CHAPTER FOUR

ENGAGING STUDENTS IN YOUR LESSONS

Great teachers engage students so that they feel like part of the lesson. They make a habit of focused involvement in the classroom. While that may already sound easier said than done with the most resistant students, it’s doubly challenging since students need to be engaged in not just the class but in the work of class. That is, you could easily engage students in class by substituting frills for substance. The techniques reviewed in this chapter will consistently draw students into the work of class and keep them focused on learning.

TECHNIQUE 2: COLD CALL

When calling on students during class, it’s natural to think about managing who gets to participate and think, “How do I give everyone a chance?” “Whose turn is it?” or “Who will give me the answer I want?” However, a more important question to ask is, “How can I adapt my decisions about which students I call on to help all my students pay better attention?” The idea, of course, is that you want everybody to pay attention and develop a system that ensures that all students think it’s possible that they are about to be called on, regardless of whether they have raised their hand, and therefore think they must therefore prepare to answer. You need a system that ensures that instead of one student answering each of your questions, all of your students answer all of your questions in their minds, with you merely choosing one student to speak the answer out loud. Cold Call is that system.
KEY IDEA

COLD CALL

In order to make engaged participation the expectation, call on students regardless of whether they have raised their hands.

When you cold call, you call on students regardless of whether they have raised their hands. It's deceptively simple: you ask a question and then call the name of the student you want to answer it. If students see you frequently and reliably calling on classmates who don't have their hand raised, they will come to expect it and prepare for it. Calling on whoever you choose regardless of whether the student's hand is up also brings several other critical benefits to your classroom.

It's critical to be able to check what any student's level of mastery is at any time.

First, it allows you to check for understanding effectively and systematically. It's critical to be able to check what any student's level of mastery is at any time, regardless of whether he or she is offering to tell you. In fact, it's most important when he or she is not offering to tell you. Cold Call allows you to check on exactly the student you want to check in on to assess mastery, and the technique makes this process seem normal. When students are asked to be asked to participate or answer by their teacher, they react to it as if it were a normal event, and this allows you to get a focused, honest answer and therefore check for understanding reliably. This means that while using Cold Call to assist you in checking for understanding is critical, you'll also do best if you use it before you need to check for understanding. Your goal is to normalize it as a natural and normal part of your class, preferably a positive one.

Second, Cold Call increases speed in both the terms of your pacing (the illusion of speed) and the rate at which you can cover material (real speed). To understand the degree to which this is so, make an audiocassette of your lesson sometime. Use a stopwatch to track how much time you spend waiting (and encouraging and cajoling and asking) for volunteers. With Cold Call, you no longer have a delay after you ask, "Can anyone tell me what one cause of the World War I was?" You no longer have to scan the room and wait for hands. You no longer have to dangle hints to encourage participation or tell your students that you'd like to see more hands. Instead of saying, "I see the same four hands. I want to hear from more of you. Doesn't anyone else know this?" you simply say, "Tell me one cause of World War I, please, [slight pause here] Darren." With Cold Call, you'll move through material much faster, and the tedious, momentum-sapping mood when no one appears to want to speak up will disappear. These two results will increase your pacing: the illusion of speed you create in your classroom, which is a critical factor in how students engage (see Chapter Three for more on pacing).

Third, Cold Call allows you to distribute work more broadly around the room and signal to students not only that they are likely to be called on to participate, and therefore that they should engage in the work of the classroom, but that you want to know what they have to say. You care about their opinion. Many students have insight to add to your class but will not offer it unless you push or ask. They wonder if anyone really cares what they think. Or they think it's just as easy to keep their thoughts to themselves because Charlie's hand is always up anyway. Or they have a risky and potentially valuable thought on the tip of their tongue but aren't quite sure enough of it to say it aloud yet. Sometimes there will even be a glance—a moment when this student looks at you as if to say, "Should I?" or maybe even, "Just call on me so you've shared responsibility if this is totally off the mark."

Many people mistakenly perceive cold calling to be chastening and stressful. Once you've watched clips 7, 8, and 9 on the DVD, you'll know that it's not. When it's done right, it's an extremely powerful and positive way to reach out to kids who want to speak but are reluctant to be hand raisers. It says, "I want to hear what you say," even if Charlie's hand is up for the tenth time in twelve questions.
Fourth, Cold Call will help you distribute work around the room not only more fully (that is, beyond the hand raisers) but more authoritatively. One of its positive effects is that it establishes that the room belongs to you. Not only will this allow you to reach out to individual students, but it will have a strong cultural effect in that it will draw out engagement. If I am pretty sure that at some point in the next few hours or days you’re going to call on me to respond to our class work, I have a strong incentive to do that work in anticipation of this probability. You have made me accountable. This is an incredibly powerful force. People sometimes ask, “Which one of these techniques should I do first?” or “If I can teach my teachers to do only one, which will make the biggest difference?”

For the reasons I’ve described above, the single most powerful technique in this book is, I believe, Cold Call. But while making a habit of calling on students regardless of whose hand is up is one of the most critical techniques you can use to drive universal achievement, all cold calling is not equally effective. You can do it wrong, doing it right will ensure that it has the effect you intended. The success of the technique relies on the application of a few key principles:

- **Cold Call is predictable.** Cold calling is super-preventative medicine but less effective as a cure. It is a way to keep students’ attention from drifting, but is not as effective once they’re off task. It’s an engagement strategy, not a discipline strategy.

  *When a stimulus is predictable, it changes behavior by anticipation, not just by reaction. If you cold call for a few minutes of your class almost every day, students will come to expect it and change their behavior in advance.*

  *If you cold call for a few minutes of your class almost every day, students will come to expect it and change their behavior in advance; they will prepare to be called on by paying attention and readying themselves mentally. If your cold calls surprise students, they may learn a lesson (“Damn, I should have been ready!”), but this will be too late to help them. Unless they know there’ll surely be a next time very soon, they won’t have cause to change their behavior before you ask your question. They may also feel ambushed, caught off guard, and therefore more likely to be thinking about the past (“Why’d she do that?”) than about the future (“I’m going to be ready!”).*

If cold calls are predictable and students begin to anticipate them, the effect will be universal. The possibility (indeed, the likelihood) of a cold call affects all students, not just those who actually get called. You want students to react beforehand to the reliable possibility, not after the unpredictable fact. You want them always ready for the call that might come, not deciding after the fact to be ready for the next one. And you want all of them thinking that way.

Cold calling, then, should be part of the fabric of everyday life in your class. A little bit of it every day will have a stronger effect on classroom culture than a great deal of incremental but inconsistent or unexpected cold calling. At some point in most lessons, students should be asked to participate regardless of whether they have raised their hands.

Furthermore, since the purpose of Cold Call is to engage students before they tune out, many teachers find that the beginning of class is the ideal time for this technique. This allows them to set the tone for the rest of the day and engage students before they can become distracted. Cold Call is preventative medicine.

