

TEXT
STRUCTURES
FROM

**PICTURE
BOOKS**

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Dedication

To Zinnia—You inspire us every day. We love you mucho.

*To our 2022–2023 sixth- and seventh-grade students—
Thank you for going on this adventure with us. You’ve taught us so much.*

*To the teachers of Uvalde CISD, the first to do these lessons with us—
Thank you for your heart, your courage,
and the light you bring to your classrooms every day.*

TEXT
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BOOKS

Lessons to Ease Students
Into Text Analysis,
Reading Response, and
Writing With Craft

STEPHEN BRISEÑO ≡ and ≡ KAYLA BRISEÑO

◇◇◇ with ◇◇◇ GRETCHEN BERNABEI

CORWIN Literacy

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For downloadable resources, visit the companion website for
Text Structures From Picture Books, Grades K–8.
resources.corwin.com/textstructurespicturebooks

For a complete Bookshop.org list of the picture books featured, visit
bookshop.org/lists/text-structures-from-picture-books.

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Reference Chart

	TITLE	TEXT STRUCTURE	BIG IDEAS EXPLORED	WRITER'S CRAFT CHALLENGES
1	<i>The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend</i>	Yearning for a Friend	imagination, finding your place, journey, long-awaited friendships	A Pitchforked Description
2	<i>Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day</i>	Bad Day	self-empathy, feeling alone, frustrations, unfairness	Use a Refrain
3	<i>The Bad Seed</i>	I'm So	gossip, nature versus nurture, reshaping our personalities	Using a Refrain
4	<i>The Blunders: A Counting Catastrophe!</i>	Blundering	learning from mistakes, using math to solve problems, asking for help, saving face	Da-Bang-Boom: A Ba-Da-Bing Variation
5	<i>The Color Collector</i>	A Change in Perspective	finding beauty in unlikely places, seeing things differently, diversity, feeling new	Purposeful Fragments as a List
6	<i>Dandy</i>	Trying to Get Rid of Something	perfectionism, friendliness, loyalty, new beginnings, caring what others think	Dialogue Refrain
7	<i>The Day the Crayons Quit</i>	Voicing a Complaint	honesty, demanding change, taking a stand or standing up for yourself, unity	Parentheses for an Aside
8	<i>Digging for Words: José Alberto Gutiérrez and the Library He Built</i>	Finding the Thing I Love	community, the value of books, selflessness, second chances, dreams (<i>sueños</i>), patience	Microscope Sentence

(Continued)

(Continued)

	TITLE	TEXT STRUCTURE	BIG IDEAS EXPLORED	WRITER'S CRAFT CHALLENGES
9	<i>The Dot</i>	Somebody Wanted, But, So Then	self-expression, creativity, inspiration, pushing through the hard part, grit, growth mindset, inspiring others	Echo Ending
10	<i>Each Kindness</i>	Ripples of Unkindness	kindness, friendship, being new, being left out, regrets, peer pressure	A Proof Pitchfork*; Ba-Ba-Bang: A Ba-Da-Bing-Ah-Ha Variation
11	<i>Extra Yarn</i>	Sharing the Magic	generosity, spreading kindness, integrity, finding ways to help	Pitchforked Verbs
12	<i>Eyes That Speak to the Stars</i>	Healing From Hurt	recognizing your own power, family traits, identity, being teased	Personification
13	<i>Fly</i>	Learning Something New (with help)	competition, challenging yourself, growth mindset, unexpected lessons, ignoring the haters	Pitchforked Verbs
14	<i>I Hate Borsch!</i>	I Used to Hate It	change in perspective, embracing culture, learning to love something	Pitchforked Nouns
15	<i>The Invisible Boy</i>	Becoming Visible	acceptance, friendship, feeling invisible, feeling left out	Em-Dash Sentence
16	<i>Just Like Grandma</i>	Watching and Trying	role models, food, connection to culture, generations learning from each other	A Varied Refrain
17	<i>Kafka and the Doll</i>	A Fictional Journey	playfulness, the power of storytelling, losing something you love, the impact we have on others	Double Personification

	TITLE	TEXT STRUCTURE	BIG IDEAS EXPLORED	WRITER'S CRAFT CHALLENGES
18	<i>Kitchen Dance</i>	A Special Moment I Want to Keep	joy in the little things, family, the power of song	Sensory Details
19	<i>Last Stop on Market Street</i>	Gaining a New Perspective	unfairness, new perspective, beauty in everyday things, wisdom	Big Idea Similes
20	<i>The Little Engine That Could</i>	The Story of My Thinking	self-confidence, sacrifice, helping others, selflessness, grit	Inner Dialogue
21	<i>Little Wolf's First Howling</i>	A Compromise	being unique, forging your own path, breaking or passing down traditions, compromise	Hypophora
22	<i>The Longest Storm</i>	A Temporary Storm	coming together in a crisis, feeling trapped, conflict, grief, overcoming loss, healing	Ping-Pong Sentences
23	<i>Lubna and Pebble</i>	A Treasure I Used to Have	leaving home, loss, feeling unsafe, comforting each other	A Pitchfork of Purposeful Fragments
24	<i>Mel Fell</i>	No One Thought I Could	failure, grit, learning, trusting yourself, helping others, community, trying something new	A Made-Up Language*; Exploding a Moment
25	<i>Mixed: A Colorful Story</i>	The Ups and Downs of Change	community, prejudice, blended families, stereotypes	A Unique Simile
26	<i>The Most Magnificent Thing</i>	Back to the Drawing Board	creative process, grit, trial and error, anger management (self-care)	Parallel Mirror Sentences
27	<i>My Brother Is Away</i>	Missing Someone	family, struggling with the truth, reconciliation, missing loved ones	Alliterative Simile

(Continued)

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	TITLE	TEXT STRUCTURE	BIG IDEAS EXPLORED	WRITER'S CRAFT CHALLENGES
28	<i>My Hands Tell a Story</i>	Learning to Do Something	learning from our elders, stories, passing down history, identity, growth mindset	A Truism Refrain; A Recipe
29	<i>My Monster and Me</i>	Dealing With My Monster	difficulties of sharing, feeling seen or heard, managing emotions, the power of listening	A Pitchfork Pattern: I + Verb
30	<i>Nigel and the Moon</i>	A Quiet Wish	dreams, family, hope for the future, overcoming shame, identity	Tip-Toe Sentences*; Anaphora Reversals
31	<i>The Notebook Keeper: A Story of Kindness From the Border</i>	A Long Road to Hope	kindness, immigration, displacement, stepping up in a crisis	Integrating a Language Other Than English*; Zigzag Sentences
32	<i>The Oldest Student: How Mary Walker Learned to Read</i>	A Wish Deferred	determination, freedom, slavery, poverty, supporting family, the power of reading	A Simile Following by an Explanation
33	<i>The Princess and the Pony</i>	Unwanted Gift	wants versus needs, expectations, breaking stereotypes	Epistrophe; Alliterative Pitchforks*
34	<i>The Rough Patch</i>	Dark Days	losing someone you love, the healing power of friendship, the stages of grief	AAAWWWUBIS Openers
35	<i>The Sandwich Swap</i>	War Between the Sandwiches	friendship, changing your opinion, armed conflict, mob rule	Da-Bing-Boom: A Ba-Da-Bing Variation
36	<i>Seven Golden Rings: A Tale of Music and Math</i>	Solving a Problem	problem solving, creativity, courage, humility, exploring multiple solutions	Plus-Minus Sentences; Pitchforked Descriptions With Prepositional Phrases
37	<i>Spork</i>	Finding Where I Fit	trying to fit in, blended families, being unique, feeling out of place, hidden talents	Echo Bookend Sentences

	TITLE	TEXT STRUCTURE	BIG IDEAS EXPLORED	WRITER'S CRAFT CHALLENGES
38	<i>Strega Nona</i>	Unintended Consequences	consequences (unintended), disobedience, chaos, wisdom, ignoring advice	Shaka-Laka-Boom
39	<i>Swashby and the Sea</i>	From Enemies to Friends	opening your heart, community, found family, working through annoyance, wrong first impressions	Neighboring Pitchforks*; Epistro-Versal Sentence Pattern
40	<i>Sweetie</i>	Learning to Be Me	acceptance, being different, finding your people	Internal Questions
41	<i>Ten Ways to Hear Snow</i>	Many Ways to Hear Something	small moments with family, discovering the world around you, paying attention, nature, empathy, senses	Framing a Story With Onomatopoeia
42	<i>Thank You, Omu!</i>	Sharing and Sharing and Sharing	putting others before yourself, community, love, generosity	Contrasting Adjectives
43	<i>This Way, Charlie</i>	Helping Each Other	friendship, overcoming fear, living with disabilities, serving others	Can't-Can't-Can Sentence Pattern; A Flip-Flop (or Chiasmus) Sentence*
44	<i>The Three Billy Goats Gruff</i>	Getting Past the Troll	safety in numbers, greed, teamwork, not getting what you want	Pitchforked Participles
45	<i>Toasty</i>	Picture Book Story Structure	having a dream, going after what you want, friendship	Contrasting Funnel
46	<i>Tomatoes in My Lunchbox</i>	Fitting In	being new, trying to change oneself, identity, new friendships	Similes

(Continued)

(Continued)

	TITLE	TEXT STRUCTURE	BIG IDEAS EXPLORED	WRITER'S CRAFT CHALLENGES
47	<i>Watercress</i>	An Embarrassing Memory	family, traditions, longing for home, difficult memories, embarrassment, poverty, family grief	A Lyrical Pitchfork
48	<i>The Water Princess</i>	What I Have to Do	problem solving, community, hoping for change, poverty, ritual	An Imagined Ba-Da-Bing Variation
49	<i>We Don't Eat Our Classmates</i>	A Bad First Impression	listening to wisdom, changing perspective, fitting in, making friends	A Blurled Reason
50	<i>Zombie in Love</i>	Picture Book Story Structure	rejection, love, trying and failing, self-improvement, patience, happy endings	Anaphorks: Anaphora + Pitchforks



NOTE: Writer's Craft Challenges with an asterisk () are available online only at resources.corwin.com/textstructurespicturebooks

Foreword

Last year while visiting a seventh-grade classroom, I heard the teacher ask, “Today, you get to choose: twenty minutes with your novels? Or a read-aloud?”

The students’ answer was clear, so she said, “Then come on. Everyone to the carpet for a story.”

The teacher moved to a rocking chair in the corner of the room, and students flocked around her. I turned to a student near me, “I don’t see a carpet.”

He grinned. “We pretend.”

This year, the Briseños showed me their brilliant idea for *Text Structures From Picture Books*.

I didn’t know most of the stories. They did. So that I could help extract the writers’ craft, naturally, they read the stories to me.

