

# SECONDARY CONNECTIONS

MIDDLE SCHOOL / HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM NEWSLETTER

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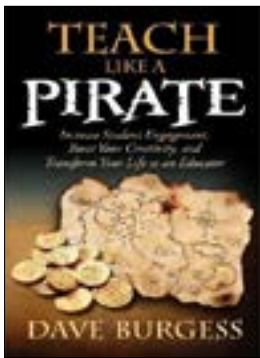
# READER REFLECTIONS

## RCSD EDUCATORS SHARE PROFESSIONAL READING FAVORITES

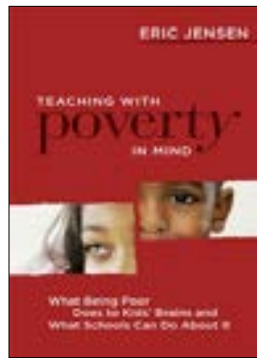
by Sheri Blankenship

In many classrooms and hallways in our district, I have seen posters that indicate for students what their teachers are reading so that students become very aware that their teachers ARE reading - yes, even when it's not been assigned for a class! The message is, of course, that reading is a lifelong, pleasurable, worthwhile activity. Our hope is that this will inspire our students to make reading a part of their own lives long beyond their school days.

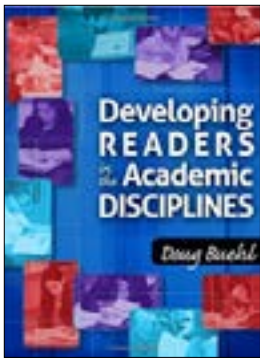
Seeing these posters always makes me smile and often makes me pause to see what I might add to my own personal reading list. This inspired me to think about the power of a venue for sharing our PROFESSIONAL reading titles with each other. What have YOU read that has profoundly shaped or impacted your classroom or school? I posed this question to several of our fellow educators in the district. Check out the following recommendations and videos from some of our educators to add to your own Professional Reading List:



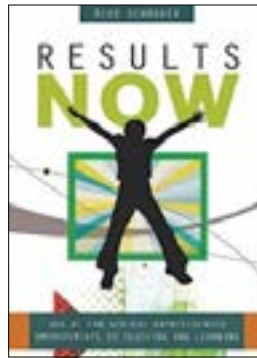
**Amber Armstrong** teaches US history in our district. A book that has impacted her professional learning is *Teach Like a Pirate: Increase Student Engagement, Boost Your Creativity, and Transform Your Life as an Educator* by Dave Burgess. Click [here](#) to find out how this book has impacted her classroom.



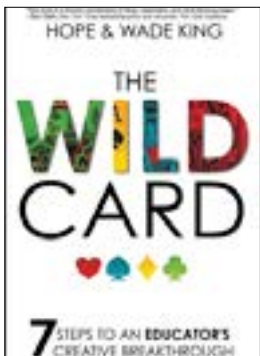
**Katie Nelson**, an administrator in our district, highly recommends *Teaching with Poverty in Mind* by Eric Jensen to help us all better understand how poverty affects our students' ability to learn and connect [link](#)



*Developing Readers in the Academic Disciplines* by Doug Buehl is a book I, **Sheri Blankenship**, strongly recommend to help us better understand why our students may have gaps in reading effectively in each of our academic disciplines and how we can begin to change that. Click this [link](#) to see what I have to say about this book!



**Zach Roberts** has selected a book that pushes him and all educators to think about what needs to be intentionally included in our lessons every day to grow our students. Results Now by Mike Schmoker challenges educators to do the things that matter most to achieve unprecedented results with our students. Zach, a high school English teacher in the district, shares his recommendation [here](#).



*The Wild Card* by Hope and Wade King is a book that has enlightened how **Jana Comer**, an ELA teacher in the district, seeks to engage her students. Through this book, she was reminded that creativity and magic are possible in every classroom despite what sometimes think. Check out what she shares [here](#).

I hope you will consider adding to this column with YOUR professional reading favorites in future issues of the Secondary Connection. Please feel free to email me at [sblankenship@rcsd.ms](mailto:sblankenship@rcsd.ms) if you have a professional book you think we all need to consider adding to our professional bookshelf!

Happy Reading!



# Rankin County Welcomes Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program Graduates

by Cindy Christian

When most people from the Rankin County area hear the words Mississippi State, Ole Miss, Brandon High School (BHS), and Northwest Rankin High School (NWRHS) mentioned in the same sentence they assume the topic will be about school rivalries; however, the Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program (METP) has brought all four institutions together to provide support and academic growth for students and teachers in our district and across the state of Mississippi.

It is obvious that METP graduates are working hard to change the face of education in the state of Mississippi. Blake Adams, the METP Program Coordinator for the University of Mississippi, explains that the METP graduates have unique opportunities as part of their undergraduate studies to hone their teaching skills. As he states, "METP students begin weekly classroom observations almost as soon as they step onto the Ole Miss

campus and continue throughout their undergrad careers." According to the METP Twitter site, "The Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program (METP) is a collaboration between the University of Mississippi (UM) and Mississippi State University (MSU) to attract top-performing students to an innovative new teacher education program." Each university accepts up to thirty fellows per year. It requires a five-year commitment to teach in a Mississippi public school after graduation. The first cohort was established in the fall of 2012 and many graduates began their first year of teaching in the fall of 2017. The Rankin County School District is now home to five METP graduates. The recent METP graduates who are teaching in our district include: Shelby Knighten (NWRHS), Bella Dukes (NWRHS), Jake Wheeler (NWRHS), Katianne Middleton Wheeler (BHS) and Ashton Winstead (NWRHS). These teachers are definitely making an impact on their students, in their schools, and throughout our district.