Take it daily to keep the symptoms from ever appearing.

- **Cold Call is systematic.** Teachers who use Cold Call signal that these calls are about their expectations, not about individuals. They take pains to make it clear that cold calls are universal (they come without fail to everyone) and impersonal (their tone, manner, and frequency emphasize that they are not an effort to single out any student or student). The less a cold call carries emotion, the less it seems tied to what a student has or has not done, to whether you are happy or disappointed with him, whether you think he did his homework.

  *The message should ideally be, “This is how we do business here.” The teachers interviewed for this book use Cold Call with an even, calm tone and spend a minimum amount of time appearing to him and how about which student to call on. Questions come at students quickly, clearly, and calmly, in clusters directed to multiple students, in multiple locations around the room, rather than focused on a single student or group of students in isolation. They should take in all types of students—not just those who might become off-task or who are sitting in the back. After all, a cold call is not a punishment; it is a student’s chance, as Colleen Driggs puts it, “to shine.”*

Some teachers emphasize the systematic nature of Cold Call by keeping visible charts tracking who’s been called on. What could send a cleaner message that everyone gets their share than a tracking system in which every name gets checked off in good time?

- **Cold Call is positive.** The purpose of Cold Call is to foster positive engagement in the work of your class, which ideally is rigorous work. One of its benefits is that students occasionally surprise themselves with what they are capable of. They do not volunteer because they do not think they can answer, but when they are forced to try, they are happily surprised to find themselves succeeding. In so doing they also benefit from knowing that you thought they could answer the question. You show your respect and faith in a student when you
ask her to join the conversation. But this works only if your questions propose to ask students to contribute to a real conversation rather than to catch them out and chasten them. This is the aspect of Cold Call that teachers are most likely to get wrong. There’s part of many of us that wants to use it as a “gotcha”—to call on a student when we know he was tuned out to show him that fact or prove some sort of a lesson to him (“What did I just say, John?” or “Isn’t that right, John?”). But this rarely works since causing a student to publicly criticize on purpose and with no potential benefit at stake is more likely to make him ask questions about you (“Why’s she always picking on me?”) than about himself.

A positive cold call is the opposite of a gotcha in two ways. First, it is substantive. “What did I just say?” is not a substantive question. It’s a gotcha, designed to “teach a lesson” that in fact it rarely teaches. “Do you think Lincoln declared war on the South primarily to eradicate slavery?” is a real question. “What is the subject in this sentence?” is a real question. You might ask a peer such a question in the faculty room, and this shows that you respect the person of whom you are asking the question. Second, the goal is for the student to get the answer right, not learn a lesson by getting it wrong. You want your students to succeed, to feel good and maybe even a little surprised by that success, even while they are challenged and stretched by the healthy tension of Cold Call. Remember that Cold Call is an engagement technique, not a disciplinary technique. It keeps students on task and mentally engaged. Once a student is off task, the Cold Call opportunity has passed. Then you should use a behavioral technique.

You can ensure a positive cold call by asking questions that pertain to the lesson and suggest you are making a genuine invitation to a student to participate in the conversation. Use Cold Call in an upbeat and positive tone, suggesting that you couldn’t imagine a world in which a student would not want to participate.

One final aspect of Cold Call that leads to a positive tone occasionally eludes some teachers when they aren’t prepared: the question and what an answer could look like should be clear. Every teacher has had the experience of asking a student a question that in retrospect wasn’t clear, where even a well-informed and engaged student wouldn’t know what to say. It’s doubly important to avoid this kind of question when cold calling, and many teachers address this challenge by planning their exact questions in advance and word for word as part of their lesson planning process.

- **Cold Call is scaffolded.** This technique is especially effective when you start with simple questions and progress to harder ones, drawing students in, engaging them on terms that emphasize what they already know, and reinforcing basic knowledge before pushing for greater rigor and challenge. This will often require “unbundling,” or breaking a single larger question up into a series of smaller questions.

Consider this sequence from the classroom of Darryl Williams as he teaches his third graders to identify the complete sentences from among a list of several choices:

- Williams: Read the next choice for me, please, Kyrese.
- Kyrese: [reading from the worksheet] “Have you seen a pumpkin seed?”
- Williams: Do we have a subject, Japhante?
- Japhante: Yes.
- Williams: What’s the subject?
- Japhante: “You.”
- Williams: “You.” Excellent. Do we have a predicate, Eric?
- Eric: Yes.
- Williams: What’s the predicate?
- Eric: “Seen.”
- Williams: “Seen.” Excellent. Is it a complete thought, Rayshawn?
- Rayshawn: Yes.
- Williams: Is that our complete sentence?
- Rayshawn: Yes.
- Williams: So we just keep going? What do we need to do, Shakaye?
- Shakaye: We need to look at the other two [answer choices] because that might sound right but one of the other two might sound right too.

The sequence involves calling on five students in rapid succession and follows a careful progression of increasing difficulty. The first question merely asks a student to read what’s in front of him. The difficulty level is low. Williams is
scaffolding: anyone can get it right. The next question ("Is there a subject?") is an incredibly simple yes-no question designed for the student of whom it is asked to get it right. When he does, Williams comes back with the more difficult question ("What is the subject?"); but that question now comes on the heels of the student's previous success and after Williams has engaged him in the process of thinking about sentence structure. After asking another student a similar sequence, he goes on to harder questions about whether the sentence is complete and what strategy students should take next in answering the question. By breaking the basic question, "Is it a complete sentence?" into smaller parts and starting with simple questions, Williams successfully engages students and ensures their readiness when he asks more difficult questions. By passing the question out to five students instead of one, he also ensures fuller participation and the expectation that participation is a predictable and systematic event.

A more subtle method of scaffolding is to allow students to begin answering cold calls about work that they have already done and have the answers in front of them. This again begins the sequence with something they are likely to get right. Darryl Williams began his sequence of Cold Call above with a request to Kyrese to "read the next [answer] choice for me." This engages the student at the outset at a level where he is almost sure to succeed: he merely has to read what's in front of him. Furthermore, a cold call that asks a student, "Please tell us your answer to the first problem, Minigros," employs scaffolding because Minigros has done the work and has an answer in front of her. She begins by merely reporting back on her work. Of course, a sequence that begins with such simple questions would ideally progress to more rigorous follow-up questions that did ask Minigros or Kyrese to think on their feet. One of the misperceptions some teachers have about this technique is that it is only a way to ask simple questions. But its questions should be as rigorous as you can make them—something students will come to take pride in as they see themselves able to handle demanding material on the spur of the moment. Starting simple doesn’t mean ending that way, but it does tend to engage and motivate kids and cause students to be inspired by the building level of rigor and challenge.

Using Cold Call to follow up on previous comments in class underscores how much you value students' participation and insight. It also emphasizes that your students’ engagement in what their peers say is as important as their engagement in what you say. There are three varieties to consider:

- **Follow-on to another student's comment.** This reinforces the importance of listening to peers as well as teacher: "James says the setting is a dark summer night. Does that tell us everything we need to know about the setting, Susan?" or "What does exploit mean, Stephen? Good and who gets exploited in Macbeth, Markkeshia?"