“One day in class, Duncan went to take out his crayons and found a stack of letters with his name on them.”

Over the next weeks, I listened as Kayla or Stephen read book after book.

“We are in the old Pontiac, the red paint faded by years of glinting Ohio sun, peeling rain, and biting snow.”

I became reacquainted with the feeling of being read to: the lump in our throats, beauty washing over us. A velvet cloak of comfort.

“He was born on an island far away where imaginary friends were created.”

Soothing when I didn’t know I needed soothing. An elixir.

“Daddy spies something scary on his perfect lawn.”

These read-alouds took me back to my own childhood, my mother, nestled on the couch with us, reading of Eeyore and Piglet, and a man who wouldn’t wash his dishes, ill-mannered princesses, the gingham dog. I found myself wondering . . .

What creates this elixir of magic? Is it the voice of the reader, washing over the being of the listener? The story itself? The nearness of human touch as we physically snuggle in to listen?

“On a cold afternoon, in a cold little town . . .”

What’s a teacher to do after reading a story? How can we use the picture book to connect reading, writing, all the cognitive gymnastics required in the classrooms of today? The gifts in this book are obvious: there’s so much choice. Stephen and Kayla have simplified some complex learning for our students here.

But beneath all of that cognition lies the best magic, the most quiet and beautiful thing that Stephen and Kayla have restored to us here: the soothing gift of a voice reading a story.

—Gretchen Bernabei

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Acknowledgments

No one creates a book in a vacuum, and this book is absolutely no exception. We have so many folks that helped make the book you're holding now a reality. Here is a list of the people, in no particular order, to whom Kayla and Stephen would like to extend our sincere gratitude:

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Cleo and Byron Desormeau writing from Abu Dhabi

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Stephen reading to Dylan in Nowhere Books

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Kayla going through the *Mel Fell* lesson with Layla Kirkpatrick

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And finally, all of the incredible authors and illustrators who brought the stories featured in this book to life. Thank you for spreading joy and hope through your writing and illustrations! We are forever grateful!

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About the Authors



Stephen Briseño is a middle school English teacher, writing consultant, and award-winning picture book author. His debut picture book, *The Notebook Keeper: A Story of Kindness From the Border*, won a Pura Belpré Honor and a 2023 Notable Children's Book designation from the American Library Association. He writes and reads with his daughter, Zinnia, and his wife, Kayla, with whom he also drinks a ton of coffee. They all live in San Antonio, Texas. Follow him on Twitter at @stephen_briseno or visit him on the web at www.stephenbrisen.com.



Kayla Briseño has taught English all over the world and to students of nearly every age, from elementary through adults. She has conducted professional development workshops with Gretchen Bernabei for over a decade, sharing and generating impactful writing instruction, while being a long-time contributor to Trail of Breadcrumbs publications. *Text Structures From Picture Books* is her debut book. She and her husband, Stephen, are both self-declared book nerds, coffee aficionados, and national park fanatics. When she's not teaching or helping teachers, you can find her creating art with her daughter, Zinnia, reading a good book, or enjoying a stroll

along the San Antonio Riverwalk, in the city where she lives with her family. Follow her on Twitter at @kayla_briseno.



Gretchen Bernabei is a popular workshop presenter and winner of the NCTE's James Moffett Award in 2010. She has been teaching kids to write in middle school and high school classrooms for more than thirty years. In addition to writing four other professional books and numerous articles for NCTE journals, she is the author of National Geographic School Publications' The Good Writer's Kit, as well as Lightning in a Bottle, a CD of visual writing prompts.

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Introduction

Our picture book journey began in Shenzhen, China, where we, Kayla and Stephen, read picture books to our infant daughter, Zinnia. Kayla would check out picture books from our school library, and we'd take turns reading them, doing all the voices, while fighting that new-parent fatigue. *Piggie* and *Elephant* were Zinnia's favorites even when she was a baby.



When Zinnia was old enough to grab a load of books, waddle over to the couch, and command, "Read," we fell even more deeply in love with picture books. If both of your parents are English teachers, you're bound to catch the book bug, and Zinnia was no exception. We read each book to her, the three of us cuddling and being whisked away to far off lands and laughing at silly characters. This is a practice we still enjoy to this day, years later.

Fast forward to my eighth-grade classroom. Students were in need of a reteach on how to infer, and instead of turning to a short story or novel excerpt, I reached for Chris Van Allsburg's picture book, *The Stranger*.

"No one has read to us like this since second grade."

"I can't remember the last time I read a picture book!"

"Is this going to be a new thing, story time with Mr. B?"

I read *The Stranger* to them, pausing when necessary, and it was just like reading to Zinnia. The class was calm, settled, and, miracle of miracles, paying attention. The idea of inferencing clicked—and it only took reading a picture book for about 10 minutes.



Good teachers know that we should read to our students. Even better teachers know that the magic of picture books can enchant any age group. And the best teachers know that picture books can unlock the door to empathy in safe ways that readers of all ages can explore.

The quality of picture books being published today is unprecedented. Some authors and librarians say we are in a new golden age of picture books, with topics ranging from the silly to the serious, the boisterously fun to the quietly poetic. They are rife with teaching opportunities across grade levels and language abilities: analysis, reading and writing response, theme, craft, and so much more—and all in compact, 32-page bundles. They act as a scaffold to all kinds of deeper thinking for the upper grades. They are rich in language, cover a wide range of subjects and experiences, vary in their structures, and are accessible in practically every school and library.

This brings us to a problem as old as teaching itself: “What is a good story for my students to read and discuss?” There are tried and true stories out there, but what worked for one class may not work for the next. Already strapped for time, teachers don’t want to comb through websites and lists and textbooks only to find something that doesn’t match their learning focus. The hunt can be so exhausting.

We’re here to help.

In this book we’ve curated for you lessons using fifty top-notch picture books. Some of these books are classics that you’ll be familiar with; others are new treasures. We’ve crafted lessons for you, to save you some time and energy in the short term, to mentor you through some of the magical ways picture books can launch the learning of key ELAR skills, and to help you feel confident in selecting books and crafting lessons on your own—because we all know there are millions of excellent picture books just waiting for our students.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

For any grade level, you can start with reading a story or with writing. Either way is fine, as one leads to the other.

Let’s say you want to begin with writing:

Begin with a quick write. Show students the quick write prompt and let them write for about 3 minutes. Or use it as a discussion starter or a topic for your morning meeting. Put aside the quick writes and launch into reading and discussing the story.

OR

Begin with a kernel essay. Show students the quick write prompt and the text structure and have them write a kernel essay (demonstrated on the next pages). Put aside the kernel essay and launch into reading and discussing the story. Bonus—they could even look for the parts of the structure as you read.

OR

Begin with the big idea. Show the students a few of the big ideas listed in each lesson and ask them to write what they know about a particular big idea or a memory that they associate with it. Put aside the writing and launch into reading and discussing the story.

Let’s say you want to begin with reading:

Read the story aloud as a whole group, stopping to discuss noticings, make predictions and inferences, and highlight skills or a craft you’ve taught in class.

To move to writing, read the quick write prompt on the lesson page. Invite students to use the text structure to write kernel essays (either to retell the story or craft their own stories). Move on to some of the “Lessons for Going Deeper” in order to highlight author’s craft, analysis (using big ideas and truisms), and even reading response (using the reading response question stems and text structures in the appendix).

Rules you are invited to break:


1. Use every aspect of the lesson.
No way! These lessons are full of great things for you to try, so pick and choose what works for you. Make it yours!
2. Stick to the quick writes and text structure offered on the page.
You don’t have to. Choice is essential for good writing. Some situations require freewriting, without a structure at all.
3. Use all the picture books or read them all in order.
Who cares? Use the ones you want, when you want!
4. Don’t change the words in the text structure boxes.
Keep it real. Change anything about them you need to (verb tense, point of view, their order, anything).

Ideas to embrace (our soap box moments):

1. Writing should be social, and sharing is the main course, not the dessert, in the process.
Don’t skip the sharing.
2. Good teachers write with their students. It is incredibly powerful, as it acts as a model, a community builder, a heart-stitcher. It builds empathy. As teacher and author Rebekah O’Dell tweeted, “Modeling and writing alongside our kids keeps us engaged and curious.”
Write with your kids.
3. Students want to learn and improve, not just repeat exercises. Give them the gift of great stories and wonderful craft. The lessons for going deeper (“Want to Go Deeper?”) and the appendix are full of tools to help with this.
Variety is both refreshing and necessary.
4. Writers should have as much choice as we can figure out how to give them: to choose their topics, their beliefs, their structures, their craft. If all of the essays seem alike, we need to reexamine what we’re asking.
Let writers make choices.
5. Picture books can be paired with any other genre. Feel free to pair any of these books with nonfiction texts, class novels, articles, poems, student writing, or even other picture books.
Don’t put yourself in a box.

A →

1 **The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend**
by Dan Santat



Summary: Beekle lives in the land of imaginary friends. But when he's not picked to become an imaginary friend, he embarks on a journey to the real world to find that special friend.

Why We Love It: Dan Santat is an artist and a storyteller of extraordinary caliber, and Beekle's story is a home run because of its imaginative premise; it is a story full of heart coupled with eye-popping illustrations.

Big Ideas: friendship, waiting, imagination, patience, belonging, fitting in, finding your place, longing, loneliness, journey, going after what you want, dreams, courage, long-awaited friendships

1 → **1 QUICK WRITE.**

- Think of a time you felt really alone and wished for a friend. Write about this for 3 minutes and then set it aside.

2 ← **2 READ.**

Read the picture book *The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend* and discuss the story. Discuss parts of the story that stick out to you or that you connect with. What writer's craft moves do you notice the author using? Notice the parts of the story.

3 → **3 CRAFT MOVES TO NOTICE.**

- An echo ending ("... he did the unimaginable.")
- A pitchforked description ("The real world was a strange place. **No kids were** eating cake. **No one stopped** to hear the music. And **everyone needed** naptime.")
- Pitchforks

40 Text Structures From Picture Books, Grades K-8

AN OVERVIEW OF THE LESSONS

What follows is a snapshot of a lesson—at least one way to do it. Keep in mind all the options detailed previously.

A **Choose your book.** Browse the list in the front of this book for a text structure you'd like to use, a big idea, a craft move, or even a title or author you love. (See page XX.)

1 **Do a quick write.** Use the quick write prompt to get students writing or talking about the topic and/or big idea found in the book. Write for 3 minutes. If the prompt we have provided doesn't quite work for your students, feel free to change it to suit your needs.

2 **Read.** and discuss the story using the questions provided.

3 **Identify and discuss craft moves.** After you read, point out the craft moves the author used. These can be explored and utilized in students' writing later in the "Want to Go Deeper?" section.

