



Text Features

By
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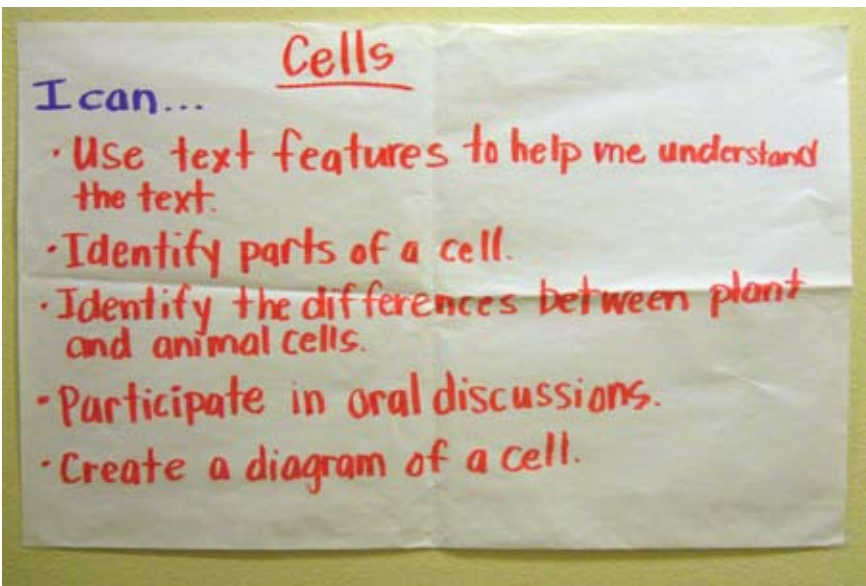
A Teacher's Story

When Mrs. Cruz was in elementary school, she remembers starting a chapter in a textbook without even reading the title. She barely glanced at the pictures and skipped the captions. She never read the graphs or charts and skimmed the headings and subheadings without consciously thinking about the purpose of the information.

Thinking back, Mrs. Cruz believed her goal was to read all the words and get through the chapter and not be slowed down by this extra stuff. *I was one of those disengaged readers that closed the book at the end of the chapter and then said, "There, I read it!"*

The turnaround point for Mrs. Cruz was in middle school. One teacher showed her how to turn headings and subheadings into questions and then read the section in search for answers.

Now a teacher, Mrs. Cruz has many 4th grade students in her classroom with the same lack of understanding of the important role text features play in comprehending the text. Using her knowledge from attending professional development sessions, reading professional articles, and trying different strategies to emphasize how text features support comprehension, she plans her lesson. She knows the importance of reading the text before assigning it to her students in order to point out to students the text features they should attend to.



I don't want my students missing the main point because they went through the motions of reading the words, but didn't engage with what was written, says Mrs. Cruz. I want students to get excited and prepared for reading the text by looking at all the pieces of information, such as pictures, captions, and headings to help focus on the topic.

Recently, she overheard students discussing an assignment comparing animal and plant cells. She was pleased by what she heard and happy to know that her 4th grade students are realizing the value of text features now rather than in middle school like she did.

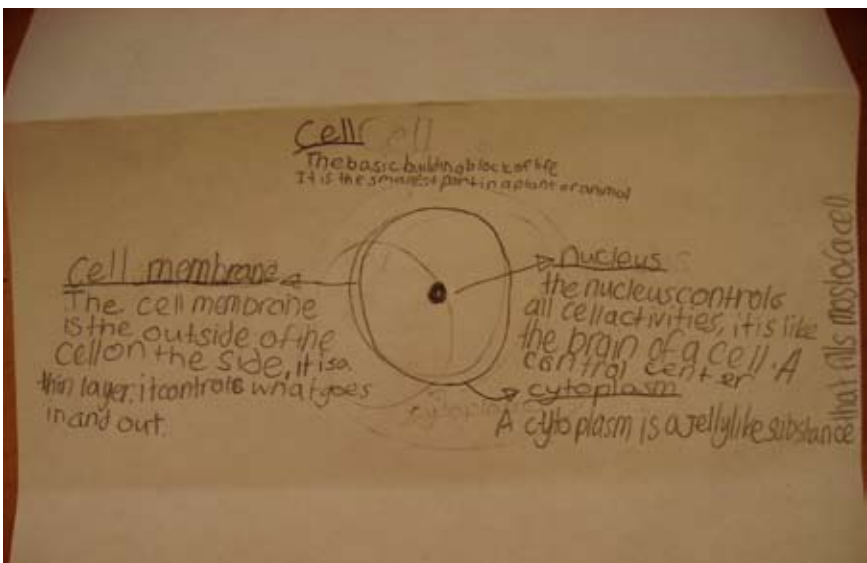
One of the differences between animal cells and plant cells is that animal cells have a cell wall, said Anthony.

