

## **Behind-the-Lesson: Teacher Planning Notes**

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**Grade/Subject:** 1st Grade, Language Arts – Reading Comprehension/Retelling

**School:** Crestwood Elementary School

**Tch Video:** Academic Choice: Comprehending & Retelling a Story

### **1. At what point in the year did you teach this lesson?**

I taught the lesson during the third quarter, at the end of February. Our third quarter pacing guide focuses on the elements of fiction, including characters, setting, and the sequence of important events and details from the beginning, middle, and end of stories we have read.

### **2. What lessons or learning happened before you taught this lesson?**

Prior to students selecting their academic choices, we compared fiction and nonfiction and created an anchor chart for the classroom for ongoing comparison. Students grew in their understanding that fictional stories include make-believe or impossible events and may include animals talking. In their comparison of fiction and non-fiction, students reviewed the purpose of why we would read a particular text. Non-fiction texts help us learn facts and information, but we read fictional stories for entertainment and fun. After the overview, the class began reading different versions of the fairy tale “Goldilocks.” By the end of the unit, the class had read and reread approximately 10 different versions. After the first rereading of the original version, the class spent approximately two days focusing on characters (people, animals, etc.) and then two days focusing on settings (where and when). The class continued to read different versions while focusing on sequencing the important events and details using a graphic organizer.

### **3. What materials/resources did you use when planning this lesson?**

1. VA Standards of Learning and the Fairfax County Public Schools Program of Studies
2. “Learning Through Academic Choice” – Text by Paula Denton Ed.D., Northeast Foundation for Children (NEFC) and Responsive Classroom
3. Learning Profile – Developed by my colleague and previous university supervisor, Kim Amenabar
4. The Academic Choice form I developed based on NEFC’s “Learning Through Academic Choice” book
5. Smart Board Notebook file I created for mini-lesson on using character names
6. Bag of character names for pairs to use during the mini-lesson



#### **4. How did you assess student learning?**

I assessed student learning and progress through observation of the elements each student was including in their project. As they worked, I observed and encouraged them to talk about what they were creating (clay, painting, and drawing, acting out with props) or including (writing). I asked questions about the elements they were including. I made anecdotal notes of the elements they explained either orally or in writing, both when prompted and unprompted (e.g., using the characters' names and naming the setting, and using transition words such as first, next, then, after that, and finally). To assess if they forgot information or just had not gotten to that point yet, I would ask them to tell me about their next steps.

As students neared the final work date, they signed up to conference with me to share their projects in preparation for their class presentation. During this time, I used our criteria for finished work rubric to assess their understanding and level of completion.

#### **5. What happened after you taught this lesson? How did your assessment guide next steps?**

Students continued to work on their academic choices during Daily Five time. Daily Five is how our language arts block is structured, and students choose to work on either Read to Self, Read to Someone, Listen to Reading, Writing, or Word Work when they are not working with a teacher. We ended up having additional snow days and delays, which affected our ability to work on the projects regularly. Also, the Play-Doh did not stay malleable, so we had to throw out some projects and begin again with modeling clay that never dries out! As a result, the project period extended longer than originally planned.

Based on my individual conferencing, I was able to see that the majority of students were including all of the characters and settings. However, a few did leave out one of the three key events (e.g., skipped to chairs before talking about the porridge). This showed me that we needed to practice sequencing key events in the story. As a result, I added two additional lessons in which we used photos from one of the original versions, to sequence the story as a class, and then a follow up lesson in which we sequenced photos of this version of the story in small groups. I was then able to pull a small group of three students, which included my student who is a selective mute, for additional opportunities to assess their understanding. Upon further conferencing, I was able to see that students were including main events, as well as details (e.g., too salty, too sweet, just right for the porridge) with more accuracy.

I was then able to move beyond the recall of specific story events to begin lessons on making either text-to-self connections or text-to-text connections between the different versions of the story. For example, in one of the versions, it discussed how Goldilocks was a sassy girl who never minded her mother. Not only did we learn about the phrase minding your mother (vocabulary that may not be familiar to second language learners), but we then were also able to make connections to times we did not listen to our families and the consequences that may have come as a result of those choices. We also began to compare and contrast the versions in greater detail. Taking the time to really understand the characters, settings, and sequence of events really opened up our abilities with the higher level thinking opportunities. Students also grew in their creativity as to what they wanted to add in their own written versions of the fairy tale. For example, one student decided that because Papa Bear was such a big bear, he would need to drink a lot of water and so water had to be on his bedside chest or table.

As we moved into our measurement unit in math, we integrated this with our “Goldilocks” work. At the end of most of the versions, Goldilocks jumps out of the Three Bears’ window. I gave the students a challenge to design a window using measurements that would help Goldilocks jump out of the window safely. They had to use square tiles for their window measurements, and all windows had to be at least 5 square tiles wide and 7 square tiles long. It was interesting to see the creative designs and plans for how to meet the measurement requirements. I was also able to differentiate and easily see who needed extra support with length and height and carefully measuring end-to-end without spacing the tiles. I was also able to easily assess who was ready for discussing the concept of half a tile or half an inch. For example, when the measurement really was 4 and  $\frac{1}{2}$ , some would say 5 and  $\frac{1}{2}$ . This showed me they were using but confusing the concept of  $\frac{1}{2}$  and ready for a deeper discussion.