4 **Share with students the text structure (harvested from the picture book).** Use the text structure to have students retell the story (orally or in writing) or have them use it to create their own written pieces. They can use it to write a kernel essay or to guide their longer writing.

The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend
by Dan Santat

1

4 → **4 SHARE THE STRUCTURE.**
Show the students the structure found in the picture book. Reread the story, looking for chunks together and watching for how the author moves from one part to the other.

Yearning for a Friend

Why I felt alone	What I decided to do about it	How that didn't help	How I finally found a friend	What we did together
------------------	-------------------------------	----------------------	------------------------------	----------------------

5 → **5 INVITATION TO WRITE.**
Here are several ways you can get students to write.

- Have students use the text structure to write a kernel essay summary of the story. (Give them between 5 and 10 minutes to do this.)
- Have the students use the text structure to write their own piece in a kernel essay. (Give them between 5 and 10 minutes to do this.)
- See what students come up with. (Give them around 10 minutes.) Here are some possibilities:
 - A page of thoughts in their quick write
 - Examples of the author's craft moves
 - A text structure

Whatever they choose to write, let them know that they can change anything they need to and make it their own.

6 ← **6 SHARE.**
Invite students to try their writing on someone else's ears. This is a crucial step! The sharing is just as important as the writing.

Lesson 1 • The Adventures of Beekle 41

5 Give students time to write. There are several ways you can get students to write. Let students choose one of these:

Summary: Have your students use the text structure to write a kernel essay summarizing the story. (Give them between 5 and 10 minutes to do this.)

OR

Kernel essay: Have your students use the text structure to write their own piece in a kernel essay. (Give them between 5 and 10 minutes to do this.)

OR

Free choice: See what students come up with. (Give them around 10 minutes.) Here are some possibilities:

- A page of thoughts in their quick write
- Examples of the author's craft moves
- A text structure

Reading response: Have your students respond to questions provided using the reading response text structures found in the appendix.

Whatever they choose to write, let students know that they can change anything they need to and make it their own.

6 Let students share what they wrote. Remember, don't skip this step!

1 **Want to Go Deeper?**
Try These Options.

OPTION 1: CRAFT CHALLENGE

A Pitchforked Description
In this story, the author uses a pitchforked description to describe the real world:
"The real world was a strange place. No kids were eating cake. No one stopped to hear the music. And everyone needed naptime."
Look through your piece and see where you can try this pitchforked sentence pattern:
My (noun) was (adjective). No (noun + verb phrase). No one (verb phrase). And everyone (verb phrase).
Try it out on someone's ears to see how it sounds in your writing.

OPTION 2: ANALYZE

1. Start with a big idea.

- If you want students to find the big ideas themselves, try asking, *What big ideas do you see in this story that tell you what it's really about?*
- If students need a nudge, try using some of the big ideas from the list in this lesson's introduction and have students provide evidence from the story to support their answers. **Ask:** *How is this story about (big idea)? How does the author explore the big idea of _____? Where in the story do you see that?*

2. Turn the big idea into a truism (thematic statement).

- Once you have identified the big ideas, use one of them to create truisms for this story. Here are some examples from this story:
 - "Sometimes the best friends lie just beyond our imagination."
 - A good friend is worth searching for.
 - Sometimes your best friend isn't who you expected.
 - Sometimes you need to write your own story.
 - Have students write and share their own truisms.

Ask them to prove their truisms by providing evidence from the text. They might imagine a listener saying, "Oh yeah? How do you know? How is that true in the story?"

OPTION 3: READING RESPONSE

Students can compose short or extended responses to demonstrate understanding by answering any of these questions. Look in the appendix to find a list entitled "Basic Reading Response Text Structures" and a list of additional question stems.

Questions for Reading Response

- What is this story really about?
- Why does Beekle decide to leave and start his journey?
- How are Beekle and the girl alike?
- How do Beekle and the girl benefit each other?
- What are the main reasons the author included these sentences? "The real world was a strange place. No kids were eating cake. No one stopped to hear the music. And everyone needed naptime."

42 Text Structures From Picture Books, Grades K-8

BUT WAIT! THERE'S MORE!

B Try one or all of the options labeled "Want to Go Deeper?"

These lessons will help students to take the writing further. Choose from a writer's craft lesson or an analysis lesson, using big ideas and truisms.

Check out "What Can I Do With Truisms?"—a main section of the online companion—for even MORE ideas about analyzing using truisms.

G Option 3: Reading Response

Students can compose short or extended responses to demonstrate understanding by answering any of these questions.

WHAT IF I WANT TO SHAKE UP THE LESSON ORDER?

While this sequence provides a solid experience weaving writing and reading together, there are plenty of variations that could also prove useful. Here are some things you might try:

1. Quick write
2. Look at the text structure
3. Create an original piece of writing using the text structure
4. Share the picture book
5. Identify some writer's craft (using one of the options for going deeper) and try that same craft in writing

OR

Use the text structure to write a poem, a letter, a skit, an essay, or a speech.

OR

Use the text structure to write a response to the book.

OR

Read the picture book and write a one-sentence summary of each box in the text structure, as a way to summarize or kernelize the story.

OR

Use the question stems and text structures in the appendix to do some reading responses, writing, discussing, and even preparing for a standardized test.

Questions and Text Structures for Constructed Reading Responses

Questions and Answers About Understanding the Reading

GENERIC QUESTION STEMS	TEXT STRUCTURES TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS																						
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What happens in the story? (Retell the story) 2. What is the story mostly about right now? 3. How do you think ____ feels at the beginning and/or end of the story? 4. What is the conflict or problem of the story so far? 5. Who is more ____ (helpful, nicer), ____ (a character) or ____ (another character)? 6. How does ____ change during the story? 7. Why does ____ do/think/say/believe/ want? 8. What's one word you would use to describe ____ (character)? 9. What lesson does ____ learn in the story? 10. What is the moral of the story? 11. In sentence ____, what does the word or phrase ____ suggest? 12. How are ____ and ____ alike/different? 13. Why does ____ become ____ (upset, happy) when ____? 14. What does ____ (character) mean when he/she says ____? 15. What can the reader tell (conclude) from the action in sentence(s) ____? 16. What does ____'s reaction when she/he learns ____ show about her/his character? 	<p>QA12345</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Question</td> <td>Answer</td> <td>How do you know?</td> <td>What does that mean?</td> <td>How else do you know?</td> <td>So ... your answer is ... what?</td> </tr> </table> <p>RACE</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Restate the question</td> <td>Answer</td> <td>Cite evidence from the text</td> <td>Explain what the evidence means</td> </tr> </table> <p>BA-DA-BINGING THE EVIDENCE</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Answer to the question</td> <td>What the character does, says, and/or thinks that proves my answer</td> <td>What that shows</td> </tr> </table> <p>FIGURING OUT THE READING</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>I read the words "____."</td> <td>Which told me ____</td> <td>Then I read "____"</td> <td>Which told me ____</td> <td>And then I knew ____</td> </tr> </table> <p>EXPLAINING A CHANGE</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>How ____ changes in the story</td> <td>At the beginning, ... (with evidence)</td> <td>At the end, ... (with evidence)</td> <td>Another way to describe the change</td> </tr> </table>	Question	Answer	How do you know?	What does that mean?	How else do you know?	So ... your answer is ... what?	Restate the question	Answer	Cite evidence from the text	Explain what the evidence means	Answer to the question	What the character does, says, and/or thinks that proves my answer	What that shows	I read the words "____."	Which told me ____	Then I read "____"	Which told me ____	And then I knew ____	How ____ changes in the story	At the beginning, ... (with evidence)	At the end, ... (with evidence)	Another way to describe the change
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How ____ changes in the story	At the beginning, ... (with evidence)	At the end, ... (with evidence)	Another way to describe the change																				

GENERIC QUESTION STEMS	TEXT STRUCTURES TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. How do the actions of ____ and/or ____ support the theme or moral? 18. What causes ____ to realize ____? 19. Why does ____ agree to ____? 20. What is ____'s attitude about ____? 21. What argument does ____ (a character) make to support ____'s (that character's) behavior/opinion? 22. What challenge(s) does ____ face? 23. What does ____ represent in the story? 	

Questions About Author's Choices

GENERIC QUESTION STEMS	TEXT STRUCTURES TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS																			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why is ____ (an event or character) important? 2. Why does the author ____? 3. How does the author show that ____ (character) is ____ (characteristic)? 4. Why did the author write this story? 5. What does the author show us by including a description of ____? 6. How did the author help visualize ____? 7. What is the main reason the author included the sentence(s) ____? 8. Why does the author choose this setting for the story? 9. In sentence ____, the author uses the word(s)/phrase(s) ____ to suggest what? 10. What does the sensory language in the sentence ____ illustrate? 11. How does the description in the sentence(s) ____ affect the reader's understanding of the setting/character? 12. The author includes the information in the sentence(s) ____ to help the reader do what? 13. What is the author's purpose in writing this story? 14. How does the author's description of ____ help the reader understand ____? 15. What effect does the word/phrase ____ have in the sentence ____? 16. How does ____ contribute to the development of the author's ideas? 17. ____ is important in the story because it shows what? 18. How does the setting influence the plot of the story? 19. What is the effect of the author's use of ____? 	<p>RACE</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Restate the question</td> <td>Answer</td> <td>Cite evidence from the text</td> <td>Explain what the evidence means</td> </tr> </table> <p>NOTICING THE AUTHOR'S MOVES</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>I read the words "____."</td> <td>Which told me ____</td> <td>Then I read "____"</td> <td>Which told me ____</td> <td>And then I knew the author did ____ to create ____</td> </tr> </table> <p>THE EFFECT ON A READER</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>When I read "____"</td> <td>It made me feel/ picture/ think ____</td> <td>Which created ____</td> <td>If the author had used a different word/ phrase, such as ____</td> <td>It would have had this effect ____</td> <td>So I think the author was trying to create ____</td> </tr> </table> <p>THE EFFECT OF AN AUTHOR'S CHOICE</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>The author uses (pick one) <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary <input type="checkbox"/> Sensory images <input type="checkbox"/> Figurative language <input type="checkbox"/> Device: ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Something else</td> <td>An example</td> <td>Another example</td> <td>This creates (pick one) <input type="checkbox"/> A mood of ____ <input type="checkbox"/> A feeling of ____ <input type="checkbox"/> A ____ tone <input type="checkbox"/> A character who ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Interest in ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding of ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Something else</td> </tr> </table>	Restate the question	Answer	Cite evidence from the text	Explain what the evidence means	I read the words "____."	Which told me ____	Then I read "____"	Which told me ____	And then I knew the author did ____ to create ____	When I read "____"	It made me feel/ picture/ think ____	Which created ____	If the author had used a different word/ phrase, such as ____	It would have had this effect ____	So I think the author was trying to create ____	The author uses (pick one) <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary <input type="checkbox"/> Sensory images <input type="checkbox"/> Figurative language <input type="checkbox"/> Device: ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Something else	An example	Another example	This creates (pick one) <input type="checkbox"/> A mood of ____ <input type="checkbox"/> A feeling of ____ <input type="checkbox"/> A ____ tone <input type="checkbox"/> A character who ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Interest in ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding of ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Something else
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Basic Reading Response Text Structures

