

# Transforming Literacy Centers

## Tools for the Common Core Classroom

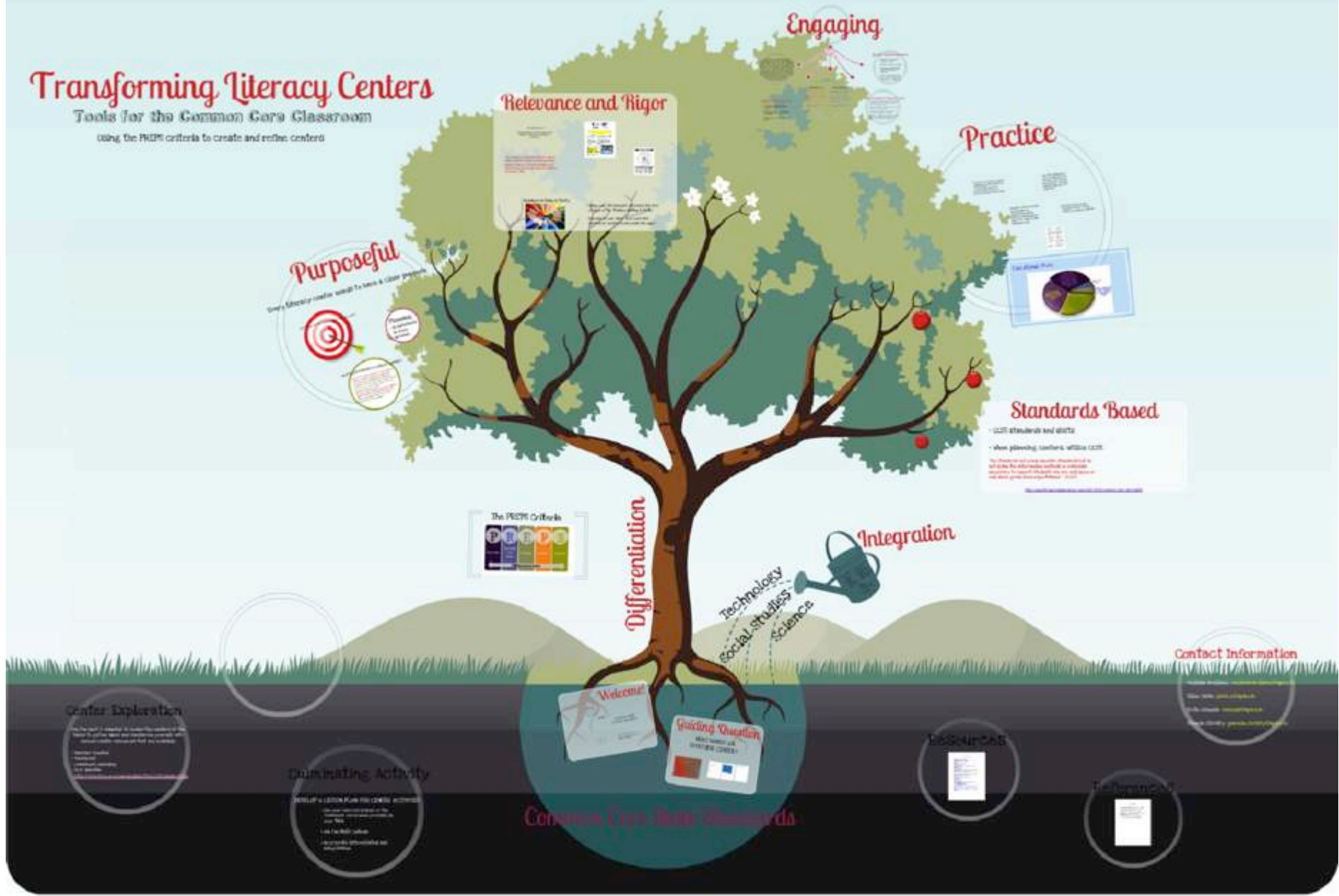
Using the PREPS criteria to create and refine centers



# Transforming Literacy Centers

Tools for the Common Core Classroom

Using the P21® criteria to create and refine centers



# Welcome!

LIKE ME

Who's here  
today?

