Carousel Brainstorming

Carousel Brainstorming is a powerful summarizing activity that engages all learners. As students “carousel” from chart to chart, they record ideas, details, and illustrations that show their understanding of a particular topic or concept. In heterogeneous groups, students brainstorm together for a few minutes about a topic or question before they “carousel” to the next chart. This assessment technique utilizes small groups and focused conversations that help build student confidence. Used as an assessment, Carousel Brainstorming allows you to get a feel for what the class has learned and pinpoint any gaps or misunderstandings.

Step-by-Step

1. Create a list of important subtopics or open-ended questions about your big topic. Write each one on a different sheet of chart paper. You can use the planning sheet on page 93.

2. Form groups of students so that there are as many groups as there are charts. For example, if you created five charts, you should have five groups. (Form groups by having students count off from 1 to 5 and then grouping all the 1s together, all the 2s together, and so on.)

3. Number the charts to indicate the order in which groups should move from chart to chart. Make sure, however, that the charts themselves do not build upon one another, because some students will be starting at the last charts and then moving to the first charts.

4. Give a different color marker to each group and have the groups “carousel” from chart to chart and respond in writing to each of the topics or questions. For each chart, a different group member records the group’s responses on the chart. Students might draw a sketch or a symbol to illustrate an idea, provide details or examples for each subtopic, perform a required mathematics operation, or answer a provided question with a response that is different from those already recorded.

5. Explain to your students that they must read what others have written but may not directly copy what’s already been said (although, to encourage language development, you might allow them to say the same thing in a different way or to elaborate on another group’s response by adding additional words).

6. Give students from two to three minutes at each chart to add as many ideas as they can, and then ring a bell or flick the light to signal that it’s time to move to the next chart.

7. The Carousel Brainstorming strategy is an activity for processing and reviewing information. Be sure to provide a follow-up activity that makes use of the information gathered. Using the charts, students can write brief essays that note relationships, summarize information, or make comparisons. The charts can be referred to by the whole class. The teacher should point out errors or misunderstandings and provide additional information where he/she has noticed gaps in understandings.

These eager learners worked together as a team, rotating from chart to chart as they analyzed their reading in a Carousel Brainstorm activity.
You can use the charts as a prewriting activity. Students can be asked to write a summary using information from all of the charts or to compare and contrast information on two of the charts (two presidents, two characters, two stories, two time periods, and so on).

If the charts are about characterization, you might ask students to stand next to the character they are most like (or most unlike) and explain how they are similar or different using details from the charts.

To integrate technology, use computer stations or laptops instead of charts around the room. (If you have a Smart Board, students can save their charts in Word and send them to the Smart Board. The charts can then be saved in Smart Board Notebook software for printing copies and future retrieval.) At each computer, open and save a Word document with a different question or subtopic for the Carousel Brainstorming. As small groups of students rotate through all the computer stations, they must print their response using their own color at each station. You can print out the responses from all the stations and provide students with their own copies to use for follow-up writing assignments.

In addition to the ideas on page 9, consider the following.

To support struggling learners: Provide them with details written on sticky notes. Have them place the notes on the appropriate charts.

Encourage students to draw illustrations on the charts.

Buddy-up shy or quiet students (or ELLs) with a partner.

To challenge advanced learners: Ask students to create symbols to represent main concepts and themes.