

Informational Text Reading Strategies

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Purpose

The purpose of this minilesson is to give students some strategies they can use in a variety of reading situations to glean meaning from informational texts. Students are often intimidated by informational texts or are bored with textbook reading. By equipping them with effective reading strategies, it is my hope that they will not only be more informed, but come to enjoy reading informational texts as well.

Objectives

Objective: *Analyze and evaluate informational materials that are read, heard, and/or viewed by...determining importance of information...monitoring comprehension*

Materials

- Transparency of *Winter Ice* from the October 2004 National Geographic
- Overhead markers

Lesson

“Today, we’re going to work on some strategies for helping you to read informational texts. First, I want to show you how I go about reading one of my favorite informational texts, *National Geographic*. Here’s part of an article from the October edition that I want to share with you and have you help me with. *(Put up transparency of Winter Ice to show students.)*”

“Now when I read this, or any other informational text, I look for clues and key words. What kind of key phrases might I be looking for? *(possible answers include lists, headings, topic sentences and other features that help highlight important information)*”

“Let’s look together for some of those key phrases in this article.” *(students may suggest headings, title, numeric data, quotations, and other important information)* Give students the handout on reading strategies for informational texts. “This handout is for you to keep in your notebooks and nearby when you’re reading informational texts in the library or elsewhere. I’d like to draw your attention to the color-coding system at the bottom of the handout. As a class, when you’re reading informational texts that I give you copies of, I’d like you to use this color-coding system with those handouts. You can use similar strategies with your notes from this class and others. These are just a few ways for you to gain more meaning from informational texts so that they will not be as confusing and overwhelming as I know sometimes they seem.”

Follow-up

To follow up this activity, I would periodically check students' notes to see how they're doing with the color-coding system. I would also try giving them other informational articles to have them mark with highlighters or pencil and then have them summarize the essential and important information.

Reading Strategies for Informational Texts Handout

As you read any informational text (newspaper article, textbook, magazine article, brochure, credible website, etc.), try using some of these strategies to help you find the meaning in the text.

As you read your text, look for one or more of these factors:

- Headings and subheadings
- Lists
- Diagrams and figures (these give you a brief overview of lots of information)
- Special features (you might be tempted to skip these, but they're often packed with interesting informational tid-bits)
- Dates or places (especially in your social studies reading)
- New vocabulary (you might find a lot of this in science or math, but also other subject areas)

You might find it helpful to color code your notes or text. For example, you might use a system something like this:

- Green: dates
- Yellow: places or people
- Orange: topic sentences or main ideas
- Pink: new vocabulary or other items you have more questions about
- Blue: diagrams or figures you find particularly helpful in understanding the information in the text

Winter Ice by John L. Eliot

(taken from October 2004 National Geographic)

Let a raven drop a bone onto the ice or the aromas from a hunter's cook tent waft from a mile away, and a small white shadow will soon materialize to investigate—an arctic fox. Near Hudson Bay a fox's curious nose pokes around a knifelike ridge of ice. "It is the friendliest and most trusting of the North American foxes, although it is characterized...as 'impudent'," wrote naturalist Barry Lopez.

In winter these small, almost delicate foxes range over huge areas seeking rodents or mammal carcasses. Some cross more than 600 miles of pack ice in 40-below-zero conditions. The species expanded in the Arctic at the end of the last warm interglacial period, about 120,000 years ago. Evolution equipped them with small ears, short muzzles, and thick fur to minimize heat loss. Their feet are fur-covered, like hares'—hence their scientific name, *Alopex lagopus*, or "hare-footed fox".

Play or Predation? Hunting ringed seal pups born in small caves under the snow in Norway's Svalbard archipelago, a fox rears up, jumps on a den, and dives in headfirst. Pups often escape from the den into open water. The foxes tag along with polar bears in winter to scavenge leftover seal carcasses.

Arctic foxes' most vital food source—or lack thereof—is a little fur ball called the lemming. Problem is, the rodents aren't reliable. "They don't commit mass suicide: That's a myth popularized by an old Walt Disney film," says James D. Roth, an ecologist at the University of Central Florida who has studied Hudson Bay foxes. "But lemmings do follow a natural boom-and-bust cycle. About every four years they're super-abundant, then they crash for one year, and gradually increase until the next peak." With a circumpolar range, arctic foxes probably total several hundred thousand, with wide fluctuations because of variations in the lemming populations...