Informational Texts: Building Background with English Learners

Nancy Frey, PhD
www.fisherandfrey.com
A little background about reading development
To build strength

To build stamina
To build strength

To build stamina

Less Complex

More Complex
Constrained and Unconstrained Reading Skills
Constrained Skills

Phonemic Awareness

Phonics

Fluency
Unconstrained Skills

Comprehension

Vocabulary
Activated and built receptively and expressively.

Background Knowledge
We use background knowledge to make sense of new information.
Background Knowledge is Like a Teenager’s Closet...

Just because the backpack is in there, doesn’t mean he can find it!
How People Learn

Organized: Know where to find it

Conditionalized: Know when it is needed

Transferable: Know how to apply it to new situations

Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000
Strongest middle school readers utilized their background knowledge of how web-based information was organized in order to search efficiently and accurately.

Background Knowledge’s Impact on Digital Literacy
• Vocabulary serves as a proxy for what a learner knows
• Volume of word knowledge a child possesses at school entry predicts school achievement (Hart & Risley, 1995)
• Correlated to performance on standardized tests (Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986)
something that is read
a copy of a printed work offered for distribution

interpret something that is written or printed
have or contain a certain wording or form
look at, interpret, and say out loud something that is written or printed
obtain data from magnetic tapes

Visual Thesaurus
Knowing Words is Not Enough

*Conceptual understanding matters.*
3 Practices to Promote Background Knowledge

• Assess what students already know

• *Plan lessons and activities* that build background knowledge

• *Design ways to activate* students’ knowledge by having them interact with content
## Assessing Your Practice

### Self-Assessment of Background Knowledge

**How do teachers foster background knowledge across the school day?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge of Misconceptions</th>
<th>Units include discipline-specific misconceptions that are directly assessed. Explicit teaching is designed to interrupt misconception.</th>
<th>Units include discipline-specific misconceptions. These are assessed, but are not directly addressed in teaching.</th>
<th>Misconceptions are sometimes included and may or may not be assessed or directly addressed in teaching.</th>
<th>Awareness of some discipline-specific misconception. These are integrated into some aspects of assessment or teaching.</th>
<th>Unfamiliar with the discipline-specific misconception that should be anticipated from students.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Assessing Background Knowledge

- **Common formative assessments** focus on core background knowledge, not incidental knowledge. Assessment results are used to plan instruction and re-teaching. Results are shared and discussed with colleagues.

- **Formative assessment** focuses mostly on core background knowledge. These assessment results are used to plan instruction and re-teaching, but are based within single classrooms.

- **Formative assessment** is used, but core and incidental background knowledge is not differentiated. Results are used for some instructional planning, but not routinely. Results are not discussed with colleagues.

- **Assessment is used as a pre-test, but is rarely analyzed for planning instruction and re-teaching. Results are not discussed with colleagues.**

- **Assessment is summative and is used primarily for grading purposes. Results are not used for the purposes of improving future instruction.**

### Activating Background Knowledge

- **Both unit and lesson purposes are established at the onset of every lesson. Varied oral and written language tools are used throughout the lesson to cause activation.**

- **Unit and lesson purposes are established during most lessons. Varied oral and written language tools are used to activate BK, but primarily at the start of the lesson.**

- **Unit and lesson purposes are posted on the board, but are not discussed within the lesson. Oral or written language tools are occasionally used in some lessons.**

- **Purpose of the lesson is posted but is not linked to larger unit purposes. Oral or written language tools are used as icebreakers or warm-ups.**

### Building Background Knowledge

- **Indirect and direct methods for building BK are used daily, including teacher modeling, wide reading, and assessments.**

- **Indirect and direct methods for building BK are used daily, including teacher modeling and wide reading.**

- **Indirect methods, such as wide reading and experiential learning are used occasionally, primarily when students are re-teaching.**

- **Methods for building background knowledge are used, including teacher modeling and wide reading.**

- **Lessons are designed to present the core content. Any gaps in background knowledge are assumed to be addressed.**
Assessing Background Knowledge
Cloze Assessments

- Originally developed for readability
- Now used to assess content knowledge
- Teacher-made
- 250-word passage
- Every fifth word deleted
- Scoring
  - Independent level: 60% correct or above
  - Instructional level: 40-59% correct
  - Frustration level: 39% or below
Opinionnaire in History

Name: ___________________________  Period: _____  Date: _____

**Directions:** Think about your own reactions to these statements and circle the description that best matches. There are no right and wrong answers.

