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Explicit Instruction of Reading Comprehension Strategies

Good teachers use many strategies to enhance students' reading comprehension, and it is helpful to identify which strategies they use in order to explain why the technique successfully improves their students' skills. Even more important is the explicit instruction of the individual strategies, including modeling, guided practice, and independent practice. These steps ensure that students learn to independently and consistently use a wide variety of reading comprehension strategies for a broad range of reading experiences.

Teaching students the strategies to improve their comprehension is nothing new to educators. Research has demonstrated that students greatly benefit from the direct instruction of reading comprehension strategies when reading a text (Block 1999; Dole, Brown, and Trathen 1996; Durkin 1978–1979; Pressley and Afflerbach 1995, as cited by Kragler, Walker, and Martin 2005) (Duke and Pearson 2002). Simply put, strategy instruction is an effective means of assisting students in comprehension and improving understanding.

The *Report of the National Reading Panel* (2000), commissioned by the U.S. Congress to evaluate research in the area of reading, identified a number of effective comprehension strategies. Michael Pressley (2000) echoes these findings. These strategies include vocabulary development, prediction skills (including inference), the building of prior knowledge, think-alouds, visual representations, summarization, and questioning. This book provides a detailed explanation of each strategy and describes a number of activities that language arts teachers can incorporate into their lessons.

Students also need to develop their metacognitive skills when reading and learning in language arts. Scholars agree that metacognition plays a significant role in reading comprehension (e.g., Baker and Brown 1984; Garner 1987; Gourgey 1998; Hacker et al. 1998; Mastropieri and Scruggs 1997; Mayer 1998; Paris, Wasik, and Turner 1991; Schraw 1998, as cited by Baker 2002). Research shows that teachers should foster metacognition and comprehension monitoring during comprehension instruction because in doing so, students will be able to monitor and self-regulate their ability to read. "Developing engaged readers involves helping students to become both strategic and aware of the strategies they use to read" (McCarthy, Hoffman, and Galda 1999, as cited by Baker 2002).

It is important to note that educators should never take a "one-size-fits-all" approach when teaching reading comprehension. Some strategies work for some students and other strategies work for other students, just as some strategies work best with certain types of reading material and other strategies work best with other types of reading material. The most important thing to remember when trying to improve reading comprehension in students is that the skill level, group dynamic, and make-up of students should determine the approach to take.

How to Use This Book

This book includes a variety of strategies that can be used within language arts lessons to improve students' reading comprehension skills: promoting word consciousness, analyzing word parts, activating knowledge through vocabulary development, using and building prior knowledge, predicting and inferring, think-alouds and monitoring comprehension, questioning, summarizing, using visual representations and mental imagery, using text structure and text features, and using multiple reading comprehension strategies instruction.

Each section opens with an overview of research in that area to emphasize the importance of that particular reading comprehension skill. There is also a clear and detailed definition of the skill, suggestions for instruction, and best practices. This information provides teachers with the solid foundation of knowledge to provide deeper, more meaningful instruction to their students.

Following each skill overview is a variety of instructional strategies to improve students' comprehension in that area. Each strategy in the book includes a description and purpose of the strategy, the research basis for the strategy, and the reasons why the strategy is effective in improving comprehension. The grade level spans for which the strategy is most appropriate (1–2, 3–5, 6–8, or 9–12) and the language arts standards that are addressed are listed. A detailed description of the strategy includes any special preparation that might be needed and extension ideas where appropriate. Finally, suggestions for differentiating instruction are provided for English language learners, below- and above-level students. Following the strategy descriptions are grade-level examples of how the strategy is applied to language arts. A blank template of the activity sheet is included as a reproducible, where applicable, as well as on the accompanying Digital Resource CD. Reproducibles are available on the Digital Resource CD in PDF form and often as Word documents to allow for customization of content and text for students of diverse abilities and needs.
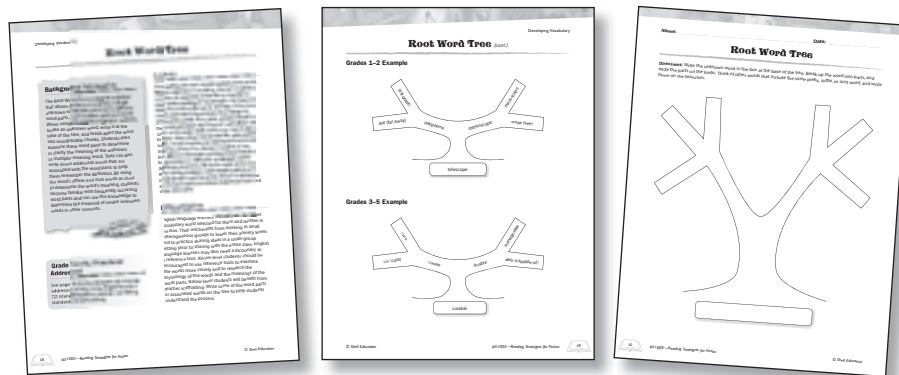
Context Clue Analysis Chart

