

What Comes to Mind?

What is it?

A quick and easy way to unlock students' background knowledge and use that knowledge to increase curiosity in the learning to come

What are the benefits of using this tool?

Unlocking students' prior knowledge about a topic before instruction begins can help increase curiosity about upcoming learning. Why? Because prior knowledge serves as the raw material students need to start thinking actively and curiously about the content to come. What do they already know about the topic they're going to be learning about? What questions or "wonderings" do they have about it? Does it evoke any particular feelings or associations? This tool encourages students to explore—and to fully "turn on"—their minds before learning. It also provides teachers with valuable pre-assessment information that they can use to teach more effectively. Best of all, the tool takes only a few minutes to implement in the classroom.

What are the basic steps?

1. Introduce the topic you are about to teach. ("For the next few days, we'll be learning about ____.")
2. Encourage students to explore their minds fully by asking themselves what they know, feel, and wonder about the topic. Have them record their responses on the reproducible organizer (p. 33) and/or share their responses aloud.
3. Review students' responses. Use what you learn about students' level of understanding to correct any factual errors or misconceptions and to adjust the entry point for instruction, if needed.
4. Use the additional information you gather to increase and sustain curiosity during instruction. Among other things, you might
 - Make connections between things students already know and content you're about to teach.
 - Incorporate students' questions into classroom discussions and lesson plans.
 - Encourage students to check and correct their facts and seek answers to their questions.
 - Discuss students' feelings about the topic.

Teacher Talk

→ You can also use this tool to get students curious about how their minds work by asking this tongue-twisting question: "What do you know that you don't know you know?" Encourage them to think about why learners often believe they don't know much about a topic, only to find that when they stop and think, there is a lot more in their minds than they first thought. Discuss how this tool addresses this phenomenon.

How is this tool used in the classroom?

- ✓ To learn what students know, feel, and wonder about a topic before you begin teaching
- ✓ To help students unlock their curiosity before learning
- ✓ To adjust and improve instruction based on students' interests and needs

EXAMPLE: Elementary mathematics

Third graders are about to begin a unit on fractions. Their teacher uses What Comes to Mind? to help him pre-assess students' understanding and to help students approach the content with more active and curious minds. One student's completed organizer appears below.

Name: Taylor Date: _____

What Comes to Mind?

What comes to mind when you think about Fractions?

Facts?
Fractions are smaller than regular numbers. Things like $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{1}{4}$ are fractions.

Feelings?
Sometimes fractions make me mad like when my mom says I can only have $\frac{1}{2}$ of a candy bar.

Questions?
Why is one number on top and one number on bottom?

Anything else?
Fractions can help you share things.