No, that's not true. Animal cells don't have a cell wall, exclaimed Tyler.

Yes, they do! Anthony argues back.

No! No, they don't. Look at the diagram on page A7, says Brittney. It even says it under the heading, Cell Parts, animals do not have a cell wall.

Oh, Anthony responds sheepishly.



As students progress through schooling, they are often faced with the challenges of comprehending informational and content area text. Informational texts are known for their use of text features. When teachers make students aware of what text structures are available to them, they will then be able to show students how to use text features.

In this book, *Effective Instructional Strategies: Text Features*, we will take you on a teacher's journey to understanding the importance of teaching text features and show you how to apply some of these activities in the classroom and with your students. All persons referred to are fictional characters.

The framework for this book is the *Pacific Communities with High-performance In Literacy Development (Pacific CHILD) Teachers' Manual*. Pacific CHILD is a professional development program that was tested in the Pacific region using a true randomized control trial design. The Pacific CHILD is a principles-based professional development program consisting of research-based teaching and learning strategies proven to help improve students' reading comprehension using informational text.



What are Text Features?

Text features are the physical features of the text that highlight the important content. Knowledge about text features enables students to use them to improve their comprehension of the text. According to Kinder and Bursuck (1991), physical text that is well presented facilitates reading comprehension. When students learn how to use text features, they are able to make better predictions, anticipate their learning, and comprehend the content being studied (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2010.). Furthermore, when students gain understanding of how to use text features and text structure as a strategy, their reading comprehension is improved (Dickson, Simmons, Kame'enui, 1995).

There are five broad categories of text features found in informational texts:

1. **Text divisions** identify how the text is organized and presented. Some examples are chapters, sections, introductions, summaries, and author information.
2. **Organizational tools and sources of information** help readers understand the information. Some examples are titles, table of contents, index, headings and subheadings, glossary, pronunciation guide, and references.
3. **Graphics** show information that is easier to understand because of its visual representation, or enhances what was written in the text. Some examples are diagrams, charts and tables, graphs, maps, labels, photographs, illustrations, paintings, cutaway views, timelines, and captions.
4. **Font size or formatting** style, such as boldface, italic, or a change in font signals the reader that these words are important.
5. **Layout** includes aids such as insets, bullets, and numbers that point readers to important information.

(adapted from Fountas and Pinnell, 2006)

Mrs. Cruz knows the primary purposes of teaching text features are getting students to know what they are and how they can aid with understanding the text. She will begin by looking at the text to see if there are examples from each of the categories listed above.

Why are Text Features Important?

The purpose of text features is to help readers focus on the important information in the text. The teaching of text features is important for a number of reasons.

- Using the visual features of the text creates opportunities for teachers to build background knowledge for students prior to reading the main text body (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2010).
- The headings and subheadings are often part of informational text, which alert the reader to focus on the topic they will be reading about. In addition, students can change the subtitles into questions, and thus set a purpose for reading the section.
- Text features present new material in meaningful chunks. In many cases, informational text is unknown material to the students and it is easier for them to process information in smaller chunks, such as the ones provided by the subheadings for each section. Also, indexes and tables of contents guide the reader to look up pertinent information in an efficient way.
- Many content informational texts provide a glossary so students can immediately understand the meaning of words and see how they are being used in context.

As Mrs. Cruz plans for her students to read *Land of Fire* by Brownlee (2005), she notices several text features she would like to point out prior to reading. She will:

- Refer to the map to show where the Hawaiian Islands are located.
- Point out the picture of the lava, so students know what it looks like.
- Teach the bold words, such as *plates* and *magma*, since the meaning of these words are so critical to comprehending the text.
- Point out the glossary box for students to refer to if they have difficulty remembering the meanings.
- Explain the diagram on how volcanoes erupt.

