

## Total Language Lessons: Talk, Listen, Read, Write

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### Rivet

Rivet is an activity I created one day while sitting in the back of a classroom watching a student teacher try to introduce some vocabulary words to her students. The vocabulary the student teacher was introducing was important to the story and the words were words most of the students had concepts for and only needed to learn the word. The student teacher was diligently writing the words on the board, giving students kid-friendly definitions and having students access meanings for the words and relate them to each other. Unfortunately, the students were not particularly interested in the words, and their attention was marginal at best. After the words had been introduced and the students began to read the selection, many of the struggling readers couldn't decode them, much less associate meaning with them. Rivet was conceived that day and has since saved many a student teacher from the dreaded experience of having taught some words that no one seemed to have learned!

When using Rivet to introduce vocabulary, we choose the words as we always do. We pick words that many of our students don't know but need to know and words which are important to the selection. We also include the names of important characters, especially if these names will be difficult for our struggling readers to decode. Sometimes, as in this lesson, we include a two-word phrase if it is very important to understanding the selection. This Rivet activity was based on the book *Arturo's Baton* by Syd Hoff. We begin the activity by writing numbers and drawing lines on the board to indicate how many letters each word has. The board at the beginning of this rivet activity would look like this:

1.     — — — — — — — — — —
2.     — — — — — — — — — —
3.     — — — — — — — — — —
4.     — — — — — — — — — —
5.     — — — — — — — — — —
6.     — — — — — — — — — —
7.     — — — — — — — — — —
8.     — — — — — — — — — —

For, each word, we fill in the letters in order one at a time. We tell students that they are allowed to "shout out" in a Rivet activity and that they should shout the word as soon as they think they know what it is. We pause briefly after we write each letter to see if anyone can guess the word. Students are not guessing letters but are trying to guess each word as soon as they think they know what it is.

Once someone has guessed the correct word, we finish writing the word, have everyone pronounce *conductor* and ask if anyone knows what the word, *conductor* means. For *conductor*, students may say that a train has a conductor. We agree and ask if anything besides a train has a conductor. If they suggest orchestra or band, we acknowledge that and then ask if they know any other meanings for the word *conductor*. If you are studying electricity in science, someone may think of that meaning of conductor. As you introduce each word, ask questions to elicit the total knowledge of the class about each word but don't give away how the word is used in the story.

When we have elicited all the associations anyone in the class has with *conductor*, we begin writing the letters of the second word, pausing for just a second after writing each letter to see if anyone can guess the word. The attention of all the students is generally riveted (thus the name Rivet) to each added letter and with a few more letters many students will guess the word. Once the word orchestra is completed and pronounced, ask students what they know about an orchestra. Is it different from a band? Have they ever seen an orchestra? Do they know anyone who plays in an orchestra? Now that you have the word orchestra, ask students how they think conductor and orchestra go together. Help students to see that in this story the meaning of conductor is probably going to be the person who “conducts” the orchestra. Continue in this fashion until all the words have been completely written and correctly guessed. Here is what the board would look like when all words were introduced:

c o n d u c t o r

o r c h e s t r a

T o s c a n i n i

A r t u r o

b a t o n

w o r l d    t o u r

p a j a m a s

c a n c e l

After writing each word and having the word pronounced, ask question to elicit all the possible meanings of the words and any relationships students see between words. In this lesson, one student commented,

‘What do pajamas have to do with anything?’

The teacher responded,

“That is a strange word here but it turns out it is an important word in the story.”

Next, we want students to use the words. The task we use in Rivet to get students to process words and to use them in speech is to ask them to make a prediction about something they think will happen in the story. Their prediction must use at least two of the vocabulary words. We have partners turn and talk to create their prediction together and then we let children share their predictions with the class. We write five or six of their predictions on the board, underlining the vocabulary words introduced.

The orchestra went on a world tour.

The conductor was Toscanini

Arturo Toscanini was the conductor of the orchestra.

They had to cancel the concert because the orchestra wore their pajamas.

Toscanini forgot his pajamas when he took the orchestra on a world tour.

If children fail to use some of the words in their predictions, prompt them to think about how those words might fit into the story. After asking them how the baton fits into the story, you might get these predictions:

Toscanini needed the baton to conduct the orchestra.

Toscanini got mad and threw the baton at the orchestra so they had to cancel the show.

