

Ideas to Ignite your Students' Interests



- Ask questions that stimulate a desire to learn the topic, such as:
 - Why do cycles go around and around?
 - In what ways do systems function and dysfunction?
 - How do we solve difficult problems?
- Form “Special Interest Groups” (SIGs) in your classroom. The groups could be based on broad ideas (such as sports, the arts, math, science, reading, video games, etc.) or specific to the topic (such as in science when working on the topic of habitat form “rock snot algae”, “cow farts” and “dung beetles” groups to investigate their impact on the topic).
- Read articles (either current news, research studies, or historical documents) that related to the topic being studied. The articles should be short and include controversy, ambiguity and debatable issues.
- Use the problem based learning (PBL) method. PBL is a highly motivational and engaging way to allow students to study a topic through their questions.
- Incorporate the topics you will be teaching into every day conversations with students. This can be done by posting questions around the room that stimulate thinking within and across topic areas such as: What effect might the massive volcanic eruption in Iceland have on your life? (Science & Geography) If you lived during the time of Hamlet, what type of work would you do and how much would you make per year? (Social Studies, Literature & math)
- Play games associated with the topic to reduce students’ anxiety, this works especially well in mathematics.
- Set up centers in your room that preview the topics students will encounter. Centers can be physical places within the room where materials and books related to the topic are displayed or where activities related to the topic can be experienced. Centers can also be virtual, as in pages bookmarked on the computer that highlight the topic, show videos, games to be played or quizzes to take.
- Expose your students to the topics by showing short videos, or television shows.
- Get them excited about the topics by sharing controversies within the field (Literature: Did Shakespeare really write his plays? Math: How can we use math to fool people? Science: Global warming is a myth. Social Studies: Immigration should be illegal. Family & Consumer Science: Food poisoning is rampant in school lunches.).

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- Take field trips to locations where the students can see the topic in an authentic way. Rather than do the field trip at the end of a unit, do it in the beginning to get students excited about or connected to what they are about to learn.
- Invite “experts” from the disciplines into your classroom to talk about how they apply the topics in their work life. A critical aspect of bringing in successful experts into your room is that the person should “look like” your students. Students who live in poverty or come from diverse backgrounds need to see themselves in the experts so they know they too can achieve and be successful.
- Offer students hands-on activities where they physically engage with the learning materials. Making the content concrete for the students can help them envision themselves in the study. This can include providing artifacts, tools of the study/discipline, or manipulatives to help solve problems.
- Start units with the “big picture.” Tell students where you are going, what will happen, and what the expected outcomes will be by the time they finish the unit. Promote the conceptual ideas students will learn over what they will do and know. Such as: “Throughout this unit we will be trying to understand what *causes people to revolt.*”
- Infuse reading materials that have a high interest value to your students. Text that are dry and full of information may not engage students into wanting to know more. Try text written from a first person perspective or from the view point of students like yours.
- Allow for students to work on their own and at their own pace. Some students want to learn new things but prefer to work by themselves. Sometimes working in a group can be stressful or impersonal. Let students work alone, and then have them share their ideas with either a small or large group.

