

Cooperative Sentence Strip Paragraph on Columbus, Taíno, etc.

This activity is adapted from a GLAD strategy.

1. The teacher picks a specific topic and creates a topic sentence for a paragraph on the chosen topic. For this unit, the topic could be Columbus' exploration, the Taíno, the encounter of Columbus and the Taíno, etc. There are many possibilities. For example, one could start with: "In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue." Or "Life for the Taíno changed drastically with the arrival of Columbus." Or "Books don't always tell the whole truth about Columbus' exploration." The topic sentence is then written on large paper that can be posted at the front of the room. The teacher and students read the topic sentence together.
2. Working in small groups, students will create a sentence that could belong in a paragraph with the posted topic sentence. In order to get students engaged and excited, a game like quality is added to the assignment. After discussing options among their group, each group must write their rough draft sentence on a piece of notebook paper. When they are done, they raise their hand for the teacher to check their sentence. If there are any errors—factual or grammatical—the teacher guides them toward these without correcting it for them. Students must fix their errors and then raise their hand to have the sentence checked again. If it is correct, students get final copy sentence strips to rewrite their sentence on. The key is that no two groups may write the same sentence about the same supporting fact. The goal is to finish as quickly as possible before someone else uses your idea. When the students have finished their final copy they put their sentence up on the board underneath the topic sentence—using something like magnets make this easier to move them later during the editing process.
3. Once all groups are done and have hung up their sentence, the class reads through all the sentences together. Guided by the teacher, the class discusses the best order to put the sentences—is there a sentence that should clearly go first after the topic sentence? Are there facts that should be grouped together? As the class makes these decisions, the teacher moves the sentences around, visually modeling how to edit a paragraph.
4. When the paragraph is completely edited, the class reads it out loud together.
5. This activity can be done multiple times in one unit depending upon how many different kinds of topic sentences a teacher can create. For example there could be one on the Taíno and one on Columbus.