Jake Wheeler believes in conversation and strategic grouping to help impact student learning. He is an enthusiastic and passionate teacher who provides formative feedback for his students throughout his math lesson. When he is asked about teaching he states, "The growth I see in them [the students] is the best feeling I get during the week... when grouped correctly I can reach all students through conversation." Mr. Wheeler believes that his METP experience is invaluable to his growth as an educator. He states that his classroom experience before graduation has

helped him "identify techniques that are successful in the classroom."

Mr. Wheeler is teaching at NWRHS while his fellow METP cohort member and new bride, Katianne, teaches on the other side of Rankin County at Brandon High School. Katianne has been an invaluable asset to the BHS math department. Marcus Stewart, BHS Assistant Principal and Math Department Principal, states, "Mrs. Wheeler has quickly become a part of the Brandon High Family. She has become a beloved member of the math department and school as a whole. Due in part to her METP training, she entered the year familiar with the processes involved in a successful and productive learning environment." Katianne is a driven teacher who expects all of her students to achieve at a high level. She works diligently to communicate with parents, provide support for her students, and establish a culture of learning in her classroom. Her desire to make an impact is evident in her actions inside and outside of the classroom. As her principal notes, "Mrs. Wheeler is one of the first teachers to arrive each day and she regularly stays late to help students after school. More so, she finds time to attend extracurricular events to support students in their individual pursuits."

Mr. Ben Stein, the head principal from Northwest Rankin High School agrees with the administration from Brandon High School when he is asked about the METP Graduates who are currently teaching in his building. He claims, "These teachers are more prepared coming out of college than some teach-



ers with multiple years of experience. They are energetic, willing to learn, and excited to have an opportunity to grow as a professional.” Part of that energy and willingness to grow can be seen when one enters Mr. Shelby Knighten’s classroom on the 200 Hall at NWRHS.

As a first year teacher at NWRHS, Mr. Knighten teaches ninth grade English and ACT Prep classes. He goes above and beyond to meet the diverse needs of the learners in his classroom. He not only teaches Romeo and Juliet, but he leads his students in the choral part of the reading as he engages them in the meaning and language of William Shakespeare. Mr. Knighten is currently pursuing graduate studies during the summer through the Middlebury College Bread Loaf Program. His experience in the METP cohort definitely helped to prepare him for his future as an educator. He notes, “The METP scholarship gave me access to professional development opportunities that many undergraduates never experience, including an all-expenses paid trip to the annual conference of the National Council for the Teachers of English.” Mr. Knighten brings a wealth of knowledge and ideas to his classroom, and he has built strong relationships with his students in order to impact their achievement levels. When he is asked about his first year teaching experience and the advice he would give a new teacher in the state of Mississippi he states, “Don’t give up. Don’t give up your values or beliefs about what can be accomplished in the classroom. Don’t give up on your students or your colleagues. Don’t give up on yourself and

don’t ever give up hope in the possibility of a brighter Mississippi.”

Bella Dukes is also a math teacher on the Northwest campus who has easily assimilated into the school setting. Ms. Dukes teaches geometry and when she is asked about the best part of teaching she states, “To me, there isn’t a better feeling than when you see a student who has been struggling finally have a light-bulb moment and truly understand the concept you have been explaining.” Bella is originally from McComb, Mississippi where she attended Parklane Academy. She was inspired by one of her high school math teachers to pursue a career in education. This teacher helped her discover how much she loved math and now she works tirelessly to ensure that same love exists in her own students.

Bella, Shelby, Jake, and Katianne are graduates of the Ole Miss METP program; however, one of our current new teachers is a MSU METP graduate. Ashton Winstead is a native of Olive Branch, Mississippi and she currently teaches Algebra I at NWRHS. When she is asked about her METP experience she states, “METP provided some incredible experiences for me.” Upon reflection, she feels that a trip to Canada with fellow METP students was particularly memorable. On this trip she “learned about their educational system and toured schools to see how change is implemented.” Ms. Winstead is able to inspire her students to perform well every day. She works hard to “constantly switch between class discussions and group discussions” in order to keep her students engaged

and to assess their understanding of a concept or idea. In return, her students are continuously showing growth and inspired to become better mathematicians every day.

Our school district is on the cutting edge of change in the state of Mississippi and part of that change involves embracing the ideas and creativity produced from new educators. The METP is preparing topnotch educators to work in the field and RCSD is proud to be home to five METP graduates. Blake Adams sums it up when he states, “Our program is in place to recruit and retain top talent as an investment in Mississippi’s future.” These teachers are definitely making a difference and investing in the future of our students. We are grateful they have chosen Rankin County for their first year teaching experience.