STORY OF MY THINKING			
I used to think ...	But this happened	So now I know ...	
CHARACTER FEELINGS			
____ felt ____	I know because they did ____	I also know because they said ____	What this shows
MAKING A CONNECTION			
When I read ____	I made a connection to (self, text, world)	Because ____	
SUMMARY			
Somebody wanted ____	But ____	So ____	Then ____
THE EFFECT OF AN AUTHOR'S CHOICE			
The author uses (pick one) <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary <input type="checkbox"/> Sensory images <input type="checkbox"/> Figurative language <input type="checkbox"/> Device: ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Something else	An example	Another example	This creates (pick one) <input type="checkbox"/> A mood of ____ <input type="checkbox"/> A feeling of ____ <input type="checkbox"/> A ____ tone <input type="checkbox"/> A character who ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Interest in ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding of ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Something else

Timing the Lesson

With students we've worked with, the whole lesson (steps 1–5) takes 40–55 minutes.*

- 3–5 minutes to introduce the prompt and allow students to quick write
- 5–10 minutes to read the story
- 5 minutes to talk about the story
- 5–10 minutes to model the writing
- 10–15 minutes to “go deeper” (truisms, writer’s craft, reading response)
- 5–10 minutes to share (in partners and whole class) and wrap up

*The timing depends on the length of the picture book, the age (and needs) of the students, and what activities you choose to do.

Revisions can take one or more sessions or can go on indefinitely.

The “Want to Go Deeper?” options could be done on a separate day or even as the main lesson. The craft lesson could take 15 to 20 minutes, and the analysis lesson could take 40 to 55 minutes, depending on how far you take it.

What Can You Do With All That Great Writing?

Have students share their work out loud! Cover your walls and bulletin boards with kernel essays, stories, poems, and truisms that students have written. Share them with the author of the picture book, and us, of course!

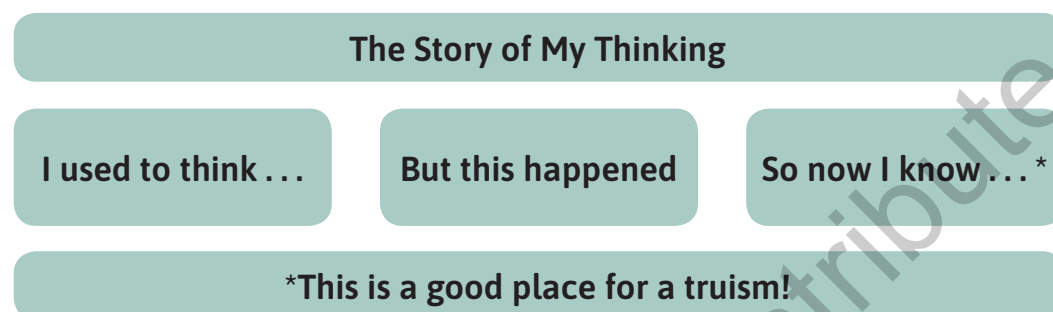
Every lesson includes

- A quick write topic
- Craft moves to notice
- A text structure to use for retelling a story and/or generating new writing
- A craft challenge to try
- Big ideas and truisms for analysis
- Questions for reading response

At a time when the strain and pressures of the world are as intense as ever, everyone needs moments to heal. We hope that you find that these lessons offer hope and spread joy—and inspire every writer in your classroom.

WHAT IS A KERNEL ESSAY?

A writer can write about a topic by using a text structure as a guide, creating one sentence per box. These sentences make a kernel essay. Here's an example using the text structure we call "The Story of My Thinking."



If I (Kayla) wanted to write about a time that my thinking changed, I might write a kernel essay like this:

1. **I used to think** that brussels sprouts were pretty gross.
2. **But then** my husband cooked them with bacon, onions, tomatoes, and a little bit of butter.
3. **So now I know** that brussels sprouts can be absolutely delicious!

Now that the kernel essay is written, the next step is for the writer to read the kernel essay aloud to several listeners to see how that structure worked.

A kernel essay is like a kernel of corn: a small thing packed with possibility. What can you do with a corn kernel? You can *leave* it. You can *pop* it. You can *plant* it. You can *toss* it.

KAYLA
BRISENO

MY TOPIC: BRUSSELS SPROUTS

THE STORY OF MY THINKING

I used
to
think...

But this
happened...

So now
I know...

MY KERNEL ESSAY

1. I used to think that brussels sprouts were pretty gross.
2. But then my husband cooked them with bacon, onions, tomatoes, and a little bit of butter.
3. So now I know that brussels sprouts can be pretty delicious!

I HEARD THIS!

1. Stephen
2. Zinnia B.
3. _____

What can you do with a kernel essay? Writers can treat it just like a kernel of corn. They can leave their essay just like it is; they can “pop” it (i.e., develop it into a full essay by adding details and craft); they can toss it out (if they don’t like the way it sounds); or they can “plant it” to let it grow into something even bigger, like a research project or a book.

The great thing about a kernel essay is that it offers writers a quick way to get thoughts on paper and see if they have something worth developing or if they need to try something else. A student doesn’t have to slog through writing a page or two before knowing whether this writing is on the right track.



Stephen explains what kernel essays are and how to use them



Gretchen walks us through how to write a kernel essay

WHAT ARE TEXT STRUCTURES?

A text structure is the plan, or path, that a writer uses in order to “track movement of the mind.” In other words, the structure will allow a reader to glimpse what you, the writer, know and how you know it. It can be created intentionally by a writer or gleaned from reading. For simplicity, we place these steps into sequenced, horizontal boxes, resembling stepping stones.

Text structures can be revised to make them work for the writing situation. Writers are free to use the text structure as it is provided, or they may wish to add, delete, change, or rearrange it in some way. A writer may even want to create a new and unique text structure—and that is absolutely okay! In fact, it’s great! The structures are tools that are meant to be manipulated for each writer and task.

OK, So What Does All This Have to Do With Picture Books?

All fifty picture books use different text structures, offering writers a chance to

- use the text structure as a pre- or post-writing exercise, as an entry or reentry into the text;
- use the text structure to retell the story they have read in the picture book; and
- use the text structure to create their own piece of writing.

Other text structures serve as handy reading response templates. Some of our favorites are in the appendix. Using these reading response structures, writers can demonstrate what they know by

- responding to something they have read (without a question or prompt),
- writing answers to questions provided for each picture book,
- constructing a short answer response,
- constructing an extended response, and
- composing a full essay (a theme, literary analysis, or other form).



Gretchen teaches how to use text structures to respond to reading (Part 1)



Gretchen teaches how to use text structures to respond to short-answer questions (Part 2)



Gretchen teaches how to use text structures to compose literary essays (Part 3)

INTRODUCING YOUR STUDENTS TO KERNEL ESSAYS

What's the Classroom Problem?

It's time to compose a piece of writing. You announce to the class, "OK, today we are going to write about how our thinking changed about something. Here is your paper. Get started writing your five-paragraph essay on this topic."

The response comes in the form of blank stares.

Students stare into the endless abyss of the blank page, and one raises his hands to announce, "Uh, Miss, I don't know what to write about."

After writing two "sentences," a second student raises her hand to declare, "I'm done!"

Another student gets started right away, to which we breathe a sigh of relief. However, while dutifully observing the writers, you discover that this student is writing in a stream of consciousness, and only about three lines might be viable for the assignment.

Let's face it: when it comes to writing an essay, a response, a story, or even a poem, it is often hard to know where to start. That blank page can be daunting to even the most experienced writer. And then, once writers get started, it is sometimes even more difficult to know where to go from there!

So, What's the Solution?

Enter kernel essays and text structures.

We have found that using a text structure to get our students to write, and asking them to write "just one sentence per box" has helped to jump-start their thinking and provides them with a road map of how to track their thinking.

Below is an introductory lesson for writing a kernel essay that you can teach tomorrow.

Basic Steps:

1. Choose a topic (from a quick list,* a quick write, a prompt, anywhere).
2. Choose a text structure.
3. Have students use the text structure to write about their topic by writing one sentence per box.
4. Have students share their kernel essays with other writers.
5. Repeat often to give them practice with a variety of other structures.
6. After writing several, have students choose one to "pop" by adding details.

TOPIC _____

STRUCTURE

MY KERNEL ESSAY

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

I HEARD THIS. 1. _____ 2. _____

3. _____

Tools/Supplies:

- A quicklist,* quick-write idea, or topic
- Student journals
- A text structure

*A quicklist is a list you can have students make of things and experiences that are personal to them. They are meant to be created quickly and to be kept in a writer's notebook for later use. They can be made about anything. Find some examples in many of Gretchen Bernabei's other books.

Step 1: Choosing a Topic

Depending on what you want your students to write, you may need to create a quicklist, use a quick write topic (there is one provided for each lesson in this book), or choose a topic.

Say: *Look at your quicklist and choose a topic (or think about this topic on the board). We are going to write about this topic in a kernel essay.*

Step 2: Choosing a Text Structure

Whether you are writing a reading response, a story, a piece about your life, a literary analysis, or an argumentative essay, there are text structures for every kind of writing. Choose a text structure that fits the writing needs of the moment in your classroom, and project it on the board, write it on chart paper, or display it under a document camera.

When you are first starting out with kernel essays, we recommend using one text structure with the whole class. Practice the same structure a few times, over a couple of days, so students have a chance to internalize it and get the hang of using a structure to guide their thinking and writing.

Step 3: Writing a Kernel Essay, One Box at a Time

Have students create a page in their notebooks that looks like this.

Say: *Now to write our kernel essay, we are going to need a text structure. Today we are going to write about a time our thinking changed by using “The Story of My Thinking,” which has three boxes. A kernel essay is small—you will only need to write one sentence per box, so how many sentences are we going to write? (Hopefully your students will tell you three sentences.) That’s right, three. Remember that sentences start with a capital letter and end with some sort of punctuation. Now let’s get started.*

We always recommend writing with your students, so you may wish to write your own kernel essay (on the board, chart paper, or the document projected by the document camera) as you walk them through the steps.

