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Getting to Know Your Students

In order to differentiate, you need to know your students' abilities and interests. In a middle school setting with limited class time, this can be difficult to do! The following suggestions, however, will help you.

Write a Letter: Write a letter to your students telling them about yourself—your family, hobbies, interests and the ways you like to learn. It's okay to address the letter generically ("Dear Sixth Grader"), but instead of typing your letter, handwrite it to make it more personal. Make enough copies for every student, then ask students to write you a return letter. Not only will you learn about your students' interests, and how they perceive their learning styles, you'll also be getting a sample of their writing skills.

Conduct a Learning Inventory: Ask students to complete a questionnaire such as the one on the following page. Feel free to add your own prompts!

Interviews: If time allows, meet with students individually to get to know them. You can discuss their learning inventories, or ask a few questions from the inventory, such as "What are your hobbies?"

Back Cover Biographies: Spend some time reading the author biographies on the back cover of books. Give students their own "book covers" in which they may title, illustrate and write a brief summary of their lives.

Limericks: After teaching students the format of limericks, have them write four to five silly rhymes that tell about their hobbies, interests, family, experiences, etc.

Encyclopedia Entry: Tell students that an encyclopedia of famous people has decided to add them as an entry in the latest volume. The catch is, the company insists that the student write his or her own entry! What would they write?



Learning Inventory

Dear Student,

In order to help you learn you this year, I'd like to learn more about you—what you like to do at home and how you learn. Please take your time as you respond to each of the following questions. Thank you!

Sincerely,

At Home Questions

1. In my free time, I like to . . . _____

2. My favorite thing to do is . . . _____

3. I'm good at . . . _____

At School Questions

1. My favorite subject is . . . _____

2. I like/don't like language arts because . . . _____

3. It's hard for me to . . . _____

4. My favorite book is . . . _____

5. I'm good at . . . _____

Learning Inventory

6. I get confused when . . . _____

7. Check all that apply.

a. I like to work

by myself

with a partner

in a small group

b. When the class reads a book, I prefer

to read it together in class

to read it mostly by myself

to read it with a partner or a small group



8. In last year's language arts class, my favorite/least favorite thing was . . . _____

9. My goal this year is to . . . _____

10. Write anything else you'd like me to know about you! _____