## **6. What did students do well in this lesson/unit?**

During the Smart Board lesson in which I used pronouns in place of the characters’ names, the first grade friends picked up on my omissions without hesitation during the read aloud of the prepared text. Once I read, “Soon she came to the house and went inside,” they began asking out loud “Who?” An added bonus was that one student noticed that I was not specific in naming the setting either, and when I read “the house,” she quickly asked, “Whose house?” This was evidence that the class understood the necessary elements to include in a retelling to demonstrate their comprehension; and they were taking on the responsibility of using the characters’ names and specifics for the setting and events as we continued. Overall, most of the first grade friends were engaged with the character cards, while one friend selected



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the correct name at the Smart Board. They quickly knew which character name to pull out and show as our reading of the text continued.

As students began to select their individual academic choices, or the way they wanted to show their comprehension of “Goldilocks,” it was interesting to see how they explained their actual choices in comparison to how they said they like to learn best on their learning profiles. It was exciting for me to hear them share in a genuine way. For example, one girl had originally selected role play/acting on her learning profile, but then chose creation with modeling clay. In my own reflection, I realized that I was just assuming students wanted to use the Play-Doh/modeling clay due to the novelty of the material. However, she honestly shared that she got nervous about acting out the story. This was powerful because I was able to acknowledge her nerves and fear as real feelings, but was also able to push her a bit past her comfort zone. When I encouraged her to show how she would act it out, she acted out how she would make the character Baby Bear sound. While she ultimately did not act out/perform the entire story, she had an opportunity to try a new way of showing her learning. I am hoping she will consider this as an option in the future, particularly because she is so verbal and animated. However, that being said, I have to be careful to make sure I am not putting upon them the choice that I think they will do best at, but rather continuing to give them the option to try out different ways to come to a realization on their own of how they do their best learning and are most engaged.

Overall, I think my first grade friends did an outstanding job of using retelling vocabulary, including character, setting, events, and transition words (such as first, in the beginning, next, then, after that, at the end, or finally, etc). While I hope to set up lessons that push beyond basic recall by having them make thoughtful comparisons and connections between texts, considering the majority of friends in our class are second language learners, this was definitely a success for key vocabulary acquisition and understanding.

### **7. What did students struggle with? How did you make adjustments for students who struggled?**

Students showed great success with including all of the elements in a retelling. Since academic choice in this particular format was introduced later in the year, they needed more time to become familiar with the format and materials. In the beginning, they seemed more interested in the materials than using the materials for the purpose of retelling. This showed me that I need to make sure they have time to use the materials through a “Guided Discovery” prior to being expected to use them to demonstrate their understanding.

My first grade friends did not always match their academic choice with their preferred/selected learning style. I anticipated that students who picked writing or



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acting may have been wooed or distracted by the modeling clay/Play-Doh option. However, at the time of the lesson, I did not see much benefit in making their choice

match their stated/preferred learning style. I made adjustments for this by having the students talk through their selections to hopefully stretch them beyond fears and hesitation, and also to begin helping them reflect on their own thinking and how they learn and work best.

Focus during independent work can always be a challenge with first grade students and just where they are at developmentally. While some friends may not have been on task 100% of the time, having choice that they selected did add to the engagement level.

Telling the whole story in an oral report can be overwhelming and intimidating for second language learners and learners with various speech and special needs. This is why I love using academic choice, which naturally lends itself to differentiation. I have several students with either focusing, speech, or language needs. For example, one boy, who is a selective mute, did not have to worry about relying on only an oral report. In the event that he did, he would have been able to demonstrate his understanding of the story and growth as a reader who can retell. Having nonverbal options available helped him not only demonstrate his success but also FEEL successful. It is my hope that this continual boost in his confidence will help him feel comfortable to speak in class.

Similar to retelling the story solely in an oral report, having to write the whole story can be intimidating and overly challenging to students with motor difficulties or visual motor challenges. Again, having these various options available gave students a chance to participate in a way they felt comfortable and engaged.

### **8. If you taught this lesson/unit again, what would you do differently?**

Due to my year being erratic with extra county and state roles and events as the 2014 Virginia Teacher of the Year, I had not been able to introduce academic choice in this format as early as I would have liked this year. Had the class been using the modeling clay and paints earlier, this would have cut down on the “Guided Discovery” time on how to use the materials, and would have given more hands on creation time from the start.

I also would have had the modeling clay option as a work tool and free time tool much sooner – again to ward off the novelty versus honest reflection on how they learn best and how they might like to show their thinking. Also, this would introduce materials sooner to those who may not realize they enjoy sharing their thinking and learning through building, or painting, etc.



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