Access to Complex Informative Text:
From Reading to Writing

Try following the procedure to help students be successful with reading and comprehending challenging informational text. If students are guided through all of these processes, they begin to build the thinking habits of strong readers and will be able to share their own thoughts about what they have read in writing as well. Good readers do this internally without having to be prompted, but anyone can learn how to read strategically if they are taught these strategies.

Choose a text that has supportive text features such as diagrams, bold print, or captions. Find a text with fairly clearly organized paragraphs to assist in the "gist" process. Some likely sources are:

Science and Social Studies Textbooks: These are typically very well organized and contain multiple text features to assist comprehension such as on-page glossaries and prompts for thinking before the text. In some ways they are almost too easy, but students need to be shown how to use the features to assist their learning of the content.

Readworks: this is a free source for nonfiction passages organized by lexile level and topic. They are not the most interestingly written, but are very generally well organized:

http://www.readworks.org/

Science News for Kids: This website houses hundreds of current articles about issues in science that are well written and include gorgeous photos. Although tricky to print on paper, you can project the text and work through it together:

www.sciencenewsforkids.com

National Geographic student magazines are written in 3 reading levels (Young Explorer—K-1, Pathfinder 2-3, and Explorer—4-6) and the feature article from each of the archived editions is downloadable. These are well-written and include great photographs. They tend to be focused on life science, but if you search the archive you will find other topics that you may want to cover:

http://ngexplorer.cengage.com/pathfinder/

Time for Kids magazine site allows you to view multiple current articles with topics of interest to students. Although there isn't a shortcut to printing, you can copy and paste the photos and text into a word document fairly easily if you want students to be able to highlight and annotate.

http://www.timeforkids.com/

Informational Text Informative/Explanatory

CCSS Standards for Reading Informational Text: RI 1, 2, 4, 5, 10 and **Writing: WI 8** apply to this document.

Lesson Sequence

Here are the steps for this lesson. Initially you'll need to guide every step of the way, over time, gradually reduce the reminders and support until students can do this independently. One way to gradually pass it off to the students is to have them work in pairs, before they are expected to do this independently.

Step 1: Building up Schema

(RI Standard 10 suggests students activate prior knowledge before reading)

Tell students that before good readers read informational text, they check out the topic of the text and then ask themselves what they already know. This is called "schema" and schema theory states that all knowledge is organized into units. Within these units or categories, is stored all of our personal information about a topic. It's helpful before we read to bring up that information so that when we encounter new information we can store it in our brains in an organized fashion. I also tend to use the metaphor of the word "LOADING" when teaching students about schema. Most students have seen that a game "LOADS" before it is playable, that is, the software and information for that particular game gets ready before anyone can play.

Display the article, look at the title and illustrations or text features with the students and then ask them to discuss in pairs or small groups what they already know about that topic. Ask for individuals or groups to share out what they know to build up general background knowledge.

Step 2: Generating Questions before you Read:

(RI Standard 1 suggests students ask questions about text)

Tell students that it is helpful to come up with some questions before you read so that you have a purpose for reading. Display on the whiteboard the question words: "who, what, where, when, why and how" Ask students to work with a partner to generate a question about the topic. Call on partners to share out questions and then use shared writing to list those on a chart or the whiteboard. You may also use individual white boards to have students write their questions and then share them that way.

Step 3: Text Structure:

(RI Standard 5 suggests students understand how to use text structure to locate information efficiently)

Tell students that there are features of informational texts that are there to help us locate information more efficiently. Review the title, illustrations, diagrams, headings, captions, glossary, or any other text features with the students. Ask them about each, "what information might we find here? Why did the author include this feature?" Also note whether any of the text features may help us find the answers to the questions we generated easily.

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Step 4: Shared Reading:

Project the text so that all students can read it. Use a pointer on the screen and read aloud the text with all of the students' voices chiming in. Use "oral cloze" periodically to back the teacher voice out and encourage students to say key phrases or vocabulary terms on their own. Stop after each sentence or two to have students tell each other what they just learned in that part of the text. Pause over difficult vocabulary and show students how to use context clues to determine the meaning of challenging words. (RI Standard 4) Use choral response to have students repeat challenging words out loud as well and then re-read the sentence that the word is located in.

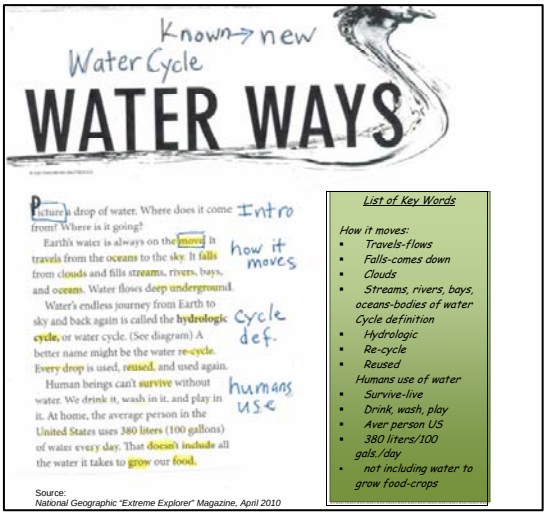
Step 5: The "Gist"

(RI standard 2 suggests that student be able to recount the main ideas and key details of texts)

After each paragraph tell students that it is helpful to write down the gist, or a word or phrase next to that paragraph to remember what it was mostly about. Students may also draw a symbol to go with their gist. There is no right "answer" when it comes to writing the gist, students are to write or draw whatever helps them remember the main content of the paragraph.

Step 6: Taking Notes

(WI Standard 8 suggests students need to learn to gather information from sources and keep notes on what information was gleaned)



Either ask the students what categories of information would make sense to take notes on, or provide a framework yourself. Students may be taking notes in response to a central question or point they are researching, or they may be gathering comprehensive information into some sort of graphic organizer for a unit. Show students how to identify the information they are looking for and take notes about that in word or phrase form without copying whole sentences. It will require a lot of modeling and guidance to show students how to lift words or phrases for key points without copying. Students may also use synonyms or symbols to capture the information in their notes. Using bullet points will remind them that they are not writing entire sentences when they are note-taking.

Use the document camera to have students compare what each other has written in note form after reading a given passage. This will help students see that there is no "right" way to list information. The goal is for the student to be able to recall the information from the notes and use those notes to help them write about the information in their own words and with their own organizational scheme or central focus.

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