



## #RightNow: A Tagging Activity

**Objective:** Students will analyze something they created in any course—a paper or short essay, a photograph or painting, a test or lab report, etc.—and engage in writing activities and class discussion around and about that piece. They will then consider the meaning of the content and how they produced it, and they will examine their own thinking about it, working their way from off-the-cuff reflections and stories to more polished narratives and verses, and finally to

carefully selected “tags.”

While this exercise would be ideal for writing and arts coursework, it can be done in any class. The times below reflect a project that can take a few class periods, but they can also be compacted into a single period—especially if students come in with an artifact they are already prepared to talk about—or extended throughout a week.

### 1: Search and Discover: Find an evocative learning artifact. (10–20 min)

- Pair up or form small groups.
- Search your learning archives (folders, computers—even lockers) for learning artifacts that grab your attention.
- set aside 1–3 learning artifacts.
- in discussion, share the who, what, when, where, why, how of your artifacts, and set aside the one that really gets you going.

This should be a fun, low-stakes activity, where students feel free to talk about content, thinking and learning.

### 2: Describe and Analyze: Free-write a list of qualities about the chosen artifact. (20–30 min)

- Free-write: set a timer and just go.
- Prompts: these prompts are meant to evoke the descriptive, concrete, and aesthetic; the analytical, abstract, and interpretive.
  1. What stands out about this visually and aesthetically?
  2. Where did you make/do it, and what kind of materials was used to produce it?
  3. Who was involved in learning about it?
  4. How did you do it?
  5. What physical objects come to mind when you explore it?
  6. What is the subject matter of the artifact?
  7. In what discipline would you place the artifact? What are some related disciplines, and why would you consider placing it in them?
  8. What was the point/objective of the work? What was your purpose or intention?
  9. What kind of thinking was involved? [Here are some suggestions.](#)

10. What skills are demonstrated or implied by the work?
11. What are some places that come to mind when you think about the material?
12. What physical object or image could the work be associated with?
13. What are some contrasts inside the work? For example, if you see something linear, serious, or cool, do you see anything nonlinear, playful, or warm?
14. What does the work “say” to you personally?
15. Do you see any personal qualities or patterns in this work?
16. How do others react to this work? How do they interpret it?

### **3: Interpret or Transpose: Write a vignette about your artifact. (20–30 min)**

- Use the free-writing and prompts from above to support a more structured composition about the artifact. This could be a story about a moment in time related to the artifact, or it could be a specific part of the artifact that really stands out or needs further explanation or description. It could be in the form of a memoir, in which students describe making/doing that part, or it could be solely descriptive of the aesthetics and content of the artifact.

### **4: Share and Document: Create a collection of quotes about your artifact (10–15 min)**

- In a group, share things that stand out so far. Speak off the cuff or tell stories related to the artifact and the learning experiences around it.
- Listeners should write down what they hear and consider “important.”
- Share the notes so the speaker can pick out interesting words and phrases.

*Some students get caught up in the storytelling. I have found it helpful to assign scribes or to have them set up a recorder of some kind to capture and document ideas.*

### **5: Distill and Tag: Find well-chosen words, phrases, and quotes from the above. (10–20 min)**

- Select words and phrases to use as tags for this artifact.
- Use the entire spectrum of writing you have done so far to express the universe of the artifact’s qualities.
- Select a few quotes said by both you and your peers.

### **6: Final Products**

- Create a display to surround the original artifact.
- Consider encouraging students to polish some of the writing in steps 1–5 above, and then to create an object with that: to use one font for quotes, another for reflections, another for vignettes; consider making key words and phrases (the tags) stand out from the rest of the language.
- Integrate materials and crafts which bring the display and presentation of this richly tagged artifact to life.