

## Activating Prior Knowledge (APK) and Building Background Knowledge (BBK)

Engaging students in activities that activate their prior knowledge (by tapping into past experiences) and then build background knowledge on the topic builds schema, a context upon which students can begin to “attach” and make sense of the new knowledge. The less that such activities – often called “Entry Events” or “Kickoffs” - rely on text, the more accessible they will be to a broader range of students. Further, the more you are able to fortify students’ understanding of the target topic at the beginning of the unit through low-linguistic load materials and experiences, the more accessible “heavier” academic activities such as reading, writing, and researching will be throughout the remainder of the unit. Research has shown that perhaps the most significant factor hindering ELL comprehension of text other than a lack of vocabulary is the lack of background knowledge about the content of any given text.

Structure	APK	BBK	Discipline-specific Examples
<b>Semantic Webbing</b> Students create a web around a key topic word and fill it with the symbols, words, pictures, phrases, events, people, etc. associated with that term.	X		<b>ELA:</b> The teacher asks students to create a semantic web around the word “poetry” on the initial day of a unit on that content topic. After brainstorming associated terms in small groups, students share out their findings and the teacher records them on a large semantic web on chart paper at the front of the room. The teacher clarifies any terms that may be unfamiliar to some students and pushes their thinking by asking questions to clarify or expand on certain terms.
<b>Agree-Disagree</b> Ask students their opinions about the target topic or pose true/false questions in order to assess what they already know/ think about the topic.	X		<b>ELA:</b> On the first day of a unit on persuasive writing, students participate in a Human Barometer activity, in which they are asked to respond to controversial statements (e.g. <i>Should students be allowed to have cell phones in school?</i> ) by standing somewhere on a “Agree-Disagree” spectrum, which is clearly marked by a line of masking tape on the floor. Students confer in pairs or small groups with those standing near them on the spectrum and create a brief position statement that is shared with the whole class.
<b>KWL Charts</b> Students share what they know about a topic, discuss it, and brainstorm what they more they would like to know.	X		<b>Science:</b> In small groups, students brainstorm what they already know about insects; the teacher encourages them to be as specific as possible in sharing their prior knowledge. Groups then collaboratively develop a set of questions about the topic. Students return to these later to chart their new learning and understanding.
<b>Poll Everywhere</b> Teacher polls the class about their knowledge of a topic (this application must be purchased).	X		<b>Social Studies:</b> In a unit on world religions, students are polled about the religious practices of their families/cultures and their beliefs on issues like the afterlife; statistics from classroom polls are compared to statistics of similar polls given across the US, as a springboard for a discussion on modern society’s religious views and practices.

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<p><b>Storyboards</b> Students use blank storyboard templates to show what they already know about the target topic through a series of drawings that tell a story.</p>	X		<p><b>ELA:</b> On the first day of a new unit on mythology, the teacher asks students to storyboard (using stick figures) a myth from their native country, highlighting key moments in the story. Students work individually or in pairs with peers from their country/culture. They present their tales to the entire class and the teacher facilitates a discussion on common patterns; this discussion leads to the development of a list of criteria for myths.</p>
<p><b>Artifacts, Images, and Realia</b> Students can bring in artifacts related to the target topic and share and discuss them; or, the teacher can provide such artifacts for students to explore and use as the basis for making inferences about the topic. Having objects that appeal to multiple senses is a powerful way of introducing a topic.</p>	X	X	<p><b>Math:</b> On the opening day of a unit on scale and proportion, the teacher brings in various realia that represent scale: blueprints, model cars, model airplanes, Barbie dolls, doll furniture, fashion sketches, etc. Students explore these artifacts and collaboratively discuss how “accurate” they believe these models to be, brainstorm ideas for determining the proportions of a model, etc.</p> <p><b>Science:</b> In the beginning of a unit on tectonic plates, students participate in a stations activity in which each section contains photos, maps, and diagrams connected to a particular natural disaster (e.g. volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, earthquakes, hurricanes, etc.). They discuss the materials and share any personal experiences they have had with natural disasters in their native countries.</p>
<p><b>See-Think-Wonder</b> Students record what they see, what they think, and what they wonder in reaction to visual material or a shared experience. The focus of the activity can be something known already or something entirely new.</p>	X	X	<p><b>Math:</b> Each student group watches a different brief video clip connected to how fractions are used in the “real world” (e.g. following a recipe, paying sales tax, dividing food, counting money, comparing prices while shopping, etc.). Students engage in a See-Think-Wonder exercise based on their viewing and share the results with other students through a brief Gallery Walk.</p> <p><b>The Arts:</b> Student triads each engage in a See-Think-Wonder activity with a different artwork from the same movement/time period/artist. Students share out the results of the exercise in a whole group discussion facilitated by the teacher.</p>
<p><b>Surprising Statistics</b> Surprise students or challenge pre-conceived notions they have about the target content by giving them a set of statistics or “fun facts” on the topic.</p>	X	X	<p><b>Social Studies:</b> Students in pairs discuss the most surprising fact from a list of statistics designed to upend students’ preconceived ideas about the founding of the US (e.g. 1/3 of American colonists supported armed resistance against the British).</p> <p><b>Health:</b> In small groups, students read through a set of statistics on the effects of obesity in the United States (rising rates of diabetes, increases in the average BMI, increases in health care costs, etc.) and discuss possible causes of these trends.</p>