Background Information

In addition to inferring meaning from the etymology of words, students should also use context clues as a strategy to surmise the meaning of unknown or multiple-meaning words. Context can provide clues about word meaning through word relationships, such as synonyms, antonyms, and analogies. Edwards and her colleagues (2012) recommend teaching students five different types of context clues: *definition*, *synonym*, *antonym*, *example*, and *general*. The first context clue, definition, refers to when the author explicitly states the meaning of a word within the context of the sentence or selection. A synonym context clue provides meaning for a vocabulary word by using a word similar in meaning within the same sentence or passage. An antonym context clue suggests the definition of the vocabulary word by contrasting it with a word of opposite meaning. Authors may also choose to explain words by giving example context clues. Finally, words can be understood through general context clues, or several words or statements that give meaning to the target word. The goal of this strategy is to teach students to identify and use these five types of context clues to infer meaning about unknown vocabulary words.

Grade Levels/Standards Addressed

See page 37 for the standards this strategy addresses, or refer to the Digital Resource CD (standards.pdf) to read the correlating standards in their entirety.

Activity

Explain that writers often embed clues about word definitions within the text, and as a result, students can use these context clues to determine or clarify the meaning of unknown words. Explain that context clues can be words, phrases, or sentences within the same sentence or paragraph as the unknown word. Before beginning the lesson, select five new vocabulary words from the story that warrant further study. These words may be general academic or domain-specific words, but should be grade-appropriate and add significant value to the comprehension of the text. Display the *5 Types of Context Clues Reference Sheet* (page 274, contextclues.pdf) and discuss the clues and their examples. Provide several example sentences with unknown words and work together as a class to determine the type of context clue used to infer the meaning of the words in each sentence. Distribute the *Context Clue Analysis Chart* activity sheet (page 57, contextcluechart.pdf) to students with the five selected words filled in under the "unfamiliar word" column. Have students complete the activity sheet.

Differentiation

Provide English language learners with assistance in reading the vocabulary words. Because they may not be familiar with the words used in context (in addition to the chosen vocabulary words), it is beneficial to allow these students to work with a language-proficient partner to complete the activity sheet. Challenge above-level students by providing them with advanced vocabulary words and ask them to develop alternative sentences using different types of context clues for their vocabulary words. Below-level students will benefit from scaffolding in this activity. Provide these students with their own set of vocabulary words and attempt to give them words that are novel but not too challenging. The ideal type of words for these students are words that they have seen and heard before but still do not fully comprehend.

Context Clue Analysis Chart *(cont.)*

Grades 3–5 Example

Unfamiliar Word	Context	Type of Context Clue	Possible Definition
feeble	The feeble old man was frail and sickly.	synonym	weak or without physical strength
solitary	Instead of going to parties, Allison liked solitary activities like reading a book.	antonym	alone or by oneself
obsolete	An obsolete comic book is one that is no longer printed or produced.	definition	no longer created or used
compensate	To compensate for her poor eyesight, Sally used a guide dog to help navigate her surroundings. The guide dog's skills made up for her lack of vision.	general	to counterbalance or make the same
amphibian	We saw many different types of amphibians, such as toads, salamanders, and frogs, on our hike around the pond.	example	group of animals with wet skin and four legs

