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Strategy Taught: Sketch to Stretch

Reflection



In preparing to teach the class about the strategy Sketch to Stretch, I was surprised with how difficult it is to simply choose material to read. I had reviewed the strategy and was detailing the different steps when I realized, I still have to pick a reading to actually model this strategy on. This proved difficult because I wanted something that would be consistently understood because the strategy was not focused on asking questions, but instead in digger more deeply into the text. Next, I attempted to brainstorm what everyone might have read. The problem I soon found though was that not everyone reads even close to the same material. So instead, I began looking for themes present within literature. I also thought about the reading that we have been using in my fourth grade classroom that I am observing. To help further the theme of exaggeration within tall tales, we have been asking students to read multiple examples of tall tales and then create their own. In looking for this lesson then, I thought it would be best to model this as I would have for my classroom that I have been teaching in and also at the same time find a genre that most everyone has read something from: tall tales. After that, preparation for the strategy was easy. It was simply a matter of making sure there were enough copies of each handout and reviewing the strategy to make sure to teach it correctly.

Good -  
Instructional  
Strategy  
+  
Purpose!!

While actually teaching though, I found many new challenges arose. First, I realized quickly that with silent reading, each child is finishing at a different rate which delays the next instruction if I choose to wait for each person to be done reading. I adapted then from my original plan and gave instructions out for students as they were finishing up. Secondly, not all students were engaged in the reading even though I had considered it enjoyable reading. In this case then, it was easier to ask these students to discuss within their group the themes they found. I think this element of the strategy is helpful because

it can help students who are having difficulty finding meaning within the context of the text. Lastly, I was surprised by how much differentiation there was between presentations of the three groups. While I did not give direct instructions about the process of the presentation, I was still serving as a sort of moderator and helping to steer the discussion into productive realms.

I particularly noticed this when I asked students to give the class a short summary of their tall tale. It seemed that having the quick drawing of themes in front of them made this quite simple and therefore non-stressful for the student called upon. I noticed though that frequently students were not engaged. While cooperative, this strategy did not seem to pique their interest at all. This, I believe, was partially because of the fact that many college students have no interest in drawing. Also, I noticed that I did not work nearly as hard to engage my age group because I mistakenly assumed that there would really not be a need for a hook. I think then if I did this differently next time, I would make sure to include a hook that really caused to students to become engaged in the reading. I think though that the most difficult part was finding precise ways to give instructions and ask questions. It would have been far more helpful to plan several questions and instructional phrases out ahead of time so I could reword whatever I wanted to say.

On the whole though, I would say that the demonstration went well. It seems to be that as a teacher you will always be able to reflect on things to change in the future. This is helpful because it changes the actions you might take; for example, I would draw and write an example for this strategy on the board the next time. I think I would also work on timing, because I feel like the time was a little bit too long to draw and write and not long enough to discuss. I really liked though how many people commented on how much they enjoyed their stories. It was a pleasant surprise to see how many college students still looked back at tall tales with a sort of wistful amusement because of the memories that they represent. While teaching brought many new challenges, it also held exciting possibilities.

good points here

# 40 Sketch-to-Stretch

## Instructional Focus

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Oral Language              | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Comprehension |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Phonemic Awareness/Phonics | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fluency                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Spelling                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Content Areas            |

## Grade Levels

- |  |
|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kindergarten–Grade 2  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Grades 3–5 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Grades 6–8 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> English Learners      |

**S**ketcho-to-stretch is a visual activity that moves students beyond literal comprehension to think more deeply about the characters, theme, and other elements of story structure and the author's craft in a story they're reading (Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988; Short & Harste, 1996). Students work in small groups to draw pictures or diagrams to represent what the story means to them, not pictures of their favorite character or episode. In their sketches, students use lines, shapes, colors, symbols, and words to express their interpretations and feelings. Because students work in a social setting with the support of classmates, they share ideas with each other, extend their understanding, and generate new insights (Whitin, 1994, 1996).

Students need many opportunities to experiment with this activity before they move beyond drawing pictures of the story events or characters and are able to think symbolically. It's helpful to introduce this instructional strategy through a minilesson (see p. 74) and to draw several sketches together as a class before students do their own sketches. Through this practice, students learn that there's no single correct interpretation, and teachers help students focus on the interpretation rather than on their artistic talents (Ernst, 1993). The

A Fourth Grader's Sketch-to Stretch About *The Ballad of Lucy Whipple*



box on page 111 shows a fourth grader's sketch-to-stretch made after reading *The Ballad of Lucy Whipple* (Cushman, 1996), a story set during the California gold rush. The sketch-to-stretch emphasizes two of the themes of the book—that you make your own happiness, and that home is where you are.

### WHY USE THIS INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Sketch-to-stretch is an effective tool for helping students deepen their understanding of stories they're reading. In particular, students focus on theme and on the use of symbols to represent characters and theme as they make sketch-to-stretch drawings (Dooley & Maloch, 2005). An added benefit is that through this activity, students learn that stories rarely have only one interpretation, and that by reflecting on the characters and events in a story, they can discover one or more themes.

