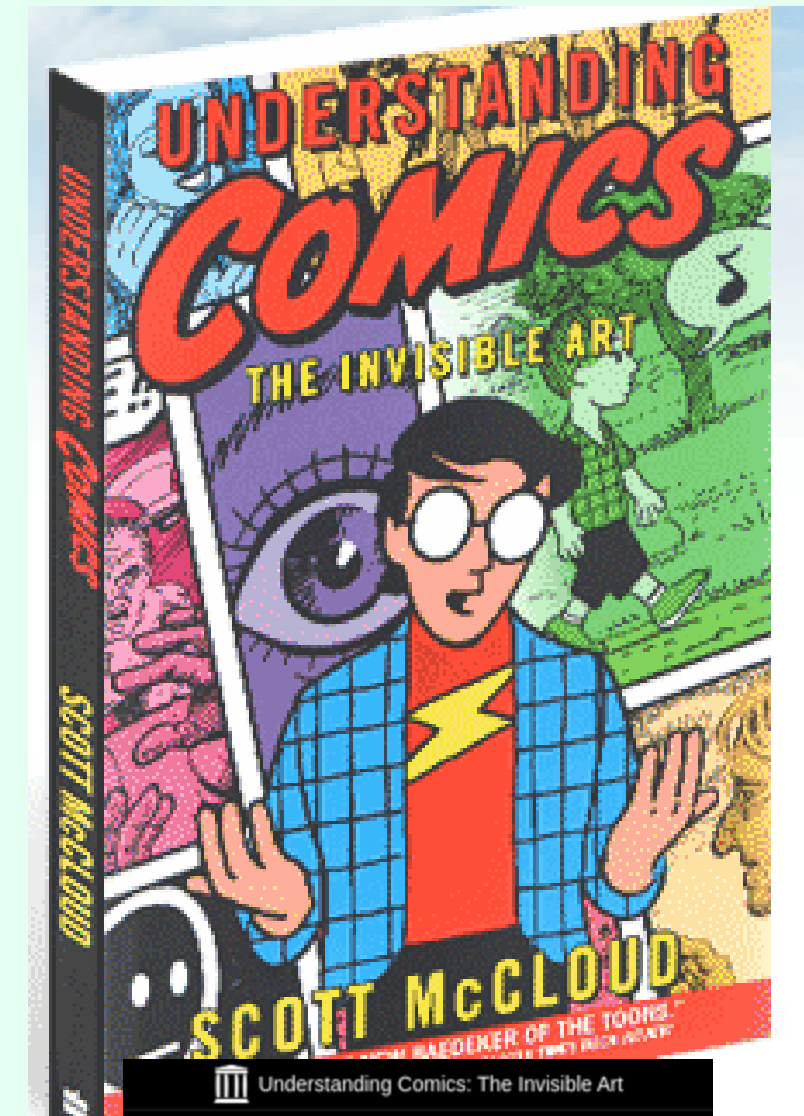
💡 Ellii (formerly ESL Library)