Grades 6–8 Example

Unfamiliar Word	Context	Type of Context Clue	Possible Definition
formidable	I had the formidable task of getting my little brother out of bed in the morning. I dreaded this job more than just about anything else.	general	causing fear or apprehension
agile	The agile dancer glided across the stage. Her quick and graceful movements made her appear as if she was floating.	synonym	quick or nimble
rebuke	He thought his father would applaud his performance. The sharp rebuke he received stunned him instead.	antonym	reprimand or scold
aboriginal	Aboriginal forests are the earliest known forests in a region.	definition	indigenous or native
prehistoric	Prehistoric dinosaurs, such as the tyrannosaurus rex, triceratops, and stegosaurus, roamed the earth during this time.	example	preceding the modern world

Context Clue Analysis Chart *(cont.)*

Grades 9–12 Example

Unfamiliar Word	Context	Type of Context Clue	Possible Definition
bucolic	The bucolic setting was quite a contrast to noisy, chaotic city life.	antonym	quiet or peaceful
nuance	She explained the nuances, or subtle differences, between the two chosen words.	definition	subtle variation
elucidate	I tried to clarify the situation, but my explanation failed to clearly elucidate the issue.	synonym	to explain clearly
etymology	The etymology of a word can help you understand the word's meaning. For example, studying a word's prefix, suffix, and root word can provide clues about its definition.	example	the parts of a word
irreverent	His irreverent tone took the teacher by surprise. Normally his students were respectful when discussing the serious nature of the disease.	antonym	flippant or disrespectful

Context Clue Analysis Chart

Directions: In the chart below, locate the unfamiliar words from the reading passage. Write the phrase, sentence, or passage that provides context clues about the meaning of the word. Using your knowledge of context clues, decide which type of context clue the author uses to help you understand the new word: *definition*, *synonym*, *antonym*, *example*, or *general*. Then, write a possible definition for the word in the space provided.

Unfamiliar Word	Context	Type of Context Clue	Possible Definition

Using Prediction and Inference Overview

Using Predictive Strategies

Closely related to assessing and building on prior knowledge is using predictive strategies to enhance reading comprehension. As the National Reading Panel (2000) has found in its analysis of reading research, prior knowledge affects a reader's comprehension by creating expectations about the content. This directs the reader's attention to the most important and relevant parts of the text, which enables the reader to infer from and elaborate on what is being read. As a result, the reader is able to fill in missing or incomplete information in the text. When drawing on prior knowledge and using prediction skills, the reader taps into the pre-existing mental structures, or schemata, to construct memory representations. Because these mental structures already exist, the reader is easily able to use, recall, and reconstruct the information in the text at a later time.

What Is Prediction?

Making predictions can be described simply as the ability to guess at what will happen and then read to see how things turn out. However, true predicting is not mere guesswork for successful readers. Readers rely heavily on their prior knowledge on a topic to determine their predictions. They use their prior knowledge to create a framework for understanding new material, and as they read, they determine whether their predictions were correct. We can call their predictions "educated guesses," but as Frank Smith (2004) asserts in *Understanding Reading: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning to Read*, prediction simply means that the uncertainty of the reader is reduced to a few probable alternatives.

What makes good predictors good readers? Students who have encountered the information before, who are familiar with text patterns, and who can guess the missing word are better readers. If the predictions are accurate, the process of reading is much more fluent, flexible, and effective.

Prediction and the Investigative Process

Using predictive strategies is much like the processes that geographers, economists, and political scientists employ. Those who work in social studies-related fields spend much of their time making predictions. Geographers make predictions about and draw inferences from maps, historical documents, surveys, journals, photographs, etc. Economists make predictions about future trends based on market reports, stock history, world events, and natural disasters. Political scientists use Gallup Polls, historical trends, and government reports to make predictions.

Social scientists form a hypothesis or a theory, which is a possible explanation for what they have observed. Before testing a hypothesis, they must first make predictions. After testing the hypothesis by conducting experiments, they analyze the results and draw conclusions based on those results. Predicting in reading works much the same way. Readers look at their reading material prior to reading; this is called previewing. This gives them clues about what to expect in the reading. Readers look at the title, the pictures, the organization, and the words chosen, and they compare and contrast what they see with what they already know. This enables them to predict what will happen in the reading. Predictions in reading direct the reader's expectations about what they will find in the text.