Children generally enjoy trying to combine the important words and make predictions—some serious and some silly. The important thing is not how serious the predictions are or whether or not the predictions are right. What matters is that students are using the key vocabulary and anticipating how these words might come together to make a story.

When you have some predictions—6-8 is plenty—have students read the selection to see if any of the predictions were true. After the students have read the selection, have them once again use the key words to write some true things that happened in the story. Their sentences after reading might include.

Arturo wanted to cancel the concert because he lost his baton.

Toscanini was Arturo's dog and he found the baton.

Arturo decided he didn't need a baton and he went off on a world tour.

Rivet is a very motivating way to introduce vocabulary when the words that need to be introduced are words most of your class has concepts for and some of your students have some meanings for. Children pay attention to the words as the words are being written because of the “hook” of trying to guess the word before anyone else does. They actively process the words by talking with their partner to create a sentence that uses at least two of the words and that might happen in the story. After reading, they use the words to write two sentences, each one using at least two of the words that tell something that actually happened in the story.

Some teachers find the students are even more motivated when the teacher sets up a competition between the teacher and the class. In “Rivet Versus The Class,” if the students guess the word before the final letter is written, the class gets a point. If no one guesses the word before the last letter is written, the teacher gets a point. The class is always delighted when they beat the teacher and if they guess every word, they declare it a shutout!

### **Preview-Predict-Confirm**

*Preview-Predict-Confirm* (Yopp & Yopp, 2004) is an activity that teaches students to use the pictures in a text to build vocabulary and to predict what they will read. To begin your PPC lesson, put your students in groups of three and show them pictures from the informational book or magazine article they are about to read. If possible, scan these pictures into a powerpoint presentation and project them one at a time, giving your trios of students 30 seconds to talk with each other as they look at each image. Alternately, you can gather your students close to you and show them pictures from the actual text, making sure to cover all words on the pages so that only the pictures are visible to the students.

When they have viewed all the images and have had half a minute to talk together about each, give each trio 30-40 small slips of paper and tell them they will use these to write words they think will occur in the text they are about to read. Hand the small slips of paper and a pen to the most fluent writer in each group. Send the trios to far corners of the room to do this and ask them to use their “secret” voices so that no other group can hear the words they are guessing. Give them no more than 10 minutes to record words and then stop them and ask them to lay out all their words and put them into some groups. Give them five or six minutes to discuss and group the words.

When the students have had five or six minutes to discuss and group the words, hand each trio three large index cards. Have the recorder in each group label one index card with the letter *C* for *Common*, one *U* for *Unique* and one *I* for *Interesting*. Give the trios a few minutes to talk about their group of words and to choose one word they think all the other trios will have, one word they think is unique which no other trio will have thought of, and one word they think is a really interesting word and they hope to learn more about when reading the book. The recorder should write these words on the large index cards big enough for everyone to see. Remind the trios to continue to use their “secret” voices so that no other groups can hear which words they are choosing.

Gather your students together and have each group show the word they have chosen as common, as unique and as interesting. As the different words are shown, help the students determine how well they predicted which of their words were common to many other trios and unique to their trios. Ask each trio to explain their reasoning for which of their words was most interesting.

Now that you have used the pictures to build background knowledge and get your students talking and thinking about the words they might encounter in the text, have the trios read the text together and put a \* on each word that actually occurred.

When they have finished reading the text, have trios decide on five or six words they should have guessed but didn't. Gather the class and lead students in a discussion about which words did occur and their reasons for choosing five or six words they wished they had guessed.

End the lesson by having each student write three sentences summarizing what they read. Each sentence must use at least two of their words.

1. Seat students in trios. Show students 10-15 pictures from the text they will read. Give them 30 seconds to talk about each picture.
2. Give students 25-30 small strips of paper (or a sheet with 25-30 small boxes) and have them write words they think will occur in the text. Once they have written the words, have them group some words they think belong together.
3. Have students choose one word they think all the trios have, one word unique to their trip and one word they think is most interesting. Have students write these three words on three index cards with a marker. Let volunteers share their trio's choices with the class.
4. Have the trios read the text and put a \* on each word that actually occurred.
5. Give them 5 or 6 more little strips (or have them turn their sheet of words over and write the words on the back). Ask the trios to write 5 or 6 words “they wished they had thought of.”
6. Lead a discussion of which words were correctly guessed and which words they wish they had thought of.
7. End the lesson by having each student write three sentences summarizing what they learned. Each sentence must contain at least two of the words they thought of or wished they had thought of.