▼ LEFT TO RIGHT: Jake and Katianne Middleton  
Katianne Middleton | Bella Dukes | Shelby Knighten  
Jake Wheeler | Ashton Winstead



# BOOK STUDIES ARE FOR MATH



by Pamela Franklin and LaVonda White

Experiences where we work alone often yield low returns. Collaborating with other professionals opens the door for sharing ideas, for better understanding issues presented, and for encouraging one another. Professional learning through book studies provides a social experience where colleagues participate in discussions that can lead to improving teacher practice and student learning. Working together with other educators to engage in professional discourse around specific topics of teaching and learning helps teachers to grow as professionals.

- The Math Curriculum Department has conducted two district-wide book studies this school year. The first book study of Jo Boaler's *Mathematical Mindsets* gave participants an in-depth look at establishing a growth mindset, identifying rich mathematics tasks, and the power of struggle and mistakes in math. Here is what some participants had to say on their evaluation feedback of the book study:

*"Everyone is math-minded!"*

*"Great book, great conversation, great information."*

*"All of the activities will be great to pass along to the students, and changing the mindsets."*

*"Excellent!"*

*"I hope we will use this book in all math departments."*

The second book study of Margaret Smith and Mary Kay Stein's *5 Practices for Orchestrating Productive Mathematics Discussions* introduced participants to the practices of anticipating, monitoring, selecting, sequencing, and connecting in order to effectively orchestrate discussions in the math classroom. In an effort to enhance the book study and to make it more accessible to participants, adjustments were made from lessons learned from our first book study: 1) the timespan for the second study was shortened from our first to our last meeting, 2) participants were able to participate virtually via Zoom, 3) the meeting time was allocated to devote half to analyzing artifacts presented by the participants. School administrative staff was also invited to participate.

If you are thinking of starting a book study, below are some basic guidelines and ground rules you may want to consider.

## **BASIC BOOK STUDY GUIDELINES:**

- Choose a book to study or suggest titles for the group to decide
- Allow teachers to join the study voluntarily
- Have introductions and establish group norms, meeting dates, meeting times, location, and responsibilities during the first meeting
- Assign a group coordinator (who acts as a co-learn-



er) to ensure meeting logistics are taken care of, to provide open-ended guiding questions to direct the sessions, to redirect the conversation when necessary, and to send reminders a few days before of meeting date/location/time

- Revisit norms, goals, and timeline at the beginning of each meeting

## GROUND RULES AND THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Keep the group small, 3-15 members
- Keep the meeting time reasonable, 1-2 hours
- Start on time, end on time
- Encourage participants to attend meetings even if they have not finished the reading requirement – valuable insight can still be shared
- Disagree respectfully – differing opinions make great discussions
- Limit discussion time to the book – social time can be included after
- Allow equal airtime for participants – establish a talking protocol such as passing a specified object to recognize the speaker, or using tokens to take turns speaking
- Understand that teachers may have different levels of commitment and motivation to engage in the study
- Consider posting open-ended questions for discussion in a forum for participants to give responses prior to the meeting – blogs, shared files, and discussion boards work well for this purpose and can also be used to share resources relevant to the book
- Consider virtual meetings through video conferencing. Not all meetings have to be face-to-face.
- Study duration may depend on the length of the book, but keeping the duration short may encourage

better participation

- Offer an incentive for participation – food, CEUs, door prizes
- Share responsibilities – participants can sign up to facilitate specific chapters or to bring food
- Consider extending a group invite to others besides teachers – administrators, parents
- Make meetings interesting and fun – include activities/games relevant to the reading

Information concerning our next book study of John Hattie, Douglas Fisher, and Nancy Frey's *Visible Learning for Mathematics* will be forthcoming. Until then, if there are other titles of interest to you, or if you are considering starting your own book study, please don't hesitate to reach out to us if you'd like assistance.



