

The Thinking Chain

Purpose

The Thinking Chain Collection helps young readers see how their understanding grows as they listen to or read a text. Each paper chain represents a different kind of thinking. Students use the chains to track the ways their ideas grow and change about a character, a story's lesson or theme, or new information they discover while reading.

By building a chain link by link, students learn that reading is not about remembering every detail. It is about noticing how new information changes what they think, feel, and know.

When to Use It

Use this tool after reading a picture book with clear turning points or character change. It also works well during small-group discussions to model reflective thinking, or as a follow-up to a comprehension mini-lesson on making connections or understanding theme.

Introducing the Thinking Chains

Explain to students that every reader's ideas grow while reading. Tell them that each type of chain helps them explore a different way their thinking can change:

The **Character Chain** focuses on how students' thoughts about a character shift as the story unfolds.

The **Lesson or Theme Chain** helps students notice the message or moral of the story and how their understanding of it develops from beginning to end.

The **New Information Chain** supports readers as they learn to connect new facts or ideas with what they already know.

Each type of chain ends with a small "button" that shows its focus.



A face represents a Character Chain



A heart represents a Lesson or Theme Chain



A lightbulb represents a New Information Chain.



The Thinking Chain

How to Model It

- Read part of a story aloud and stop at a key moment.
- Think out loud:
- “At first, I thought the main character was being mean. But now I see she was nervous. My thinking is changing.”
- Write or draw that idea on a paper strip and connect it to the first link.
- Continue reading and add a new link each time your thinking grows.
- When finished, fasten the chain with the matching button symbol—a face, heart, or lightbulb to show if you explored character growth, a lesson or theme, or new information.

Student Directions

Give each student of paper strips. On each strip, have them complete the sentence starter:

- “At first, I thought...”
- “Then I noticed...”
- “Now I think...”
- “This helps me understand that...”

Students can draw or write their ideas before connecting their strips into a chain. When they are finished, they can select the button symbol that matches the type of synthesizing work they did (a face, heart, or lightbulb) and use it to “fasten” their thinking chain.

Teacher Tip:

Create a bulletin board titled

Display finished chains in three groups: Character Chains, Lesson Chains, and Information Chains. Invite students to explain which chain they made and how their thinking changed as they read.

Name: _____

My Thinking Chain

glue or staple	At first I thought...	glue or staple
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glue or staple	Then I noticed...	glue or staple
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glue or staple	Now I Think	glue or staple
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glue or staple	This Helps me understand that...	glue or staple
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glue or staple	I explored how my thinking changed about...	glue or staple
	A Character A Lesson or Theme New Information	

glue or staple	<div>Glue your button here.</div>	glue or staple
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Choose a button to fasten your chain. Cut it out and glue it on the final strip in your Thinking Chain.

A face represents a Character Chain

A heart represents a Lesson or Theme Chain

A lightbulb represents a New Information Chain.

