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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to provide teachers of grades 4 to 8 with a way to help their students become more independent and responsible readers. I've found that the best way to achieve this with my own middle school students is to teach each reading objective well and then give students a choice of activities. When students are given a choice in their own learning, they feel a sense of ownership; they take control and set a purpose for completing the assignment.

One of my favorite ways to provide choices for reading-response activities is to design a Think-Tac-Toe grid full of projects—a choice board for learning. For each of the seven literary elements covered in this book, you'll find a Think-Tac-Toe grid that lists nine engaging projects for students to complete during independent work time. Students choose which projects they want to complete according to their individual strengths and learning-style preferences (written, oral, visual, and/or kinesthetic). Each project comes with an easy-to-follow assignment sheet that guides students to completion; students can set their own pace while working on their projects and you can assist students as needed.

Most important, this independent reading management kit offers a student-centered way to differentiate your instruction for all learners: Your reluctant readers will enjoy completing activities that are within their comfort zone and your above-average readers will soar with activities that require more in-depth thinking.

How to Use This Book

The projects in this book may be used as an independent reading program or they may be used to supplement your existing program. Each chapter presents nine project options in a Think-Tac-Toe grid to help students explore a specific literary element. The projects come with student-friendly instructions and grading criteria to help guide them and enable you and your students to easily evaluate their work.

How you decide to use the project choices will depend on your teaching style, your classroom setup, and how much independent work your students are able to handle. Here are a few different ways you can structure the work:

- As an independent study on a certain literary element.
- As an end-of-the-novel project or after reading a few chapters to assess what students have learned so far about one or more literary elements.
- As a way to have students practice reading response using several literary elements you would like them to focus on.
- As a tiered assignment.
- To offer both teacher- and student-choice assignments.
- To encourage critical thinking through teacher- and student-created assignments.

Independent Study

If you choose to conduct an independent study on a literary element, have students review the assigned Think-Tac-Toe grid and decide on three projects to complete after they've finished a novel. Then have students complete and sign a contract that lists their project choices (see the reproducible contract on page 8). In this way, students know what you expect and understand how to reach that expectation. Make sure that both you and their parent or guardian review and sign the contract so that everyone is held accountable: the teacher, the student, and the parent.

Have students use the Daily Log on page 9 to set goals for themselves as they work independently in class. (I have my students note the work they've finished on the form and turn it in everyday before they leave my class so I can initial it and keep track of their progress.)

The image shows three reproducible forms used for independent study on literary elements.

Setting Projects (Page 10): A Think-Tac-Toe grid for choosing projects. The grid is 3x3. The top row contains 'Diorama', 'Visual Representation', and 'Map'. The middle row contains 'Trip Plan', 'Cube', and 'Friendly Letter'. The bottom row contains 'Pop-Up Folder', 'Mystery Cards', and '3-D Model'. Below the grid is a small illustration of a house. The form includes fields for 'Name', 'Book Title', and 'Due Date'.

STUDENT CONTRACT (Page 8): A form for a student to agree to complete projects. It includes fields for 'Name' (Vivian) and 'Date' (April 8th). The student has chosen three projects: 1. Diorama, 2. Visual Representation, and 3. Map. The contract includes a section for the student's signature, parent's signature, and teacher's signature, all dated May 3rd.

Map (Page 13): A worksheet for creating a map of a story's setting. It includes a 'Skill' section (Describe setting details in relation to key events in a story), a 'What you'll need' section (a sheet of 8- by 14-inch construction paper, markers or colored pencils), and a 'Steps' section. The steps include: 1. While you are reading, take notes on the story's main setting. Note where key locations are in relation to landmarks and the general landscape of the place. 2. After reading the book, create a colorful map of the main setting. Be sure to label all of the places you include on the map. 3. If the author does not give specific information about the locations of certain places that are important to the setting, you may have to infer those locations. If your novel is based in an actual town or state, you may want to refer to a map. 4. If you've labeled the map, a few sentences near the map of the places that they major and minor that occurred there. A 'Grading Criteria' table is also included, with points for various categories: Location and landmarks (15 Points), All locations and landmarks are labeled (10 Points), Map layout is neat and uncluttered (5 Points), Major and minor events are described (10 Points), Creativity (5 Points), and Mechanics (50 Points). Below the criteria is a small illustration of a map.

End-of-Novel Assessment

When they've finished a novel, give the whole class the same Think-Tac-Toe grid to complete and let students select project choices for the literary element.

If students need more scaffolding, have them complete just one assignment from the Think-Tac-Toe grid after reading a few chapters of the novel. For example, recently I had my entire class read the first four chapters of Robert C. O'Brien's *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* and then choose one reading-response project according to their interests and strengths. I assigned the setting Think-Tac-Toe grid (page 10), because the novel covered much of the setting in these chapters. I used the project grade in place of a quiz on setting.

