How Writing Improves Reading

How to make the connections that count…

an eBook
by:

Empowering® Writers

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Chapter 1 – The Case for Writing to Read

A million times we've heard the following statement – good readers are good writers.

It seems to make sense.

But as a classroom teacher I haven't always found it to be true. Sometimes my best readers are impatient writers, or, highly creative thinkers with few organizational structures on which to hang that creativity.

My godson Jack was a perfect example of this. A voracious reader, he kept a never-ending stack of way-beyond grade level books beside his bed, and devoured them, with great enjoyment and deep comprehension. The biggest challenge for him as a reader was finding a way for his mother to keep up with his demand for new books.

Writing, however, was another story. He'd rush through assignments, provide sparse details, often without a clear sense of purpose, strategy, or structure. At the initial 7th grade parent-teacher conference his mother was astounded to hear his writing teacher say, "What Jack's writing indicates to me is that he just isn't a strong reader." The teacher made assumptions about Jack's reading based on his reluctance or inability to express himself on paper.

What the teacher didn't realize (as most of us don't) is that a more universal "true-ism" is this: Good writers are good readers. Always.

That's not to imply that students like Jack, who haven't demonstrated strong writing skills, can't read well. Jack is an innately good reader. But for students who struggle with deep comprehension and close reading strategies, teaching specific writing skills is the best way to empower them to read differently – to read with "author's eyes." The benefit for the more able readers in your class is that using writing as a pathway to increased reading power boosts

their reading abilities even further. That's exactly what happened with Jack once more attention was placed on the instruction of writing.

In short, the practice of specific genre-related writing skills, learning how to deconstruct text with an author's eye, all for the purpose of informing writing will greatly improve every student's writing *and* reading. In this book we'll use informational writing as the practical examples, but the same holds true for any other genre – learning to write it, skill by skill, empowers students to better understand the writing of others.

In the next chapters we'll examine:

- how writing informs close reading, and vice versa.
- the building blocks necessary for students to respond successfully to text.
- specific tools for powerful responsive writing that increase comprehension.
- how to cite examples and evidence in text.

You'll also find specific lessons that can be used to meet these objectives, which demonstrate how to make every writing experience a tool for increasing comprehension. Another benefit of this instruction is that it will clearly put students in a better position to excel at all types of academic writing, as well as to perform any challenging writing task on standardized tests with skill and confidence. Most importantly, this process powerfully impacts students' ability to reason, think logically, process and access information in ways that dramatically affect learning across the curriculum.

Chapter 2: Where to Begin - Annotation

Just like a kid who learned everything there is to know about auto-mechanics by taking apart and reassembling the engine of an old jalopy, one of the best ways to figure out how to better understand what you read and to write effectively is by **annotating and deconstructing text**. That's what close, strategic reading, skimming and scanning is all about – deconstructing text. Often, when we introduce these skills at writing workshops teachers ask, "But, when are we going to get to the writing?" There's a disconnect between what is seen as "just writing" – putting pencil to page, and the foundational understandings that shape effective writing. Without these fundamental concepts student writing will lack focus, organization, and overall effectiveness.

It's really helpful to introduce deconstruction tasks through the use of texts designed specifically for this purpose. This is a great way to start, but it's just that – a start. As in all valuable learning situations, the basic skills then have to be used in "real world" contexts. It's important to apply the following lesson procedures to magazine or online articles about science and/or social studies, nonfiction texts, and textbooks. (The following example is excerpted from The Informational and Opinion Writing Guide for Grades 5.)

Analyzing and Annotating

Expository and Opinion Writing

LESSON AT A GLANCE:

Whole Class Activity

- *Read opinion and expository pieces*
- *Analyze, annotate, summarize according to instructions.*

Objective

Students learn to identify the salient features of expository and opinion writing and recognize the organizational structures of each without the benefit of headings, photographs, or diagrams.

Procedure

1. Explain to students that you'll be looking at two different pieces of writing about Siamese cats, each with a different purpose.

2. Reproduce and distribute The Expository Pillar, p. 64, Ask students to think about the elements featured the pillar before reading the pieces. Then, reproduce and distribute Siamese Cats, p. 66

   A great way to help with comprehension is to build background by showing an appropriate online video that illustrates the topic. You can also gather vivid online images to inform their reading.

3. Next, read the entire piece aloud to them to familiarize students with the content. This helps students who might not read as fluently as others to better access the information.) Then project the student copy of the piece. Explain that they will be annotating the text, meaning that they'll be marking all the salient features. Use the annotated teacher pages and guiding questions to inform your discussion. Demonstrate how to mark all of the designated parts of the writing, pp. 67 Have students annotate their papers, identifying and labeling all key elements by following your lead. (Help students notice that the first sentence of each body paragraph usually contains the main idea.)