Agenda

Centers are...  
Centers are not...

#### PROCESS

- In the first column, each table group will use sticky notes to write the facts that are known about centers.
- In a second column, each table group will use sticky notes to write the facts that are known to not be part of centers.
- Agree on the most significant examples and report out to the whole group.

- Revisit Centers are.../Centers are not...
- Consider the PREPS criteria and decide if any changes are necessary.



Centers are...

Centers are not...

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# Guiding Question

## WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE CENTER?



**What are the characteristics of an effective center?**

The characteristics of an effective center are:

- 1. The center is designed to meet the needs of all children.
- 2. The center is designed to be flexible and adaptable.
- 3. The center is designed to be safe and secure.
- 4. The center is designed to be fun and engaging.
- 5. The center is designed to be challenging and stimulating.

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**The Importance of Play**

Play is an essential part of a child's development. It helps children learn about the world around them, develop social skills, and build self-confidence. Play is also a fun and enjoyable activity that children love to do.

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This article is excerpted from *Differentiated Literacy Centers* by Margo Southall.

The differentiated literacy centers (DLCs) I developed contain reading and writing activities that directly support whole-class and small-group instruction. Each center offers multilevel literacy activities that are assigned to individuals and groups of students based on their demonstrated (data-based) need in order to strengthen specific skills and strategies. Differentiated center tasks also take into account student interests and the level of support students require in order to complete these literacy assignments. The ultimate goal of DLCs is to support an easy-to-manage, success-oriented literacy program.

#### What's Different About Differentiated Literacy Centers?

##### Traditional Literacy Centers

1. Activities are based on whole-class instruction.
2. Differentiated resources are not available.
3. Students may become bored or frustrated.
4. Individual levels of support are not part of the center design.
5. One level of response is provided for each activity.
6. Students may select activities that are outside their instructional zone.

##### Differentiated Literacy Centers

1. Activities are based on student assessment data.
2. Students work with multilevel resources.
3. Students are engaged in their learning.
4. Levels of support based on student need are incorporated into the design of each center.
5. Tiered activities include varied responses for each skill or strategy.
6. Students follow a simple coding system to select activities within their instructional zone.

#### The Structure of DLCs

We begin with setting up three core, working centers that develop skills in the key literacy areas: comprehension, fluency, and word study (phonemic awareness, phonics, high-frequency words and vocabulary), as shown below.

#### Three Core Literacy Centers



##### Reading Comprehension

###### Students will

- identify and identify all strategies using independent-level text
- increase reading proficiency, fluency, and engagement, and to strengthen phonics, fluency and reading
- participate in teacher modeling, either collaborative and self-modeling format



##### Fluency

###### Students will

- identify and identify all strategies using independent-level text
- increase reading proficiency, fluency, and engagement, and to strengthen phonics, fluency and reading
- participate in teacher modeling, either collaborative and self-modeling format



##### Word Study

###### Students will

- apply an understanding of the words used through independent practice and to read at the fluency level
- increase ability to reading and spelling, use sight words and
- participate in teacher modeling, either collaborative and self-modeling format

#### Multilevel Center Activities

Multilevel center activities are strategy-based tasks designed at three levels of challenge: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. By using these multilevel center activities, teachers enable students with different learning needs to apply the same key skills and strategies but at varying levels of complexity and open-endedness (Tomlinson, 2000). For example, three students at the comprehension center may all work on a questioning activity, yet each one will be reading a different leveled text and completing an activity page that has been designed to meet his or her needs, based on assessment.