We all make judgments about what we observe every day. We wake up, look out the window, and see that the sky is dark and cloudy, which usually indicates rain, so we decide to bring an umbrella along with us. We infer from the clouds and dark sky, based on our past experiences with these weather conditions, that

Using Prediction and Inference Overview *(cont.)*

it is likely to rain. We use inferential thinking when evaluating the information available to predict what will happen next. Social scientists use their observations about events to help forecast or make generalizations about future events.

Making Inferences

Inferential thinking requires readers to read the text carefully, evaluate the information presented, and consider how it is presented in order to determine general facts or minute details, emotions and feelings of characters, information about the author (opinions, point of view, personal history), and implications for and connections to other information. Students must use clues, references, and examples from the text to make inferences. They must also examine the connotative meanings of words used in the text to infer meaning.

What the Research Says

While the connection between prediction and the activation of prior knowledge has been established by researchers, it has primarily focused on the effectiveness of prediction skills with narrative texts. Duke and Pearson (2002) demonstrate that engaging students in prediction behaviors has proven successful in increasing interest in and memory for stories. In fact, in Jane Hansen's study (1981), and Hansen and Pearson's study (1983), the findings show that when students were encouraged to generate expectations about what characters might do based on their own experiences in similar situations, their reading comprehension was superior. They also performed better when reading similar stories independently. When teachers presented students with oral previews of stories, and turned these into discussions and predictions, story comprehension increased.

The National Reading Panel (2000) includes the following predicting activities as valuable procedures for improving reading comprehension: having students preview the text by examining the structure, the visuals, the organization, and the content; having students answer pre-reading questions about the text in order to make predictions about the content based on the students' prior knowledge; having students search the text and using what they know to answer inferential questions about the text; and encouraging students to compare their lives with situations in the text, either prior to or during the reading.

Developing predicting skills in students helps them set their purpose for reading, increases their motivation to read, instills curiosity, and heightens their motivation to learn (Ryder and Graves 2003).

Using Prediction and Inference Overview *(cont.)*

Standards Addressed

The following chart shows the correlating standards for each strategy in this section. Refer to the Digital Resource CD (standards.pdf) to read the correlating standards in their entirety.

Strategy	McREL Standards	Common Core State Standards
Picture Prediction	Grades 1–2 (5.2) Grades 3–5 (5.1, 5.2) Grades 6–8 (5.1) Grades 9–12 (5.1)	Grade 1 (RL.1.7, RL1.10) Grade 2 (RL.2.7, RL.2.10) Grade 3 (RL.3.7, RL.3.10) Grade 4 (RL.4.7, RL.4.10) Grade 5 (RL.5.7, RL.5.10) Grade 6 (RL.6.7, RL.6.10) Grade 7 (RL.7.7, RL.7.10) Grade 8 (RL.8.7, RL.8.10) Grades 9–10 (RL.9-10.7, RL.9-10.10) Grades 11–12 (RL.11-12.7, RL.11-12.10)
Text and Subtext	Grades 3–5 (5.3) Grades 6–8 (7.5) Grades 9–12 (7.5)	Grade 3 (RL.3.1, RL.3.10) Grade 4 (RL.4.1, RL.4.10) Grade 5 (RL.5.1, RL.5.10) Grade 6 (RL.6.1, RL.6.10) Grade 7 (RL.7.1, RL.7.10) Grade 8 (RL.8.1, RL.8.10) Grades 9–10 (RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.10) Grades 11–12 (RL.11-12.1, RL.11-12.10)
Wordsplash	Grades 3–5 (5.3) Grades 6–8 (5.1) Grades 9–12 (5.2)	Grade 3 (RL.3.10) Grade 4 (RL.4.10) Grade 5 (RL.5.10) Grade 6 (RL.6.10) Grade 7 (RL.7.10) Grade 8 (RL.8.10) Grades 9–10 (RL.9-10.10) Grades 11–12 (RL.11-12.10)

