

Module 21: Comprehension Instruction

Script for “Using Compare-Contrast” (Text Structure) Strategy

The lesson begins with the teacher explaining the strategy and its value and then modeling its use.

We talked last time about how an author’s purpose affects the way in that information is presented. And how the author uses some words that tip us off to the purpose of a text. So...for example, if I look at a text and it says, first, then, next, then, finally, I know that I’m reading directions for something.

Giving directions is just one purpose an author can have in writing. If I can figure out an author’s purpose, I’ll know what information to look for and how to organize it. And when I know how to organize the information in a text I’m better able to understand and learn from what I read.

Let me show you how I would do this with something other than directions.

The teacher reads aloud the following text:

Oranges and apples are both fruits that grow on trees. But orange trees need a warm climate to produce fruit, while apples can grow in most climates.

So...the first thing I ask myself is: “What is this about?” And I’m going to say it’s about apples and oranges. And then I ask myself: “What is the most important thing that the author is saying about apples and oranges?” Something I notice is that the author has used some words that tip me off to the purpose: both, but, and while. The word both tells me something that’s true of both oranges and apples. And the words but and while are signals to me that the author is telling me how apples and oranges are not the same. So, in this case, I would say that the author’s purpose is to say how apples and oranges are alike and how they are different. And to help me keep track of all this, I’m going to use a picture to organize the information.

The teacher draws a Venn diagram and narrates while doing so:

In the left hand circle, I’m going to put just what’s true of oranges. In the right circle, I’m going to put just what’s true of apples. And in the middle – the area that the 2 circles share, I’m going to put what’s true of both. So...on the left I’ll write “Oranges – need a warm climate” and on the right, I’ll put “Apples – grow in most climates”. And in the middle, I’ll put what’s true of both oranges and apples – they are both “fruit” and they both “grow on trees”. By using this picture, it’s easy for me to organize the information and remember it better.

Let’s try another one.

The teacher reads aloud the following:¹

The lion is often thought of as the king of the jungle, but the African wild dog may be a better hunter. Both lions and African wild dogs are pack animals and have females lead their hunts, but they have different hunting styles. Although lions are very fast, they do not have much stamina. They attack in short, ferocious bursts because they get tired quickly. On the other hand, African wild dogs are not very fast, but they have incredible stamina. They can run for hours and often chase their prey to exhaustion. Dr. George Schaller studied African wild dogs in the Serengeti and found that 9 out of 10 of their hunts ended in kills, while lions are only successful in 3 out of 10 hunts. So you see, it's not always good to be king.

Okay. What is this mostly about? I'd say it's mostly about two kinds of animals: lions and wild dogs. And again, I notice some words that are signaling to me to the author's purpose. Like before, I'm seeing the words but, both, but again, different, although, on the other hand, but again, and while. These words are telling me that the author's purpose is to compare and contrast these two kinds of animals.

Using the circles like before, I can organize what the author is saying. I'll put lions on the left, and wild dogs on the right. In the middle I'm going to put what's common to both. So I'm going to start there, since that's where the author started. Common things: they both "hunt", they "live in packs", and "females lead the hunts". That's interesting...I did not realize that. So now...how are they different? And I see that some of the differences have to do with "hunting style". So, I'm going to write that in each of the circles, and then list the differences that the author tells me about. Lions are "fast", "not much stamina", which if I read on a little farther I see has to do with how quickly they tire. For "hunting style", wild dogs are "not fast", but have "incredible stamina". I also see there's a difference in "hunting success". So I'm going to write that in each circle, and for lions I'm going to put "3/10 kills", and for wild dogs, "9/10 kills". Hmmm...that's quite a difference! Which would you rather have as an enemy?

So, let's try another one, this time together.

The teacher reads aloud the following:

Many people use the words *cyborg* and *android* interchangeably when, in fact, they have different meanings. Both terms refer to beings powered by robotics, but an android is powered entirely by robots. Though androids are completely mechanical, they are designed to look like humans. They may have synthetic skin, hair, and other features, but no human organs. On the other hand, cyborgs are part human and part machine. They may have robotic hands, legs, or eyes, but all cyborgs have surgically implanted technologies that enhance their abilities.

So...what is this mostly about? The teacher asks for the opinions of several students. If students say "robots", the teacher should ask: *Is it just about robots? Is it about all kinds of robots?*

¹ This text and the one that follows are texts found at <http://www.ereadingworksheets.com/text-structure/text-structure-worksheets>

Once students have recognized that the paragraph is about two kinds of beings: cyborgs and androids, then the teacher should ask: *So...are there any words here that tip us off to what the author's purpose is in writing about cyborgs and androids?*

Students should be helped to identify different, both, but, though, but, on the other hand, but.

So, what do these words tell us about the author's purpose?

Students should recognize that the author's purpose is to compare and contrast cyborgs and androids.

Following the same strategy I've been using, what should we do next?

Students should recognize that the next step is to draw and fill in the Venn diagram.

So...what should we put in the middle? How are cyborgs and androids alike? What does the author tell us? After giving students a few minutes to think, the teacher asks for opinions, honing in on the idea that both are powered by robotics.

What would be our next question? After students respond with "How are they different?", the teacher should ask, *And what does the author tell us about how they are different?*

Discussion should result in recognition that androids look human but are 100% machine, while cyborgs are part machine and part human.

The lesson should end with the teacher reminding students that when they recognize an author's purpose, it will help them to understand and remember. For today's lesson and the next few that follow, they have been looking at how to recognize when an author's purpose is to compare and contrast two or more things, and a way that they can organize and remember that information.