

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

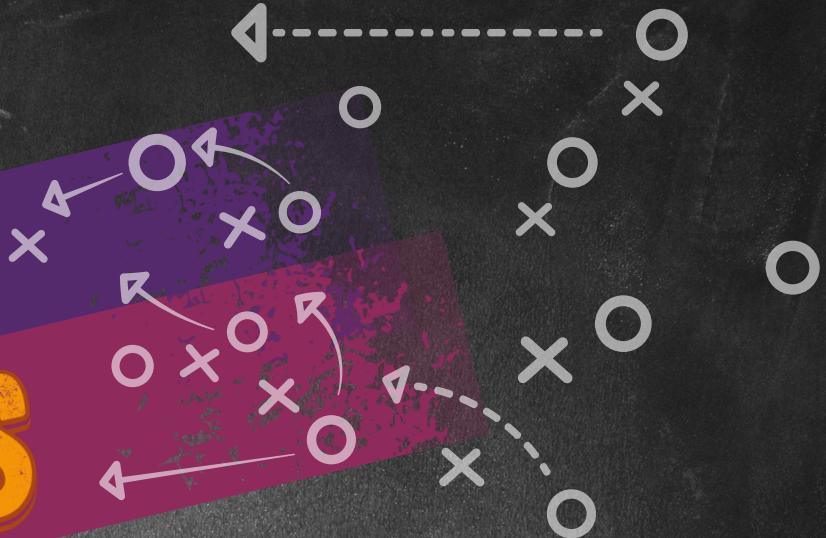
Before students care about the standard, they need to care about **SOMETHING.**

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.

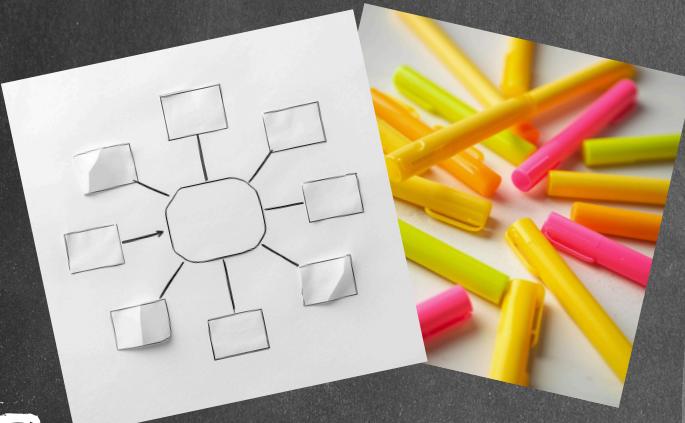
PLAY #2 MAKE IT **VISUAL**

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!

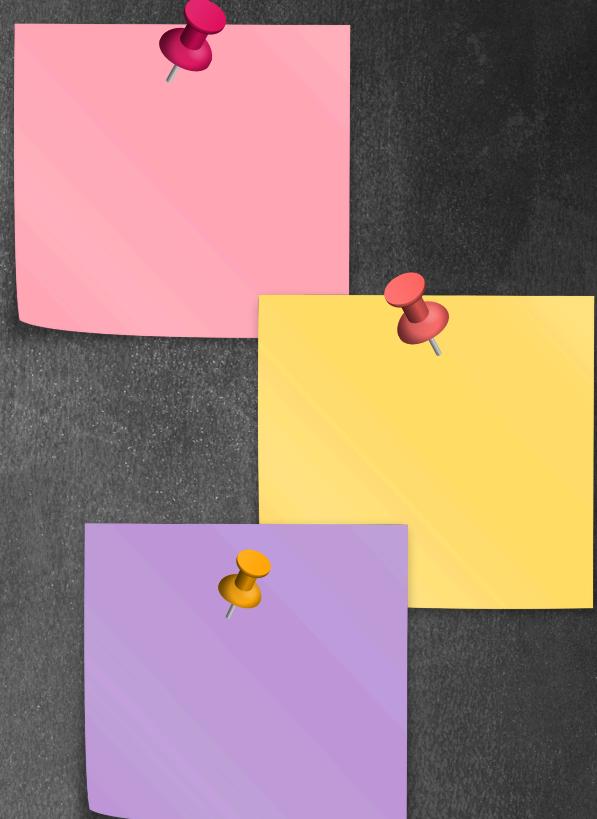
Choice makes learning personal.
It helps every student see
themselves in the work.
It's ownership!

LET THEM **CHOOSE**:

WHO... they'll write about

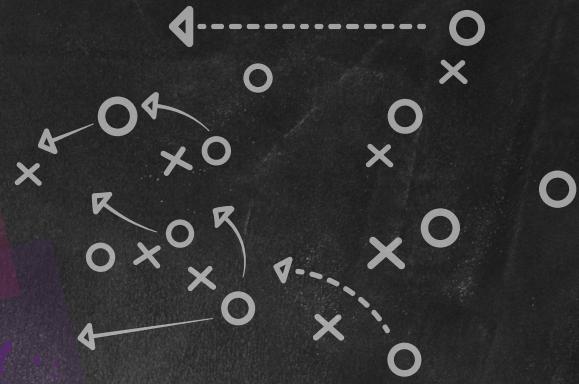
WHICH... novel they'll read
or project they'll create

HOW... to research,
present, or argue



“
Let students pick
their path; watch
engagement
skyrocket.

PLAY #5 SCAFFOLD FOR SUCCESS

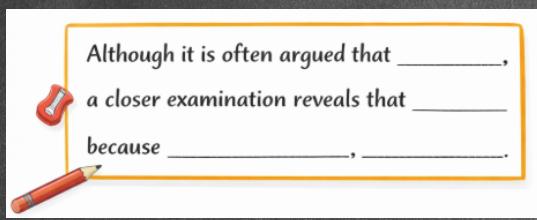


Middle schoolers need steps that build confidence, without spoon feeding them. Small wins create competence. Competence drives engagement.

USE THESE:



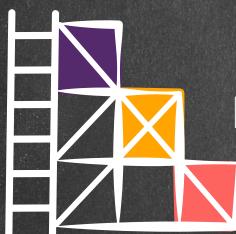
Sentence starters
and sentence frames



Self-Question Prompts



Start with modeling



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