Elementary maps triumph

Students then write each trait that they brainstorm, such as "loyal," in circles surrounding the two characters' names. Circles containing common traits are connected by a line to only one character. Roosevelt students are taught to recognize which of the school's eight "thinking maps" to use to work through a problem, such as a bubble map to show description, a tree map to show classification and categorization, a flow map to show sequences, or a bridge map to show analogies.

The repeated use of such maps trains kids to see which thinking skills are used to solve different problems, Holzman says. 

"We're really showing eight different ways to think, eight different ways to understand," she says. "So it's not a logic problem. It's really how we think, how we problem-solve." 

Without maps, the child may come up with the right answer, but have no clear idea what thought process he used to find it.

The children are taught to explain their thinking either verbally or in writing. "If you've written it down, writing is thinking," Holzman says.

The thinking maps, she says, are "an invaluable tool for thinking and for rigorous analysis of the work." She adds, "We don't just teach kids to make maps. We teach them how to use them to think."