

# “You Have to Think Real Hard When You Write”

Teachers at the Calverton School, Huntingtown, Maryland, have developed their own K-12 program for teaching thinking through writing in the content areas.

How many of us have assigned writing topics such as these?

- Write a report about an animal.
- Compare and contrast the characters of *Macbeth* and *King Lear*.
- Analyze the political situation leading up to World War I.

More important, have we taught our students how to think through and complete assignments such as these? Concerned with reports of poor thinking skills in students throughout the nation's schools, teachers at The Calverton School (Huntingtown, Maryland) have developed their own program, designed to teach students in grades K-12 to think more clearly and precisely through writing.

Thinking of themselves as a commu-

nity of learners, Calverton teachers are always searching for and sharing thinking/writing connections in the content areas. In math classes, for example, students use journals to describe their thinking processes as they solve problems. Students also observe each other as they articulate aloud their thoughts while working through a problem on the board. We call this “process observing”; it is an attempt to make “invisible thought visible.”

In science classes, teachers highlight the parallels between the scientific method and the writing process, and students learn how to explain their research as they move toward writing their hypothesis statements. Later, after they write up their studies, classmates respond to their reports,

making certain their peers' thinking is expressed clearly and logically.

A visiting teacher recently asked a student in a 4th grade classroom how thinking and writing are connected. The child looked at her with puzzled eyes and said, “You have to think real hard when you write. If you ever tried to write, you'd know.”

Even our kindergarten children use visual organizers to stimulate their thoughts before writing. The teacher gives the children individual Venn diagrams, then probes their thinking with questions such as “How are Indians and Pilgrims the same? ... How are they different? ... What about their clothes? ... Their methods of hunting?” Once, as the children completed the chart, a 5-year-old exclaimed, “I feel like all my thoughts are coming out on this paper. I won't have any more thoughts left.”

At Calverton we have come to recognize that thinking truly can be taught through writing in all subject areas at all grade levels. Teaching writing can be much more than assigning topics; it can be the catalyst for intellectual achievement for all students. □

*Author's note:* Through a grant from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, we have developed *The Calverton Workbook*. This collection of field-tested lesson plans is published by the Dodge Foundation and supported by the Maryland State Department of Education. For further information, please contact The Calverton School, 300 Calverton School Rd., Huntingtown, MD 20639.

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Photograph by Russ Van Westervelt



Getting feedback from peers transforms a typical class into a true writers' workshop at the Calverton School.

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