### **Think-Writes**

Another kind of writing you can easily incorporate into your subject area instruction are short, quick bits of writing you lead students to do to help them focus and clarify their thinking. These quick bits of writing are often completed in two minutes and never take more than five minutes. We call these quick bits of writing “think-writes” to distinguish them from other more formal, extended writing experiences. Because think-writes are written not for others to read but for the writer to help clarify thinking, think-writes are not published and thus they do not require revising and editing. To make it very clear to your students that think-writes are writing they are doing just for themselves, have your students do think-writes on scrap paper, sticky notes or index cards.

### *Connection Think-Writes*

Before your students begin to learn about a new topic in science or social studies, do you ask them to share what they already know about that topic? When you pose the “What do you know about ...” question, do the same hands always go up—and the same hands never go up? Do you wonder why some students’ hands almost never fly into the air? Equally problematic (and more annoying!) are the students whose hands always fly up and then when they are the first person you call on, they ask, “What was the question?”

Connection think-writes can make your efforts at prior knowledge activation more productive for all your students. Imagine that your learning focus for today’s lesson is on presidents. You begin your lesson by saying,

“Today we are going to start learning about some of our nation’s presidents. Take a piece of scratch paper and write down everything you know about presidents. If you think you know something but you aren’t sure, write it down anyway and we will try to find out. You have two minutes. Go!”

Your students grab scratch paper you have recycled from the copying room, torn into quarters and placed in small baskets at each table and begin writing. You stand in front of the class and watch the clock, timing the students for exactly two minutes. Many of your student write as fast as they can, trying to “beat the clock” and write down many things. Your students no longer ask you to spell things—as they did the first few times you did these think-writes because they know what the answer will be.

“Spell it as best you can. This writing is just for you to get your thoughts down. No one else needs to read it so as long as you know what you wrote, we’re good.”

When exactly two minutes have passed, you say,

“Stop! Pens down! Who has something they want to share?”

Every hand is raised. You call first on a student who may not have much prior knowledge and that student proudly responds, “George Washington.”

“Good thinking, George Washington was our first president.”

You continue to call on students and affirm their responses.

“Yes, the president is the head of our nation.”

“Yes, presidents get elected every four years.”

Sometimes, you ask a follow-up question.

“Yes, Abraham Lincoln was a president. Does anyone know how Abraham Lincoln died?”

“The president does live in the White House. Who knows where the White House is? Have any of you ever been to the White House?”

“Good thinking. We did have two presidents named George Bush. We also had two other presidents with the same name. Does anyone have an idea who they might be?”

“Yes, Barack Obama was our first African-American president. Does anyone know where his father was born?”

Another student volunteers, “George Washington” and you remind everyone that we need to listen and not repeat ideas and then asks that student if he has anything on his list that hasn’t been said. When students volunteer information that is clearly incorrect, you correct that information but affirm the response of the student.

“Benjamin Franklin was never president but he played a very important role in our government.

Can anyone tell us what Benjamin Franklin did?”

When no more hands are raised, you congratulate your students on how much they already know about presidents and tell them that they will be learning many more interesting presidential facts and trivia in the coming days.

Think-writes to activate prior knowledge increase student engagement and motivation. Your most able students see it as a kind of race and they want to write as many ideas as they can in the two minutes. Your struggling students who may be reluctant to raise their hands are much more confident when they have had two minutes to think and when you are affirming of even a wrong answer or a misconception. Using think-writes forces you to do something we all know we need to do—but often

find ourselves not doing. When we give students two minutes to write down ideas, we are forced to “wait” while they write. Both the quantity and quality of the responses you get will increase when you give your students wait-time. Two-minute think-writes make students think and teachers wait!

Once you start using think-writes, you will wonder how you taught without them. You can use think-writes to activate prior knowledge during math.

“We are going to be learning more about measurement this week. You have two minutes to write everything you think you already know about measurement. Go!”

“Our new math topic is fractions. I know you already know a lot about fractions. Take a piece of scratch paper and write down what you know. You have two minutes. Go!”

