



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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All the News That's Fit to TEACH

About two years ago I decided that all those excellent articles I read in the newspaper were going to waste. So I decided I would read them to my freshman composition classes. Now, I read the newspaper at the beginning of class when everyone is getting settled or during the last few minutes. This, I think, is good teaching.

- **New words are found in the newspaper.** (Try these: factoid, precycling, Saddamized, videophile, arcology, shifting, glass ceiling, awareness chic.)
- **Good writing is found in the newspaper.** The writing would not appear in a paid-subscription press unless it was good enough to satisfy the readers and the advertisers. The writing is up-to-date with plenty of punch.
- **Community college students have limited milieus.** They may come from towns so small they do not even have a Dairy Queen. They may know plenty about rodeoing and deer hunting but nothing about a recent art exhibit in New York. The newspaper broadens their knowledge.
- **Examples of writing techniques are in the newspaper.** The book or movie review is the same as the evaluation essay. Such articles as "Why Women Aren't Cracking the Glass Ceiling" and "When White Guys Finish Last" explore causes for phenomena relating to the job market.
- **The metaphor and simile can be taught from articles that deal with regional expressions,** such as a recent article listing Texanisms—"as cold as Patterson's peach orchard" and "felt like she'd ironed all night with a cold iron."
- **The acronym shows up colorfully,** such as in a recent article on an organization called PINTO BEAN—People Inclined Naturally Toward Ostentatious Bean Eating.
- **Materials for selected readings are in the newspaper.** Maya Angelou's "Uncle Willie" gets a boost from a nostalgia column about old-time expressions or country stores. An animal rights essay, a common feature in freshman texts, comes to life with an article about animal rights activists protesting bowhunting or the circus.
- **Oftentimes reading the newspaper draws students out.** A humorous column on Cavaricci jeans had one fashion merchandising major standing up to show off her Cavaricci shorts, especially the label. A column on comic books on exhibit at the New York Museum of Modern Art interested a comic book collector.

But, you say, your own newspaper does not really have good articles in it. Even small newspapers usually carry the syndicated columnists. However, I prefer a big-city paper because of the variety of articles. I read from *The Dallas Morning News*. In the past, I have used the *Wall Street Journal* and, for audience study, a small-town paper, the *Diboll Free Press*.

What newspaper teaching does *not* offer is a sense of order, and this is the best part of all. I never know exactly what I'll be reading. It's fresh to me and to the students. And I never know what, if any, response I will receive.

So next time you find yourself reading the newspaper to the cat because you found an interesting article, remember your roomfuls of unenlightened students.

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It Never Hurts to Ask

In introductory courses, students must learn many new words. Nevertheless, few subjects can cause more blank, bored stares from students than vocabulary lessons. After enduring too many of these vacuous looks, I asked the students for their ideas about how to make learning new words enjoyable. They jumped at the chance to have their say. "Let's play 'The Match Game,'" one shouted. "No, 'Wheel of Fortune,'" another countered. We experimented with each game, enthusiastic smiles replaced the former glazed eyes, and I relearned a familiar lesson: It never hurts to ask!

The idea of playing a game, however, brought a second familiar lesson to my mind: It never hurts to ask yourself whether the game enhances learning or merely entertains. To facilitate learning, I added a detailed structure. Groups would compete with one another according to rules that required the students to pronounce the word, use it in a sentence, and define it. The rules of "Word of Fortune" are as follows:

Step 1: Each team selects a host and a monitor to administer the game. The host goes to another group to select the words, give the clues, and keep the score. The monitor remains in his or her group to ensure that its guest host performs accurately and honestly.

Step 2: The host selects a word from given pages of a vocabulary book, places a blank line on the board for each letter in the word, and writes a clue about a word root beneath the blank letters. The monitor checks the host's work.

Step 3: The team member rolling the largest number on the dice begins the play. He or she rolls the dice each time before guessing a letter and earns the number of points on the dice for each consonant guessed correctly. Rolling snake eyes causes the player to go bankrupt—lose all of the dice points accumulated on his or her round. To buy a vowel, the student forfeits the points on the dice. The play moves to the student on the right of the current player when the current player

either guesses a letter incorrectly or completes the play on one word.

Step 4: When a team member guesses the word, he or she may earn double the points on the dice for a correct definition, 100 points for the correct use of the word in a sentence. The instructor judges whether the student's answer earns any of the possible points.

Step 5: The instructor announces the five-minute warning; after that time, no group can begin a new word. Each group completes its current word, and the host and the monitor reach agreement on the scoring. The members of the team with the highest score receive five bonus points on their next test.

Asking paid off! Actively involved in a different approach to learning, the students saw the immediate relevance of the subject. They took ownership of new vocabulary words in a way I never dreamed possible. The reticent and the recalcitrant alike attempted to pronounce the words, use them in sentences, and define them while having fun in an efficient learning structure.

What should I ask for next?

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