

Intermediate Grade Sample Lesson

Listening Closely to Determine an Author's Main Idea and Supporting Evidence

OBJECTIVE

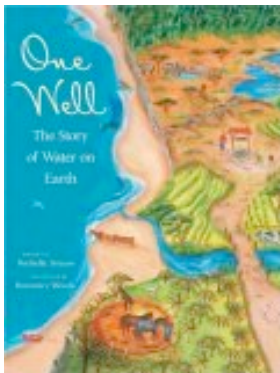
The student will listen to a nonfiction text read aloud and synthesize, as expressed orally and in writing, the ideas in the text including identifying one or more of the author's central ideas and the related supporting evidence.

NATIONAL STANDARDS

- *National Science Education Standards: Earth Science Standards K-4, 5-8*
- *Common Core Reading Standards for Informational Text K-5:*
 - 3.2 Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support a main idea; 4.2 Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text; 5.2 Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by the key details; summarize the text.
 - 3.3 Describe the relationship between scientific concepts; 4.3 Explain concepts in scientific text based on specific information in the text; 5.3 Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more ideas in scientific text based on specific information in the text.

MATERIALS

- copy of book ***One Well: The Story of Water on Earth*** (Strauss, 2007)
- blank sheet of paper and pencil for each student



PROCEDURES (Note: This lesson may take a few days to complete.)

1. **Read aloud the book *One Well* (Strauss, 2007).** (This book may require a few lessons to read aloud.) At particular sections of the text prompt for students' synthesis of information with questions like:
 - What do you think is important to know?
 - Why do you think so?

Also, look for opportunities to reinforce and nurture understanding of cause/effect.

2. **Explicitly define synthesis:** *Synthesis is when a reader thinks about the author's main ideas, the evidence the author uses to support those ideas, and why those ideas are important to consider. We have been engaged in synthesis as we listened to and discussed this book.*

3. **Think aloud about your own synthesis of information in the text to model for students.** For example, you might stop after reading aloud the section "Plants at the Well" on page 10-11 and say the following:

As I read these two pages and looked at the illustrations, I realized the author was trying to explain how important water is to plants. Water is essential to the survival of plants. There were a lot of facts the author gives to support this idea. Let me look back. (Pause and reread the second paragraph aloud.) For example, in this paragraph, she includes the fact that plants and animals are mostly made out of water and that if they didn't have water they would droop and shrivel which means they would die. (Point out the cause and effect in this example.)

If the students are ready, ask them to share other facts from those two pages that support the idea that water is essential to the survival of plants.

4. **Reread aloud a couple of sections from the book.** You might consider reading sections from pages 20-29. (These pages focus on how water is a limited source, there is a huge demand for this limited source, pollution is limiting this source even further, how we need to engage in conservation of water.) Set the purpose for listening. You might say the following:

While I am reading, I want you to listen for the author's main ideas. What is she trying to tell us that is important to know? What kind of facts does she include to support her ideas? How are cause and effect a part of what she is describing?

Stop as needed (maybe at the end of each section) and engage the students in conversations around these questions. At some point, nurture accountability by asking them to discuss these questions in small groups.

5. **Ask the students to write and illustrate a letter** to someone they know, perhaps another student or a parent or another adult. The purpose of the letter is to explain the student's synthesis of the text - the author's main idea, the supporting evidence the author uses, and why this idea is important to consider. You might consider writing the purpose as a list of questions or as a prompt for students to view. (Fifth grade students should write about more than one main idea.) The student should act as though the reader of his/her letter has not read the book and may not know about water as a limited resource. The student's illustrations should serve to support the points in the letter.

6. **Suggestions for scaffolding & meeting needs of diverse learners:**
- Provide a sentence starter for the first sentence of the letter..
 - Write the beginning of the letter with the students...
 - Together generate a list of important words and phrases the students might use in their letter..
 - Confer with students as they write using prompts like the following:
 - Tell me what you are thinking about writing.
 - What do you think the author's main idea is? What makes you think so?
 - What is evidence from the book you can include?
 - Locate additional copies of the book for students to reread independently or with a small group.
 - Pull a small group of students to work closely with you.
7. **Assess students' writing and plan a follow-up lesson** to strengthen their understanding of synthesis and their ability to write about their synthesis of the ideas in a text. This may include reading aloud another book related to the content area unit of study and engaging in a similar lesson.

FOR MORE READING ON THIS APPROACH:

Cummins, S., & Stallmeyer-Gerard, C. (2011, March). Teaching for synthesis of informational texts with read alouds. *Reading Teacher* 64(6), 394-405.

To see detailed rubrics for assessing students' written responses, consult the following:

Cummins, S. (December, 2012). *Close reading of informational text: Assessment-driving instruction in grades 3-8*. New York: Guilford.