- **Follow-on to a student's own earlier comment.** This signals that once the student has spoken, she's not done: "But, Yolanda, you said earlier that we always multiplied length and width to find area. Why didn't we do that here?"

Beyond these principles, there are several elements champion teachers apply, vary, and adapt to maximize the benefit of Cold Call in a variety of settings. These are some key variations on the Cold Call theme:

- **Hands Up/Hands Down.** You can use Cold Call and continue allowing students to raise their hands if they wish, or you can instruct your students to keep their hands down. Both versions emphasize different aspects of the technique. Taking hands allows you to continue encouraging and rewarding students who ask to participate, even if you sometimes call on those who don't have their hands raised. You merely move between taking hands and cold calling at your discretion. This continues providing incentives to students to raise their hands while also allowing you to add sophistication to your scaffolding. When you're allowing hands during your cold calling, you can, say, cold call students for the first three questions in a sequence and then save the latter two for more rigorous follow-up. That's because it may not always be obvious to students whether the classmate who got called on had her hand up or was cold called. Taking hands also gives you an important data point. Even if you ignore it, it tells you who thinks they know well enough to volunteer. Thus, if you want to try to call on students whose mastery is steady, you have a clearer idea of who to try.

You can also decide to tell students to put their hands down, that you're not taking hands, and then proceed to cold call whenever you wish. This sends a more forceful message about your firm control of the classroom, and it makes your cold calling more explicit, predictable, and transparent ("I'm cold calling now"). It also lends to making the pacing of your cold calling, and thus your lesson, even easier by because you don't spend time navigating hands. Finally, hands down can be more effective for checking for understanding in two key ways. First, it
reduces the likelihood of students’ calling out answers in eagerness. While truly a sin of enthusiasm, calling out is corrosive to your classroom environment and specifically to your ability to steer questions to the students who need to work or those you need to assess. Second, because students who do want to answer are rendered less visible (they don’t have their hands up), your decision to target your checking for understanding of more reticent students is less patently visible and therefore seems a bit more systematic.

A last caveat is that most champion teachers appear to use both hands up and hands down as a matter of habit, with their choice determined by the situation. One possible reason for this is that using only hands up is not as forceful and energetic and using only hands down is a disincentive to hand raising over the long run. With enough time, it risks convincing students not to bother raising their hands at all, since doing so is never rewarded. In that case a teacher had better really like Cold Call because she’ll have few hands offered and few alternatives.

- **Timing the Name.** Cold Call can vary in terms of when you say the name of the student you’re calling on. The most common and often the most effective approach is to ask the question, pause, and then name a student, as in, “What’s 3 times 9? [pause]. James?” Using this sequence—“Question. Pause. Name.”—ensures that every student hears the question and begins preparing an answer during the pause that you’ve provided.

In some cases, calling a student’s name first can be beneficial. Often it can prepare a student to attend and increases the likelihood of success. This can be especially effective with students who may not have been called on before, students who have language processing difficulties, or students whose knowledge of English is still developing. In its most exaggerated form, this is known as a precall. In a precall, you tell a student that he or she can expect to be called on later in the lesson. It can happen privately (a teacher might say to a student before class, “Okay, Jamal, I’m going to ask you to go over the last problem from the homework today. Be ready!”) or publicly (“Paul’s going to give us the answer, Karen, but then I’ll be asking you why!”).

Another instance in which it is productive to state the name first is for clarity. For example, if you are coming out of a sequence of Call and Response (the following technique in this chapter), in which students have been calling out answers in unison, dropping in a name first and then asking the question makes it clear to students that you are no longer using Call and Response and thus avoids the awkward and counterproductive moment when some students attempt to answer in unison a question you had intended for an individual.

- **Mix with other engagement techniques.** Cold Call responds especially well to mixing with other engagement techniques. Call and Response is a perfect example: moving back and forth between whole group choral response and individual responses at a rapid energetic pace can drive up the level of positive energy dramatically. It can also allow you to ensure that students aren’t coasting during Call and Response. To take a simple example, you could review multiplication tables with your students by asking everyone to call out answers to a few problems:

  **Teacher:** Class, what’s 9 times 8?
  **Class:** 72!
  **Teacher:** Good, what’s 9 times 9?
  **Class:** 81!
  **Teacher:** Good, now Charlie, what’s 9 times 9?
  **Class:** 81!
  **Teacher:** Good, what’s 9 times 9, class?
  **Class:** 81!
  **Teacher:** Good and, Matilda, what was 9 times 7 again?
  **Matilda:** 63!

By toggling back and forth, you can cause individual students to review material or reinforce a successful answer by having the class repeat it.
*Pepper* (technique 24, later in this chapter) is another engagement technique that works well with *Cold Call*. In fact, it’s very similar to *Cold Call* in that it consists of rapid-fire questions that are often cold called. Finally, *Everybody Writes* (technique 25, later in this chapter) is a preparation for *Cold Call*, as it allows everyone to prethink the topic or questions you’ll be addressing; this increases the likely quality of responses.

Teachers often conclude that *Cold Call* questions must be simple. In fact, *Cold Call* questions can and should be rigorous and demanding. Part of their power lies in having students feel the pride of answering demanding questions at the spur of the moment. Following is a transcript of a session of *Cold Call* executed by Jesse Rector of North Star Academy’s Clinton Hill campus. Rector is an exceptional math teacher with exceptional results and a following within our organization for his craft. The rigor of his questioning shows why. See how many of the following *Cold Call* questions, asked of seventh graders in rapid-fire succession, you’d get correct.

Rector: I’m a square field with an area of 169 square feet. What’s the length of one of my sides, Janae?

Janae: 13.

Rector: 13 what? [Asking Janae for the units is an example of Format Matters, technique 4.]

Janae: 13 feet.

Rector: I’m a square field with a perimeter of 48 feet. What’s my area, Katrina?

Katrina: 144 square feet.

Rector: Excellent. I’m a regular octagon with a side that measures 8x plus 2. What is my perimeter, Tanisse?

Tanisse: 64x plus 16.

Rector: Excellent. I am an isosceles triangle with two angles that measure 3x each. What is the measure of my third angle, Anaya?

Anaya: 180 degrees minus 6x.

Rector: Excellent, 180 degrees minus 6x. The square root of 400 is what, Frank?

Frank: 100.

Rector: No, the square root of 400 isn’t 100. Help him out.

David: 20.

Rector: That’s right; it’s 20. Tell him why.

David: Because if you multiply 20 by 20, you’ll get 400.

