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Concept Map

What it is...

A concept map is a specific type of graphic organizer that help students visualize various connections between words or phrases and a main idea. There are several types of concept maps; some are hierarchical while others connect information without categorizing ideas.

Most are comprised of words or phrases surrounded by a circle or square that connect to one another and ultimately back to the main idea through graphic lines. These lines help students to "negotiate meaning" (Hyerle, 1996) as they read and make the meaning connections between the main idea and other information.

Why it's so great...

Concept maps have been shown to support struggling readers (Lovitt & Horton, 1994) by building off of students' prior knowledge and asking them to reflect on their understanding while reading. They are easy to construct and can be used across all content areas.

How to create it...

There are several ways to construct concept maps for middle and high school students. Most include the following steps:

1. Model for your students how you identify the major ideas presented in a reading as you read.
2. Organize your ideas into categories if applicable to the type of concept map you chose. Remind students that your organization may change as you continue to read and add more information.
3. Use lines or arrows to represent how ideas are connected to one another, a particular category, and/or the main concept.

How to use it...

- You can use concept maps as a pre-reading strategy by inviting students to share what they already know about a particular concept. As students begin reading and adding to the map, they are able to meld their prior knowledge with new information they have gathered from their reading.
- After students have finished the guide, encourage them to share their concept maps with one another in pairs or small groups. This will allow students to share and reflect on how they each interpreted the connections between concepts and words.
- Encourage students to use the concept map to summarize what they have read, organize their writing on the concept, or to create a study guide for their own studying.

Hyerle, D. (1996). Visual tools for constructing knowledge. Alexandria, VA: Association of Supervisors of Curriculum Development.

Lovitt, T.C., & Horton, S.V. (1994). Strategies for adapting science textbooks for youth with learning disabilities. Remedial and Special Education, 15, 105–116.