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Comprehension Instruction Strategies in the Early Grades:

A Focus on Informational Texts

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Plan

- Brief overview of informational text types

- Focus on comprehension instruction strategies

Informational Text

- Sometimes the term "nonfiction" is used
- Purpose is to inform about the natural or social world
- Examples: reports, science and nature books, biographies, histories, encyclopedias

Types of Informational Texts

- Some use narrative writing
- Some use expository (non-narrative) writing
- Some mix expository and narrative writing in the same book.

Narrative-informational

- Story format for information including characters, goal, and resolution.

- Specific references rather than general (Polly, "the parrot," Father Fox).

- Chronological; needs to be read sequentially.

Narrative-informational

 In the days when farmers worked with ox and sled and cut the dark with lantern light, there lived a boy who loved snow more than anything else in the world.

 Willie Bentley's happiest days were snowstorm days. He watched snowflakes fall on his mittens, on dried grass of Vermont farm fields, on the dark metal handle of the barn door. He said snow was as beautiful as butterflies, or apple blossoms. (n.p.)

Snowflake Bentley (Martin, 1998)

Expository (non-narrative-informational)

- Report format

- General references rather than specific (parrots, a fox)

- Many of these can be read in any order

- Often has table of contents, headings, index, glossary, bibliography, diagrams

Expository

This tiny green tree frog is so small that it could sit on your thumb. It hides from its enemies among the green leaves. Tree frogs have sticky fingers and toes. They cling to leaves and twigs, looking for insects to eat. (p.10)

Jungle Animals *(Royston, 1991)*

Expository

Each year, Americans eat more than 800 million pounds of peanut butter. Most of it is eaten by children. But American children were not the first peanut butter eaters.

Almost 3,000 years ago, South American Indians ground peanuts into a sticky past. Their peanut butter was not as spreadable as modern peanut butter and it tasted different, too. They mixed their gooey delight with cocoa, the main ingredient of chocolate.

*The Life and Times of the Peanut (*Micucci*, 1997)*

Mixed Text

- Includes both narrative and expository in the same book.
  - *Snowflake Bentley* is mainly a narrative about a real person. But there are expository insets periodically.

Comprehension

- Can be taught in all contents using informational text
  - focusing on expository texts today
- Too important to be left to "reading" time
- Strategy instruction can help students learn to comprehend

Comprehension Strategies

- Should be taught in context – not in isolation
- Should be taught as a means of understanding – not as an end in themselves
- Should be taught with understanding that strategy use is depends on text, reader, and purpose

- Strategies can be taught using read-alouds or in small- or large-group instruction

Comprehension Strategies Useful in Informational Text

- Before, during, and after reading

Comprehension Strategies Useful in Informational Text

- Before Reading
  - Accessing Prior Knowledge
  - Predicting

Dreher & Kletzien, 2015

Comprehension Strategies Useful in Informational Text

- During reading
  - Making connections
  - Questioning
  - Visualizing
  - Inferencing
  - Using text structures to identify major ideas
  - Paraphrasing
  - Reading graphs and diagrams

Dreher & Kletzien, 2015

Comprehension Strategies Useful in Informational Text

- After reading
  - Summarizing
  - Making graphic representations (pictures, graphs, etc.

Dreher & Kletzien, 2015

Strategy Instruction

- Declarative knowledge – what it is
- Procedural knowledge – how to do it
- Conditional knowledge – when to use

Strategy Instruction

- Explain what the strategy is

- Explain how to do it

- Give examples of when it might be useful

- Model numerous examples, inviting students to begin using the strategy with you

- Gradually release responsibility for using the strategy to the student

Before reading: Goals

- activate students' prior knowledge
- assess what prior knowledge they have
- provide any additional needed information
- arouse curiosity, and
- motivate students to want to read.

Before reading: Predicting

- Different from predicting in stories
  - **Not** what will happen, what the characters will do, and what the resolution will be.
- In informational texts, predicting means thinking about what kind of information the author has probably included.

