Use Content Studies to Brainstorm Topics

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

- Use science and social studies topics to brainstorm ideas for research reports.
- Work with partners to brainstorm ideas for a research report.
- Contribute to a class web of topic ideas for research reports.

Preparation

Materials Needed

- Chart paper and markers
- Writer’s notebooks
- Interactive whiteboard resources

1. Focus

Explain the Brainstorming Process

Say: As writers, we often brainstorm to find out what we know and what we want to know. When we want ideas for a research report, we can use the topics we’ve studied in science and social studies to help us brainstorm. We can come up with great ideas for a research report—ideas that we jot down quickly so we can think about them more later. This is how I brainstorm ideas for a research report.

Model Brainstorming Using Content Studies Ideas

Use the sample think-aloud to help you develop your own brainstorming models to share with students. As you think aloud, record your ideas using chart paper or the interactive whiteboard resources.

Sample think-aloud. Say: I’m trying to learn how to eat healthier foods, so one topic from science that really interests me is nutrition. Now, what are some of the things I’ve been learning about nutrition? Well, I’ve learned how nutrition affects our quality of life. I’m also learning about how certain additives in our foods cause health problems for some people. I’ve read about which vitamin supplements are important, I’ve been reading a lot about whether eating organic instead of nonorganic foods is really that important. I think I know a lot about this topic and I also have a lot good questions I’d like to research, so this would make a good topic. I’ll add this to my research ideas web. We studied the ancient cultures of Egypt. The Great Sphinx is something I would love to research. I would like to find out more about the theories behind when and by whom this monolith was built. I’ll add this topic to the web, too. After we studied inherited traits, I found that I still had questions about it. I’ll add this to the web as a good idea to research. I also like the idea of researching more about the topic of how humans affect the environment. Topics we’ve learned about in science and social studies provide a range of ideas.

Sample Brainstorming Web
2. Rehearse

Practice Brainstorming Using Content Studies

Ask students to work with partners to brainstorm topics from social studies and science that they would like to research. Students can use these questions to focus their brainstorming:

- What are we studying in science and social studies?
- What did we study earlier this school year?
- What do I find interesting about this topic?
- What do I know about the topic?
- Would I like to know more?

Remind students to record their ideas on a web in their writer’s notebooks.

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 a research report. Add students’ topic ideas to the research web you began earlier. Reread the ideas and comment on the variety of topics. Remind students that a classmate’s idea can often spark a new idea of their own.

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 keywords 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 with self-stick notes 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 a research report. For example:

- I liked studying about ______.
- Something I learned is ______.
- I’d like to know ______.

All Levels

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

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We’ve just learned one strategy for brainstorming topics for a research report—using ideas from the social studies and science topics we’ve studied. As you brainstorm on your own, think back to things you’ve studied this year. Decide how you feel about each topic. Ask yourself how much you already know about it and if you’d like to find out more. The best topics for writing a research report are the ones you’re interested in already.

Encourage students to think about content they’ve studied in science and social studies as 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 a research report that they are especially interested in. Ask them to tell why the topics are of interest and the kinds of things they would like to find out.