

Teaching Strategies

The Cornerstones Lesson Guide suggests instructional practices that will help students benefit the most from a Cornerstones teaching unit. This supplement explains the terms used in the Guide.

- Read Aloud/Think Aloud: Make Your Thinking Visible
- Comprehension Questions
- Shared Reading and Guided Reading
- Story Grammar
- Writing
- Build Word Knowledge
- Teach Words Conceptually
- Classroom Visual Aids

The Cornerstones Lesson Guide recommends daily reading aloud, shared and/or guided reading, and independent reading. The purpose of *read-aloud* is to foster enjoyment of a story and comprehension on several levels. *Shared reading* and *guided reading* are ways that the teacher can give students practice and feedback as they learn decoding and comprehension strategies. At the other end of the reading continuum, students apply all that they know about reading when they *read independently*. The ideal combination of these approaches depends on the difficulty of the reading material and the reading skills of the students.

Read Aloud/Think Aloud: Make Your Thinking Visible

When you read aloud or present a video of the story, stop to model comprehension strategies for your students. Let them *see* what effective readers *do inside their heads*. For example, when the fox says, "Look at that beautiful bird!" you may be thinking, Who is the fox talking to? Is the crow beautiful? Why would the fox say that? Does the crow believe it? Would you? etc. These questions show the students how you reflect on the story, words, pictures, or language. They show how you begin to make predictions about what will happen next.

When reading to young children, you may want to do such a think-aloud strategy during each reading. Each time choose a different section to open up for discussion, following the same order that concepts are presented in the Lesson Guide. It is best to think aloud during reading (rather than when you have finished reading) at the actual point in the story that raises questions in your head.

Comprehension Questions

Implicit in the think-aloud process is the use of questions. Ask the children open-ended questions that start with Why and How, as well as Who, What, Where, and Did/Do/Does. Encourage the children to ask their own questions, using a variety of question forms.

There are three broad types of questions, and students should be exposed to all types:

- 1) The answer is explicit in the text. You ask, "What did the crow have in her beak?" The text says, "The crow had a piece of cheese in her beak."
- 2) The answer is implicit in the text and requires critical thinking. You ask, "Why did the crow drop the cheese?" The children need to think about what happened just before she dropped the cheese and what caused her to open her mouth.
- 3) The answer is not in the text but is in our experience. You ask, "How did the crow feel about losing her cheese?" The word "unfortunately" provides a clue. Also, maybe the children have lost something or had to give something up because they were tricked. They can remember how they felt or imagine how they would feel in such a situation.

Shared Reading and Guided Reading

You are aware of what the students know and you can use this information as you read aloud. In shared reading, you invite them to apply their skills, setting them up for success. Stop at particular points in the text and ask someone to help you read. Emphasis here is on the print so point to what you are reading. Stop reading and encourage children to read independently where you know they can be successful. Also, encourage students to volunteer to participate in the reading. When students come to a word they know, they can say or sign it aloud. Then you pick up with reading aloud until you come to another section of text which the students or one student can read independently.

In guided reading, the student takes the lead, reading as best he or she can until coming to an unknown word. The teacher encourages the student to decode the word, looking at spelling patterns, using structural analysis (attending to a prefix or suffix, for example) or employing other strategies.

Story Grammar

A Cornerstones unit is designed so that teachers and students study one aspect of story grammar in depth each day; for example, characters, setting, problem, solution, outcome.

Knowing the common structure that most stories follow can help students remember the details of a story. Typically, the story takes place at a point in time and in a certain location (the setting), there are characters, a problem and response, a resolution and sometimes a moral. One graphical organizer that you can use to good effect is a five-pointed star (see Graphical Organizer Section).

Writing

Writing facilitates the development of reading and reading facilitates the development of writing. The Cornerstones Lesson Guide recommends that children write every day and suggests writing activities involving individual words, sentences, and longer pieces, according to the children's skills. When children write, they engage with words and ideas and explore new meanings—they communicate. With pencil in hand, children can ponder an idea, change their mind, and devote time to expressing themselves clearly. Writing is a tangible way for a

child to demonstrate to teachers and peers what he or she knows. For children who are not fluent with English, it is also a critical window by which the teacher can glimpse gaps in knowledge or understanding.