**COLD CALL/PEPPER**

*See it in action: Clip 7*

A clip 7 on the DVD, Jesse Rector is modeling *Cold Call*. You’ll notice that his students are standing up; this makes the fact that he’s going to use *Cold Call* obvious to you, the language of the technique. *Predicable* means give them what they’ve just proven. He tries to keep up with his seventh graders’ pace in answering the questions. This is also a good example of Pepper: a significant quantity of questions (not just *Cold Call* questions, though in this case they are) asked rapidly around a given number of themes (geometry and square roots here), with little discussion in between.

You can read more about Pepper later in this chapter. After you’ve done so, rewatch Jesse’s video and see how he puts both techniques to work.

The first time you use *Cold Call*, your students may wonder what’s going on, and with some justification. They may have never been cold called before. They may not have been in a classroom where that kind of thing happened. They might not see the connection between *Cold Call* and their getting into college, say, or they might be inclined to see it as a negative rather than a positive situation. Thus, it’s a good idea to script some brief remarks—in essence, a rollout speech—to use the first time with *Cold Call*. Your brief remarks can explain what and why. This makes the exercise rational, systematic, predictable, and, with a little skill, inspiring.
what he did, and in doing, talk about it? Why would he talk about not being able to talk about it?

I was struck by two things: first, how lucky the students were to be in a classroom with a teacher who asked demanding and perceptive questions in full faith that they could answer them. Second, I was struck by the students' response, which was silence. They looked somewhat blankly at the teacher, and she, in the end, stepped in and gave them a very nice summary of her thinking as to the answer. It was a fine summary but not a successful discussion, and the result was a lower ratio: the teacher did the cognitive work.

Looking at the students as they struggled with the question, I was struck by the paradox of their earnest confusion. No students rolled their eyes; none looked longingly out the window and disengaged. They wanted to answer, some of them even craning forward as if to await some insight. And then they averred their eyes in hopes that the teacher wouldn't call on them. This was a watershed moment: the teacher asked exactly the kind of question that pushes students beyond their current understanding and knowledge of literature, the kind of question that exemplifies true college preparatory expectations, and she was rewarded with a great silence descending.

Is there any way around such a paradox? To answer, I have to consider what it would take for me to answer the teacher's question. The answer is that I would need a minute, even half a minute, to think and, more important, to write: to jot down my thoughts and wrestle them into words. With time to reflect and begin turning thoughts into words, I'd have the best chance of being ready to participate and, ideally, at some level of depth, because my ideas would be better and I would be more confident in them.

**KEY IDEA**

**EVERYBODY WRITES**

Set your students up for rigorous engagement by giving them the opportunity to reflect first in writing before discussing. As author Joan Didion says, "I write to know what I think."

Like Joan Didion, I often have to write to know what I think. In college, writing papers at the fringes of my understanding, I sometimes did not truly understand what my thesis was until I had written it. Only when the paper was done would my ideas have crystallized and coalesced in some organized form. In retrospect, my participation in discussions of literature would have been ten times better if they'd happened after I wrote the paper, a fact I recognized when one of the best professors I studied with required of his students a short written reflection as the entry ticket to each day's class. In that class, where everybody wrote first, the conversation started where it ended in other classes. Another of my best professors described a "notion" as something two steps shy of an idea. Like many other students, I spent a lot of time talking about notions in college, and I'd argue, it's in the writing that the ideas emerge.

Effective teachers also set their students up to hold rigorous discussions and reach rigorous conclusions by giving them the opportunity to reflect first in writing before discussing. This is the rationale behind *Everybody Writes*, a technique in which teachers ask all students to prepare for more ambitious thinking and discussion by reflecting in writing for a short interval.

In a broader sense, most class discussions are structured, unwittingly, around the false assumption that the first ideas to be generated or the first students to raise their hands will be the ones most conducive to a productive conversation: ask a question, call on a hand. But the first answer is not always the best answer. Some students require time to generate worthy ideas or to feel confident enough in their ideas to offer to share them. Ideas get better even for the students whose hands shoot right up when they benefit from a few moments of reflection.

There are at least six benefits to *Everybody Writes*:

1. It often allows you to select effective responses to begin your discussion since you can review your students' ideas in advance by circulating and reading over shoulders.
2. It allows you to cold call students simply and naturally since you know everyone is prepared with thoughts and you can merely ask, "What did you write about, Ariel?" to kick things off.
3. It allows you to give every student, not just those who can get their hands up fast, the chance to be part of the conversation.
4. Processing thoughts in writing refines them, a process that challenges students intellectually, engages them, and improves the quality of their ideas and their writing.
5. You set standards or steer students in a direction you think especially fruitful. For example, you could advise them to write a sentence defining the vocabulary word imperceptible and ask them to ensure that their sentence makes it clear that imperceptible is different from invisible. Or you could ask students to describe what the Capulets think of the Montagues in Romeo and Juliet and then push them to understand the intensity of the hatred by asking them to write their answer in the words a member of the family would use.

6. Students remember twice as much of what they are learning if they write it down.

With all these advantages to writing, it’s worth looking for every opportunity to have your students write—not just to improve their writing but to improve the quality of the thinking that informs discussions at key points in the lesson.

**SEE IT IN ACTION: CLIP 12**

**EVERYBODY WRITES**

Clip 12 is from the DVD, Art & Wonder of North Star Academy. Everybody writes: He begins the lesson by asking his class a deep and challenging question. "What are some of the characteristics of a quality that an individual must have to change history?" He is a very rich and important lesson to ask, but he also asks the very first student to have his hand up, would be without reflection. What would the quality be, he asks, and the subsequent discussion by, and how ready would student be to answer their arguments in evidence?

Worth, addressing this and asks all of his students to begin writing answers. He asks them to brainstorm two to three characteristics that an individual must have. He directs it as a vital and underscores the power of this technique. If you look at answers without asking everybody to write, you can really get students to think of any group. Write every group will affect the notes, everybody. Write as a whole. With that in mind, he tells the multiplicity of the amount of thinking students use and also to stress the important fact that there is nobody answer.

Notice the teacher’s level of preparation. He has given them space in their note packets to brainstorm. This reduces the transaction cost of...
of the two. Vegas moments have to be developed and implemented with care. Otherwise they can take students off task and do as much harm as good. Here are a couple of sound design principles:

- **Production values.** Performers vary their tone and pace, occasionally whispering for emphasis, later speaking in a booming voice, sometimes speaking very slowly, sometimes racing along. Mike Taubman of North Star Academy uses this when he reads and discusses a story with his students. During a discussion of the Pied Piper fable, for example, he asked students to infer the lesson. In Taubman’s hands, the drama of the story was clearly evident, even in his summary of the ending, which he used to help his class reflect on the lesson. His pace was quick and his voice loud, and he glossed the last moments of the tale: “He takes the children and hides them in a dark cave.” As Taubman neared the end, he slowed down and dropped his voice, delivering the last word, **forever,** in a slow, emphatic stage whisper that broke the single word into two: “for ever.” As he completed his dramatic summary, a moment of hushed silence ensued, and then almost every hand shot up into the air to explain the lesson. The simple production values he added to the retelling successfully drew his students in.

