Active Reading: “The Allure of Gangs”
An In-Class Practice
Reading and Understanding Informational Text

Directions: Read the nonfiction article, “The Allure of Gangs.” Demonstrate your understanding of the active reading strategies for learning and understanding difficult text.

BEFORE READING
• Set a Purpose

Directions: Answer the following in complete sentences.

1. What is your purpose for reading an article such as “The Allure of Gangs”?

2. What should you expect to be able to do after reading?

• Preview the Reading

In the space to the right, list anything in the article that might give you a sense of what you can expect to learn. Be sure to list a minimum of five items.
The Allure of Gangs

By now you have a good understanding of the characters in *The Outsiders*. You know that they are members of a “gang,” but they really are not like the gangs that exist today. Mainly, they stick together to watch out for one another, because they really feel they have no one else. But is that where the similarity ends?

Gangs are nothing new. At the turn of the century (the early 1900s), many large police departments on the east coast had gang units to monitor the immigrant gang who got together to protect their neighborhoods and to gather for social reasons. Gangs as most people think of them today were probably first recognized by the public with the inception of the Los Angeles gangs in the early seventies.

**Why do kids join gangs?**

The stereotype that comes to many people’s minds is that kids who join gangs come from single-parent homes. They likely live with their mother, who has to go out and make a living for her family, and sometimes work two jobs to make ends meet. With the mother away from home, the kids have too much freedom and not enough supervision. They may feel as though they are unimportant in their own world, and join a gang because they need an identity.

Often, kids who join gangs feel alienated by their parents, and have lost the connection with them that they may have had when they were small. A difficult home life can affect their lives, as well, and they may become more vulnerable to the fascination of gangs. Some think they will feel safer in a gang than they do in their own homes. They want to feel like they are a part of some kind of family, and the most logical bond, in their eyes, is being with friends. “Bad friends are better than no friends.” Young people need someone to bond with. Being in a gang may also satisfy their need for attention and provide someone who will listen to and care about them.

If academic achievement is below average or poor, they often lack social success, and do not involve themselves in school activities. Gangs can fill that void for some. They may also join a gang to feel competent at something—anything...

Ironically, some kids enter a gang to combat their feelings of fear—fear of gang members. Some join because bigotry runs rampant in their neighborhoods, and they feel helpless to fix it.

Poverty leads some kids into gangs, because they need or want to help out their families and they are not educated, not skilled, or know of no other way to get the money they need to help.

Feelings of being caught in a trap in a hopeless situation, in a poor neighborhood with no way out, and the general breakdown of society as a whole are also considered motivations for joining a street gang.

Some kids join gangs just because they want to feel like a part of something different, new, and exciting.

**Why do they stay?**

After entering gang life, most feel a sense of power. As people begin to fear them, they get a high from the presumed respect of others. Those who used to intimidate them now become their equals, and they begin to develop an elevated sense of self-esteem.

Children from poverty-stricken homes, for the first time, begin to experience what it is like to
have some money to spend on the things they want. Although gang leaders reap the benefits of the gang's activities, keeping most of the money the gang takes in from its criminal behavior, the money received by the lower members is likely more than they have ever had before and it feels good to them to have that freedom.

**The Three R's of Gang Culture—Reputation, Respect, Retaliation**
In some gangs, status is gained by having the most callous and ruthless reputation (rep). How a member gains that image is as important as having a reputation. The more violent and dangerous a member is perceived to be, the more respect he is given by both his own gang and rival gangs, further enhancing his reputation. Often, gang members will embellish a story about their gang activities to impress the people they are talking to, giving them a feeling of power. Gang members openly admit to the crimes they have committed, anticipating that it will improve their rep among their crew. Bringing a rep to the gang improves the status of the gang as well as the individual member.

**Respect** is another quality that gang members feel they must have. They want individual respect, but more importantly, they want the respect of rival gangs. In some gangs, it is mandatory that each member show disrespect for rival gang members. If he is caught not "dissing" a rival, he may have to endure beatings by his own gang as punishment.

