

Activating Student Knowledge

THE CHALLENGE



You're mid-lesson, and it's not landing. Students look lost. You're thinking: *"Why aren't they getting this? I already taught them the basics!"*

You've planned a rigorous lesson, but students aren't making the connections. They stall out before the lesson even begins.

What's Really Going On?

The truth? They *did* learn it—but they need help retrieving it. Without anchoring to prior knowledge, students can't make the leap to new content—and you end up reteaching instead of building deeper thinking.

Strong lessons **activate prior knowledge up front** and **target unfinished learning in advance** so that every student enters the lesson with something to build on.

TRY THIS INSTEAD



Two Moves to Activate Student Knowledge

1. Surface what they need to know

- **Identify the prior knowledge students need to access the task.**
 - Read your exemplar response—what knowledge is required to get there?
 - Decide how students will review that knowledge: warm-up activity, chart, turn-and-talk, etc.
 - Revise the structure of the lesson so this happens *before* the productive struggle.
 - Make it visible: *"What do we need to remember before we get to our productive struggle today?"*

2. Pre-Teach with Precision

- **Give targeted support to students with unfinished learning.**
 - Use data to identify students for 1:1 or small group conferencing.
 - While others work independently, meet to pre-teach key concepts.
 - Use visuals and concrete representations.
 - Make sure students leave the pre-teach with a **model or strategy they can reference** during the lesson.

Now, Make It Stick

- If you're not activating knowledge at the start of your lesson, you're setting yourself—and your students—up to struggle. Plan it with intention, daily.