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Introduction

The Comprehension Mini-Lessons Series

National and state standards, and schools across the country require all students to master a set of reading objectives, with an emphasis on these key comprehension areas: main idea, summarizing, inference, cause and effect, point of view, fact and opinion, sequencing, and context clues. For me and the teachers I work with, teaching students to deepen their comprehension has always required several creative lessons for each reading objective to ensure that everyone achieves success. Customizing each lesson plan is a lot of work, and that’s where this series of high-interest mini-lessons—the product of years of classroom lesson successes—comes to the rescue.

Each book in this series provides you with several different mini-lessons for each objective, which appeal to different learning styles and help you reach each and every learner. The mini-lessons include activities and real-world examples, so that students have fun learning the reading objective and find the skills they learn useful in their everyday reading and pertinent to their lives.

About This Book

This book presents lessons that teach students skills and strategies for understanding sequencing and context clues.

Sequencing
The brain seeks meaning from what it already knows. This is why knowing the order of events in a text is crucial to understanding the whole story and predicting what will happen next. Time-order words such as first, second, next, and so on, lead a reader to visualize the order of and relationship among events and serve as clues to understanding the events within a time frame. Readers who build skills in sequencing can visualize what is happening, make sense of the story line, predict what may happen based on the time and order of events in a story, and better understand the causes and effects of events.

Context Clues
Writers often suggest the meanings of words that may be unfamiliar to their readers through words or hints that surround the word. Understanding how to seek out clues in the context of the passage to determine the meaning of unknown words allows readers to continue without having to stop and disrupt the flow of reading, helps readers gain a deeper understanding of the whole passage, and increases accuracy in predicting word meanings.
How to Use This Book

You’ll find five mini-lessons on sequencing and five on context clues with activities that stimulate different learning styles. I recommend teaching the lessons sequentially. The first lesson introduces the objective in simple terms. The subsequent lessons elaborate on the objective and offer students different skills to better understand it. The last lesson features the objective in a standardized test format, which helps familiarize students with the test language and structure.

A final project pulls the whole concept together and offers students an opportunity to demonstrate creatively what they learned in the mini-lessons. Students also get to share their learning with other classmates when they complete a project. Whenever students teach other students what they have learned, the learning becomes more cemented in their brains.

Notice that each lesson contains anticipatory sets, which enable you to grab students’ attention when you open the lesson, and special closures to end the lesson so that students’ brains can have another opportunity to absorb the learning. Also included are activities that you can send home to extend the learning in another real-world setting.

—LeAnn Nickelsen

Young Adult Fiction Resources

Here are some suggestions for young adult titles that support the objectives in this book:

Books That Support Sequencing


Books With Rich Vocabulary Supported by Context Clues


Sequencing Guidelines

Opening the Lesson

Star In preparation for this activity, I cut apart a comic strip for each pair of students. I write a number on the back of each panel that corresponds to its order in the strip so that my students can check their work. Then I place each cut-up comic strip in an envelope.

Idea

Before cutting apart the panels, turn over the comic strip and write a word on the back of it. One letter should appear on the back of each panel. When the panels have been placed in order, tell students to turn them over to make sure the letters form a word.

* After pairing my students, I challenge them to put their comic strip panels in sequential order.

* Then the partners present their sequenced comic strips to the rest of the class, and we discuss what kinds of strategies they used to place the panels in the correct order.

Teaching the Lesson

1. Begin by giving a definition of sequencing. Here’s what I tell my class: Sequencing is bringing order to a group of ideas, items, or processes. It involves looking closely at the steps or events and finding a logical and meaningful order in which to place them. Give the comic-strip activity they’ve completed as a concrete example of sequencing. Ask students to shorten the definition and rephrase it in their own words.

2. Then write these guidelines on the chalkboard, and discuss them:
   - Read through all the steps (or events) so that you can identify the end result for the sequencing.
   - Decide which steps (or events) are first and last.
   - Arrange the remaining steps (or events) in the correct order.
   - Check to see if any steps (or events) are missing or left out.
   - Evaluate the final arrangement of steps (or events) to see if it makes sense.

Objective

Students use sequencing guidelines to arrange items in the correct order.

Materials

1 comic strip and 3 envelopes for each pair of students, scissors, markers, The Polar Express by Chris Van Allsburg (Houghton Mifflin, 1985)

Reproducibles

(Make 1 copy for each pair of students.)

Story Strips for The Polar Express, page 9
Sequencing Guidelines Sheet, page 10
“How-to” Sequence Strips, page 11
3. Give students a chance to practice using the guidelines. (NOTE: For this activity, you will need to make enough copies of the Story Strips for *The Polar Express* for each pair of students.) Cut apart the story strips, and place the sets into envelopes. Read aloud *The Polar Express*. Then pass out the Sequencing Guidelines Sheet and envelopes to partners. Tell students to place the story strips in chronological order. As they complete each step on the guidelines sheet, they should check it off. Set a timer for five minutes, and set partners to work. Go over the correct sequence of the story strips. Ask students how the guidelines helped them.

4. For the next activity, enlarge and make enough copies of the “How-to” Sequence Strips reproducible so that each pair will have a set for one of the four activities. Cut apart the strips, and place the sets in envelopes. Again, partners will put the strips in order and check off the steps on the guidelines sheet. Have a complete set of “How-to” Sequence Strips at your desk to use as answer keys. As they finish the task, partners can check their work against the answer key. 

NOTE: There are two sets of checklists for the How-to activities on the guidelines sheet. The extra checklist can be used for pairs to practice sequencing a second activity from the “How-to” Sequence Strips reproducible, or students can use it when they order classmates’ how-to strips in the Opening the Lesson activity on page 12.

**Closing the Lesson**

Use one or more of these activities to wrap up the mini-lesson.

* Journal: Have students write their own definitions of sequencing. Ask how they use sequencing in their everyday lives and why it is an important strategy to know.

* Assessment: Instruct students to write out their own “How-to” sequence strips for a familiar activity. Encourage them to include as many as eight steps. They should cut apart the strips and place them in an envelope labeled with “How-to Activity” and their names. Remind students to make an answer key. They will use these strips in Mini-Lesson 2.