Just ASK's
Making the Standards Come Alive!
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Mirror, Mirror, On the Wall: Promoting Student Reflection

> We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience.
>
> - John Dewey

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What a year it has been for educators, students, and parents. The intellectual horsepower required with the implementation of the **Common Core State Standards** has been significant and life changing. We have learned there is great complexity to teaching and learning, and that it is only through reflection that we can understand how much we have learned, how effective we are, and how to make improvements to our work. There are many far reaching benefits of reflection, yet it tends to be an area that often neglected.

The true act of learning requires our students to reflect often and to make it a habit to think about what they have learned and how those ideas link to their previous experiences and what they already know. Building in time for reflection enhances the meaning of new content, promotes students' growth, and builds insight. Reflection raises students' awareness, helps them to take more responsibility for their learning, and helps them to see how they have grown. Now more than ever, with the instructional shifts happening with the **Common Core**, is the time to make reflection a priority for your students.

Establishing an Environment for Reflection

To reflect, and to reflect well, takes practice. It is a learned skill for students to be able to think critically, make judgments about their learning, and then take steps towards improvement. Students should reflect daily; this can happen in oral or written form.

When students are reflecting orally, the teacher needs to decide how to capture key points, be it jotting notes, videotaping, or other means of documentation. Some teachers have students keep journals, while others prefer students record their reflections on index cards or sticky notes. In order to provide the necessary time and practice, students need to reflect throughout each day on one of more facets of their learning.

Prior to expecting students to reflect well, it is essential teachers model their own reflections. Moments of reflection to share with students include learning new material, planning instruction for students, and evaluating instruction after teaching.

The reflections shared with students should be planned carefully. Not only is modeling a powerful tool, reflections also have the potential to make powerful teaching points as well. Some conversation starters when modeling reflections could be:

- Yesterday, as I was reading over your work, I realized that…
- Before we began this unit/lesson, I thought that…, but now I know…
- When I read _____'s work, I thought about… (and show work with child's permission)
- In the past I always…, but I've now discovered…

After modeling reflective thinking, it is important to allow students to give it a go, with teacher and classroom support. Students do not learn reflection from simply being told to "go reflect." Instead, students benefit from

the use of guiding questions or sentence starters, the opportunity to respond to those first orally, and then in writing. Doing this as a whole class and having students respond to others' reflections is a great place to begin. It is after hearing the ideas of others and having multiple opportunities to reflect themselves that students learn the art of reflection.

Facilitating Reflection Through Guiding Questions and Sentence Starters

One purpose of asking questions is to promote students thinking about their thinking, otherwise known as metacognition. An awareness of what comes easily, what is difficult, and where there is understanding as well as confusion is invaluable to the learning process. See tables for samples of questions to guide students' reflection and thinking and sentence starters.

English Language Arts

In what ways does this text push me as a reader?
This text requires me to…

Where was I confused?
I was confused when the author said _____ because….

What unanswered questions do I have?
I'm still wondering…

What hunches or inclinations do you have as a result of your reading?
I think… Maybe... Perhaps…

How does this connect to other texts I have read? Experiences I have had?
This reminds me of… I remember when…
This connects to…

What demands does the genre I'm reading place on me as a reader?
When reading _____ I have to know how to…

What claims can I make as a result of my reading?
My big ideas include…

What evidence substantiates my claims?
I know this because… When the author said _____ she meant…

What is the structure of the text I am writing? (ie. narrative, argument, informative/explanatory)

Mathematics

Do I understand what is being asked of me?
This question is asking me to…

What is confusing?
I am confused by…

Have I considered different strategies and tools to solve the problem?
Some ways to solve this problem are….

What tools am I using most frequently? Very little? (ie. diagrams, tables, graphs, formulas)
When solving problems I use… When solving problems, I rarely use…

How would I justify my answer?
My answer is justified because…

Am I able to explain the reasoning of others from looking at their solutions?
My classmate thinks… My classmate solved the problem by…

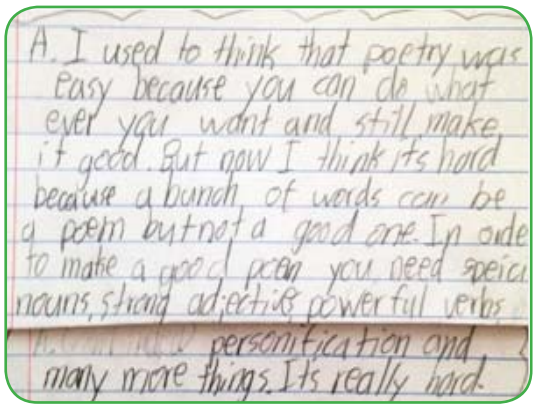
What language have I included in my communication that demonstrates my mathematical understanding?
Some math vocabulary I have used includes…

