Ali's Favorite Classroom Strategies

Together
We Learn & Grow

Brainstorming

What is it?

A strategy that invites students to share ideas freely around a concept, question, or topic without judgment to activate prior knowledge and spark curiosity.

How does it work?

- Present a concept, image, or question
- Students share ideas orally or in writing
- Record all ideas without correcting or evaluating
- Revisit ideas during and after the inquiry

Importance: Activates prior knowledge and sparks curiosity at the start of an inquiry.

Classroom Example

Students brainstorm different examples of change in their environment. The teacher records all ideas on a chart to revisit and connect throughout the unit.

Mind Map

What is it?

A visual tool that organizes ideas around a central concept using branches, keywords, and images, helping students see connections and relationships.

How does it work?

- Place the main concept in the center of a page
- Add related ideas as branches
- Include sub-branches with details, words, or drawings
- Update and expand the map as learning progresses

Importance: Helps students visually organize ideas and see relationships between concepts.

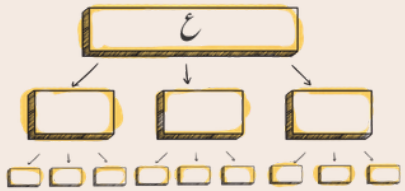
- **Classroom Example**
- Students create a mind map about School:
- Branches / Sub-branches:
- People → Students, Teachers, Staff
- Places → Classrooms, Library, Playground, Cafeteria, Lab
- Activities → Sports, Art, Science Experiments, Clubs
- Rules & Values → Respect, Responsibility, Safety

Students can add connections between categories as the unit progresses, for example linking “Science Experiments” (Activities) to “Lab” (Places).

Concept Map

What is it?

A strategy that shows relationships between concepts using boxes or circles connected with linking words, helping students make connections explicit.



How does it work?

- Identify concepts in a topic or unit
- Place concepts in boxes or circles on a page
- Connect related concepts with arrows and linking words (e.g., causes, requires, includes)
- Revise and expand the map as learning develops

Importance: Deepens conceptual thinking by making relationships between ideas visible and explicit.

Classroom Example

Students create a concept map :

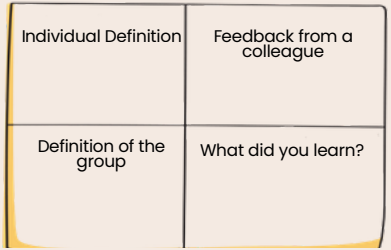
- Concepts: Resources, Actions, Consequences
- Connections: “Using renewable energy” → “Reduces pollution,” “Recycling materials” → “Conserves resources”

Students discuss and add linking words to show relationships between human actions and environmental outcomes.

Thinking Map

What is it?

A structured thinking routine that supports definition building, collaboration, feedback, and reflection.



How does it work?

- Box 1: Students define a word or concept
- Box 2: Receive peer feedback
- Box 3: Collaborate in groups to refine the definition
- Box 4: Reflect on learning after the inquiry

Importance: Supports gradual construction and refinement of conceptual understanding through feedback and reflection.

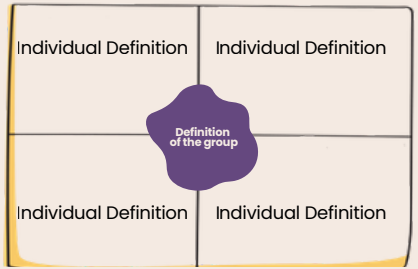
Classroom Example

Students define **Ecosystem** at the start of a unit, receive peer feedback, refine their definitions collaboratively, and then reflect after investigations and discussions about food chains, habitats, and interdependence.

Consensus Chart

What is it?

A collaborative strategy that helps groups reach shared understanding or agreement.



How does it work?

- Students write individual ideas
- Share ideas within the group
- Discuss similarities and differences
- Agree on a group response in the middle of the chart

Importance: Encourages collaboration and shared ideas by guiding students to reach agreement on key points.