By explaining the various text features prior to reading, Mrs. Cruz will help students build the necessary background knowledge about the text features they will be using to understand the article.

Teaching Text Features

Mrs. Cruz knows that teaching text features is a two-step process. The first step is to explain what text features are. The second step is to show students how to use text features as a strategy. To do this, Mrs. Cruz must be explicit with her teaching. Explicit teaching involves:

- Building students’ knowledge about the concept, in this case, the concept of text features.
- Explaining the strategy being taught, its importance, and purpose.
- Explaining how and when to use the strategy.
- Modeling the strategy.
- Gradually reducing the amount of teacher support while increasing the amount of student-guided practice.
- Independent student practice of the strategy.

Mrs. Cruz will use a think-aloud and an anchor chart in getting students to understand text features.

Today we will be learning about text features. Text features are the physical features of the text. They are the objects on the page that stand out and say, “Hey, look at me!” Text features are important because they are a tool to help me understand the text. Let’s look at the text. What jumps out at you?

Liane raises her hand. *The title jumps out at me.*

Mrs. Cruz confirms. *Yes, Liane, the title is large and bold. It helps the reader know what the text will be about. On the chart, I’m going to write the title and how that information helps us as readers.*

Mrs. Cruz knows that the use of titles can be a springboard to tapping into students’ prior knowledge about the topic and to building their comprehension.

She explains: *As a reader, I have to use the title to prepare myself to understand what I am going to read. The title of this article is Land of Fire. I’m wondering what I know about fire that might give me a clue to what the author means?*

Mrs. Cruz continues: *The photograph shows something that looks like fire, but the caption talks about a volcano. I think this text is about volcanoes.*

She allows the students to discuss briefly what they know about volcanoes.

I see there is a subtitle: Scientists trek up violent volcanoes to answer some burning questions. I'm not sure what the word trek means, but I think it means to climb because it looks like the scientist is on a hike and that makes sense in the sentence. Also, the word trek is followed by the word up and that makes me think the scientist is hiking up the trail.

Mrs. Cruz knows that she needs to release some of the responsibility on to her students to determine if they understand how to use text features as a strategy.

She shares: Now I'm going to let you work with the person next to you. I want the both of you to preview the text and tell me what text features jump out at you.

Theo shouts, *Oh, I see a map.*

Good eyes, Theo, responds Mrs. Cruz. Maps tell the reader where a location is. The map here shows all the Hawaiian Islands and points to the Big Island of Hawai'i where Kilauea Volcano is located.

Mrs. Cruz provides more opportunities for students to preview the text. She walks around and listens in on their conversations.

Mrs. Cruz, asks Caleb, Why are some words dark and others are not? See, like this word magma.

Good observation, Caleb, she responds. When words are bold or what you call dark, this means the word is important. Often times, the meaning of a bold word is found in a glossary in the back of the book or in a word box just like the one on the next page.

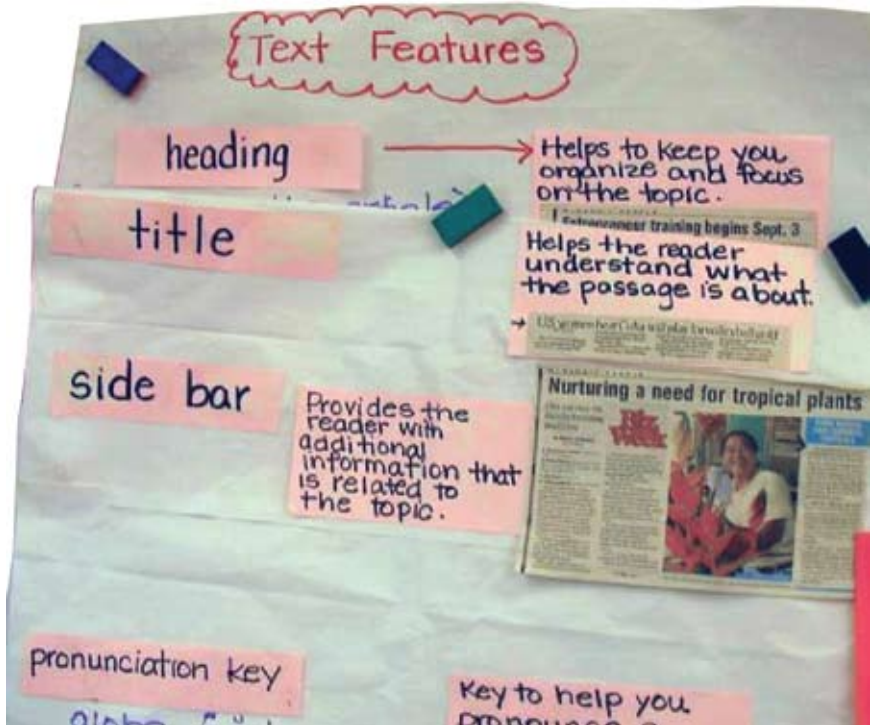
Cool! says Caleb. Magma means liquid rock that is still underground. I like the word box because this means I don't have to stand up and get a dictionary to find out the meaning of the word.

