

**FOR-PD's Reading Strategy of the Month**

**TEA PARTY**  
**December 2006**



(Developed by Smith, L. & Zygouris-Coe, V., 2006)

"The March  
Hare took  
the watch  
and looked  
at it  
gloomily:  
then he  
dipped it into  
his cup of  
tea, and  
looked at it  
again: but  
he could  
think of  
nothing  
better to say  
than his first  
remark, 'It  
was the best  
butter, you  
know.'

Alice had  
been looking  
over his  
shoulder  
with some  
curiosity.  
'What a  
funny  
watch!' she  
remarked.  
'It tells the  
day of the  
month, and  
doesn't tell  
what o'clock  
it is!'

'Why should  
it?' muttered  
the Hatter.  
'Does your  
watch tell  
you what  
year it is?'

'Of course  
not,' Alice  
replied very  
readily: 'but

that's  
because it  
stays the  
same year  
for such a  
long time  
together.'

`Which is  
just the case  
with mine,'  
said the  
Hatter.

Alice felt  
dreadfully  
puzzled. The  
Hatter's  
remark  
seemed to  
have no sort  
of meaning  
in it, and yet  
it was  
certainly  
English. `I  
don't quite  
understand  
you,' she  
said, as  
politely as  
she could."

~Lewis  
Carroll  
*Alice's  
Adventures  
in  
Wonderland,*

"A Mad Tea-  
Party"

## Rationale:

Poor, young Alice; what a predicament she found herself in when she fell down that shadowy rabbit hole. She may have been better off making the daisy-chain instead of chasing the White Rabbit. Plus, the tea party she attended led her to confusion and many misgivings. Perhaps if Alice had taken the time to predict what was going to happen, compared and contrasted her opportunities for the day, or considered the causes for her boredom she may not have been tempted to follow that punctually-challenged rabbit. She might have saved herself both anguish and agony.

Of course, that tea party gave Alice an excellent opportunity to get to know some fine, fine characters. As we read above, the March Hare, the Mad Hatter, and the Dormouse each brought interesting conversation to the table even if it did consist of clocks and butter. The concept of a tea party lends itself well to the idea that attendees should get to know each other and better understand one another through dialogue and discussion. It is with this in mind that the Tea Party literacy strategy was developed.

The Tea Party strategy offers students an opportunity to actively participate in discussions and consider parts of a story or content-area text before they ever actually read it. While students mimic a tea party by conversing with one another, they are also encouraged to "predict what they think will happen in the text as they make inferences, see causal relationships, compare and contrast, practice sequencing, and draw on their own prior experiences" (Beers, 2003, p. 94). Reluctant readers are enticed to read more of the text as they gain insights on the material. Actively involving students in constructing meaning before reading a text is a good way to help engage student with the text and ensure they consider what they are reading during each stage of reading.

## How to Use the Strategy:

Tea party is a social activity mostly used as a pre-reading strategy, although it can be modified as an after reading activity as a way to celebrate the conclusion of a thematic unit or literature focused unit (Tompkins, 1998).

### Steps to Tea Party (Beers, 2003)

#### Create Cards

Using index cards or small sheets of paper, write phrases, sentences, or words from the text that the students will be reading. Remember to not paraphrase the text; the students should have the exact material provided in the text. Choose phrases that offer insight into characters, plot, setting, and conflicts.

Example of Tea Party phrases, sentences, and words for <i>Speak</i> by Laurie Halse Anderson.
I am Outcast.
THE FIRST TEN LIES THEY TELL YOU IN HIGH SCHOOL
Gym should be illegal. It is humiliating.
Rachel/Rachelle has lost her mind. She has flipped. She went to the movies with Andy Beast and her exchange friends and now she follows after him like a bichon frise.
Maya Angelou watches me, two fingers on the side of her face. It is an intelligent pose. Maya wants me to tell Rachel.
The Beast Prowls
Anderson, L.H. (1999). <i>Speak</i> . Penguin: New York.

#### Have Students "Socialize"

Pass out cards and have students roam around the room, talking and chatting individually about the information on the cards and what they think the text will be about. This should take between ten-to-twelve minutes. As students study the phrases on their cards they begin to develop an outline in their minds about the story and text elements. They gain insight into possible settings, characters, cause and effect relationships, the sequencing of the material, and gain insight into what the story will be about.

Example Tea Party Discussion
<b>Student One:</b> My card reads, "gym should be illegal. It is humiliating". This must be a story about someone in school who hates gym.
<b>Student Two:</b> Mine says, "I am Outcast".
<b>Student Three:</b> Like the band Outcast? Maybe she's in the band!
<b>Student One:</b> No, quit joking around. It goes back to school. This person's in school and they feel like an outcast.
<b>Student Two:</b> Right! This person really feels like an outcast though. They are using the word "outcast" with a capital letter so it's more like a name.
<b>Student Four:</b> They must not be very popular. Mine is "Maya Angelou watches me, two fingers on the side of her face. It is an intelligent pose. Maya wants me to tell Rachel". I think Rachel is a friend and Maya must be a teacher. This person must have a secret.
<b>Student Three:</b> Nope, Maya Angelou is a poet. Remember, we read one of her poems last semester. This person must like to read poems. That's cool.
<b>Student Five:</b> Mine says "Rachel/Rachelle has lost her mind. She has flipped. She went to the movies with Andy Beast and her exchange friends and now she follows after him like a bichon frise". What's a bichon frise?