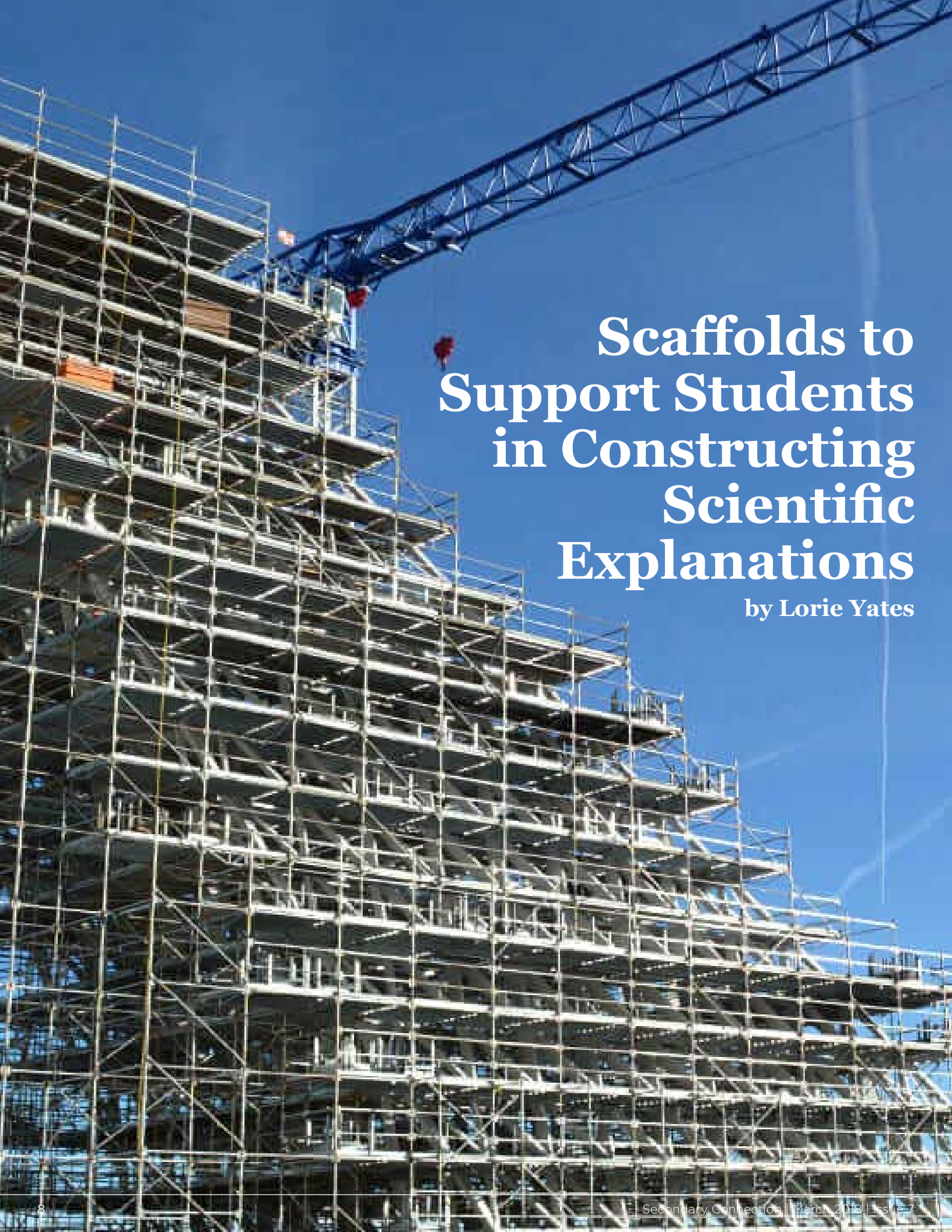
▲ **LEFT TO RIGHT:** Angie Abernathy, Marcoe Walker, Victoria Crawford, Christi Wood; Not pictured: Ashton Frye, Jennifer Loshelder

▼ **LEFT TO RIGHT:** Caralee Ferrell, LaVonda White, Amanda Downard, Collette Usry, Pam Franklin



▼ **LEFT TO RIGHT:** Pam Franklin, Consuela Dixon, Emily Lingle, Sherra Shearer, Kelsey Nobles, LaVonda White; not pictured: Aaron Freeman, Tonya Griffin, AP Laura Clark, Althea Woodson, Donna Rice, Michelle Lane





# Scaffolds to Support Students in Constructing Scientific Explanations

by Lorie Yates



The Science and Engineering Practices are woven in to the new performance objectives of the Mississippi College and Career Readiness Standards for Science. [The Science and Engineering Practices Reference Sheet](#) is a great resource when trying to determine what the practices should look like in the middle and high school science classrooms.

We know that students come to us at all grade levels with varying degrees of science content knowledge, skill sets, and experiences with scientific investigations. Since one of the key practices that shows up in many of the MS CCRS for Science performance objectives is “Constructing Explanations” and “Engaging in Argument from Evidence,” it is crucial that we provide students structured scaffolding in order for them to practice, refine, and ultimately, master these skills.

Scientific explanations include three components: a claim, evidence, and reasoning (CER). Claims are statements about the results of an investigation that answer an original question or solve the original problem. Evidence is the scientific data that supports the claim. Reasoning ties together the claim and the evidence by using scientific principles to justify how or why the data support the claim.

[This CER Scaffolding Tool](#) can be used to support students’ writing of evidence-based explanations.

You can start off allowing students to work together in small groups using this tool. As students develop the skills needed to construct explanations, you can gradually release the scaffolding and allow students to construct explanations on their own.

Start with a question that students will research and answer throughout an investigation, lesson or unit.

Once students have generated the question they want to answer, they work on gathering evidence to help answer that question. Evidence can come in the form of actual data collected during a lab investigation or simulation, from general observations, and/or from information gathered from texts such as articles, textbook passages, or videos.

One of the components of this scaffolding tool that makes it different from most CER templates is the “Science Concepts” and “Develop a Model” sections. These are crucial components for making sure students understand the content behind the data they are collecting. To be considered “evidence” the data must be related to the question being studied. For each type of evidence, there should be some science concept that explains why we observed what we did or why the data counts as evidence. Having students actively participating in the science practice of “Developing and Using Models” aids students in developing a deeper understanding of the scientific principles.

After students complete the evidence and science concepts sections, they write a claim. Students write the claim after those sections to develop the understanding that claims are based on evidence.

