CRITICAL THINKING & PROBLEM SOLVING

Teacher Resource

WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING & PROBLEM SOLVING?

Gathering information to think through and determine the best solution.

BENCHMARKS

✓ **HE.1.R.4.2** — Identify the importance of sharing thoughts and ideas as an individual and as part of a group.

✓ **HE.2.R.4.1** — Identify strategies to work together to solve problems.

PURPOSE

▶ These interactive activities will help your students learn the characteristics of critical thinking and problem solving and how to gather information to think through and determine the best solution. Share the suggested introduction with your students, choose one or more of the activities below, and conclude with the suggested wrap-up. Feel free to modify or revisit activities throughout the week to continue reinforcing critical thinking and problem solving.

Suggested Introduction:

"Today, we are going to learn about critical thinking and problem solving. Critical thinking and problem solving means gathering information to think through and determine the best solution. Critical thinking and problem solving help you figure out how to answer challenging questions and make good choices. When you use critical thinking, you ask questions and look for clues to understand things better. Problem solving is about finding smart and creative ways to fix problems, like drawing a picture to help solve a math problem or folding the corner of a page if you lose your bookmark."

Activities to Build Critical Thinking and Problem Solving:

1 Mystery Shape Challenge

Before class, build a simple structure using blocks or pattern pieces and keep it hidden from the students. Using spatial language, describe the shape to students without showing it (e.g., a triangle sits on top, there is a square on the right side). Students will listen and try to build what they think the shape looks like. Encourage students to think critically and be perseverant if it gets tricky. Have students show the class what their object looked like and then reveal the object. Discuss how they used their listening and critical thinking skills to build the structure.

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Activities to Build Critical Thinking and Problem Solving (Continued):

2 Storytelling Circle

As a class, create a story with a problem and a solution. Have each student contribute one line or idea to the story, building upon what the previous student said. Encourage students to think about how their part of the story can help solve a problem the characters might face (e.g., finding their way home, helping a friend in need). After the story is complete, reflect on how working together as a group created a more interesting and creative story. Highlight how each student's individual idea helped the group reach a solution.

3 "Classroom Problem Solvers"

Designate a day of the week where students become "Classroom Problem Solvers." Present them with a challenge related to classroom logistics (e.g., "How can we clean up faster after art time?" or "How can we prepare for dismissal faster each day?"). Students brainstorm solutions individually, then discuss and poll the students on the best solution. Create a tally chart to display the results of the poll for the class. After implementing the solution, reflect on how sharing individual ideas and working together helped solve the problem. Adjust the solution as necessary based on group feedback.

Suggested Wrap-Up:

Guide student responses or provide sentence stems.

"Can someone tell me what critical thinking and problem solving means? You all did a great job identifying the characteristics of critical thinking and problem solving! These help you use your brain to learn and do amazing things! Remember, it's okay to make mistakes because they help you learn. Keep practicing, and you'll get better and better at solving problems and thinking like a superhero!"

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