



## I USED TO THINK . . . , NOW I THINK . . .

Reflect on your current understanding of this topic, and respond to each of these sentence stems:

- I used to think . . .
- Now I think . . .

Having students reflect at the end of a unit is a common occurrence in classrooms.

However, much of the reflection students offer tends to focus on the activities they did and how they would rate their performance on those tasks. While asking students what they are proud of and what they would like to do better next time can be an interesting conversation, we wanted to create a reflective routine that would focus students' attention more on the thinking that class activities caused them to do rather than reporting on the activities themselves. We also wanted to focus attention on how the development of understanding is not just an accumulation of new information but often results in changes in thinking. This led us to create I Used to Think . . . , Now I Think . . .

### Purpose

This routine helps students reflect on their thinking about a topic or issue and explore how and why that thinking has changed. It can be useful in consolidating new learning as students identify their new understandings, opinions, and beliefs. By examining and explaining how and why their thinking has changed, students develop their reasoning abilities and recognize cause-and-effect relationships. This routine also develops students' metacognitive skills, the ability to identify and talk about one's thinking itself.

### Selecting Appropriate Content

This routine is applicable across a wide variety of subject areas whenever students' initial thoughts, opinions, or beliefs are likely to have changed as a result of instruction or experience. After reading new information, watching a film, listening to a speaker, experiencing something new, having a class discussion, or completing a unit of study are all potentially powerful times a teacher might make use of this routine. Greater depth

and insights are likely when the object of reflection is conceptual or process oriented rather than merely an accumulation of new facts. Ask yourself, Have students had a chance to confront their misconceptions or to shift their thinking in fundamental ways based on the experiences they have had?

### Steps

1. *Set up.* Explain to students that the purpose of this routine is to help them reflect on their thinking about the topic and to identify how their ideas have developed over time. It may be useful for students to have their journals on hand, class documentation available, and/or access to their learning portfolios where collections of their recent work reside.
2. *Encourage individual reflection.* Say to the students, "When we began this study, you all had some initial ideas about it and what it was all about. Take a minute to think back to when we started and remember what kind of ideas you once held. Write what it is that you used to think about our topic, starting off with the words, 'I used to think . . .'" Once students have had a chance to write their responses, say, "Now, I want you to think about how your ideas about our topic have changed as a result of what we've been studying, doing, and discussing in class. Write a few lines to capture where you are now in your thinking, starting with the phrase, 'Now, I think . . .'"
3. *Share the thinking.* Have students share and explain their shifts in thinking. Initially it may be worthwhile to do this as a whole group so that you can probe students' thinking and push them to explain. This also provides a model for students who are having difficulty. Once students become accustomed to explaining their thinking, you could have them share in small groups or pairs before soliciting a whole-group response.

### Uses and Variations

After June Kamenetsky's first grade students at Bialik College completed their unit on communication, she brought the class together in a group and asked them to remember back when they first started exploring communication and to tell her what they used to think it was. June recorded students' responses on the whiteboard for all to see: *I used to think communication was a kind of message and sign language; another word for speaking; was talking on the phone and showing pictures; a long word; was being good and helpful.* June then asked them to tell her how their thinking had changed. Their responses to this prompt included: *Now I think communication means that when you don't know where to*

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go, signs can communicate it to us; you can make a look on your face to show what you want; when somebody who cannot talk uses a computer, other people can read its fossils and drawings communicate to people, too.

The humanities teachers at Vanguard High School in New York City used the I Used to Think... routine to help prepare their seniors for their exit exhibitions. Specifically, students were asked to explain how their thinking grew, shifted, and changed over time when considering the course throughlines: "What is democracy and why does it matter? What does it mean to be free, really?" Once students completed their reflections, the teachers asked them to put together a portfolio of artifacts from the most significant class activities they had experienced during the year that moved their thinking from what it was to where it is now regarding the concepts of democracy and freedom. By having students organize their portfolios around their thinking rather than around favorite projects or assignments with good grades, teachers thought the collection of artifacts represented the most momentous learning students experienced throughout their humanities course.

### Assessment

This routine is fairly open-ended, so teachers must be flexible as to what information can be gleaned from their students' reflections. It is useful to note exactly what students recognize as having shifted in their minds about a topic from what they had initially conceived. This may unveil misconceptions about which the teacher was not previously aware. The responses are likely to be unique for each student. Nonetheless, looking for patterns of responses can be one way a teacher identifies key areas of the class's learning. Do students make mention of particular concepts that have changed for them, or do they reflect upon a new set of skills they've acquired? Do students mention shifts in their thinking about key ideas the teacher might expect them to have reconsidered, or do they mention other kinds of ideas that strike them as significant in ways unexpected to the teacher? Grouping students' reflections by possible themes might help a teacher get a sense of the story of learning that has taken place for students within the studied topic.