Combined-Literary-Element Instruction

If you would like to have students focus on more than one element at a time, you can create a Think-Tac-Toe grid that targets multiple literary elements by cutting and pasting sections of different literary element pages on to the blank Think-Tac-Toe grid on page 112.

Have students choose a project from each row so they work on all the literary elements you've selected. For example, if you have students who need practice in the areas of characterization, setting, and point of view, then you may give them a multiple-literary-element Think-Tac-Toe to work on, as shown in the example.

Name: _____ Due Date: _____		
Book Title: _____		
Report Card	Memory Box	Character Profile
Diorama	3-D Model	Visual Representation
Readers Theater	Rewrite	Fractured Version

Character projects

Setting projects

Point-of-View projects

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Differentiated Assignments

You can create differentiated learning tasks by assigning students the appropriate Think-Tac-Toe grid. For example, you may have six students working on projects from the plot grid, while five are working on the theme grid.

You also may want to have students who need more support complete only one project from the grid, while you assign two or more projects to students who require a more challenging assignment. This leveled option works well for a mixed-ability classroom.

Teacher- and Student-Choice Assignments

Another way to use the Think-Tac-Toe grid is to select a teacher-choice project that students must complete and circle it on the grid—or create your own assignment and write it in the center of the grid. (I usually write this project in the middle square and label it “Teacher’s Choice.” Students know that they are all responsible for completing that project.) Let students choose one or two more projects from the remaining options. This format encourages students to take control of their own learning while allowing you to assess all students on a single project that targets a specific learning goal.

Tip

Almost all projects require paper and pencil or pen. Additional materials are listed for each project. Be sure to have a supply of both lined and unlined (copy) paper available for your students.

Teacher- or Student-Created Assignments

When students are familiar with the Think-Tac-Toe grid format, you may want to create your own grid to teach other reading objectives. Fill in a copy of the blank grid template with your own project choices. For example, you may design

an assignment grid that focuses on a certain novel, author's craft, and more.

Students also may want to create their own Think-Tac-Toe assignment grids. Encourage them to develop a set of activities around a specific literary element or reading objective.

Introducing Independent Reading Activities for Literary Elements

After I've taught a new literary element, I make an overhead transparency of the Think-Tac-Toe board for that element and a set of copies for the class. I show the transparency on the overhead and give a brief summary of each project. I ask students to put stars next to the projects they may want to do. Then I invite them to attend an informational meeting on the projects they've starred. At the meeting, I hand out copies of the activity directions, review the procedures, and answer any questions. After they've attended several meetings, I give them one day to narrow their choices to three projects, fill in the Student Contract, and have it signed.

Every day before they work on the project in class, I expect students to set goals for what they will accomplish. At the end of the period they record what they actually have accomplished in their Daily Logs. I collect the logs before students leave and, later, review and initial them, so I can monitor their progress each day.

Assessing Student Work

Each project has its own rubric with specific grading criteria. Students can use the rubric on their project direction sheet for guidance. At the end of each chapter, you'll find a grading summary sheet that includes the rubrics for the nine projects. Make a copy of the summary sheet for each student and check the boxes next to the three projects he or she decides to complete. Grade the projects as the student completes them. When the student has completed all three, record the final total on the summary line at the bottom. This score will be his or her final grade.

Displaying Student Work

Once all three projects have been turned in and graded, I choose some examples of outstanding work to display around the room and out in the hallway. I think it is important for students to see what other projects look like. It also motivates students to preview projects they may have a chance to work on soon.

Name: _____ Date: _____

STUDENT CONTRACT

I have read the book _____ and agree to complete the following projects based on this story:

Project choice #1 _____

I chose this project because _____

_____.

Project choice #2 _____

I chose this project because _____

_____.

Project choice #3 _____

I chose this project because _____

_____.

I prefer to do a project of my own creation: _____

_____.

I reserve the right to change project choices at any time as long as I inform my teacher and parent(s), by completing a new plan on this form. I must have the change initialed by both my teacher and parent(s).

In addition to completing this project I agree to keep a Daily Log of what I accomplish each day in class and when I work on my projects at home. I will bring my Daily Log to my teacher so that my work can be monitored. My teacher agrees to initial my Daily Log after he or she reviews it. My parent(s) agree to initial my Daily Log when I work at home on my projects.

I agree to turn in my projects on this date _____.

Student signature _____

Parent signature _____

Teacher signature _____

Name: _____ Date: _____

DAILY LOG

[illegible]

Setting Projects

Name: _____ Due Date: _____

Book Title: _____

Diorama

3-D Model

**Visual
Representation**

Map

Trip Plan

Cube

**Friendly
Letter**

**Pop-Up
Folder**

**Mystery
Cards**

