

# Story Grammar

Short, E.J., & Ryan, E.B. (1984). Metacognitive differences between skilled and less skilled readers: Remediating deficits through story grammar and attribution training. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 76*, 225-235.

This reading comprehension strategy was designed to provide students with a strategic plan for selecting important aspects of story information for further study by asking themselves the five “wh” questions.

## **Stage 1: Develop and Activate Background Knowledge**

Prior to teaching the strategy, it is necessary to evaluate the student's background knowledge. Using this in a classroom where the teacher is familiar with the students and their reading abilities will provide a lot of this information. Formal or informal assessments can be used to determine what skills the students possess and what skills they lack; doing a task analysis will provide the information for identifying the skills necessary to successfully complete the strategy.

### **Task Analysis for Story Grammar Strategy:**

- Ability to read at the grade level that the book is written
- Knowledge of and ability to identify story parts (the “wh” questions)
- Knowledge of story characters; how they are sometimes presented in texts
- Knowledge of story setting
- Knowledge of story actions
- Ability to check for understanding
- Ability to turn thoughts into writing
- Ability to recall information that has been read
- Knowledge of emotions: how they are sometimes presented in texts
- Knowledge of story endings/resolutions

Initially, it will be necessary to determine students' levels of reading fluency; a running record will be done with each student to determine this. Students will also be given an informal survey.

### Sample Survey

|   |             |              |              |                       |   |
|---|-------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------------|---|
| Name: _____   | Date: _____ |              |              |                       |   |
| 1 = Strongly agree  | 2 = Agree   | 3 = Not sure | 4 = Disagree | 5 = Strongly Disagree |   |
| 1. I understand and am able to answer “wh” questions.                               | 1           | 2            | 3            | 4                     | 5 |
| 2. I am able to read and understand narrative texts.                                | 1           | 2            | 3            | 4                     | 5 |
| 3. I can pick out characters and identify the main character in stories.            | 1           | 2            | 3            | 4                     | 5 |
| 4. I can describe/pick out settings (time & place) of stories.                      | 1           | 2            | 3            | 4                     | 5 |
| 5. I understand where a story ends and how it is finalized.                         | 1           | 2            | 3            | 4                     | 5 |
| 6. I can understand and describe character emotions/feelings from text that I read. | 1           | 2            | 3            | 4                     | 5 |
| 7. I can understand and describe the main characters' actions.                      | 1           | 2            | 3            | 4                     | 5 |
| 8. I am able to identify key words or phrases as they relate to the topic.          | 1           | 2            | 3            | 4                     | 5 |
| 9. I know if I understand what I have read or not.                                  | 1           | 2            | 3            | 4                     | 5 |
| 10. I am able to recall information that I have read.                               | 1           | 2            | 3            | 4                     | 5 |
| 11. I am able to put my thoughts about text that I read into writing.               | 1           | 2            | 3            | 4                     | 5 |

Following the survey, teachers' observations, teacher directed questioning, and any other information collecting should be completed to ensure that students possess the prerequisite skills for the strategy and may establish any deficits.

### Stage 2: Discuss the Strategy

This stage is the first stage in 'initiating' the strategy. In this stage it is important to be up front and open with the students about what you are doing and why it is to their benefit to learn the strategy. It is important to stress the relevance of reading. Brainstorm with the students any possible situations where reading stories accurately is important. *“When would it be important for you to read a story accurately?”*

- For a test
- For an assignment
- Making an informed decision
- Learning more about something or someone of interest to you
- Enjoyment
- To gain information for enrichment
- Be able to answer comprehension questions and get work completed so you don't miss recess
- Get work done quicker and better so you don't have homework

- Parents will be proud of you
- Get on honor roll, or some other form of achievement

### Sample Script

When I'm reading a story I like to ask myself several questions to help me remember the information. What do you do to remember ideas when you read? Do you use questions? There are five important questions you can ask yourself to help you remember the information that you are reading and they are all included in the story grammar strategy. The "wh" questions are a good way for me to remember important information when reading a story. Can you guess what these questions are?

These are the five "wh" questions:

- \*\*Who is the main character?
- \*\*Where and when did the story take place?
- \*\*What did the main character do?
- \*\*How did the story end?
- \*\*How did the main character feel?

Why would we need to know all of that? If we answer these questions we will know practically everything that happened in the book. We can use this information to write a paper or another story, or to answer questions about the story that someone asks us. We can even use this information to tell our friends about this cool book we read! If we don't understand this information or if we get it wrong, we may not be able to answer questions about the book or even continue reading without getting confused. That wouldn't be very good.

What details should we look for when reading the story? For example, do you know what a character is? A character is a person or an animal. They are the main people in the story and are involved in most of the action. They should be easy to find in the story because they are everywhere!

I know that you are a good reader, but these questions will help you to become even better. I bet you have even been using some of these questions when you read without even knowing it. Why do you think these questions would help you remember the important points in the story? I know when I ask myself these questions I mark information with sticky tabs and then I write down the information that I found.

