

# I Wonder Board

**A practical  
approach to filling  
your classroom  
with wonder using  
an I wonder board.**

I know what you might be thinking, “Another I wonder board... Why would I waste my money on another I wonder board resource. These do not work for middle and high school students.” If you are someone who feels that wonder boards are overrated for students older than ten this may be the starting package for you.

## **How my approach started?**

From the time I started teaching I have always been fascinated with how educators can provoke or inspire curiosity, wonder and awe in their students as it relates to the various topics up for study. I had seen wonder boards where student are required to place a question or thought on the board daily. This addition to the board could be about anything students were wondering or thinking. I had also seen I wonder boards become a method in which teachers try to force students to place an idea or a thought on the board for grade or as a way to start a unit. I will admit I have tried I wonder boards in many different ways and often found myself discussing best practices with my colleagues. However through various conversation and experiences with the I wonder board, I found common practices with I wonder boards tended to have three common problems:

- 1) Students sometimes felt forced into adding to I wonder board for grades and often felt the pressure of having the right answer.
- 2) I wonder boards often were so student focused and open ended that students had trouble determining where to start in adding to the board.
- 3) I wonder boards gain momentum in the beginning of a unit but slowly die as pressures of covering content or students loose interest.

### **Kate's approach:**

I teach middle school humanities and every single unit I use and I wonder board to help provoke student curiosity, wonder and awe. My approach to I wonder boards in some ways is fundamentally different than what most teachers might see around their schools. For me I wonder boards allow myself as a teacher to become more attuned to students thoughts, ideas and wonderments and to actively engage with their thinking. If you choose to use my approach for I wonder boards it is important for teachers to be willing to put their common assumptions and ideas of right and wrong aside to allow for authentic dialogue to emerge with students.

## How it works:

### 1) **Setting the Scene and the Personal Book of Wonder.**

To pull off this approach to the I wonder board it requires setting the scene for learning. Setting the scene for learning requires teachers to provide and invitation for students through literature, images, quotes or any form of media. Often setting the stage is like one giant activation strategy that says to students: “Hey this is what I have for you today now what do you think of it.”

I typically set the stage for students with **‘A Personal Book of Wonder’** (There are several versions of Personal Books of Wonder on my tpt store). The Personal Book of Wonder is a work book that students work through during class time as I am sharing various pieces of literature or images related to the topic with students. The key to Personal Books of Wonder is assuring students that you will be the only one seeing their booklet. However, it is up to students if they feel like sharing any of their ideas during discussion.

The goal of the Personal Book of Wonder is to provoke students curiosity, wonder and awe in a way that results in students creating their own I wonder statements and questions. These questions will be the core of the I wonder board for the entirety of the unit and help shape your unit.

## **Personal Book of Wonder Parts:**

1) Asking students what they already know and want to know about a theme or topic by asking them to write a word, phrase or draw a picture representing what they know about the topic.

2) Read students a story or show an image, have students draw a picture, write a word or image that stands out to them.

3) Now give students a list of words and ask them to create 3 to 5 questions they have relating to the words. If a different word than on the list came to mind students may create their own word to use for their questions. Are currently wondering about.

4) Then give students room to write down what they are currently wondering. They can complete the following statement I wonder..... Or they can write their thoughts in the clouds provided.

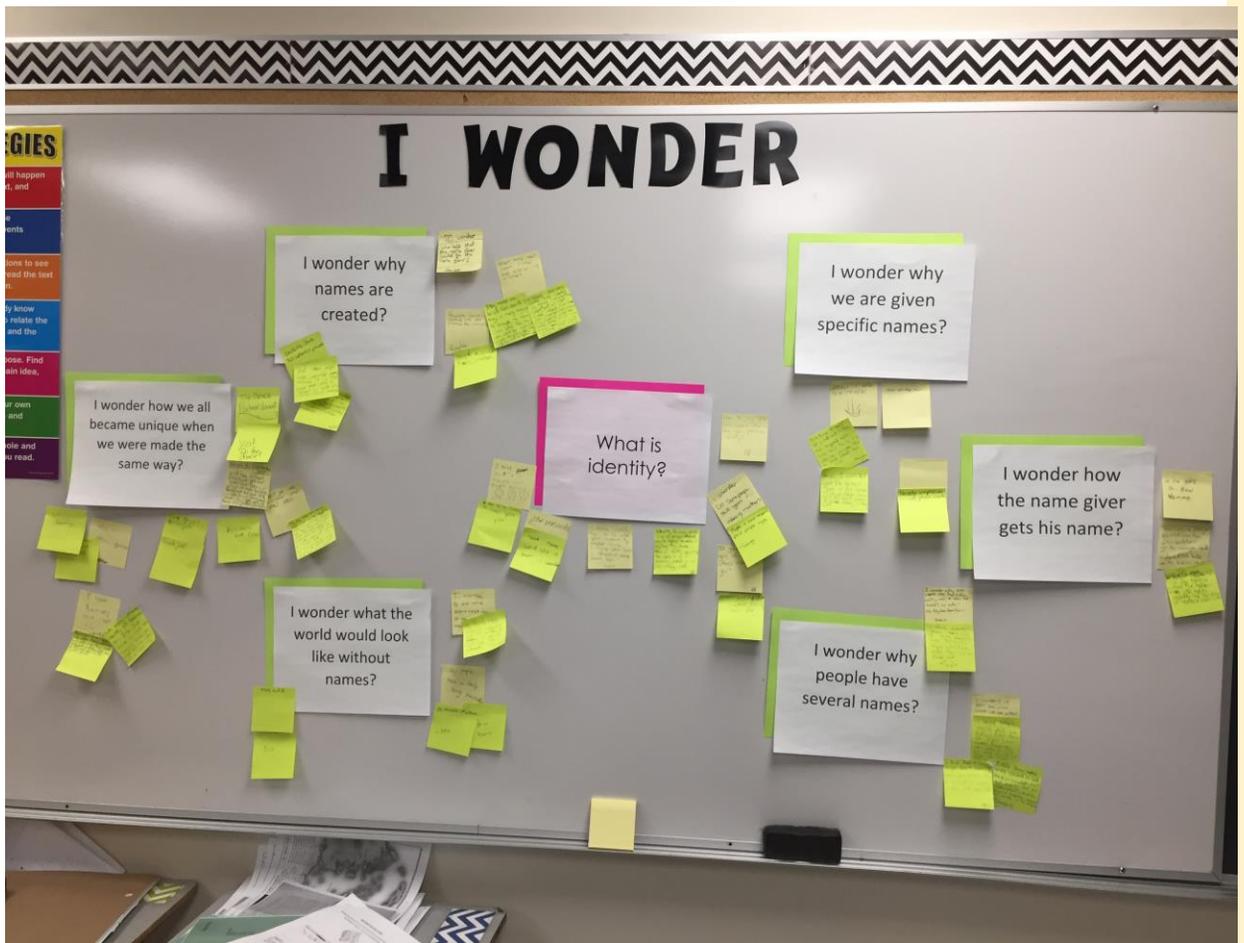
5) Personal Books of Wonder are then collected by the teacher and the teacher puts all the student's questions and I wonders into a list categorizing questions into like themes and finding student's commonalities.