Say: *OK, I’m going to write about a time when my thinking changed about a food—brussels sprouts. The first box says, “I used to think . . .” So I’m going to write, **I used to think** that brussels sprouts were pretty gross. Go ahead and write your first sentence. If you need to change the words from the box in some way, go ahead.*

Give students time to write their sentences.

Say: *Now let’s write our second sentence. The second box says, “But this happened” I need to tell what happened to change my thinking. So I’m going to write, **But then** my husband cooked them with bacon, onions, tomatoes, and a little bit of butter. I don’t need to use the words “But this happened.” I’m just going to say what happened. Go ahead and write your next sentence.*

Give students time to write their sentences.

Say: Now let's write our last sentence. The third box says, "So now I know . . ." I need to tell how my thinking changed. So I'm going to write, **So now I know** that brussels sprouts can be absolutely delicious! Go ahead and write your last sentence. If you need to change the words from the box in some way, go ahead.

Give students time to write their sentences.

Step 4: Sharing the Kernel Essays (Don't skip this step!)

Writing should be social, and sharing is the main course, not the dessert, in the process, so *don't skip the sharing*. There will be students who think they didn't do it correctly or who didn't understand it at all, so their page might be blank. Sharing will help with that. They will have a chance to hear what other writers did with the structure.

Say: OK, now that we have written our kernel essays, it's time to share what you wrote. Before I tell you how to move around, here are some ways not to do it.

1. **Say:** "Here's my kernel essay. Read it." (This is your chance to poke fun at . . . I mean, imitate the lethargic behavior of your students when they just toss their notebooks at someone else when it's time to share. Ham it up. Have fun with this.)
What am I doing or not doing?

Students: You're not sharing with your voice! You're just trading papers.

Say: Exactly. We need to read our own writing, with our own voices.

2. **Say:** Here's another wrong way to do it. "I used to think that brussels sprouts were pretty gross. My parents didn't really like them, so they never made them. In fact, whenever we'd see them at a restaurant or something, they would turn up their noses and talk about how gross they were. . . ." (It helps to do this part quickly, imitating that one student who always adds on a bunch of extra details. You know the type.) *What am I doing?*

Students: You're adding a whole bunch of details you didn't write. You're going on and on.

Say: Yep. And while it is great to add details to your story (that's what we'll do when we pop and revise our kernel essays later), that's not the job for right now. Just read what you wrote and then listen to your partner's essay.

Say: OK, so now that you know how to do it wrong, here's how to do it correctly. Write **I HEARD THIS** at the bottom of your page. Then draw three lines next to it. When I say 'go,' I want you to stand up, find a partner, and take turns reading your kernel essays. Once someone has listened to your kernel essay, have that person sign on one of the lines. Your job is to have three people listen to your kernel essay, get three signatures, listen to at least three kernel essays, and then sit down when you have finished. I'll know we are finished sharing when we have all returned to our seats.

Allow students to move around the room and share their kernel essays. Once they have had a chance to get their signatures, gather them back together again and ask for volunteers to share with the class.

Say: Now that you've had a chance to try out your writing on a few people's ears, who would like to share theirs with the whole class? Did anyone hear a good one that we all need to hear? (Watch as hands fly up after that question.)

Allow as many students to share as time allows. As students share their essays out loud, point to each step of the text structure to reinforce the structure.

If a student has changed the structure in some way, celebrate it by writing it on the board or chart paper. **You might say,** "Oh, I noticed how Clementine has used the words 'Now I believe' instead of 'Now I know' or Cuate has added an extra 'But this happened' because he just couldn't keep it to one sentence. If you'd like to use Clementine's Story of My Thinking or Cuate's Story of My Thinking next time we use this text structure, go ahead."

Allowing students to make these structures their own has powerful results. Not only will students start tweaking the structures to make them work for their writing, but before long, many will start finding and/or inventing their own. If you keep the text structures you use and discover on the wall, it will be filled in no time with student-created ones. They will quickly see themselves as writers who make choices.

Step 5: Repeating the Process (often)

Once students have practiced writing and sharing a kernel essay, repeat this process often to give them practice with a variety of other structures.

If you really want them to internalize a certain structure, consider having them practice it three or more times in a week. You may choose to type the structure for them to glue to the top of the page of their notebooks or have them write it themselves (this helps with internalizing the structure).

If you would like them to use a variety of structures, once you have practiced a few together, consider giving them a few to choose from and sharing what they come up with.

Step 6: Popping a Kernel Essay (adding details)

Once students have had some practice with writing kernel essays and have a few to choose from, ask students to choose one they think they could pop (add the rest of the story with plenty of details—perhaps turning each sentence into at least one paragraph). If they are having trouble choosing, consider having them choose two or three and trying them out on some listeners to see which one others find most interesting.

To develop a kernel essay, start by turning each sentence of the kernel essay into a paragraph. Here are some ideas for how to do that.

- Use the "like what" button. (After a statement, imagine a reader asking, "Like what?" The student will know what details to add.)
- Use jerk talk. (After a statement, imagine a real or imaginary listener who says, "No, it's not!" Prove it!")
- Add some ba-da-bings. (These are sentences that traditionally tell what someone was doing (ba), what someone saw (da), and what someone felt (bing): where your feet were, what you saw, and what you thought.)

- Add some pitchforks. (A pitchfork sentence or series of sentences will take one thing and branch it off into three or more.)
- Hunt for vague writing and change it into something specific.
- Add dialogue.
- Add text evidence.
- Add a truism and explain it.
- Add descriptions.
- Add metaphors, similes, or other writer’s craft tools.
- Use the “three questions” technique: Listeners write three questions, things they want to know about the writing.
- Use the “Writer’s Tools Chart” (found on the companion website) as a handy tool for revision.

TEACHER DEBRIEF

This intro lesson offers a pattern of writing that, with repeated practice, becomes routine and can be used for any sort of writing. In this book, lessons are built around the text structures found in picture books. However, if you want to get your students used to writing kernel essays that follow a text structure, you may want to try having them write a few kernel essays using these simple structures:

THE STORY OF MY THINKING		
I used to think . . .	But this happened	So now I know . . .

THE MEMORY STRUCTURE				
Where I was and what I was doing	What happened first	What happened next	What happened last	What I learned or realized

HOW ONE EVENT CHANGED A CHARACTER		
How a character was before	What happened	How the character changed

11-MINUTE ESSAY				
Truism (something I believe is true)	One way I know it’s true (an example from a book, a movie, history, or my life)	Another way I know it’s true (an example from a book, a movie, history, or my life)	Another way I know it’s true (an example from a book, a movie, history, or my life)	Truism (said differently) or I wonder . . .

Once students have the hang of it, jump into some of the lessons in this book to see how real authors use text structures in their writing.

We write kernel essays regularly to do all kinds of things: write about our lives, respond to something we've read or watched, reflect, or compose a persuasive or informative essay. As we have said, text structures can be found everywhere and can be created for just about any writing purpose. In their kernel form, they act as an outline for where the writing should go, and they provide an entry point for even the most reluctant writers.

GOING FURTHER

Here are several ways to use the text structures in this book.

- Use the text structure to write a kernel essay summary of the story.
- Use the text structure to write an original piece in a kernel essay.
- Use the text structure to write a piece of longer writing.
- Use the list of question stems and reading response text structures to do some reading responses, writing, discussing, and even preparing for a standardized test.
- Use the text structure to launch a discussion or compose a poem, a letter, a skit, an essay, or a speech.

Consider providing a permanent home for text structures in your classroom (bulletin board, wall, the back of the door, the side of a filing cabinet). Have students collect text structures in their notebooks for easy access.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

INTRODUCING YOUR STUDENTS TO TRUISMS

What's the Classroom Problem?

You give your students a piece (like “All Summer in a Day” by Ray Bradbury, for example), and after they read it, you ask them “What’s the theme?”

They don’t hesitate.

“It’s about my grandmother!”

“My kindergarten teacher!”

“It’s about rain.”

“Turtles.”

Like people playing darts with their eyes closed, they just hope something sticks to the board and you get off their backs. Teachers all over agree: *Theme* is one of the most difficult concepts to teach. However, it is a vital skill for students to be able to read between the lines, to pick up on subtleties and nuances, and to explain their thinking accurately and succinctly. And if we can get them to do it with some style and eloquence, all the better.

So, What's the Solution?

The solution to get your students to analyze for the theme accurately is to teach them how to write truisms. A truism is simply a life lesson—what an author or creator might want us to take away from a work.

Below is an introductory lesson you can teach tomorrow.

Overview of the Steps:

1. Project a compelling photo or piece of art
2. Practice point-it-out observations
3. Practice noticing “big ideas”
4. Practice composing truism statements

Tools/Supplies:

- Two or three photographs (We like to use photos from many sources, including “Photos of the Week” from *The Atlantic*, “Best Photographs of the Day” from *The Guardian*, the *National Geographic* “Photo of the Day,” images from the website Unsplash, and others.)
- Student journals

Step 1: Project a Compelling Photo or Piece of Art

You want something that will grab your students’ attention—something that will get them talking as soon as it’s up on the projector and the lesson hasn’t even begun. This photo is a great one to get them talking.



Say: Go ahead and look at the photo of children playing tug-of-war on the screen. Take a good long look. Pay attention to every detail.

Today, we're going to break apart this photograph. But before we do that, we're going to need to define an important word.

Who knows what the word inference means?

That's right, it means an educated guess based on clues or evidence. Keep that definition in your mind today.

Step 2: Practice Point-It-Out Observations

Say: Now that you've looked at it closely, imagine you could step into this photo. What are some things that you would be able to touch? Look for things that you can point out. For example, a detail I see is the rope. If you can place your finger on it, then that's a detail. So, what do you see?

Allow students to share what they see. If they jump to an inference, like "The boy looks happy," redirect them by saying, "I like that inferencing, but let's focus just on the details. Instead, we could say 'the boy is smiling.'"

Step 3: Practice Noticing "Big Ideas"

Say: Next, we're going to look at the photo and identify what I call "Big Idea Words." These are words of things that you can't really touch. For example: love, friendship, heartache. Those are big idea words. What are some other big idea words that come to mind?