The neat thing is, I know these questions really do work. I had a group of three students and after they started using these five "wh" questions when reading, their comprehension improved so much that they are moving right into chapter books now! I am so proud of them, and you know what? They thought it was easy to

answer these five questions. Do you think you can do it too? Can you use the “wh” questions while you read? Can you tell me what they are again?

A technique used to enhance the effectiveness of this strategy is using sticky tabs to locate information. Students will be given color-coded sticky tabs to identify the different parts of the story grammar strategy. For example: Blue sticky tab = Who is the main character? The wall chart and the students prompt cards will be color-coded to correspond to the color of sticky tabs the student will be given to use.

**Who is the main character?**

**Where and when did the story take place?**

**What did the main character do?**

**How did the story end?**

**How did the main character feel?**

### **Stage 3: Model the Strategy**

A wall chart will serve as a guide during the modeling process. Cue cards will also be provided so that each student will have their own personal reminder of the strategy prompts. The teacher will need to use a “think aloud” to demonstrate the use of the strategy. The teacher will use a graphic organizer (see figure 1) when modeling the process to show the students how to organize the information they marked with their sticky tabs.

### **Sample Script**

Okay. What is it I have to do? I need to read this book, Arthur Meets the President. To be a more effective reader I can use my Story Grammar Strategy. Just to make sure I remember all of the story part questions I will use the wall chart or my cue card to help me.

Let’s see, first I should review the questions that I want to know. *Who is the main character? Where and when did the story take place? What did the main character do? How did the story end? How did the main character feel?* Okay, I can do this! I will just start reading and keep referring back to my prompt card to make sure I am on track.

{Read page 1} Hmm . . . a few characters were mentioned, but from what I already know about reading other books like this one, and by reading the title, I think Arthur is the main character. I will put a blue sticky tab by his name because I want to remind myself that he is the main character and on my cue card the main character question is in blue. I'm sure Arthur is the main character, he always is. Ok, that was easy, I can do this!

What are the next questions? *When and where did the story take place? What did the main character do?* Well, from what I know now the story takes place at Arthur's school, in his classroom, I'm not sure if this is the main setting in the book, but I will put a red sticky tab by that and come back to it after I have read some more. I put a red sticky tab there because my wall chart shows the where and when question in red. I'm not sure what he did. I better read on to find out. {Read page 2} Hmm . . . I was right, right now the story is taking place in Arthur's classroom, but I'm still not sure if that is the main setting of the story, and it really doesn't say when it took place. I do know that it is during the school year, but I don't know exactly what day it is, or what time of the day it is. This isn't very specific, but I know it is a time and that answers the when question. There really isn't a place for me to put my sticky note, so I will just jot that down on my story grammar organizer right here where it says "when."

Ok, the other question that I wasn't sure about was the "What." I now know that Arthur is writing a paper about 'How I Can Help Make America Great.' I'm going to put a pink sticky note by that because that's the color of my "what" question. I better keep reading.

{Read pages 3& 4}. Wow, this is getting exciting! The story is still taking place at school. I want to keep reading. {Read pages 5 & 6} Wow, Arthur won! His class is going to Washington D.C., to the White House. That's it; that is the setting, which really makes sense, since the title of the book is Arthur Meets the President, and I know that the president lives in the White House which is in Washington D.C. I am going to mark that with a red sticky tab because that is a place and that fits my "Where" question.

This is easy, I just need to read on, keeping in mind the last two questions, and make sure I was right about the action and setting. What are the last two questions again, Hmmm . . . I know, *How did the story end? How did the main character feel?* Ok, I should keep reading. {Read pages 7 & 8} Hmm . . . here is another action. Arthur needs to memorize the paper that he wrote so that he can recite it in front of the President. I think there is more than one action. Really, there is a kind of a chain of actions and reactions. I will mark them with pink sticky tabs. Let's see, first Arthur wrote a paper on how to make the world a better place I already marked that, then he won the writing contest, I will mark that, then he had to memorize his paper to recite it for the President, I will mark that also. Ugh, this is getting long, I have used a lot of sticky tabs, but I know this will help me later when I need to answer my comprehension questions.

I should keep reading, to see what else happens. {Read pages 9, 10, & 11} Another thing, Arthur was nervous and worried, really, that is how he felt. I think I should mark that with a green sticky tab. I know this is a feeling that Arthur had because it says that he was too worried to sleep

I better keep reading and see what happens next. {Read pages 12 through 20}. There was some more action. Arthur and his class and family flew to Washington, Arthur practiced reciting his paper, and the class toured Washington, D.C. I will mark all of those with pink sticky tabs. There was also more in there about how he felt. It said that he was very nervous about reciting his paper. That's the same feelings he had before. I will mark that again with a green sticky tab.

{Read pages 21 through 22} More action. Oh, no Arthur's note cards got blown away! This made him even more nervous. I better mark both of those, pink for the cards and green for the nervous part. This really is getting exciting; I want to read more.

