**﻿First Word-Last Word**

**﻿Description:**

*First Word- Last Word* is a variation of acrostics. Students construct statements about a concept or topic before and after instruction that begins with a designated letter of the alphabet. The acrostic format provides a structure for them to build their idea statements off different starting letters that make up the topic word (Lipton & Wellman, 1998).

**﻿How this FACT promotes Student Learning:**

The *First Word* acrostic is used to activate student thinking about the concept or topic students will be studying prior to beginning a unit. Writing conceptual statements that reflect one's understanding is a metacognitive task that requires students to think about what they already know. The *Last Word* provides a metacognitive opportunity for students to examine where they were in their thinking at the beginning of a unit of instruction and reflect on how their present understanding extends or modifies their initial understandings.

**﻿How this FACT Informs Instruction:**

This FACT provides an opportunity at the beginning of instruction to uncover likely barriers to learning, such as tenaciously held misconceptions. After instruction, it helps teachers examine how students' ideas may have changed, solidified, or become more sophisticated throughout the course of their learning. In the example below on photosynthesis, the teacher can scan the *First Word* to determine what the student already knows, how sophisticated his or her knowledge or terminology is, and any misunderstandings he or she might bring from prior experiences. In this example, the student has a significant misconception about the plants getting their food directly from the soil. The teacher may notice similar ideas in other students' papers. The teacher uses this information to plan a lesson that will challenge the students' concept of "plant food."  
  
The *Last Word* provides a postinstruction opportunity for teachers to assess how studentss have progressed in conceptual understanding, accuracy, and sophistication of ideas compared to their initial statements about the concept. It also reveals misconceptions that continue to persist. The example of the *Last Word* below indicates that the student changed his or her idea that plants get their food from the soil. Other ideas were revised that reflect an accurate and more sophisticated understanding. The information from *Last Word* also signifies whether additional learning experiences or modifications to lessons are needed.  
  
**FIRST WORD- PHOTOSYNTHESIS**  
**P**lants make their own food.  
**H**appens in cells.  
**O**ther animals eat plants.  
**T**he roots take up food and water.  
**O**xygen is breathed in through leaves.  
**S**unlight makes food for plants.  
**Y**ou can't make your own food.  
**N**eeds water,sunlight, oxygen, and minerals.  
**T**he leaves, roots, and stems are all parts that make food.  
**H**ave to have sun and water.  
**E**nergy comes from the sun.  
**S**unlight turns plants green.  
**I**t happens in all plants.  
**S**oil is used by plants to make food.  
  
**LAST WORD- PHOTOSYNTHESIS**  
**P**roducers such as plants use energy from the sun to make their food.  
**H**appens in cells that have structures called chloroplasts.  
**O**rganisms that eat plants are using stored energy from the plant.  
**T**he roots take water up to the leaves where it reacts with sunlight and carbon dioxide.  
**O**xygen is given off during photosynthesis and is used by plants and animals for respiration.  
**S**unlight provides the energy so plants can make food.  
**Y**ou need to have cells with chloroplasts and chlorophyll to make food.  
**N**eed water, carbon dioxide, and sunlight to make food.  
**T**he leaf is the food making part.  
**H**ave to have sunlight, water, and carbon dioxide.  
**E**nergy comes from sun  
**S** unlight is trapped in the Chlorophyll.  
**I**s a necessary life process for all plants.  
**S**oil holds the water for plants and gives some minerals.

**﻿Design and Administration:**

Choose one word or a short phrase that represents a major concept or focus of the curricular topic you are teaching. The *First Word* is given to students before beginning a sequence of instruction. Have students write the word vertically down the page. Start with the first letter in the acrostic to begin a statement related to the topic. Remind students that there is no such thing as a blank slate in their heads. Everyone can write something that springs to mind. Encourage students to write full sentences, not single words or short phrases. If students struggle with writing ideas as sentences rather than words or short phrases, create an example of a *First Word* acrostic using a concept they previously studied, to show students what the FACT should look like. Collect the *First Words* for analysis and save them for a final reflection. After completing a series of lessons on the concept or topic, the students repeat the process on a new sheet of paper called the *Last Word.* Pass bace the saved *First Words* and have students examine them to compare their ideas at the beginning of instruction to their current thinking. They write a *Last Word* by repeating what they stated before, if their idea has not changed; revising prior statements to include more detail, complexity, and appropriate terminology; or correcting misunderstandings by completely rewriting the statement to be structurely correct. Students are often quite surprised and excited to see how their ideas have changed considerably. They are able to recognize and acknowledge the extent to which new and deeper understanding developed as a result of their instructional experiences.

**﻿General Implementation Attributes**

Ease of Use: Medium Time Demand: Medium Cognitive Demand: Medium

**﻿Modifications:**

Use shorter words for the acrostic with younger students. This FACT can be used in pairs for students who lack strong language skills and need the support of a peer. It can also be used as a whole-class activity, charting the class ideas as the *First Word* and revisiting it to create a *Last Word* chart that reflects the class consensus after a sequence of instruction.

**﻿Caveats:**

Don't assume students know what acrostics are. It may help to model the strategy with a familiar concept the first time it is used and/or begin some of the sentence stems with the class to start them off.

**﻿Disciplines this FACT can be used In:**

Mathematics, science, social studies, language arts, health, foreign language, and performing arts.  
  
  
Keeley, Paige. (2008) *Science Formative Assessment: 75 Practical Strategies for Linking Assessment, Instruction, and Learning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press