

# Student Engagement

**Student Engagement** is an expression of motivation. An engaging environment refers to the degree of curiosity, passion, and interest students show during learning.

Explore these strategies to intentionally support Student Engagement in your classroom.

## **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.

## **Wonder Wheel**

When you start a new topic, have students share their questions or wonderings about it. Display these wonderings on a wheel. As you work through the unit, revisit the wheel periodically and challenge the class to discuss it. Having questions visible in the classroom promotes curiosity and student engagement.

## **Gameify**

Increase student engagement by taking a note from the gaming industry. Consider what makes a game compelling. There is a goal, obstacles in the way of that goal, and some way to chart your progress toward that goal. Recreate these elements in your lesson. Position the learning objective as a goal (e.g., the discovery of how much energy is transferred between trophic levels). Then set up the various components of the investigation as obstacles (e.g., you must select your ecosystem and organisms; collect trophic level data, quantify the energy transferred, etc.). Chart each team's progress through the "obstacles" in a visible way so each team sees themselves nearing the final "destination."

## **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.

## **Zoom In**

Create a sense of intrigue and mystery in your classroom to boost student engagement and curiosity. [Zoom in on a portion of a larger picture \(or use a site such as https://game-solver.com/zoomed-in-answers/\)](https://game-solver.com/zoomed-in-answers/). Have students describe what they see and then make guesses as to what the larger picture may be. Have students support their guesses with evidence from their observation. Zoom out a little at a time and eventually affirm the curiosity of the class as they see the full picture. You can do this all in one setting for, or you can use it as a motivator, showing the zoomed in image at the beginning of a lesson and the reveal at the end of the lesson.

## **Progress Bar**

Students like to visually see where they are in a process. To keep them engaged, create a Progress Bar on the board. For example, if investigating plant growth, you could visually display the steps: Set up plants-->Record data after 5 days-->Record data after 10 days-->Analyze data-->Watch videos/Read sources-->Present. Color in each step of the process as you complete it. Progress Bars give your lesson an instant game-like quality.

## **Video and Songs**

Movies and songs can often provide an engaging opener to an investigation. Find a clip from a movie or song that ties in with the topic under study. Play the clip without any introduction. When it is over ask the students a question that leads into the day's topic. Tie their learning back to the video or song at the end of the lesson. Perhaps even have students rewrite the clip utilizing their new learning.

## **U Pick**

Keep a class list of things students want to know. When there are a few minutes, or when some students have finished work and others have not, encourage students to pick a topic from the list to research and find an answer. You can limit the list to phenomenon or science content they are studying, or you can take a broader approach and encourage a wide range of wonderings. Choose one day each week where students can present on what they learned.

## **Inspiration**

Post pictures or quotes from people who persevered through challenges to accomplish their goals. (Athletes, inventors, world leaders, etc.). These examples remind students that success rarely comes without failure and perseverance.