Predicting: *Slap, Squeak & Scatter: How Animals Communicate* (Jenkins, 2001)

- Third-grade teacher example:

  - Read the title, show children the book cover

  - Remind them that good readers predict what a book is about before they read it.

    ...

Dreher & Kletzien, 2015

- Modeling how to predict from the title
  - Let's see, well, it says how animals communicate, so I would predict that the author will tell us what the animals might want to communicate – maybe where there is food or maybe that there is danger. I guess he will also tell us how animals communicate since they don't talk the way we do. Because the title is Slap, Squeak, and Scatter, I predict that some animals may slap something to communicate; some might squeak, and I don't know what it would mean to scatter.

- Involving students in predicting from the title
  - Which animals might squeak and which ones might slap?
  - What might the animals be trying to communicate?

During reading: Goals

children should be
- actively engaged in reading
- monitoring their comprehension
- connecting new information with what is already known

During reading: Paraphrasing

- Putting the text into one's own words
  - Translating the information into personal speech
- Different from summarizing
- Different from retelling

Summarizing

- Reduce the text to approximately 1/3
- Reduce lists to a general statement
- Select a topic sentence (or construct one)
- Delete redundancy
- Delete unimportant information

(Brown, Campion, Van Dijk, 1981)

Retelling

- Use structure of the author
- Use language of the text

Paraphrasing

- Readers have to put the text into their own words
  - Translating the information into personal speech
- Provides a way to monitor comprehension
- Connects prior knowledge with the text
- Encourages deeper processing of text

Monitoring Comprehension

- Puts emphasis on understanding what one has read
- If you cannot put what you have read into your own words, chances are you did not understand it.

Connecting Prior Knowledge

By searching for their own words to express an idea, students must access similar concepts, thus connecting what is being read with what has already been learned.

Deeper processing of text

- By accessing prior knowledge, new knowledge can be incorporated

- Instead of creating a "text base," a reader creates a "situation model" incorporating new and known information (Kintsch, 1998)

