

Improve Your Gifted Classroom

7 Ways in 7 Days!

Ian Byrd

ian@byrdseed.com

www.byrdseed.com

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About

This document is a compilation of seven of the most important ideas I have learned in my time teaching in a gifted classroom. Consider taking a day to read each page and create one practical implementation for your classroom. Within a week, your classroom will be a better place for gifted learners.

Where These Ideas Come From

These tips are a synthesis of information gleaned from books, trainings, conferences, and conversations in the teachers' lounge. The origin of many of these ideas is the research of gifted experts such as:

- Sandra Kaplan
- Susan Winebrenner
- Carol Ann Tomlinson
- Sally Reis
- Joseph Renzulli

I recommend doing your best to attend one of their presentations and pick up a book by one of them.

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Contact

If you are interested in more information on gifted education, please keep in touch by visiting [Byrdseed.com](#). Email me at ian@byrdseed.com with any questions, comments, or success stories!

1. Incorporate Depth & Complexity Across Disciplines

The [depth and complexity tools](#) developed by [Dr. Sandra Kaplan at USC](#) provide a simple method to increase rigor to grade-level lessons. But are you taking them across all disciplines? Take a day and incorporate these tools into each subject you teach.

The Elements of Depth And Complexity

- Points Of View
- Change Over Time
- Across The Disciplines
- Language of the Discipline
- Ethics
- Patterns
- Rules
- Trends
- Big Idea
- Details
- Unanswered Questions

Examples Across The Disciplines

Language Arts

- Identify **patterns** in an author's use of **language**.
- Analyze how a character **changes over time**.
- Investigate the **rules** a poet follows when creating a poem.

Math

- Learn the **rules** of the order of operations.
- Study the **patterns** of multiplying by fractions and decimals.
- Understand the **language** of algebra.

Social Studies

- Analyze the different **points of view** of a historical event.
- Investigate how a civilization **change over time**.
- Determine the **ethical** choices a ruler had to make.

Science

- Examine the **rules** that allow a plant to grow.
- What are the **unanswered questions** of ultraviolet light?
- Identify the different **points of view** of nuclear power.

Learn More

- Grab a copy of Kaplan and Gould's [Flip Book](#) to learn more about depth and complexity.
- Pick up its sequel, [The Flip Book, Too](#) and implement [the content imperatives](#).
- Print out [Azusa USD's](#) reference table on Depth and Complexity.
- Investigate [David Chung's use of Depth and Complexity](#) within high school literature circles.

2. Integrate a Universal Theme

Connect with gifted students' ability to think abstractly. Unite all subjects throughout the year with a using a "universal theme." During this day, try to connect all of your lessons using a common theme.

Example Themes

These broad concepts may include:

- Power
- Conflict
- Change
- A list of themes from [Prufrock Press](#).

Seeing Power In All Disciplines

- Math: the exponent is more **powerful** than the multiplication sign.
- Writing: figurative language leads to more **powerful** writing.
- Social Studies: the invention of writing was a **powerful** moment in human history.
- Science: a river has **power** over a mountain through erosion.

Seeing Change In All Disciplines

- Math: all operations cause **change**.
- Writing: in good writing, characters experience **change**.
- Social Studies: powerful civilizations **change** the most.
- Science: **change** can occur quickly or over long periods of time.

Using A Universal Theme

- After reading a story, ask your class to [go through the story again](#) and find examples of the universal theme.
- Upon finishing a set of stories, ask the class to compare and contrast the use of the theme.
- Create a statement about your theme and ask students to prove it true or find counter examples (eg, "Power is always good.")
- Take that statement and apply it to a new subject or discipline. Ask students to repeat the exercise.
- Ask students to develop their own statements about the universal theme. Test these themes throughout the year.

3. Up-Level Your Graphic Organizers

Implement the depth and complexity tools into everyday graphic organizers. Everything from Venn diagrams to flow charts can be made more sophisticated by embedding these tools. Today, take a standard graphic organizer and increase its rigor with a thinking tool.

Venn Diagram

Take your classic Venn Diagram and add Depth and Complexity. Now your students aren't simply comparing and contrasting apples and oranges, they're comparing and contrasting:

- The **rules** of growing apples and oranges.
- The **contribution** of apples and oranges towards nutrition.
- The **convergence** of factors necessary to grow apples or oranges.

Flow Chart

A flow chart showing the order of getting dressed in the morning can be enhanced by:

- Showing the order of getting dressed from two different **points of view**:
 - Dad and son
 - Dad and mom
 - How about an ancient Egyptian Pharaoh and a modern child.
- Show the **rules** of getting dressed for a soldier, executive, and a chef.
- Show how the style of getting dressed has **changed over time**.

Categories

When asking students to create categories, have them based those categories on a depth or complexity tool. For example, categorize sports based on:

- The **rules** of scoring.
- Different countries' **points of view** towards the sport.
- The sports **origin** and how it has **changed over time**.

Other Organizers

- Check out [Frames](#) by Sandra Kaplan and Bette Gould: a way of framing a concept in four different ways.
- Sandra Kaplan wrote about [Concentric Circles of Knowledge](#) (a downloadable pdf, it's buried pretty deep!) Help students look at a concept from different layers.
- Be sure to experiment, embedding the tools of Depth and Complexity into your own graphic organizers - here's a [character analysis form](#) that I use, for example.