**Student One:** My aunt has one of those. It's a white, fluffy dog. He's always following me around.

**Student Two:** No way! This person is calling Rachel a dog. She must be jealous! I'd be mad if someone called me something like that.

**Student Three:** Or envious, there is a difference between envy and jealousy.

**Student Four:** Beast is an odd last name. I think the person's making fun of him. He must have done something to make him a beast.

### Return to Small Groups

Have students meet in small groups to discuss their predictions and what they think is happening in the story or text. Having four-to-five students per group is ideal.

### Record Predictions

Students should write a collaborative "We Think" statement. The paragraph can begin with, "We think that this selection is about...". You may have them write this in their notebook or on large pieces of chart paper for easier viewing.

#### Sample "We Think" Statement

We think this selection is about a boy or girl who hates school and has a secret they think they should tell but might not know how. The secret is about a boy named Andy who is not very nice in some way but we're not sure what way yet.

### Sharing "We Think" Statements

The groups of students can share their "We Think" statements. Teachers should remember to ask them to explain how they reached their prediction.

### Read the Selection

Have students read the text used for the Tea Party. You may want to use literature circles or allow for a specific time for students to read the text. If you students used large pieces of chart paper for their predictions you may consider posting them around the room for others to reflect on as they read and review the text.

### Reflection and Discussion

Students should take time during and after reading to reflect on their predictions and discuss how they differed from the actual text. Students can review the words and phrases chosen during the initial Tea Party and converse with how they created relationships in their mind during that activity and how the relationship changed during the actual reading of the text.

### Modifications for Content Area Selections

Content area teachers can help their students gain insight into the texts they will be using for specific concepts and topics using the Tea Party strategy. Instead of just focusing on predictions, students can also discuss the cause and effect relationship among the given phrases and words, how the words would be grouped into categories, or what the specific vocabulary means to them.

### Extensions

Teachers may want to design a Tea Party that focuses specifically on the characters provided in a given text. A group of five students can each be given character cards with specific phrases from the text or an overall idea about that character's feelings, thoughts, and actions (Christensen, 2000). The individual students would then complete an activity sheet about their own characters and fellow characters they meet at the Tea Party.

#### Tea Party Character Activity

**FOR**

**TEA PARTY CHARACTER ACTIVITY**

Read your character role provided by your teacher and answer the questions below.

1. What are the key points about your character?
2. What are some questions you have about your character?
3. Take notes on the other characters you meet at the Tea Party. Write any questions or comments.
 

Character One \_\_\_\_\_

Character Two \_\_\_\_\_

Character Three \_\_\_\_\_

Character Four \_\_\_\_\_

Character Five \_\_\_\_\_
4. What predictions do you have about the text?

## Assessment:

Teacher observation during the Tea Party activity is vital for the success of this activity. Circulating and taking detailed and general notes during the initial part of the Tea Party, when students are discussing the meaning of their cards, and later on when they get into groups will help ensure that students are staying focused and making thoughtful predictions. Later the teacher can revisit the notes taken and draw students into further discussions.

After students have shared their "We Think" statements, teachers may want to take anecdotal notes on students' statements and evaluate the explanation given for how they reached their prediction.

## Resources:

### Tea Party

<http://teachers.santee.k12.ca.us/carl/Document/Literacy%20Lane/Tea%20Party.doc>

Description of the Tea Party Strategy, including rational and step-by-step instructions for implementation.

### Goals for Tea Party

[http://www.ctap4.org/infolit/reading/tea\\_party.doc](http://www.ctap4.org/infolit/reading/tea_party.doc)

Goals for the Tea Party strategy.

### The Tea Party

[http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/14\\_04/tea144.shtml](http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/14_04/tea144.shtml)

A high school English teacher uses a "tea party" - in which students give brief previews of good books - to entice reluctant readers to read.

### Tea Party

<http://coldfusion.mead.k12.wa.us/ls/subject2.cfm?callvar=teaparty>

Description of the Tea Party Strategy, including directions and teacher tips.

### Open House Before Reading Strategy

<http://www.allamericareads.org/lessonplan/strategies/before/openhouse.htm>

Description of the Open House Strategy (also known as the Tea Party Strategy), including an overview, directions for the activity, and how to assess student performance.

### Tea Party Strategy

<http://159.191.14.139/.docs/pg/.download/filename/teachers.pps.k12.or.us/literacy/hsliteracy/TeaPartyStrat04.pdf>

Description of the Tea Party Strategy, including preparation, steps, suggestions, and variations.

## References:

Anderson, L.H. (1999). *Speak*. Penguin: New York.

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Caroll, L. (1994). *Alice's adventures in wonderland*. Retrieved December 8, 2006, from <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext91/alice30.txt>

Christensen, L. (2000). *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up: Teaching about social justice and the power of the written word*. Rethinking Schools: Milwaukee.

Tompkins, G. (1998). *50 literacy strategies: Step by step*. Prentice-Hall: Upper Saddle River.

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