### Tips

It is important that this routine carries with it the message that a teacher is genuinely curious about how his or her students' thinking has grown, deepened, shifted, or changed as a result of classroom endeavors. Sometimes there is a tendency for students to think this routine is about saying what they had "wrong" before and what they have "right"

now. When students feel they need to be teacher-pleasing in their responses rather than introspective, genuine reflection on their thinking is compromised. The open-endedness of this routine can cause uneasiness for teachers looking for a specific response from students. By keeping open to whatever students reflect upon, teachers often get new ideas as to where to take their instruction next, even when student responses are not exactly what the teacher had initially imagined.

It sometimes strikes people as a good idea to do the I Used to Think... portion at the beginning of a unit, before instruction begins. However, one cannot possibly identify misconceptions and ingrained assumptions until they have been confronted. Consequently, this type of reflection can only effectively happen after new learning has occurred. With time, this routine develops students' disposition to be aware of their own thinking by keeping a clear emphasis on the cause-and-effect relationships of what students do and how their thinking changes. As a result it is not uncommon for students to suddenly become aware of new insights as they happen and to express these aloud as "I used to think..., but now I think..."

### A Picture of Practice

The year before Erica Doyle began using thinking routines in her ninth grade Reading-Writing Workshop at Vanguard High School in New York City, she remembers a tense conference with a student about a memoir the student had just written. "I asked her about some of the details she'd written about. Whether she remembered what something looked like and what other details she might add to make her piece better," said Erica. The student seemed frustrated by Erica's questioning and finally said, "Why don't you just tell me what to write?" Erica was taken aback by this reaction. The student continued, "Well, there's obviously something you want me to write, so just tell me what to write!" Erica realized in that moment that her student had come to learn that school wasn't a place where her thinking mattered very much. School was a place that she came to repeat back the adult's thinking. "I never thought about this before. This young lady was the first person that was bold enough to call me on this game," remembers Erica. "It was then I became really curious as to how I could create a classroom culture where my students' thinking mattered. I started asking myself how I could make sure that our Reading-Writing Workshop was about *our* thinking, where all of *our* ideas could be validated and valued, not just mine."

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Erica knows that many students come into her workshop not considering themselves good readers or writers. "It is as if they hold a fixed viewpoint that only some people have the ability to read and write well and most others don't, so I've wondered how I could help change that mindset. I've wondered how I could challenge their thinking about what it means to be a good reader and writer. Figuring out a way to help them become aware of their own growth seems key," believes Erica. "When I first encountered thinking routines, the I Used to Think... Now I Think... routine seemed perfect to help students pay close attention to how their minds can grow over time throughout the school year."

Trying to keep the routine as open as possible, Erica started by asking her students to write for her what they used to think and what they're thinking now about their reading and writing at the end of the class period. "I soon realized the responses my students had written were a lot broader than just telling me what was happening with their reading and writing in my class," remembers Erica. The first time she used the routine, students said things like *I used to think I wouldn't like this book because I don't like this genre, but now I think I do like it, or I used to think I'd never do good in school because I didn't really do good in elementary and middle school, but now I think I will graduate*. These reflections weren't exactly what Erica was aiming for, but she quickly recognized that her students were genuinely telling her what was going on inside their minds. "At first I thought they didn't quite get the routine, then I realized that actually this was pretty amazing information about how my students were seeing themselves as learners. This was their thinking 'in the wild,' and that was a great place for me to start challenging their mindsets about what it means to be a capable learner," Erica said.

Rather than discarding the I Used to Think..., Now I Think... routine, Erica decided to use it even more. "I wanted to make this a regular part of how we make our thinking visible in this workshop," said Erica. "So I persisted in using this routine daily at the conclusion of each class session. Getting my students to open up about how they saw themselves socially, emotionally, and as learners helped create the kind of safe culture I wished for them to experience."

Eventually, Erica began to target her students' thinking a bit more toward what they were reading. "I said to them, 'Okay, as you do your I Used to Think... today, I want you to consider how your thinking has changed since we started reading Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*. What have you been thinking about a particular character, or the plot, or the setting? Maybe there was a prediction you had that didn't come true? I want you to write to me with that kind of focus in

mind today.'"

Having familiarity with the routine and being gently prompted by Erica to focus their attention on the text, students wrote reflections such as:

- I used to think Katniss was a coward because she wouldn't speak up at the beginning of the games, but now I think she's not a coward because she shot an arrow at the judges.
- I used to think that Kat was going to let Prim fight because her personality wasn't big hearted, but now I know that she's thoughtful because she sacrificed herself.
- I used to think about coliseums as great heroic things because of "Gladiator," but now I think it's horrible because it's the same principles as the "Hunger Games."