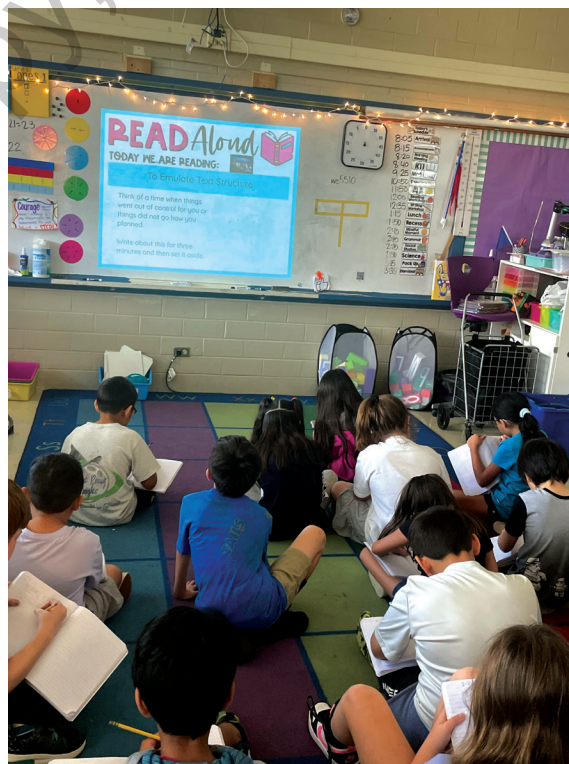
Allow students to share some big idea words. Correct them as necessary.

Say: Great work! Let's look at this picture again, but this time, instead of looking for details we can touch, let's look for details that we can't touch—big idea words. What do you see? Whatever you come up with, you're going to have to have point-it-out evidence to back it up.

Allow time for students to think about and then share what big ideas they see. As they share, write it down on the board.

A list of big idea words is provided in the appendix. Big idea words my students saw in this photo included teamwork, childhood, competition, excitement, joy, enthusiasm, and struggle.

TRUISMS		
WHAT I SEE	BIG IDEAS	TRUISMS
- Kids pulling a rope	teamwork	We accomplish more when we work together.
- Boy smiling	hard work	
- grass	competition	A strong team can be made up of all kinds of people.
- glasses	working together	
- Hands	struggle	There can be joy in struggle.
- Jacket	joy	
- Someone in the back (not pulling)	team	



Step 4: Practice Composing Truism Statements

Say: All artists or authors usually have something they want the audience or reader or viewer to think about or understand—a message they hope their audience learns. In your journal, on a blank page, write the words “Truisms” and the following definition (write the definition on the board, too).

A truism is a message or a truth about life that applies to nearly everyone.

Truisms do not describe, and they do not command.

Say: At this point, we’ve 1) broken down this photograph and 2) identified a huge list of big ideas. Look through our list of big ideas. Choose the one big idea that you think this photograph is mainly about. Write a truism for this photograph using the big idea word you chose. For example, let’s say you think that teamwork is the most important big idea in this photo. Ask yourself, “What is the photographer trying to get me to understand about ‘teamwork?’” Your answer is your truism.

I have three requirements for your truism.

1. You must be able to provide point-it-out evidence for your truism. Don’t just pull something out of your hat! It should connect with the picture in some way.
2. Your truism should be written as a complete sentence.
3. Your truism should not be a command—don’t tell me what to do.

If you’re stuck, start with the word “sometimes.” Let’s see what you come up with!

Give students a few minutes to write. Purposefully don’t give them an example. See what they come up with on their own. Give them a chance to share with a small group or partner first before sharing with the whole class. Some example truisms could be

- We accomplish more when we work together.
- A strong team can be made up of all kinds of people.
- There can be joy in struggle.

Say: Let’s hear a few. Who heard a truism that is powerful or the whole class should hear? That’s a great truism! What point-it-out evidence do you have that supports your truism? Good!

TEACHER DEBRIEF

This intro lesson demonstrates a pattern of analysis that, with repeated practice, becomes shorthand in your class and can be used for any sort of media. We’ll be analyzing picture books, but we recommend starting with a photograph to make the analytical process concrete and as simple as possible for your students. We try

to do this at least weekly, with poems, pictures, videos, stories, announcements, you name it. (“Oh, what would a truism be for this?”) Remember, you are laying the groundwork for analysis skills that students will use all year long—and hopefully the rest of their lives!

GOING FURTHER

For scaffolding purposes, it is best to start with a picture. As students get more practice and gain confidence, consider using short videos, short texts, poetry, picture books, and eventually novels.

- *Photographs.* The more thought provoking the picture, the better it works). Historical photographs and *National Geographic* “Photo of the Day” images work well.
- *Artwork.* Pieces by these artists often work well: Norman Rockwell, Pawel Kuczyński, Banksy.
- *Short, wordless videos.* “Alma,” “The Invention of Love,” and “Wire Cutters” are a few favorites for middle schoolers. Pixar shorts are great for elementary students.
- *Short stories or excerpts of mentor texts.* “Love” by William Maxwell, “All Summer in a Day” by Ray Bradbury, and “Thank You, Ma’am” by Langston Hughes are a few staples for fifth grade and up.
- *Poems.* A few of our favorites for middle and secondary grades are: “Gate A4” and “Kindness,” both by Naomi Shihab Nye; “Teenagers” by Pat Mora; “A Rainy Morning” by Ted Kooser; “Allowables” by Nikki Giovanni; “First Love” by Carl Linder; “what love is’nt” by Yrsa Daley-Ward; and “Death Barged In” by Kathleen Sheeder Bonanno.
- And, of course, we recommend picture books! We’ll provide starting points in this book but any favorite picture book will do.



Stephen and Kayla explain the power of truisms



A Prezi we created to teach truisms to our seventh graders

I recommend doing a group practice after this lesson. Project a new picture, review the process, and have kids discuss with those around them at each step.

Consider providing a permanent home for truisms in your classroom, such as a bulletin board, a wall, the side of a filing cabinet, or the back of a window shade. This will be a place for students to post their own truisms, ones they’ve found in the real world, as well as the “keepers” from their independent reading.



Truisms can be found anywhere! We used this one for *Ten Ways to Hear Snow!*

OK, so what do I do with all these truisms? There are more resources available on the companion website to help you teach truisms.

- Big ideas word list
- Truism dude/Levels of truisms
- Truism sentence frame (see “Truism Reteach Lessons”)
- Theme chart
- Truism braid (with video)
- 11-minute essay (with video)



Scan the QR code to visit the companion website to find these truism resources.



A growing wall of truisms in Kayla’s classroom.

INTRODUCING YOUR STUDENTS TO READING RESPONSE

What's the Classroom Problem?

You've just read something together as a class, and now it's time to see if anyone understood it. You ask the class, "Can anyone tell me how our character changed from the beginning of the story to the end?"

"Her hair got shorter!"

"She fell asleep."

"She got older."

"Uh. . ."

"She got nicer?"

Encouraged with that last response, you say, "OK! How do you know that?" No response.

The facts are these: getting students to *talk* about what they have read, what they think, and why they think that (beyond the surface level) can be nearly impossible—let alone asking them to *write* about these things. And even if you *do* get them started, they tend to go in circles and never really form the answer. Nor do they provide that ever-elusive text evidence to back it up.

Some states require this form of writing on their state assessments, so there is a real urgency for our students to do this well.

So, What's the Solution?

Once again, we turn to text structures and kernel essays.

Just as we have seen kernel essays and text structures work wonders in other genres of writing, we have found that providing students with a structure to follow is like leading them along a path with a trail of breadcrumbs.

Without being forceful or formulaic, we can naturally show them how to provide a solid answer supported by evidence from the text. Students can easily learn a concrete way to say, "This is what I think" and "This is how I know that."

Below are a few introductory lessons for writing a reading response that you can teach tomorrow.

Basic Steps:

Basic Reading Response Text Structures

STORY OF MY THINKING			
I used to think ...	But this happened	So now I know ...	

CHARACTER FEELINGS			
_____ felt _____	I know because they did _____	I also know because they said _____	What this shows

MAKING A CONNECTION		
When I read _____	I made a connection to (self, text, world)	Because _____

SUMMARY			
Somebody wanted _____	But _____	So _____	Then _____

THE EFFECT OF AN AUTHOR'S CHOICE			
The author uses (pick one) <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary <input type="checkbox"/> Sensory images <input type="checkbox"/> Figurative language <input type="checkbox"/> Device: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Something else	An example	Another example	This creates (pick one) <input type="checkbox"/> A mood of _____ <input type="checkbox"/> A feeling of _____ <input type="checkbox"/> A _____ tone <input type="checkbox"/> A character who _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Interest in _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding of _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Something else

If you want students simply to respond to reading (no prompt)

1. Read something together.
2. Show students the reading response text structures.
3. Let them choose a text structure.
4. Have students use the text structure to write about the text by writing one sentence per box.
5. Have students read their kernel essays to other writers.
6. Repeat often to give them practice with a variety of other structures.
7. After students have written several, have them choose one to “pop” by adding details to turn it into a full essay.

Questions and Text Structures for Constructed Reading Responses

Questions and Answers About Understanding the Reading

GENERIC QUESTION STEMS	TEXT STRUCTURES TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS																						
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What happens in the story? (Retell the story) 2. What is the story mostly about right now? 3. How do you think ____ feels at the beginning and/or end of the story? 4. What is the conflict or problem of the story so far? 5. Who is more ____ (helpful, nicer), ____ (a character) or ____ (another character)? 6. How does ____ change during the story? 7. Why does ____ do/think/say/believe/ want? 8. What's one word you would use to describe ____ (character)? 9. What lesson does ____ learn in the story? 10. What is the moral of the story? 11. In sentence ____, what does the word or phrase ____ suggest? 12. How are ____ and ____ alike/different? 13. Why does ____ become ____ (upset, happy) when ____? 14. What does ____ (character) mean when he/she says ____? 15. What can the reader tell (conclude) from the action in sentence(s) ____? 16. What does ____'s reaction when she/he learns ____ show about her/his character? 	<p>QA12345</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Question</td> <td>Answer</td> <td>How do you know?</td> <td>What does that mean?</td> <td>How else do you know?</td> <td>So ... your answer is ... what?</td> </tr> </table> <p>RACE</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Restate the question</td> <td>Answer</td> <td>Cite evidence from the text</td> <td>Explain what the evidence means</td> </tr> </table> <p>BA-DA-BINGING THE EVIDENCE</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Answer to the question</td> <td>What the character does, says, and/or thinks that proves my answer</td> <td>What that shows</td> </tr> </table> <p>FIGURING OUT THE READING</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>I read the words "____."</td> <td>Which told me ____</td> <td>Then I read "____"</td> <td>Which told me ____</td> <td>And then I knew ____</td> </tr> </table> <p>EXPLAINING A CHANGE</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>How ____ changes in the story</td> <td>At the beginning, ... (with evidence)</td> <td>At the end, ... (with evidence)</td> <td>Another way to describe the change</td> </tr> </table>	Question	Answer	How do you know?	What does that mean?	How else do you know?	So ... your answer is ... what?	Restate the question	Answer	Cite evidence from the text	Explain what the evidence means	Answer to the question	What the character does, says, and/or thinks that proves my answer	What that shows	I read the words "____."	Which told me ____	Then I read "____"	Which told me ____	And then I knew ____	How ____ changes in the story	At the beginning, ... (with evidence)	At the end, ... (with evidence)	Another way to describe the change
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GENERIC QUESTION STEMS	TEXT STRUCTURES TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. How do the actions of ____ and/or ____ support the theme or moral? 18. What causes ____ to realize ____? 19. Why does ____ agree to ____? 20. What is ____'s attitude about ____? 21. What argument does ____ (a character) make to support ____'s (that character's) behavior/opinion? 22. What challenge(s) does ____ face? 23. What does ____ represent in the story? 	

