

SAVE THE LAST WORD FOR ME . . .

This article by CRISS devotee, Doug Buehl, a Madison East High School teacher in Wisconsin, was originally published in the Wisconsin Education Association newsletter. Doug has granted us permission to share it with you here.

For many students, "reading" means taking a quick and superficial trip through the text for the sole purpose of answering assigned questions. Unfortunately, these students often never achieve more than a very cursory literal level treatment of what they have to read. Classroom discussions which encourage students to think about what they have read tend to sputter as a result, because they did not engage in reflective reading behavior.

Activities that stimulate students to reflect upon what they read help to develop active and thoughtful readers. One effective strategy for developing readers who are thinkers is Save the Last Word for Me (Vaughan and Estes, 1986). Devised by Burke and Harste, Save the Last Word both prompts students to actively interact with the text and provides a cooperative group format for the subsequent class discussion.

THE STRATEGY

Save the Last Word for Me is an excellent strategy to use with material that may elicit differing opinions or multiple interpretations. The strategy involves the following steps:

Step 1: Assign the story, selection, or passage to be read. As students read the material, they are required to locate five statements that interest them or that they would like to say something about. These might be statements with which they agree or disagree, or statements that contradict something they thought they knew. They

could also be statements that particularly surprised, excited, or intrigued them. With literature, students could also select revealing statements or actions made by characters in the story. Students place a light check mark in pencil next to their five chosen statements.

Step 2: Distribute five index cards to each student, a card for each of their selected statements. Students write one of the statements on the front side of a card. On the reverse side of the card, students write the comments they wish to make about that statement. For example, a student reading a selection about wolves as an endangered species might select this statement for the front of a card: "Wolves are sometimes illegally shot by ranchers who fear that their livestock will be attacked." The student may write the following comment on the back of the card: "Ranchers ought to have a right to protect their animals from dangerous predators like wolves."

Step 3: Divide the class into small groups of four to five members. All students in each group are allowed to share one of their five designated statements with their group members. The first student reads a statement to the group and helps them locate the statement in the text. However, the student is not allowed to make any comments on the statement until the other members of the group give their reactions or responses. In effect, the student gets "the last word" in the discussion of this statement. For example, one student might share the statement: "Wolves naturally try to avoid contact with humans." But she cannot discuss her comments--that people's fears of wolves are exaggerated, especially because of the way wolves are treated in fairy tales--until every other group member

has had a say about this statement. The attitude during this phase is: "Here is a statement that interested me. You tell me what you think, and then I will tell you what I think."

Step 4: With the completion of the discussion of the first statement, the attention goes on to a second student, who is asked to share a different statement, without comment, until all other students have spoken. This process continues until everyone in the group has shared one statement and has provided the "last word" in the discussion.

ADVANTAGES

Save the Last Word for Me offers a number of advantages as a teaching strategy:

*Students are given an exercise which requires them to adopt a more reflective stance as they read.

*Students are encouraged to talk about things in the reading that personally connected to them, and they all have an opportunity to participate in the class discussion.

*Students are allowed to hear their classmates' views before they offer their own. This provides students with the chance to adjust their comments and reflect upon their ideas before having to express them to others.

*This strategy is adaptable to most subject areas and is appropriate for elementary through high school age students.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Vaughan, J. & Estes, T. (1986), *Reading and Reasoning Beyond the Primary Grades*. Allyn and Bacon.

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