

Reading and Writing with the AlphaSmart



Reading Journals

While reading a story, students keep a journal recording their reactions and thoughts. This writing is based on their opinions, so there are no right or wrong answers. You may have them stop every few pages and write 2-3 sentences in their journals. Or they can do the writing at the end of the story. You can also read a story aloud to the class and stop at different points to have them respond. Encourage your students to write about what they like or dislike, what seems confusing or unusual to them, to explain what they think something means, make predictions about what might happen later, and relate their personal experiences, which connect with the plot, characters, or setting.

Quotable Stories

Students identify an important quote in a story they've just read. They write the quote at the beginning of their file and then add 2-5 sentences explaining the quote's importance to the story. For example it might describe a character, or move the plot along, or explain the setting.

Book Covers

Students write a brief, but exciting description of a story they have just read. They print it out directly from their AlphaSmart and in the remaining space on their printed page they illustrate their description. You can post these "book covers" in the room and encourage students to choose their next story to read based on what other students have written.

Online Collaboration

Students write a letter to their partner in another class describing a project they are working on. Taking turns, have each student go to the online computer, open an email message, download their letter from the AlphaSmart and send it to the other class. Or, to save time, you can open one email message and have all your students download sequentially. You can then send the group of letters to the other teacher who responds via one email. You print out the long letter, cut it into individual letters and give it to class members to read and respond.

Cooperative Writing

Using 1 AlphaSmart per writing group: Each student is assigned a special task (one is in charge of spelling, one grammar, one looks only to make sure verb tense is correct throughout, etc). They do a writing activity (You determine type – one week may be fiction, the next a chapter summary in your Social Studies or Science book, the next an explanation story of how to do something or walk somewhere). To input the text, they take turns to begin with – or one student types if one student is faster on the keyboard. Then they print out a rough draft for each member of the group and each student focuses only on their "job". This can be done once a week with the jobs rotating.

Using 1 AlphaSmart per student: Have your students write Round Robin Stories each starting on their own AlphaSmart and you indicating when it is time to pass it on. The first group of writers has to develop characters, next determines setting, next determines action, next determines outcome. You could also do this in a writing center with one AlphaSmart keeping a long Round Robin story going as students have time to go back and write (It is important to have them put their name on their section of writing – as it helps with keeping story on track.).