The final section is the Scientific Reasoning. This is the heart of the final scientific explanation because it ties all the components together - the claim, the evidence, and the scientific principles. To construct a scientific reasoning, students must do more than simply restate the claim and describe the data. They

Constructing Explanations Scaffolding Tool With Guiding Questions

Question

What is the scientific question you are investigating?

How does temperature affect tomato plant growth?

Claim\*Evidence\*Reasoning First Draft

Evidence


What are the science observations or data that address your question (ex. Data from investigations, observations, cited facts from text)?

Our control group was growing at normal room temperature, while our experimental group was growing in a hot greenhouse for one week. Over the course of the week, we observed that the experimental plant was healthier looking, had more leaves, and grew taller than the control plant. The mass of the experimental plant increased from 15 g to 30 g, while the control plant increased from 15 g to 20 g. The experimental group grew from 14 cm to 18 cm (increase of 4 cm), and the control group grew from 12 cm to 14 cm (increase of 2 cm). The experimental plant got four new leaves and the control only got two new leaves.


Information from video  
Textbook reading on needs of living things.

Science Concepts

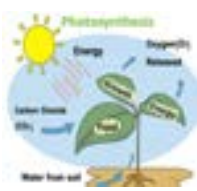
What science concepts are connected to the evidence that might help answer the question?



Requirement of all living things  
Limiting factors of photosynthesis



Develop a Model That Represents Your Science Concept(s):



Scientific Claim

A one-sentence answer to the question you investigated. What can you conclude from your investigation? What is the relationship between the independent and dependent variables?

The rate of tomato plant growth increases as temperature increases.

Scientific Reasoning

How do the science concepts connect to the evidence? Why or how does each piece of evidence support your claim? Why is THIS evidence you listed important to THIS claim?

Tomato plants are sensitive to the temperature of their surroundings. All plants grow best within a certain temperature range (some plants would actually grow better in at cool temperatures than warm temperatures). Plants need energy to grow, and their energy comes from photosynthesis. Photosynthesis is the process during which green plants produce sugar from water, carbon dioxide, and light energy. Producing sugar is essential for plant growth and development. As temperatures rise, photosynthesis increases. That is why the plants growing at higher temperatures grew more. There are other factors that could affect the growth such as the amount of carbon dioxide in the greenhouse compared to outside of the greenhouse. Also, the materials around the plant inside the classroom and the materials the greenhouse is made of. These are factors that we cannot control, but based on our data, as temperature increases, tomato plant growth increases because photosynthesis is more efficient in the warmer temperatures.

must describe how or why their specific data supports their specific claim and the scientific principles at work.

Once the table is complete, allow for time for a peer review process. Let groups swap papers. When groups peer review one another’s Claim, Evidence, and Reasoning, they should be looking closely at all the components to give feedback that strengthens the clarity and credibility of the scientific reasoning. The Constructing Explanations Scaffolding Tool includes a peer review form with guiding questions for those giving feedback. The groups giving feedback have come up with their own claims, data, and reasoning, but their claims may be different OR their data may be different. By participating in the peer review process, students are analyzing differing viewpoints, practicing providing quality peer feedback, and learning more about the content being studied.

To see an example of how this might look, go to this Student Example of a CER Scaffolding Document by Tools for Ambitious Science Teaching.

Students then take their peers’ comments and suggestions into consideration and revise their claim and scientific reasoning.

Once the table is complete, and they have gotten feedback from peers, students are ready to construct their scientific explanation. Students should be instructed to use all the information in the boxes to construct their scientific explanation: the question, the claim, the relevant evidence that supports the claim, the scientific concepts that are connected to the evidence, and the scientific reasoning that explains how the data answer their question and supports their claim.

If students struggle to bring all ideas together in their final scientific explanation, you can provide Sentence Starters for CER writing.

One final note, the students will only get more proficient at constructing explanations in science and engaging in argument from evidence if they have regular practice doing so AND if they see models of what these practices should look like.

Designing Science Inquiry with the CER strategy provides two great ideas on how to model the CER connection: one with the Mars rover Curiosity and another using an Audi commercial.

This NSTA Web Seminar slide presentation provides lots of strategies for introducing and modeling scientific writing.

And, check out this Google folder, Scaffolds for Constructing Explanations in Science that has several other resources and ideas on how to scaffold instruction, sample rubrics, and lessons using Gizmos to help students practice scientific writing.

How can you support students in constructing scientific explanations?

- 1. Explicitly teach the Claim, Evidence, Reasoning strategy so students know the components of a scientific explanation.
- 2. Model!
- 3. Use a rubric to clearly communicate expectations for students’ writing.
- 4. Show examples of scientific explanations.
- 5. Provide scaffolding through templates and sentence starters; gradually release as students get more proficient at writing scientific explanations.
- 6. Encourage productive science talk; including peer reviews.
- 7. Have students draw models as part of their scientific explanations.

