

Reading Frenzy

Teachers often ask, “What am I supposed to do while kids are working in their groups?” during a “reading frenzy,” or any other other stage of inquiry circles, for that matter. Here, you can see Smokey circulating, conferring, assisting, and assessing on the fly as he visits each team.

Careers Group 1

Diego is reading a web article, written in a Q-and-A format, about how to become a marine biologist.

DIEGO: *Smokey, I don't understand this question. It says, "Should I major in marine biology as an undergraduate?" What does that mean?*

The issue for Diego is two mystery vocabulary items—*major* and *undergraduate*. I make a drawing of college with under and graduate courses; I also explain what a major is. I suggest he look at Woods Hole and Scripps Institution websites for more information about marine biology.

Jessica and Ashley are working side by side, learning about the careers of doctors and pharmacists. Ashley and I both get stumped online trying to figure out exactly how you get to be a Doctor of Pharmacy. After many clicks, we figure out that you need two years of undergrad with lots of science and chemistry—and then you apply to enter a four-year Pharmacy program. We are both impressed to see that “real” pharmacists (as opposed to techs) make \$75,000 to \$125,000 a year!

French Group

The girls immediately find an instructional CD in one of the French travel books I have brought. They grab a jambox and sit down in a cozy corner. They adjust the volume down to a classmate-considerate level, and join right in with the exercises. Someone quietly produces some cookies, and the girls discreetly munch as they listen and recite. “I’m sorry, je suis desole, excuse me, excusez-moi . . .”

Maria muses to no one in particular: “I can’t really talk French with these cookies in my mouth.”

The girls don’t seem to need anything from me right now, so I move on.

Global Warming Group

They have taken a similar tack—straight to the media. In their bin they have found the Leonardo DiCaprio video called *The 11th Hour*, which depicts climate change in grave terms. I stop by and ask kids what they are thinking.

LUKE: *It’s sad and scary at the same time.*

SMOKEY: *How do you mean?*

LUKE: *Well there are all these storms and people and losing their homes and some are dying. . . .*

Jordan has taken it upon herself to take notes on the film. When they come to an especially important segment, they stop the program, and the boys wait patiently as Jordan gets key words down. She color-codes her notes, writing about each section of the film with a different color pen. The results are quite beautiful.

They have tons of articles and books yet to be read.

The Future Group

These guys are struggling a bit, trying to pick a year that will symbolize the future. They first named the group The Year 3000, but most of the articles they are finding are much nearer future—2050 or 2027. They have decided they are not as interested in a future time when they will be dead! So they are scaling the year down—2030 looks good now.

Nathan is engrossed in a very challenging article about cloning and he interrupts to read us passages every minute of two. Did you know they can clone a goat that is both a male and a female at once? This factoid gets our attention and we look at a picture of a goat with big horns and an udder. Yuck. Maybe Nathan could tackle the pluses and minuses of cloning.

Careers Group 2

In the other careers group, they tread water for a while and there is some goofing around with Devin and Daniel. These two sit in a chair together and page through *The Dummies Guide to Neuroscience*. For a few moments they get interested in the page about neurons, but they move on. A few minutes later Daniel comes to find me and asks if I know anything about Albert Einstein. He tells me there is some famous equation that Einstein thought up. I write $e=mc^2$ on a Post-it note and ask if that's it. "Yeah," he exclaims and drags me back to the book.

The boys have found the famous picture of Einstein with his tongue hanging out, and a big nuclear blast in the background. I ask if Daniel or Devin has ever been to the Bradbury Science Museum at nearby Los Alamos National Laboratory where the WWII atomic bombs were designed and built. They shake their heads no, but just then Diego overhears and walks over and tells us all about it. The Bradbury is essentially the world's only pro-atomic bomb museum, a stunning, confounding, and disturbingly memorable experience. I tell the boys about the David Bodanis' book *E=mc^2* and make a note to bring the book tomorrow.

Meanwhile, Christy is totally engaged in a really nice fashion design book which my daughter donated. I show her an article in the day's newspaper about France trying to punish too-thin model images. Christy is very firm that she wants her own fashions to fit all sizes of women.

Animal Extinction

This group is hitting on all cylinders. Jose has quite a few pieces about elk hunting and conservation, so he stays put reading and annotating. Nadia and Nayetzy go to the computers and search for more info on polar bears and tigers respectively.

Later on, I sit down next to Nayetzy as she reads the printout from an endangered animals website. She looks up at me and says: "This is really, really sad." She tells me that three of the nine tiger species are already extinct. She has tears in her eyes as she jots this fact in her research notebook.