Pay particular attention to the relationship between the main idea and supporting details in each paragraph of the body of the piece. Ask the class if each detail supports the main idea/reason – ex. If the main idea sentence is: *They have short, cream colored fur that darkens to a rich chocolate brown on their ears, face and toes...* ask the students for a "blurb" that summarizes what the entire paragraph is about (*appearance*) and have them mark that in the margin. Then, as you read each subsequent detail ex. *This elegant breed takes good care of its slim, muscular body so that it needs very little extra grooming...* ask the class if that detail supports the main idea. (yes) It's important to emphasize this relationship between main ideas and details so that they'll transfer this critical thinking to their own writing.

Finally, answer the accompanying questions, pp. 68

(continued)

Informational Pillar

INTRODUCTION
Lead/Topic Sentence

Main Idea #1 _____

Detail	Detail
Detail	Detail

Main Idea #2 _____

Detail	Detail
Detail	Detail

Main Idea #3 _____

Detail	Detail
Detail	Detail

Conclusion

Informational Summarizing Framework

TOPIC: _____

MAIN IDEA #1: _____

MAIN IDEA #2: _____

MAIN IDEA #3: _____

Student Page

Name: _____

SIAMESE CATS

One of the oldest cat breeds in the world, the Siamese cat is a popular pet in the United States today. Let's learn more about the regal history, elegant appearance and unique needs of this charming breed.

Siamese cats were brought to America from Thailand back when it was called Siam. It is believed that the royal family of Siam kept these exotic felines as pets and that they were sometimes used to guard ancient temples. The breed arrived in America in 1878 when a Siamese cat was given to the wife of President Rutherford Hayes as a gift, who was a well-known cat lover. Mrs. Hayes said that the "mahogany-colored feline enjoyed making grand entrances" when she was entertaining at the White House. By the early 1900s, Siamese cats were exhibited in American cat shows.

These beautiful animals are known for their distinctive appearance. They move gracefully with their tails held high as though they know just how lovely they are. The royal cats of Siam have sparkling, bright blue eyes with a slight slant that adds to their exotic appearance. They have short, cream colored fur that darkens to a rich chocolate brown on their ears, face and toes. This elegant breed takes good care of its slim, muscular body so that it needs very little extra grooming. In some Siamese, the bright eyes are closely set and they can appear cross-eyed.

Unlike most cats, a Siamese is not an independent creature. They crave the company of their owners and will meow loudly and persistently to get it. If left alone too often, they are likely to get into mischief. I know of a Siamese who shredded a large quilt with its claws one lonely afternoon. All are capable of such destructive behavior, so be prepared to spend lots of time playing with your pet. Like a dog in a cat body, some even play fetch and most can be trained to walk on a leash.

With their interesting history and undeniable beauty, Siamese cats can be great companions to those who understand their unique needs. They are an excellent choice for people who have lots of time to devote to a pet.

Annotated Page

SIAMESE CATS

Topic

lead fact introduction

1.) One of the oldest cat breeds in the world, the Siamese cat is a popular pet in the United States today. Let's learn more about the regal history, elegant appearance and unique needs of this charming breed.

topic sentence

2.) Siamese cats were brought to America from Thailand back when it was called Siam. It is believed that the royal family of Siam kept these exotic felines as pets and that they were sometimes used to guard ancient temples. The breed arrived in America in 1878 when a Siamese cat was given to the wife of President Rutherford Hayes as a gift, who was a well-known cat lover. Mrs. Hayes said that the "mahogany-colored feline enjoyed making grand entrances" when she was entertaining at the White House. By the early 1900s, Siamese cats were exhibited in American cat shows.

word referent

origin

3.) These beautiful animals are known for their distinctive appearance. They move gracefully with their tails held high as though they know just how lovely they are. The royal cats of Siam have sparkling, bright blue eyes with a slight slant that adds to their exotic appearance. They have short, cream colored fur that darkens to a rich chocolate brown on their ears, face and toes. This elegant breed takes good care of its slim, muscular body so that it needs very little extra grooming. In some Siamese, the bright eyes are closely set and they can appear cross-eyed.

appearance

4.) Unlike most cats, a Siamese is not an independent creature. They crave the company of their owners and will meow loudly and persistently to get it. If left alone too often, they are likely to get into mischief. I know of a Siamese who shredded a large quilt with its claws one lonely afternoon. All are capable of such destructive behavior, so be prepared to spend lots of time playing with your pet. Like a dog in a cat body, some even play fetch and most can be trained to walk on a leash.

like company

5.) With their interesting history (2) and undeniable beauty (3), Siamese cats can be great companions (4) to those who understand their unique needs. They are an excellent choice for people who have lots of time to devote to a pet.

