The Best Ideas for Managing and Evaluating the Interactive Student Notebook

Presented by TCI

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Using the Interactive Student Notebook
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"Notebooks have made my students more responsible for their own learning. They have become more involved in the lessons, more attentive during the activities and reading, and more precise in their note taking."

Posted on a wall of almost every elementary classroom in the nation, you will likely see the crowded daily agenda: reading, writing, spelling, math, physical education, science, music, art, and sometimes even social studies. With all the subjects elementary teachers are responsible for covering, it’s no wonder social studies is taught so sporadically. Consequently, most elementary students get a fragmented view of the subject. It is difficult for them to remember—much less synthesize and apply—what they learn. And it is almost impossible for teachers to measure student growth. This is why elementary teachers across the nation are turning to Interactive Student Notebooks as a cornerstone of social studies instruction.

Students eagerly take out these notebooks when it is time to begin a social studies lesson. The Interactive Student Notebook provides a cohesive structure and serves as the organizational anchor for the multiple intelligence activities that occur in a TCI lesson. Students’ work in the Interactive Student Notebook centers on three key elements of the TCI Approach:
• **Preview Assignments** At the start of a lesson, a short, intriguing assignment helps students connect the upcoming lesson to their own experience, activating their prior knowledge.

• **Graphically Organized Reading Notes** As the lesson unfolds, students use a section called Reading Notes to record, in a striking graphic format, main ideas and supporting details of what they are learning.

• **Processing Assignments** Students end the lesson with a Processing assignment—perhaps involving an illustrated timeline, matrix, annotated map, flowchart, advertisement, or persuasive letter—to synthesize and apply their learning.

Examples of each of these parts of the notebook can be found in the corresponding sections of this book.

**Why Interactive Student Notebooks Engage Students**

Teachers find that their students embrace the Interactive Student Notebook enthusiastically. “I used to hate taking notes and filling out worksheets in class,” one student commented, “but I love working on my notebook because it’s fun.” Teachers also report that because the Interactive Student Notebook encourages a variety of forms of expression, there’s more interest and more involvement by students, in addition to more learning and better retention. Here’s why Interactive Student Notebooks truly engage students:

They reach out to students, inviting them to be active participants in their learning. Many students are accustomed to filling out blanks on a worksheet or laboriously copying teacher-written notes from the board or the overhead. The Interactive Student Notebook changes that. At the beginning of a lesson, students are “hooked” with a personalized Preview assignment that taps into their own experiences and prior knowledge. Then students are encouraged to record Reading Notes accurately for a purpose—searching for implications or assumptions, identifying main ideas, providing supporting details, interpreting information. They will use this information during Processing assignments that challenge them to really think and apply what they have learned. As a result, students become more creative, more independent thinkers.

They encourage students to use a variety of intelligences, not just linguistic intelligence. Conventional student notebooks may work for motivated students with strong linguistic skills, but they do not work as well for students with other predominant intelligences. In the Interactive Student Notebook, students approach understanding in many ways. They can tap into their visual intelligence through such elements as graphs, maps, illustrations, pictowords, and visual metaphors; their musical intelligence by composing song lyrics or reacting to a piece of music; their intrapersonal intelligence by reflecting on the ways social studies topics affect them personally; their interpersonal intelligence by recording group discussions and group project notes; and their logical-mathematical intelligence through sequencing and the use of spectrums, graphs, and charts.

“Students like that the notebooks allow them the freedom and creativity to express themselves in a variety of ways. Parents continually tell me that they think it’s fantastic that kids are relating social studies to their lives and writing about what they learn in their notebooks.”
They help students to organize systematically as they learn. Students use their notebooks to record ideas about every social studies lesson. They use a variety of organizational techniques—topic headings, color-coding, different writing styles—to give coherence to what they learn. The notebook also helps students keep assignments together and in a logical order. Gone are the days of notes and assignments wadded up and stuffed in backpacks or lockers.

They become a portfolio of individual learning. These personal, creative notebooks become a record of each student’s growth. Teachers, students, and even family members can review a student’s progress in writing, thinking, and organizational skills. This makes them useful for parent conferences.

Hints for Making Effective Interactive Student Notebooks

Teachers use the Interactive Student Notebook in a variety of forms. Some give their students the consumable workbook that is provided with TCI’s core program materials. Teachers who elect to use this consumable can follow the sequence exactly as designed, having students complete the specified Previews, Reading Notes, and Processing assignments. This helps teachers who are new to the TCI Approach, since they can rely on the published Interactive Student Notebook for support while they are learning to use the essential elements and strategies of the program.