4. Encourage Inductive Reasoning

The general population learns deductively. Teach an idea, and then support it. However, gifted students often learn in the reverse: look at details and then form a big idea. It's more complex, less predictable, and difficult to grade, but inductive reasoning can be a powerful tool in your arsenal. Design a lesson that uses inductive thinking today.

Concept Attainment

Using the concept attainment model of instruction is one of [my favorite ways to teach a grammar lesson](#). It turns a bland lesson about the rules of language into an engaging puzzle. Concept attainment is a nice way to use inductive thinking but still teach a focused lesson.

Steps

1. Begin with two columns: one for examples and one for non-examples.
2. Tell students that their job is to guess the concept you are teaching. They should be looking for patterns within the examples and non-examples.
3. Since students cannot stay silent once they see the big idea form, let them have a chance to share their ideas with a partner after a few examples.
4. Now let your class categorize a few samples as examples or non-examples on their own.
5. In the end, unveil the concept (to many oohs and aahs) and practice a few concrete examples.

Inductive Lesson

Here's another way to include inductive thought: brainstorm details about a topic and then form a larger idea about those details. This activity will be much more student-driven and requires that students have enough knowledge about a subject to generate sufficient details. The statements generated by students can be saved and applied to other areas as well.

Example: Opening The Year With Conflict

Here's an example of an inductive lesson I used to open a year with the universal theme of "conflict."

1. My students brainstormed all examples of conflict they could think of.
2. Next, in small groups, students attempted to categorize these examples. They chose the criteria, however you may want to give more scaffolding depending on your grade level.
3. Their next task was to form statements using their category names. Students who categorized conflict as "helpful" or "harmful" might form the statement: "Conflict can be both helpful and harmful." Students who used "emotional," "mental," and "physical" as categories might state "Conflict can arise from emotional, mental, or physical problems."
4. Save these generalizations to use throughout your year. See which ones hold up and which ones are too specialized.

5. Offer Choice

This doesn't mean giving up control of your classroom, but it does mean shifting to ideas and products that offer students a chance to use their interests. Today, allow your students to choose how they will demonstrate their understanding.

Consider

Your classroom is filled with unique students. Does everyone have to:

- Create the same product?
- Work in equal sized groups?
- Even work in a group?
- Work at the same level of Bloom's Taxonomy?
- Have the same time limit?

Menus

Creating a [menu of options](#) is an excellent way to retain control, yet also give students choice. How many ways can students show you that they understand the parts of speech? Could they:

- Write a haiku poem about each part of speech?
- Create an illustrated children's book?
- Make a table of examples.
- Take sentences from a novel and diagram each part of speech?
- Develop a skit?
- Give a powerpoint presentation?
- Paint a picture?

Come up with a handful of interesting (and practical) options and let your students pick which one they like best.

Differentiation Resources

- Some of Dr. Kaplan's books: The Flip Book, The Flip Book, Too, and Independent Study all available at jtayloreducation.com.
- Byrdseed's own [Differentiator](#)
- Byrdseed's [Extend A Menu](#) offers automated extension menu generation!
- Susan Winebrenner's [Teaching Gifted Children in the Regular Classroom](#)
- Carol Ann Tomlinson's [The Differentiated Classroom](#)

6. Preassess

Do they seem bored? Are they getting the right answer without showing any work? Are they frustrating you with their lack of effort?

Maybe they *already get it*. Or they may have already gotten it *before you even taught it*.

Gifted students are gifted. They pick things up faster than the average person. They need fewer repetitions. They quickly grow tired of practicing.

Today, give your students a preassessment to determine what they already know then modify tomorrow's instruction based on the results.

Possible Results

Accelerate

Your pre-assessment may reveal that your class as a whole has an 80% understanding of your upcoming unit. In that case, it may be best to accelerate your pacing. Help your class with those areas they aren't fully understanding and then move on to material that will challenge your class.

Up Level

If acceleration isn't an option (perhaps you're afraid you'll accelerate right through the year!), increase the rigor of your lessons. Incorporate depth and complexity, move to a higher level of thinking skills, or develop atypical products.

Group

Most commonly, the results of your preassessment will be mixed. Some students will ace the material before any instruction. Some will have had no exposure. Most will fall somewhere in between. In this case, set up two or three groups with differentiated assignments. Your experts can explore the material at a higher level, while the novices get grade-level instruction in a smaller setting.

Benefits

By preassessing your students, you are:

- Affirming their giftedness
- Removing potential behavior problems
- Teaching only those who need it
- Making your class a child-focused environment

Read More At Byrdseed

- [Flexible Math Groups In A Gifted Classroom](#)
- [How I Preassess In Language Arts](#)

7. Learn Social Emotional Needs

No amount of instructional strategies will make up for a poor understanding of the social emotional needs of your students. There is some fascinating research available about the unique inner world of a gifted child. Today, just take some time to read up.

Articles Online

- A fascinating [article](#) by Karen Rogers
- [Three Ways Teachers Battle Gifted Students](#)
- [Helping Adolescents Adjust To Giftedness](#)
- [Many Sides of Giftedness](#)
- [Competing With Myths](#)
- [Helping Gifted Kids With Stress](#)
- [Motivating Underachieving Gifted Students](#)

Websites

- [SENG: Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted](#)
- [Hoagie's Gifted - Social Emotional Section](#)

Books

- [Growing Up Gifted](#) by Barbara Clark
- [When Gifted Kids Don't Have All The Answers](#) by Judy Galbraith
- [Guiding The Gifted Child](#) by James Webb