SEAL

Deconstructing Text / Deconstrucción de texto

CCSS: L.1, 3-6, RL.4, 5,; RI.4, 5, W.1-3
ELD: Part II: A.1-2, B.3-5, C.6-7; Part I: A.2-4, B.6-8, C.10-12

Summary

"Unpacking text" and "deconstructing text" refer to analyzing the way in which written text is structured, both to enhance comprehension of the content and to deepen understanding of how formal, written English works. This kind of analytic activity, often associated with "close reading," applies primarily to K-3 SEAL classrooms when children are interacting with written text, either independently or through read aloud.

The teacher guides students in close examination of academic text for two purposes: (1) to make meaning and understand the passage more fully and (2) to learn how academic texts are structured, both in terms of the overall text structure and also grammatical structures within sentences. For English Learners, this attention to language in the academic register is particularly critical if they are to gain the skills required to access and produce academic text throughout their education. The Common Core English Language Arts standards and the ELD standards call for such attention to the structure of text.

Implementation

In SEAL classrooms, there are many opportunities to engage in this unpacking and deconstructing of text, including but not limited to Vocabulary in Context, Dialogic Read Aloud, Shared Research Projects, and Literature Studies. In addition, students have the opportunity to apply this learning during the Cooperative Strip Paragraph, Sentence Patterning Chart extensions, Writer's Notebook, Academic Process Journal, and Student Publishing.

In Kinder classrooms, much of the work is done orally, often with the teacher modeling his or her thinking when encountering complex text. As students are attending to print more easily in 1st grade and beyond, they are able to apply these skills with text more independently while being guided by the teacher.

This work can be done during regular instruction, in both bilingual and English only settings as opportunities present themselves. And, it should also be done during Designated ELD using complex text in English, and geared toward student's proficiency level as described in the ELD standards.

There is not a single way to deconstruct or unpack text. What should guide this work is the particular texts the students are reading and what students will need to understand in order to engage effectively with the text. Teachers should also consider particular text features they would

like students to produce in their own writing. What is most critical is that teachers are regularly noticing and explicitly pointing out various text features so students have access to these linguistic features. In order for teachers to lead children through this work, the teacher must be familiar with the various levels at which text can be deconstructed, or unpacked:

1. **Text Level** – This refers to the overall structure of texts. For example, students need to be taught how a narrative text is organized as compared to an informational or opinion piece. This level also includes attention to the way ideas are linked together within the body of the text, such as using sequential language for a procedural piece, or using phrases like *in my opinion, furthermore, in addition* in an opinion piece. In the ELD standards, these concepts are referred to as Text Structure and Text Cohesion.

2. **Sentence & Clause Level** – Students need to learn how sentences are constructed in particular ways to convey meaning effectively in academic texts. Examining text at the sentence and clause level teaches readers how to understand the meaning of the sentence by using their understanding of densely packed academic sentence structures. Below is an example of a complex sentence structure typical of academic text:

   "As the forager bee collects nectar, she carries pollen from flower to flower."

   Students need to understand how this sentence begins with a dependent clause, signaled by the word "as" which means the same thing as "while" or "at the same time." They also need to understand how the independent clause relates to the dependent clause at the beginning. Students should understand the separate ideas embedded in the sentence and how those ideas are interrelated.

3. **Phrase Level** – Work at the phrase level includes examining how nouns can be modified to add details through the use of adjectives, as well as noticing how embedded clauses and prepositional phrases provide meaning. Students should be supported in unpacking some of the long noun or adjective phrases in sentences to disentangle the meaning in them. An example of a long noun phrase is:

   "the man with the gigantic smile plastered on his face…."

4. **Word Level** – Word level study will lead students to greater familiarity with varied and precise language. This includes identifying words that send readers backwards or forwards in the text or highlighting text connectives that create cohesion. Examining text at the word level involves teaching about nominalization. Nominalization is the process of creating a noun or noun phrase from another part of speech or condensing large amounts of information into a noun or noun phrase. Some examples of nominalization include:

   They *destroyed* the rainforest. $\Rightarrow$ The *destruction* of the rainforest.
   The rainstorm caused *heavy flooding*. $\Rightarrow$ *This* destroyed houses and crops.
   strong $\Rightarrow$ strength

Below is an excerpt from the California ELA/ELD Framework from a 1st grade vignette (Vignette 3.6) demonstrating the steps one teacher employed to unpack text:

Unpacking Sentences
1. Start with a text that you are already using.
2. Identify a few sentences that students find challenging to understand.
3. Focus on meaning: Show students how to unpack the meaning in the sentence by writing a list of simple sentences that, when combined, express the meaning of the sentence.
4. Focus on form: Show students important features of the sentence (e.g., specialized vocabulary and descriptive language; conjunctions show relationships between two ideas in compound and complex sentences, prepositional phrases are used to add details, vocabulary).
5. Guided practice: Guide the students to help you with steps 3 and 4.
6. Keep it simple: Focus on one or two things and use some everyday language examples as well as examples from the complex texts. (Adapted from Christie 2005, Derewianka 2012, Wong Fillmore 2012)

Example:

"As the forager bee collects nectar, she carries pollen from flower to flower."

There's a forager bee.
The bee collects nectar.
The bee has pollen on its legs.
The bee carries the pollen to many flowers.

Notes on Strategy

Table 3: Instructional Elements of Fiction and Non-Fiction Text

"Stories are about more than just plot."

		Fiction	Non-Fiction
CCSS RL/RI #1-3	**Text Structure** *See Table 2 below*	Narrative: 1. Character & Setting 2. Goal/Problem 3. Plot 4. Resolution	Text types: • Description • Sequence • Problem/solution • Cause & effect • Compare & contrast
CCSS RI/RL #4-6	**Text Features**	• Title & cover illustrations • Title page • Author & author information • Illustrator & illustrator information • Story summaries • Chapter titles and formats	• Table of contents • Diagrams, charts, graphs, flow charts, etc. • Labels & captions • Chapter titles • Headings, subheadings • Lists, "bullets" • References, bibliography • Index, appendix, glossary
	Craft	• Voice • Style • Point of view • Repeated images • Figurative language	• Structure decisions • Connotative language • Implicit metaphor • symbolism
	Language & Vocabulary *See Fig. 3.5*	• General academic vocab • Complex grammatical structures	• Domain specific vocab • General academic vocab • Complex grammatical structures
CCSS RI/RL #7-9	**Illustrations & Images**	• often provide clues or enhance the meaning of the text	• provide information related to text • typically real photos • usually have captions • diagrams, charts, tables, etc. are necessary
	Comparative Analysis of Texts	• Events & characters • Plot across texts, themes • Books vs. movies • Non-fiction that relates to fiction	• Integrate info across texts • Evaluate information, ideas, claims, reasoning, evidence • Content in different media