Story Mapping

FOR-PD’s Reading Strategy of the Month September 2004
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Rationale:
Research shows that teaching students about the plan or structure of a story leads to improved comprehension (Trabasso & Bouchard, 2002; Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001). The structure or plan of narrative text is often referred to as story grammar. Story grammar involves three basic elements: setting, plot, and theme. A story is set in motion through characters presented with problems that they must solve. To facilitate comprehension and memory of stories, students need to know about the general structure of stories. One tool, teachers can use to help students understand story grammar is the story map. Story maps are templates that provide students a concrete framework for identifying the elements of narrative stories.

The basic elements of a story map are:

- **Setting** – when and where the story occurs
- **Characters** - the most important players in a story
- **Problem/Conflict** - the focal point around which the story is centered
- **Events** - the attempts by the main character(s) to resolve the problem or conflict
- **Resolution/Solution/Conclusion** - the outcome of the attempts to resolve the problem or conflict
- **Theme** - main idea or moral of the story

How to Use the Strategy:
To effectively use the strategy, teachers should model how to identify story grammar elements. First, introduce the story map by explaining the importance of story grammar. Most stories have certain elements in common. Remind students that most stories have a **beginning**, which includes the time of the story, **where** it takes place, and introduces the main character(s). An **event** then sets a problem or conflict in motion, which is followed by attempts to reach the goal or resolve the conflict. Finally, the **goal or conflict** is resolved in some way and the main character(s) react to the outcome.

Next, model how to complete a story map. Questions can be used to guide discussion:

- **Setting** – Where did the story occur? When did the story occur?
- **Character** – Who is the story mainly about? Who is the main character?
- **Problem/Conflict** – What major problem does the main character face? What does this character hope to achieve?
- **Events** – What did the main characters do?
- **Resolution/Conclusion** – Does the character solve the problem? How does the character solve the problem? Is the character defeated by the problem? Does the
character learn to live with the problem? How did the story end? How did the main character feel?

The teacher can then model how to use the story map to write a summary. Students should be given guided practice in developing story maps on books they are reading, independently or in class. Once students have an understanding of the basic story map, they can extend their understanding by focusing on a particular character.

Teachers and students should spend time reflecting on the use of this strategy. Questions that can guide this reflection include:

• "Why are story maps an excellent tool to summarize a story?"
• "How can story maps be used in developing original stories?"
• "How did this strategy help you as a reader?"

Adaptations:

• Students can use a story map as a pre-reading strategy. The teacher can introduce a book through a completed story map. By deleting some events, students can make predictions about what they think will happen in the story.
• Students can use their story maps as notes for oral book reports.
• Students can use story maps in preparing media presentations.
• Students can use story maps as a prewriting tool in developing their own stories. Teachers can also use story maps in writing conferences as a way to help students revise their story writing.
• In history, story maps can be used to organize a historical event or a current event article.
• In math, story maps can be used to help students solve open-ended math problems. Or students can use the story map to create their own math problems.
• In science, the story map can be modified and serve as a format for a laboratory investigation.

Ideas for Assessment:

One goal of reading is to maximize students’ interaction with text- the more students get involved with text, the higher the probability of them constructing meaning from text. The key concepts of this graphic organizer form the basis for evaluation. By looking at the information on the story map, teachers can quickly assess if the student has “gotten it.” Story retelling is an authentic way of assessing if the reader can identify key story elements. In story retelling, the student is asked to recount in their own words what they have read. Through the retelling, students should identify the major elements of story grammar. Teachers can allow students to use a story map to guide their retelling. A simple checklist can be used to assess the student’s ability.

Is the student able to?
• Name the characters
• Tell about the setting
• Tell about the problem
• Tell about the solution
• Tell about the beginning, middle, and end of the story
• Retell events in sequential order
• Include details from the story

References