### HOW TO USE THIS INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY: STEP BY STEP

Students create sketch-to-stretch drawings individually and then share them in small groups and sometimes with the whole class. Teachers follow these steps as they implement this instructional strategy:

- 1 Read and respond to a story.** Students read a story or several chapters of a longer book, and they respond to the story in a grand conversation (see p. 43) or in reading logs (see p. 100).
- 2 Discuss the themes.** Students and the teacher talk about the themes in the story and ways to symbolize meanings. Teachers remind students that there are many ways to represent the meaning of an experience, and that students can use lines, colors, shapes, symbols, and words to visually represent what a story means to them. Students and the teacher talk about possible meanings and ways they might visually represent them.
- 3 Draw the sketches.** Students work in small groups to draw sketches that reflect what the story means to them. Teachers emphasize that students should focus on their thinking about the meaning of the story, not their favorite part, and that there's no single correct interpretation. They also remind students that the artistic quality of their drawings is less important than their interpretation.
- 4 Share the sketches.** Students meet in small groups to share their sketches and talk about the symbols they used. Teachers encourage classmates to study each student's sketch and tell what they think the student is trying to convey.
- 5 Share some sketches with the class.** Each group chooses one sketch from their group to share with the class.
- 6 Revise sketches and make final copies.** Some students will want to revise and add to their sketches based on feedback they received and ideas from classmates. Also, students make final copies if the sketches are being used as projects.

### WHEN TO USE THIS INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Students use sketch-to-stretch to deepen their comprehension whenever they're reading and discussing a story. In literature circles, for example, students create sketch-to-stretch drawings about themes and symbols that they share during group meetings (Whitin, 2002). Through this sharing, students gain insights about their classmates' thinking and clarify their own understanding. The same is true when students create and share sketch-to-stretch drawings during literature focus units.



# Never Mind Them Watermelons

## An Alabama Ghost Story

retold by

**S. E. Schlosser**

[Listen to the story](#) (4.3 mb download)

Well now, old Sam Gibb, he didn't believe in ghosts. Not one bit. Everyone in town knew the old log cabin back in the woods was haunted, but Sam Gibb just laughed whenever folks talked about it. Finally, the blacksmith dared Sam Gibb to spend the night in the haunted log cabin. If he stayed there until dawn, the blacksmith would buy him a whole cartload of watermelons. Sam was delighted. Watermelon was Sam's absolute favorite fruit. He accepted the dare at once, packed some matches and his pipe, and went right over to the log cabin to spend the night.

Sam went into the old log cabin, started a fire, lit his pipe, and settled into a rickety old chair with yesterday's newspaper. As he was reading, he heard a creaking sound. Looking up, he saw that a gnarled little creature with glowing red eyes had taken the seat beside him. It had a long, forked tail, two horns on its head, claws at the ends of its hands, and sharp teeth that poked right through its large lips.

"There ain't nobody here tonight except you and me," the creature said to old Sam Gibb. It had a voice like the hiss of flames. Sam's heart nearly stopped with fright. He leapt to his feet.

"There ain't going to be nobody here but you in a minute," Sam Gibb told the gnarled creature. He leapt straight for the nearest exit - which happened to be the window - and hi-tailed it down the lane lickety-split. He ran so fast he overtook two rabbits being chased by a coyote. But it wasn't long before he heard the pounding of little hooves, and the gnarled creature with the red eyes caught up with him.

"You're making pretty good speed for an old man," said the creature to old Sam Gibb.

"Oh, I can run much faster than this," Sam Gibb told it. He took off like a bolt of lightning, leaving the gnarled creature in the dust. As he ran passed the smithy, the blacksmith came flying out of the forge to see what was wrong.

"Never mind about them watermelons," Sam Gibb shouted to the blacksmith without breaking his stride.

Old Sam Gibb ran all the way home and hid under his bed for the rest of the night. After that, he was a firm believer in ghosts and spooks, and he refused to go anywhere near the old cabin in the woods.

# The Fisherman and the Bear

A Maine Tall Tale

retold by

S.E. Schlosser

One fine day an old Maine man was fishing and fishing on his favorite lake and catching nary a thing. Finally, he gave up and walked back along the shore to his fishing shack. When he got close to the front door, he saw it was open. Being of a suspicious nature, he walked to the door quietly and looked inside. There was a big black bear. It was just pulling the cork out of his molasses jug with its teeth. The molasses spilled all over the floor and the bear rubbed his paw in it, smearing it all over.

Well, the old man was not the timid sort. He went to the back of the shack, put his head in the window and gave a loud yell. The bear jumped and ran out the door. It was running strangely. The old man saw that the bear was holding up the foot covered with molasses so it wouldn't get dirty.

The bear ran to the lake shore. Standing on its hind legs, it held up the paw full of molasses. Soon all the flies and bugs and mosquitoes were swarming all over the sticky sweet paw. Then the bear waded into the water with his sticky paw full of bugs. It held the paw out over the water. Suddenly, a big trout came jumping out of the water trying to get to the flies. The bear gave it a swat and it flew to the shore and flopped there. Then another fish jumped into the air after the flies, followed swiftly by another. Every time a fish jumped after his paw, the bear cuffed it ashore. Soon it had a large pile.

Finally, the bear decided he had enough fish and waded to shore. The bear had caught a mess of fish any fisherman would envy. The old man had caught nothing. He watched that bear eat half a dozen trout, his stomach rumbling. All he had for dinner was some bread and what was left of the molasses. Finally the bear paused in his eating, and looked over to the bushes where the old man was hidden. The bear stood up and laid the remaining fish in a row. Then it walked away up the shore. It kept looking back at the bushes where the old man stood.

The old man crept out of the bushes and down to the shore. Sure enough, the bear had left six large trout for him. He looked over at the bear. It was standing at the edge of the wood watching. "Thanks a lot," the old man called to the bear. The bear waved the now-clean paw at the old man and disappeared into the thicket. "Well," said the old man, "That's the first time a bear has ever paid me for my molasses."

The old man never hunted bears again.