

Narratives in the Classroom

What is a narrative?

A narrative is a story, no matter how short or long it is. Components of a narrative can include character(s), setting, kick-off event, character emotions and plans, sequence of resultant events, a direct consequence of the event(s) and a resolution.

Why are narratives important?

Narratives provide a rich, contextual medium for learning language and social skills. They incorporate the use of all domains of language including speech sounds, vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, pragmatics and metalinguistics.

- The development of *oral* narrative skills directly impacts reading development.
- Students' narrative skills predict their reading comprehension skills.
- Poor narrators in kindergarten are at risk for reading difficulties in later grades.
- Use and understanding of narratives (stories) develops higher level language skills than interpersonal communication (conversation).
- Development of narrative skills is an important step to being able to write expository text.

The Progression of Narrative Development

Stage 1: Descriptive sequence (preschool age)

- includes character(s) and setting

Stage 2: Action sequence (preschool age)

- includes character(s), setting and a list of actions

Stage 3: Reactive sequence (preschool and kindergarten age)

- includes character(s), setting, a kick-off event and a list of actions that are the result of the kick-off event

Stage 4: Abbreviated sequence (early elementary age)

- includes character(s), setting, a kick off event, development of character emotions as they relate to the kick-off event and a conclusion to the story/direct consequence of events

Stage 5: Complete episode (late elementary age)

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- includes character(s), setting, kick-off event, emotion(s), character plan or intention, events that are the result of the interaction between the kick-off and the character's plan, a direct consequence of the events and a resolution

Stage 6: Complex episode (early adolescent age)

- includes all of the elements from stage 6, but one or more events cause a kick-off event for a new narrative
- may involve multiple embedded narrative chains

Stage 7: Interactive episode (late adolescent age)

- includes all previously described elements
- two characters have separate goals and actions that influence one another

How to support narrative development in your classroom

- Be aware of the expected level of narrative skill for the age group you are teaching. Young students are not expected to produce or understand complex narratives!
- Use story organizers, such as the Story Grammar Marker or Webber Story Builder during whole-class and small group instruction. This will help reinforce narrative concepts.
- When reading stories with your students, work together to identify the narrative components of the story you are reading. Use of consistent visuals with students helps to reinforce learning of narrative components.
- Focus on how the kick-off event relates to subsequent events in the story, including the character's emotional and cognitive reaction. This 'critical thinking triangle' is the core of understanding the remainder of the story.
- Rather than using a standard 'beginning-middle-end' rubric to help students write stories and understand stories, talk about more specific components such as those listed above with the appropriate stage of the student's narrative development

Resources in Henry Grube library:

Story Grammar Marker Kit (published by MindWing)

Webber Story Builder (published by Webber)

References:

Cain, K., & Oakhill, J. V. (1996). The nature of the relationship between comprehension skill and the ability to tell a story. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 14, 187-201.

Fey, M. E., Catts, H. W., Proctor-Williams, K., Tomblin, J. B., & Zhang, X. (2004). Oral and written story composition skills of children with language impairment. *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research*, 47, 1301-1318.

Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

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