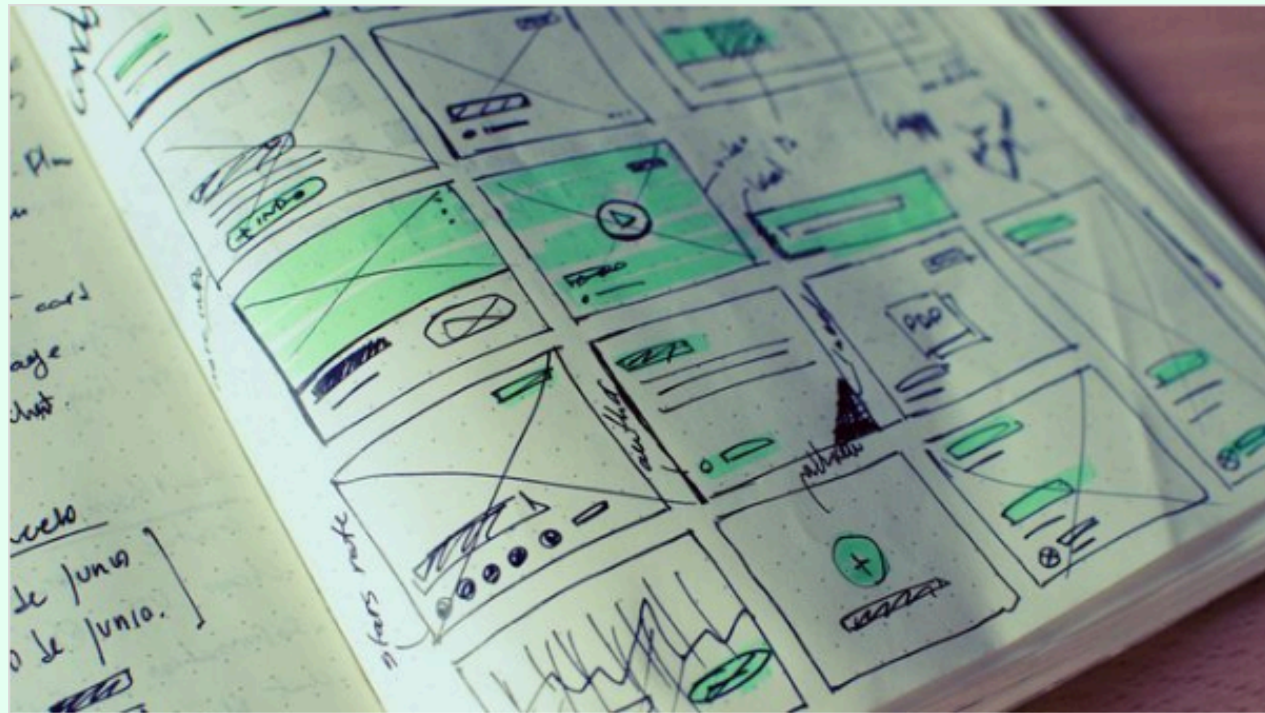
What's Going On in This Picture?

Intriguing Times images stripped of their captions — and an invitation to students to discuss them live.

The New York Times



Visual texts might be comics, political cartoons, graphs, or art.




Storyboarding 101: How to plan and visualize great ideas [Free Guide]

A storyboard is a graphic representation of how your project will play out. Learn more about what a storyboard is, its elements, and how to make one here.

 Learn / Jan 23

Short Films

 Pixar Animation Studios



Lesson Plans & Print Resources

We offer over 700 lesson plans and other resources that make direct curriculum connections for every film in our catalogue. Like all our educational programmes, the lesson plans are completely free of charge. [Read More...](#)