Mrs. Cruz wants her students to transition to partner work. She gathers the students back for a brief whole group conversation. Mrs. Cruz knows that before they can use text features as a strategy, they must know what it is.

She asks, *I want us to review some of our learning before you begin your partner work. Who can tell me what are text features?*

Text features are the physical things that authors include to help us understand the text. You know, like the title and pictures and stuff like that, answers Theo.

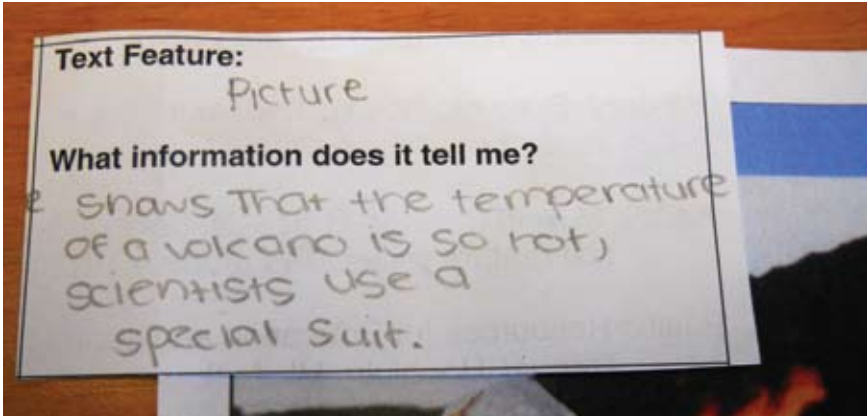
Mrs. Cruz continues the conversation. As each text feature is discussed, she writes the information on an anchor chart identifying and explaining its purpose, like the one below.



After the discussion, Mrs. Cruz allows the students to read the text independently or in pairs. She also provides time afterwards for the students to discuss the content by providing a list of questions to ensure that students get to the heart of comprehending the text.

Mrs. Cruz gives an assignment in which students identify the text features and explain what content information is presented. She has students write the information on cards, then posts the information onto the article. (See Appendix A).

After the lesson, Mrs. Cruz notices that some of her students understood the tasks while others need support.

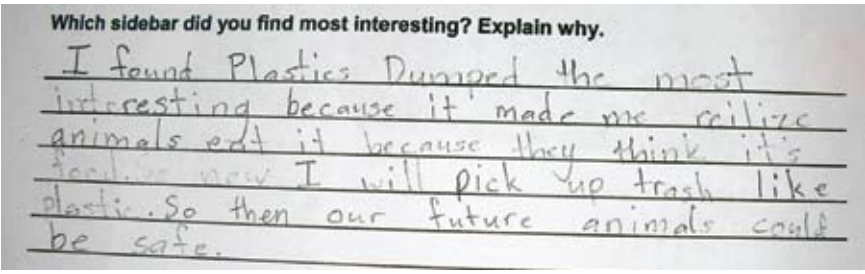


Assessment

Mrs. Cruz has been teaching her students how to use text features. She now must determine if they are actually using text features in their independent reading. Mrs. Cruz will write anecdotal notes to record students' group work on text features. She uses a letter-sized paper and creates squares for each of her students. She will place a plus sign (+) for thorough understanding; a check for acceptable (✓); and a minus (-) for no understanding.

