

15. ENVELOPES

Approx. duration: 30-45 min

Groups of: 4-6

Competencies involved: S, L, R, W

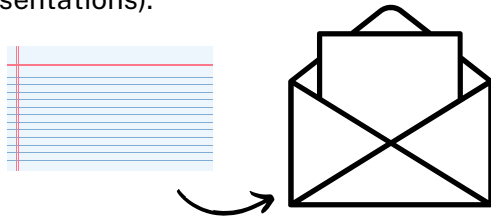
Level: All

Required Material :

- Large envelopes (1 per team)
- Cue cards/index cards (6 per team)
- Large piece of paper (optional)
- Whiteboard and marker (optional)
- Laptop (optional)

Activity Description

The envelope activity “[...] provides students the opportunity to examine others' ideas and compare them to their own thinking”. [1] The basis of the activity is a list of prompts that can “[...] inspire a brainstormed list of actionable behaviors”. [2] The starting point can therefore be a generic idea (e.g. social behaviors or habits in a given context) or a more specific topic (e.g. reacting to a few argumentative essay prompts, or identifying common principles related to essay writing or oral presentations).



First, the teacher hands out the index cards and the “stimulus envelopes” [2] with a different prompt on each one derived from the same overall topic. Round one starts with each team responding to the prompt with three short sentence answers, written on three distinct index cards. Once done, they must place the cards in the envelope and pass it to the next team for the second round. Next, without opening the envelope, the students repeat the task from round 1 based on the new prompt they have received.

The third and final round (the “evaluation round” [2]) involves the students evaluating other teams’ answers and commenting on them. They must review the answers, compare them, and select a top three, which they should transfer to the whiteboard or a large piece of paper. The final recap task can revolve around each team presenting their top three and briefly describing “[...] what criteria they used for selecting them”. [2]

Preparation

TEACHER

- Topic and prompt selection (one per team)
- Preparation of the envelopes (one per team)
- Cue cards (six per team)
- Assessment and/or feedback criteria preparation (optional)
- Team formation
- Assignment explanation and materials distribution

STUDENTS

- Preliminary research/work (if applicable)
- Timekeeper designation (optional)
- Facilitator designation for the final round

Workflow

TEACHER

1. Gives the activity instructions and hands out the envelopes and cards.
2. Times the activity steps and guides transitions.
3. Walks around the classroom to verify the students’ progress.
4. Guides the collective recap (conducted orally or using a poster).

STUDENTS

1. Answer the prompt on three cue cards as a group and place them in the envelope.
2. Receive a new envelope and prompt and repeat the first task.
3. Receive a new envelope and evaluate the answers to create a top three.
4. Proceed to a recap by sharing their choices and explaining them.

Tips

- The students should be given only a few minutes for each round (3-5 minutes).
- It’s important to keep in mind that since this activity is organized around cue cards, it requires a bit more material and planning than other class activities.
- It’s imperative to point out to students that what they write on the cue cards does not need to reflect their own opinions or values.

Evaluation options

TEACHER

- Formative assessment of the evaluation criteria from the final round

STUDENTS

- Formative assessment of other teams’ answers using basic assessment elements previously provided by the teacher or co-created by the students

[1] K2O Center. (2020). Authentic Lessons for 21st Century Learning: Chain Notes. University of Oklahoma. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/52>

[2] Thiagarajan, S., Richter, M., Richter, E. (2024). Interactive techniques for learning. LAD Press.