 REEL CANADA /



50+ Types of Camera Shots & Angles

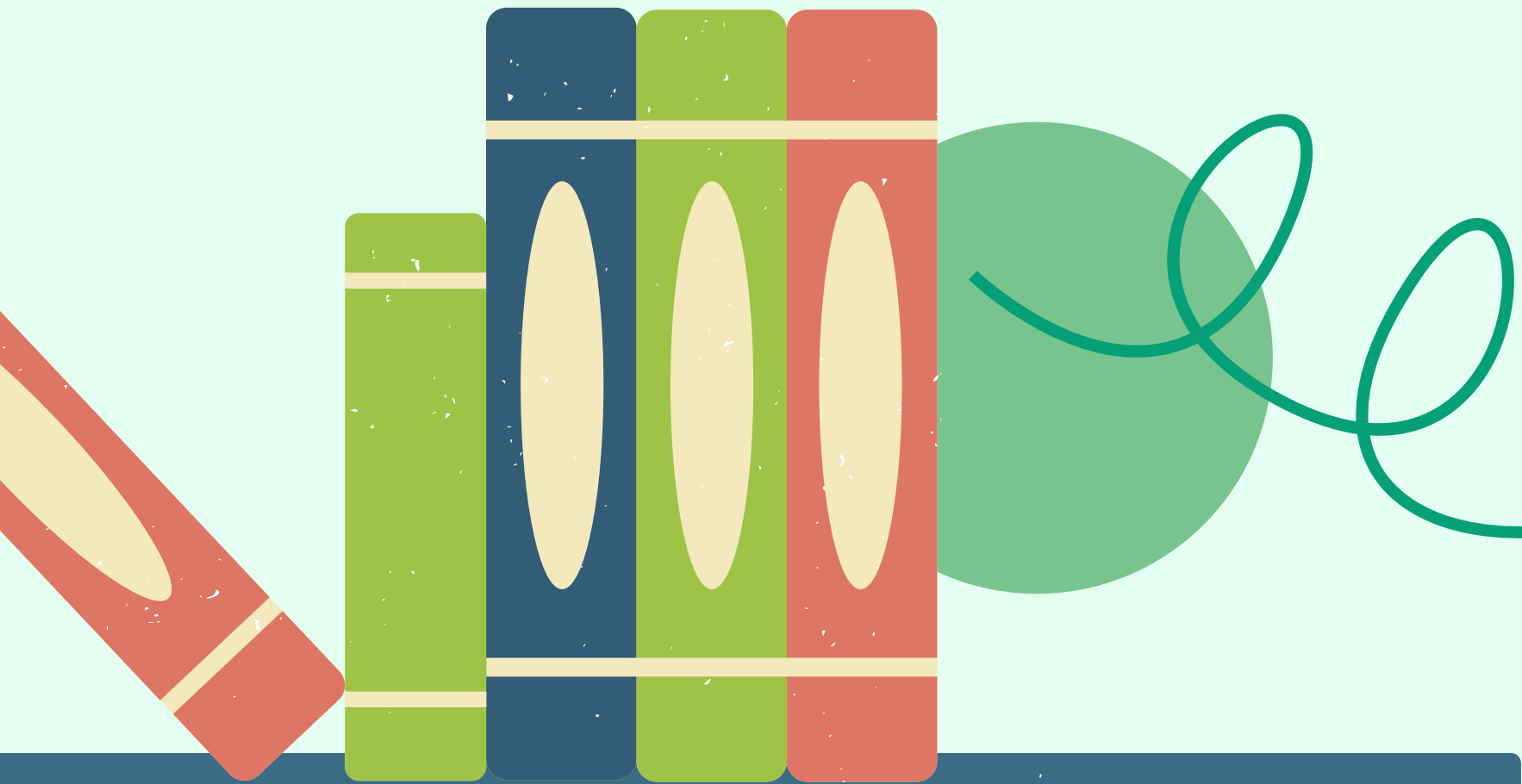
A complete guide to types of shots and angles in film, including shot size, camera angle, framing, focal length, and camera movement.

StudioBinder / Jan 13, 2025



Film study is a great way to engage students.

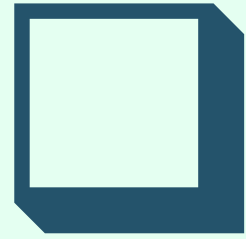
TARGETED TEACHING



- Visual Analysis
- Artistic Creativity
- Graphic Elements and Design
- Comics and Political Cartoons
- Symbolism
- Multi-media Analysis/ Media techniques.

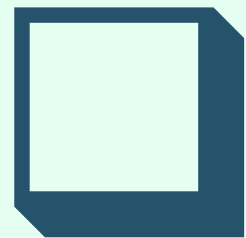


SET UP

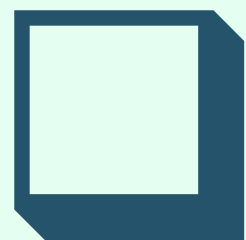


Teach basic terms upfront.

Always pair with examples.