## **2) Starting the I Wonder Board**

Now that students have given you all of their questions it is your job to create the I wonder board. The I wonder board starts with anywhere from one to three questions that students had in their personal book of wonder. I have found that starting with three questions of different levels tends to engage students the most. The rules about these I wonder board questions is they have to be open ended to allow for student dialogue.

I usually set up my I wonder board on one of my white boards or bulletin boards. I start with a heading " I Wonder..." (usually in black) Students questions I print off on white sheets of paper and create a border with colored paper. I usually have a couple different colour borders in rotation. One colour will signify a new question that is added to the board and the other colours signify questions that have already been posted.

Here is a picture of my most recent I wonder board:



You may colour code your questions how ever you like. This board I used pink for new questions and green for questions that have been their for a while. I always encourage students to add to the wonder board whenever a thought comes to them or if they have a new question they would like to add.

## **Quick Steps to Starting your I Wonder Board:**

1) Teacher picks 1 to 3 questions to be printed off in a big font to place on the I Wonder Board.

2) Teacher picks colours to line the questions. One colour should be for new questions and another colour should be for questions that have been their for a while.

3) The wonder board functions best if students and teachers respond to questions using sticky notes. This also makes it less prep. You will want at least two colours for students to use to respond to each other and another colour that is the teachers response only sticky note. (I usually use pink sticky notes for teachers only responses and students use yellow and green)

4) Introduce students to the board. I have found it helpful to refer back to students personal book of wonder to introduce the questions on the board by using phrase like "Remember when...". I never use names or refer to specific students and I do not require students to put their names on their additions to the I wonder board. This is because it tends to make the I wonder board a safer place for students to engage in dialogue.

## **Some years I have posted guidelines for students:**

- 1) You do not have to place your name on your sticky note unless you want to.
- 2) Any inappropriate or disrespectful comments will be removed.
- 3) You may add a questions to the I wonder board any time you want except during direct instruction.
- 4) Student responses can be added to the I wonder board using yellow or green sticky notes.
- 5) Students may respond to other students sticky notes.

## **3) Keeping the I Wonder Board Going**

Keeping your I wonder board going requires making a decision to encourage students daily to add or pursue their burning questions. I tend to add a new questions everyday that will link to the mini lesson we are doing tomorrow or a thought a student had I found interesting. Either way to keep a Wonder Board going requires the thoughtful participation from teachers

and students. This is crucial to keeping the wonder board going. Also notice how a key component of the I wonder board is teachers taking the time to add responses to students' sticky notes that will further challenge students' thinking. You may use praise in your responses but the key is to make sure your response also includes a question or statement that will keep the dialogue going.

## **But what about assessment?**

Perhaps you wonder how the I wonder board will work as an assessment tool if students are not including their names. I have found that the dialogue that emerges from the I wonder board has created excellent opportunities for exit slips, journal responses or other tasks that can serve as great formative or summative assessments. As well, over time you will come to know students' handwriting which will help you see which students are adding to the I wonder board. This can help you better understand your students and their thought processes.

## But is it worth it?

The I wonder board is one of my favorite activities to do with students no matter what unit we are working on. I have gotten positive feedback from both students and parents when approaching the I wonder board in this fashion. The first time I tried this approach with my I wonder board most of my class had already experienced I wonder boards during their time in elementary school. However, students found this approach must more engaging than just having a typical I wonder board where they can add whatever they want to it. What is it about this approach that engages students so much more? As one of my students put it, **“The I wonder board is my favorite thing about school because it allows us to revisit our own questions and respond to our peers. Its like a more relational I-messaging.”**

So there you have it Kate’s approach to the I wonder board. If you try out my approach to I wonder boards I would love to hear how it worked out for you!

# Thank You For Your Purchase!

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**LET'S FILL THIS  
SPACE WITH...**

*Curiosity*

*Wonder*

**and**

**Awe**