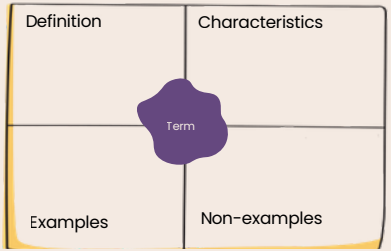
Classroom Example

Groups discuss what **Culture** means in a unit on traditions and beliefs. Each student shares ideas, compares similarities and differences, and the group reaches a consensus on a shared definition.

Frayer Model

What is it?

A graphic organizer that deepens understanding of a concept through definition, characteristics, examples, and non-examples.



How does it work?

- Divide a paper or template into four sections
- Define the concept in one section
- List characteristics in another section
- Add examples and non-examples in the remaining sections
- Revise and expand the model as learning develops

Importance: Clarifies complex concepts by exploring definitions, characteristics, examples, and non-examples.

Classroom Example

Students explore the concept of **Living Things** using a Frayer Model:

- Definition: Organisms that grow, reproduce, and respond to their environment
- Characteristics: Movement, growth, reproduction, response to stimuli
- Examples: Plants, animals
- Non-examples: Rocks, water, sunlight

Jigsaw

What is it?

A cooperative learning strategy where students become “experts” on one part of a topic and then teach others in their group.

How does it work?

- Divide the topic into sections
- Assign each student one section to become an “expert”
- Students meet in expert groups to study their section
- Return to their home group to teach what they learned

Importance: Builds responsibility and collective knowledge as students learn from and teach one another.

Classroom Example

- Students research different natural disasters in expert groups: earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and wildfires. Each student becomes an expert on their topic and then teaches the home group, allowing all students to learn about each type of disaster.

Connect – Extend – Challenge

What is it?

A thinking routine that helps students connect new learning to prior knowledge, extend thinking, and identify questions or challenges.

How does it work?

Ask students:

- How does this connect to my previous knowledge?
- How does this extend my thinking?
- What challenges or puzzles me?

Record responses and discuss as a class

Importance: Promotes metacognition by helping students reflect on how new learning shapes their thinking.

Classroom Example

After reading an article on migration, students list connections to what they already know, note how it extends their ideas about communities, and identify questions they still have about migration patterns.

Sorting

What is it?

A strategy where students sort ideas or objects into self-created categories.

How does it work?

- Provide words, images, or objects
- Students create their own categories
- Explain reasoning for the categories
- Revise categories as thinking evolves

Importance: Develops critical thinking by allowing students to create and justify their own categories.

Classroom Example
Students sort animals based on their own criteria, such as habitat, diet, or size, and then explain why they grouped them in that way.

Gallery Walk

What is it?

A movement-based strategy where students explore and respond to work displayed around the room.

How does it work?

- Display student work or prompts around the room
- Students move in small groups, observe, discuss, and respond
- Reflect as a class on observations

Importance: Encourages movement, discussion, and multiple perspectives through shared visual learning.

Classroom Example

Students walk around posters on Identity, noting similarities and differences, and discussing how people express identity in various ways.

Photo from the Window

What is it?

A reflective strategy where students use photography to observe, describe, and question the world.

How does it work?

- Students take a photo from a window or viewpoint
- Describe what they see
- Share interpretations
- Ask questions inspired by the photo

Importance: Strengthens observation, interpretation, and questioning by connecting learning to real-world contexts.

Classroom Example

Students photograph their neighborhood for a unit on communities and describe what they notice about buildings, people, and activities, then ask questions about how communities function.

Bus Stop

What is it?

A rotation strategy where students move between discussion stations.

How does it work?

- Set up stations with questions
- Groups rotate and respond
- Review ideas together

Importance: Promotes active engagement and idea building.