It is important for you, the teacher, to model what you do when you write. Use shared and guided writing (which follow the same principles as shared and guided reading) and independent writing. Give children feedback on their writing. Feedback sessions should be interactive so that children learn to evaluate their own writing and put themselves in the shoes of their readers. Don't overwhelm children; focus on some low-level skills, such as spelling, punctuation and grammar, as well as some high-level skills, such as organization, expressive language and clarity of ideas. Give them a chance to improve their skills, and let them know when their written work has gotten better.

Writing templates are in the Activity Workbook of the Teacher Resources section on the Cornerstones Web site.

Build Word Knowledge

What does it mean to know a word? You can know a single common meaning or multiple meanings. A person's word knowledge is incremental; people grow in their understanding of words through exposure over time, continually building a conceptual field that surrounds a word. The conceptual field entails its primary and secondary meanings, as well as nuances, usage, compound components, synonyms, antonyms, and figurative language. Good readers know a substantial number of words and quite a bit about the words.

The Cornerstones Lesson Guide introduces only a handful of words each day so that teachers can spend time building children's knowledge of the words in depth. This helps them comprehend the story as well as learn about the words beyond their use in the story.

Children may build word knowledge in many ways:

- Learn to recognize a word in print.
- Learn another meaning of the word, if there are multiple meanings.
- Learn a new word that represents a known concept.
- Learn a new word that represents a new concept.
- Clarify and enrich the meaning of a known word.
- Use a word expressively.

Teach Words Conceptually

The Cornerstones Lesson Guide provides many suggestions for teaching words conceptually. Keep in mind that conceptual fields of different kinds of words—nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs—will be different. For example, adjectives fall along a continuum and are relative. *Beautiful* and *gorgeous*, for example, don't mean exactly the same thing and children should learn that people use them for different purposes. An example of a conceptual field for *bird* is shown later in the Relationship Map graphical organizer.

Generally, when teaching words— through discussion, reading, writing, and hands-on experiences— we recommend that you include the essential features of the a word as well as the variable features; give examples as well as non-examples; and demonstrate the word in appropriate contexts. For example, in the case of the word *bird*, all birds lay eggs, and have feathers, wings and a beak (except the *beak* on a duck is called a *bill*). Some birds fly. Other creatures besides birds have wings, lay eggs, and can fly. Dolphins have beaks. Feathers are unique to birds. Birds use their beaks for a wide variety of tasks, which is why they come in so many shapes and sizes. Beaks and mouths have many features in common and also many differences. Through in-depth discussions of such features, the conceptual field can grow.

Classroom Visual Aids

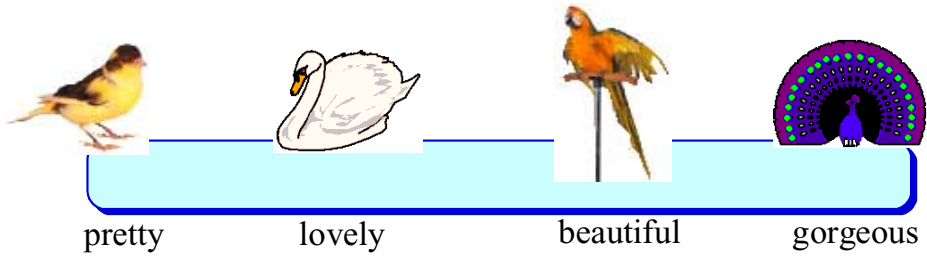
Use Graphical Organizers

A graphical organizer can be very helpful in making abstract concepts more concrete. Fill in the graphical organizer together with your students, rather than present one already developed. As much as possible, students should create and manipulate the graphics. Revisit the graphical organizer during the unit so that the students can add their new knowledge and see how much they are learning. Active engagement is critical to the effectiveness of these tools.

Five types of graphical organizers are illustrated below. We created them using *Inspiration* (www.inspiration.com).