#### Differentiated Literacy Center Materials

Reading materials, activity sheets, graphic organizers, and other learning materials such as word cards all need to be differentiated for the three levels of activities. Reading materials should be provided at each student's independent reading level (95–100 percent accuracy rate for fiction, 90–100 percent for nonfiction). You can select from the alternative task cards, student prompts, recording forms, and suggested manipulative materials in the following chapters to meet the needs of students who struggle with reading or require additional support with organizational skills. In this way, you can modify tasks while still allowing students to participate in the same activity as their peers. These modifications maintain students' self-esteem and support their engagement and motivation.

#### How Do Differentiated Literacy Centers Support My Instruction?

The three core centers address the essential skills and strategies as identified by the National Reading Panel (2000). These include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Differentiated literacy centers are part of the daily instructional cycle as we assess, plan, and implement instruction according to our curriculum. They provide opportunities for students to practice skills and strategies at their level and based on their needs. The figure below illustrates how DLCs can support your daily instruction.



A differentiated classroom meets the learners at the point of need on a continuum of literacy learning and provides developmentally appropriate learning activities based upon ongoing assessment and an understanding of how our students learn. By using the organizational guidelines for determining student need provided in Chapter 2, together with the center resources included in the following chapters, you will be able to implement a differentiated literacy center program that addresses demonstrated student needs within a multilevel classroom. In this way, every student may be both challenged and supported within a differentiated instructional framework.

