



## TENACITY LITERACY CURRICULUM SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Tenacity's reading curriculum has been reviewed and approved by Boston Public School literacy coaches and teachers. It was designed around one of the major goals of the Boston Public Schools Citywide Learning Standards – that of producing independent learners who are encouraged to think, question, and communicate. *Thinking* includes being able to internalize new ideas and connect them to familiar concepts and prior knowledge. *Questioning* includes the framing of thoughtful questions, and the pursuit of these questions until the student fully understands. *Communicating* means putting learning into the language of speech or writing, and requires reflection in such forms as examination, clarification, analysis, and synthesis.

With this overall goal in mind, Tenacity has adopted teaching and learning strategies that are directly linked to the Boston Public Schools City-Wide Learning Standards for all middle school grades. These standards are designed to ensure that students:

- Read, write, and think a lot about topics and ideas of importance to them;
- Make personal connections between the content and other knowledge, experiences, text, or media;
- Ask questions as they read, listen, or view;
- Listen or watch for important elements, themes, or issues;
- Clarify the meaning of words or content they don't understand;
- Make predictions, inferences, and judgments;
- "Get in the shoes" of characters or participants.

Tenacity implements a theme-based approach to literacy that provides students with a transparent framework through which to apply these learning standards. Each new piece of literature being experienced by the students is preceded by an activity designed to activate students' prior knowledge about the subject. Students are empowered to *interact* with the text, making connections to what they already know or believe, and modifying that prior knowledge to accommodate the new learning. Perspective taking is a regular activity in reading groups. Students are often asked to imagine themselves in the situation of a character and to explore, orally or in writing, why a character makes certain decisions. Instructors regularly ask students to respond orally or in writing to questions such as: What do you think will happen next?; What would you do if you were in this situation?; Do you agree with the character's actions/decisions?; and Why or why not? Students are provided opportunities to ask meaningful questions, to discuss their reading with other students, and to complete personal journals that include applications of words they have read such as definitions, sentences using the words or illustrations depicting the word's meaning.

In addition to the reading, writing, and thinking strategies outlined above, reading is centered on topics and ideas important to students. We do this by first deliberately selecting literature that focuses on the lives and experiences of adolescents from a diverse range of backgrounds. Second, we always give students several books and stories from which to choose so that they maintain control over what they are reading. Most of the reading takes place in small groups of 2-3 students and one tutor. In these groups, students are encouraged to ask questions and discuss parts of the reading they don't understand. Additionally, a student always has a journal and pen handy to record questions s/he might have about the reading, as well as words s/he hears and doesn't understand. At the end of the reading, the group is given time to go back to these questions and try, collaboratively, to answer or understand them. In support of the total literacy effort, the Tenacity ASEP program presents a daily vocabulary exercise, referred to as "Cool Words", in which students identify unfamiliar words which will then be written down, defined, and discussed in context.

Along with being linked with Boston's learning standards, Tenacity's curriculum was developed to be directly aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks standards in the following strands for Grades 6, 7 and 8: Reading and Literature, Discussion and Oral Presentation, Language, and as illustrated in the following table:

Strand	Massachusetts Curriculum Standard	How ASEP Meets the Standard
Reading and Literature	Select books for independent reading.	Students and tutors discuss strategies for choosing books and then students participate in a “book pass” activity where a variety of books are passed around the group so that students rate several books quickly and efficiently. This process helps them choose books for independent and group reading.
	Use before, during, and after strategies to enhance their comprehension of texts.	Activity guides to <i>all</i> books employ before, during, and after strategies, which instructors model in whole group read-alouds and small reading groups.
	Use background knowledge to make inferences and predictions and to make personal connections to what is being read.	Before reading, students engage in an activity to activate their prior knowledge about the subject to deepen their level of thinking while they read.
	Set a purpose for reading.	Students read to further develop the themes of self-identity and community and are asked to choose specific related questions they expect to explore in a given text.
	Visualize information in text to support comprehension.	Students asked to illustrate the meanings of some words or phrases, create visual representations of their existing knowledge of a particular subject or scene from a book – i.e., timelines, character sketches, concept maps - and illustrate favorite or most memorable scenes from a text.
Discussion and Oral Presentation	Use agreed-upon rules for informal and formal discussions in large and small groups such as Book Club, Literature Circles, Buddy Reading.	Literacy block group develops group norms and rules. Students are required to commit to and follow these rules. Students choose various roles in their literacy groups, such as Time Manager and Cool Words Manager; these help maintain structure in the groups.
	Actively listen, respond to, and build on ideas generated during group discussion.	Reading group discussions are focused around a particular question, posed by the tutor or one of the students. All ideas are listened to before coming to group consensus. Journaling activities, referred to as “Pondering Perspectives,” take place to further students’ exploration.
	Use information to inform or change perspectives.	Students regularly revisit their own ideas about how they are based on readings, discussions and journal reflections. Journal entries show character sketches that evolve as student gains new contextual information.
	Evaluate the productivity of group discussion using group created criteria and make changes to address the needs of the group.	Each small group makes a plan for the day. At session end, group collaboratively completes evaluation form.
Language	Determine the meaning of unfamiliar words using knowledge of word parts and context clues.	Students identify “Cool Words” to list in journals, and discuss in small groups what words might mean based on prior knowledge and context clues.
	Read grade-appropriate imaginative/literary and informational/expository text fluently, accurately, and with understanding.	Students read independently, collaboratively and are read to with grade appropriate fiction and non-fiction. Students can check out books from the ASEP library.