{Read pages 23 through 25, the end} Let's see, I am coming close to the end, and by the end I need to have all the questions answered, or be able to answer them. Arthur started to give his speech (action – pink), and everyone started to laugh (action – pink). They were laughing at D.W. she was trying help Arthur, and was hanging in a tree (action – pink).

Oh, I am already to the last page, this is how the story ends. Arthur then recited his paper and felt really good about himself, because his whole paper was about helping others. D.W. helped him, and he was happy because of it. I will mark that with a purple sticky tab because the story-ending question on my story grammar strategy chart is in purple.

Now I can go back and fill in all of my questions on my story grammar organizer. I already have all of the answers to these questions marked with sticky tabs so they should be easy to find, and I already have part of the setting written down.

I will start with "Who" I know those are the blue tabs... Then I will go to the red ones because I know those are the "Where and When" or setting ones. . . . Next I will do the pink ones, which are the action ones, or the "What" question. . . . Then I will go to my purple tab and write down how it ended. . . . Last, I will look at my green tabs and write down how he felt.

Yippee, I'm done! That really did help. I was able to answer all of my story grammar questions.

Once modeling has been completed, the student will be asked to discuss what they thought. Do they think this will be something useful for them, and why or why not.

How do they think they will use the strategy? What would they have done differently? Do they have any questions about what I did?

#### **Stage 4: Memorize the Strategy**

Memorizing the strategy is extremely important! We want the students to focus on the task and not on the steps of the strategy. The activities themselves are not important. The important part is whether or not they facilitate memorization. To begin students may use their prompt cards to assist them in committing the strategy to memory.

#### **Memorization Activities**

- 1) Pair up and recite the stages with a partner, explaining what needs to be answered or what each question is asking for.
- 2) Students will make their own cue cards with the strategy steps on them. The teacher will make sure that all steps are complete and accurate.
- 3) Memory Circle – Students form a circle around one person. The person in the middle calls out the “wh” word part of the prompt, and points to someone who has 5 seconds to accurately state the rest of the question. If they don't get done within the 5 seconds then they go to the middle.
- 4) Students will be prompted during various times of the day to recite different questions in the strategy, and will be rewarded for correct responses.

#### **Stage 5: Support the Strategy**

In this stage scaffolding is important. With scaffolding it is possible for a gradual transfer of strategy performance from teacher to student. This is possibly the most critical part of the process; students need to be given adequate time and support to master the strategy.

With teacher direction students will, as a class, read a story and answer the questions using the story grammar strategy. The teacher will continue to model the use of the strategy, sticky tabs, and graphic organizer. During this time the teacher can encourage student participation by asking for input at appropriate times so that they begin to use the strategy on their own.

Students will initially be put into pairs assigned by the teacher. This will allow them to consult with others while reading and using the strategy. Students will be paired according to their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their ability to work together.

The teacher will support the strategy by working collaboratively with students, in pairs and on an individual basis, making sure they are using the strategy appropriately. By doing this the teacher will be able to give support when necessary and provide corrective feedback, while fading help over time, slowly allowing students to take ownership.

Students will be given short stories to read and use the strategy with. The stories will be relevant to the curriculum currently being taught. This way, students can use the strategy in a relevant situation, which will enable them to see its usefulness.

The students will set individual goals with the teacher for reaching mastery of the strategy. These goals will help guide them to independent performance. The teacher will need to be aware of the progress that students are making toward their goals. If a student is having difficulty reaching his/her goal, it may be necessary to reassess the situation. Reteaching the strategy or clarifying uncertainties may be necessary. In other cases, readjusting the goal may be in order for the student to be successful.

Students will be encouraged to use their cue cards and the wall chart to guide them through the strategy steps. As students move closer to mastery, prompts will be removed so that the student does not completely rely on them.

Students need to show mastery of the strategy steps and their use, as well as their own regulation of the strategy. Each student needs to be able to demonstrate the use of the strategy by doing his or her own "think aloud." When the student has successfully demonstrated use of the strategy he/she is ready to move on to independent practice. The time that it takes for students to reach this level of mastery will vary.

### **Stage 6: Independent Performance**

During this final stage students will be given a variety of narrative prose passages. The student will be required to use the strategy and turn in their answers to the questions for teacher review. The teacher's role has now changed; the main focus of the teacher will be to monitor the student's performance. The teacher must evaluate the student's success through assessing increases in achievement. This can be done through the use of curriculum-based measures. The teacher will only intervene when students need clarification or their performance is decreasing in quality.

Students may modify the strategy to personalize it; this is fine as long as they are still successful. At this point, it is not so much following the steps that matters, it



is the fact that the students can be successful at reading the given text, answering essential comprehension questions, and recalling important information.

As a teacher, it is important to constantly monitor students. It may be necessary or helpful to return to earlier stages and reinforce the strategy. This is normal.

In order for students to generalize the strategy and use it in a variety of settings it is essential that other teachers are aware of strategy steps and how to use the strategy.

# Figure 1: Story Grammar Organizer

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Author \_\_\_\_\_

