Use Personal Interests to Brainstorm Ideas

1. Focus

Explain Using Personal Interests to Brainstorm Ideas

Say: When you brainstorm a story, you let your imagination go free. When you brainstorm a procedural text, you think of things you know how to do or things you want to know how to do. But when you brainstorm a report, you need a different strategy. Today I’m going to show you one strategy for coming up with your report ideas. I’m going to show you how to brainstorm by thinking about informational topics that are interesting to you.

Model Using Personal Interests to Brainstorm Ideas

Use the sample think-aloud below or develop your own think-aloud to share with students. Demonstrate how to record ideas on chart paper as you model brainstorming.

Sample think-aloud. Say: When I was shopping last week, I saw a man who was unable to see. He was walking through the store with his guide dog. I think it’s interesting how an animal can be so helpful to a human. I’d like to know more about guide dogs and other animals that help people with disabilities. I’ll write that idea on my chart because it’s very interesting to me. Another interest I could write about is flowers. I love to grow them, and I know which ones are best for our climate. I’ll add that idea to my brainstorming list. Something I don’t know a lot about is growing vegetables and herbs. I’d like to have more information about that. I would like to expand my flower garden to include vegetables and herbs I could use to make salads, such as tomatoes, arugula, basil, and mint. I think it’s something that would be interesting to write about, too. Continue brainstorming other ideas and adding them to the chart.

Things That Interest Me

- animals that help disabled people
- growing flowers
- growing vegetables and herbs
- mountain biking
- hybrid cars
- tsunamis
- pioneers

Sample Brainstorming Chart
2. Rehearse

Practice Using Personal Interests to Brainstorm Ideas

Invite students to work with a partner to brainstorm things they find interesting. Remind them to record their ideas in their writer’s notebooks. To support students’ brainstorming, write the following questions on chart paper to guide their thinking:

- Why is this interesting to me?
- Is this something I know a lot about?
- Is this something I want to know about?

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

Share Ideas

Bring the class back together and invite volunteers to share an idea from their brainstorming as you record each one on a class brainstorming list. As students share, ask them if the idea is something they know a lot about or if it is something they want to find out about. Reread the ideas on the chart and talk about the variety of interesting things students shared. Remind students that a classmate’s idea can lead them to a new idea of their own because, in a classroom of writers, we all get ideas from each other.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We’ve just learned a strategy for using our interests to brainstorm ideas for writing informational reports. As you brainstorm ideas of your own, think about all of the things you find interesting and whether you know a lot about them or not. An interesting idea can grow into an interesting report!

Encourage students to brainstorm topics of interest and list their ideas. During student conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to share their lists of topic ideas.

---

**Strategies to Support ELs**

**Beginning**

Give beginning ELs a sheet of drawing paper folded into two or three sections. Invite them to sketch things they find interesting in each section and then tell you about their drawings using whatever words they can. Write a brief title above each section and label the key people and items in their drawings. Help students form simple sentences about their ideas using simple sentence frames. For example:

- I am interested in ______.

**Intermediate and Advanced**

Provide sentence frames to help ELs talk to their partners as they brainstorm. For example:

- I’m interested in ______.
- I know a lot about ______.
- I’d like to know more about ______.
- ______ is an interesting idea because ______.

**All Levels**

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: information/la información; interesting/interesante.