

Author Schema Study plan by Ginger.txt

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To: mosaic listserve

Subject: [mosaic] schema study/authors/long

This year I am trying something different. Because my students are well grounded in connections I did not feel I needed to do an in depth study just on connections. And since I feel SO STRONGLY that the focus should be on SCHEMA rather than "connections" I decided to see how it would work to do it in a different way. I've been talking with them for a while now about schema. They know that it means "what you already know." I've used Debbie Miller's concept of mental files in our brains as well as the rooms in the house (house being the brain) that someone on the list mentioned earlier. Any chance I get I've been asking them to activate their schema. I tell them we are building our schema whenever we are learning something new- whenever that comes up.

I have an anchor chart that lists the three kinds of schema. Connections, author, and text type. In our conversations we share connections but just as a natural response to the texts we are reading. I have pointed out coincidences when they came up and continue to remind them that a connection is usually to something important in the text. Not a small detail. And that a connection usually helps us understand the text in some way. We really haven't done much more than that. And it feels o.k.

We have talked about how good readers have different kinds of schema and that connections is just one kind. We have just now moved on to our author schema study. Something they did a bit of last year as well. I have selected 10 authors. (Judith Viorst, Bernard Waber, Ezra Jack Keats, Ann Morris, David Adler, Judith Caseley, Jan Brett, Alexandra Day, Jeanie Baker, and Gail Gibbons) I went to the public library and pulled 5 books for each author.

My 29 kids are now in 9 groups of 3 and one group of 2. On Thursday I modeled what they will be expected to do. I chose Stan and Jan Berenstain. I took 5 of their Berenstain Bear books and had two chart papers up on the board. I showed them that there are some things that are in common in all the books that can help me read these books. And that most authors have a style that can be discovered by spending some time searching for and analyzing the authors work.

I showed them the following things (using the B.Bears books for specific examples)

1. Text Placement- where the text is placed on the text. Is it placed on TOP of the illustrations, always at the bottom, on blank white space, always

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on one side of the two open pages, etc.

2. Illustrations- what is the medium? markers, paint, collage, pencil/pen, photograph, etc. Do the illustrations fill the page from top to bottom, or are they within smaller sections like a bubble or form? Is there a border on the page or white space around the illustrations? More than one on the page or not? etc.

3. Characters- what type of characters does this author choose? Human? Animal? (The B.Bears book has bears wearing human clothes and doing human things: talking, living like we do) Kids, adults, both? Families? What do you think about the characters? etc.

4. Settings- Notice where the stories take place. What setting does the author use? etc.

5. Topics- What topics does the author write about? How is the story/information presented? What can you discover that helps you "read" the book? etc.

6 Themes- See if the 5 books have any common themes. If not, find the themes in each of the books. Be able to give evidence.

7. Text Type- is the text realistic fiction, fantasy, nonfiction, etc? Be able to give evidence.

I also told them I wanted them to do the following:

8. Connections- Choose two books and write a connection they have to an important part.

9. Memory aids- Write words or draw something that will help them remember their author's books.

As I showed them all of these things in the B.Bears books, I filled the first chart paper. Just like they will be doing in preparation for their class presentation. When I was done, we listed the 9 things they would have to do on the other chart paper.

Friday I gave them their books. THEY WERE IN HEAVEN. I walked around and listened in on their talk. They were pointing out things to each other. Some groups were just quietly reading. Some were reading to each other. I told them the first day they could do whatever they needed to do. I have a packet for them on Monday where they will write down their findings. They will have two days to complete it and then they will create their chart paper and practice their presentation for the class. They are going to become the experts on that author.

On Wednesday the parents are invited in for Education Week. So either they will be assisting in the charting or they will be our audience if the presentations are ready to begin.

In the packet I have a page where they can each read the other 9 authors books and jot something down to help them remember each author. Last year I

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had the class take notes during the presentation. I won't be doing that this year. During independent reading they will have the chance to read the other authors books.

I know that some of this is not standard for all the books by that author. And that some of this may seem not important to focus on. All I can say is that for the past two years of doing this I always have kids coming up to me during library time showing me a book by one of our studied authors. They remember who they were. They are excited to find another book by one of our authors. I guess my hope is that when they do choose a book by one of these authors they will be able to read the book because they have schema for the way that author writes. It will be a support to them.

I may create a hallway display about schema. Reminding us all that it is not just connections. It's prior knowledge. And it includes that we need to know when we DON'T have schema about something and what we should do when that happens. Schema is the biggie!!! I know we have all encountered kids who are lacking schema and BOY does it impact our instruction. Remember: it's all about activating, building, and revising our schema.

Author schema is fun. I've done it in the graduate course I co-teach and teachers love doing it. Consider this same study for a staff meeting. What can you learn from a collection of different authors that can support you as a reader when you choose one of their books in the future?

I will post my author schema packet on the TEACHING TOOLS page.

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