

Strategy 2: Understanding Text Implementation Guide

Overview

When students understand how text is structured, they stand a better chance of remembering what they have read. The general structure of the text may vary from a story, to an explanation, to a quotation from a speech. In this activity, students will become more familiar with two aspects of understanding text (structure and signal words) while reading.

The Strategy in Action

Students should complete the following steps to practice the strategy. Be sure to pass out copies of Activity Guide 2 before students begin their work. Steps 1–4 should be completed before the reading, and Step 6 is to be completed after the reading.

- Step 1: Survey the Text.** Have students scan the text and note the general purpose of the text.
- Step 2: Identify the Signal Words.** Have students circle transition words in the text. Some students may prefer to highlight photocopied pages of text or attach “sticky” notes to help them locate the transition words. Or, they may simply generate a list. Whatever the vehicle, students need to identify the signal words present in the text.
- Step 3: Identify the Structure of the Text.** Individually or in a small group, students should discuss what they think the main structure of the text may be (cause and effect, compare and contrast, description, problem and solution, and sequence or chronological order). They would ask themselves: “What kind of thinking will be necessary to understand the information in the text?” and “How would I best display the information after reading?”
- Step 4: Predict the Main Idea of the Passage.** Using what students know about the signal words and the structure of the text, write a sentence stating what you think the main idea of this passage may be.
- Step 5: Read the Text.** Have students read the passage about the dinosaurs.
- Step 6: Revisit the Main Idea Prediction.** After reading, students should go back to their prediction of the main idea of the passage. They may then use a graphic organizer to display the information, write a summary, or in some other way organize what they have read.

Discussion

Once students have finished the activity, you may want to have a brief discussion with them about the assignment. Encourage students to probe why they did or did not get close to the text’s actual meaning. You may want to ask students what they think they could do to improve their ability to make

predictions about a text's main ideas by using structure and signal words before they read.

Answers to Student Activity Guide

Part A

1. The purpose of the text is to describe how the dinosaurs died.
2. Signal words such as *as it did*, *so*, and *then* indicate a sequence. *Current scientific thought*, *current research*, *would have*, and *may have* indicate that this is someone's theory, and not what actually happened.
3. The text is generally a sequence, but the introduction to the text seems to indicate that it will offer someone's opinion as to what happened.
4. Dinosaurs—and how they died

Part B: Answers may vary, depending on students' original predictions.

Name: _____ DATE: _____ Class: _____

Strategy 2: Understanding Text Activity Guide

Part A: Answer the following questions BEFORE you read the text.

1. Scan the text. What do you think is the text's purpose?

2. Circle or highlight all the signal words you find in the text. Write them below.

3. What is the main structure of the text? (Hint: cause/effect, compare/contrast, problem/solution, or sequence).

4. What do you think the main idea of this text is? (Hint: list the topic and 3–5 more words that elaborate on that topic—this is probably the main idea).

Part B: Now read the text. Once you have finished, answer the question that follows.

The Day the Dinosaurs Died

Why did dinosaurs disappear? One popular theory is that a collision with an asteroid about 65 million years ago caused dramatic weather changes and wiped out nearly all life. This reading applies geographic evidence to imagine the death of a giant Tyrannosaurus rex in the American West.

Impact! A brilliant fireball flashed across the southeastern sky. . . . The T-Rex, blood dripping from his huge teeth, raised his head from the carcass [dead body] of an old Triceratops . . . and roared a challenge to the heavens.

The six-mile wide asteroid—a rock the size of Mount Everest—slammed into the Gulf of Mexico off the coast of the Yucatán Peninsula. . . . [It] melted a huge hole through the ocean floor. . . . As it did so, most of the asteroid vaporized. Within seconds the impact crater reached its maximum depth, likely about 30 miles. Then the center of the crater quickly began to rise—like the liquid that leaps back in the air when you splash milk into a glass. . . .

Impact Plus One Minute. T-Rex glanced towards the southeast as the ground continued to shake. Even his poor eyes could detect the huge orange flare of light along the southeastern horizon. . . . The light grew brighter and closer with amazing speed. . . .

The speed of the burning rock, minerals, and gases ejected from the impact crater . . . would have been incredible; current research suggests that the first effects of the asteroid's impact off the Yucatán coast took only ten minutes to reach present-day New Jersey. . . .

Impact Plus Six Minutes. T-Rex looked up, startled, as a thunderous roar pounded his ears. Suddenly an unimaginable blast of wind knocked him down while ripping huge trees and boulders out of the ground. . . .

The shock wave created by an asteroid hitting at . . . 40,000 m.p.h. would have had a devastating impact on large plants and animals over a very great area. Indeed, pollen records in parts of western America and Japan indicate large plants were completely absent from the landscape for a long period after the impact. . . .

Impact Plus Seven Minutes. Battered and dying, the stricken T-Rex had one final sight—a horizon-to-horizon wall of . . . fire raging up from the southeast . . . that would consume him and almost all other life forms.

The fireball, together with burning ejecta [debris] from the impact crater, would have ignited most of the plants, animals and surface fossil fuels in the Western Hemisphere and perhaps large parts of the rest of the world and started great wildfires. . . . The fires could have burned for weeks, filling the air with smoke and gas and temporarily blotting out the sun. . . .

Impact Plus Five Days. . . . A small mouselike rodent scurried around the charred and broken landscape, stopping occasionally to nibble at the scorched meat of large, less fortunate animals. . . . Although she was extremely uncomfortable in the mind-numbing heat, hunger forced her out of her cool burrow to hunt for food.

The fireball is thought to have raised global air temperatures by at least 50 [degrees] F. . . . This temperature increase alone probably was intolerable [unbearable] to many species. . . . Combined with changes in the food chain [it] would have led to massive death totals. The underground temperature of the Earth, however, . . . would not have changed much.

Impact Plus Two Months. The small rodent-like creature stuck her head out of her underground burrow and surveyed the dismal scene. The “day” . . .

was dark—dry, cold gloom untouched by precipitation. The few . . . small plants that had survived . . . now were withering [shrinking] into brown death. Each day, she was forced to roam farther . . . for food. . . .

The great quantity of dust shot into the stratosphere by the meteorite's impact soon would have circled the globe and blocked out significant sunlight over a large portion of the Earth. This brought an end to the intense heat, and began a period of bone-chilling cold. Photosynthesis would have been impossible for many plant species. . . . The global cooling . . . may have contributed to the extinction of the dinosaurs and other species. . . .

Impact Plus One Year. The little rodent-like mammal had survived the shock waves, the firestorm, . . . and the icy cold. Now . . . Earth's weather shifted back towards conditions prior to impact. . . . Tiny green shoots of plants worked their way up through the burnt, crusty soil. . . . Life had survived on Planet Earth.

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Now check to see if your prediction about the main idea you made before reading was correct. Revise it below if necessary.