Other teachers elect to supplement the printed workbook with their own handouts and materials that students bring in. Students use spiral-bound notebooks, clasp folders, or three-ring binders to combine the materials, cutting and pasting as they create their own unique Interactive Student Notebooks. In this format, TCI materials serve as the backbone, but teachers have the flexibility to tailor instruction to suit their needs.
Still other teachers may be developing their own curricular materials based on the TCI Approach. They won’t have a published notebook to start with, but they can follow the same structure, having students create spiral-bound Interactive Student Notebooks that include the teacher’s own prereading or Preview activities, graphic organizers for capturing content notes, and Processing assignments, plus any additional support materials. Creating this type of Interactive Student Notebook is labor-intensive, but many teachers are willing and eager to take on the task because of the tremendous success of this powerful organizational and instructional tool.

Regardless of the format you plan to use, the following hints will increase the effectiveness of your Interactive Student Notebooks and allow students’ individual styles to flourish.

1. **Supply materials that inspire creativity.** An abundance of materials—colored pencils and markers, scissors, glue sticks, colored highlighters—will spark creativity for notebook assignments. Some teachers keep a class set of such materials in their room for in-class work on the notebooks.

Students use their visual intelligence when they interpret information graphically in their notebooks. With colored markers and construction paper, they create vivid images that help them understand and remember key concepts.
2. Let students create their own covers. When you introduce the Interactive Student Notebook, encourage students to embellish theirs with a colorful cover that in some way reflects the content you are teaching. This immediately sends students the message that the notebooks will be their own creations that they can take pride in—and it helps cut down on the number of lost notebooks during the year.

Notebook covers can be as individual as your students. It’s up to you to specify which information you consider essential for the cover, such as the subject area, student’s name, classroom, teacher’s name, or date.
3. Personalize the notebooks with an author page. Have students create a page about themselves to include at the front of their notebooks. Their author page could include a portrait or photograph, as well as personal information or favorite quotes. (As needed, remind students that any content unsuitable at school is also unacceptable for use in notebooks.) With both a personalized cover and an author page, very few notebooks get lost.

4. Consider adding a table of contents. The consumable workbook format comes with a simple table of contents. If students are assembling their own notebooks, you may want them to create a running table of contents. This helps them stay organized and ensures that they have a record of all assignments. Ideally, all of their social studies work is collected in the notebook, so they will list the Preview, Reading and Activity Notes, and Processing for every lesson.

Lost Notebooks?
Because students take a great deal of pride of ownership in their notebooks, typically very few are lost during a semester. Most teachers report that only a handful of students lose them each year. If your students do lose their notebooks, consider allowing them to make up a select number of assignments so they may receive partial credit.

A contents page for the notebook helps students stay organized. It can be as simple as a list of assignments and the page where each can be found. These examples show two possible formats. Recording the scores for individual assignments will help you immensely when it’s time to grade the notebook as a whole.
5. **Give clear guidelines for the notebooks.** One of the most important steps for successful notebooks is to establish clear guidelines. Decide ahead of time what you expect your students to produce in their notebooks, and then clearly communicate your expectations. Most teachers create a list of criteria on which notebooks will be graded and have students attach it to the inside cover of the notebook.

You might also send a letter to students and families, explaining the purpose of the notebook and your expectations. See, for example, the sample guidelines shown opposite. Note that this teacher uses the consumable workbook for blackline masters. Students glue these worksheets into a spiral notebook, interspersed with their own work.

**How to Manage Interactive Student Notebooks**

With daily assignments to review and grade for each student in three to four other content areas besides social studies, you will need a simple system for assessing these notebooks. Ideally, you will both informally assess the notebooks on a regular basis, to give students immediate feedback, and also formally collect and grade the notebooks every three to four weeks. The assessment section of this book offers tips for managing the assessment of student notebooks.

**Create an “Interactive Teacher Notebook.”** One very useful management tool is a master notebook in which you record each notebook assignment, attach student handouts, store copies of content notes, and make annotations on the activities for future reference—notes on how they went, which groups or individuals seemed to have trouble with them and why, and what questions really worked to prompt good critical thinking. By keeping a master notebook, you have a visual record of what took place in class.

The Interactive Teacher Notebook serves both the teacher and the students. For the teacher, this tool

- functions as the teacher’s lesson-planning book.
- includes a table of contents that becomes the “official” record of assignments.
- provides a place to store extra materials and handouts.
- communicates special instructions for students who have been absent.
- serves as a journal to reflect on the effectiveness of activities and assignments and ways to improve them.

For students, the Interactive Teacher Notebook

- is a place they can find any information and assignments they missed during an absence.
- serves as a model of how assignments should be title, dated, and arranged.
- allows them to check the completeness of their own notebook.
Interactive Student Notebook Guidelines

What is the purpose of the Interactive Notebook?
The purpose is to help you be a creative, independent thinker. Your notebook will be used for taking notes on your social studies reading, and sometimes on the activities we do in class. You will express your ideas and apply what you have learned.