Using Prediction and Inference Overview *(cont.)*

Strategy	McREL Standards	Common Core State Standards
Preview	Grades 1–2 (7.2) Grades 3–5 (7.6) Grades 6–8 (7.4) Grades 9–12 (7.1)	Grade 1 (RL.1.10) Grade 2 (RL.2.10) Grade 3 (RL.3.10) Grade 4 (RL.4.10) Grade 5 (RL.5.10) Grade 6 (RL.6.10) Grade 7 (RL.7.10) Grade 8 (RL.8.10) Grades 9–10 (RL.9-10.10) Grades 11–12 (RL.11-12.10)
Inference Investigation	Grades 3–5 (6.8) Grades 6–8 (6.9, 6.10) Grades 9–12 (6.9)	Grade 3 (RL.3.1, RL.3.10) Grade 4 (RL.4.1, RL.4.10) Grade 5 (RL.5.1, RL.5.10) Grade 6 (RL.6.1, RL.6.10) Grade 7 (RL.7.1, RL.7.10) Grade 8 (RL.8.1, RL.8.10) Grades 9–10 (RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.10) Grades 11–12 (RL.11-12.1, RL.11-12.10)
Character Inferences	Grades 1–2 (6.2, 6.4) Grades 3–5 (6.5, 6.8) Grades 6–8 (6.4, 6.10) Grades 9–12 (6. 4, 6.9)	Grade 1 (RL.1.1, RL.1.3, RL.1.10) Grade 2 (RL.2.1, RL.2.3, RL.2.10) Grade 3 (RL.3.1, RL.3.3, RL.3.10) Grade 4 (RL.4.1, RL.4.3, RL.4.10) Grade 5 (RL.5.1, RL.5.3, RL.5.10) Grade 6 (RL.6.1, RL.6.3, RL.6.10) Grade 7 (RL.7.1, RL.7.3, RL.7.10) Grade 8 (RL.8.1, RL.8.3, RL.8.10) Grades 9–10 (RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.3, RL.9-10.10) Grades 11–12 (RL.11-12.1, RL.11-12.3, RL.11-12.10)

Picture Prediction

Background Information

It is important to guide students to closely examine any pictures in a narrative selection prior to reading to formulate some expectations about what they will learn. Students seem naturally drawn to the colorful pictures in fiction books, but they need to develop inferential thinking so that they can more accurately predict the content of the reading. Teachers draw or gather images related to the reading selection to present to students. After presenting the images, the teacher asks students to predict how the pictures are related to one another and to generate a list of words and concepts associated with the pictures. Students then try to anticipate the content of the reading selection because the better they are at anticipating the content, the more effective and fluent their reading comprehension will be. As students read the selection, they check to see how the images are related to the new information, allowing them to more efficiently incorporate new knowledge into their existing schema. Additionally, through their predictions, students understand how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to the development of the story's elements, such as character, plot, setting, etc. Moreover, students are more motivated to read when they have determined the purpose of a reading task.

Grade Levels/Standards Addressed

See page 104 for the standards this strategy addresses, or refer to the Digital Resource CD (standards.pdf) to read the correlating standards in their entirety.

Activity

After carefully examining the reading selection, draw or gather three to six images directly relevant to the content, and arrange them in the desired order. Either place the images on the *Picture Prediction* activity sheet (page 109, pictureprediction.pdf), and distribute them to small groups or individual students, or project the images on a large screen for the class to view. As students view the images, ask them to consider how the images are related to one another and predict the content of the reading. Place students in small groups, and ask them to generate a list of words or concepts associated with the pictures and the inferred topic of study. Have groups present their words and concepts as you write them on the board. Ask students to look over all of the words and try to generate any words that were not mentioned. As students tackle the reading selection, ask them to consider how the pictures are related to content and the new information they encounter. As an extended activity to encourage metacognitive skills, students can write reflectively about their predictions, how they related to the pictures, and what they learned from the reading. They should consider the process as a whole.

Differentiation

English language learners may have difficulty generating words related to the pictures, so it may help to have a list of words handy for them. To increase the challenge, the list might include words unrelated to the picture in addition to words relevant to the topic of study. Below-level students will work best in the small-group setting. Above-level students will enjoy the challenge of the activity, particularly if they have a different set of images related to the topic of study to work with.

