

DOINGWHATWORKS



Presentation

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Helping Students Focus on Text Structure

January 2011

Topic: Improving K-3 Reading Comprehension

Practice: Focus on Text Structure

Highlights

- This multimedia overview highlights key components of the recommendation to focus on narrative and informational text structure to help students understand what they are reading.
- The overview summarizes the elements of narrative text and the features of common informational texts that are important to teach, as well as effective instructional strategies.

Full Transcript

Slide 1: Welcome

Welcome to the overview on Helping Students Focus on Text Structure.

Slide 2: Text structures

Helping students understand how different types of texts are structured can greatly improve their reading comprehension. As students gain a firm grasp of narrative and informational text structures, they can apply that knowledge when they approach more advanced materials. This process can begin as early as kindergarten.

Slide 3: Narrative texts

Let's look first at introducing children to narrative texts, which can be described as texts that tell stories about characters. This covers a wide range, from folk tales to biographies.

Students can learn how to identify and understand the five main elements of structure in narrative text:

- Characters,
- Setting,
- Problem,
- Plot, and
- Resolution

Slide 4: Teaching techniques

Teachers can introduce students to tools and techniques to help them remember the story elements. For example, students can count them off, associating one element with each finger on their hand.

Story maps or graphic organizers can also be used to teach the parts of a story, such as:

- A chart that helps students match structure to content,
- A sequencing activity for younger students in which they rearrange a scrambled list of pictures to accurately represent the sequence, or
- A diagram of the plot that connects major action points within the story

When introducing these tools, teachers should explain how each tool or strategy can help students understand what they are reading. This way, students are more likely to think about the story elements as they read, and not just when the tools are used in class discussion.

Slide 5: Instruction across grades

Instruction on text structure will look different across grade levels. For kindergarten students, teachers can identify narrative elements by asking questions while reading, such as:

- Where does this story take place?
- Who was the main character?
- What happened?
- How did the story end?

As students get comfortable with the five elements, teachers can introduce stories with multiple examples of each element and have students identify each of them. For example, with *Little Red Riding Hood*, the setting is both the woods and grandmother's house.

With older students, teachers should gradually introduce new structural elements—such as themes, morals, subplots, and multiple conflicts—while reinforcing those that have already been taught.

Slide 6: Informational texts

Teachers should also introduce students to the structural elements of informational or expository text. For beginning learners, it's important to use texts that provide clear, easy-to-recognize examples of the structure being taught.

Slide 7: Examples of structures and exercises

Examples of informational text structures include compare and contrast, description, sequence, problem and solution, and cause and effect.

- A compare-and-contrast text might present types of animals or modes of transportation. Students can work together to create a table or Venn diagram of the similarities and differences between the objects in the text.
- With a description text, students might use the details of what is being described to draw an illustration or create a three-dimensional display.
- A text that outlines a sequence of events can be made visible by assigning each event in the text to a student, and having the class line the students up in the correct order.
- When working with a problem-and-solution text, students may be able to act out key parts of the passage.
- Cause-and-effect texts can be explored by matching up pictures that represent causes and effects in a game-like activity.

Slide 8: Clue words

Students can also be helped to recognize clue words in a passage so that they can identify the text structure. Words such as *alike*, *unlike*, *both*, *but*, and *however* can signal a compare-and-contrast text, while *before*, *after*, *next*, and *then* can indicate a sequence-of-events text.

It is important, however, that students are not taught to rely solely on clue words to identify text structure.

Slide 9: Variety of text examples

As students grow more adept at working with informational texts, examples can move from short passages to paragraphs to larger texts that may contain multiple structures. For example, a magazine article may include a description of an event, some information about its position in a sequence of other events, and an explanation of cause and effect.

Teachers should provide a variety of examples when showing students how texts can contain more than one structure.

Slide 10: Encouraging constant awareness

Students should be encouraged to pay attention to text structure in all of their reading experiences, and may need to be reminded to do so before reading periods.

Slide 11: Tools for teachers

Teachers can use common lesson-planning time to collaborate on identifying texts with clear examples of narrative elements and expository structures. There are also book lists that identify ideal texts for this kind of instruction.

Slide 12: Integration with other recommendations

Students can focus on structure as they discuss text or practice comprehension strategies.

Understanding the underlying features of texts will support them as readers and writers as well as in their conversations about text.

This recommendation pairs well with other K-3 reading comprehension recommendations available on this website.

Slide 13: Learn more

To learn more about Helping Students Focus on Text Structure, please explore the additional resources on the Doing What Works website.