



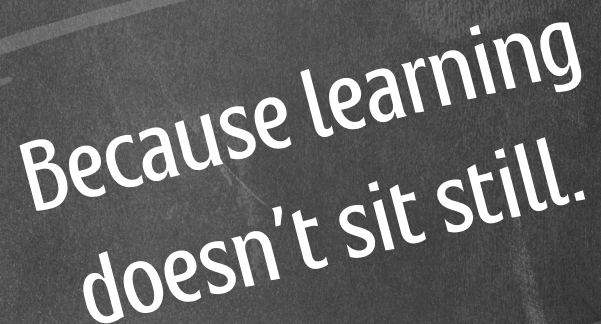
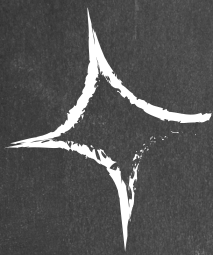
The THINKBRIGHT



ENGAGEMENT PLAYBOOK



5 plays that get middle schoolers to
ACTUALLY CARE about history & ELA
without more grading, burnout,
or planning your Sunday away.



“
Because learning
doesn't sit still.”

FOR TEACHERS WHO ARE OVER BLANK STARES AND FAKE READING.

PLAY #1

LEAD WITH

ARTIFACTS

Before students care about the standard, they need to care about **SOMETHING.**

Middle schoolers don't lean in for objectives.

They lean in for **MYSTERY.**

An artifact, an image, a document, a strange object, a primary source fragment.

Something that feels unfinished. Unexplained. Worth arguing about.

What does this **glyph** represent?



Start with the thing worth thinking about
and the rest will follow.

PLAY #2

MAKE IT

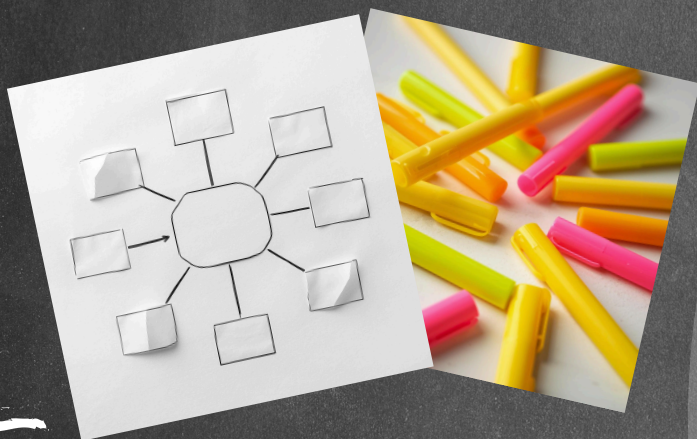
VISUAL

Middle schoolers process visuals faster than text.

When students can see the content, they're more likely to **understand & engage.**

LOOKS LIKE:

- Images instead of long texts
- Color-coded thinking tools
- Visual organizers that guide analysis



What story do these images represent?



Rikki-Tikki-Tavi?



If students **can point to it, color it, or label it,** they're more likely to **remember it.**

PLAY #3

SPARK CURIOSITY

Mystery or Challenge

Kids remember what they can't quite solve, quite crack, quite explain.

Questions resonate more than answers.

TRY THIS:

- 📌 A historian detective mystery that uses evidence
- 📌 A word, map, or artifact with a secret they have to uncover
- 📌 A puzzle, game, or word challenge






A well-timed mystery can **fill the room with purpose**. Shake up your sequence. Add a cliffhanger.

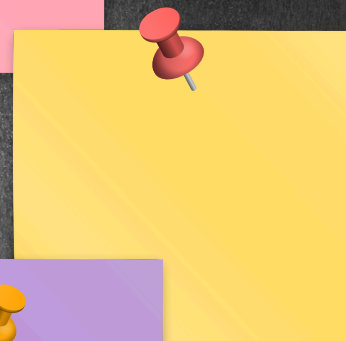
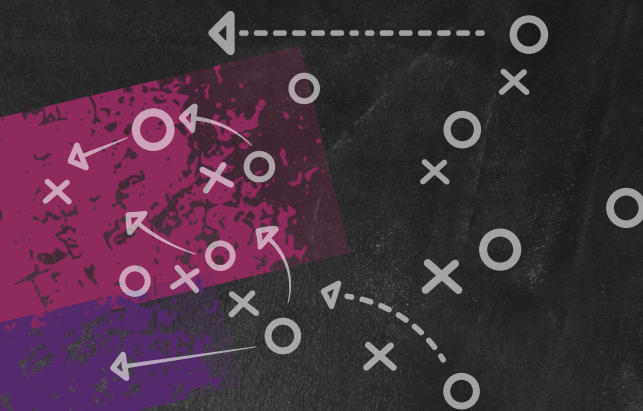
PLAY #4 BUILD IN CHOICE

Why it works!

Choice makes learning personal.
It helps every student see
themselves in the work.
It's ownership!

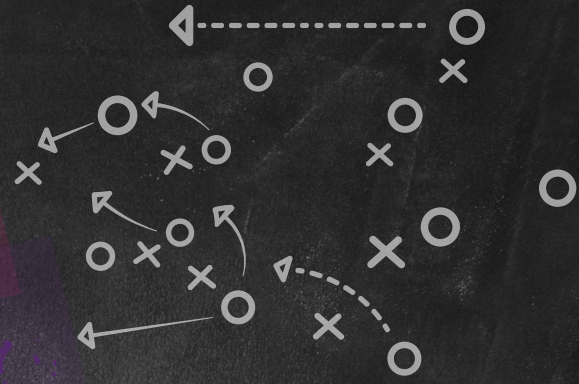
LET THEM CHOOSE:

-  **WHO...** they'll write about
-  **WHICH...** novel they'll read
or project they'll create
-  **HOW...** to research,
present, or argue



Let students pick
their path; watch
engagement
skyrocket.

PLAY #5 SCAFFOLD FOR SUCCESS



Middle schoolers need steps that build confidence, without spoon feeding them. Small wins create competence. Competence drives engagement.

USE THESE:



Sentence starters and sentence frames

Although it is often argued that _____,
a closer examination reveals that _____
because _____, _____.



Self-Question Prompts

???



Start with modeling



Rigor isn't raised by removing the rungs.
It's climbed by guiding each step up.