Student Page

Name: _____

SIAMESE CATS

1. This is an example of what kind of writing? Circle one:

   Expository Opinion

2. Number each paragraph.
3. Circle the **introduction**.
4. Box the **conclusion**.
5. Circle the **title** and identify the **topic**.
6. Underline the **lead** in red.
7. Underline the **topic sentence** in blue.
8. Underline each **MAIN IDEA** sentence. Write a blurb (a word or two) in the margin next to the paragraph explaining what the entire paragraph is about.
9. Read this detail: *Owners will need to spend a great deal of time at home so their furry friends don't get depressed.*

   Where does this detail belong? Paragraph # _____
10. What word referent for "cat" is used to describe the Siamese in the second paragraph? _____
11. Number the references to each main idea restated in the conclusion. Use paragraph numbers.
12. Fill in the summarizing framework/author's prewriting plan:

    TOPIC: _____

    Main Idea #1_____

    Main Idea #2_____

    Main Idea #3_____

Here are some simple tips you can use for the applying these skills in the content areas:

1.) Begin with magazine articles or text book chapters that are straightforward and clearly organized.

2.) Be sure to read the article or chapter section aloud first, to enable students to get an overview.

3.) Distribute plenty of small sticky notes and have students use them to annotate key structural and other salient features:

- the title/topic
- introduction paragraph and lead
- main idea "blurbs" beside each paragraph
- conclusion paragraph and restatement of each main idea

4.) Have students perform a "mantra question" for each supporting detail in a paragraph by asking themselves: *"Does this detail belong with this main idea? Does this belong?"* In doing so they are really identifying evidence that backs up each main idea. They also internalize a writing check-system for assessing the relevance of details in their own writing.

5.) Point out how these activities improve study skills by helping students organize and categorize information logically.

Once students can identify the organizational structure and other key characteristics of informational writing they'll naturally begin to approach other texts with the same critical eye. These children will also have a clear understanding of what an effective piece of exposition looks like, and a grasp of the necessary elements that contribute to the success of the writing.

Chapter 3: Text Conventions as Comprehension Clues

Once students have mastered basic reading skills (learning to read) they move on to apply the skills (reading to learn). By fourth grade, students are expected to move far beyond decoding and literal comprehension to a place where they can glean deeper layers of meaning from texts. And conversely, they're expected to communicate these layers of meaning through responsive writing – writing for the purpose of demonstrating deep comprehension.

What mature readers often take for granted is the importance of text conventions as signposts to meaning - the critical clues provided through a carefully selected title, headings within an article, bold-faced and italicized text, photographs, charts and graphs, captions. When students are taught to recognize and use these signposts their comprehension and ability to access information in the context of a text improves dramatically.

What follows are some exemplar texts and accompanying lessons that can be used to hone student awareness of how to use text conventions to reveal organizational strategy and improve understanding, and later, to similarly construct informational writing in logical, sequential ways. Note that the first lesson in strategic reading (Bears) is straight-forward, with the teacher guiding students through the text, pointing out key text features. The next lesson is more sophisticated, requiring students to read with an editorial eye, providing the missing context clues. Both lessons will improve students' strategic reading and reinforce the organizational strategy and structure of informational writing. Students are taught to pay special attention to each heading, italicized and bold-faced word, any charts, diagrams, maps, graphs, or photographs. (The following material is excerpted from the Informational and Opinion Writing Guide for Grades 4.)

Strategic Reading – Informed Writing

Objective

Students learn strategies for close reading that provide valuable information about organization that will later inform their writing.

Strategies include:

- skimming and scanning for an overview of the entire text
- recognizing the importance of headings, keywords, diagrams, illustrations
- writing a summary based on information provided (text conventions)

LESSON AT A GLANCE:

Whole Class Activity

- *Introduce students to text conventions.*
- *Modeling skimming, scanning.*
- *Point out how cues improve reading.*
- *Summarize piece.*

Important Vocabulary

title, topic, headings, bold-face print, italicized print, key words, diagram, photograph, illustration, caption

Procedure

1. Explain to the class that they will be reading a selection titled Bears and that they'll be learning some strategies for how read more effectively in order to glean the most information from the piece.
2. Photocopy pp.39-40 and distribute copies to the class and project it on the white board. *To build context and background begin by showing the students numerous online images of a variety of bears*

   Then, ask them to listen carefully as you read the piece aloud to them. (This is particularly important for students who may have difficulty reading the piece independently.) This will give them a sense of what the text is all about.
3. Explain that, before they read an expository piece, it's important to look for certain cues that can provide valuable information to aid the reader's understanding. Direct their attention to the piece and ask them to annotate it together, labeling the important parts. Use the guided questions below to inform your discussion.
4. First, circle the ***title***. Ask them what the *title* reveals. (the ***topic***) Remind them that the topic tells the reader what the entire piece will be about. **Model** this for students and have them do the same.
5. Next, for reference purposes, number each paragraph.
6. Point out and underline the ***headings***. Explain that the headings allow you to quickly skim and scan the piece and get a sense of the ***main ideas*** of the piece.
7. Ask them to help you fill in the summarizing framework, based solely on the title and headings.

