

How to Teach Critical Thinking

Seven Parts: Observation and conclusions Making comparisons and contrasting Analysis Behaving cooperatively No ending Socratic method Argument analysis Community Q&A

Critical thinking skills are skills that children (and adults) need to learn to be able to solve problems. This includes analyzing and evaluating information that is provided, whether that information is through observation, experience or communication. The core of critical thinking is being responsive to information and not just accepting it. Questioning is the most important part of critical thinking. It is a part of scientific, mathematical, historical, economic and philosophical thinking, all of which are necessary for the future development of our society. Here are a few ways to teach critical thinking that can be used whether you are a teacher or a parent.

Observation and conclusions



1. Observe and draw conclusions.

- When children begin to make detailed observations about objects or information, they are then able to draw conclusions or make judgments based on those observations.
- When a child asks the question "Why?," respond with "Why do you think?" to encourage the child to draw his or her own conclusions.
- This is the beginning of scientific observation skills that will be useful and necessary throughout life.

Making comparisons and contrasting



1. Compare and contrast items and topics.

- This allows children to tell the ways things are similar and different and helps them analyze and categorize information.
- A simple example of this activity is to have children compare and contrast an apple and an orange. Allow them to describe all the ways they are similar and different.
- Comparing and contrasting stories is another way to encourage critical thinking. Children are analyzing characters, settings, plot and other story elements when they list the way stories are the same and different.

Analysis



1. Discuss and analyze stories.

- Have children "retell" a story you have read in their own words. This encourages them to summarize the main ideas of the story instead of just responding to specific questions with facts.
- Ask questions that do not have direct answers in the story. This makes the children infer and draw their own conclusions based on their understanding of the story. An example of this would be to ask "What do you think the author meant when?" or "Why do you think the character?".
- Ask the children to analyze character and setting elements in the story. This is a good opportunity to have the child compare and contrast within the story and outside of the story.
- Have the children relate the story to their own lives or outside events. This is the beginning important critical thinking skill called synthesizing, where children begin to use the information in new ways and apply it to different ideas.

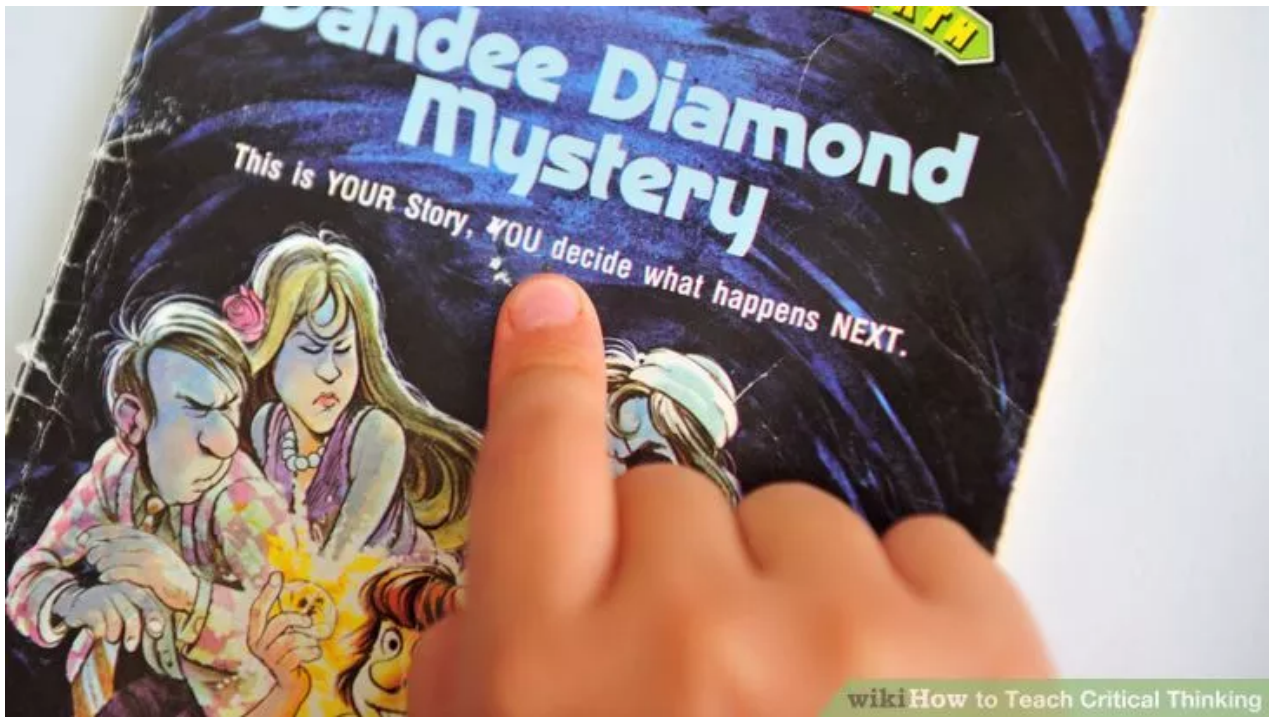
Behaving cooperatively



1. Learn cooperatively.

- Providing cooperative learning opportunities will help children develop critical thinking skills as they share ideas and learn from each another.
- Encourage children to read stories together and share their evaluations of the story. This can spark a healthy debate with older children, in which they must defend their opinions.
- Let children explore creatively with common play activities, such as with water, sand or bubbles. Ask them questions about what they are doing.

No ending



1. Provide stories without conclusions.

- Telling a story without an ending and asking the children to finish the story is another way to encourage critical thinking skills such as synthesis. The children must take the information from the story and creatively compile it, draw conclusions and come up with their own ending.
- This can also be done by asking a child "What do you think happened next?" on a familiar story that does have an ending, such as a fairy tale.

Socratic method



1. Practice the Socratic method.

- Socrates was famous for teaching critical thinking through questioning. Children are already naturals at questioning, so turn the tables a little and question them back. Take an opposite position and try to get them to defend their opinions on a topic by asking pointed questions.

Argument analysis



1. Identify a problem or a premise or a statement to discuss.



2. Search or discuss possible solutions or counter-arguments.



3. Discuss how to judge the credibility of information. Discuss the "appeal to authority" approach, to assist a person in knowing whether an appeal to authority is real or fallacious. Use a book such as Jill LeBlanc's "Thinking Clearly: A Guide to Critical Reasoning". She posits four ways to identify a true appeal to authority; it must meet all four ways to be supported:

- The authority must be identified
- The authority must be respectable
- The matter must be in this authority's field of expertise
- The matter must be one on which there is a consensus of experts.



4. Clarify the difference between opinion, judgment and fact.

- The above activities can also be done with older children and adults by adjusting the subject matter and reading level.
- Critical thinking activities are also preparing children for math, science and reading skills.
- Critical thinking skills can be encouraged by helping children solve everyday problems, such as deciding what coins are needed to make a purchase, how many watering cans of water are needed to water the garden or how 2 houses you pass are alike and different.

<http://www.wikihow.com/Teach-Critical-Thinking>

