



WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

Video: Grunge: The Making of an Adventure Narrative Story Structure (story map)



Concept of Story

Children who are read to on a regular basis develop a concept of what a story is. Researchers have found that this concept development, or schema, supports children in three important ways. First, children develop a set of expectations about what a story is, the elements (characters, setting, goal, plot, resolution) that belong in a story, and the sequence of these elements. Second, it helps them understand or comprehend the events in the story. Third, it provides a framework to remember the story.

From an early age, children are familiar with the big chunks of a story. Researchers call these the “macrostructures” or “global” elements of story discourse. Every story has three big chunks. The first chunk, also called the beginning, or the *initiating* event, is where some problem or conflict emerges for the character. The middle, or *sequent* events, includes the multiple attempts by the characters to resolve the conflict or solve the problem. The third chunk is the ending, or *final* event, in which the conflict is resolved or the problem is solved. Another element that is often included in stories is the setting, where the author places the character in a particular time or place. The *finale* is an optional element that provides us with the feeling that everything will be all right. It is sort of a restoration or reestablishment of equilibrium. It goes beyond the resolution by adding conventional statements about the main characters – “they lived happily ever after” or “they were friends for the rest of their lives.” Since the *finale* hints that the characters are good and well, it often becomes a place for another story to start. A third optional element is the moral of the story. A moral is a message or lesson to be learned from the story. Some examples include: “Better to be safe than sorry,” “Don’t judge people by the way they look,” and “overconfidence in one’s abilities may lead to failure or loss.”

Learning Story Grammar

Many children learn story grammar (characters, setting, goal, problem, attempts or tries, solution) by listening to stories on a regular basis. Be sure to read to your child often and discuss the story when you do. The following questions may be helpful prompts to start a conversation with him/her:

- Who are the main characters?
- When does the story take place?
- Where does the story take place?
- What do the main characters want to do?
- What happens when the main characters try to do it?
- How does the story end?
- How do the main characters feel?

References:

- Pappas, C. C. & Brown, E. (1987). Young children learning story discourse: Three case studies. *The Elementary School Journal*, 87(4), 455-466.
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- Whaley, J. F. (1981). Readers' expectations for story structures. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 17(1), 90-114.