What do I notice? What patterns do I see?
I noticed… I see…

Have I used the most efficient strategy to solve this problem? How do I know?
The most efficient strategy for me was…

In what way does this problem connect to other problems you have solved before?
This problem reminds me of…

I Used to Think..., but Now I Think...
This routine, from Harvard's **Project Zero's** work on visible thinking, helps students reflect on their thinking about a topic, idea, or experience, and helps them reflect on how their thinking has changed over time. This routine is great to use where you believe students' initial thinking has changed as a result of the instruction and learning experiences. When introducing this routine, it is best done with the whole group, so that the types of thinking used are visible.



The reflections of a third grade student after a unit on poetry

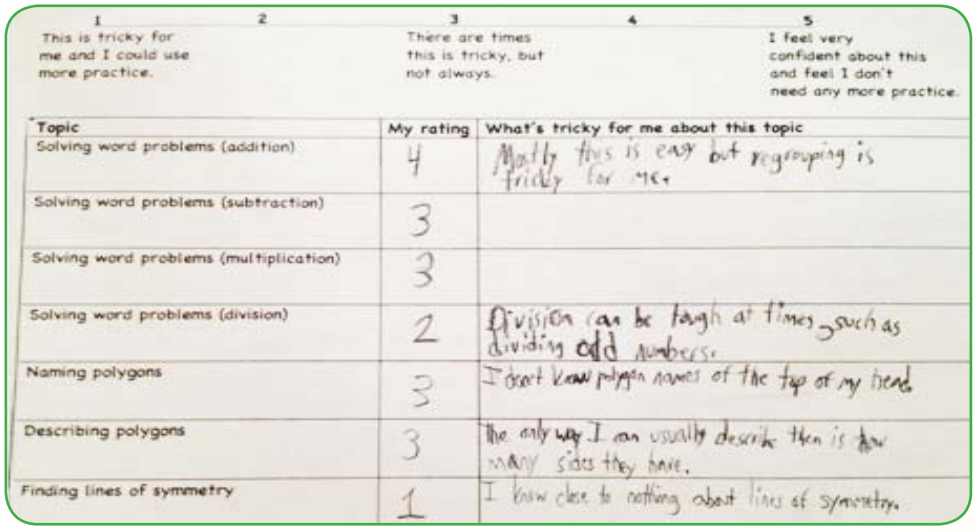
This routine can be used with many different audiences including students at the end of a unit of study, students after they have had been taught a new concept, students at the end of an art project, ESOL students at the middle and end of a school year, faculties at meetings reflecting on a reform agenda, scorers at the end of a scoring session, during pre- and post-conferences with individual teachers, and when looking at student data. The possibilities are endless, and the routine always promotes deep reflection.

Student Self-Assessment
In this age of standards-based instruction and reporting, student self-assessment has the potential to increase motivation, ownership, responsibility, and engagement. When our students think critically about their work, they are more motivated and invested in their success. When students assess themselves on their performance or understanding, they are empowered to lead their own learning and are better able to judge their success.

Self-assessment is a process where students monitor and evaluate their learning and identify what will improve their understanding, skills, and performance. If we always tell them how they are doing, they do not learn to think critically, to self-assess, or to reflect. In order to judge their own work, students need to have a clear picture of the desired performance. When the criteria for assessment clearly communicates the expected outcomes, students can assess their progress, performance, and understanding in a variety of ways including, but not limited to, rating themselves using a rubric, continuum, or checklist.

By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest.

- Confucius


1 This is tricky for me and I could use more practice. 2 3 There are times this is tricky, but not always. 4 5 I feel very confident about this and feel I don't need any more practice.

Topic	My rating	What's tricky for me about this topic
Solving word problems (addition)	4	Mostly this is easy but regrouping is tricky for me.
Solving word problems (subtraction)	3	
Solving word problems (multiplication)	3	
Solving word problems (division)	2	Division can be tough at times, such as dividing odd numbers.
Naming polygons	3	I don't know polygon names off the top of my head.
Describing polygons	3	The only way I can usually describe them is how many sides they have.
Finding lines of symmetry	1	I know close to nothing about lines of symmetry.