Picture Prediction *(cont.)*

Grades 1–2 Example

from *Lin Yi's Lantern: A Moon Festival Tale+* by Brenda Williams
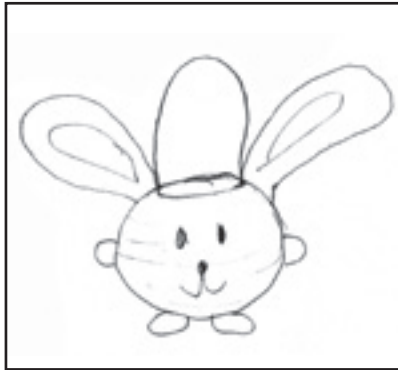
Words: lantern, light, paper, market, buying, rice, moon, trading

My Prediction: A little boy is going to buy something at a market. He needs a paper lantern to light the way because it is nighttime.

Grades 3–5 Example
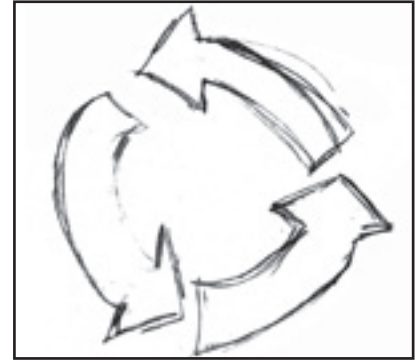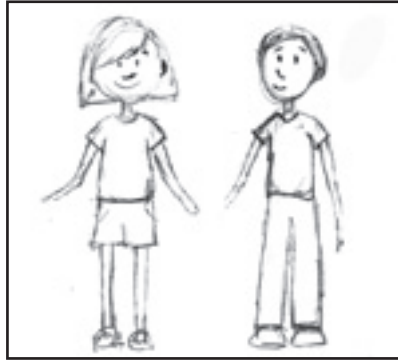
from *Fantastic Mr. Fox* by Roald Dahl

Words: fox, farmer, mean, farm, chickens, catch, steal, eat

My Prediction: I think the reading will be about a fox that wants to steal and eat the mean farmer's chickens.

Picture Prediction *(cont.)*

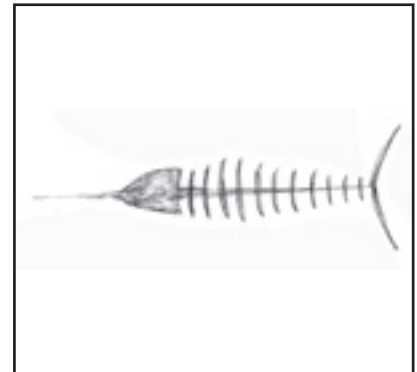## Grades 6–8 Example
from *11 Birthdays* by Wendy Mass

Words: birthday, balloons, celebration, friends, boy, girl, cycle, circle, arrows, around and around, repeating

My Prediction: Two friends are celebrating a birthday, but something keeps repeating.

Grades 9–12 Example
from *Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway

Words: fish, marlin, strong, fast, fisherman, boat, fishing rod, hook, bait, skeleton, dinner

My Prediction: The fisherman struggles to catch a large fish and then eats it.

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Picture Prediction

Directions: Write down any words that you think of when you look at the pictures. Think about what you will be reading, and write down what you think the reading will be about.
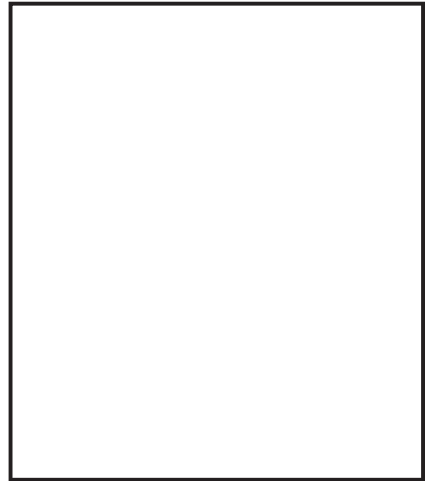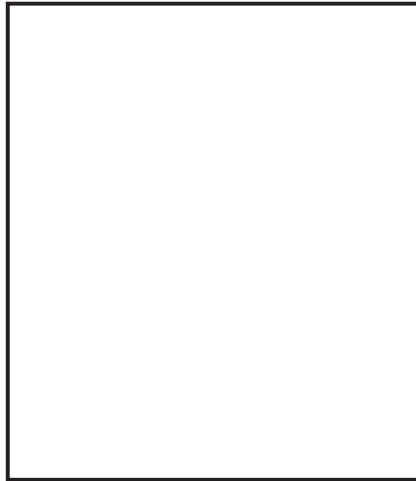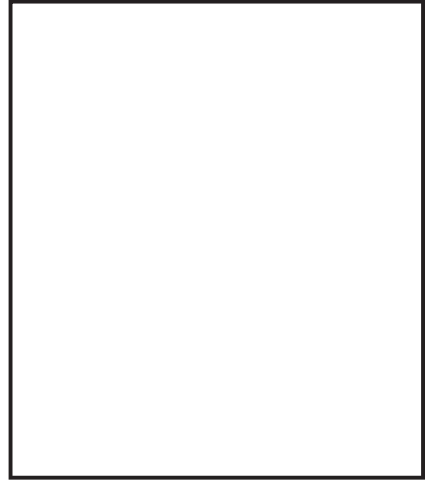
Words

