

Save the Last Word for Me

Overview:

This is a text-based discussion protocol that encourages deep thinking about a text, sharing of perspectives, and reflection. Students chose a passage to share, their peers respond, and then the initial student has the “last word” by sharing why they selected that passage and how hearing their peers thinking about that passage impacted their own thinking.

Purpose:

The Save the Last Word for Me protocol is designed to help students to clarify and deepen their thinking about a text, and particularly to see how meaning can be constructed and supported by the ideas of others. This protocol is especially helpful when students may struggle to understand their reading; the nature of the protocol allows students not only to present their ideas in a nonthreatening oral fashion, but also to benefit from the knowledge acquired by other members of their group.

Application: When and where can I use it?

This protocol can be used in any setting, provided students are able to read the text presented to them. The text being supported by the use of this protocol should be sufficiently complex as to have multiple passages, or phrases, that participants could identify as worthy of discussion. This is a very structured protocol that is designed to for participants to build on each other's thinking, not to enter into dialogue. As such, it may initially feel uncomfortable or awkward; students should be held accountable for following the protocol steps as designed. If the groups begin actively discussing when they should be silently listening, or discussing content randomly, remind everyone of the protocol structure and the value of working within the protocol rather than having an everyday conversation.

Getting Started: What are some tips for starting and using this routine?

Students read the assigned text silently, annotating or highlighting important information. Instruct students to identify three passages that strike them as significant in some way and to mark those passages clearly. (Passages can range from a phrase to a few sentences.)

Arrange students into small groups of four or five. Within each group, one student is identified to be the first presenter. That student chooses ONE of the passages that they identified and reads it out loud to the group. The student says nothing about why he or she chose that particular passage; they just read it.

Moving around the group, each of the remaining three or four students has one minute to respond to the passage just shared – saying what it makes them think about, what

questions it raises for them, if it resonates with them and why. When the discussion comes back around to the presenter, they have three minutes to share why they chose that part of the reading and to respond to – or build upon – what the other participants have said. The presenter may change their perspective, add to it, or stick with their original thinking.

The same pattern is followed until all members of the group have had a chance to be the presenter and to have “the last word.”

When all groups have finished (all students have had the chance to present and have the “last word”), the full class may be engaged in discussion about the process as well as the most important learnings from the reading passage, and how their thinking about the reading was informed by their classmates.

See this Instructional Move in action:

[Teacher Toolkit: Save the Last Word for Me \(Elementary\) - Bing video](#)

Read more about this Instructional Move:

[“Save the Last Word for Me” Protocol – Teach Write Now \(nwp.org\)](#)

[Save the Last Word for Me \(6-8, 9-12\) | Learning for Justice](#)

[5.6-Save-the-Last-Word-for-Me.pdf \(wisconsinrticenter.org\)](#)

References:

EL Education: Classroom Protocols

Teach Write Now National Writing Project Resource Hub [About – Teach Write Now \(nwp.org\)](#)