Joyce +	Caleb ✓ assists with diagrams	Anthony ✓ assists with reading tables ✓ uses TF before reading	Chloe +
Tyler +	Sharon - assists with reading tables - uses TF before reading	Theo ✓	Liane ✓

Mrs. Cruz knows that the purpose of using text features is to understand the content of the text and how it connects to life experiences. For another lesson, she creates a handout to determine if students are able to make this connection. As she reads students' work, Mrs. Cruz finds evidence that students are connecting information to their lives. She is satisfied and thrilled that these 4th graders are becoming strategic readers.



Connecting Text Features from Reading to Writing

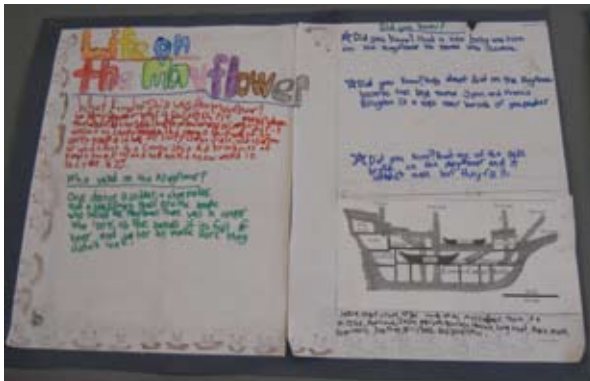
As Mrs. Cruz leaves for the day, she walks past a colleague's room and notices the display board of students' writing. Her colleague, Mrs. Tanaka, shares how her students used their knowledge of text features in reading and applied the same concept in writing.

While my students prepare to publish their writing, I explain the importance of engaging the reader with their writing piece, says Mrs. Tanaka. We make a list of the text features that would work in their writing. As I confer with students, they tell me what they would like to include. For example, in this piece, this group of students wanted to include a sidebar of did you know facts and a diagram.

Wow, said Mrs. Cruz. I never thought of making the reading and writing connection.

You'll be amazed at how students are able to take their knowledge of text features and apply this information to other content areas, says Mrs. Tanaka.

I was excited because the students are becoming strategic readers using text features. Now I am motivated with helping them use text features in their writing, says Mrs. Cruz.



Overview of Key Steps

- Read the text prior to teaching to decide which text features need explicit teaching. Keep in mind that not all text features need to be taught.
- Think about administering a needs assessment to determine what the students know about text features (See Appendix B).
- Explain what text features are. Students must know what text features are before using it as a strategy.
- Consider doing a *text feature walk*. A text feature walk consists of reading/viewing the text features found in the text and predicting how each of the key text features will assist with comprehension of the main text. Let the students hear the thinking you go through as you study the text features included in the text (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2010).
- Provide explicit **vocabulary instruction** for key words before reading the text. Be sure to include a student-friendly definition, context clues, repeated exposure, and active involvement to help with word knowledge.
- Model and gradually diminish help on how to use text features as a strategy before reading, during reading, and after reading.
- Continue to teach the value of text features over time until the students begin automatically integrating the use of text features in their daily reading.
- Connect text features from reading to writing.
- Post an **anchor chart** in the classroom that illustrates the various text features for the teacher and students to view as needed.

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Appendix A: Text Feature Cards

Text Feature: What information does it tell me?	Text Feature: What information does it tell me?
Text Feature: What information does it tell me?	Text Feature: What information does it tell me?
Text Feature: What information does it tell me?	Text Feature: What information does it tell me?
Text Feature: What information does it tell me?	Text Feature: What information does it tell me?

Appendix B: Text Features Needs Assessment

Directions: Use your text to answer the questions below about text features.

1. Find the table of contents. Write yes or no if the text contains the following:
 - Glossary _____
 - Index _____
2. Read the text features listed below. Write yes or no if your text has the text feature. If the text feature is present, write how the text feature helps you understand the content.

Text Feature	Write yes/no if your text feature is available.	Explain how you think the text feature will help you understand what you are reading.
Chapter titles		
Headings/ subheadings		
Photos and illustrations		
Bold words		
Pronunciation guide		
Graphs/charts		
Maps		

Adapted from: Florida Department of Education. Text Features (2007). Retrieved from http://forpd.ucf.edu/strategies/strattext_features.html



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