Empower students to become critical thinkers
WEBINAR SERIES

October 3, 2018
Housekeeping

● 50 minute presentation
● Chat/question panel
● Questions at the end
● Recording
Who are we?

- A pioneer in K-8 education since 2000
- Provide core and supplemental programs for ELA, Science, and Math
- Provide teachers with tools that help them understand and respond to the needs of all their students
- Serve more than three million students in all 50 states
Your presenters

Larry Berger, CEO

Deb Sabin, Chief Academic Officer
Middle school matters

- They are doing important developmental work
- They are more independent
- They want to express their opinions
- They need additional challenge
- They are very invested in peers
Brain at work for middle schoolers

Laying down the tracks of the pre-frontal cortex - "I think therefore I am"

"cognitive workspace."

— Maryanne Wolf
What is critical thinking?
How do we know critical thinking is happening?
Critical thinking process

1. Make an observation that causes one to...
2. Have a burning question
3. Consider alternative questions
4. Consider alternative answers
5. Critique (evaluate)
6. Express
Support a classroom of critical thinkers

Express engagement ...and wait

“Great idea! I am really interested in how you thought about that...can you tell me how.”

Get them to say more ...and wait

“How would you respond to Jack’s observation that...?”

“Can you say more about that?”

“Is there another way we could think about this?”

Have them talk to each other...and wait

“Can you talk to each other about this...and wait.”

“Is there another way we could think about this?”
Help them use the text as referee

Peer Discussion Guidelines

Share
The answer I chose was __________.

Explain
I think my answer is correct because of ________ from the text.

There were a couple of examples from the text that gave me my answer. One example is ____.

I think this is the answer because ____.

Comment
You have an interesting point. What more can you tell me about ____?

I didn’t think of it that way. Can you explain ____?

Where in the text did you see ____?
Starting with the text, get them to write early and often

- 10-12 minutes to work critically with the text
- Challenge them to say more
- Comment on the idea and impact
Do you agree or disagree with the narrator’s description of what is happening? 

It is hard to believe someone who starts by saying that he hears so well that he can hear things in “hell”. Also, someone who tells you that he “loves the old man,” but then he needs to kill him because of his vulture eye. These details give a pretty big clue that he is untrustworthy! Another place where I got suspicious was when he is with the policemen, he begins to hear the heartbeat, but the police do not hear it. The sound gets louder, so he gets up and argues and drag the chair around room, probably to cover up the sound he hears. “And still the men chatted pleasantly and smiled he writes”, which seems like a clue that the policemen do not hear. Because if they heard the sound, they would of probably looked around. (On the other hand, since he says “I foamed - I raved - I swore” it is strange that the police don’t even notice this.) But, even though, I don’t believe that there is a heart beating under the floorbords, I believe that he DOES hear it. Maybe he is hearing his own heartbeating louder as he is sitting with the policemen and the body is under the floor. Maybe, he is hearing his own heart because he is thinking about killing the man.
PROMPT: Do you agree or disagree with the narrator’s description of what is happening?
10 minutes; Develop one idea

It is hard to believe someone who starts by saying that he hears so well that he can hear things in “hell”. Also, someone who tells you that he “loves the old man,” but then he needs to kill him because of his vulture eye. These details give a pretty big clue that he is untrustworthy! Another place where I got suspicious is when he is with the policemen, he begins to hear the heartbeat, but the police do not hear it. The sound gets louder, so he gets up and argues and drag the chair around room, probably to cover up the sound he hears. “And still the men chatted pleasantly and smiled,” he writes”, which seems like a clue that the policemen do not hear. Because if they heard the sound, they would of probably looked around. On the other hand, since he says “I foamed - I raved - I swore” it is strange that the policemen do not notice this. But, even though, I don’t believe that there is a heart beating under the floorbords, I believe that he DOES hear it. Maybe he is hearing his own heartbeat louder as he is sitting with the policemen and the body is under the floor. Maybe, he is hearing his own heart because he is thinking about killing the man.

“I am interested in this idea that what he hears is related to his thoughts about killing the old man. Write 3 sentences to explain more about this one idea.

“Now that you say it, the policemen's actions are strange even if they don't hear the sound.”
How do we empower critical thinking?
Poe's Tell-Tale Heart

“The Tell-Tale Heart”

Edgar Allan Poe

1843
Critical thinking process

Make An Observation that causes one to...

Have a burning question → Consider alternative answers → Critique (evaluate) → Express (understanding)

Consider alternative questions

Construct cognitive workspace
A common trap...

1. First, introduce concept of an unreliable narrator
2. Now, read Poe together as a class
3. And, students answer questions about the unreliability of the narrator

Instead, try this...

1. First, read Tell-Tale Heart
2. Now, have student observations drive the understanding
3. Build model of what happens from different perspectives
4. Have classroom debate to come to understanding
“TRUE!—nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad?”

What are 2-3 things you are being told?
The cognitive workspace

Tell-Tale Art
Classroom activity
Immersive experiences to collaborate and build meaning
Police Report

Poe used this room to entertain his fellow writers and visitors—and it is where Rufus Griswold and Mark Twain claim to have been at the time of the murder. Interestingly, we have just located actual documents written by these two authors. One is Poe's obituary, written by Griswold but published under a pseudonym—which may require further investigation, as it seems suspicious—and the other is a collection of letters written by Twain that mention Poe.
Sample questions

- What do you know about the cloth?
- Were you angry with Edgar Allan Poe?
- What could have been used as a murder weapon?
- Why was one of Edgar Allan Poe’s eyes open and the other closed?
Where were you when Poe died?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIMELINE</th>
<th>Track the movements of all the suspects during the evening of October 6, 1849</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9:00 PM</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAVEN</td>
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<td>LENORE</td>
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<td>ANNABEL LEE</td>
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<td>RED DEATH</td>
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<td>TWAIN</td>
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Text-based questions

- Would Mark Twain read Edgar Allan Poe’s writing?
- How does Mark Twain say he wished Jane Austen would die?
- What is Mark Twain’s opinion of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”?
- Do you think either of these documents incriminates Twain or Griswold?
THE ACCUSATION

1. Who did it?

2. How did he/she/they do it?

3. What time did the murder take place?
Critical thinking process

1. Make an observation that causes one to...
2. Have a burning question
3. Consider alternative answers
4. Critique (evaluate)
5. Express (understanding)
Involve the cognitive workspace

Support a range of interpretations

Have them talk to each other

Show them they have something interesting to say
The teacher is the most important ingredient

- “Celebrate” silence
- Curate texts wisely and let students drive the meaning
- Find “no right answer” questions
- Facilitate discussion but let the text be the referee
- Be engaged with students’ ideas and challenge them
Who Killed Edgar Allan Poe?
Questions