Peer Feedback Form	
Comments from peers to help improve our work.	
<b>Claim</b> Is the claim clear? Is the claim answering their question?	
<b>Evidence</b> Does the data they provide make sense? Is their data clear? Does it include all the information to support their claim?	
<b>Reasoning</b> Does the data they provide actually provide evidence to support their claim? Are there big gaps between the data, the claim and the reasoning? Could there be other claims based on the data they provide, or is their data the evidence they need to support their claim? Does their reasoning include one or more scientific principles important to the data and the claim?	
Claim*Evidence*Reasoning Final Draft	
Evidence	Science Concepts

Constructing Explanations Scaffolding Tool With Guiding Questions	
<b>Question</b> What is the scientific question you are investigating?	
<b>Evidence</b> What are the science observations or data that address your question (ex. Data from investigations, observations, cited facts from text)?	<b>Science Concepts</b> What science concepts are connected to the evidence that might help answer the question?
Develop a Model That Represents Your Science Concept(s):	
<b>Scientific Claim</b> A one-sentence answer to the question you investigated. What can you conclude from your investigation? What is the relationship between the independent and dependent variables?	
<b>Scientific Reasoning</b> How do the science concepts connect to the evidence? Why or how does each piece of evidence support your claim? Why is THIS evidence you listed important to THIS claim?	

What are the science observations or data that address your question (ex. Data from investigations, observations, cited facts from text)?	What science concepts are connected to the evidence that might help answer the question?
<b>Scientific Claim</b> A one-sentence answer to the question you investigated. What can you conclude from your investigation? What is the relationship between the independent and dependent variables?	
<b>Scientific Reasoning</b> How do the science concepts connect to the evidence? Why or how does each piece of evidence support your claim? Why is THIS evidence you listed important to THIS claim?	
<b>Construct Your Scientific Explanation</b> Using the information in the boxes you have completed, write a scientific explanation that includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> The scientific question</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Your claim</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Relevant evidence to support your claim</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Scientific concepts that are connected to the evidence</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Scientific reasoning that links the evidence, the science concepts and the claim</li></ul>	

# TOO MUCH TECHNOLOGY?

## IT'S THE WORLD WE LIVE IN

BY BRIAN GADDIE

Too much technology may be an odd thing to hear from “the tech guy” (as I have been dubbed by my teachers throughout this year), but hear me out: there is a method to my madness. I hear all too often that there is just too much being thrown at teachers and how all of this technology and apps and websites are great but there just isn't time to learn them all and it becomes overwhelming. I could not agree with this statement more. There is too much technology but not in the sense of there being too many options or too much available but rather the fact that we often try to do too much technology at one time. One of my favorite things to tell teachers when I am in the schools is that I know how much time you don't have and I hope that you are not trying to implement every piece of technology that I have presented to you right now because no teacher has time for that.

Technology integration is a process and should be done in a steady manner (sounds funny right? Technology? Steady manner?). Even though technology is there to make our lives easier and moves things in a faster pace, education in the classroom is a totally different animal. Technology must work for the curriculum and the students, not the other way around. Students need to be familiar with technology in ways that help them to become resourceful and marketable in a technology driven world. The technology that is presented to teachers is there to assist teachers where needed and give them an opportunity to show students how to use different types of technology for useful and meaningful tasks. Even though high school students already know everything (am I right?) there is still room for them to experience new technology and how that technology can improve tasks and, at times, totally change the way something is done.

The lesson here is that, yes, technology is everywhere, there is a lot of it, and sometimes there is too much technology but it is so important for the success of our students for them to experience proper uses of technology. When our students leave the safety of school and enter the workforce they will need something to set them apart from the crowd, technology can be that something. So, what should we do with all this technology? Where do we go from here with technology integration? We take a page out of L.S. Vygotsky's book and use some

scaffolding (supports, steps) to get to us to the point where we fully understand the technology and how to use it to enhance our instruction and provide new learning opportunities for our students. Too much technology? Yes. But only because we are teachers and because we want the best for our students we sometimes try to conquer the world in 90 minutes. Technology works for you; not the other way around, enjoy it at your and your students' own pace.

### Technology Reminders...

- Restart those computers! You should be restarting your computer at the very minimum, once a week. Restarting can solve a myriad of problems that may arise on your computer.
- MAYhem is coming! Yes, the month of may will consist of taking up your computers and issuing you a new one along with some switching out for juniors and taking up those senior computers. It will be MAYhem but with your cooperation we will get through just fine!
- Back it up! Backup your computers now. When we switch out your old computer for a new one, your old one will be wiped so make sure ALL of your data is backed up to your Google Drive or an external hard drive. Getting a new computer should be a happy time; let's keep it that way!
- If you leave the district at the end of your contract, your email/account will be disabled after your last working day (5/25/18 for teachers). Please move any accounts (iTunes, banking accounts, other such personal stuff) to another email address prior to your last working day.





# Getting to Know the National Career Readiness Certificate

by Montgomery Hinton

While many people are very familiar with the ACT and are often vaguely familiar with the SAT and its little sister the PSAT, not many people are aware of a new member who holds a seat at the table. That member is the National Career Readiness Certificate, henceforth referred to as the NCRC. The NCRC has four distinct levels-bronze, silver, gold and platinum.

As some students directly transition from high school into the workforce, a need has arisen to assess the readiness of potential employees for immediate employment for specific careers.