In gang culture, no challenge goes without retaliation. Often, a drive-by shooting or other act of violence occurs following an event which has been perceived as a "dis." If a gang member is confronted by a rival gang when he is alone, he will leave and return later with his "homies" either immediately afterwards or after they have had time to plan and equip themselves for retaliation. He needs to retaliate in order to keep his reputation intact. Many times, these acts of violence occur as a result of infringement on drug territory or because of drug deals gone bad.

**Common Characteristics of Gangs**
Gangs usually wear certain types or colors of clothing to identify themselves to their own members and as a warning to other gangs. Often tattoos, brands, or some other type of identifying marks of their gang's name, logo, or other symbol are flaunted on their bodies. Most gangs have a system of communication using hand signs and graffiti. Graffiti can be used to send messages to other gangs, such as challenges, warnings, or announcements of deeds done or about to take place.

Gang members will break the law to further their own reputation and the reputation of their gang on the streets. Some sell drugs, steal cars, rob businesses and private homes, and assault a range of victims, even to the point of killing innocent people as a symbol of their gang loyalty. Guns and other weapons are common and they do not hesitate to use them to further their reps.

**Getting Out of a Gang**
Once within the clutches of gang life, a member is reminded again and again that there is no escaping the gang; he will always be a gang member. This cultivates a fear in him of brutal retaliation from his fellow gang members if they suspect he wants out. Some are told that they will be killed if they ever try to leave the crew. Some are given the choice to kill their own mother as a way to earn their way out. Whatever they choose to do, you can be sure that they believe everything the gang tells them. What choice do they have?
• Plan a Reading Strategy

**While reading “The Allure of Gangs,” you will...**

~ Define key terms
~ Complete a 5Ws+H graphic organizer
~ Make inferences/interpret text
~ Practice reading comprehension skills
~ Compare informational text to poetry
~ Relate personal experiences

**DURING READING**

• Read with a purpose and look for information to fit your purpose.

Directions: Define the six vocabulary words found in the article, “The Allure of Gangs.” Then, find two words you found challenging. Write the words and definitions in the space provided. DEFINE ALL WORDS USING A DICTIONARY.

1) alienated-

2) vulnerable-

3) competent-

4) bigotry-

5) embellish -

6) infringement -

7) ______________________ -

8) ______________________ -
Directions: Using the information from the article, “The Allure of Gangs,” as well as the knowledge you have gained from *The Outsiders*, complete the t-chart. Identify details from the article and novel that characterized gangs in the 1960’s in the column labeled “1960’s.” Then, use your personal experiences and knowledge to list details about modern-day gangs in the column titled “Today.” Be sure to list a minimum of five (5) details in each column.

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Directions: Select the best answer to each question. Place your answer on the line using a capital letter.

1. The gangs of today first began to be recognized in
   
   A. The early 1900’s  
   B. The mid-1960’s  
   C. The early 1970’s  
   D. The late 1980’s  

2. The Three R’s of gang culture are
   
   A. Reputation, regulation, and ruthlessness  
   B. Reputation, respect, and retaliation  
   C. Rules, rules, and more rules  
   D. Revenge, resources, and retaliation
3. TRUE OR FALSE

Gang groups usually wear certain types or colors to identify themselves to their own members and as a warning to other gangs.

4. Why is it difficult to leave a gang once you have become a member?

   A. Gangs cultivate a fear of retaliation from fellow gang members if they suspect a member wants to leave
   B. No one from the gang will be friends with an ex-member
   C. The ex-member is banned from wearing clothing that symbolizes the gang
   D. The ex-member must move out of the city where the gang operates

MAKE PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

Knowing what you now know about gangs, discuss several things you might say or do to help a peer make a decision about joining a gang. Be sure that your response refers to specific details or information from the article, “The Allure of Gangs,” or the novel, The Outsiders.

AFTER READING

- Pause, reflect, and look back to see if you found information to fit your purpose.
- Reread to find things you may have missed the first time.
- Remember what you have learned.
RESPOND TO THE READING

Directions: Answer the following extended response in one (or more) complete paragraph(s). Cite facts, examples, and/or details from the article or *The Outsiders* in your response. Be sure to begin with a topic sentence that restates the prompt.

**Identify three (3) reasons kids join gangs. Explain whether you believe each reason is valid and why or why not.**
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