Use Content Studies to Brainstorm Topics

1. Focus

Explain the Brainstorming Process

Say: As writers, we brainstorm before we write to decide what we know and what we want to know. This helps us come up with good topics for an informational report. We can think about the things we’ve studied this year in social studies and science. Thinking about those topics can help give us ideas for informational reports. Let me show you how I use brainstorming to think of ideas before I write.

Model Brainstorming Using Content Studies

Use the sample think-aloud to develop your own brainstorming models to share with students. Use your social studies and/or science texts to model getting ideas for an informational report. Demonstrate how to record ideas on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources as you model brainstorming.

Sample think-aloud. Say: One good way to come up with topics for an informational report is to think about what we learned this year in social studies and science. I can look back through the table of contents of our textbooks to help me remember topics that particularly interested me. We studied the causes of the American Revolution. One thing that angered people was being taxed but not having a say in the government. Americans felt they deserved the same rights as English people. The causes were many and complex, so this could make a good topic for an informational report. We also studied the colony of Roanoke. This was really interesting because there is a mystery attached to the colony. I know Roanoke is called “the lost colony.” Its people just disappeared and no one knows why! I also know that the settlers desperately needed supplies from England that never came. One of the settlers went back to get them, but it took him three years to return. When he got back, everyone was gone! I’ll write this topic on my brainstorming list. Continue talking about other ideas and adding them to the list.

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:
• Use science and social studies topics to brainstorm ideas for informational reports.
• Work with partners to brainstorm ideas for informational reports.
• Contribute to a class list of topic ideas for informational reports.

Preparation

Materials Needed
• Current social studies and/or science texts
• Chart paper and markers
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation
If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” onto chart paper.

Interesting Social Studies and Science Topics

- The causes of the American Revolution
- The colony of Roanoke
- Wetland ecosystems
- Electricity

Sample Brainstorming List
2. Rehearse

Practice Brainstorming Topics You’ve Studied

Ask students to work with partners to brainstorm for an informational report using recent studies in social studies or science. Students could refer back to their science and social studies texts or folders to trigger ideas.

If your class includes English learners or other students who need more support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

Share Ideas

Bring students back together and invite them to share their favorite ideas for an informational report as you record them on the list of topic ideas you started earlier. Comment on the differences and the similarities in the topics that the writers in the classroom chose. Reread the list and remind students that a classmate’s idea can often spark new ideas of their own.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We’ve just learned one strategy for brainstorming informational report topics—using topics we studied for science and social studies to trigger ideas. As you brainstorm on your own, think about things we’ve learned this year. These are the topics that will work best because they are things you’re interested in already!

Encourage students to think about content they’ve studied for science and social studies when they brainstorm during independent writing time. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to share some of their ideas for an informational report that they are excited about. Have them tell why they are excited.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

 Invite beginning ELs to tell you about a favorite topic they’ve studied this year using any words they can. Record key words as they share and help them expand the words into simple sentences about the topic. An alternative would be to encourage students to draw about a favorite topic. Label key items, terms, or people in their drawings and help the students use the words in simple sentences.

Intermediate and Advanced

Provide sentence frames to help ELs talk to their partners about their topic for informational report. For example:

I liked studying about ______.
I thought it was interesting because ______.
I’d like to know more about ______.

All Levels

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: interesting/interesante; science/la ciencia; social studies/los estudios sociales.