Questions About Author's Choices

GENERIC QUESTION STEMS	TEXT STRUCTURES TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS																			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why is ____ (an event or character) important? 2. Why does the author ____? 3. How does the author show that ____ (character) is ____ (characteristic)? 4. Why did the author write this story? 5. What does the author show us by including a description of ____? 6. How did the author help visualize ____? 7. What is the main reason the author included the sentence(s) ____? 8. Why does the author choose this setting for the story? 9. In sentence ____, the author uses the word(s)/phrase(s) ____ to suggest what? 10. What does the sensory language in the sentence ____ illustrate? 11. How does the description in the sentence(s) ____ affect the reader's understanding of the setting/character? 12. The author includes the information in the sentence(s) ____ to help the reader do what? 13. What is the author's purpose in writing this story? 14. How does the author's description of ____ help the reader understand ____? 15. What effect does the word/phrase ____ have in the sentence ____? 16. How does ____ contribute to the development of the author's ideas? 17. ____ is important in the story because it shows what? 18. How does the setting influence the plot of the story? 19. What is the effect of the author's use of ____? 	<p>RACE</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Restate the question</td> <td>Answer</td> <td>Cite evidence from the text</td> <td>Explain what the evidence means</td> </tr> </table> <p>NOTICING THE AUTHOR'S MOVES</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>I read the words "____."</td> <td>Which told me ____</td> <td>Then I read "____."</td> <td>Which told me ____</td> <td>And then I knew the author did ____ to create ____</td> </tr> </table> <p>THE EFFECT ON A READER</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>When I read "____."</td> <td>It made me feel/ picture/ think ____</td> <td>Which created ____</td> <td>If the author had used a different word/ phrase, such as ____</td> <td>It would have had this effect ____</td> <td>So I think the author was trying to create ____</td> </tr> </table> <p>THE EFFECT OF AN AUTHOR'S CHOICE</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>The author uses (pick one) <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary <input type="checkbox"/> Sensory images <input type="checkbox"/> Figurative language <input type="checkbox"/> Device: ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Something else</td> <td>An example</td> <td>Another example</td> <td>This creates (pick one) <input type="checkbox"/> A mood of ____ <input type="checkbox"/> A feeling of ____ <input type="checkbox"/> A ____ tone <input type="checkbox"/> A character who ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Interest in ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding in ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Something else</td> </tr> </table>	Restate the question	Answer	Cite evidence from the text	Explain what the evidence means	I read the words "____."	Which told me ____	Then I read "____."	Which told me ____	And then I knew the author did ____ to create ____	When I read "____."	It made me feel/ picture/ think ____	Which created ____	If the author had used a different word/ phrase, such as ____	It would have had this effect ____	So I think the author was trying to create ____	The author uses (pick one) <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary <input type="checkbox"/> Sensory images <input type="checkbox"/> Figurative language <input type="checkbox"/> Device: ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Something else	An example	Another example	This creates (pick one) <input type="checkbox"/> A mood of ____ <input type="checkbox"/> A feeling of ____ <input type="checkbox"/> A ____ tone <input type="checkbox"/> A character who ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Interest in ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding in ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Something else
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If you want them to respond to reading with a student-written prompt

1. Read something together.
2. Show students the question stems and write some questions together.
3. Ask them to choose one of the questions to answer.
4. Show students the reading response text structures.
5. Let them choose a text structure.
6. Have students use the text structure to answer the question about the text by writing one sentence per box.
7. Have students read their kernel essays to other writers.
8. Repeat often to give them practice with a variety of other structures.
9. After they have written several kernel essays, have students choose one to "pop" by adding details to turn it into a full essay.

Common Extended Constructed Response Prompts

<p>Informational</p> <p>How do the two pieces have the same message (or theme, life lesson, purpose, point...)?</p>	TWO VOICES, ONE MESSAGE				
<p>Informational</p> <p>How does ____ (a character, a situation, a place, an idea) change?</p>	SOMETHING CHANGED				
<p>Informational</p> <p>How are ____ and ____ alike (or different)?</p>	WAYS WE ARE ALIKE				
<p>Informational</p> <p>How do ____ and ____ benefit each other?</p>	A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP				
<p>Argument</p> <p>What's better (or more important, more beneficial, more valuable, more beautiful, more impactful): ____ or ____?</p>	THIS IS BETTER THAN THAT				

If you want students to respond to reading with a teacher-provided prompt

1. Read something together.
2. Show students the question they will answer.
3. Show students the reading response text structures.
4. Let them choose a text structure.
5. Have students use the text structure to answer the question about the text by writing one sentence per box.
6. Have students read their kernel essays to other writers.
7. Repeat often to give them practice with a variety of other structures.
8. After they have written several, have students choose one to "pop" by adding details to turn it into a full essay.

Tools/Supplies

- A common text
- Student journals
- A text structure (or a collection of reading response structures)
- A prompt or question (or the list of question stems)

Step 1: Read a Common Text.

Read one of the books together (or any selection). You may wish to start with the quick write provided, but you don't have to. Stop to discuss the story.

You can ask about any aspect of the story. Here are a few questions to get you started:

- What happened in the story?
- What did you notice?
- What confused you?
- What did you connect with? Why?
- What was the main character like?
- What parts of the story stuck out to you? Why?
- What writer's craft moves did you notice the author using?

Say: *To show our understanding, we're going to write a response to our story. Let's get our page ready to write.*

Step 2: Choose a Path to Respond

In this lesson, step 2 can follow a few different tracks.

If you want students simply to respond to reading (no prompt), follow step 2a.

Step 2a: Choosing a Text Structure

If you are doing this for the first time, we recommend using the Basic Reading Response text structures without a prompt.

To familiarize them with this process, give students only one structure and practice it a few times with multiple stories.

Choose the text structure that you would like the students to use and project it (write it on the board, write it on chart paper, or display it under a document camera). If your students are comfortable using these structures, let them choose their own.

Continue on to steps three through six below.

If you want them to respond to reading with a student-written prompt, follow steps 2b through 2d.

Step 2b: Creating Questions

Show students the question stems for reading response.

Say: *We are going to create our own questions about this book. Here's an example of a question we might write for *The Dot* by Peter H. Reynolds. [Write this question on the board, on chart paper, or show it under the document camera: *How does Vashti's attitude towards art change during the story?*] I'm not going to answer this question right now. I'm just going to write a few questions that I could answer. Take a few minutes and write two or three questions about the story that you could answer using the question stems I've provided. You don't need to answer them right now.*

Give the students time to write a few questions in their notebooks or on sticky notes.

Say: *Now that we have all written some questions, who would like to share theirs?*

As students share, write five to eight of them on the board, on chart paper, or show them under the document camera.

Step 2c: Choosing a Question to Answer

Now you have a bank of questions for students to answer. Keep the questions visible for students to choose.

Say: *Now you have several questions you could choose to answer. Choose one and write it at the top of your page (next to where you have written "My Response to *The Dot* by Peter H. Reynolds). This is the question you will answer, using a text structure.*

Step 2d: Choosing a Text Structure

To familiarize them with this process, give students only one structure and practice it a few times with multiple stories.

Choose the text structure that you would like the students to use and project it on the board, write it on chart paper, or display it under a document camera. If your students are comfortable using these structures, let them choose their own.

Continue on to steps three through six below.

If you want students to respond to reading with a teacher-provided prompt, follow steps 2e through 2f.

Step 2e: Revealing the Question

For each book, we have provided you with some questions for short and extended responses. Feel free to use these or create your own using the question stems.

Say: *I want you to answer this question about the story: *How does Vashti's attitude towards art change during the story?* Write it at the top of your page (next to where you have written "My Response to *The Dot* by Peter H. Reynolds"). We will answer this question using a text structure.*

(Continued)

(Continued)

Step 2f: Choosing a Text Structure

To familiarize them with this process, give students only one structure and practice it a few times with multiple stories.

Choose the text structure that you would like the students to use and project it: write it on the board, write it on chart paper, or display it under a document camera. If your students are comfortable using these structures, let them choose their own.

Continue on to steps three through six below.

Step 3: Write a Kernel Essay, One Box at a Time

Have students create a page in their notebooks that looks like this.

The image shows a hand-drawn template on lined paper. At the top, the word "TOPIC" is written in capital letters, followed by a horizontal line. Below this is a large rectangular box with rounded corners, labeled "STRUCTURE" in capital letters at the top left. Underneath the structure box is another large rectangular box with rounded corners, labeled "MY KERNEL ESSAY" in capital letters at the top left. Inside this box, there are five numbered lines: "1.", "2.", "3.", "4.", and "5.", each followed by a horizontal line for writing. At the bottom of the page, the phrase "I HEARD THIS." is written in capital letters, followed by three numbered lines: "1. _____", "2. _____", and "3. _____".

Say: Now to write our kernel essay about our story *The Dot* by Peter H. Reynolds, we are going to use the text structure called “The Story of My Thinking,” which has three boxes. (If you have allowed the students to choose their own structure, skip this part.) Remember that a kernel essay is small—you will only need to write one sentence per box. So how many sentences are we going to write? (We hope your students will tell you three sentences.) That’s right, three. Remember that sentences start with a capital letter and end with some sort of punctuation. Now let’s get started.

We always recommend writing with your students, so you may wish to write your own kernel essay (on the board, chart paper, or on the document camera) as you walk them through the steps.

Say: I’m going to write about how Vashti’s thinking changed about how artists get better. The first box says, “I used to think. . . .” So I’m going to write, **Vashti** (not I) **used to think** that artists were just born with artistic talent. Go ahead and write your first sentence. If you need to change the words from the box in some way, go ahead.

Give students time to write their sentences.

KAYLA BRISEÑO

MY RESPONSE TO THE DOT

THE STORY OF MY THINKING

I USED TO THINK...	BUT THIS HAPPENED	SO NOW I KNOW...
--------------------	-------------------	------------------

MY RESPONSE:

1. VASHTI USED TO THINK THAT ARTISTS WERE JUST BORN WITH ARTISTIC TALENT.
2. BUT THEN VASHTI PRACTICED AND PRACTICED WITH ALL KINDS OF TECHNIQUES TO MAKE HER DOTS, AND SHE EVENTUALLY BECAME SKILLED ENOUGH FOR AN ART SHOW.
3. SO NOW VASHTI KNOWS THAT TO GET GOOD AT SOMETHING, YOU HAVE TO PRACTICE A LOT.