   Chart:

TOPIC: Bears
Main Idea #1: Kinds of Bears and Where they Live
Main Idea #2: Common Traits
Main Idea #3: Bear Behavior

(continued)

Discuss the way that identifying the topic and headings can set a purpose for learning. As readers they already have a good idea what they'll be reading about, which aids in comprehension. Discuss how a summary such as this might be an excellent way for an author to begin. (Helps with organization and focus.)

8. Next, in each paragraph, have them locate all **bold-faced** or ***italicized*** words. Explain that these are key vocabulary words that might be new to the reader. These keywords are usually either preceded or followed by a definition to aid in understanding. Point out that these specially marked words indicate some of the important ***details*** in the piece.

   (**Option**: For homework, have students create a key word vocabulary chart, listing each key - words followed by a definition they craft from the information provided in the text.)

9. Point out the ***photograph*** and its ***caption***. Ask students why both are important.

10. Next, on the white board or chart paper, translate the information on the summarizing framework into an extended summary using the following sentence starters:

> This expository text provides information about *bears*. We'll discover *where different types of bears live*, learn about *their common traits*, and become familiar with *bear behavior*.

Or…

> This expository text provides information about *The Giant's Causeway*. We'll discover *the unusual land forms*, learn about *the geology of the region*, and become familiar with *the legend of Finn MacCool*.

> This expository text discusses *scarecrows, past and present*. The author explores *the need for scarecrows*, investigates *scarecrows around the world*, and reveals *all the ways to have fun with scarecrows*.

> This informative piece is all about *ice cubes before the age of freezers*. The author delves into *the use of ice in the olden days* and uncovers *how harvesting ice became a business*.

11. Finally, have them read the text independently. Discuss how examining the following text conventions: ***title, headings, bold or italicized key words, photographs*** and ***captions*** guide their reading – think about how much they've learned before they've even started reading! Also point out the way that the author organized the information made it more accessible to the reader.

Name: _____

Bears

It's hard to believe that these large, often ferocious relatives of the dog, raccoon, and panda are the inspiration for millions of cuddly soft stuffed toys! There are many kinds of bears, living in numerous places the world over. Their behavior and shared traits fascinate their human neighbors all around the globe.

Kinds of Bears and Where They Live

Many kinds of bears can be found in a wide variety of places, mostly in wild mountain, forest, and arctic areas. In fact, bears inhabit every continent except Africa, Antarctica, and Australia. The largest bear, the ***Kodiak***, which weighs almost a ton is found in the wilderness and wide open grasslands of Alaska. The Kodiak is related to the ***Grizzly***. Grizzly bears, with their dark fur edged in white, live in many areas of the United States and Canada. ***Brown Bears***, which are smaller than the Kodiak and Grizzly, and the ***North American Black Bear*** (which isn't always black, but brown, white, gold, even bluish tinted) also live in the United States and Canada. The coast of the Arctic Ocean is home to the distinctive white ***Polar Bear***, thriving in the snow and ice. Asia is where the slow-moving ***Sloth Bear*** is found, with its short black fur and bib of light colored fur.

Common Traits

What do all bears have in common? Scientists group them into a family of creatures called ***Ursidae***. All bears are classified as ***caniforms*** meaning "dog-like" creatures. They have long snouts and ***non-retractile*** claws, just as dogs do.

Grizzly bear
(about 8 ft. long)

(continued)

Of course, bears are larger than dogs. These large furry mammals have thick, weighty bodies and can stand on their hind legs. You can recognize bears by their rather squared off snouts, short rounded ears, and short stubby tails. Their feet are similar to human feet, complete with a heel and a sole. In fact, bears' hind feet also have five toes. Their long curved sharp claws are used to tear food and to move nimbly - they can even climb trees. Bears are ***carnivores*** meaning that they eat mostly meat. This is why they have numerous large teeth that can grind, crush, and tear meat. However, bears also eat vegetation.

