CLOSED AND OPEN WORD SORTS

DESCRIPTION

Word Sort is a simple small group activity. Students list key words from a reading or a unit of study, or alternatively, the teacher may provide a list of terms prior to the sort. Students identify the meaning and properties of each word and then sort the list into collections of words with similar conceptual features. This sorting process draws links between concepts, and helps students to consider the interrelationships among concepts.

Vacca and Vacca (1996) describe two forms of Word Sorts:
- Closed Word Sort: The teacher provides the categories (and the specific features of each) to the students. The students then match the words with the features to create the word collections.
- Open Word Sort: The teacher provides only the list of words. Students work together to discern the common features and to describe the categories for collecting the word groups.

LEARNING STRATEGIES	Connecting, Inferring, Metacognition, Synthesizing
LESSON PLAN STAGE	Building Background, Reflection, Synthesis
SKILLS	Assessing Prior Knowledge, Classifying Information, Making Meaning

PREPARATION

List between 10 and 20 key words from a unit of study or reading selection on the board or on index cards. If doing a closed word sort, also generate the categories for the words to be sorted into. As described above, you can alternatively ask students to identify the key words themselves, particularly if you are using this activity to review or reflect on a book or unit already completed.

	ACTIVITY STEPS	TEACHING TIPS
1	Divide the class into small groups of four or five students. Distribute the index cards, if applicable.	Carefully consider group membership, being mindful of which students are likely to work together most effectively.
2	For a closed word sort, provide students with the categories into which they will sort the vocabulary words. For an open word sort, instruct the student teams to suggest categories for organizing the words.	As students become more adept at this task, they can move towards open word sorts.

ACTIVITY STEPS

TEACHING TIPS

3 Allow 10 to 15 minutes for the student teams to assign the words to the appropriate categories.

4 Conduct a class discussion with each group presenting their word list for one of the categories. Require the students to defend their sorting of terms by asking about the common features of the categories and how each specific word meets these criteria.