What materials do I need?
- Spiral notebook (white paper, college-ruled, at least 100 pages)
- Blue and black pens, number 2 pencil
- Glue stick and scissors
- Colored pens and pencils, highlighters

What goes in my notebook?
Everything we do in social studies. It will contain your reading notes, written assignments, maps, diagrams, and artwork.

How will my notebook be graded?
I will look for these things:
- Is your notebook complete? Have you finished all the assignments?
- What is the quality of your work?
- Is your notebook well organized?
- Is your notebook NEAT and attractive? Have you included drawings?

I will check the notebooks from time to time—usually every 3 or 4 weeks. All class notes and notebook assignments must be included, even for days you were absent.

What happens if I am absent?
If you are absent, it is your responsibility to get the notebook assignments from a classmate or from the teacher.

Please share this handout with your parent or guardian. When both of you have read this information, please sign your names below.

Student Signature ___________________________

Parent Signature ______________________________
Four Steps to Implementation

   - Monitor aggressively by walking around and writing comments and suggestions in Interactive Student Notebooks.
   - Allow students to use notebooks on a quiz or test.
   - Have students look at other student examples.

2. Grade daily assignments.
   - Use as daily grades.
   - Use lesson directions to determine what is graded.

3. Grade notebooks as a whole.
   - Determine your objective for the notebook.
   - Grade according to goals.
   - Explain to students the criteria used to grade notebooks.
   - Create an evaluation form.
   - Stagger collection and grading.
   - Plan ahead of time when you will grade notebooks.

4. Continually strive to improve the quality of student notebooks.
   - Require students to add color.
   - Encourage a sense of pride in notebooks.
   - Help parents to understand the concept of the Interactive Student Notebook.
Interactive Student Notebook Evaluation Rubric

Name ____________________________

5 – Exceptional Project

Notes
• All notes are neat, easy to read, and complete (even for days student was absent).
• Graphic organizers are used consistently for notes and there are at least seven different organizers employed in notes.
• Color is used consistently and effectively to help distinguish ideas or information in notes.
• Student has at least a dozen examples of adding information to notes from his or her own unassigned research.

Preview and Processing Assignments
• All responses are neat and complete.
• Most responses are thoughtful, colorful, and creative.
• Student has included at least a dozen personal responses or extensions to learning that were not assigned by the teacher.

Extra Elements
• Student has included several elements in his or her notebook that were either unassigned or go well beyond the requirements specified by the teacher (ex: detailed table of contents, exceptionally creative unit title pages).

4 – Strong Project

Notes
• Notes are generally neat, easy to read, and complete (even for days student was absent).
• Graphic organizers are used consistently for notes and there are at least five different organizers employed in notes.
• Color is used often and effectively to help distinguish ideas or information in notes.
• Student has at least six examples of adding information to notes from his or her own unassigned research.

Preview and Processing Assignments
• Responses are generally neat and complete.
• Many responses are thoughtful, colorful, and/or creative.
• Student has included at least six personal responses or extensions to learning that were not assigned by the teacher.

Extra Elements
• Student has included one or two elements in his or her notebook that were either unassigned or go well beyond the requirements specified by the teacher (ex: detailed table of contents, exceptionally creative unit title pages).
3 – Standard Project

Notes
- Some notes are incomplete, not well organized, or difficult to read.
- Graphic organizers are used for notes but not consistently. There are at least three different organizers employed.
- Color is used but not consistently or effectively to help distinguish ideas or information in notes.
- Student has at least three examples of adding information to notes from his or her own unassigned research.

Preview and Processing Assignments
- Most responses are neat and complete.
- Some responses are thoughtful, colorful, and/or creative.
- Student has included at least three personal responses that were not assigned by the teacher.

Extra Elements
- Student has not included any elements to his or her notebook that were either unassigned or go beyond the requirements specified by the teacher.

2 – Substandard Project

Notes
- Many notes are incomplete, not well organized, or difficult to read.
- Graphic organizers are rarely or never used for notes.
- Color is rarely or never used to help differentiate ideas or information.
- Student has no examples of adding information to notes from his or her own unassigned research.

Preview and Processing Assignments
- Many responses are either incomplete or messy.
- Few, if any, of the responses are thoughtful, colorful, or creative.
- Student has not included any personal responses or extension to learning.

Extra Elements
- Student has not included any elements to his or her notebook that were either unassigned or go beyond the requirements specified by the teacher.

1 – Incomplete Project

- Most or all of the notes and preview and processing assignments are either incomplete or missing.

Student Comments: Overall Student Evaluation ________
(1, 2, 3, 4, or 5)

Teacher Comments: Overall Teacher Evaluation ________
(1, 2, 3, 4, or 5)