

Creative Thinking is the process of expanding ideas. It is the consideration of new and unusual possibilities. Creative thinking is used to generate large numbers of ideas, different categories of ideas, and ideas that are unique.

Explore these strategies to intentionally support Creative Thinking as a Habit of Mind in your classroom.

Infographic It!

Want to develop critical and creative thinking skills at the same time? Ask students to evaluate and organize their data in a visual way. They must think critically as they evaluate the validity of their data and decide how to organize it. They must think creatively as they communicate their data in the form of a graph, drawing, or infographic. The more students exercise critical and creative thinking, the better problem-solvers they will be!

RAFT

Use the RAFT strategy to differentiate instruction and to promote creative thinking. Assign (or have students choose) a Role, an Audience, the Format, and the Topic. For example, you may have students present a Topic that is related to the investigation question, and students might choose to play the Role of a newscaster, present in the Format of a cartoon, and pretend their Audience is parents.



Inanimate Letters

Have students write letters from one inanimate object to another. For example primary grade students may write a letter from the number 1 to the number 3. Older students may write a letter from the element Radon to the element Argon. Inanimate letters require students to re-contextualize what they know about the subject(s) and apply their thinking in a novel way.

Worksheets Gone Wild

When you have to use a worksheet, bolster its utility by using it as a tool to strengthen creative thinking skills. Have the students weave a story out of the answers on the worksheet. Have them connect something on the worksheet to something they have learned in another subject. Have them turn the worksheet into an infographic.

Creative Thinking Sentence Stems

Use these sentence stems to promote creative thinking:

- What would happen if...
- What would it be like to...
- What's another way to...
- Where else can you...

Analogy a Day

Increase student creativity and foster a culture of risk-taking in 5 minutes a day with Analogy a Day. Pose random analogy questions to students every day to get them accustomed to thinking abstractly and creatively. For example, how is a classroom like an orange? How is a building like a hammer? How is a pencil like a flower? Give students time to think, then delight in their creative explanations.

Press On

Students are often good at an initial brainstorm, but once the flurry of initial ideas slows, they sometimes have trouble pressing on to the next flurry of ideas. Practice this skill by posing prompts for small groups to discuss such as, "Think of things that are red." Once the room quiets, let the students sit in the awkward silence for 20 seconds. Then prompt, "What about other things, like emotions or feelings?" The groups will resume their discussions, discovering that brainstorms sometimes lull, but you can press on by thinking about the issue from a different perspective.

SCAMPER

Use the SCAMPER activity to differentiate instruction, promote creative thinking, and/or discover alternate design solutions. Once students have studied a concept or designed a solution, ask them to SCAMPER it. They can choose one letter of the acronym to revisit their learning. S=substitute, C=combine, A=adapt, M=modify, P=put to other use, E=eliminate, R=rearrange.

Connection Challenge

It's always best to connect what you're teaching to something students are interested in, but it can be daunting to think of all those connections yourself. Shift that responsibility to students. At the end of a lesson, ask them to connect the learning to something that interests them. Sometimes answers may be logical (we learned about planes and I like baseball, and the pitcher stands on a different plane than the other players). Other times answers may be a stretch (we learned about electric circuits and I need electricity to play my video games). Honor all answers. The act of trying to make the connection is more valuable than the tightness of the connection.

Storify

Increase student engagement by taking a note from the craft of storytelling. Consider what makes a story compelling. There is a character, setting, and a plot that has some sort of conflict and resolution. Incorporate the elements of a story into your lesson plan for a memorable and engaging experience. For example, if studying the layers of rock in the Grand Canyon, position the layers as characters throughout time. Explain the setting as each layer was put into place. Use rich language to describe the obstacles that organisms faced in each layer, and use the grandeur and beauty of the Grand Canyon as a resolution.

This and That

Choose two random objects and have students discuss how a new item could be designed that incorporates both objects. You may want to involve students in determining the objects. For example, flip through the pages of a magazine and have students yell stop and choose an object from the page you're on (maybe a couch and a refrigerator, or a plane and a microwave). Finding connections between two disparate items helps develop creativity and problem-solving skills.

A Dot for your Thoughts

Draw a dot on the board. Have students brainstorm a list of what the dot could possibly represent (basketball, eye, star, etc.). Then ask the group to create categories out of the ideas listed so far (sports, art, space, etc.). Resume the brainstorming, this time filling up the newly created categories. Going between divergent thinking (creative brainstorming) and convergent thinking (critical categorization) can yield more varied ideas and better focus. As students brainstorm, allow for new categories and also discuss any unique ideas that couldn't fit in a category.

Square Pegging

Practice divergent and abstract thinking to develop students' creative thinking skills. Prepare a bucket of random subjects and predicates. Use a prompt that combines two unrelated ideas in one sentence, such as, "How can a _____, _____?" For example, "How can a rowboat win an election? Have students develop an argument to support their ideas. When students become accustomed to brainstorming solutions abstract ideas, the more prepared they will be to brainstorm solutions when it is required by an investigation.

Alphabet Knowledge

Have groups of students write each letter of the alphabet on a large piece of paper. Challenge them to write a word or short phrase for as many letters as possible that connects to the topic being studied. Adding the focus on a specific letter forces students to get creative and to think abstractly.

First Word Acrostic

Students write the topic word (ex. Photosynthesis) on their paper. They use the letters of a word to incorporate their understandings about the topic. For example, for the "P" in photosynthesis, the student may write "Plants use the process of photosynthesis to make their own food." Let them work in pairs and encourage creativity.

RAFT

ROLE	AUDIENCE	FORMAT	TOPIC
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Writer• Journalist• Scientist• Artist• Judge• Athlete• Weather Forecaster• Historian• Adventurer• Student• Doctor• Police Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Class• School• City• State• Parents• Fictional Character• Jury• Experts• Toddlers• Sports Team• Actors• The President	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poem• Song Lyric• Video• Cartoon• Infographic• Journal Entry• Brochure• Advertisement• Game• Biography• Newspaper article• Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Issue relevant to current events• Issue relevant to a particular time period• Topic of personal interest• Topic related to investigation questions