Contents

Introduction

Imagine that you've just walked into a first-grade classroom and are watching the teacher, who has the children's rapt attention as he finishes reading a picture book to the class. Once he finishes reading, he transitions into a lesson on story grammar. The students have already learned the concepts of character, setting, and plot. They are now learning how these elements fit together to create a story. The children excitedly recount the elements of the story while the teacher records and labels their responses on chart paper. At the end of the lesson, when the students are ready to work independently, their teacher passes out story-mapping graphic organizers as a follow-up assignment. Observing the students working independently, you realize that the story maps the students are completing are not the same. Taking a closer look, you notice slight differences, although the basic assignment seems to be the same. You have just walked into a classroom that uses leveled graphic organizers to differentiate student learning.

Differentiated Instruction

Tomlinson (1999) explains that teachers can modify three aspects of teaching: *content*, *process*, and *product*. When we differentiate by using leveled graphic organizers, we are modifying products.

We know that when we introduce a skill to a whole class (or even a subset of a class), the children in the group are not likely to learn at the same rate. Some will catch on to the skill faster than others, and some will be able to demonstrate their understanding in more complex ways than others. In order for all children to learn at an optimal pace, we must match children with a reinforcing activity that allows each one to be successful at a cognitively appropriate level. A teacher, for example, could provide whole-class instruction on character development, teaching students that a character's physical appearance, actions, and personality contribute to his or her development. After modeling how to identify and label character features, the teacher could have several students work on a graphic organizer in which they draw and write about a character's "outside" appearance and actions. Meanwhile, several other students might work on a graphic organizer that asks them to draw and write about the character's physical description and actions, and also what the character is thinking. Students might need to explain what all the features tell us about this character. Finally, the remaining students in the group would work on a graphic organizer in which they consider more deeply the "inside" and "outside" features of a character. (You can find leveled examples on pages 46–48.)

At all three levels, students are using the graphic organizers to reinforce the skill of character development that their teacher introduced to the entire group. Each student should feel successful because he or she was matched to a graphic organizer that was just right for him or her—one that was neither too easy nor too difficult.

Why Use Tiered Graphic Organizers?

In order to meet the diverse needs of students in today's classrooms, teachers must be able to design lessons that (1) meet individual instructional requirements, (2) stay within what is often mandated curriculum, and (3) ensure consistent outcomes for all students.

Time constraints place limits on the amount of individual instruction we can provide. In *Teaching Reading: Differentiated Instruction With Leveled Graphic Organizers*, we structure each whole-class mini-lesson around one central objective and then modify the follow-up activities—or student products—to meet student needs. First we teach a concept or skill to the entire class, and then we match students with graphic organizers that are "just right" for their developmental level.

When we "tier" the graphic organizers, we create planners on three levels: a *beginning* level, where students demonstrate a basic understanding of the target concept using pictures and a limited amount of writing; a *developing* level that is applicable for students who are ready to engage, with some support, in higher levels of thinking and writing than students using the beginning level organizers; and an *extending* level that is appropriate for students who are able to work, with limited support, on material that is more cognitively advanced than that of the lower two levels. Leveled graphic organizers make it possible for teachers to match each student with developmentally appropriate comprehension activities.

Although the leveled graphic organizers represent different degrees of complexity, we've designed each organizer in a set to look equally demanding and appealing. It's also important to note that graphic organizers are not end products; rather, they are planners that students use to record ideas for a subsequent activity. In the primary grades, students might work on individual organizers and then share their ideas orally in a whole-class discussion. Other times, students might use the organizers as planning tools for writing activities. In all cases, the organizers should be viewed as a means to an end, not a final product.