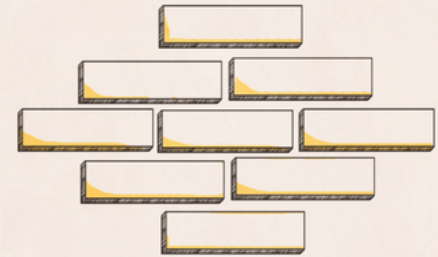
Classroom Example

Stations explore leadership actions such as listening, decision-making, and teamwork. Students rotate and add ideas.

Diamond Ranking

What is it?

A prioritization strategy where students rank ideas based on importance.



How does it work?

- Provide nine ideas
- Rank them in a diamond shape
- Justify choices

Importance: Develops reasoning and justification skills.

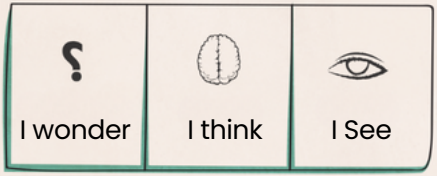
Classroom Example

Students rank qualities of a responsible citizen from most to least important and justify their decisions.

I See – I Think – I Wonder

What is it?

An observation-based routine that moves students from noticing to questioning.



How does it work?

- Observe carefully
- Interpret meaning
- Ask questions

Importance: Builds inquiry through careful observation and questioning.

Classroom Example

Students analyze a historical photograph and share what they see, think, and wonder.

Three Steps: Step In – Step About – Step Out

What is it?

An imaginative routine that deepens engagement with images or situations.

How does it work?

- Step into an image
- Use senses to explore
- Step out with questions

Importance: Encourages empathy and deeper questioning.

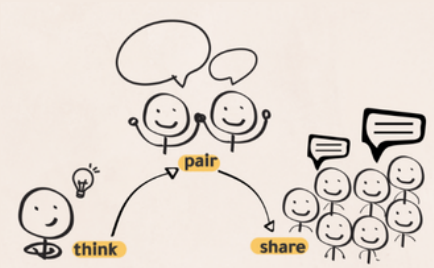
Classroom Example

Students step into images from a historical event and imagine sights, sounds, and emotions before generating questions.

Think – Pair – Share

What is it?

A collaborative routine that structures individual and shared thinking.



How does it work?

- Think individually
- Discuss with a partner
- Share ideas

Importance: Increases participation and confidence.

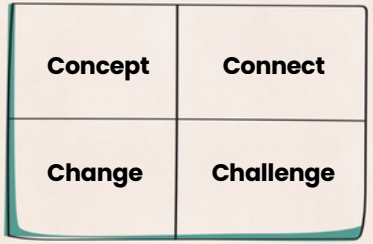
Classroom Example

Students respond to a conceptual question about fairness, discuss with a partner, then share with the class.

4Cs: Concept – Connect – Change – Challenge

What is it?

A reflection routine that supports conceptual and emotional thinking.



How does it work?

- Identify the concept
- Make personal connections
- Reflect on a change in thinking
- Identify challenges

Importance: Makes learning visible through structured reflection.

Classroom Example

After reading an article on Sustainability, students reflect on how their ideas about responsibility changed.

Blob Tree

What is it?

A visual reflection tool using figures to self-assess

How does it work?

- Choose a blob
- Explain choice

Importance: Supports emotional awareness and empathy.

Classroom Example

Students choose a blob representing their understanding of multiplication.

I Used to Think... Now I Think...

What is it?

A reflection routine that highlights shifts in thinking.

How does it work?

- Record prior thinking
- Compare with current thinking

Importance: Highlights growth and conceptual change.

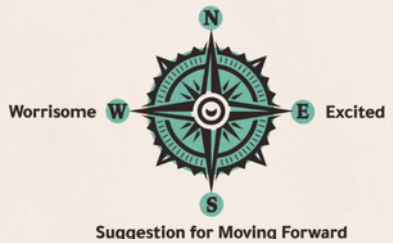
Classroom Example

Students reflect on how their ideas about energy have changed.

Compass Points (N–E–W–S)

What is it?

A strategy that explores feelings, concerns, and ideas.



How does it work?

- Identify Needs, Excitements, Worries, Suggestions

Importance: Encourages multiple perspectives.