After reading: Goals

students should

- reflect on what they have read
- integrate new knowledge with what they already know
- think about how the reading might be related to their own lives
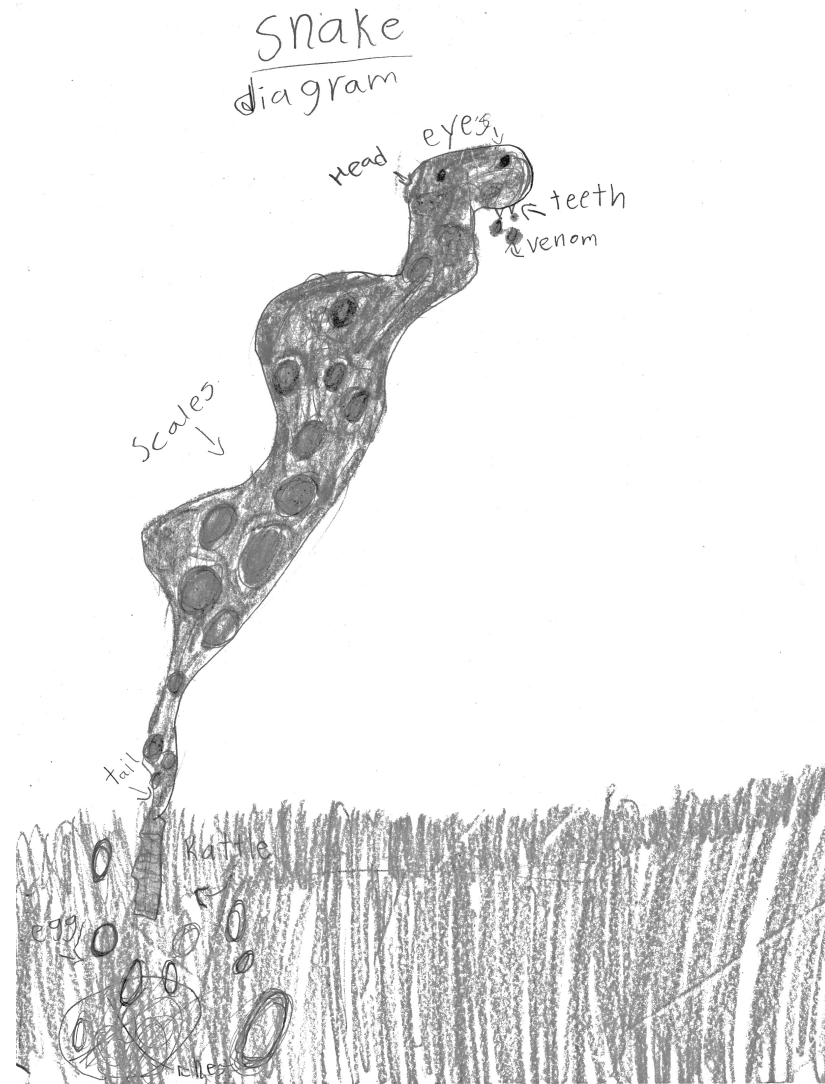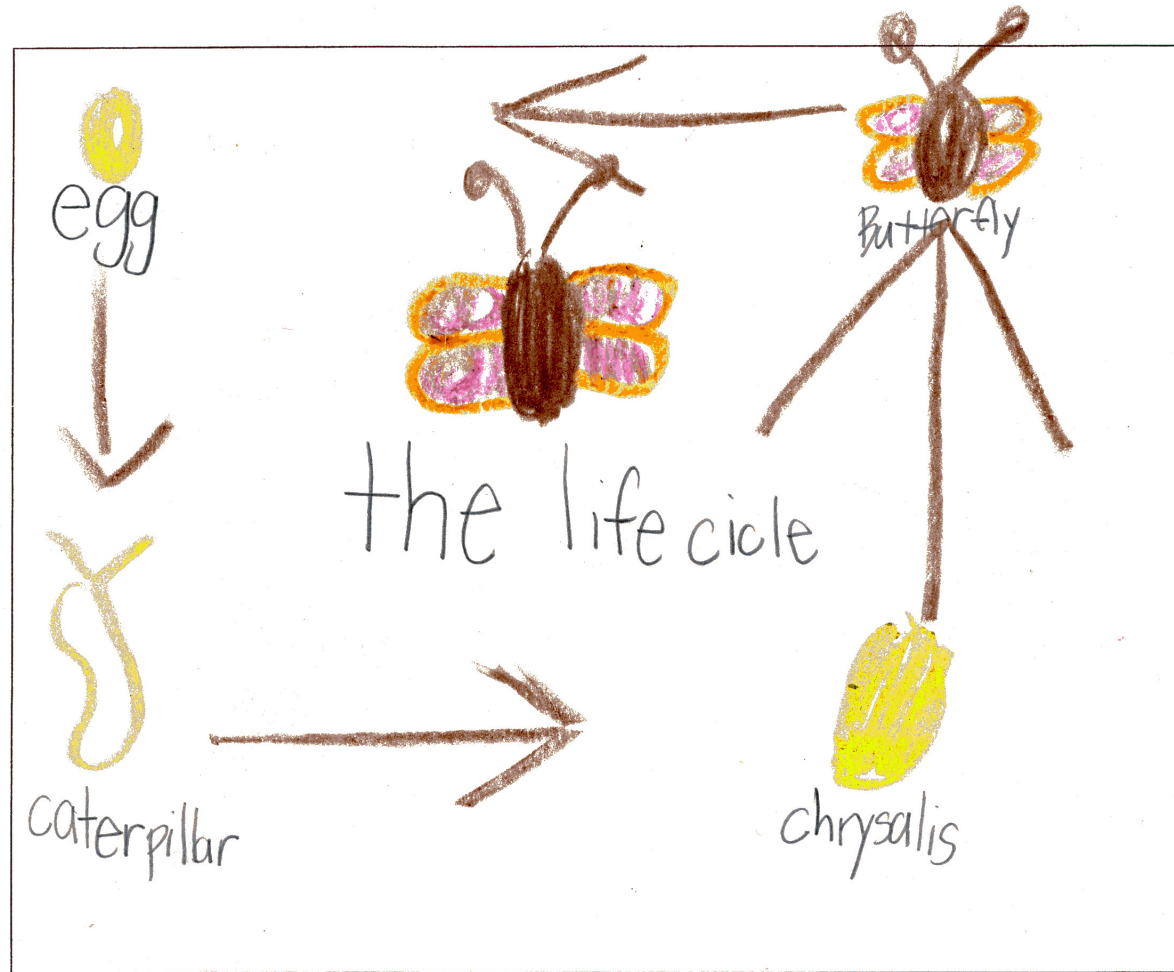- be able to apply new knowledge to new situations
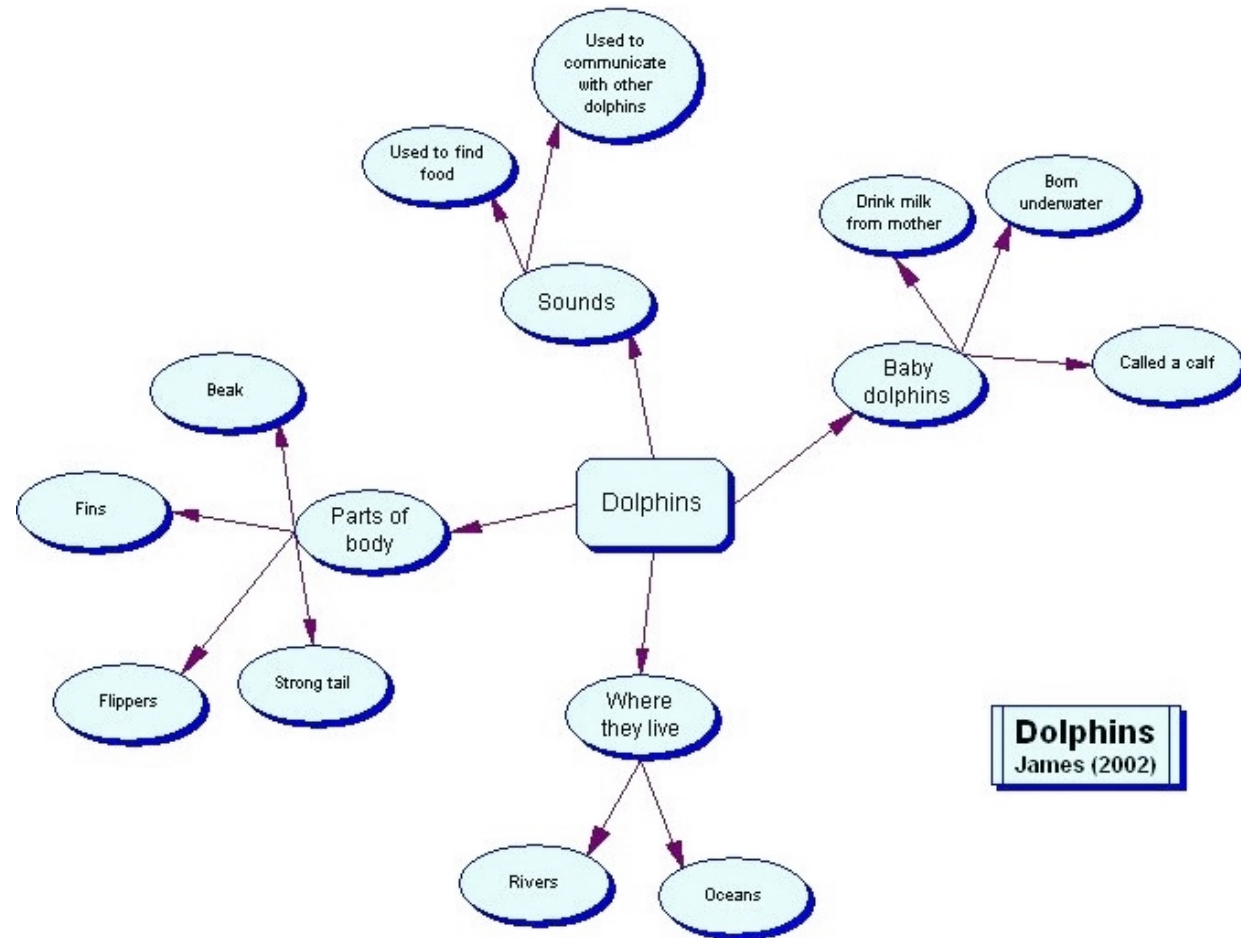
Pictures or graphic representations