Polar bear at home in the snow and ice

Bear Behavior

Bear's behavior has always interested people. Some bears ***hibernate***, retreating to their dens, doing without food, and entering a deep sleep state in which their ***metabolism*** (body function) slows down dramatically. These large animals, which may appear rather clumsy and slow, are actually very fast runners. A mother bear may charge at any threat to her cubs, human or animal. In order to fuel their hefty bodies bears must eat a lot. They've been known to raid campsites and cottages, ***foraging*** or digging through supplies and trash in order to find something edible. Bears also love honey and have no problem batting down a bee's nest, swiping at it with their claws, and scooping out gobs of thick, sweet, honey. Their thick fur makes it difficult for bees to sting them, although bears gladly endure stings in order to eat the bee larvae in the honey. These amazing creatures communicate through a complicated ***marking system*** in which they claw, gnaw, or chew at tree trunks as a means of warning other bears to stay clear of their territory.

In your world travels, if you ever find yourself in a National Park, or hiking in a nature preserve, keep your eyes open for a member of the Ursidae family. If you spot any type of bear, stay calm and move quietly away. These beautiful, yet sometimes menacing creatures, and the habitats they live in certainly deserve our respect.

Strategic Reading

Organization and Text Conventions

LESSON AT A GLANCE:

Whole Class Small Group, and Independent Activity

- *Review text conventions.*
- *Read and revise an Informative Article, inserting title, headings, captions, etc.*
- *Summarize piece.*

Objective

Students draw on prior learning in order to insert text conventions into an informative text. (Further reinforcing the reading-writing connection.)

Strategies include:

- Skimming and scanning for an overview of the entire text.
- Recognizing the importance of headings, keywords, diagrams, illustrations.
- Writing a summary based on information provided (text conventions).

Important Vocabulary

title, topic, headings, bold-face print, italicized print, key words, diagram, photograph, illustration, captions

Procedure

1. With students, discuss and review what they learned from the previous lesson emphasizing the important clues text conventions provide for the reader. Have them generate a list of these tools: *title, topic, headings, bold-face print, italicized print, key words, diagram, photograph, illustration, captions.*
2. Explain that one of the jobs an editor has is to read a text and to make recommendations about the use of text conventions as tools to help the reader. Tell them that they are going to play the role of editor. Their job will be to decide where to add a title, heading, caption, or bold-faced text in order to make it easier for the reader to learn from an informative text.
3. Photocopy and distribute You be the Editor, p. 49, and the accompanying text, pp. 50-51. If possible, project the text for easy reference. Walk them through the You be the Editor page.
4. Based on their grasp of the previous lesson you can determine whether you'll work this through with them as a whole class, or whether they have the confidence and independence to work in small cooperative groups or independently.
5. When the activity has been completed, discuss the reasoning that informed their decision making.

Name: _____

YOU BE THE EDITOR!

Imagine you're the editor of a science magazine for kids. Your assistant sent you this article, but forgot some of the most important parts that will help the reader learn from the text. Your job is to provide the missing parts.

1. Read the entire piece. What is the **topic** – in other words, what is the text **all about**?

   _____

   Is this an expository or opinion piece? How do you know?

   _____

2. Based on the **topic**, create a **title** for this piece that will help the reader figure out what they'll be learning about. Write your title, in large print, across the top of the article.
3. Number each paragraph.
4. Circle the **introduction**.
5. Bracket the **body** of the piece.
6. Box the **conclusion**.
7. Read the first paragraph in the body of the piece *(paragraph 2)*. It is missing a **heading** that tells the reader what the entire paragraph is about. Identify the main idea in order to create a heading and write it in the blank at the beginning of the paragraph. Do the same thing for paragraphs 3 and 4.
8. Read paragraph 1 again. The writer has forgotten to italicize or bold the *key* **vocabulary words**. Use the diagram in the middle of the page to help you identify these key vocabulary words. Underline these words to help the reader.
9. Insert **captions** beneath the diagram and the photo to explain what the reader is looking at.
10. Scan the remaining paragraphs and underline any key vocabulary words that should have appeared in bold or italicized print.
11. Fill in the summarizing framework, below.

TOPIC: _____

Main Idea #1: _____

Main Idea #2: _____

Main Idea #3: _____

(continued)

Student Page

Name: _____

Title _____

You've all seen how someone cracks open an egg when cooking or baking. What's inside an egg? Clearly, there's a yellow part and a clear part. But do you know the other important things about that egg that help a chick grow and hatch?

Heading:

_____

_____

_____

Let's look closely at everything inside an egg. The clear liquid part is called the white or albumin. The albumin protects the yolk (yellow part of the egg) and provides nutrition for the developing chick. There is also a thin white skin or lining called the shell membrane that protects the egg from bacteria that might harm the egg. At the wider end of the egg there is an air space that forms when the egg is laid. There also may be a small white spot on the yolk. This white spot could be the beginning of a chick!

