The Six Traits Across the Curriculum: A Writer’s Roadmap

Did you know? The Common Core State Standards ask EVERY teacher to play a role in students’ writing development—in Literature, Math, Science and Social Studies.

1. IDEAS
   - Literature: Think about potential ideas in a writer’s notebook and keep reading journals to track responses to literature.
   - Math: Show how numbers communicate ideas by analyzing data (e.g., percentage of kids who think school lunch could be improved).
   - Science: Help students form scientific hypotheses, test them through experimentation, and take notes documenting the results.
   - Social Studies: Encourage kids to brainstorm topics for an argumentative essay by taking a perspective on history, like the causes of the Civil War.

2. ORGANIZATION
   - Literature: Use ideas to sequence events in literature and describe how settings have a beginning, middle, and end.
   - Math: Try depicting the same data in different ways (e.g., bar graph, circle chart). “Sketch to see which is the most effective.”
   - Science: Give students a template for a lab report. Once they’ve mastered it, encourage them to experiment organizing their results in different ways.
   - Social Studies: Talk about the differences in organizing a historical argument versus constructing a timeline of events.

3. VOICE
   - Literature: Tease out how characters and settings create a mood and affect the tone of the story.
   - Math: Discuss how symbols and vocabulary are used to convey their thinking and show how the differences impact how the work is interpreted (e.g., symbol “=” vs. “correct answer”).
   - Science: Talk about why scientists’s typically write in a way that is used in a scientific context (e.g., “theory”).
   - Social Studies: Analyze the tone in various primary source documents. How does the tone add to our knowledge of the time period?

4. WORD CHOICE
   - Literature: Keep lists of words that are suited for different types of writing (e.g., opinion writing, response to literature, narrative writing).
   - Math: When solving a problem, challenge students to be precise in explaining their reasoning, using short words as possible.
   - Science: Discuss how words have different meanings when used in a scientific context (e.g., “theory”). Discuss how fluency lends credibility to scientific writing (e.g., it can seem simplistic to have sentences that all start or sound the same).
   - Social Studies: Talk about how the words we use to describe historical events change over time (e.g., the different label assigned to U.S. Civil War).

5. SENTENCE FLUENCY
   - Literature: Give students a blank story outline and have them write the appropriate expressions for a given story.
   - Math: After solving a problem, challenge students to explain their reasoning using varied, interesting sentence structures.
   - Science: Discuss how fluency lends credibility to scientific writing (e.g., it can seem simplistic to have sentences that all start or sound the same).
   - Social Studies: Ask students how “The Gettysburg Address” would be different, for example, if all of the sentences began in the same way.

6. CONVENTIONS
   - Literature: Give students rules another writer’s work for conventions. Provide a list of grammar, usage, mechanics rules and editing marks for students to use.
   - Math: Compare mathematical symbols to punctuation. How does the meaning change, for example, with an inequality instead of an equal sign?
   - Science: Discuss how fluency lends credibility to scientific writing (e.g., it can seem simplistic to have sentences that all start or sound the same).
   - Social Studies: Try giving students complicated historical quotes and challenging them to rewrite the quotes using the appropriate conventions.

Want more help writing across the curriculum using the six traits? Check out Strategies for Writers, a new curriculum from Zaner-Bloser!