

Graffiti Boards

Why?

Students learn from capturing and exploring “what’s on their minds.” As they interact with people and texts, they search for patterns that connect their current experiences to past events, texts, and feelings. Through these connections they are able to make sense of those experiences. They also attend to difference, to the “yet to be understood.” As students read or engage in an experience, their initial thinking and responses can easily be lost, fleeting in and out of their minds. They need a way to quickly capture these responses that does not require them to organize their thinking or express that thinking in formal ways. Through quickly capturing their initial thinking by jotting words and thoughts and sketching images, they can then revisit that thinking to share with others or to organize that thinking through a web or chart.

Materials

1. A large sheet of chart paper
2. Markers of various colors or pastels or colored pencils

How?

1. Students engage in some type of shared experience, such as reading from a particular text set or shared book set, participating in a science observation or experiment, working through a mathematical problem-solving experience, or listening to a musical composition.
2. During the shared experience, students sit in small groups at tables with a large piece of chart paper in the middle of the table. At various points throughout the experience, students are invited to stop and write their observations and reflections on the paper in the form of graffiti. Each person takes his or her own corner of the paper and works alone, sketching and writing images, words, and phrases that come to mind. There is no particular organization to those images and words. They are simply written randomly on the graffiti board.
3. Students within each small group share their thinking with each other, using the graffiti board as a reference point to remind them of their thinking.
4. The experience can be extended by creating an organized web, chart, or diagram of their connections from the unorganized thoughts and images on the board.

Variations

1. Another possible use of the board is after each chapter in a class read aloud novel, where students add to their responses each day on the graffiti board.
2. The graffiti board can serve as a place for students to record their thoughts about a particular concept as they engage in a series of experiences related to that concept. After each experience, they are asked to add to their thinking on the board.
3. With young children, the graffiti board can be a large sheet of paper on the floor with children seated around the paper to sketch their responses and then later dictate words to describe their thinking.

*An alternative name for this engagement is a “Sounding-Off Board.”