Using a continuum, a third grader assesses his understanding of several different math concepts.

Just ASK consultants are ready to help you develop new or refine old units to align with the **Common Core State Standards**. For more information, contact us at www.justaskpublications.com

Using Students' Reflections and Self-Assessments to Plan Future Instruction

Not only does building the time for your students to reflect enhance their understandings and ability to think metacognitively, it gives teachers and parents great information for planning future instruction and experiences.

Make it a point to consistently read students' reflections and do some reflecting of your own. When you read students' responses to reflective prompts you've given them, or to students' responses to the **I Used to Think…, but Now I Think…** routine, consider the following:

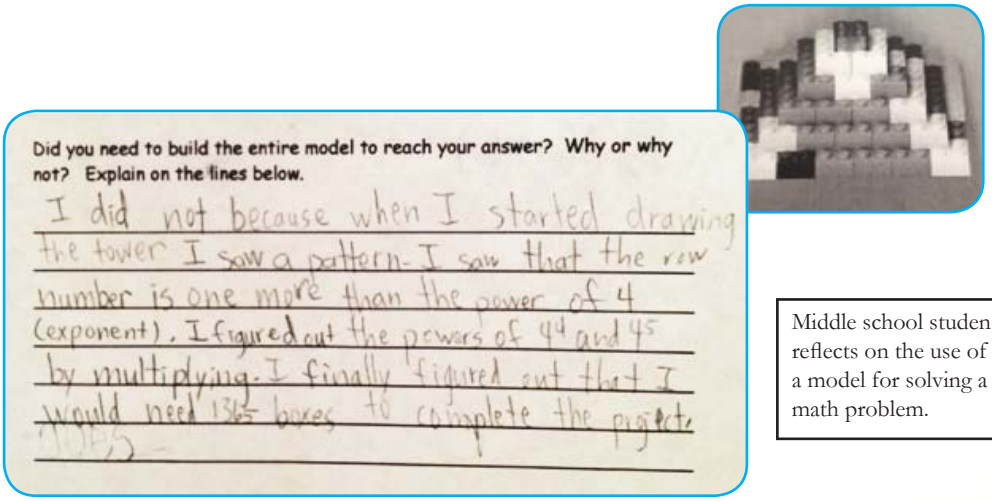
- Were there misconceptions? If so, where?
- What patterns do you notice in the responses?
- In what ways did the responses vary?
- What were the key experiences and instruction that resulted in a change of thinking?
- Which students had no change in thinking?
- After reading the responses, what would you preserve in the future? What would you change in the future?

Taking Some Time For Your Own Reflection

As you close out the school year, think about what will be different next year. Educators and parents across the country have spent a great deal of time just learning the standards and unpacking the demands for learners, and as a result there has been little time to think of anything else. While you take a collective breath after the year has come to a close, give yourself permission and the time to reflect on your year. Some questions to get you started are as follows (For parents, substitute "my child" for students. For leaders, substitute "my staff"):

- What structures exist in my classroom that supported my students as they took on a more rigorous curriculum?
- Are there new things I would like to put in place for the coming school year? What are they? Why?
- Where did my students show strengths? Where did my students struggle?
- How am I carefully monitoring the progress of each student?
- What supports have I put in place to catch them if they fall?
- In which areas do I need to spend more time learning the content?
- How do I ensure I am integrating the **Standards for Mathematical Practice** in my work?
- How do I ensure I am integrating literacy across all areas?

Even though a longer line has been cast for ourselves and our students with the **Common Core**, there is comfort in knowing that with the proper structures in place, including ample time for reflection, we and they can be successful.



Middle school student reflects on the use of a model for solving a math problem.

Resources and References

www.old-pz.gse.harvard.edu/vt/VisibleThinking_html_files/03_ThinkingRoutines/03c_Core_routines/UsedToThink/UsedToThink_Routine.htm
A protocol and tips for implementing Harvard's Project Zero visible thinking "I used to think…, but now I think…" routine.

www.teachingchannel.org/videos/getting-students-to-talk
In this Teaching Channel video, a teacher reflects on the lesson she designed for bilingual students to promote thinking and talking in response to literature.

www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/promoting-student-self-assessment-30102.html
This link includes an array of strategies to promote students' self-assessment.

www.criticalthinking.org/pages/structures-for-student-self-assessment/458
This link includes a variety of structures for students to assess themselves in reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

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