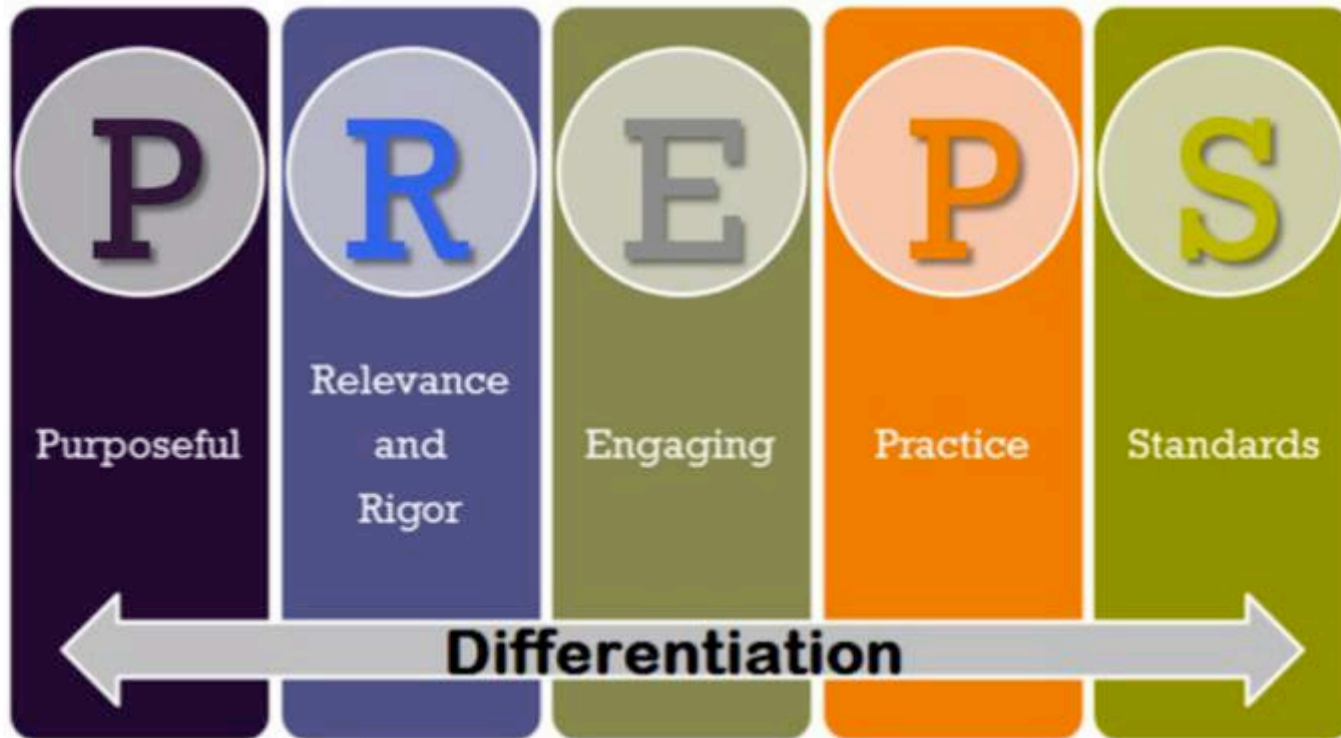
# SAY SOMETHING

## PROCESS:

- Choose a partner at your table.
- Read article silently and simultaneously to designated stopping points (each section).
- When each partner is ready, stop and "say something."
- The something might be a question, a brief summary, a key point, an interesting idea, or a personal connection.
- Continue the process until you have completed the selection.



# The PREPS Criteria



# Purposeful

Every literacy center needs to have a clear purpose

What is your specific learning target for this center?



## Planning

- Be intentional in every decision

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LITERACY CENTERS?

- Promotes independence and responsibility
- Allows students to learn through self-discovery and collaboration with peers
- Provides teachers with time to pull students one-on-one or in small groups to teach specific academic skills
- Provides differentiated practice to better meet the needs of individual students
- Reteaching opportunities, practice, extensions or enrichment

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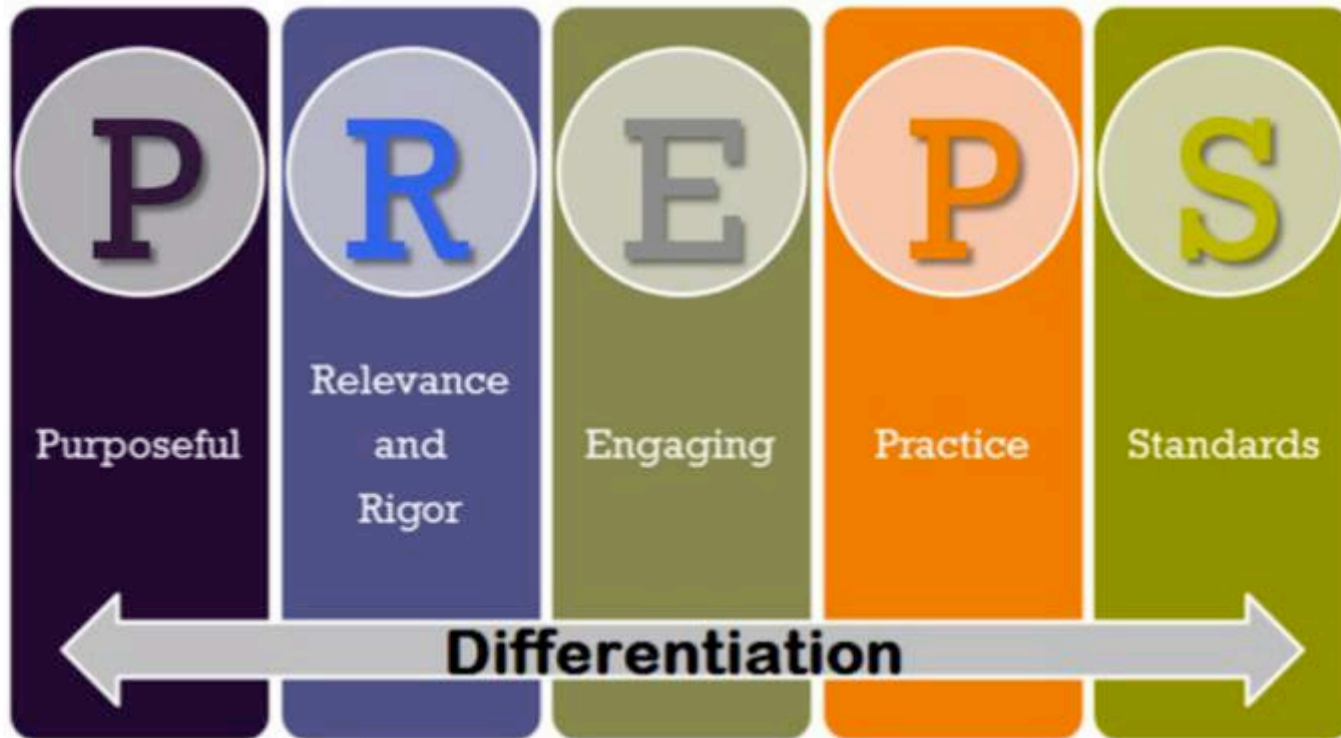