- pictures and other graphic representations let young children show understanding
- pictures with captions, concept maps, diagrams, cause-effect graphics, compare-contrast charts, or timelines.
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Dreher & Kletzien, 2015

Dreher & Kletzien, 2015

Used to
communicate
with other
dolphins

Used to find
food

Drink milk
from mother

Born
underwater

Sounds

Baby
dolphins

Called a calf

Beak

Fins

Parts of
body

Dolphins

Flippers

Strong tail

Where
they live

Dolphins
James (2002)

Rivers

Oceans

Dreher & Kletzien, 2015

Strategies Useful in Informational Text

Before Reading	During Reading	After Reading
Accessing prior knowledge	Making connections	Summarizing
Predicting	Questioning	Making graphic representations
	Visualizing	
	Inferencing	
	Using text structure to identify major ideas	
	Paraphrasing	
	Reading graphs and diagrams	

Mobilizing several strategies

- Good readers use more than one strategy when they read

- They coordinate several strategies to construct meaning, shifting from one to another and integrating the strategies with ease.

- The goal is to help children learn to be strategic in their reading by using a repertoire of comprehension strategies.

- Teachers can support students' ability to use strategies independently and effectively by encouraging discussions of text which focus on both content and strategy use.
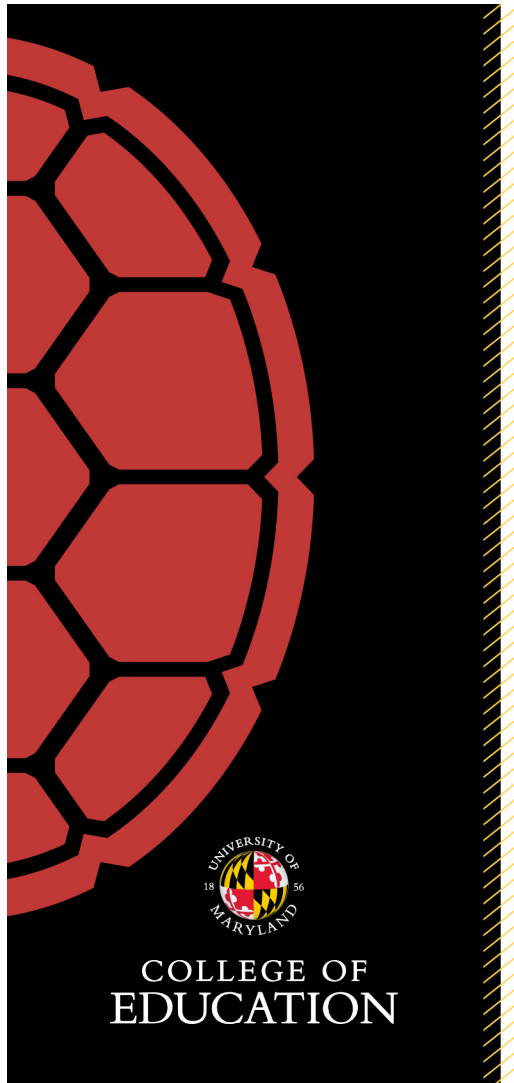
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