

Association Triangles

What is it?

A tool that assesses big-picture understanding by challenging students to explain the connections between important terms or concepts

What are the benefits of using this tool?

Checking if students can explain how key concepts and terms relate to one another is an important part of checking for understanding. We know this, yet we often test students' knowledge of isolated facts, terms, and ideas instead of asking students to make these bigger-picture connections. This tool puts the focus back on the big picture by challenging students to explain the relationships between three things they've learned about. Asking students to make these kinds of connections serves both to develop and test their depth of understanding.

What are the basic steps?

1. Select three important terms from a lesson, unit, or reading assignment. Note that "terms" can be anything from concepts to events to real or fictional characters (pictures are also fine).
Other options: Give students a list of terms to choose from (have them pick three) or invite them to choose their own terms from a given topic or text.
2. Instruct students to draw a triangle on a piece of paper and record one term on each of its points.
3. Ask students to explain how adjacent terms on the triangle relate to one another. Have students record their explanations along the side of the triangle that connects the two terms.
4. Challenge students to think about how *all three* terms are connected. (Do they share a common theme? Fit into a bigger picture?) Have them record their ideas in the middle of the triangle.
5. Invite students to share and refine their ideas with a partner and/or as a class. Use students' responses, as well as their completed triangles, to gauge their understanding of key relationships and their sense of the big picture. Help them fill in any gaps.



Teacher Talk

- To have students draw connections between two terms instead of three, use Vocabulary Bridges rather than Association Triangles. (Draw a picture of a bridge, put one term on either side, and have students explain the connection across the length of the bridge.) For four terms, use the Four-Corners variation. (List each term on the point of a square and have students connect the points.)
- This tool can be used to target various Common Core State Standards. To target Reading Anchor Standard 5, for example, put individual lines/stanzas/scenes from an assigned text on the points and ask students to explain how these textual elements relate to each other and to the text as a whole. For other ideas, see Examples 1 and 2.

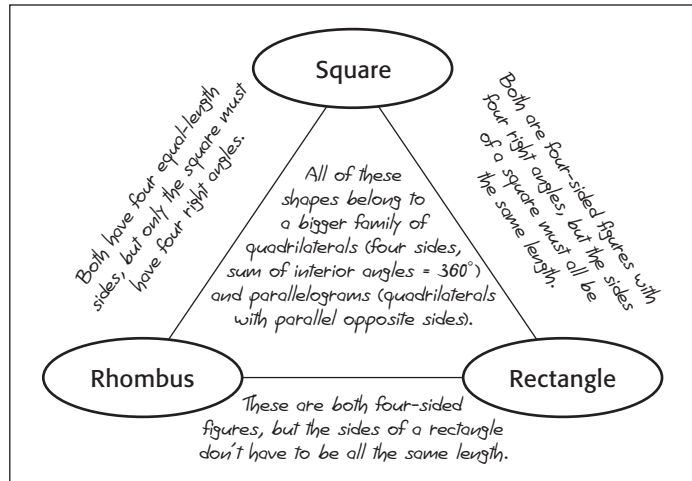
How is this tool used in the classroom?

- ✓ To check (and have students check) their understanding of key concepts and ideas

The examples below show how Association Triangles can be used in different grade levels and content areas. Additional examples are available at www.ThoughtfulClassroom.com/Tools.

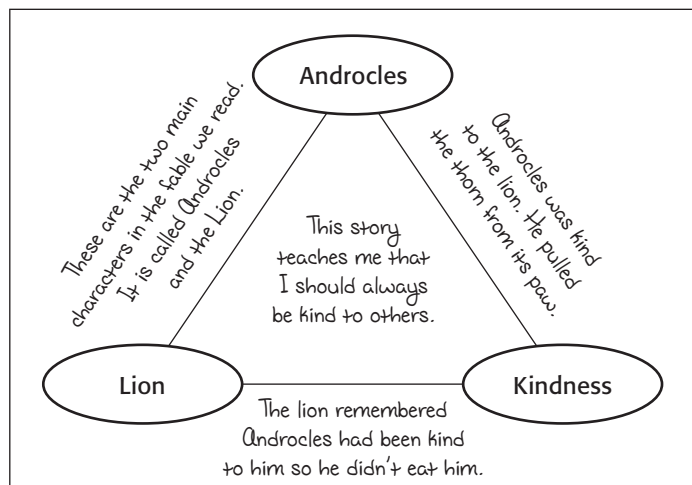
EXAMPLE 1: Math triangle

A fourth-grade teacher designed this triangle to develop and test his students' ability to reason with shapes and their attributes (Common Core 4.G.2, building on 3.G.1).



EXAMPLE 2: Literature triangle

A third-grade teacher used this triangle to see how well his students had understood the plot and central message of a fable (Common Core RL.3.2).



EXAMPLE 3: History triangle

A history teacher had her students complete Association Triangles like this one for homework throughout a unit on the American Revolution. Her goal was to reinforce and test students' understanding of key people, events, documents, and themes.