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<b>Structured Conversations</b> Students engage in discussions in pairs, triads, or larger groups following a structured protocol.	X	X	Such protocols for structuring conversations in any discipline area where students are sharing what they know/have just learned include: Think-Pair-Share, Pairs Compare, Gallery Walks, Give One-Get One, Pinwheel Discussions, Listening Triads, Listening Carousel, List-Group-Label, and others. (NOTE: Google these terms for instructions on how to implement them in the classroom.)
<b>Field Trips</b> Students can “experience” aspects of the target topic by visiting new environments off-site connected to that content.	X	X	<b>The Arts:</b> art museums, galleries, concerts, performances of various kinds <b>Science:</b> science museums, laboratories, research facilities, zoos, nature centers, hospitals, or observatories <b>Social Studies:</b> historical museums, site, and monuments <b>ELA:</b> plays, author readings
<b>Guest Speakers</b> These visitors have the potential to bring the target topic alive for students through the sharing of their stories and expertise.	X	X	<b>Social Studies:</b> Holocaust survivors, veterans, activists, politicians, the elderly <b>Math:</b> Architects, engineers, or other professionals working with mathematics <b>Science:</b> Biologists, scientists, chemists, astronomers, physicists, lab technicians <b>Physical Education/Health:</b> Athletes, dieticians, health care professionals <b>ELA:</b> authors, journalists
<b>Video/Film/TV Clips</b> Brief clips such as these can make the target concept more accessible than static images or text.	X	X	<b>ELA:</b> clips of filmed versions of a novel/short story students are reading <b>Any subject area:</b> clips from documentary films showcasing a variety of topics from different content areas <b>Physical Education:</b> clips from exercise/training videos showing how to correctly engage in a particular exercise/sport/movement
<b>Simulations</b> Students participate in a brief structured activity that mimics a “real-life” experience connected to the target content.	X	X	<b>Social Studies:</b> In a unit on the Constitutional Convention, students grapple over how to select menu items for the school cafeteria: should choices be divided equally among the school’s different cultural groups or by each group’s proportional number of students? This situation mimics that of the Constitutional Convention of 1789 in determining how representation of the states within Congress would be allocated.
<b>Conduct a Demonstration</b> Students watch or participate in a live demonstration of a process related to the target content.		X	<b>Science:</b> The teacher conducts a particular lab experiment, uses a microscope to view a variety of specimens of interest, uses a telescope or other scientific tool to model the observance or measuring of a particular phenomenon, etc. <b>Health:</b> The teacher demonstrates how to make a healthy dish that takes little time and includes fresh ingredients, low salt/sugar content, simple cooking techniques, etc.

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<p><b>Themed Listening Activities</b> Students listen to a song, poem, or brief podcast (and follow along with a written transcript) as an introduction to the new target topic.</p>		X	<p><b>Social Studies:</b> historical songs, audio book clips from historical novels/non-fiction  <b>ELA:</b> audio book clips of passages from a novel students will read, recited poetry  <b>Science:</b> excerpts from a <i>Radiolab</i> (or other science show) podcast episode  <b>Math:</b> excerpts of interviews with engineers, architects, other “math” professionals  <b>The Arts:</b> excerpts of interviews with artists, radio dramas, songs from other cultures  <b>Physical Education:</b> excerpted interviews with athletes</p>
<p><b>Language Experience Approach</b> After students have participated in any of the above BBK activities, they collaboratively generate a text about the experience and their learnings. The text becomes the basis for a variety of literacy activities.</p>		X	<p>This can be done as a follow-up activity to any of the above listed shared experiences; students dictate to the teacher a variety of sentences about the experience and what they learned about the target content. The teacher acts as a scribe, recording student utterances and maintaining as much of the students’ authentic language as possible. The teacher reads the entire text, pointing to each word as it is read, and then leads students in a choral repetition of the entire text out loud. The text then becomes the basis for several follow-up literacy activities that rehearse phonological awareness, fluency, sight word recognition, and phonics.</p>
<p><b>Anticipation Guides</b> Teacher develops a series of statements and/or questions connected to what students will be learning.</p>		X	<p>Anticipation guides can be used with any content topic in any discipline area; students respond to the statements (can be true/false or agree/disagree) or questions (open- or close-ended) both at the beginning and again at the end of the unit. The statements/questions thus serve as a preview for students will be learning.</p>
<p><b>Compelling Quotes</b> Select an interesting, easy-to-understand quote (or multiple quotes distributed across groups) that provide insight on the topic to be introduced later.</p>		X	<p><b>Science:</b> Students compare and discuss quotes representing both sides of the Climate Change debate. They analyze the evidence referred to in the quotes and discuss.  <b>ELA:</b> Before students begin reading a book/story, each student is given a quote from/about the book and students participate in an activity where they stand up and share their quotes with various partners; they then reconvene in small groups, share what they learned from classmates, and predict what they think the book will be about.</p>