Say, Mean, Matter

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Say, Mean, Matter is the name for a strategy that helps students

- question the text
- search for deeper meanings
- make connections between the text and their lives
Say, Mean, Matter is effective for all student levels from language learners to honors and AP students.

It can be used with

- academic texts
- fiction
- verbal and non-verbal material
Three column chart

- overhead transparency
- chart paper
- chalkboard
- student’s own paper
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAY</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>MATTER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>This is a summary of what the texts says.</em></td>
<td><em>This is about interpretation.</em></td>
<td><em>What are the implications?</em> (Possible outcomes or results?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>What does the text say?</em></td>
<td><em>Ask questions like, “What makes you think that?”</em></td>
<td><em>Why does it matter to me or others?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>What happened?</em></td>
<td><em>“How do you know that?”</em></td>
<td><em>Why is it important?</em> (to the story as a whole?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cite text (quotation) or paraphrase.</em></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>What is the significance?</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Example of SAY, MEAN, MATTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAY</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>MATTER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **SAY** Mom comes home and says, “No TV tonight!” | **MEAN** • I can’t watch TV.  
• Mom’s angry from work.  
• You did something wrong and got caught.  
• Your grades came in the mail.  
• She’s mad at Dad.  
• She wants to watch something!  
• We’re going out! | **MATTER** • I’ll be bored.  
• I’ll miss my favorite show.  
• We’ll have to walk on “eggshells.”  
• I’ll get grounded.  
• There will be fighting and yelling between mom and dad.  
• I’ll have to listen to music.  
• We’re having family night. |
The third column is the most abstract and may prove to be difficult at first, especially with less sophisticated students.

So what?

What is the theme or message of the piece?

How does this piece connect to your own life?

What does it matter to you?

What questions does this piece raise?

What implications does it hold for a given group of people or for people in general?
Next step

- The class generates a paragraph to explain or analyze the piece.
- Use the ideas recorded on the chart to create the paragraph.
- Start with statement from the “MATTER” column as a topic or thesis statement.
- Draw on the “SAY” and “MEAN” columns for supporting details.
- The first column provides the “text proof” (what the text says).
- The second column provides the student interpretation (what the text means).
- The teacher should model initial steps of the writing; then students can complete it on their own, or with a partner.
When SAY, MEAN, MATTER is applied to a longer text (a chapter book, a story, or even a novel) the columns can be used to help students structure an essay, using the same process as when writing a paragraph.
Another writing approach is to chunk ideas according to a number of MEAN ideas and to support these with SAY items.

The introduction and/or conclusion may come from a MATTER idea.

The writer can start anywhere and build a coherent analysis of the text.
Variations

- Use a piece of artwork to demonstrate the strategy.
- Use a “Quote of the Day” and have students quickly practice the strategy with you or with a partner.
- For novels, students can keep a SAY-MEAN-MATTER journal/notebook for each chapter.
- When students complete their reading of the novel, they will have information to draw on for any final writing project.
This strategy also can be used orally once students are familiar with it. The teacher can stop in the middle of a class reading and quickly do an oral run through of the three columns, asking,

“What is this saying?”

“What does it mean?”

“Why does it matter?”

This encourages higher level thinking during reading and is especially useful when text is complex.
Literary Analysis

Claim

This can be taken from the MATTER column.

Evidence

This can be taken from the SAY column.

Elaboration

This can be taken from the MEAN column.
Practice

Cartoon

- Analyze the cartoon
- Write a short paragraph