Students who had previously told Erica that they were *not* readers and were *not* writers were beginning to share thoughtful insights with Erica and with others in the class the same way readers and writers would do. Erica was extremely pleased.

Along with helping students feel safe enough to make their thinking visible, Erica knew she had to communicate the value of her students' thinking. "I decided I needed to intentionally make use of their thinking in these 'I used to think... now I think...' reflections," said Erica. "So I found myself starting class the following day saying, 'I noticed that a lot of people mentioned things about the main character, Katniss Everdeen, yesterday in your reflections, so why don't we talk about her a little more today?' or 'I noticed so many of you said things about characterization in your reflections, but I'm wondering what people have noticed about symbols and symbolization. What kinds of things are you picking up on there? What is shifting in your thinking?'" Erica did not want her students to feel their "I used to think..., but now I think..." reflections were just sitting on her desk never to be visited again; rather, she wanted to convey value for students' thinking by using it to guide where they would go next in their learning.

Erica believes that drawing her students' attention to how their thinking develops over time has had great impact on them on many levels. Over the course of a school year, Erica collects her students' reflections on their personal development as readers and writers and tries to sort them into categories so that she can learn from possible patterns that emerge (see Table 5.5). This provides her with valuable insight into the impact her class is having on students' development as independent, engaged learners.

**Table 5.5 Erica Doyle's Categorization of Students' Reflections on Their Growth as Readers, Writers, and Learners**

<p><b>Self-Monitoring</b></p> <p>I used to think I was able to multitask by talking and doing work but now I think I need to sit with people I don't like because I talk too much. (Andrea, 4/26/10)</p> <p>I used to think that I couldn't do this because I was confused but now I think that I can do it. (Jose, 5/20/10)</p>
<p><b>Emotional</b></p> <p>I used to think I was a non-stressed person but now I think I'm not because so many things are on my mind as in: family, life, crushes, school. A lot of things are stressful because it requires a lot of time. I know this because something's always on my mind. (Nicholas, 10/26/09)</p> <p>I used to think that I had a messed up personality because people say I'm bad and say pretty horrible things but now I think I'm all right because Catnip [main character's nickname from Hunger Games book we read together] is practical and that's me. (Arawis, 3/9/10)</p>
<p><b>Social</b></p> <p>I used to think I would never get a long with nobody [sic] in this school because I barely got along with anybody in junior high school. But now I think I get along with a lot of people in high school because I have a lot of friends. (Dionna, 3/23/10)</p> <p>What I learned today is that Salim is a good and smart friend. I used to think this project is lame because I didn't know how to do it. But now I think it's going good because Salim helped me. (Alexis, 4/22/10)</p>
<p><b>School—Grades</b></p> <p>I used to think I wasn't gonna pass last semester because my grades were low. But now I think I passed it because I saw my grades and they were higher than I thought it would be. (Dionna, 3/22/10)</p>
<p><b>Writing Process—General</b></p> <p>I used to think that writing was really boring because it seemed like you needed to take so much time and be creative, but now I think that it's fun because you can express anything you want in it and we don't get topics to write about, it's free write. (Pamela, 10/26/09)</p> <p>I used to think writing could be two sentences because I didn't like writing because I was mad lazy. But now I think I can add so much details because writing opens up a whole another [sic] world. (Luis T., 10/26/09)</p> <p>I used to think that writing was boring because it was a lot of work and confusion. But now I think it's fun because you learn a lot from your own writing. (Juan, 4/27/10)</p> <p>I used to think that grammar wasn't really a big deal because I just went through school writing papers and having teachers check my work and not really teaching me about grammar. But now I see that grammar is really important and that I really need to work on it because it is important and I have to work better at getting what I'm saying through clearly. (Chekeshia, 5/20/10)</p> <p>I used to think that the hook is just a sentence that you write. And now I think that it would be something that would bring the reader in to read my essay because that's what makes the reader want to read. (Jessica, 4/20/10)</p> <p>I used to think that essays were just a summary of an object because I always wrote an essay on how the teacher told me. Now I think that essays are more complicated because it helps you understand grammar and also makes you a better reader. (Estiven, 4/27/10)</p>

This evolving collection of students' responses provides valuable data that help Erica gain a sense of what seems particularly useful for her learners, or what might be missing from her instruction that could be revisited with students in following lessons. "This thinking routine has helped me get to know what is really inside my students' minds. Everything a student gives me, whatever he or she gives me, tells me something about the student. It is all good information that I can use to help them grow as readers, writers, and as human beings," says Erica. "I believe anything that makes their thinking visible is a prize to truly value."