_____

_____

My Prediction

_____

_____

Rank-Ordering Retell

Background Information

Students need to learn how to evaluate the information in a selection of fictional literature to determine the most important ideas, the moderately important ideas, and the less important ideas to summarize effectively what they have read. Rank-Ordering Retell (Hoyt 2002) assists students in learning to identify the main idea and key supporting details. In the activity, students write down phrases they consider to be important to the topic. These phrases should describe the content of the reading. Students must decide if the phrases can be categorized as the most important, moderately important, or least important concepts in the story. In small groups or as a whole class, students learn how to rank the importance of the information as they justify their placement of the phrases into the different categories. Key details, central messages, and important lessons from the text should always be classified as most important, while less important details and nonessential information should be placed in the moderately important or least important categories.

Grade Levels/Standards Addressed

See page 186 for the standards this strategy addresses, or refer to the Digital Resource CD (standards.pdf) to read the correlating standards in their entirety.

Activity

Distribute strips of paper. As students begin a reading selection, ask them to write down phrases they consider important to the topic. The phrases can be either taken directly from the reading or inferred by students, but all of the ideas should describe the information in the reading. Ask students to use the *Rank-Ordering Retell* activity sheet (page 192, rankordering.pdf) to begin evaluating and sorting the strips into three categories: most important, moderately important, and least important. Instruct them to work with the most important and least important ideas first, as this is the easiest way to evaluate the information. Have students justify their decision to write the phrases in the different categories. Ask students to identify which ideas would be the most helpful if they had to write a summary.

Differentiation

If the content of the reading is completely unfamiliar to English language learners, build their prior knowledge and vocabulary for the topic. Below-level students may have trouble identifying the phrases to sort, so scaffold the task by completing some of the strips for students. Above-level students can extend the activity by defending their answers.

Rank-Ordering Retell *(cont.)*

Grades 1–2 Example

Text: *Owen* by Kevin Henkes

Most important ideas: Owen loves his blanket. He does not want to give it up.
Moderately important ideas: Owen's neighbor thinks he is too old to have a special blanket.
Least important ideas: Owen takes the blanket with him to the dentist.

Grades 3–5 Example

Text: *Horrible Harry and the Ant Invasion* by Suzy Kline

Most important ideas: Harry loves ants and is disappointed when he loses his job as the classroom ant monitor.
Moderately important ideas: Harry thinks of an activity with ant words to impress his teacher and win his job back.
Least important ideas: Mrs. Foxworth, the secretary, is afraid of ants.

Grades 6–8 Example

Text: *The Giver* by Lois Lowry

Most important ideas: Jonas grows very attached to baby Gabriel and tries to save him from being released.
Moderately important ideas: Jonas is the only one in his community that can perceive flashes of color.
Least important ideas: The Giver also used to hear music, something Jonas never experienced.

Grades 9–12 Example

Text: *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak

Most important ideas: Liesel uses books to help her survive World War II.
Moderately important ideas: Liesel befriends a Jewish refugee, Max, who lives secretly in the basement.
Least important ideas: Liesel never lets her friend, Rudy, kiss her.

Rank-Ordering Retell

Directions: On separate strips of paper, write down important phrases from the text. Then, sort the strips into the categories shown below.

Text: _____

Most important ideas:

Moderately important ideas:

Least important ideas: