

**Read-Around Groups (or RAGS)** give students the opportunity of sharing their writing with one another. In this case, it is done anonymously. This excerpt outlines Kelly Gallagher's process for RAG.

#### Rules for RAGS

- I. Students bring clean drafts to the RAGs. They do not put their names on the paper. Instead, they identify themselves by writing five-digit numbers or code words at the top of their papers.
- II. Students are randomly placed in groups of four or five. Their papers are collected in one pile for each group. It is better to not have all the best (or worst) writers at the same table.
- III. At the start, on the teacher signal, the papers are passed from one group to the next. Students do not read papers by members of their own group. Each student receives one paper and reads it for one minute. Not all students will finish all papers, but in one minute they have an opportunity to get a strong feel for the paper.
- IV. At the teacher's signal, papers are passed clockwise within the groups. Each student now has a new paper and has one minute to read the paper. This process is continued until everyone in the group has read all four or five papers.
- V. Once everyone in the group has read the set, each group is charged with the task of determining which paper is the "best". They have two minutes to do so. The hope is that this will produce arguments, because it is through these arguments that students think deeply about the merits of good writing.
- VI. One student in each group is designated as the recorder. This student records the five-digit number or code word of the winning paper.
- VII. Once the winner is recorded, the papers get passed again and the process repeats itself. This is continued until all students have read all papers. Remember, each group is not to score their own papers.

*Once the seven steps are complete, the teacher asks the recorders for the winning entries and charts all the winning numbers (or code words) for the students to see. Generally, two or three papers in the class will receive the most votes. These papers are read aloud (again, no names identified). As they are read, students are asked to take bullet notes as to what made the papers the "best". The lesson is completed by students sharing their bullet notes through a whole-class discussion, thus giving everyone in the class a clear idea of what features made these good essays.*

*Gallagher finds that RAGs are more beneficial to student if they do them before their final drafts are due. Often he collects essays on the due date (without names on the papers), but instead of taking them home, he will place students in RAGs. Once they have completed the process and have seen some examples of good writing, he gives their papers back to them and allows one additional night for them to revise with the features of good writing fresh in their minds. He finds that once they have begun sharing their writing in RAGs, he finds they are more willing to begin sharing their writing in other settings as well.*

### ***Variation of RAGs***

*Have students do a RAG focused solely on a specific feature of the essay. Here are some examples of possible focus areas:*

- ❖ *Introductions*
- ❖ *Thesis statement*
- ❖ *Conclusions*
- ❖ *Transitions*
- ❖ *Supporting detail*
- ❖ *Sentence Variety*

*Adjust the reading time accordingly. For example, if students are focusing solely on introductions, cut the reading time to twenty seconds before passing the papers.*