

Learning with the *Times*

What is black and white and red all over?

The newspaper, of course! Reading the *Tampa Bay Times*, Florida's largest and best newspaper, can help children and adults become better readers and critical thinkers. Here are some newspaper activities you can do to hone your reading and critical thinking skills.

Journaling to self-discovery

Knowing who you are is the first step in being healthy and mature and taking charge of your life. Keeping a journal is a great way to learn more about yourself. Who are you? Why do you do what you do? Do you have strong convictions? Are you able to stand up to others when your ideas are questioned? While you are keeping your journal, read the *Tampa Bay Times* to test yourself. What are your thoughts about the things you read in the news? To begin your journal, write about something that you have read in the *Times* that directly affects your life. Share some of your journal entries and thoughts with your peers.

Learning new words

When you study new things, you often come up against some tough vocabulary words! Most vocabulary words are learned from context clues or good old-fashioned dictionary work. While you read the *Tampa Bay Times*, be sure to highlight or circle words you don't know. Try to figure out the words' meanings by looking for clues in the sentences around them. Write down your best guess, and then look the words up in a dictionary. As a group activity, make a list of the words your classmates identified and see which ones stumped the class. Next, use these words for a news scavenger hunt. See if you can find these words in the *Tampa Bay Times*. The group that finds the most words wins the game.

Honesty is the best policy

The comic strips in the newspaper often reflect real life. We can be pleased with this because there is much honesty that can be found among the characters in various comic strips. Read through the comic strips in the *Tampa Bay Times*. As you read, look for examples of honesty or truthfulness in each character's speech and actions. Write a brief paragraph about the comic strip and the qualities you have discovered in the character or characters. Share your thoughts with your classmates and family.

Showing compassion

Compassion can be a complicated character trait for some people. There are examples of compassion all around us, though. Look through the pages of the *Tampa Bay Times* to find an article and a cartoon that show a person or character being compassionate. In your journal, write down why this character or person is compassionate. As an additional activity, research compassion in an encyclopedia or dictionary. Find a famous person who displays compassion and philanthropy and research that person. Write a blog or Facebook post about what you have learned and share the information with your friends, family and classmates.

Setting a good example

In 2013, Tampa Bay Ray Matt Joyce hosted the fourth annual Sweet Swingin' Baseball Camp. The money from the camp was donated to the North Brandon Little League and All Children's Outpatient Care of Brandon. Joyce is setting a good example in the Tampa Bay community by being a good role model. Look in the pages of the *Tampa Bay Times*, as well as the Internet, to find other people who are role models to others because of their actions. Make a list of the people you find and what they have done that shows good character. Be sure to list specific examples next to the person's name. Share what you have learned with your classmates and family.

Healthy eating

Good nutrition is important for all people, especially growing teens. Plan a healthy eating week at your school to increase awareness of good nutrition. Talk to the head of your school cafeteria to find out how meals are planned and write an article for your school newspaper based on your findings. Use the articles in the Taste section of the *Tampa Bay Times*, to help with suggestions for healthy eating. With a partner, create a plan for the healthy eating week.

Use the ads and articles in the Tampa Bay Times to assist you. Create a graphic organizer with the information and share it with your class.

Unlocking secrets

Do you like to read? Do you like fiction or nonfiction, or do you prefer informational texts like newspaper and magazine articles? What secrets can be learned from reading the *Tampa Bay Times*? Look through the articles, cartoons, advertisements and photos in the Times. Cut out headlines, words, photos and images that unlock some secrets. Create a collage with the words and images you have collected. On the back of the collage, explain, in a fully developed paragraph, what the items shown represent and what secrets you have learned. Use specific examples to highlight your points. Share your collage with your family and classmates.

Media literacy

The *Tampa Bay Times* newspaper articles, cartoons, photos and advertisements are a consistent source of informational text. Reading the Times with your children at home and students in class is a great way to increase critical thinking skills and prepare for the new Florida Standards. Are you familiar with the structure of a newspaper? The best way to acquaint yourself and your children with a newspaper is by looking at the index, which is like a table of contents. According to the index, what pages are the following found on: classified ads, sports, editorials, local news, weather and the crossword puzzle? Where would you most likely find articles focused on health or politics? Would these articles be in more than one section of the newspaper? Why?

Alternate history

According to the Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, alternate history is “an account of Earth as it might have become in consequence of some hypothetical alteration in history.”

AlternateHistory.com defines alternate history as “the exercise of looking at the past and asking ‘what if’? What if some major historical event had gone differently, and how could that have changed the world?” Some alternate histories are built around one key event, or point of divergence, where their fictional timeline diverges from ours. Others propose a series of incremental changes over time. Still others present multiple alternate histories or parallel worlds. Find articles in the *Tampa Bay Times* that focus on an event that can be altered to write a science fiction story. With a partner, read through the articles in this week’s *Tampa Bay Times*, choose 10 articles and alter them just a bit to turn them from news to science fiction. On a piece of paper, briefly summarize each article. Then write a paragraph showing an alternate view. In order to create an alternate view, you will need to change some factual element of the story. Share your best attempts with your class.

Evaluating ads

The diet industry is big business in the United States. Why does the diet industry tend to make big promises about quick results? Television commercials, radio spots, newspaper ads ... the focus is always on losing weight quickly without any effort. The Purdue Online Writing Lab defines fallacies as “common errors in reasoning that will undermine the logic of your argument. Fallacies can be either illegitimate arguments or irrelevant points, and are often identified because they lack evidence that supports their claim.” Research the types of logical fallacies. Then find an ad or article in the *Tampa Bay Times* that focuses on a diet. Apply your new knowledge to the information in the ad and analyze the points presented. Create a chart with the information you have read and learned about. Share your information with your class.

Appreciating others

Sometimes bullying happens because of misunderstandings between people of different backgrounds. Read the *Tampa Bay Times* and look for information and pictures about customs and traditions of various cultures, religions, nationalities and ethnic groups. With your class and/or family, discuss the special qualities of the groups in the story. What makes them unique and worth appreciating? Write a blog post about your thoughts and what you have learned.

Fact vs. opinion

Knowing the difference between fact and fiction is very important, especially when it comes to information about your community and world. Oftentimes, leaders try to influence young people by providing propaganda or false information to persuade the young people to join their side in an argument, cause or for an event. Look through the news sections of the *Tampa Bay Times*. Select a few articles of interest and evaluate those articles for facts and opinions. Draw a line down the center of a piece of paper. Label one side Fact and the other Opinion. List statements in each category and discuss with your family and class why these statements fall into that category. Think about the content of the articles and the information on your chart. Thinking about the idea that facts can be persuasive, write an essay or blog post discussing the ideas you have read about and learned.

Analyzing information critically

It is time to use your critical thinking skills. After all, that is a main focus of learning about yourself and what makes you a strong individual. Using the electronic edition of the *Tampa Bay Times*, review the articles and ads for a one-week time period. Save all articles that focus on health and the environment. Write down the main points for each article. Be sure to comment on whether the article is focusing on positive or negative choices. Choose one of the points represented in one of the articles to write a research paper. You can focus your research and paper on any aspect of the article. After your paper is written, create an oral presentation for your class. Explain whether the information you found is positive, negative, helpful or harmful. Be sure to use specific examples from the article and your research in your paper and presentation.