Science topics also can be introduced with two-minute think-writes.

“Our new science topic is on natural resources. Do you know any? What do you think you know about natural resources? You have two minutes. Go!”

“Rocks is our science topic for the week. I know you know things about rocks. Let’s see how much rock knowledge you can write down in two minutes. Go!”

You may even uncover some science misconceptions that are part of your students’ prior knowledge. If someone tells you something you are sure is incorrect, make a mental note of that and respond by saying something like,

“A lot of people think that ... but we are going to find out that it actually works quite differently.”

Here are some two-minute think-writes used to access prior knowledge in social studies.

“What holiday do we celebrate in November? Right! Thanksgiving will soon be here. I know you know a lot about Thanksgiving. Grab some scratch paper and get those brains thinking. You have two minutes. Go!”

“Immigration is our social studies topic. I am not sure how much you know about immigration but we will soon find out. You have two minutes. Go!”

For all these connection think-writes, the students are recording their ideas on scratch paper. This scratch paper is essential to successful two-minute think-writes for several reasons. First, it often takes a whole class of students more than two minutes to “get out a piece of paper.” In two minutes, the think-write is done. Second, scratch paper is unintimidating. No one asks if they need to “head their paper” or if “this counts for the grade” when jotting down thoughts on a small scrap of paper. Finally, we are recycling paper that would have been thrown away and not wasting a perfectly good whole piece of notebook paper!

It is also important to specify and stick to the time limit. Two minutes is plenty of time for students to recall and jot down most of what they know. Students who don’t know much don’t get too squirmy in two minutes and students who know a lot enjoy racing to write down an impressive array of facts before the time is up.

### *Prediction Think-writes*

Prediction is another thinking process you can engage all your students in using think-writes. You will find numerous opportunities across your school day to use predictions think-writes. Science is a fertile area for prediction. In fact, prediction is one of the science processes we want all students to do regularly. Imagine that you are teaching a science unit on magnets and electricity and want your students to make some predictions and then test those predictions.

“Boys and girls, we are going to continue our unit on magnets and electricity today. In just a few minutes, you are going to get into your teams and test some materials and see if they will attract or repel the magnets. Before we test them, let’s make some predictions. Grab a sheet of scratch paper and number it from 1 to 6. Next to #1, write *ruler*. Then write either “*attract*” or “*not attract*” to show your prediction. Will the ruler be attracted to the magnet?”

The prediction think-write continues as you hold up each object your students are going to test. Students write the name of the object and their guess of attract or not next to each. Some students are hesitant to guess and claim they don’t know. You push them, however, by saying something like:

“You’re not supposed to know. That’s what a guess is. When you test them, you will change any guesses to the correct answers. Make your best guess. I’m not going to let you join your team to test the objects until you have made a prediction for each.”

Prediction is a powerful motivator but students are often afraid of being wrong. When they learn that you don’t care if they are wrong or right and that they are expected to change incorrect guesses to correct answers and if you make it clear they will not move forward in the activity until they have some guesses, they will put something down. Once they have a prediction, human nature kicks in and they are eager to “see how they did!” Think about the science units you teach and the science activities your students engage in and you will quickly envision many prediction think-write possibilities.

“Which objects will sink and which will float?”

“Will more water in the glass make the pitch higher or lower?”

“When we roll all these round objects down the ramp which one will hit the ground first?”

“Today, we are going to test clay soil, loamy soil, sand, and pebbles to see how quickly water flows through them and how much water is absorbed. Take a piece of scratch paper and order these four from slowest movement to quickest movement. Then order them from absorbs most water to absorbs least water.”

Prediction think-writes also work well in social studies although they take a very different form from those done in science classrooms. Imagine that you are about to read a piece on Ecuador in your *Time for Kids*, *Scholastic* or *Weekly Reader*.

We are going to read a short piece about Ecuador today. Before we read, I am going to give you exactly three minutes to “mine” the graphics. Look at all the graphics—photos, illustrations, maps, charts, graphs—anything visual and write down as many things as you can that you think we are going to learn about Ecuador. You can use the labels, captions and other quicktext that go with the graphics but don’t waste your three minutes reading the longer pieces of text. Take a piece of scrap paper and get started. You have three minutes to write down as many things as you can about Ecuador. You may start now!