**What’s Your Opinion?**

SA=Strongly Agree  A=Agree  D=Disagree  SD=Strongly Disagree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History is the winner’s story.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A representative democracy is the best form of government.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Revolution is necessary for political change to occur.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration and industrialization have done more harm than good in Africa and Asia.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The human cost of war is too great to justify military conflict.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The world became a safer place after World War II.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nation-building is the obligation of the victor.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activate What Students Know with Oral and Written Language Tools
Scaffold using questions, prompts, and cues to cause them to do the cognition.
“Don’t say what the student can say.”
Scaffolding to Use What They Know in Chemistry

Video available at YouTube’s Fisher and Frey Channel
Daily writing to activate background
Power Writing builds retrieval and stamina
Power Writing in Third Grade

Video available at YouTube’s Fisher and Frey Channel
Sentence Frames

• Cause/effect:
  Because _____ occurred, the results included _____.

• Compare/contrast:
  _____ and _____ share several characteristics including _____.
There is a lot of discussion about whether ______. The people who agree with this idea, such as ______, claim that _____. They also argue that ______. A further point they make is ______. However, there are also strong arguments against this point. ______ believes that ______. Another counterargument is ______. Furthermore, ______. After looking at the different points of view and the evidence for them, I think _____ because ______.

David Wray, University of Warwick
Build Background Knowledge with Texts
5 Access Points

• Purpose and Modeling
• Close and Scaffolded Reading
• Collaborative Conversations
• Wide, Independent Reading
• Formative Assessment Practices

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QaCgcf3ozZo
1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
Because children’s listening comprehension likely outpaces reading comprehension until the middle school years, it is particularly important that students in the earliest grades build knowledge through being read to as well as through reading, with the balance gradually shifting to reading independently.
By reading a story or nonfiction selection aloud, teachers allow children to experience written language without the burden of decoding, granting them access to content that they may not be able to read and understand by themselves.
Children are then free to focus their mental energy on the words and ideas presented in the text, and they will eventually be better prepared to tackle rich written content on their own.

(Appendix A Research Supports for CCSS, 2010, p. 27).
Blast! Crash! Splash!

Share What You Know

1. Think of a force of nature, such as an earthquake or a storm, that you have read about or seen on TV.
2. Draw a picture of it.
3. Share your picture with the class. Explain your drawing.

Build Background: Watch a video about forces of nature. 📸 NGReach.com
Build Background Videos and Interactives
Informational texts include e-books and tree books, visual representations and multi-media.
Infographics display data

SURPRISING BOOK FACTS

33% of High School Graduates never read another book the rest of their lives

42% of college grads never read another book after college

57% of new books are not read to completion

70% of US adults have not been in a bookstore the last five years

80% of US families did not buy or read a book last year

The more a child reads, the likelier they are able to understand the emotions of others

Reading one hour per day in your chosen field will make you an international expert in 7 years.

© RobertBronner.org

Sources: The Jenkins Group, Brian Tracy
Reading informational texts closely starts with text selection.
Assessing Texts

- Quantitative measures
- Qualitative values
- Task and Reader considerations
## Comparison of Former and CCR-Aligned Lexile Ranges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Band</th>
<th>Former Lexile Range</th>
<th>CCR Aligned Lexile Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>450-725</td>
<td>420-820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>645-845</td>
<td>740-1010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>860-1010</td>
<td>925-1185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>960-1115</td>
<td>1050-1335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-CCR</td>
<td>1010-1220</td>
<td>1185-1385</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Levels of Meaning and Purpose

- Density and complexity
- Figurative language
- Purpose
Structure

• Genre

• Organization

• Narration

• Text features and graphics
Language Conventions

• Standard English and variations

• Register
Knowledge Demands

- Background knowledge
- Prior knowledge
- Cultural knowledge
- Vocabulary
Knowledge Demands

Prior experience *(Secondary text on technical directions and related information)*

Background knowledge *(technical drawings and directions for making a paper airplane, invention process, mythology)*

630L

Grades 2-3
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUN6-YG807g