According to information found on the ACT's website under the heading "Research + Results = Career Readiness" WorkKeys can be defined as:

"Developed with the same knowledge and research expertise responsible for the ACT test, WorkKeys assessments and training help lead individuals and businesses to success. Our solutions are helping strengthen job readiness and skills development for more than 10 million businesses, government agencies, professional associations, education institutions, and individuals in the United States and internationally. WorkKeys is a system of assessments, curriculum, and skills profiling that determine, build, and measure essential workplace skills that can affect your job performance and increase opportunities for career changes and advancement. ACT® WorkKeys® assessments are based on situations in the everyday working world. They are supported by data from more than 20,000 job skills profiles and rooted in decades of workplace research."

Under the ACT's website under the heading "The National Career Readiness Certificate-Benefits," the ACT also states, "The ACT NCRC is a portable, evidence-based credential that certifies the essential skills for workplace success. Employers look for it from job candidates, whether they come directly from high school or through postsecondary paths, because it is a valid predictor of job performance."

Additionally, the American Council on Education is recommending to its 1,000 plus member institutions that the institutions offer students 3 or more college hours for students who earn certification on the NCRC. The website to examine further information can be found [here](#).

Thus, it is clear that this certification benefits not only those who are directly entering the workforce but also those who will, upon completion of a higher degree, enter the job market. In fact, it is possible that with the additional college credits that could possibly be gained by achieving an NCRC, a student could potentially graduate early.

The test which a student or adult would take to achieve a certificate is given in three different sub-tests, similar to the ACT's which has four sub-tests.

## APPLIED MATHEMATICS

The Applied Math assessment measures critical thinking, mathematical reasoning, and problem solving techniques for situations that actually occur in today's workplace. While individuals may use calculators and conversion tables to help with the problems on the assessment, math skills are still needed to think them through.

## WORKPLACE DOCUMENTS

Employees need to be able to understand written text to do a job. The Workplace Documents assessment measures the skills people use when they read and use written text such as memos, letters, directions, signs, notices, bulletins, policies, and regulations on the job.

## GRAPHIC LITERACY

Workplace graphics come in a variety of formats, but all communicate a level of information. From charts to graphs, diagrams to floor plans, identifying what information is being presented and understanding how to use it are critical to success. The Graphic Literacy assessment measures the skill needed to locate, synthesize, and use information from workplace graphics.

Mississippi, a state of industry, has boldly embraced NCRC and currently has 30 of 82 counties and 878 current employers who recognize the NCRC. Recently in an interview I conducted with the Human Resources manager at a local Rankin County manufacturing plant, I was told that a student who comes in to apply for a job at this plant with a silver or gold certificate would be ahead of 80% of their current employees. Once a certificate is earned, an individual carries the certificate with them for life! Rankin County School District is glad to begin exposing our students to the NCRC. Students continue to be offered unique opportunities as a student within the great walls of the Rankin County School District!



# The John K. Bettersworth Award

by Catherine Beasley

The John K. Bettersworth Award is presented annually at the Mississippi Historical Society meeting to an outstanding teacher of middle school or high school history. This award memorializes John K. Bettersworth, the distinguished historian and author who served as professor and administrator at Mississippi State University for almost 40 years. Dr. Bettersworth also served as president of the Mississippi Historical Society and as a longtime member of the Board of Trustees of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

The 2018 award recipient is Jennifer Johnson of RCSD. Jennifer currently teaches World History, Psychology, Law, and US History at Puckett High School, as well as coaches the archery team. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Social Sciences from Florida State University and a Master's degree in Teaching from Belhaven University. Jennifer is married to Wayne Johnson and together they have four children in Rankin County School District - Gracie (11th), Paige (10th), David (5th), and Eliana (4th). She is the first teacher from the Rankin County School District to be given this award.

I have had the pleasure of getting to know and work with Jennifer over the last few years and I am always so excited to talk with her and hear what awesome things are going on in her classroom. She is truly a life-long learner with a passion and dedication for her students, school, and community.



## Mark Your Calendars!!

We are so excited to offer some great professional development opportunities this summer and I wanted to go ahead and get in your calendars ... I know they fill up so quickly over the summer! More information will come about all of these great opportunities but we would love for you to sign up to hold your spot and receive specific information as we get closer to summer.

### **The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi Teacher Field Trip - June 21**

<https://goo.gl/forms/LVrslrkEsjY95iXt1>

### **Learning about the Holocaust - June 26 & 27**

Day 1 - Teaching about the Holocaust

Day 2 - Using primary sources to teach about the Holocaust

For these sessions, you may choose to attend either day or both days.

<https://goo.gl/forms/p7vPJzldvUDmUWq1>

### **Facing History and Ourselves - July 17, 18, & 19**

These sessions will be hosted at RCSD in partnership with MDE.

There will be more information to come about this PD opportunity.

# CLASSROOM DISCUSSION STRATEGIES

by Catherine Beasley

In our collaborative sessions with teachers over the the last few months, there has been one topic that keeps coming up - quality classroom discussion. Almost every teacher, in one way or another, said how much he or she wants quality discussion to happen in the classroom. As teachers, we always want to make sure our students understand what we are teaching and what better way to do that than with a classroom discussion where students can actually verbalize what they know about a particular topic! Now, this definitely comes with some apprehension on both sides ... many students are not always confident enough in the particular topic to carry on a quality discussion or they are not prepared to actually talk on a historical topic or they don't have the skills to carry on a classroom discussion or teachers were uneasy about in which direction a classroom discussion might go! The list could go on and on ...