Building Concepts for Primary Students

A few years ago, we wrote *Teaching Reading Through Differentiated Instruction With Leveled Graphic Organizers* (Grades 4–8) (2002) and since then, a large number of primary-grade teachers have said to us, "We want leveled graphic organizers, too." And now they have them in this book, which addresses the developmental needs and interests of primary-grade children and emphasizes the need to build (as opposed to reinforce) concepts. Building a thorough understanding of literary concepts in the primary grades is crucial because these understandings form a foundation for a deeper development of these same concepts in the intermediate grades and beyond. Most students in the primary grades, for example, are probably just learning to summarize. They are learning both the term itself and the abstract idea that the word *summarize* represents. We introduce this complex concept and 14 others in this book. We begin with concrete examples and gradually move to abstract representations as we introduce each concept. It is important to note, too, that we include 15 reading skills and objectives that have been identified as important components of comprehension by researchers (Allington, 2001; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Miller, 2002; Pinnell & Scharer, 2003; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) and through our own classroom experiences.

Techniques offered in this book to build comprehension should not be taught in isolation or in the language arts block alone, but connected in practical ways to the entire curriculum. For instance, when the class is waiting in the auditorium for a program to begin, you can keep students focused by asking them to give you words that describe the auditorium, thereby reinforcing the concept of
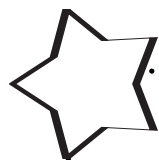
setting. If the program is a play, afterward you can lead a discussion about the characters, the setting, and the plot of the play and then reinforce these concepts with the story map organizer. Most primary-age students need time and reinforcement to gain conceptual understandings.

How Is This Book Organized?

One of the major goals of this book is to help students become effective, independent readers. Towards this end, we incorporate in each chapter the following components from Duke and Pearson's (2002) comprehension model:

1. An explicit description of the strategy as well as when and how it should be used

2. Teacher and/or student modeling of the strategy in action

3. Collaborative use of the strategy in action

4. Guided practice using the strategy with gradual release of responsibility

5. Independent use of the strategy

You'll notice, too, that each chapter contains the same organizational structure:

❋ Names and defines a target skill

❋ Provides an activity to use with students through which we introduce the skill and related concept

❋ Transitions from a concrete activity to a piece of quality literature in order to illustrate the concept in a more abstract form

❋ Offers a model lesson in which we provide direct instruction using the skill and prepare students for the tiered graphic organizers

❋ Includes three tiered graphic organizers: Beginning, Developing, and Extended

❋ Lists two or more picture books and one chapter book, with annotations, that teachers can use in follow-up lessons

Although we present the concepts individually, we urge teachers to model a flexible, multi-strategy approach to constructing meaning from texts.

We created the chapters in *Teaching Reading: Differentiated Instruction With Leveled Graphic Organizers* so they can be used as stand-alone chapters, to be used in any order that meets your needs and those of your students. The chapters can also be introduced as units of study that build on one another. For example, it might make sense to introduce the chapters on setting, character, and plot before you teach story mapping. In addition, the lessons and activities in this book can easily be incorporated into guided reading classrooms, used in conjunction with basal reading series, or used to reinforce concepts taught within literature circles.

Is This a Workbook?

No. This is not a reading workbook, even though some workbooks can be useful for some students. Workbooks are texts that can be used one time—once the answers have been recorded on a page, the workbook has served its purpose. Conversely, the activities in this book are open-ended and may be used over and over again as your students grow and develop.

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Effective teachers always strive to meet the needs of every student with whom they work. Leveled graphic organizers can assist in this process. Just imagine the possibilities they can afford your students.

Connections: Text to Self

Skill: Evoke personal connections to literature.

Description

Keene and Zimmerman (1997) in *Mosaic of Thought* discuss the effectiveness of encouraging students to make connections with the text they are reading. These connections are divided into three categories: connections to self, other text, and the world. To build this important concept for primary-grade children we decided to teach each concept independent of the others, although students may not always make connections that way. We begin with making connections to oneself because students naturally connect story characters and events to their own lives. For instance, losing teeth and other childhood events highlighted in picture books seem to instantly spark personal stories for most children. These memories—their personal connections—deepen children's interest in the story, their motivation to read, and their comprehension.