When the three minutes is up, you have your students put the text out of sight and ask them to volunteer what they learned about Ecuador from the graphics. Just as in the connections think-write, you accept their answers and ask expanding or clarifying questions as appropriate.

Yes, Ecuador is on the equator. Does anyone remember what the equator is?

Yes, bananas are a major crop. Do you think they keep all the bananas they grow there or export them?

Right, Ecuador is about the size of Nebraska. Do you think that makes it larger or smaller than our state?

As your students share information and think about your expansions on their ideas, they are going to want to return to the piece again and point out more information from the graphics. You explain that they will be reading the whole piece soon but until then you want them to focus on how much they were able to glean from the graphics in just three minutes. If you catch someone sneaking a peak, you remove the text from that student and return it when it is time to read. You adhere firmly to your “no sneak peeks” rule during the first several three-minute predict what you will learn think-writes, knowing that your students will learn to make maximum use of their three minutes in future lessons.

#### *Think-writes for Summarizing, Concluding, Evaluating and Imagining*

Connections and predictions think-writes are usually done before students read. You can also use think-writes to help your students do the thinking processes they use while they are reading. Imagine that you gave your students three minutes to mine the graphics and write down what they thought they were going to learn about Ecuador as described in the previous section. Next, your students will read the text. Before letting them reopen the text, give each student three sticky notes for marking the three most important facts they learn about Ecuador. Show them how to write a brief sentence or phrase telling what they think is important and place the sticky note right on the place where they found that information.

The first time you do this with your students, they will probably use their sticky notes quickly and ask for more. Make it clear that there is a lot of information about Ecuador in this short piece and that they can't sticky note everything. Their job is to pick three important facts they think everyone should know about Ecuador. Don't give them any additional sticky notes. Letting them cover the piece with sticky notes would defeat your purpose of helping them learn to think about what information is most interesting and important. You may want to have your students work in partners to read and sticky-note the text, partnering struggling readers with stronger readers who will help them with difficult words.

When students complete the reading, gather them together and go through each part of the text, asking who has a sticky note on this page. Have them read what they wrote on the sticky note and explain why they think this is an important fact. You can use three sticky note think-writes in any subject area when students are reading informational text and you want them to think about what information is most important or interesting to them.

The thinking process of concluding or inferring requires the reader to take information in the text and "figure out" an idea that the text does not directly state. Our brains draw many different conclusions as we read but often these conclusions are drawn by comparing our world and experiences to the new world or experiences we are learning about. To use think-writes to help your students draw conclusions, pose a question that requires that kind of thinking. For Ecuador, you might have students write the words climate, size and geography on a piece of scrap paper. Tell them that as they read you want them to try to figure out how the similar the climate of Ecuador is to the state in which they live. For size, they should try to figure out if Ecuador is larger or smaller than the state in which they live. For geography, they should think about the different regions of Ecuador and how these are similar to or different from the regions of their state. Tell the students to jot down notes on these three topics as they read. After they read, have students share their comparisons and support their ideas with information from the Ecuador article and information they have previously learned about their state.

Everyone loves to give their opinions! Kids are no exception to this rule. If the kind of thinking you want your students to do falls into the evaluate/opinion category. Ask them to decide something and justify that decision with facts from what they read. Here are some examples of opinions think-writes.

Your mom or dad has the chance to take a job in Ecuador. Your whole family would move to Quito and live there for two years. You would go to school there and learn to speak Spanish.

Your family has decided that everyone gets a vote in this important decision. How will you vote and what reasons will you give to support your opinions.

Imagine that you are grown up and have just been elected to the United States Senate. The deficit is large and the president has proposed eliminating the space program. How will you vote? Support your vote with facts you learn about what we have learned from space exploration.

As you are reading about sea turtles, you will discover that they are endangered in many parts of the world. Different people have ideas about how to save the sea turtles from extinction. Which ideas do you think would work best and why do you think so?

Even the thinking process of imagining can be prompted with a think-write. Give your students a large index card and ask them to "sketch" what they are reading about. Tell them to use pencils—not crayons—because you want them to focus on what they see in their "mind's eye" not on an artistic creation. Some of your more verbal students will experience some frustration with this task because they are used to processing information with words only. But your spatial and artistic students will enjoy this novel way to think about what they are reading. Maybe instead of a think-write, this activity should be called a think-draw!