

by Sheila M. Jones

Bloom's SOL Reading Roulette

As the reality of increased English class sizes in public schools grows due to current economic conditions, I use the following strategy to help provide individualized attention while still effectively preparing students for the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) Reading Exam. I use this technique with Reading classes, but much of the methodology is transferable to any language arts content.

Of course, most teachers are familiar with Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy

Knowledge
Comprehension
Application
Analysis
Synthesis
Evaluation

but in this approach [I work to have students become the actual users of the taxonomy as part of a program designed to help them also develop higher level thinking skills beyond the first level of the taxonomy, Knowledge.] That hierarchy looks like this (with explanations):

Comprehension: proof the students understand what is read.

Application: students must solve questions posed.

Analysis: students design reasoning questions.

Synthesis: students create questions focused on the reading passage.

Evaluation: students design judgment questions.

I work to have students become the actual users of the taxonomy as part of a program designed to help them also develop higher level thinking skills beyond the first level of the taxonomy, Knowledge.

Materials/Preparations:

Step one is to assign students to multi-ability groups of six with all ability levels in the class equally represented in each group of six.

Step two is to prepare the following materials:

Six role-defining index cards with the following written on respective cards:

1. What is the BEST answer for....
2. VOCABULARY (The student must choose one word from the story to query one of its multiple meanings)
3. Which answer is MOST LIKELY...
4. Which question is asked in paragraph #___?
5. All are true EXCEPT...
6. Which statement from the story is an OPINION?

Six reading passages from the following genres that are of the appropriate difficulty and length for the groups:

1. Poem
2. Narrative with dialogue
3. Recipe (or HOW TO selection)
4. Letter to the Editor (from local newspaper)
5. Biography
6. Science Fiction

Step three:

The implementation of this activity begins with groups of students reviewing released SOL reading passages and test questions from past years. Each student is given an index card that designates the student's role in the group. Students should be aware that the multiple-choice questions they write will be used as part of SOL testing practice for the whole class, so the way in which they ask the questions is very important. Students should also be encouraged to list answer choices as traditional "A," "B," "C," "D," or "F," "G," "H," and "J." Of course, valid test design requires that two of the four choices be "slash and trash" choices that can easily be eliminated from the start. Students may always refer back to previously reviewed SOL test items for help with phrasing and question forms.

Once the Roulette activity has been organized, for each new session (I recommend daily, brief sessions) the teacher simply shuffles the index cards, placing them face down on the table, letting students draw their own genre and role assignment for the session and new reading selection.

This is a wonderful way to have students share their thoughts while developing higher level thinking skills. If there is time, teachers can make overheads of reading selections and students' questions, thus creating an additional whole class activity. If a Smartboard or Promethean software is available, whole groups can present their work in the role of the classroom teacher, including calling on classmates for answers. Finally, if perhaps obviously, this activity can be referenced equally well to both oral language and writing SOLs.

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Sheila M. Jones is a Reading Specialist at Algonkian Elementary School in the Loudoun County Public Schools with over 26 years of experience as an English and Reading teacher in both elementary and secondary grades. She also serves as a consultant to the Northern Virginia Writing Project at George Mason University.