- **Like a faucet.** David Berkeley of Boston Preparatory Charter School jazzed up his study of direct objects by having students literally “oooh” and “ahhh” whenever one was mentioned. In setting up this moment of Vegas, Berkeley instructed his students, “It has to be like a faucet. You turn it on, then you turn it off. And when I say it’s off, it’s off.”

  Discussing the sentence, “Mom put the baby in the crib,” Berkeley’s Vegas might look like this:

  **Berkeley:** Here is our verb, **put,** and at the end comes a phrase, **in the crib.** What kind of phrase is it, Charles?

  **Charles:** It’s a prepositional phrase.

  **Berkeley:** And between the two, Shayna? What’s that?

  **Shayna:** It’s a direct object.

  **Class:** Oooh. Aaaah.

  **Berkeley:** That’s right. Shayna, a fabulous, brand-new direct object!

  **Class:** Oooh. Aaaah.

  **Berkeley:** And Steven Jones, tell Shayna what her direct object [pause here for oohs and ahhs] can receive!

  **Steven:** It can receive the action or result of the verb.

  **Berkeley:** [Making a faucet motion to signal that the ooh-ing and ahh-ing is done] Perfect. What action gets done to or received by the baby in this sentence, Letty?

  The final piece is critical. It’s engaging to play the game, but if the game went on, it would distract students from the work of class and interfere with Berkeley’s ability to teach because he’d get interrupted every time he said “direct object.” He needs to start a fun game he can control, not give birth to a monster that takes on a life of its own. He may come back to it off and on through the lesson but cannot lose control of it. Good Vegas starts, is fun, and then is done; it doesn’t keep cropping up when your back is turned, and it doesn’t start singing when it hasn’t been asked to. When that happens, you have to crack down quickly.

- **Same objective.** Vegas always has a specific learning objective and should have the same objective as the lesson or, at its most daring, review previously mastered but related content. Berkeley chose his Vegas to add some game-show-like tricks to his study of direct objects, but its object was to help his students focus on and recognize when direct objects appeared in sentences. It supported rather than distracted from his purpose.

- **Chorus line.** In Vegas, everyone in the room is singing the same song and doing the same steps at exactly the same time. In classrooms, everyone has to know the rules. If it’s a song, everyone has to know the words and the steps. If it’s a multiplication showdown, students have to know when to stand, how to play, what to do if they lose, and so on, and everyone has to follow those rules. If you allow students to sing any song they want or make up a cheer on the spot, you are asking for trouble.

- **On point.** In any group activity, participants can subtly express their disdain for the activity and its leader by participating corrosively: singing off-key, or too loud, or overdoing the dance, or testing a low gesture. Good Vegas has to be vigilantly managed so that as soon as it is off-point, it is immediately corrected and standards of excellence are reinforced. For tips on how to do that, you’ll want to read up on behavior management techniques like What to Do (technique 37), Do It Again (technique 39), Positive Framing (technique 43), 100 Percent (technique 36), and Strong Voice (technique 38).
1. Many of the teachers I work with think that of all the techniques in this book, Cold Call is the one with the greatest and fastest capacity to shift the culture of your classroom. Why do you think they feel so strongly about it?

2. Take a lesson plan for a class you’re getting ready to teach, and mark it up by identifying three places where it would be beneficial to use Cold Call. Script your questions, and write them into your lesson plan. Make some notes about which students you’ll cold call.

3. Take that same lesson plan, and mark it up to add two short sessions of Call and Response. Again, script your questions. Try to ask questions at all five levels, and note the response you’ll use.

4. Mark up your lesson one more time, this time identifying a place where all of your students will write answers to your question before discussion. Be sure to consider where they will write and what the expectations will be. (Will you collect their work? Are complete sentences required?)

5. Make a short list of what you want your students to do or think about when you use Wait Time. Write yourself two or three five-second scripts that you can practice and use while teaching to reinforce effective academic behaviors and discipline yourself to wait.
SEE IT IN ACTION: CLIP 8

COLD CALL

In clip 8 on the DVD, Colleen Joyce of Rochester Prep is modeling her rollcall speech for Cold Call. Many teachers assume cold calls have to be stressful for students, that they'll be forced to participate when they don't want to. But, your expectations of students influence them. She offers a self-fueling prophecy. As you watch Colleen, make a list of the things she says that you would borrow or adapt if you were a rollcall teacher to explain cold calling to your students (read a poem, tie it to understanding what a great thing it is).

A rollcall speech could be useful for any number of purposes and skills, not just Cold Call. A few that jump to my mind are Right & Right (Technique 2), No Opt Out (Technique 1), Control the Game (Chapter Ten), and Do It Again (Technique 3).

In this sequence Colleen quickly gets her students to act during Cold Call. She pairs up the students, introduces the activity in a positive way so chances to blow off.

Elm City College Prep's Summer Payne introduces Cold Call to her kindergarteners by renaming it. To a cheery little tune, she sings: "Individual turns! Listen for your name!" And her kids, like Colleen's, love Cold Call. If you present it positively, yours will too.

SEE IT IN ACTION: CLIP 9

COLD CALL AND VOCABULARY

In clip 9 on the DVD, Beth Voll of North Star Academy demonstrates exemplary teaching of Cold Call and Vocabulary (discussed in Chapter Eleven).

Voll's class is an eleventh- and twelfth-grade Advanced Placement English class with a small class size. Notice how her use of Cold Call stress to low-ons. She regularly gives students a response to a

give examples of a previous student's answer. This builds a level of strong accountability into a mature peer-to-peer culture that's especially useful with older students. It also boosts the enjoyment of the lesson and keeps the pacing strong.

In terms of Vocabulary, notice how many times students use and apply some version of the word exploit and use it in slightly different forms ("exploit", "exploits", and "exploited") in settings where both people (Macbeth) and abstract concepts (Dunson's trust) are exploited. If the goal of vocabulary instruction is for students to have a deep meaning of the world and the ability to apply it correctly in multiple settings (in terms of something just meaning). Very few students have leaned forward toward that goal in a very short space of time.

TECHNIQUES:

CALL AND RESPONSE

The basic element of Call and Response is that you ask a question and the whole class calls out the answer in unison. It sounds simple, but when it is effectively used in all its variations, Call and Response can be an exceptional tool not only to engage students but to help them achieve.

Effective Call and Response can be accomplish three primary goals:

- Academic review and reinforcement. Having students respond as a group ensures that everyone gets to give the answer. Everyone views the pitch, and the number of at bats multiplies by twenty-five to thirty. When an individual student gives a strong answer, asking the rest of the class to repeat that answer is also an effective way to reinforce it. The whole class repeats the insight and reinforces for the original student how important what he or she said was.

