

Critical Thinking: Synthesize

Synthesizing information means pulling information together to form a cohesive whole. When students read information and research, they must often pull from various sources in order to form an opinion or draw a conclusion. One effective method for developing the higher order thinking practice of synthesis is to allow inquiry to drive informational quests, and then apply a “switching” strategy.

1. Discuss the various places that information can be taken from to synthesize, such as advertisements to gain product information, research beyond ads to obtain non-bias information, research on college and career choices, online encyclopedias to gain information.
2. Discuss and present students with questions that typically drive synthesis:
 - a. *How might this be different?*
 - b. *How else might it look in another setting perhaps?*
 - c. *What might happen if...*
 - d. *Suppose that...*
 - e. *Putting this together with that makes...*
 - f. *How would you improve...?*
 - g. *How might you create your own...?*
 - h. *Can you think of another ending?*
 - i. *What if that were you?*
 - j. *What if that were your cousin?*
3. Instruct students to choose and apply one of the switching strategies described below and discuss it with a peer.

Switching Strategy – shows text bias and aids reader awareness of author intention:

- Gender switch – change the sex of the main character. How do the events change? The plot?
- Theme switch –make up a different story with the opposite theme, for example changing “peace is good” to “force is good.” How might the plot change?
- Setting switch – describe the story from a different time, place, or social class. How does the plot change? The characters?
- Clothing switch – Change the main character’s clothing, for example from preppy to gang or to formal or hip-hop. What else must change as a result?
- Emotion switch – Give characters a different emotional tone, such as calm and thoughtful or constantly joking. Does this change the theme? The background?
- Ethnic/race switch – Change characters’ race/ethnic characteristics. Do other characters react to them differently? What else must change as a result?

Teaching Tips:

1. Encourage parents to ask students similar questions at home. Provide a workshop for parents in asking these questions, or prepare hand-outs to send home with students.
2. Place these and similar questions with instructions on the school website to encourage parental involvement in on-going synthesis questioning.
3. As a lesson extension, have students write out their switching strategies in short essays.
4. Other Questions:
 - a. When reading a book:
 - “What do you think might happen next?”
 - “Does this remind you of anything from your life?”
 - “Can you tell me about what you read today?”
 - “Why did he/she act that way?”
 - b. When visiting an unfamiliar place:
 - “How is _____ similar to/different from _____?”
 - “Can you explain/show me that in another way?”
 - c. When making an important decision:
 - “How would you rank _____?”
 - “How do you imagine _____ would look?”
 - “What do you think a solution might be?”
 - “Why did you decide to choose _____ over _____?”

Taken from: www.readwritethink.org Tips: *How to Encourage Higher Order Thinking*.
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