Chapter Eleven

Bard Cards:
A Strategy for Clarifying Information

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Introduction
This strategy addresses the difficulty students have with unfamiliar texts, specifically Shakespeare and the writing of the Elizabethan period. The need for the strategy came from the difficulty many of the students were having with this style of writing.

While reading and viewing MacBeth with the senior class, I became aware of many students need for continual clarification of the text and the need for individualized instruction to explain what each stanza or soliloquy meant. Other problems include:

- Many students do not read footnotes.
- Many students do not recall the text while viewing the movie.
- Many students do not follow along with the text while watching the movie.
- Many students do not have a strong background knowledge of characters, time period, iambic pentameter etc., so when they watch the film or read the text, they are trying to figure out who the characters are and they are not concentrating on the meaning of the text.
- Many students identify the major and minor characters.
- Many students are overwhelmed by the number of characters.
- Many students do not recognize famous lines from the text/film (refers back to background knowledge).
Many students do not read at a twelfth grade reading level, so reading Macbeth can seem like a different language.

Step 1: Identifying the Strategy

This strategy will help with the overall clarification of the text for all students. The strategy also implements a kinesthetic piece that has proven effective for all learning styles. The use of color-coded cards as a thinksheet to analyze characters helps students think about one character at a time, and it also helps them isolate characteristics and synthesize information.

Step 2: Modeling the Strategy

Before beginning the text most teachers will summarize or watch a movie version first. This strategy can be implemented at any time, but works best at the beginning of the piece of literature.

1. Separate the class into cooperative learning groups that equal the number of main characters in the piece of literature.
2. The teacher, with or without the help of the students, identifies the major characters (should not exceed five or six).
3. The teacher assigns colors to each character and gives each group a supply of colored cardstock about the size of a large index card. A key of the characters and their colors should be placed where the students can refer to it.
4. The groups are instructed to write down any major events in the text, and one or two identifiable lines that would be associated with this event. The teacher should provide some guidance here making sure to point these out to the groups. (You can give the student a choice to either work as a group and identify the events or have everyone in the group write down what they think, and then at the end of class decide which five or six cards to use for the strategy presentation.) Make sure to allow enough time for five or six minutes of discussion to choose their most important events.
5. At the conclusion of the day's reading, the students can tape the cards to the wall/board in the order the events took place.

Step 3: Scaffolding the Strategy

The cards now serve as a timeline that can be displayed in the room. The color-coded cards identify to whom the even is happening. If there is one character involved, they can be placed on top of one another. The timeline
can be permanently posted and added to, or it can serve as a daily review where
the students reorganize the events prior to each day’s reading. With each
subsequent act of the play, and with other literary selections, students can use
the Bard Cards to clarify and organize information.

Step 4: Providing Additional Practice and Adapting the Strategy

The appeal of this strategy is that it can be implemented at any time
during an activity. It can also be used in many different ways to accommodate
many different types of learners. The cards can be used to pretest the students
to assess previous knowledge. They can be used to review, either daily or at the
end of the piece of literature. The cards can also be used as a novel-assessment
method, where the students can be graded on the percentage correct. The color-
coding of the characters presents an excellent visual reference and the cards
themselves can be manipulated to present the information in any unique format
the teacher can think of.

The students should be encouraged to use their “own language” when
summarizing the scenes or events, but to include a recognizable line on the back
of the card. These lines can then be used for a class that has a better
understanding of the text to make a sequencing activity that challenges the
advanced student.

Conclusion

This strategy can be used in any discipline, at any grade level, and with
all types of learners. It would work well in Social Studies giving each historical
character a different color. The timeline is very conducive to use in this
discipline.

Thinksheets

As indicated above, the thinksheets for this strategy are color-coded cards
that readers and writers create to make sense of difficult literacy selections.
The colors correspond to characters and their qualities.