- High-energy fun. Call and Response is energetic, active, and spirited. It feels lively, like being part of a cheering crowd or an exercise class. Generally participants like cheering in crowds and going to exercise classes because they find them energizing. Call and Response can make your class similarly invigorating and make students want to be there.
Students don't see Call and Response as behavioral reinforcement, but it makes crisp, active, timely compliance a habit, committing it to muscle memory.

- Behavioral reinforcement. There's an outstanding hidden benefit to Call and Response: students respond to a prompt as a group, exactly on cue, over and over again. And it makes this kind of on-cue compliance public. Everyone sees everyone else doing it. You ask, they do, over and over again. Students don't see Call and Response as behavioral reinforcement, but it makes crisp, active, timely compliance a habit, committing it to muscle memory. This reinforces the teacher's authority and command.

Although Call and Response is a fairly straightforward technique, it's easy to underestimate it, focusing on its most simplistic forms: asking students to repeat proverbs and chants, for example. In fact, there are five types or levels of Call and Response sequence, listed next roughly in order of intellectual rigor, from least to greatest:

1. Repeat: In these sequences, students repeat what their teacher has said or complete a familiar phrase that he or she starts. The topic of the phrase can be behavioral (“Who are we??!? [South Side Prep!] What are we here to do? [To learn and achieve!]”) or academic (“When we see a zero, the pattern . . . stops and begins again! The pattern . . . stops and begins again!”).

2. Report: Students who have already completed problems or questions on their own are asked to report their answers back (“On three, tell me your answer to problem number three”). This version allows you to more energetically reinforce academic work once it's been completed.

3. Reinforce: You reinforce new information or a strong answer by asking the class to repeat it: “Can anyone tell me what part of this part of the expression is called? Yes, Trayvon, that's the exponent. Class, what's this part of the expression called?” Everyone has an additional active interaction with critical new content, and when a student provides the information, Call and Response reinforces the importance of the answer (“My answer was so important my teacher asked the whole class to repeat it!”).

4. Review: This asks students to review answers or information from earlier in the class or unit: “Who was the first person Theseus met on the road to Athens, class? Who was the second person? And now who’s the third?” or “What vocabulary word did we say meant not having enough of something?”

5. Solve: This is the most challenging to do well and the most rigorous. The teacher asks students to solve a problem and call out the answer in unison: “If the length is ten inches and the width is twelve inches, the area of our rectangle must be how many square inches, class?” The challenge is that when having a group of people solve a problem in real time and call out the answer, there must be a single clear answer and a strong likelihood that all students will know how to solve it. With those caveats in mind, this type of Call and Response call be highly rigorous, and students often surprise themselves at their ability to solve problems in real time.

To be effective in any form, Call and Response should be universal, that is, all students should respond. To ensure that this is the case, plan to use a specific signal (“Class!” “Everybody!” “One, Two . . .” or even a nonverbal signal such as a finger point) to indicate your desire to have students respond in unison. Each a signal, called an in-cue, makes it clear when you are asking students to call out as a group and when you are asking students to wait until you’ve identified a student to answer. This is critically important. Every student should know whether a question you’ve asked is:

- Rhetorical: “Is 42 divided by 7 going to be 5?”
- About to be directed to a single child: “42 divided by 7 is what, Shane?”
- Awaiting a volunteer: “Who can tell me what 42 divided by 7 is?”
- Asked in anticipation of full class call and response: “Class, 42 divided by 7 is . . . “

If students don’t know how to quickly and reliably differentiate your expectations in these four cases, you will lose your ability to intentionally use any of these techniques at your sole discretion. Instead, it will fall to each member of the class to infer which of the above he or she thinks is (or would like have) applicable at any time. If that happens, you lose your ability to choose between checking for understanding with specific individual students using Cold Call, engaging all students, reinforcing an eager hand raiser, choosing just the student you think will be insightful, ensuring wait time for reflection before you take an answer, or any of a dozen other tricks of good teaching. In short, you need to have students know what kind of answer you expect. Furthermore, who doesn’t
shoulder at the thought of being at a party speaking loudly over music when all of a sudden the music goes silent and they are left shouting their thoughts to a suddenly quiet room? For students to participate enthusiastically in Call and Response, they must confidently and clearly know when to sing out because everyone will be singing out and know as well they need not fear they will be the only one singing. Thus, for Call and Response to succeed, you must use a reliable and consistent signal and make 100 percent participation the rule. A good in-cue is the key to achieving this so it's worth spending a little more time on the topic.

There are five specific kinds of in-cues that champion teachers use.

The first kind of in-cue is count-based, for example, "Ready, set..." "One, two..." or "One, two, ready, you..." These have the advantage of giving students time to get ready to answer and, in classrooms where Call and Response is especially energetic, to breathe in and prepare to sing out in their loudest voice. They also help you ensure that students answer in unison and exactly on cue so these prompts can be particularly effective in building a strong, positive culture. Count-based cues are highly effective in that they can be cut short if students are not fully attentive or on-task in the lead-up to the Call and Response. In other words, a count of, "One two, ready, you!!" can occasionally be cut off by the teacher ("One two... no I don't have everyone") to show students they're not ready while maintaining the anticipation of the fun that's to come. Finally, you can speed them up or slow them down as necessary to set the pace you desire.

Effective teachers may start with a longer count-based cue and gradually truncate it as students become familiar with it to save time. "One, two, ready, you!!" may become simply "One, two!!" The resulting saved second of class time speeds up the pace of instruction and allocates more time to teaching. That may sound trivial, but an in-cue that's a second shorter, repeated ten times a day over two hundred days, buys you half an hour of instructional time. In some classrooms, even this shorter version is sometimes replaced by a nonverbal cue to expedite it.

A second form of in-cue is the group prompt. Two common examples are, "Everybody!!" and "Class!!" as in, "What's the name of the answer to an addition problem, everybody??" Or, "Class, what's the greatest common factor of 10 and 16?" Using a collective term for the whole class helps foster group identity, and these prompts remind students of your expectation. Saying the word everybody reminds students that you expect universal participation, and should you fail to get it, allows you to repeat the sequence by merely repeating the word with slightly greater emphasis: "everybody." Champion teachers are often strategic about whether they put the prompt before the question or after. Saying, "What's the name of the answer to an addition problem, everybody??" gives students time to hear and process the question before they answer, especially if there's a slight pause between question and prompt. This carries a slightly different emphasis from, "Everybody, what's the name of the answer to an addition problem??" The former starts with the content, the latter with the expectation about who's going to answer.

A third kind of in-cue is a nonverbal gesture: a point, a hand dropped from shoulder height, a looping motion with the finger. These have the advantage of speed and don't require you to interrupt the flow of the lesson. If used consistently, they can be powerful. They can also be challenging in that the tone has to be just right or they can seem schoolmarmish. (Imagine how a teacher snapping when she wants her class to answer aloud could sound wrong; at the same time, I have seen teachers use this method with great success.) It's also easy to slip on consistency with nonverbal signals, a tendency that can give rise to long-term challenges. Nevertheless, this is the choice of many top teachers.

