



# Stories from the Classroom

## Powering up to critical thinking

— Staff

École Meridian Heights School  
Stony Plain, Alberta

As staff at École Meridian Heights School move forward in their third year of pursuing critical thinking as a school goal, they are looking for powerful ways to make critical thinking an everyday part of their teaching. Lead teachers Jacqueline Victoor and Cindy Hopley have implemented several promising strategies, four of which are described here.

### 1. A menu of ways to enhance critical thinking

This idea, from a leadership session with Jim Knight, provides teachers with a choice of different ways to access support. It also provided Jacqueline and Cindy with a structure for planning professional development in critical thinking throughout the year.

### 2. A school-wide critical challenge

To kick off the new school year, Jacqueline and Cindy devised a “decode the puzzle” critical challenge: two photo puzzles, one each for early and middle years classes. The first photo clue in the early years puzzle, for example, showed a package of sesame snacks accompanied by a photo of a street scene. Each day an additional clue was emailed to teachers who could post it or project it on the classroom whiteboard. Intrigued students understood that their suggested solutions needed to meet the criteria of being plausible and justified by evidence. Although some students made a solid case that the answer was “recycling”, most agreed that the clues pointed to Oscar the Grouch of Sesame Street fame.

### Le Menu

Choose one or more of the activities below that you would like to try this year. We will be requesting feedback, suggestions, lesson plans or great ideas that come from your critical thinking activities this year.

- computer session on on-line critical thinking resources
- participate in a TC<sup>2</sup> webinar (Jacqueline and Cindy will give more info and help arrange)
- work with grade level/subject partner(s) on a critical thinking activity while Cindy/Jacqueline are in your classroom
- Cindy/Jacqueline could help you prepare and present a critical challenge or lesson including critical thinking
- try a critical thinking activity in \_\_\_\_\_ (subject)
- create powerful questions for presenters /guests in the school
- attend critical thinking session offered by ERLC or PSD AISI cohort or TC<sup>2</sup>
- attend in school session on critical thinking strategies – to be used across the curriculum
- attend in school session on critical thinking lessons for a specific subject – state the subject \_\_\_\_\_
- assessment ideas –Create and/or use a critical thinking rubric or other rubrics
- critical thinking/TC<sup>2</sup> model-based group strategies –discover and try u-shaped discussion, pair and share, etc. from the resource, *Groups at work*
- feature a critical thinking activity your students have done on our school website-collect photos, student work, etc (Cindy/Jacqueline/Gayle/Donna help)
- share a critical thinking activity in the school newsletter
- videotape students to record their engagement during critical thinking activity
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Sharing successful critical challenges, large and small

Collaboration and mutual support among teachers are essential for embedding critical thinking in the life of a school. Jacqueline reports that she and Cindy have been encouraged by teachers' willingness to share critical challenges they have created and support each other as they try out critical thinking tasks with their students. As teachers have success with these activities, they share ideas, both informally in conversation and more formally on the school's website.

### 4. Exploring resources together

During professional learning day sessions and an after-school session, Meridian Heights teachers investigated the TC<sup>2</sup> website, among others, and familiarized themselves with available resources such as *Tools for Thought*. Jacqueline and Cindy have also found that they are able to recommend particular resources that meet teachers' specific needs, according to their Menu selection, and that this "just in time" sharing is particularly effective in helping teachers embed critical thinking in their instruction.



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