

Video Overview and Discussion Questions for *Background Knowledge:* *The Missing Piece of the Comprehension Puzzle*

CHAPTER

5

Quickening the Pace of Students' Background Knowledge Acquisition

Secondary teachers face an ongoing challenge with building background knowledge even as they are teaching new concepts. Watch as this high school environmental-science teacher uses both direct and indirect methods to activate and build his students' background knowledge.

He begins by organizing this unit with an essential question in order to provide a framework on which students can build a schema. Next, he distributes an anticipation guide that contains about a dozen statements, some true and some false, designed to activate background knowledge and address misconceptions. Importantly, the statements are not about isolated facts, but instead address larger concepts about human impact on the environment and changes in climate. Students work in pairs to discuss their ideas and then continue by previewing 18 readings, graphic organizers, tables, and charts that are posted around the room. Students will examine all of these in more detail throughout the unit, but for now the teacher wants to preview content and create opportunities for them to build the background knowledge they will need for this unit.

Discussion Questions

1. How do you build background knowledge and activate what students already know about a unit you will be teaching? Is it always something that occurs at the beginning of a unit? Why or why not?
2. Why is student dialogue so important in building background knowledge?
3. In what ways could anticipation guides be used later in a unit? For what purpose?
4. Why are indirect methods of building background knowledge (reading, student discussion) so important to learning?