A fourth kind of in-cue employs a shift in tone and volume. The teacher increases volume in the last few words of a sentence and inflects his or her tone to imply a question; students recognize this as a prompt and respond crisply. This method is by far the trickiest in-cue and the most prone to error. It's most often one that teachers begin using after mastering the simpler methods over time. It has the advantage of being seamless, fast, and natural, but you probably shouldn't use this as you are developing this skill. Furthermore, if you rely on it, you should expect a certain number of missteps to occur. In that case, you should have an in-cue of one of the above types ready as a backup to use to respond if students miss a cue.

The last kind of in-cue is specialized: it indicates a specific response to students. In many classrooms that use these, there are multiple such cues, each indicating a different response. For example, Bob Zimmerle teaches his students a song listing the multiples of all of the numbers up to 12. After he has taught them these songs, he can prompt them with specialized cues. If he says, for example, "Sevens on two, One, two... " his students will respond by writing, "7, 14, 21, 28, 35, 42... " to the tune of a popular song. If he says, "Eights on two, One, two... " his students will respond with a different song and different numbers. Or, in a different example, you might teach your students to always respond to the in-cue, "Why are we here??" with the response, "To learn! To achieve!" Once the students learned that connection, you would no longer have to offer a reminder that you were expecting a response ("Ready, everyone??"). You would suddenly say, "Why are we here??" and your students would be chanting. This form of in-cue can be especially fun for teachers and students. There's something exciting about a teacher asking a seemingly innocuous question, and then suddenly the whole class is singing and chanting in unison.
Teachers have developed a wide variety of wrinkles that add value to Call and Response and make it useful in particular situations. Here are three especially effective ways to adapt and apply this technique:

- Combine and intersperse it with Cold Call. Varying group and individual accountability to answer increases students' level of attention and taps into the tension of the unexpected, making class more exciting for students.

- Jazz up your Call and Response by asking subgroups within the class to respond in unison to some cues. For example, ask the boys a Call and Response question and then the girls, the left side of the room and then the right, the front and then the back. This unexpected twist makes the technique more interesting and unexpected for students, factors that are likely to engage them more fully in class.

- Add a physical gesture: students cross their fingers in a mock addition sign as they call out the name for the answer to an addition problem. "The product!" They point their fingers at the sky and chant, "On the roof!" when asked where the numbers they carry go in an addition problem. By sometimes including a physical gesture, teachers gain two advantages: they give students a way to be physically active in class, which keeps them alert and moving and gives them something positive to do, not just sit. For students who struggle to sit still, this is a great relief. By adding a manual cue, especially one that's not random but where the gesture reflects the correct answer (the crossed fingers), the teacher is better able to watch for students who are hiding while others participate and increases his ability to assess students' level of understanding.

**KEY IDEA**

**CALL AND RESPONSE**

Use group choral response—you ask, they answer in unison—to build a culture of energetic, positive engagement.

Effectively implemented, Call and Response can engage all students at once in an exciting, energetic, and motivating activity that energizes the class. It is extremely useful as part of a larger engagement strategy, and it has positive ancillary behavioral effects. It builds the habit of compliance in a subtle but powerful way. When they participate in Call and Response, students make a habit of doing what the teacher has asked, over and over again, without even realizing they are practicing that skill. However, Call and Response has risks and downsides that every teacher should be aware of:

- *It can allow freeloading.* If I don't know the answer or don't want to participate, I can move my lips and fake it. If you're concerned about freeloading, consider adding a gesture to the response, which gives both an auditory and a visual way to test for participation.

- *It does not provide effective checking for understanding.* In the excitement of many students answering correctly, students who are lost can easily hide, mouthing answers or watching their peers and joining in for second and third repetitions.

- *It reinforces the behavioral culture in your classroom only if it's crisp.* If students sense that they can use their responses to test your expectations by dragging out their answers, answering in a silly or loud manner, or answering out of sync, they will. Therefore, you must make sharpening up a priority. When the response to your call is any of those, you should energetically and positively correct with something like, "I like your energy, but I need to hear you respond right on cue. Let's try that again."

**TECHNIQUE 24**

**PEPPER**

For decades baseball players have warmed up for games and practices by playing a game called Pepper. In a group of four or five players, one holds a bat, and the rest stand in a ring in front of the batter, a few yards away, gloves at the ready. One player tosses the ball to the batter. Without stopping to catch it, the batter taps it back toward the group using the bat; the nearest player fields it and, again without stopping, tosses it back to the batter, who hits the toss back to another player. The game is fast, providing dozens of opportunities to practice fielding and hitting skills in a short period of time and in a fast-paced and energetic environment. Unlike formal practice, it doesn't propose to teach new skills or game strategy; it's a reinforcement of skills.
Pepper, the teaching technique by the same name, also uses fast-paced, group-oriented activities to review familiar information and foundational skills. A teacher tosses questions to a group of students quickly, and they answer back. The teacher usually does not slow down to engage or discuss an answer; if it's right, she simply asks another student a new question. If it's wrong, she asks the same question of another student, though sometimes the same student, always keeping moving. That's Pepper: a fast-paced, unpredictable (in real Pepper, you never know who's going to get the ball) review of fundamentals with lots of chances for participation in rapid succession.

Pepper is a great warm-up activity. Many teachers include it as part of daily oral drill at the outset of class, but it is also effective as an upbeat interlude to bring energy to the class, or as an energetic part of a review, perhaps wrapping up to go over material one more time before an assessment. It's perfect for filling in a stray ten minutes inside or outside the classroom with productive, engaging fun.

Since one challenge of Pepper is that it's easily confused with Cold Call, looking at some of the ways Pepper is different is a good way to get to the next level of specificity about the technique.

First, although Pepper often involves Cold Call, it doesn't have to. With Pepper, you can take hands if you prefer, calling on volunteers quickly and energetically, either from the outset or after a brief period of Cold Call to engage students. Most typically I see it happen in the latter way: the game starts out with Cold Call, but as students get engaged and enthused, they begin raising their hands, often eagerly, at which point, the teacher makes a transition into a version of Pepper that involves almost all students in volunteering.

Second, Pepper almost always asks quick fundamental questions, often as review. This is different from Cold Call, which can involve questions at any level or type. You'd be fine cold calling a student to discuss the primary causes of the Civil War but less likely to cover that material in a game of Pepper. Since Pepper is often a means for review, teachers move from unit to unit within the game. They'll ask questions about properties of quadrilaterals for two or three minutes and then move on to a series of questions about coordinate geometry. And they often do this even if the topics are not entirely related. In a social studies class, you could spend a few minutes on map skills followed by a few minutes on the original colonies.

