

A Blog for Busy Teachers

FREE LANGUAGE-BASED TEACHING STRATEGIES

Thematic Unit Planning: Step-by-Step

1. Getting Started:

- Develop a formal unit title and/or central theme
- Map out relevant sub-topics
- Establish a timeline. Will this theme last for a week? A month? The whole year?
- Choose/create theme visuals for your classroom
- Start with a KWL (Know / Want to Know / Learned) activity to assess students' prior knowledge.

2. Determining Vocabulary:

- Brainstorm 10-15 key thematic vocabulary terms.
- Develop meaningful activities to students to make connections between vocabulary terms and use them in a variety of contexts (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) from the word-level to the discourse-level.

3. Background Planning:

- Create 2-3 basic background activities to set the stage for students. These should be visually simple. Locating short video explanations can boost comprehension of a topic and give students a visual.
- Develop ways to involve students in the discovery process. For example, assign an anticipation guide, a structured fact hunt, or short research task to see what initial information they can find on their own.
- Plan a series of initial discussions that will tap into students' prior knowledge and allow them to bring forward their own experiences and perspectives. Provide consistent visuals, such as graphic organizers, to adequately support students' oral output and ground each discussion.

4. Isolated Skills Planning:

- Create explicit skills activities based upon a class' scope/sequence. Any content in these activities should be based upon the unit theme. For example, photos and videos can be utilized to elicit brainstormed vocabulary while simultaneously presenting thematic content.
- Incorporate multisensory activities to support any skill instruction embedded within the unit.



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5. Compositions & Projects:

- Determine what writing skills to focus on and what formative and summative writing assessments to include.
- Consider building in a mid-point or final project that allows for student choice and creativity.

6. Closing the Unit:

- Develop a CLOSING activity. This should tie back into the essential questions. This could be as simple as filling out the “L/Learned” portion of a KWL, a structured discussion, or a mini presentation.
- Consider how this flows into your next unit. If you are grounding instruction in a year-long overarching theme, how is content woven together, building upon concepts discussed and addressing student-driven questions or interests?

References:

Jennings, T. M., & Haynes, C. W. (2018). From talking to writing: Strategies for supporting narrative and expository writing. Landmark School Outreach Program.

