

SAY-MEAN-MATTER

Say-Mean-Matter is the name for a strategy that helps students question the text, search for deeper meanings, and make connections between text and their lives. It's effective for all student levels from language learners to honors and AP students. It can be used with academic texts, with fiction, and with non-verbal material as well.

The strategy uses a three-column chart. This can be on an overhead, chart paper, chalkboard or whatever is handy. Once students have learned the method, they can quickly draw the graphic organizer and use it to find meaning and significance. SAY, MEAN, and MATTER are the 3 column titles on the chart. When initially teaching the strategy, explain what each means using age-appropriate directions and suggestions.

SAY	MEAN	MATTER
What does the text say? What happened? Cite text (quotation) or paraphrase.	What does the author mean? How do I interpret this? Read "between the lines."	Why does it matter to me or others? Why is this important? What is the significance? What are the implications?

1. To first teach the strategy, you might use a short text or cartoon (single frame or strip) to demonstrate how text provides information on several levels. First, elicit from the students what the text says, what words are actually used, or if a cartoon, what the drawing illustrates. Students may also paraphrase the language. The text should be "right there." When filling in the chart, it may be helpful to number the responses.
2. For each item on the SAY list, ask the students what they believe the statement means. As these are suggested, write them in the second column, discussing them along the way. Ask questions, such as, "What makes you think that?" "How do you know that?"
3. The third column is the most abstract and may prove to be difficult at first, especially with less sophisticated students. Ask: "So what?" "What is the theme of the piece?" "How does this piece connect to your own life?" "What does it matter to you?" Or, "What questions does this piece raise?" "What implications does it hold for a given group of people, or for people in general?" In this column you find the meaning and depth of the piece.
4. Once students learn how the three columns are used to understand a cartoon or short piece of text, a next step might be to have the class generate a paragraph to explain or analyze the piece. Use the ideas recorded on the chart to create the paragraph. One way to do this is to start with a statement from the "MATTER" column as a topic or thesis statement, and then draw on the "SAY" and "MEAN" columns for supporting details. The first column provides "text proof," (what the text says), while the second column provides student interpretation. (Teacher should model initial steps of the writing; then students can complete it on their own, or with a partner.)

When "Say, Mean, Matter" is applied to a longer text (a chapter in a textbook, a story, or even a novel) the columns can be used to help structure an essay, using the same process as when writing a paragraph.

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