Classroom Example
Students reflect on a group project using the compass points.

Two Stars and a Wish

What is it?

A feedback routine balancing strengths and improvement.

How does it work?

- Share two strengths
- Share one wish

Importance: Supports constructive feedback.

Classroom Example

Students give peer feedback on a presentation.

Stop – Continue – Start

What is it?

A reflection strategy focused on improvement.

How does it work?

- Identify actions to stop, continue, and start

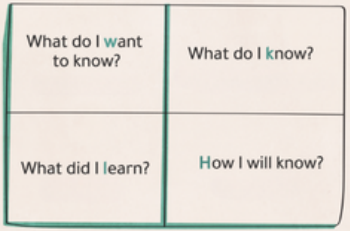
Importance: Encourages intentional improvement.

Classroom Example
Students reflect after group work.

KWHL Chart

What is it?

An inquiry tool that tracks learning.



How does it work?

- Record the answers to the questions:
- What do you know?
- What do you want to know?
- How you will know?
- What did you learn?

Importance: Structures the inquiry process.

Classroom Example

Students plan an investigation on plants using KWHL chart.

A to Z

What is it?

A vocabulary strategy using the alphabet.

How does it work?

- Add words for each letter

Importance: Expands conceptual vocabulary.

Classroom Example
Students create an A–Z list for Space.

Photo Tour

What is it?

A personal inquiry strategy using photography.

How does it work?

- Take three photos
- Share connections

Importance: Encourages self-expression.

Classroom Example

Students share photos representing who they are.

Personal Object Biography

What is it?

A storytelling strategy using personal objects.

How does it work?

Share an object's story

Importance: Builds empathy and connection.

Classroom Example

Students share objects linked to personal experiences.

Field Trip

What is it?

Experiential learning beyond the classroom.

How does it work?

- Observe
- Document
- Reflect

Importance: Connects learning to real contexts.

Classroom Example

Students visit a museum linked to a unit.

Guest Speakers

What is it?

A strategy bringing expert perspectives.

How does it work?

- Prepare questions
- Reflect

Importance: Broadens perspectives through expertise.

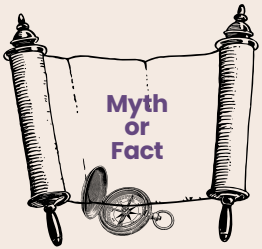
Classroom Example

A vet speaks to students.

Myth or Fact

What is it?

A strategy that challenges misconceptions.



How does it work?

- Identify myths
- Research facts

Importance: Develops evidence-based thinking.

Classroom Example

Students sort sentences if they are myth or facts.

Collection of Shells

What is it?

A metaphor-based reflection strategy.

How does it work?

- Choose a shell or any object
- Explain connection

Importance: Supports personal meaning-making.

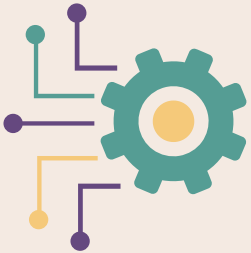
Classroom Example

Students choose a shell representing who they are.

Word Splash

What is it?

A visual vocabulary strategy.



How does it work?

- Display key words or images
- Make connections between words

Importance: Activates prior vocabulary knowledge.

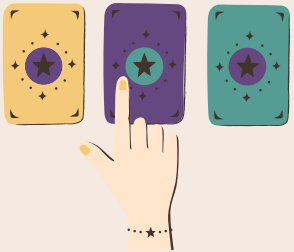
Classroom Example

Students connects words related to body systems.

Reflection Cards

What is it?

A prompt-based reflection tool.



How does it work?

Respond to prompts :

- What did you learn?
- What challenges did you face?
- How you will do it differently?

Importance: Encourages intentional reflection.

Classroom Example

Students use reflection cards after a unit.

Resources

https://tbrcommunity.com/resources/index.html
https://pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines
https://www.liberatingstructures.com
https://www.thinkingcollaborative.com/as-resources