



BETHESDA PILOTS PROMETHEAN TECHNOLOGY

Students returning to Bethesda Elementary this year noticed an impressive addition to each classroom—state-of-the-art, Promethean boards. The technology, which is already being used in high schools and middle schools around the county, is now being piloted by Bethesda, Cloverly, and Mill Creek Elementary Schools.

When B.E. was selected in July to participate in the Elementary School Action Research Project, staff responded to the call and met at Clarksburg High School for a 2-day training event. Featured speaker, Garfield Gini-Newman of The Critical Thinking Consortium, challenged staff to make education accessible to all by nurturing critical thinking. The training provided a framework for staff to use and design Promethean flipcharts that would begin with critical questions.

So what is critical thinking? A person is thinking critically...

if he/she is attempting to assess or judge the merits of possible options in light of relevant factors or criteria.

What does critical thinking look like in the classroom? First, critical questions are asked up front and give students a reason for retrieval. Teachers activate background knowledge and encourage thinking by posing questions on the Promethean board at the start of lessons. They proceed with the lesson and then revisit the question with specific tasks in



mind. For example, a critical thinking question for a primary reading class may be...Is the Wolf in *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* good or bad? Teachers might engage students in a discussion about what makes someone good or bad. Then, students listen to the story and judge the merits of their choices based on student-generated or teacher-provided criteria. A typical, non-critical thinking question about the same story might be...Who were the characters in the story?

Finally, how does the Promethean technology promote and support critical thinking in the classroom? Well, teachers create layered flipcharts that help students explore, highlight, design, uncover, transform, rank, evaluate, and assess information. The Promethean boards are engaging and interactive. Tech-savvy students are excited about using the new classroom tool and sometimes help trouble shoot as teachers and students learn the ins and outs of the technology together. It's a win-win learning experience for all.



HARVESTING GOOD READERS

Teachers reminded students in early September that part of their regular homework is reading for 20 minutes each day. Students have many book choices and parents can participate in the reading process by:

- helping select books
- reading to children (any grade)
- sharing the reading responsibility by taking turns page by page or chapter by chapter for older students
- listening to children read.

And parents...don't stop there! Talk about the books that you read together. It's not about questions and answers, but rather what they think of the characters, how the story is progressing, and if they can make connections to or predictions about the story. Keep in mind that "why" questions promote a deeper understanding of the story than "who, what, where," and "when" questions. Also, don't overlook information books. Some students prefer to learn about real things and the facts about a particular

subject may interest them more than a novel.

Motivation is key in keeping kids in books. So, encourage your children and guide them in their selections, but let them be their selections.

WRITER'S NOTEBOOKS SPARK CREATIVITY

Parents often wonder about the difference between a journal and a writer's notebook. A writer's notebook is where students write down thoughts, ideas, plans, memories, images, questions, answers, stories, and in fact, almost anything that comes to mind. It's a place where students experiment and "play" with writing without worrying about conventions like form, grammar, and spelling. It's not a record of events like a journal, but a place where seed ideas can grow into fruitful creative writing pieces.

Teachers sometimes provide prompts or quotes to get students writing, but it is not formulaic writing. The prompt is only a means to get students thinking and writing for as long as time allows. Students also know that they can express private thoughts without teacher comment. Students fold over pages that are private and teachers spot check notebooks to comment on creativity, not to grade. Students may also "quick draw" to help with their writing, but the emphasis is definitely on writing.

Ask your child about their writing notebooks. You may be surprised to find that YOU are a main character in some of their original writing!

