

## Two Steps to the Left: Helping Students Improve as Connectors and Synthesizers

Why: Students often struggle with finding similarities between disparate pieces because they are looking for consistent one-to-one similarities. This exercise helps students to discover that similarities exist in the most unlike places.

How: Have students get into small groups. Tell them they are about to do the most difficult assignment of the year. On the board write the following:

Turtle Telephone Pole

Find 5 ways they are different .

Find 15 ways they are similar.

I usually budget 5-10 minutes for howls of “It can’t be done.” A time limit - 15 minutes works well- gets them moving. It can be extended as I see fit. I do tell them the record is 99 similarities.

When asked for help, I refer students back to the directions. I will point out the directions just say turtle and telephone pole – no description.

When groups are done, we tally the results on the board. This exercise tends to validate my out-of-the box thinkers as well as help my more concrete thinkers stretch a bit more.

Tip – there will be groups that challenge other groups on the similarities. I remind them it’s not their turtle.

Extension: I’ve had students do a few more of these over the rest of the year. You could ask students to bring in the pairing or just randomly pull two nouns.

There is also a game called Tribond that has 3 seemingly random items where players must find the connection. I’ve used the cards for practice when I have 5 or so left at the end of class.