



Determining Importance

Prescribed Learning Outcome (English Language Arts): B6 – (Grades 4,5,6,7) select and use strategies during reading and viewing to construct, monitor, and confirm meaning including determining the importance of ideas/events

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Learning Intention: to focus on the strategy of determining importance.

Resources:

Comprehension Connections – Bridges to Strategic Reading – Tanny McGregor

Strategies that Work – Teaching Comprehension for Understanding and Engagement – Stephanie Harvey & Ann Goudvis

Nonfiction Reading Power – Adrienne Gear

Activity/Lessons:

From *Comprehension Connections – Bridges to Strategic Reading* – Tanny McGregor

This lesson on determining importance works on the premise of how curious students are about their teacher's life. Like many of the lessons in McGregor's book, this one uses concrete objects to get the idea across. The idea is simple, you are going for a run and will not be able to take your purse, and therefore you will need to determine which items are important enough to take. Items from the purse such as the following are displayed:

- Car and house keys

- Driver's license
- Cell phone
- Pack of gum
- Inhaler
- Lipstick
- Old Navy coupon

Students turn and talk while you listen in on their conversations. Afterwards, pull the class together to share ideas. Remind them how this thinking strategy can make even complicated text easier to get through.

Also From *Comprehension Connections – Bridges to Strategic Reading* – Tanny McGregor

Using two cooking pots, a plastic strainer and partially cooked spaghetti, students will learn how to separate “fact from fluff”. With a large pot filled with spaghetti and warm water, ask students if they have ever noticed how difficult it is to remember everything you read? Add that our brains just can't hold everything. Thoughtful readers know how to remember the important points using a method called determining importance.

The demonstration serves as a model of what your brain does while reading. Slowly pour the water and spaghetti into a strainer with the empty pot below. Ask students to turn and talk about how good reading is like preparing spaghetti. Responses should sound something like the following:

- Your brain is like the strainer and the words are like the noodles.
- The spaghetti water is not important so you don't have to keep it.
- You want to keep only the good stuff in your brain when you read.
- Is this why my mom calls my head my noodle?

From *Strategies that Work – Teaching Comprehension for Understanding and Engagement* – Stephanie Harvey & Ann Goudvis

Do you catch yourself skipping subtitles and picture captions as you read non-fiction texts? Harvey and Goudvis remind us that using text features is a simple strategy that must be taught. Titles, headings, framed text and captions help readers determine importance. These features make non-fiction an accessible genre for reluctant and less experienced readers because they help scaffold understanding.

Getting students to create non-fiction feature books or pages is a technique in which students create these non-fiction features themselves.

Pictorial Examples:



Main Title

Non-Fiction Text Features

Picture

This is a picture of an adult meerkat.

Picture Caption

Sub Title Meerkats

Life Cycle
mammals, long tail, pups

Appearance
soft fur, rats, toes, feet

Food
mice, eggs

Meerkats
solitary (10-20)

Behaviors
cuddle together, stand guard, sits or stand

Habitat
grasslands, fields, underground burrows, Africa

Text
Meerkat
By Jessi

Meerkats are words learned about them I was in Africa where they dig under live where there are grasslands like sun and water. They are. Sometimes one meerkat stand burrows. When they wake up cuddle together. When they stays behind to watch the pup meerkats is the mongoose, 8 from ten to twenty. Meerkat kat babies are called pups. 8 long claws and soft fur they feet. There thirty cm. long a Meerkats like to eat eggs, it and small birds. Meerkats a kats are wonderful.

Map

From Nonfiction Reading Power – Adrienne Gear

Adrienne Gear uses a lesson to launch a determining importance unit that is similar to McGregor’s purse activity. In this lesson, students are asked to identify 15 items they would bring to a deserted island to help survive a year. Once students have chosen their 15 items, they are asked to narrow the list to only 10 items. (pg. 88, 89)

In another lesson, adapted from the work of S.L. Manz (2002), students are invited into the world of thieves. Ask if thieves generally know what they want to steal and where to find items? Further explain, that just like a good thief, a good reader knows where to go in the text to find the “good stuff.” Students make their own THIEVES bookmarks as a helpful reminder:

T – Title

H – Headings

I – Introduction

E – Every first sentence

V – Visuals

E – Ending

S- So what?

The acronym PEEK is suggested for use with primary children.

P – Pictures

E – Each heading

E – Ending

K – Know now? (What do I know now that might be important in this book?)

Using an open-ended question such as, “Find a way to show that you know what this book is about” provides a simple structure to teach children how to determine importance. Making two column notes and webs are structures that support this very important concept.

Main Idea Chapter _____	Details:
The Peas and saga in looking for their potatoes	They did down the hill and saw the sun at the bottom of the garden and they did down the hill at the bottom of the garden
	they did stand at the bottom of the garden and they did down the hill at the bottom of the garden



Another strategy suggested by Adrienne Gear involves turning each title and heading into a question and then reading to find the answer. This simple strategy requires virtually no prep, but works well in guiding readers into locating important key pieces of text.

Turn It into a Question

Name: _____ Date: _____

Title of Book: _____ Author: _____

Title or Heading	Turn It into a Question	Read to Answer the Question