

Sum It Up Lesson Plan

Background Information:

Summarizing is a comprehension skill we taught students during reciprocal teaching, and they will rely on this skill once again as we ask them to write effective summaries from what they have read. You have probably already observed firsthand how hard it is for some students to pull out the main idea of a paragraph, and students must have a good understanding of these main ideas in order to write a logical summary. So what can we do to help them with this?

VIPs in Action:

VIPs (Very Important Points) is a tactile way to go about pulling out main ideas. Model VIPs using the overhead projector with a piece of text that you personally find somewhat challenging. Make your think-aloud as authentic as possible so students really see what you do as you try to comprehend. Take a large-sized sticky note and fringe it into 6 separate pieces. Read aloud the first paragraph of your demonstration passage thinking out loud about what you are reading. When you feel you have discovered a main idea, use a sticky note strip and place it by the main idea in the text. Keep reading and try to find more main ideas. Because the sticky note is moveable, take time to demonstrate changing your mind. This is so much easier than students permanently highlighting text.

Point out that proficient readers track down the important information and evaluate its importance. When you are done "highlighting" six main ideas, take a moment to record a few words onto each sticky note strip. Then challenge the class to help you narrow it down to only three main ideas. Which three sticky note strips do they think you should remove and why? Again this exercise forces students to evaluate the importance of the information they are reading. Gradually release the responsibility to students and have them try VIPs as small groups and finally as independent practice.

Source: Hoyt, Linda. *Make It Real*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002.

Prewriting:

Now that students have a tool to help them pinpoint main ideas, they are ready to organize and write an effective summary. What do most of our students do when they write a summary? They begin this way:

This article/book was about...

(Turn this phrase into an oversized circle with a red slash through it indicating not to do this.)

A We can strengthen their writing by providing them a formula for their topic sentence. Getting started is always a challenge for writers; a formula leads students

straight into success. Distribute the A + B + C blackline master. Discuss the A section. Go over the various ways to identify what has been read and talk about the reason why including a complete title and author is good practice.

B To help students avoid depending on the verb "to be," show them how to select verbs from the word bank of strong verbs. Asterisks are used to identify the verbs commonly used. From past experience, I can forewarn you that students will enjoy playing with language and choose verbs they really don't understand completely. They want to sound sophisticated and mature in their writing and do so by picking out the "big words." Help them understand the shades of meaning associated with some of the more difficult verbs such as entices, illustrates, and proposes.

C Part C of the formula takes a bit more thought on the part of the students. They need to think of the overall big idea and attach it to the end of their topic sentence. Students should reflect back on the three pieces of sticky note fringe to help them come up with this big idea. An example of a completed topic sentence might look something like this:

The Middle School High Five by Amy Goodman provides teachers with strategies to improve comprehension.

Writing the Summary:

Now that students have a topic sentence, juices should be flowing. Have them revisit the sticky note fringe pieces that they selected as main ideas of the passage. Encourage them to order them in various ways on their desks by actually moving them around. Have them decide on an order that sounds good when read aloud. As you circulate, ask students why they decided on a particular order - order of importance, chronological order, comparison/contrast, etc. Then students should begin adding on to their topic sentence using a paragraph format. After stating each main point, students should add on an *explain* sentence for elaboration. When students come to the end of the summary, they should avoid using any kind of closing sentence. Too often closing sentences lead to opinions, and summary writing should be based on facts only. For example, I would not want to end my summary paragraph of the Middle School High Five by saying:

Truly, the Middle School High Five changed my students reading behaviors 100% and should be used across the United States.

Source: Auman, Maureen. *Step Up to Writing*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West, 2002.