I HEARD THIS. 1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Say: Now let's write our second sentence. The second box says, "But this happened." I need to tell what happened in the story to change Vashti's thinking. So I'm going to write, **But then** Vashti practiced and practiced with all kinds of techniques to make her dots, and she eventually became skilled enough for an art show. I don't need to use the words "But this happened." I'm just going to say what happened. Go ahead and write your next sentence.

Give students time to write their sentences.

Say: Now let's write our last sentence. The third box says, "So now I know. . . ." I need to tell how Vashti's thinking changed. So I'm going to write, **So now Vashti (not I) knows** that to get good at something, you have to practice it a lot. Hey! That's a truism. That last sentence is a great place to put a truism. You might want to try that, too. Go ahead and write your last sentence. If you need to change the words from the box in some way, go ahead.

Give students time to write their sentences.

Step 4: Sharing the Kernel Essays (Don't skip this step!)

Writing should be social, and sharing is the main course, not the dessert, in the process, so *don't skip the sharing*. There will be students who think that they did not do the task correctly, or who didn't understand it at all, so their page might be blank. Sharing will help with that. They will have a chance to hear what other writers did with the structure.

Say: We have written our kernel essays, and it's time to share what you wrote. Before I tell you how to move around, here are some ways not to do that sharing:

1. **Say:** "Here's my kernel essay. Read it." (This is your chance to poke fun at . . . I mean, imitate the lethargic behavior of your students when they just toss their notebooks at someone else when it's time to share. Ham it up. Have fun with this.) *What am I doing or not doing?*

Students: You're not sharing with your voice! You're just trading papers.

Say: Exactly. We need to read our own writing, with our own voices.

2. **Say:** Here's the other wrong way to do it: "**Vashti used to think** that artists were just born with artistic talent. I mean, I thought that, too. My sister has always been good at art, and she's just good at everything. She's been into art ever since she was little. She was always drawing and painting and creating. She even sells her art now on her own website (www.maryreganart.com). It helps to do this part quickly, imitating that one student who always adds on a bunch of extra details. (You know the type.) *What am I doing?*

Students: You're adding a whole bunch of details you didn't write. You're going on and on.

Say: Yep. And while it is great to add details to your story (that's what we'll do when we pop and revise our kernel essays later), that's not the job for right now. Just read what you wrote, and then listen to your partner's essay.

Say: Now that you know what not to do, here's what you should do. Write *I HEARD THIS* at the bottom of your page. Then draw three lines next to it. When I say 'go,' I want you to stand up, find a partner, and take turns reading your kernel essays. Once someone has listened to your kernel essay, have the listener sign on one of the lines. Your job is to have three people listen to your kernel essay, get three signatures, listen to at least three kernel essays, and then sit down when you have finished. I'll know we are finished sharing when we have all returned to our seats.

Allow students to move around the room and share their kernel essays. Once they have had a chance to get their signatures, gather them back together again and ask for volunteers to share with the class.

Say: Now that you've had a chance to try out your writing on a few people's ears, who would like to share with the whole class? Did anyone hear a good one that we all need to hear? (Watch as hands fly up after that question.)

Allow as many students to share as time allows. As students share their essays out loud, point to each step of the text structure to reinforce the structure.

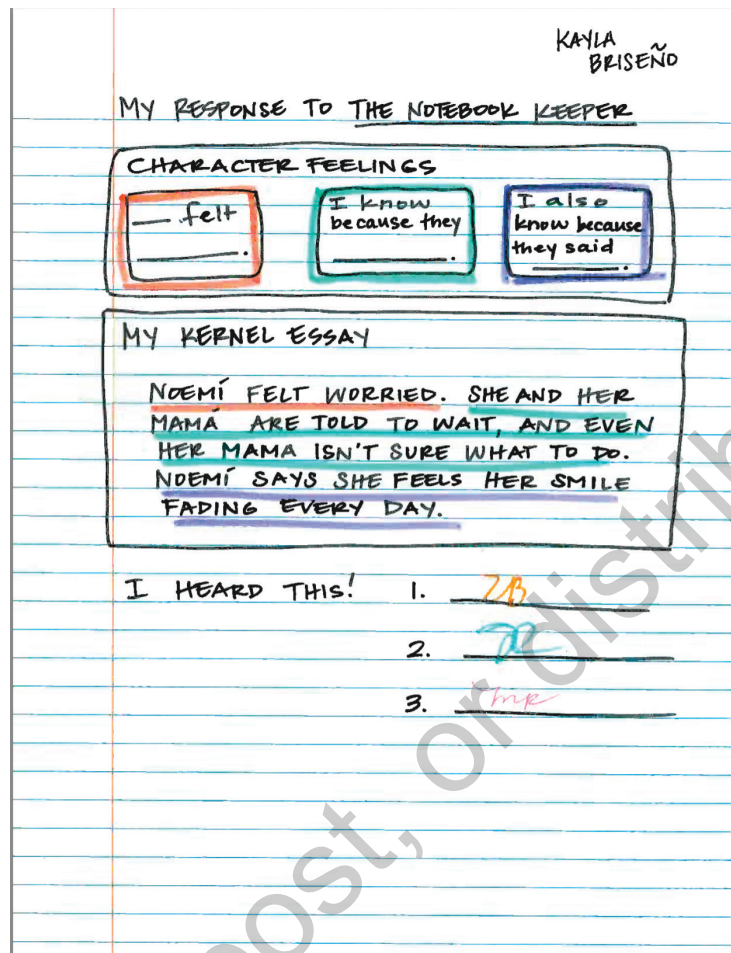
If a student has changed the structure in some way, celebrate it by writing it on the board or chart paper. **You might say,** "Oh, I noticed that Francisco has used the words 'Now Vashti believes . . .' instead of 'Now Vashti knows . . .' or that Lily has added an extra 'But this happened' because she just couldn't keep it to one sentence. If you'd like to use Francisco's *Story of My Thinking* or Lily's *Story of My Thinking* next time we use this text structure, go ahead."

Allowing students to make these structures their own has powerful results. Not only will students start tweaking the structures to make them work for their writing, but before long, many will start finding and/or inventing their own. If you keep the text structures you use and discover on the wall, it will be filled in no time with student-created ones. Students will quickly see themselves as writers who make choices.

Step 5: Repeating the Process (often)

Once students have practiced writing and sharing a kernel essay, repeat this process often to give them practice with a variety of the other reading response structures.

If you really want them to internalize a certain structure, consider having them practice it three or more times in a week. You may choose to type the structure for them to glue to the top of the page of their notebooks or have them write it themselves (this helps with internalizing the structure).



If you would like them to use a variety of structures, once you have practiced a few together, consider giving them a few to choose from and sharing what they come up with.

Step 6: Popping a Kernel Essay (adding details to turn it into a full essay)

Once students have had some practice with writing kernel essays and they have a few to choose from, ask students to choose one they think they could pop (by adding more details—they might turn each sentence into at least one paragraph). If they are having trouble choosing, consider having them choose two or three and trying them out on some listeners to see which one others find most compelling.

To develop a kernel essay, start by turning each sentence of the kernel essay into a paragraph. Here are some ideas for how to do that:

- Use the “like what” button. (After a statement, imagine a reader asking, “Like what?” The student will know what details to add.)
- Use jerk talk. (After a statement, imagine a real or imaginary listener who says, “No, it’s not!” Prove it!”)
- Add some ba-da-bings. (These are sentences that traditionally tell about circumstances and sensations: where your feet were, what you saw, and what you thought.)

- Add some pitchforks. (A pitchfork sentence or series of sentences takes one thing and branches it off into three or more.)
- Hunt for vague writing and change it into something specific.
- Add dialogue.
- Add (more) text evidence.
- Add a truism, and explain it.
- Add descriptions.
- Add metaphors, similes, or other writer’s craft tools.
- Use the “three questions” technique. (Listeners write three questions, things they want to know about the writing.)
- Use the “Writer’s Tools Chart” (found on the companion website) as a handy tool for revision.

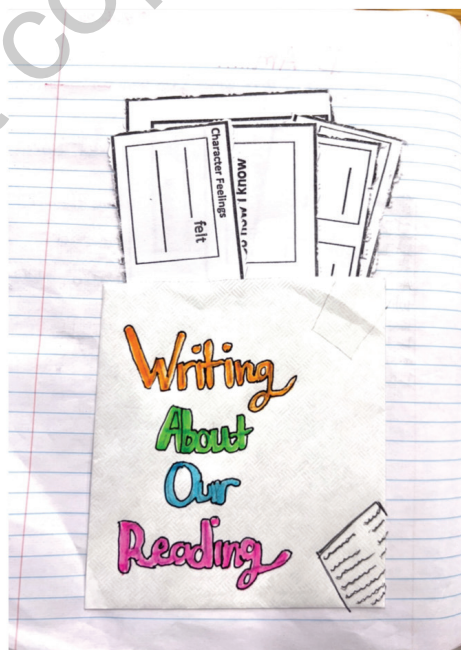
TEACHER DEBRIEF

Why Should I Give My Students All This Choice?

No matter which way you decide to go (unprompted or prompted), it is important to give students choices. Providing a variety of choices leads them to really think about what they are answering and what they need to say.

Why These Kinds of Questions?

While we’re not reinventing the wheel with these question types, we want thinking to be in the forefront. Taking students beyond the surface level requires them to really think.



Why Should I Have My Students Create Their Own Questions?

While we've provided you with some questions for each picture book, it is important for students to go through the question creation phase. Students are more involved when they write their own questions. It builds confidence. When they face these types of questions on a test, the task won't be as daunting because they have walked down that road before.

The main reason students don't share their writing is that they lack confidence in their answers. *What if I'm wrong?* When they are the question creators, not only are they confident to share, but they have been given steps to express and support their thinking.

Can I Use These Structures for More Than Just Reading Response?

Just about all writing is argumentative. We make a claim and prove it. Whenever we ask students to answer a question about a text, their answer is a claim (something they believe is true), and they have to back it up with some sort of proof—text evidence, examples from their own life, or information or ideas from something else they've read, watched, or learned. This kind of writing and thinking can be applied to all sorts of genres.



Gretchen teaches how to use text structures to respond to reading (Part 1)



Gretchen teaches how to use text structures to respond to short answer questions (Part 2)



Gretchen teaches how to use text structures to compose literary essays (Part 3)

Originally found in *Text Structures and Fables* by Gretchen Bernabei and Jayne Hover, a "Three Things Response" (also found on our book's companion website) is another useful tool to get your students to respond to reading (or to a video, a speaker, a field trip, anything), unprompted.