

Choral Montage

After students have written a list poem or other short writing, I ask each student to select one line or phrase. The idea is to fashion a group composition using only these individual fragments. First, I ask everyone to read their lines in no particular order. Then, I may need to ask for a possible opening line, and I may need to prompt for lines that might follow. Sometimes, I will ask for a possible final line, and students will build a bridge from beginning to this end. Almost always, however, students quickly take control and I step back. Usually, one or more students will step up to take the lead, and it can be surprising to see which students do this. From a social standpoint, choral montage de-centers the teacher, is student-directed, and tends to re-order the customary interrelationships of the classroom community.

Before long, most students are actively making suggestions and physically moving each other around to create *their* text.

Students see that there are many possibilities, and that each construction has a slightly or sometimes greatly different meaning. It also sensitizes students to text structure, transitions, and other elements, such as repetition and parallelism, that develop and reinforce coherence (Wilhelm, 2002, p. 176).

As Wilhelm (2002) suggests, what is particularly compelling about choral montage is the way it makes *revision* come alive. The ease of moving bodies around is comparable to cut and paste in digital writing, and the improvement that results tends to persuade students that it's worth the effort. They come away with a memorable picture of how collaborative revision works that transfers directly into online environments like a wiki.

One caution: I would suggest a group size of 8-12. This strategy has never failed me as a way to engage students, from grade 3 to moody adolescents, and even normally reluctant adults.

Adapted from Wilhelm, J.D. (2002). *Action Strategies for Deepening Comprehension*. (pp. 174-177) New York: Scholastic Professional Books.