Use still images before you move into film.

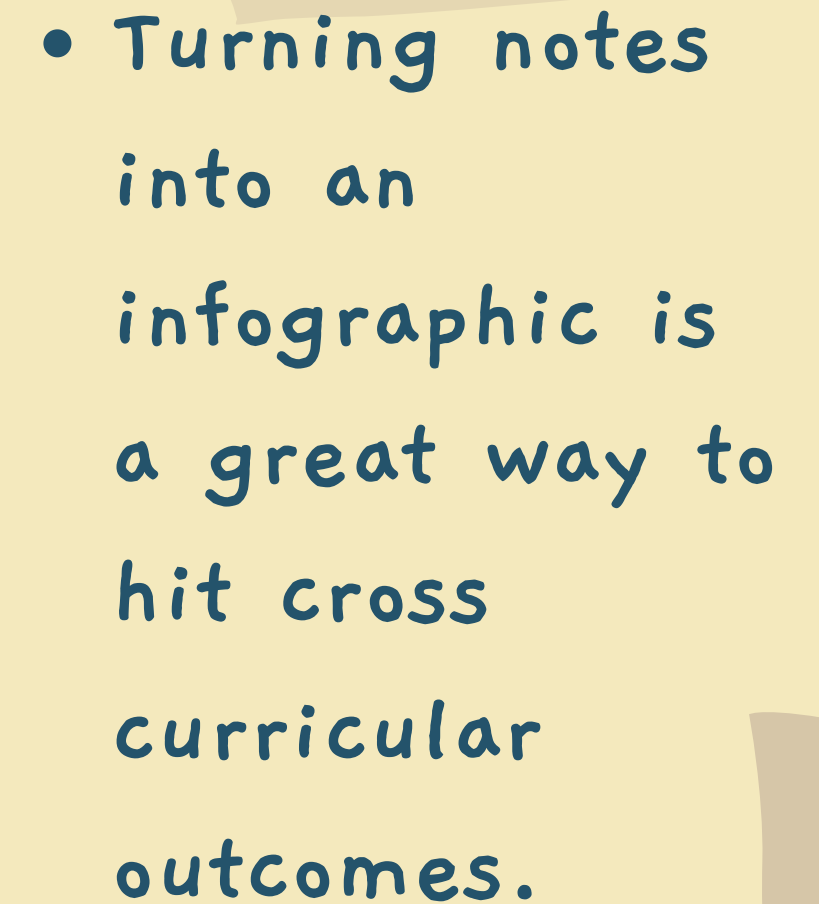



Don't forget to check about copyright permissions.



ASSESS

- Give a clear rubric upfront.
- Avoid quantitative language. (Ex. uses 3 elements)
Instead, focus more on wholistic impact.
- Use PAT-style comics as source based multiple-choice questions
- Great final project option and something kids are proud to show their family at Teacher Conference night.

- 
- Turning notes into an infographic is a great way to hit cross curricular outcomes.

- 
- Photo scavenger Hunts are always a hit.

WHAT ABOUT AI?



AI Snapshots

10-20 minute classroom activities built to spark debate, ignite curiosity, and build community.

 aiEDU



AI or not?

Use this classroom activity from the News Literacy Project to help students explore the impact of generative AI. Students complete a K-H-W-L chart, an AI image quiz, and critical reflection to evaluate visual evidence for online claims.

 The News Literacy Project / Feb 28, 2025

RESEARCH & ICT

Outcome 3

Information Literacy

Digital Literacy

Copyright & Citations

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Specialist councils



The ATA's 21 specialist councils exist to increase members' knowledge and skills in defined specialty areas related to

- curriculum subjects (eg, science, math, art);
- leadership or support roles (eg, school leaders, counsellors);
- professional practice standard [↗](#) competencies (eg, Indigenous education, inclusive education, the effective use of technology); or
- pedagogical contexts (eg, grade groupings, modes of instruction, unique learning environments).