

## Save the Last Word for Me Save the Last Word for the Artist

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### **Introduction**

Reading is an active process in which the reader constructs meaning from a text. Because readers bring differing experiences and knowledge to a reading experience, each reader will construct a different interpretation of a text. Readers need to be encouraged to take an active stance in their reading, asking questions and looking for points of agreement or disagreement with the author as they read. This active stance in reading is facilitated when readers interact with other readers and discuss their differing questions and interpretations of a book.

Less proficient readers often believe that proficient readers understand everything they read and that there is one "right" interpretation of every text. *Save the Last Word for Me* demonstrates to them that all readers work at constructing their own interpretations of what they read through relating their life experiences to the text as well as through discussing the text with other readers. When students are encouraged to share their interpretations through art, they must transmediate their understandings into a new sign system and so they come to deeper and more complex understandings of the text.

Side 1

pg. 27  
"He hadn't even won his heat. There was no cheering at either end of the field. The rest of the boys seemed as stunned as he."

Side 2

Jesse  
Jesse was scared cause he was beaten in a race by a girl. He was not afraid of the girls. It was the boys he was afraid of. Of what they were going to say.

FIGURE CE 14.1  
Save the Last Word for Me Card  
for *Bridge to Terabithia*  
(Paterson, 1977; Angie, Age  
12 (Sue Robinson's classroom))

### Materials/Procedures for Save the Last Word for Me

Multiple copies of a text

1 3" × 5" cards or slips of scrap paper

1. Each student individually reads the text.

2. As the students read, they write on the first side of the cards or slips of paper any segments of the text words, phrases, or sentences that particularly catch their attention. These segments or quotes can be items that they find interesting and want to discuss later or

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FIGURE CE14.2

Save the Last Word for Me Card for **What's Whole in Whole Language** (Goodman, 1986); Adult (Carolyn Burke's Summer Workshop)

Side 1  
"From the earliest preschool learning and throughout life, it is important for people to have the opportunities to present what they know, to share it through language, and in the course of this presentation, to complete the learning." p. 16

Side 2  
All our ideas and thoughts are the result of talking with others and they have no "body" till that discussion takes place beyond the internal dialogue of other voices + your own. In sharing, we gain our voice and our sense of knowing.

that they particularly agree or disagree with. Students should also record the page number of that segment.

3. On the other side of the cards or slips of paper, the students write out what they want to say about each quote they have selected. This can include questions and points of agreement or disagreement they have with the text segment.

4. Once students have completed the reading and writing of the cards, they gather in small groups or in a single group to share their cards.

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5. Before the group discussion, students go through their cards and put them in order from most important to least important in terms of their desire to discuss them. During sharing, if someone else uses the same top quote, the person who has not yet shared will choose his or her next quote.

6. Each student reads the quote on a card to the group. The other members of the group have a chance to react to what was read. The student who read the quote then has the last word about why that segment of text was chosen and bases the remarks both on what he or she wrote on the back of the card and on the preceding discussion.

### ***Materials/Procedures for Save the Last Word for the Artist***

A short story

- An "odds and ends" box of art materials (pipe cleaners, toilet paper rolls, clay, string, rubber bands, paper plates, balloons, ribbon), and other art supplies (construction paper, glue, scissors, and so on).

1. The teacher either reads aloud the short story to the class or multiple copies of the story are distributed so that each student can read the story on their own.

2. In groups of five or six, students discuss what they think the story means.

3. Each group is asked to use the art materials to collaboratively create a sketch that symbolizes what their group thinks the story means.

Instead of the box of materials, students can be given a large sheet of paper and markers and asked to create a Sketch to Stretch of the meaning of the story.

4. Each group displays their art piece for the class, but does not talk about it. The group remains silent while members of the other groups say what it is they think the group was trying to say in their art piece.

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5. After everyone has said what they think the piece of art represents, the creators of the piece get to talk about what they saw each symbol as representing and the overall meaning of their piece.
  6. The engagement proceeds with each group presenting their piece of art, everyone else predicting what was meant, and the artists, themselves, getting the last word.
  7. Once all groups have shared, the teacher may wish to have students take five minutes to reflect on the experience in terms of what they learned about the reading process and the role of the reader in that process.
  8. Students may also individually create their own pieces of art and then share these in small groups.

### **Establishing the Learning Context**

The teacher will want to introduce this engagement using texts that are provocative and have the potential for strong response from students. Save the Last Word for Me works best with texts that are particularly powerful in their use of language. Save the Last Word for the Artist works well with texts that are ambiguous and tend to leave readers confused so they feel a need to think and talk about the text with other readers.

The teacher should participate in making and sharing cards or art pieces along with the students. Initially, the teacher may need to play a major role in demonstrating what can be written on the cards and how to go about discussing the cards or art pieces in the groups.

### **Variations**

1. Students work in groups of three to six. Each student silently reads the text material and then chooses one quotation from the text. The students exchange their quotations with each other, and each person responds to the quotation he or she now has. The student who chose the original quotation is not given the last word but does get to see how someone else responds to the quotation he or she chose.

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2. Instead of having an oral discussion, students can pass their cards around with a sheet of paper in a variation of Writing in the Round (see Say Something). Each person chooses one card to pass around the small group. Students read the card and write their comments about the quotation on the piece of paper. The next person responds both to the card and to the comments.

3. In collage reading, students highlight powerful words, phrases, and sentences in a book or poem as they read. When the class gathers together, an invitation is given for the group to create their own interpretation of the book or poem by reading quotes out loud. One person begins and then others join in reading their highlighted words, phrases, and sentences so that they play off of what the previous person read. Certain quotes may be read repeatedly to create a refrain.

4. In text rendering, students highlight quotes that they consider significant or powerful as they read. These quotes are then read aloud during a whole class meeting. The person who reads the quote also makes a comment about their interpretation of the quote and then another person reads a quote. Text rendering works well with informational and professional reading.

5. As a further variation of Save the Last Word for the Artist, different groups of students can be assigned different sign systems. For example, one group can be asked to symbolically represent their meaning through art, another through music, a third through pantomime, a fourth through drama, a fifth through mathematics, and so on. As a culminating experience students can explore how the system in which they worked contributed to as well as highlighted various dimensions of the story's meaning.

## References

Save the Last Word for Me was originally developed by Carolyn Burke. Save the Last Word for the Artist is an extension of Sketch to Stretch and owes its origins to Carolyn Burke, Jerome Harste, Marjorie Siegel, and Karen Feathers.

Goodman, K. 1986. *What's whole in whole language?* New York: Scholastic.

Paterson, K. 1977. *Bridge to Terabithia*. New York: Dell.

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