- Continuum
- H-Chart
- Venn Diagram
- Relationship Map
- Five-Pointed Star

Continuum



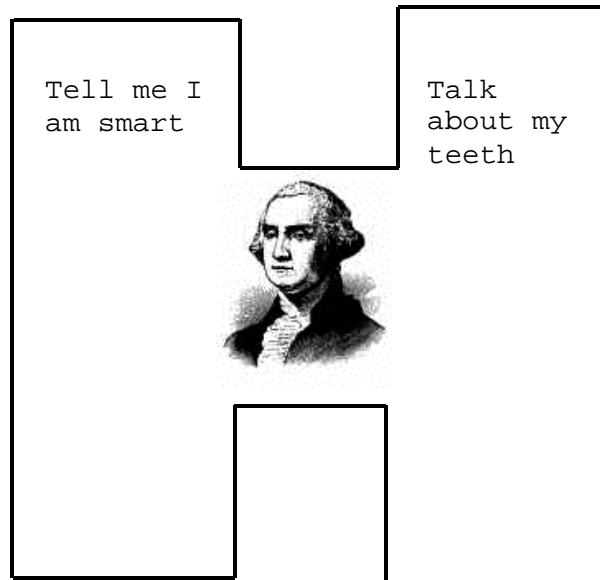
A

bird

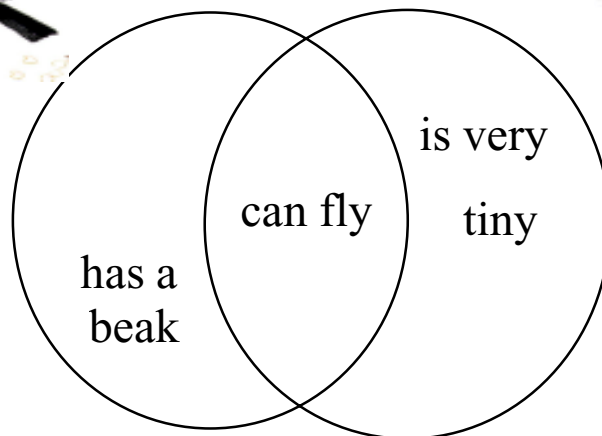
H-Chart

Ways to
flatter me

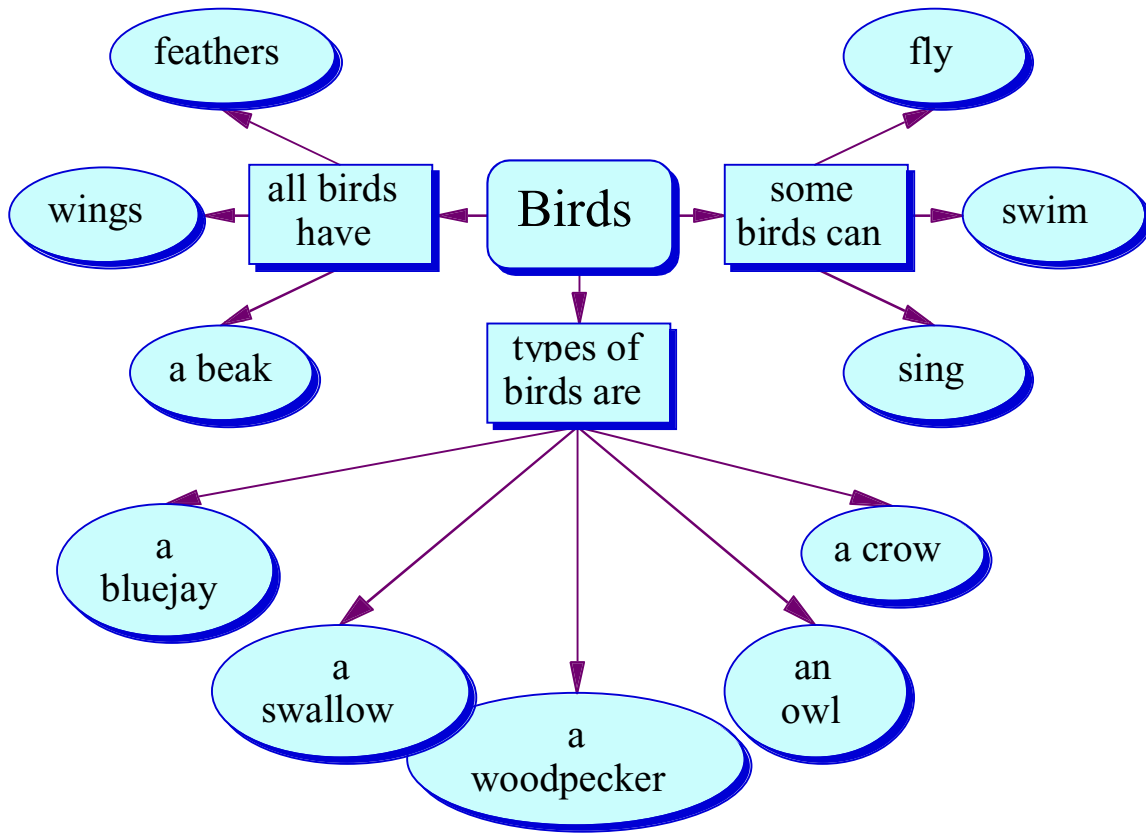
Things that do
not flatter me



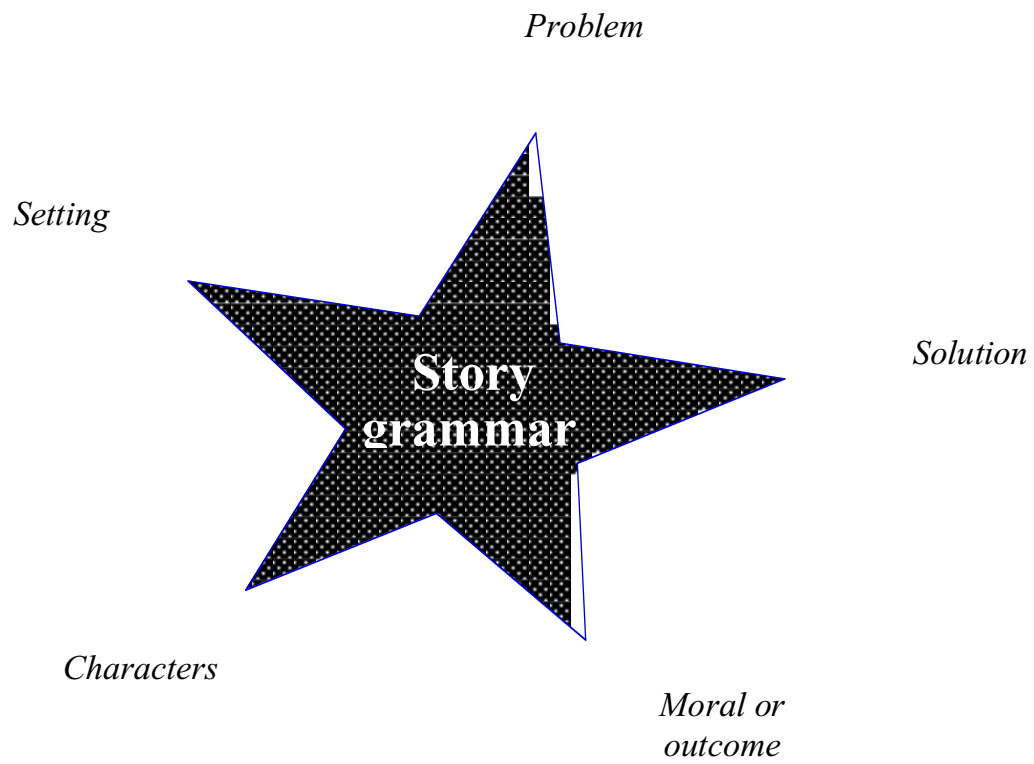
Venn Diagram



Relationship Map



Five-Pointed Star



Word Walls

Students benefit from having word walls available to them for spontaneous writing, review and reinforcement. As with graphical organizers, you are constantly adding to it over time.

You may be familiar with one type of word wall, a set of large charts that list words sorted by their initial letter, that is, a list of words that start with the letter a, words that start with b, et cetera.

Word walls can also help children see print relationships among words, such as words with common spelling patterns, rhyming words, and words that have the same prefixes or suffixes. You can also use word walls for grammatical categories, such as a list of adjectives or verb types (regular verbs, that end in -ed, and irregular verbs). Other ideas include words that can be both nouns and verbs, and comparative and superlative adjectives (e.g., big, bigger, biggest).

Charts and Posters

Charts and posters are additional ways to expose your students to print and word relationships. They can be as simple as a list of things to do, classroom rules, the daily schedule, or a diagram with labels. They can be store-bought or classroom-created. Some examples are color words, number words, a food pyramid chart, parts of a _____, things found in a _____, and types of letters and notes, with salutations and closings.

References on Teaching Strategies

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