# Planning

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# The PREPS Criteria



# Relevance and Rigor

What is "relevance"?

Student tasks are directly related to the subject or issue being discussed or considered.

"By using these tiered center activities, teachers enable students with different learning needs to apply the same key skills and strategies but at varying levels of complexity and open-endedness." (Tomlinson, 1999).

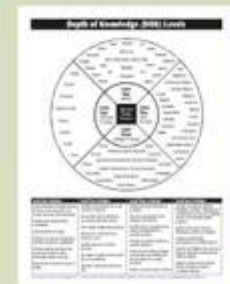
## The Beginner's Guide to Understanding Rigor

Barbara R. Blackburn

Rigor is creating an environment in which each student is expected to learn at high levels, and a student is supported so he or she can learn at high levels and reach student achievement learning at high levels (Blackburn, 2010).

When I see schools realize with teachers the often asked why I care about rigor, they are also quite to feel as they care about rigor because they are told they have to. My response is simple. There are other reasons, such as the clear research base that shows our students need more rigor. The new Common Core Standards that emphasize rigor, or the number of students who graduate from high school ill prepared for college or the workforce.

But my most important reason to care about rigor is to ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed. Rigor is about helping students learn at higher levels, and that's why I became a teacher.



## Rainbow Writing Activity



- Using your DOK handout, determine the level of rigor of the "Rainbow Writing Activity"
- Discuss at your table- How could this activity be modified to increase the rigor?

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# The Beginner's Guide to Understanding Rigor

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*Rigor is creating an environment in which each student is expected to learn at high levels, each student is supported so he or she can learn at high levels, and each student demonstrates learning at high levels (Blackburn, 2008).*

When I am in schools working with teachers, I'm often asked why I care about rigor. They are also quick to tell me they care about rigor because they are told they have to. My response is simple. There are other reasons, such as the clear research base that shows our students need more rigor, the new Common Core Standards that require more rigor, or the number of students who graduate from high school ill-prepared for college or the workforce.

But my most important reason is this: rigor is not about giving students more to do, or punishing them with more homework. Rigor is about helping students learn at higher levels, and that's why I became a teacher.