Getting to Know the Concept

Sharing with students how the stories you read together relate to your own life is the best way for students to understand this concept. To make these connections as real as possible for the students, begin by discussing an ordinary event that happened to you recently. For instance, last night you were having a drink of juice and stained your shirt or blouse; you were almost late to school because you couldn't find your keys; you went grocery shopping and realized you left your wallet at home. Most likely, before you even ask if something like this has happened to them, your students will be regaling you with similar stories. Explain to students that in the same way that we make connections to real-life stories, we also make connections to events that happen in books. To prepare them for a deeper understanding of characters' motives and feelings, ask them how they felt or behaved during the events they describe.

Teaching the Concept With Literature

The next step is to begin making students aware that these same types of connections can be made when they read. As we help children engage with

literature, we want to enhance their understanding by encouraging them to connect to the actions, emotions, or even the goals of the characters in stories. When children are first learning to make connections to self, select books that are about events that are likely to happen in their own lives.

Model Lesson

Choose a book with a protagonist and events students can really relate to, such as *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* (Viorst, 1972). Children sympathize with Alexander as he encounters such things as gum in his hair, a wet sweater, siblings getting prizes, sitting in the middle, and getting in trouble at school.

Prior to reading this story to the class, tell students that you are going to share some connections to your own life as you read the story. Explain that when you make connections to the story it is just like when they made connections to the events you shared from your own life. Tell them to listen carefully to the story, as you will be asking if they have any connections to share. Begin reading and when you find a connection, such as having had gum in your hair, share the connection with your students. Then encourage them to share a similar event in their lives. Ask how they felt when they

Thinking Cap

Draw what happened in the book, and what happened to you.
Write a sentence about it underneath the cap.

Book   You

Book Title

Beginning

Name _____ Date _____

Emotion Locomotion

Book title _____

In each train, write what happened in the book and a similar thing that has happened to you. Tell how it made you feel.

Book

You

feeling feeling   feeling feeling

book

You

Developing

11

Name _____ Date _____

Connectivity

Book title _____

Fill in the chart to show three text-to-self connections.

What happened in the book	What happened to you	How you felt	What you did

Extending

12

8

were in this situation, and what they did. Linking the story event to a real-life emotion or action leads them to a deeper understanding of the characters in the story. Continue making your own connections and soliciting them from your students as you read the rest of the book.

For additional practice, have each student complete an organizer at his or her skill level.

Graphic Organizers

Beginning: **Thinking Cap** (page 10)
Students make a connection between one or two events in the book and something they have done or something that has happened to them. For each situation, they draw what happened in the book and what happened in their own lives and then write a sentence describing these events.

Developing: **Emotion Locomotion** (page 11)
Students list two events from the book, name the corresponding events in their own lives, and describe how these situations made them feel.

Extending: **Connectivity** (page 12)
Students list three events from the book and make connections to their lives, telling how they felt and what they did in response to the situation.

Great Books for This Activity

Picture Books
Greene, R. G. (2004). *This is the teacher*. New York: Scholastic. This book is full of school experiences students can relate to.

Mayer, M. (1983). *Just go to bed*. Racine, WI: Western Publishing Company. This humorous book will have students relating to their own bedtime events.

Viorst, J. (1972). *Alexander and the terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day*. New York: Atheneum.

Chapter Book
Blume, J. (1981). *The one in the middle is the green kangaroo*. New York: Bantam-Double Day. This book is about a child who is always in the middle, yet never the center of attention.

Thinking Cap

Draw what happened in the book, and what happened to you.
Write a sentence about it underneath the cap.
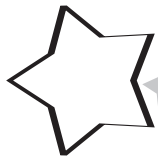
You

Book

Book Title

_____
_____
_____
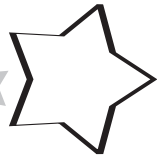_____
_____

10

Emotion Locomotion

Book title _____

In each train, write what happened in the book and a similar thing that has happened to you. Tell how it made you feel.
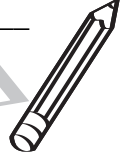
Book

You

feeling   feeling   feeling   feeling

Book

You

feeling   feeling   feeling   feeling

Connectivity

Book title _____

Fill in the chart to show three text-to-self connections.

What happened in the book	What happened to you	How you felt	What you did