The KWHL Strategy for
Out of the Dust
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Adapted from Dr. Grierson

PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY

Adapted from Ogle’s (1992) KWL strategy for the purpose of scaffolding readers’ prior knowledge to new knowledge, the K-W-H-L strategy initiates active engagement in the reading/learning task. The strategy creates an instructional framework where students list (1) what they know, (2) what they want to find out, (3) how they plan to find new information, and (4) recording what they have learned or still want to learn. This activity can be used individually, in small groups, and with whole class activities. This strategy allows students to share what they learn with others, learn that there are many sources where information can be found, and to summarize their findings.

DIRECTIONS:

STEP 1—Introduce the strategy - the teacher introduces the K-W-H-L strategy with a new topic.

The teacher places a K-W-H-L chart on the board or an overhead where all the class can see. Explain that before we read the book, it is important to find out what we know about a topic, which in this case is the Great Depression, specifically the Dust Bowl. After we organize what we know, we can generate questions that will help us to focus our reading on what we want to find out. If new questions occur as we read, these can be written down on this chart as well.

STEP 2—List what is known - question and probe to create a list on the chart.

Brainstorm with the class to see what is known about the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. Record all responses, even incorrect assumptions or misconceptions to encourage risk-taking behavior and encourage a broad variety of statements. If there are challenges to information, tell students that they will come back to this chart after reading to confirm facts.

STEP 3—List what they want to learn - generate a list of student questions.

Begin by asking “What do you want to know more about” or “What questions do you have about the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl?” List all the responses that are given on your chart. Model questioning techniques and probe until a list seems complete. Remember that many students will not volunteer information at this point.
STEP 4—Students generate their own questions - allow time for students to work individually or in small groups.

Pass out individual charts to students. Leave the chart visible that was created by the class. Have each student decide which questions they want to research personally. Give students a few minutes to generate additional questions that they want to research.

STEP 5—Discuss how to find answers to questions

As a class, list possible sources where answers to the questions that were generated could be found. Guide students to sources other than just the primary text, the encyclopedia, or the internet.

STEP 6—Read to find out

Allow time to read the selection or to do further research to find answers to as many of the questions as possible. Tell students that some of their questions may not have easy answers. Encourage them to note on their charts any new things they want to learn or questions that come up during their reading.

STEP 7—Share answers

Invite students to share what they have found and record these on the chart. Share the fact that real-life learning is ongoing and invite students to submit additional statements about things that they want to learn as well as questions that they now have about the topic. Record and discuss the additional responses.

STEP 8—Follow up activities

Use the K-W-H-L results to create further learning activities including graphic organizers, maps, outlines, learning logs, reports, and written summaries.

ASSESSMENT

The K-W-H-L strategy allows the teacher to preassess what students already know about a given topic. This preassessment directs subsequent instruction during a unit. At the conclusion of the K-W-H-L activity, a teacher can assess what was learned and what may still need to be taught. The chart should be posted in the classroom so that information can be added to it in following weeks. As learning is ongoing, students need to see that as we find out more or come up with additional questions, we can add this to our chart.