

Accept

## the Challenge:

# Strategies to Engage the Gifted

By Pattie Bailey

Were I not such a procrastinator and were my students not so busy with a kabillion projects of their own, I'd have asked them to write this article. Who better to tell you what strategies have been used in their regular classrooms, which strategies were helpful, and which strategies they adopted as their own? But, alas, here I am at the last minute writing the article from my own perspective . . . that of a K-12 teacher of gifted students.

If you are a regular classroom teacher, your biggest challenge in modeling CRISS strategies likely comes from your gifted students. It is they, if they're like my students, who roll their eyes at the mention of "two-column notes" and just want to get on with the assignment. CRISS, by definition, is CReating Independence through Student-owned Strategies, so how was I to model strategies for students who were already independent and who were, for the most part, good students getting good grades and high test scores?

Three strategies I find to be successful with my students are **RAFT** (middle school and high school), **Semantic Feature Analysis** (elementary and middle school), and **Double-entry Reflective Notes** (middle school and high school). I'll explain the contexts in which I used them and share some reflections we made following the lessons.



RAFT

RAFT (*see pages 186-190 of the CRISS training manual, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*) provided a creative and perfect fit for the initial activity with my scenario writers this fall. While they're all good writers, the students often have trouble getting started. They needed, for scenario writing, not only an idea, but also an idea set at least 30 years into the future and related to one of the year's Future Problem Solving (FPS) topics. To jumpstart the writing process this year, I invited the director of the Iowa Young Writers' Studio to engage them in an activity that might generate ideas. To show appreciation for his help, each student—using the RAFT strategy—wrote a thank you note to him from the viewpoint of the character they'd created that day. (**R**ole—the character, **A**udience—the workshop presenter, **F**ormat—a thank you note, **T**opic + strong verb—explain what you appreciated about being able to participate in the Writers' Workshop). None of my students were familiar with the RAFT strategy, but the enthusiasm shown for this assignment was a good indicator of which students enjoyed writing and would complete the FPS scenario. One student said, "I can't think what my character would say. It's more difficult." Yes! She was challenged! Another said, "I like this. May I have a scrap of paper? I think that's what my character would write on." One student created a "sloppy character" who spilled coffee on her thank you . . . but mailed it on time. This strategy enabled my students to complete a real-world task in an imaginative way. Is it a strategy they might put into their toolboxes for college? Time will tell.



My fourth and fifth graders learned to use a Semantic Feature Analysis (*see pages 211-215 of the CRISS training manual, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*) to select an animal for their research. This decision-making tool is used in one of the steps in the creative problem-solving process and is an important strategy for important life decisions. Identifying and correctly writing the criteria are critical steps in creating the matrix. To model for the students, I used a real-life scenario: What should I fix for dinner? I told the students what factors (features) were important in making this decision (we were dieting, we were busy, and didn't have time to cook and clean-up, etc.) and then explained how to turn those criteria into questions for the Semantic Feature Analysis—write a qualifying statement (why are the criteria important?) and include a superlative (so the choices can be ranked). For example: Because we've been dieting, which dinner will be the lowest in fat?

The students brainstormed factors that would be important in selecting an animal for research—available resources, most interesting, most challenging, etc. and wrote five criteria. Each class used a large ABC Brainstorming chart to list possible animals, and I combined the three lists (resulting in 125 animals). Each student eliminated animals until only ten remained. Each student's matrix was constructed with the five criteria across the top and his/her ten animals down the left side. Students ranked their ten animals on each of the five criteria; the animal with the highest sum was the animal selected for the research. The metacognition prompt was, "In what ways was the Semantic Feature Analysis (this decision-making strategy) useful in selecting an animal for your research?" Their responses included, "I didn't have to go eenie, meenie, miney, mo." "It's kind of like a computer—it gives you information back." "It's actually your choice—you usually want more than one—this helps you decide." Though the Semantic Feature Analysis was taught as a simple tool, it is, as I said, an important strategy for making life decisions.



At the high school we have more work to do than time to do it, so I really need to make the time count when I teach them a strategy. My freshmen, sophomores, and juniors participate in Future Problem Solving. For researching the first topic in the fall, I shared an article about a university museum exhibit and asked the students to read it using the "two-column notes" strategy (*see eyes rolling*). Comprehension of the newspaper article was quick; the note taking was unnecessary. I followed this activity with several other articles; again, I asked them to read, this time using Double-Entry Reflective Journals (*see pages 158-161 of the CRISS training manual, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*), and more specifically my modification which I call "Double Entry Connective Notes." This simple graphic is also in two columns, but it goes beyond organizing the information. On the left side of the graphic, students write direct quotes or summaries and the page numbers on which they were found. On the right, students are asked to make connections. "Make a connection between what you read and a challenge (problem/issue/concern) or a solution. What questions does this bring to mind?" Using this strategy required them not only to read, *but also to think*. This made all the difference to my students. Their reflections? "I stayed focused; it provided a purpose for my reading." "It helps us figure out problems for FPS." "More thinking was required with the Connective Notes, so they were better to use." Students who are too often asked just to spit back what they read were glad to be asked to think about what they had read and make important connections to their work in Future Problem Solving. Our discussion of the articles was greatly enriched with the use of the Double-Entry Connective Notes.

CRISS is sometimes a tough sell with the gifted, but student reflections through the use of RAFT, Semantic Feature Analysis, and Double-Entry Connective Notes indicate students saw the value of these tools. With meaningful content and thoughtful selection of strategies, we can experience success with our gifted students.

**About the Author:** Pattie Bailey has taught at Gladbrook-Reinbeck Community Schools, in Reinbeck, Iowa, for 36½ years. She previously taught fifth and sixth grade and Title I Math, but has worked with gifted students (K-12) in Project EAGLE (Expanded Academic Growth Leading to Excellence) for nearly twenty-five years. She says, “I love the challenge of working with these bright young people and keep both busy with and energized by their many projects and competitions.” Pattie is married to Bruce, a recently retired P.E. teacher and they have two daughters, Emily and Anne. They also have a granddaughter, Lauren, whom she describes as her greatest joy. Pattie writes, “Family is my first priority. Teaching is my passion. I also enjoy reading, listening to public radio, cooking, tending to my summer flowers, and when I grow up, I hope to be a writer.”

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