After visiting a few classrooms and talking with teachers as they build mini-task sequences to develop particular skills, I have found that many history teachers across the district are doing a great things to build speaking and listening skills into their classes and helping students develop a more confident approach to talking about historical topics.

I wanted to break down a few of the techniques that are happening throughout our district and a few others that I have recently heard about or researched ...

## Gallery Walks:

Teachers create a "gallery" for students to travel to while performing some type of task or re-

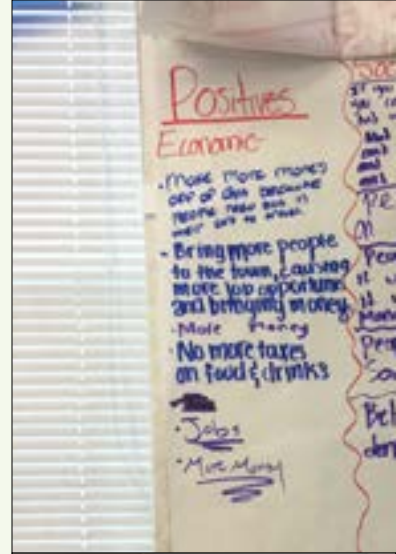
sponding to a prompt. Many times, I have seen these used to introduce a lesson or identify major concepts, or by students making connections across time periods or developing an understanding of a specific concept. During the gallery walk, students have specific ideas to explore (maybe a website to visit or image/text to break down). Developing questions for students to answer at each of the stations really helps to keep those wondering minds on track! After the gallery walk, teachers facilitate a larger classroom discussion that prompts students to connect all station ideas together. Most teachers I've talked with are very purposeful in preparing what students will discuss at each station and making those connections at the end. Many times this technique takes place of traditional lecture notes in the classroom.

## How do I Start?:

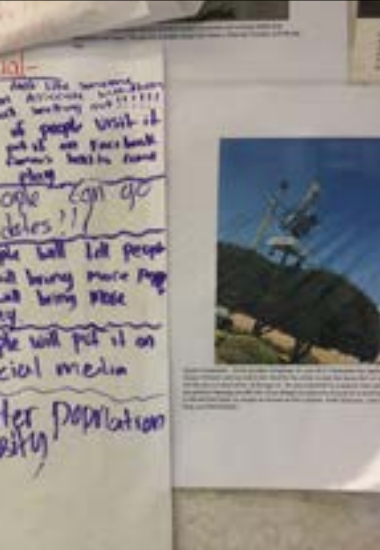
Most of our students do have great things to add to a classroom discussion, but often do not know where or how to start when discussing. In this case, the teacher provides students with a sentence starter guide. This provides a context for students to begin developing his or her thoughts and learning how to speak and listen in a discussion.

\*Variation - have your students respond directly to a person by using his or her name. This allows students to make the connections between what one person said and their own thoughts - this could be in the form of an agreement or argument of the topic.

Cool Website for Sentence Starters (maybe too many to start with but a great place for teachers!)







## What's your Two Cents? (Socratic Seminar):

This idea can be done at all levels and, ultimately, gives each student an opportunity to be an active participant in the class discussion. After one or two times doing this with guided practice from the teacher, it really becomes a quality discussion among the students. The seminar allows for collaborative dialogue to take place in the classroom and provides an opportunity for students to understand specific meaning in a particular text and listen to and observe various perspectives. Here, students are given a text before hand and time to interact with the text by annotating. Using specific symbols for annotating and purposeful questions for discussion, students will be given 2 pennies (plastic coins, etc.) to use in order to contribute to the discussion. The teacher will facilitate, listen, and document participation.

### Socratic Seminar Instructions

## Options Role Play:

When working with a topic or information that has multiple perspectives, this technique allows students to engage with a variety of perspectives on an issue. Students work in small groups to pull information on the option or perspective to create a short (2-4 minute) pitch on their perspective that uses information from text, policies, quotes to help the group develop a pitch to "win" over the class! Once students hear all perspectives, then the class can have a quality discussion on all sides of the issue.

## Hot Seat:

In this technique, students are assuming the role of a significant figure or concept. After completing research, the student takes on the role and responds to classmates' questions while staying in character. For these discussions, students are often asked to develop questions while listening to a brief presentation or based on background knowledge of this person or topic.

\*Variation - students form a panel discussion in their character role and take questions from the audience (class) on a particular topic.

## Today'sMeet:

<https://todaysmeet.com/>

Adding in a little technology never hurt anybody! Today'sMeet provides a place for students to drop ideas or thoughts on a specific topic for that day's class instruction. Here teachers can choose how long the discussion is open for and use the information as a daily check, a quick discussion point, or a formal assessment of the classes understanding. Students can hold thinking on a topic and express themselves on a topic without needing to discuss.

These are just a few of the wonderful classroom discussion techniques that are happening all across this district in many classes, not just history!





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GREAT TO BEST