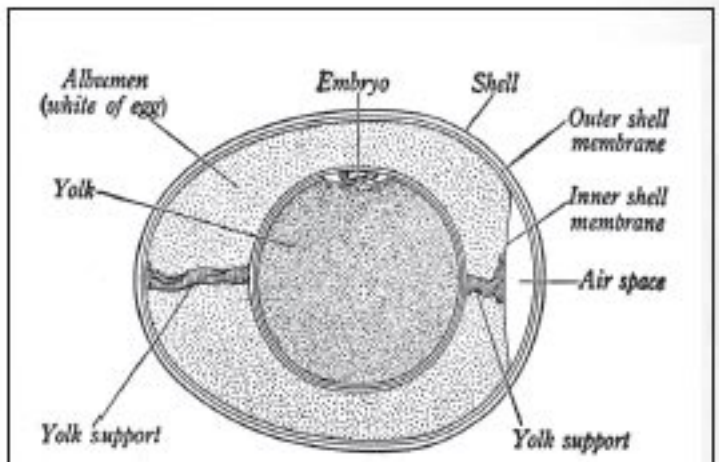


FIG. 417. *Hen's Egg, Showing Principal Membranes*[1]

Heading:

_____

_____

_____

If a fertilized egg is kept warm, many changes will take place inside the shell. The white spot will get bigger and bigger. It becomes a group of cells that will multiply and grow into a chick. This group of cells is called the embryo. The heart, blood vessels, and eyes begin to form. Soon the chick's head, body, and legs start to appear. A clear pouch called the amniotic sac surrounds and protects the embryo. Soon feathers begin to sprout.

(continued)

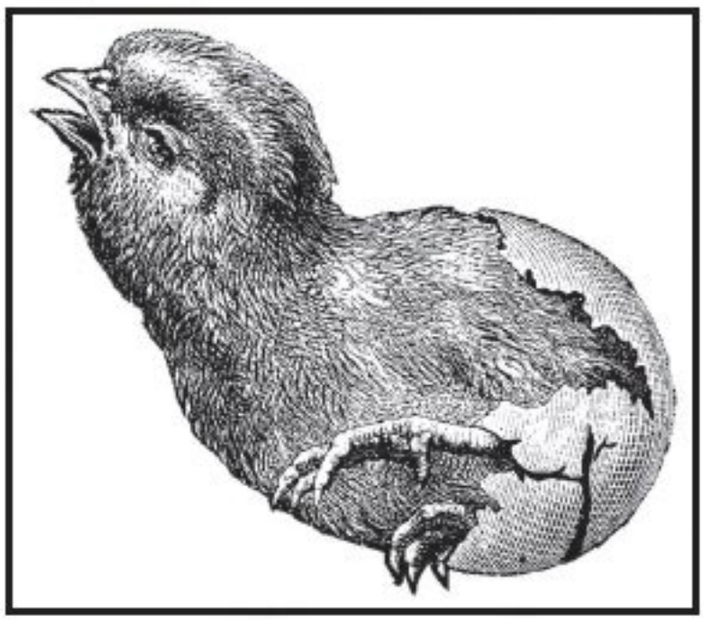
Heading:

_____

_____

_____

In three weeks the chick will hatch. Hatching requires a lot of hard work on the part of the chick. They must stretch and move against the hard shell. They use something called an egg tooth to make a crack in the shell. The egg tooth is a sharp white cap on the end of the beak that helps the chick poke a hole in the shell. Once that is accomplished the egg tooth falls off. The shell quivers and breaks open a little at a time as the chick works on opening the shell. The chick breathes heavily with the exertion it takes to push apart the shell. The chick usually starts peeping before it's emerged. When it finally hatches the chick is wet and cold. It needs to warm up beside the mother hen. Sometimes farmers keep chicks warm with a heated cage called an incubator.



Soon the chick will grow into a hen or rooster and the cycle, from the simplest cell inside the shell, to an embryo, to a newly hatched chick, will begin again. So, what do you think comes first – the chicken, or the egg?

Title Eggs

(1) You've all seen how someone cracks open an egg when cooking or baking. What's inside an egg? Clearly, there's a yellow part and a clear part. But do you know the other important things about that egg that help a chick grow and hatch?

Heading: Inside an Egg

(2) Let's look closely at everything inside an egg. The clear liquid part is called the white or albumin. The albumin protects the yolk (yellow part of the egg) and provides nutrition for the developing chick. There is also a thin white skin or lining called the shell membrane that protects the egg from bacteria that might harm the egg. At the wider end of the egg there is an air space that forms when the egg is laid. There also may be a small white spot on the yolk. This white spot could be the beginning of a chick!