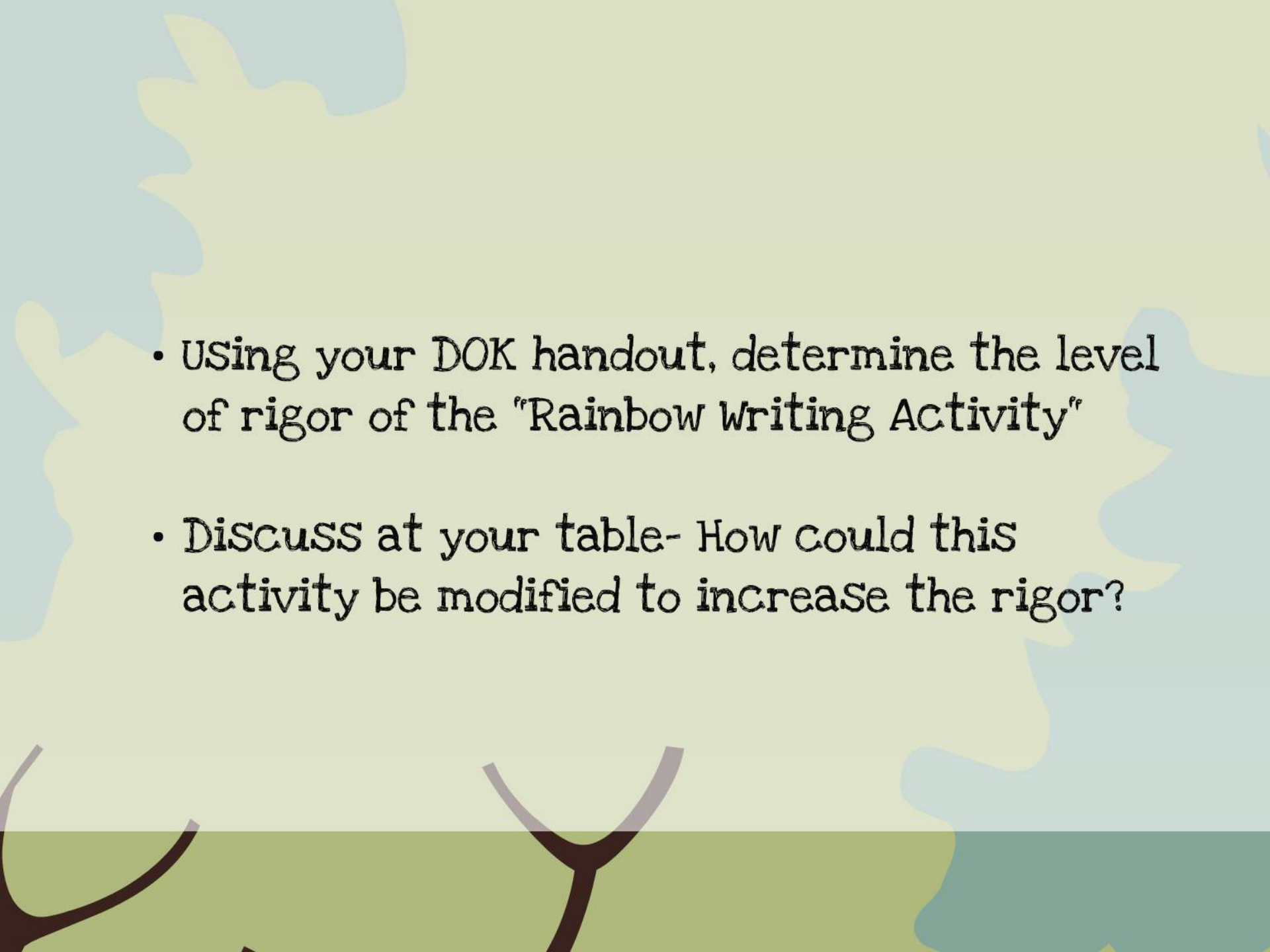




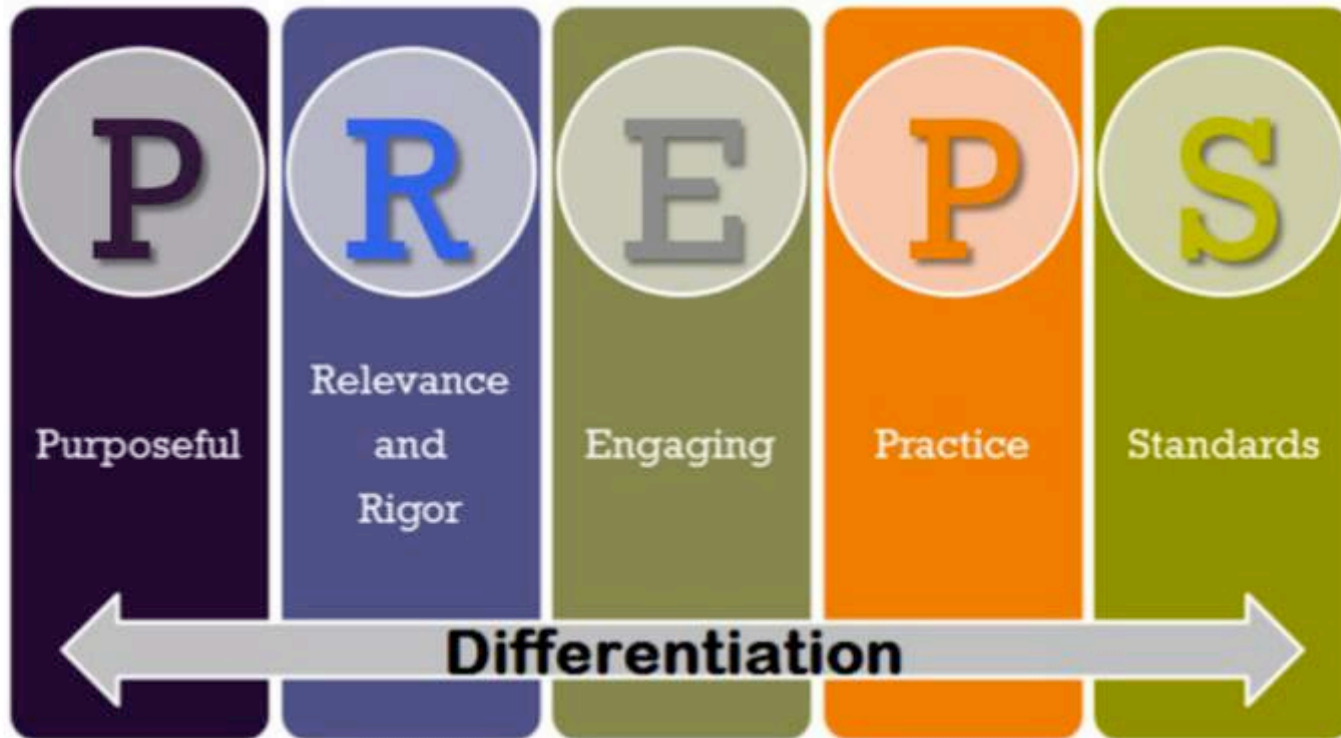
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# The PREPS Criteria





# Engaging

"Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing prepackaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write reflectively about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves."  
(Chickering & Gamson, 1997)

## Next Generation Learners

- Children don't see working, learning, collaborating, and having fun as separate experiences.
- They believe in and want their experiences occurring simultaneously in school and in future careers.
- This generation wants to problem-solve and innovate.

## Traditional "Group Centers"

- Activities are based on whole-class instruction.
- Differentiated resources are not available.
- Students may become bored or disinterested.
- Individual levels of support are not part of the center design.
- One level of response is provided for each activity.
- Students may imitate activities that are outside their developmental zone.

## Differentiated Learning Centers

- Activities are based on student "application" skills.
- Students work with differentiated resources.
- Students are engaged in their learning.
- Levels of support based on student need are incorporated into the design of each center.
- Shared activities include varied responses for work skills or strategies.
- Students follow a simple coding system to select activities within their developmental zone.

## Goals for implementing centers

- Students actively engaged in meaningful learning.
- Students working independently.
- A working environment that is conducive to small group instruction.
- Choose open-ended tasks that can be repeated with different points books or writing topics.

## Moving away from "busy work" centers

- Try to move away from "busy work" centers that must be changed out weekly and focus on more permanent content with open-ended tasks.
- Select activities that involve students in practicing reading, writing, and spelling skills.
- Choose open-ended tasks that can be repeated with different points books or writing topics.
- Remember if it takes you longer to create the center than it takes your students to complete it, ask yourself if the activity is really worthwhile.



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