



Teaching For Success®

Quick Answers

No. 803

Q: What I Can I Do to Stimulate Creative Thinking?

A: Teaching Critical Thinking with Story and Fable

by Diane Gustafson

I teach critical thinking as part of my library skills class by having the students read aloud an updated script of the Three Little Pigs. (They moved from Buffalo to San Diego to escape the cold winters. The first pig built a house of straw because he needed money for camping equipment and a sports utility vehicle, etc.)

Identify the problem

Then we brainstorm. First, we identify the problem. (Sometimes they will say that it's what kind of house to build, but I help them see that it's what to do about the wolf.) We come up with all the possible solutions, including the illegal, (murder him), the nonconfrontational (move away), and the implausible (reason with him), plus the positive and negative aspects of each before voting for the preferred one.

Describe the problem

I then have each student describe a problem he or she has (For example, what to do about the laundry?) and possible solutions (do it at Mother's; go to the laundromat; buy a washer and dryer), along with the positives and negatives.

Chose a preferred solution

As a final step, the student has to choose his preferred solution and explain it. Additionally, they break up the monotonous subject/verb/object sentence structure that first appeared; they add transitions; and they very often have strengthened unity and coherence.

If it is a response to a test question, it is nearly always right on target since so many students are contributing information.

If you do return while the revision is still going on, you'll probably always be encouraged by the number of students participating, the spirited discussions and disagreements and the general overall atmosphere of the classroom.

The wrap up

When you look at the completed paragraph, comment about as many things as possible that have contributed to the improvement. Where errors or weaknesses appear, question how those might have occurred. Finally, ask where the most difficulty came in revising the paragraph.