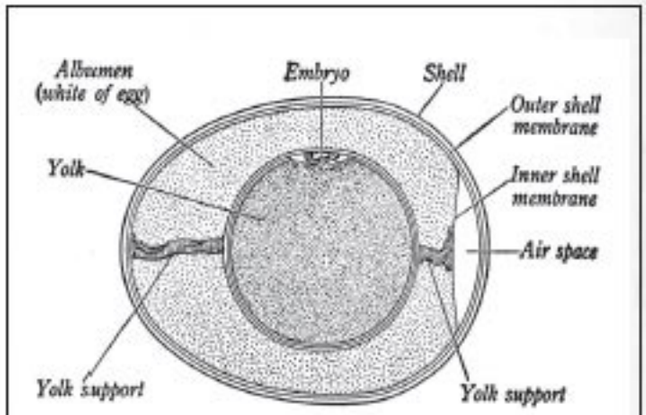


FIG. 417. *Hen's Egg, Showing Principal Membranes*[1]

inside an egg

Heading: The Fertilized Egg

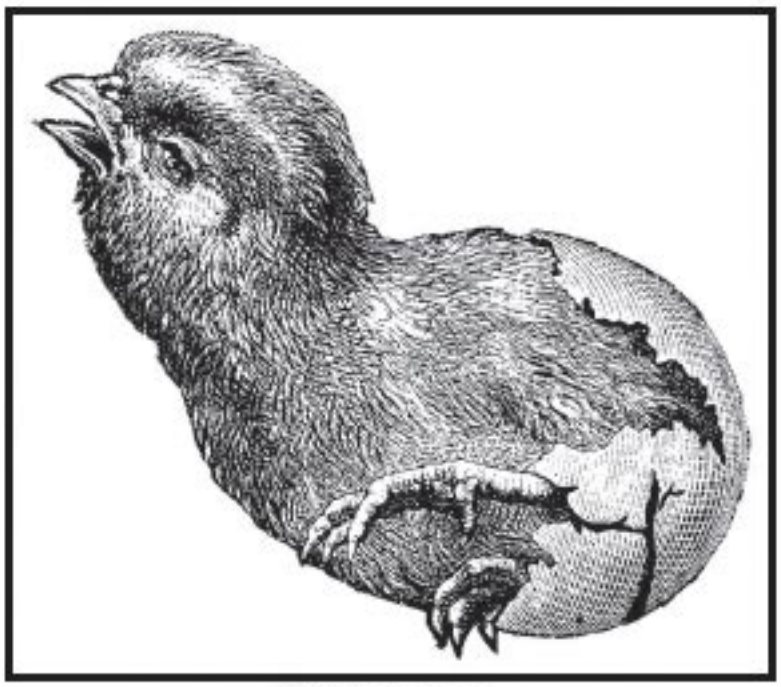
(3) If a fertilized egg is kept warm, many changes will take place inside the shell. The white spot will get bigger and bigger. It becomes a group of cells that will multiply and grow into a chick. This group of cells is called the embryo. The heart, blood vessels, and eyes begin to form. Soon the chick's head, body, and legs start to appear. A clear pouch called the amniotic sac surrounds and protects the embryo. Soon feathers begin to sprout.

(continued)

Heading:

Hatching

(4) In three weeks the chick will hatch. Hatching requires a lot of hard work on the part of the chick. They must stretch and move against the hard shell. They use something called an egg tooth to make a crack in the shell. The egg tooth is a sharp white cap on the end of the beak that helps the chick poke a hole in the shell. Once that is accomplished the egg tooth falls off. The shell quivers and breaks open a little at a time as the chick works on opening the shell. The chick breathes heavily with the exertion it takes to push apart the shell. The chick usually starts peeping before it's emerged. When it finally hatches the chick is wet and cold. It needs to warm up beside the mother hen. Sometimes farmers keep chicks warm with a heated cage called an incubator.



Chick hatching

(5) Soon the chick will grow into a hen or rooster and the cycle, from the simplest cell inside the shell, to an embryo, to a newly hatched chick, will begin again. So, what do you think comes first – the chicken, or the egg?

After using these exemplar texts, move the process into "real world" situations. Magazine articles are terrific sources for the application of these skills. "Muse," a Smithsonian publication, is one student magazine with high-quality articles that are perfect for this purpose.

Chapter 4: Response to Text: Examining Questions, Preparing Responses

Response to Text – Author's Purpose?

