

As we move fully into spring, the students’ minds are somewhere other than the classroom. With that in mind, this is a good time to look at ways to spark engagement to help keep students focused toward completion of CTE courses. There are many strategies for boosting engagement, but we are looking for ideas that pay off better than the lottery.

One of the first things to consider is harnessing the power of mystery and puzzles. Storytellers and TV shows have known it for years with shows like “The Twilight Zone” and “The X-Files” and newer shows like “Stranger Things.” In your classroom that means starting a project or unit with a mystery or problem to solve rather than just telling students what they are going to do.

Next, support the mystery by asking deeper questions and pausing, not rushing to call on the first hand that goes up. Then follow up by pausing after an answer has been given, allowing students to wonder if the answer is correct and allowing other students to agree or disagree. The pausing is easier when you are asking higher-level Blooms questions that require students to analyze, speculate, evaluate or create.

Higher-level questions can lead to debating an issue or trying to persuade others of a better way. Ask, “Why do you think……..?” or “What do you suppose would happen if……..?” Controversy can stimulate learning, but be prepared to step in and redirect if needed.

Because we are CTE teachers, we need to be ready to answer at all times, “What’s in it for me?” We are always trying to make things as real world and relevant as possible. In the real world we don’t always have the answers up front; we have to analyze, evaluate and create and it usually requires collaboration and use of social skills.

There is never one solution that will engage students every time, but it is good to be open to trying different ways to engage, spark or re-engage students.

We are coming to the end of Teacher Tips 2, and I would like your thoughts on what we offered you this year. Please follow the link below and respond to the eight questions: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JMXSRPS>.