Keying In: A strategy for Identification and Substantiation of Key Ideas

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Introduction

As eighth grade team colleagues, we have decided to try and tackle the difficulties that students have identifying key ideas and supporting details when analyzing a piece of writing. Before students can begin to respond to essay questions in any subject area, they must possess the necessary skills that will enable them to recognize key ideas and supporting statements. Over the years, we have observed students who are often able to find the key idea, but then struggle to find relevant supports that will substantiate the idea stated. At this stage of development, we believe it is essential to provide students with an organized strategy that will enable them to become capable researchers and writers.

Step 1: Identifying the Strategy

The activities designed will help students recognize key ideas and supporting details in various pieces of writing. The strategy of underlining enables students to create a visual focal point for identifying key ideas and supporting details. With this skill mastered, students will use this information to formulate essay and research based questions. The culminating task of identifying key ideas and supporting details will give students the ability to respond to essays and research based assignments at a higher cognitive level.
Step 2: Modeling the Strategy

Students will receive teacher selected articles or essays, a red pen, and a blue pen. The teacher will then inform students that the article will be read twice; one time independently and the second time as a class. Before beginning the reading, the students will be told to look for key ideas and supporting details.

Upon completion of the second reading, students will be instructed to underline key ideas in red. The teacher, along with students, will identify and underline key ideas using the overhead sheet. At this point, additional instruction and remediation in identifying key ideas will be provided based on any difficulties students may encounter. Students should make any necessary changes in regards to key ideas, before identifying supporting details.

After a thorough review of key ideas, the teacher will direct students to identify and underline supporting details in blue ink. Again, the teacher and the students will identify and underline supporting ideas using the overhead sheet. Any necessary changes and remediation will follow.

Step 3: Scaffolding the Strategy

After the group practice, the teacher will distribute an additional article entitled “Roberto Clemente: Great Athlete, Great Man”. Students will then be instructed to read the questions on page three. This step should be taken BEFORE reading the article. Students should then be instructed to refer to the Thinksheet (Addendum A), following specific directions included therein.

Students will then use a peer editing process to compare their answers from each article. Discrepancies and questions should be directed to the teacher for review.

Step 4: Providing Additional Practice

We strongly advise that this strategy should be employed at the beginning of the school year. Students should be reminded to utilize this method when responding to essay questions and research based assignments across the curriculum. After employing and mastering this technique, students may modify the strategy by circling key ideas and underlining supporting details. Any effective modification may be used in various formats.
Chapter Four: Keying In

Conclusion

The ability to identify key ideas and supporting details is an essential element in responding to essay and research-based assignments. In addition, identifying these elements enable students to better comprehend the content presented within any written text. This technique provides students with the skills they will need when responding on the aforementioned higher cognitive levels.

Suggestions for Adapting the Strategy in other Grades or Content Areas

This strategy is relevant across the curriculum. It is most appropriate to middle level grades and can be an effective remediation tool at the high school level.

Thinksheets

Copies are attached.
“Roberto Clemente: Great Athlete, Great Man” by Jerry Izenberg

Step 1
A. Read the italicized words on top of the title. Read the title and turn it into a question. Write your question.

B. Read the introduction and underline key ideas in red and supporting details in blue. Then write two facts about Roberto Clemente you learned while reading the introduction
1. __________________________________________
2. __________________________________________

C. Identify and circle each section listed below
   1. Headings
   2. Concluding Paragraphs

Step 2
Directions: Read each section listed below and underline key ideas and supporting details in appropriate colors.
   A. Reread the introduction
   B. Read “The Record Book”
   C. Read “The Project of Mercy”
   D. Read “The search and the Wait”

Step 3
Final Step
A. Use identified key ideas and supporting details to thoroughly answer the questions listed on the next page.
Thinksheet (Addendum B)

Questions To Answer

1. What proof is there in the article that Clemente was a great athlete?

2. What happened in Nicaragua to make Clemente plan a second trip there?

3. How did Clemente die?

4. What proof is there in the article that Clemente was a considerate and generous man?

5. How did the Puerto Ricans show that Clemente had “touched their hearts”?