
LESSON PLAN:

Activating Prior Knowledge and Building Background

Learning Objective

Students will improve their understanding of a News article by learning to activate prior knowledge and build background.

Pacing

45–55 minutes

Suggested Readings

Teacher's Choice

■ Preparation

Brief Definition

Background knowledge is knowledge of topic, vocabulary, and text structure that is helpful or necessary to understand a text. Building-background activities provide readers with new background knowledge before they read.

Prior knowledge is a reader's background knowledge of the topic, vocabulary, and structure of a text. Prior knowledge may come from experience or from reading. It is sometimes called *schema*. Readers who activate prior knowledge are linking what they already know to what they are currently reading. Instruction in activating prior knowledge and building background usually takes place before reading, although readers use their prior knowledge extensively while they read.

Why Use This Lesson Plan?

This lesson plan suggests an instructional sequence that focuses on activating prior knowledge and building background. Although you and your students employ other strategies as you read, the purpose of this lesson plan is to intensify your students' awareness and understanding of this single strategy so they are prepared to use it in combination with other strategies when they read independently.

Good readers make use of their prior knowledge to help make sense of the text they are reading. When they do this, they are more likely to remain engaged in the text, understand the relative importance of information, and understand new information. Less successful readers can improve their understanding by learning to make use of their prior knowledge. Building background knowledge is helpful or necessary for readers who do not have sufficient prior knowledge to develop a schema for understanding the text. Understanding a text is essentially linking prior knowledge to new knowledge.

Do Before Teaching

1. Read through the lesson plan.
2. Select a News article. For this lesson plan to work most effectively, students should have some prior knowledge of the topic.
3. Prepare basic background information for the News article in case students have insufficient background knowledge.
4. If you don't think your students are confident with this strategy, you can easily modify the lesson plan and deliver it in two or more parts.
 - a. Part 1: Make text-to-self connections only.
 - b. Part 2: Make text-to-text connections in addition to text-to-self connections.
 - c. Part 3: Add text-to-world connections.
5. Print a copy of the News article for each of your students.

Teaching Routine

Before Reading

Introduce Lesson

- Explain that in this lesson students will use prior knowledge and background knowledge to understand a News article.
- Pass out printed copies of the News article.

Teacher Direct Instruction

- Explain why activating prior knowledge and building background improves understanding.
- With the class, preview the article by reading titles, headings, graphics, captions, and the first paragraph. Point out the highlighted vocabulary words and their definitions at the end of the article.
- Survey student knowledge by asking a few simple questions related to the topic, vocabulary, and text structure. If students do not successfully answer these questions, help them build background knowledge by providing background information so they are sufficiently prepared to read the text.

Teacher Modeling

Make text-to-self, text-to-world, and/or text-to-text connections to the topic, vocabulary, and/or text structure. If your students are confident with the material, make observations from multiple categories. Otherwise, limit your observations to one or two categories. See Sample Queries and Responses on the following page.

Student Practice

Ask students to make text-to-self, text-to-world, and/or text-to-text connections to the topic, vocabulary, and/or text structure.

Text-to-Self Connections

Text-to-self connections occur when the text makes a reader think about her own life or personal experience.

Text-to-Text Connections

Text-to-text connections occur when the text reminds a reader of information from another text.

Text-to-World Connections

Text-to-world connections occur when the text reminds the reader of information about people, places, or things in the wider world. Text-to-world connections can also be related to “big ideas” or themes.

During Reading

Teacher Direct Instruction

- Explain that good readers access prior knowledge while they read.
- Divide the text into at least three meaningful sections. Sections may include a single paragraph or multiple paragraphs.

Teacher Modeling

- Ask students to read the first section of text.
- When they are finished reading, model how you make text-to-self, text-to-world, and/or text-to-text connections.

Student Practice

- After you are finished modeling, ask students to read the second section of text.
- When they are finished reading, ask them to make text-to-self, text-to-world, and/or text-to-text connections and discuss.
- Repeat until students have read all the sections of the text.

After Reading

Discuss Students’ Application of Strategy

Ask students how activating prior knowledge and building background helped them understand the text.

Apply Strategy to Future Reading

Ask students to bring a text to class to which they can apply the strategy. Plan time for students to independently apply this strategy to the texts that they have selected.

After Reading

Whole-Class Wrap Up (5-10 minutes)

- When all students have completed the 5-Step Literacy Routine (or at least the first two steps), bring the class together to review the lesson, discuss any questions students have, and provide any reteaching that is needed.
- Project the article “Electricians: Wired for the Future” so all students can see it. Ask students the following questions about the article.
 - What got the writer of the article interested in being an electrician? (*a school project on circuits*)
 - What form of career information did he provide to students in his old school? (*informational interview of people in a field*)
 - How do people train to become an electrician? (*an apprenticeship program; elaborate on what an apprenticeship program is*)
 - Electricians must take an examination to get a license. What keywords would you use to do an Internet search to learn about the examination? (*electrician, examination, exam*)
 - Where would you look to find out if electrician jobs were available in your area? (*classified section of newspaper, online search, call the local electrical union, visit local contractors*)
 - If you went to the library to learn about being an electrician, what questions would you ask the librarian? (Answers will vary. Encourage students to frame the questions as whole sentences. Role play, if necessary, so students will be comfortable asking the librarian for information.)
- Have students enter new vocabulary in their vocabulary journals and indicate their level of understanding for each of the new terms learned in this lesson. While the article is displayed, ask students to identify any other words in the article for which they need clarification about the pronunciation or meaning. Some words that are likely candidates are: *circuit, embarked, homeowners, upgrading, worksite, prospects, telecommunications*.

Sample Queries and Responses

<i>Text-to-self</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Vocabulary</i>	<i>Text Structure</i>
Possible Queries	“What experiences have you had that are related to or similar to [topic]?”	“Describe a situation in which you have used this word.”	“What do you expect from a text that is structured like this one?”
Possible Responses	“This reminds me of a time when I went with my family to ...”	“I have used this word when I was in my [subject] class.”	“I expect this kind of text to tell me a true story.” “I expect this kind of text to give me information that I can use in everyday life.”

<i>Text-to-World</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Vocabulary</i>	<i>Text Structure</i>
Possible Queries	“What events, people, or places does this [topic] remind you of?”	“Describe how other people use this word.”	“Where/in what type of publications do you usually see texts like this one?” “Who reads texts like this one?”
Possible Responses	“I went on a vacation once at a place very much like this one. It was ...”	“I’ve heard other people use this word in relation to...” “I’ve heard this word used on a television program about...” “I’ve heard other people use this word when they are feeling...”	“This looks like something I might see in a sports magazine.” “People who are interestd in sports might read this.”

<i>Text-to-Text</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Vocabulary</i>	<i>Text Structure</i>
Possible Queries	“What other texts have you read that relate to [topic]?”	“Describe how you have seen this word used in other texts.” “What other kinds of texts would use this word?”	“What other texts have you read that are like this one?” “What is the purpose of a text like this one?”
Possible Responses	“This reminds me of what I read the other day in the chapter about [topic] in my textbook.” “I read another news article about [topic].”	“This is a word that I have seen in my [subject] textbook.” “I’ve seen this word in a news article about...” “This is a word that I see in many kinds of texts including...”	“This is a news article, and I have read many news articles.” “The purpose of this text is to...” “This text’s author is trying to get me to...”