What's tricky about having students write in response to text, to perform what are sometimes called "literary analysis tasks," is that it's easy to forget the author's purpose. In narrative writing, the purpose is to entertain the reader. In expository writing the purpose is to inform or teach the reader. Opinion writing serves the purpose of reflecting the author's point of view on an issue or topic. But writing in response to text is different, in that the purpose is to demonstrate to the reader the author's deep understanding of a source text. The greatest challenge in this type of writing is that students who do not comprehend on a deeper level cannot possibly write an effective response. The resulting writing can be assessed in many ways – for mechanics, word choice, sentence variety, organization and elaboration. But these are simply tools used to effectively communicate the purpose of a piece. If the student does not have a clear grasp of the multiple levels of meaning in a source text, they can't accomplish the purpose of demonstrating comprehension.

That said, students who have routinely deconstructed and annotated a variety of texts, and who have been explicitly taught the skills that empower writers to construct the salient features of effective writing will comprehend at deeper levels. The questions we ask during annotation, the points we make as we deconstruct text become internalized and applied during both reading and writing.

Analyzing and Answering Questions

Often students get thrown by comprehension questions that require open-ended, fully elaborated responses. Here are some tips for modeling how to approach these kinds of questions:

1.) Read each question aloud. Have students verbally rephrase the question in their own words. (Question: *How does global warming affect the way that polar bears hunt for food?*)

Ex. "The question is asking for details about the way polar bears hunt for food and how the warming planet changes their hunting."

2.) Identify and discuss key words. Ask students how these key words relate to the main ideas within the piece. (In the above example, there are three keywords/main ideas – *polar bears*, *hunting for food*, *global warming*.)

3.) Color-code key words (highlight) and demonstrate how to use annotation notes (main idea blurbs) to locate related material in the text, and highlight that in the same color. This creates a clear connection between the question and source material. Keep in mind that some questions (like the polar bear example) may touch into more than one key word or main idea. If the question refers to more than one, highlight in additional colors.

4.) Some students benefit by practicing restating the important parts of the question in their main idea sentence. This helps keep them focused on what they need to address. Provide them with practice opportunities for this, always modeling first

Ex. Question: How does <u>global warming affect</u> the way that polar bears hunt for food?

Possible Main Idea Sentence: <u>Global warming affects</u> the way that polar bears hunt for food in a variety of ways.

Be sure to model additional ways to phrase the same main idea sentence:

Ex. There are a variety of ways that global warming affects the way that polar bears hunt for food.

Or… The way that polar bears hunt for food has been affected by global warming.

Also, model the use of sentence starters to restate key parts of the question:

Do you realize that_____?

It is amazing to think about_____.

There are many reasons why_____.

There are many ways in which _____.

Of course_____.

It is true that_____.

Just imagine how_____.

Remind them to use complete sentences and to avoid beginning sentences with words and phrases such as "Yes, because…" or "No, because."

5.) Model for students how to cite evidence within the source text. Students should be given a variety of sentence starters to help them do this is in a fluent way. Try the ones below:

For example_____.

In paragraph number (X), we learn that_____.

This is evidenced by_____.

The author discusses_____.

The text highlights_____.

We learn in paragraph ___ that____.

In paragraph ___, the author explains how____.

Furthermore,_____ .

It is interesting to note that_____ .

The author points out why___.

The details suggest that____ .

The reader can conclude that___.

6.) When referring to quotes within a text, use the expert's name and identify the expert, rather than using a pronoun.

Ex. (*This is evidenced in paragraph three, when the author quotes Dr. Andrew Derocher, professor of biological sciences at the University of Alberta. Dr. Derocher said, "Today's projected climate warming is far more intense than anything the species has seen in its evolutionary history."*)

Students need to see this modeled, and to practice this skill discretely before we can expect them to apply it in their own writing.

Once students have annotated and deconstructed a source text, restated the open-ended question in their own words, and used key elements of the question in their main idea sentence, they're ready to refer to the color-coded clues in the source material. They can then cite sources using the sentence starters for fluency (in doing so these language structures become part of their oral and written repertoire) and proceed with a well-elaborated paragraph.

Deconstructing Student Writing

Another value in the annotation and deconstruction process is that it can also be used to help students self-assess their own writing. After composing an open response, ask students to do the following:

√ Underline the main idea sentence and write a blurb in the margin that summarizes what the entire paragraph is about.

√ Read each detail sentence and ask, "Is this detail about my main idea?" (Checking for relevance.)

√ Color code key words in the question and in the response to ensure that all aspects of the question have been addressed.

√ Underline each direct citation to the original source material.

In this way, students can begin to see how comprehensive and complete their written responses are, and if they can't annotate for all of these check points, they'll need to go back and further elaborate. An enlightening whole class activity would be to project a student response and annotate and deconstruct it with the class, using the process provided here.

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Making these strategies a regular part of your language arts instruction will, without a doubt, help solidify the reading/writing connection, improve close reading, nurture deep comprehension, and empower confident, informed writing. For further strategies visit the Teachers' Corner at www.empoweringwriters.com
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