Third, Pepper is a game. (Baseball players love their version of Pepper because it's a break from practice.) Thus, classroom Pepper uses indicators that underscore for your class that they are playing a game. In some cases, this might mean that you ask all students to stand up, or you might call on students in a unique way—something you might not do outside the game. In Pepper, time is compressed, and the game has a clear end and beginning. Here are several variations that teachers use that emphasize the fun aspects of the technique:

- **Pick sticks:** A trademark of Pepper is its unpredictability: where each question goes, nobody knows. Many teachers take this a step further and use devices to engineer the randomization, most frequently using popsicle sticks labeled with each student's name (and why they are called pick sticks) pulled at random out of a can, for example, but also including other variations, such as random number generation on a laptop. In such a system, teachers are in most cases relying on apparent random assignment of participation. Whether or not students recognize it, a teacher pulling pick sticks retains the ability to steer questions as desired. One teacher's advice explains what I mean: “Remember, only you know whose name is really on the popsicle stick!” You can pick John’s stick but call out Susan’s name. Picking a stick has the disadvantage of taking as much time as asking a question: it slows you down by half.

**SEE IT IN ACTION: CLIP 10**

**PEPPER AND EVERY MINUTE MATTERS**

In Clip 10 on the DVD, Annette Hillef of North Star Academy demonstrates Pepper. The most compelling aspect of the scene is not just Annette’s use of rapid-fire questions in fast succession, as Pepper dictates, but the way she makes efficient, more precisely urgent use of time in her classroom. Every minute matters (see Chapter 8 right on the technique by the same name). Given the minute when a student does her work at the board can be key.

- **Head-to-head:** A teacher using head-to-head begins by having two students stand up to answer a question. The student who gets the correct answer first remains standing to compete against a new challenger. What this technique gives up in predictability, it makes up for in the benefits of a friendly competition. In using this part of the technique, emphasize the same aspects of...
regular Pepper: fast pace, short and simple questions on fundamentals, and limited engagement with wrong answers. Competition makes it easy to get too involved in discussing and even serotonin right from wrong (“But I said that!). The best teachers just keep moving and don’t engage such distractions. Otherwise there’s too much talking about that game and not enough playing it.

- Sit down. This variation, usually done at the beginning of class, starts with all students standing and the teacher peppered them with the trademark quick questions. Students “earn their seats” (get to sit down) by answering correctly. Again the teacher does not engage answers except to signal with a gesture that a student may be seated. This game can be played in reverse (stand up) to determine the ligning-up order for lunch, say.

Since Pepper is about speed, you’ll rarely see teachers stopping to discuss and analyze wrong answers. They may ask other students to correct them, but the goal is almost always to keep the pace moving.

TECHNIQUE 25
WAIT TIME

Another technique to tap into the power of ideas and students that aren’t the first to emerge when you ask a question is Wait Time—delaying a few strategic seconds after you finish asking a question and before you ask a student to begin answering it. Mary Budd Rowe, a professor of education at the University of Florida until her death in 1995, pioneered research into wait time and showed that the typical teacher allows about a second of it after a question and allows for more than one and half seconds before taking an answer.

The challenges and limitations posed by such a habit are significant. The answers you can expect to get after less than a second’s reflection are unlikely to be the richest, the most reflective, or the most developed your students can generate. And taking answers after just a second systematically encourages students to raise their hand with the first answer—rather than the best one—they can think of if they want to reasonably hope to participate. Finally, this lack of wait time makes it more likely that you will waste time processing a poor answer before you get to discuss a good one. Ironically, waiting and ensuring that you spend your time on higher-quality initial answers may actually save you time.

Minds work fast, and the amount of additional time necessary to improve the quality of answers may be small. Some research has shown that when students are given just three to five seconds of wait time after a question, several key things are likely to happen:

- The length and correctness of student responses are likely to increase.
- The number of failures to respond (those who say, “I don’t know”) is likely to decrease.
- The number of students who volunteer to answer is likely to increase.
- The use of evidence in answers is likely to increase.

But waiting is not quite as simple as merely pausing or counting to three in your mind. First, it is hard to discipline yourself to allow time to pass after a question, and doing nothing does not necessarily help you to do that well. Second, and more important, it is not necessarily apparent to students how they should respond to your waiting; especially when they have not spent significant time in schools that expect or train for rigorous reflection or that can even sustain a behavioral environment where reflection, rather than goofing off, is likely to fill the space between question and answer.

While you are waiting and accentuating your students to become scholars and habituate the behaviors that yield success, you should consider enhancing your use of Wait Time by narrating it. Teachers who use this Narrated Wait Time make the technique more intentional and productive—that is, more likely to result in the possible positive outcomes that can occur when Wait Time is used. They provide guidance to their students about what they should be doing with their three seconds to be most productive. They tactily explain why they’re waiting and tell them—for example:

1. “I’m waiting for more hands.”
2. “I’d like to see at least fifteen hands before we hear an answer.”
3. “I’m waiting for someone who can connect this scene to another play, ideally Macbeth.”
4. "I'm going to give everyone a loss of time because this question is tricky. Your first answer may not be the best."
5. "I'm seeing people thinking deeply and jotting down thoughts. I'll give everyone a few more seconds to do that."
6. "I'm seeing people going back to the chapter to see if they can find the scene. That seems like a great idea."
7. "I'm looking for someone who's pointing to the place in the passage where you can find the answer."
8. "I'll start taking answers in twenty seconds."
9. "I'm starting to see more hands now. Four, five, seven. Great. People are really starting to get comfortable taking a risk here."

Notice the different emphasis of this narrated sequence. The first merely suggests that the teacher would like to see more students participate. The second sets a group goal for participation and, through use of see, makes answering the question a collective project. The third gives the students something specific and useful to reflect on: how this scene is connected to something else they have read. In other words, what would an especially useful answer look like? The fourth pushes students to double-check themselves and develop at least one second possibility. The fifth narrows practical forms of productive activity by students in the class (jotting down thoughts) and suggests to other students that they try this as well. Again, it stresses how to be productive during the wait time. The sixth chooses a similarly productive activity to engage in during wait time to generate and research ideas. This one increases the likelihood that the teacher will receive an evidence-based answer from her students. The seventh has a similar emphasis but asks students if they have done the productive work in the interim by pointing to the answer. It also increases the reliability with which the teacher waits to give students an extended answer period (it could be longer if she wishes) by establishing a clear end point. The ninth narrows positive behavior to normalize it (to make it seem typical) and encourages the risk of trying when you aren't sure of the answer.

The point is that top teachers use their narration of the interim period during their wait time to incent and reinforce the specific behaviors that will be most productive to their students during that time. They are teaching even while they are waiting.

I recently watched a rigorous tenth-grade reading lesson at the highly successful Boston Collegiate High School. The teacher led her students through a discussion of Tim O'Brien's narratively complex short story, "The Man I Killed," from his book The Things They Carried. In the story, the narrator (perhaps O'Brien, perhaps not) describes in the first person his own inability to talk to others about killing an enemy combatant during the Vietnam War. In one of the culminating moments of the lesson, the teacher asked students an astute and demanding question: "Why would someone write a story about not being able to talk about