

BEYOND THE STORY MAP

Inferential Comprehension via Character Perspective

Erin McTigue ■ April Douglass ■ Katherine L. Wright ■ Tracey S. Hodges ■ Amanda D. Franks

How do you guide students to enter the world of a story, empathize with characters, and understand opposing viewpoints? Approaching comprehension from characters' perspectives puts a new lens on instruction.

- Teacher Who was your favorite character [in *Max's Words* by Kate Banks]?
- Belinda It's Max because, like, he is so brave.
- Teacher Yeah. Does he remind you of anyone?
- Belinda [quietly] Me.
- Teacher You? How so?
- Belinda [defiantly] Because at first, like, my sister and brother say, "That's not a very good idea." And they say "You joking, right?" And I'm not. And then... [proudly] I'm actually *doing* the job.
- Teacher So, they kind of see afterwards that you had a good idea?
- Belinda [excited] Yeah! Yeah, they see.
- Teacher Interesting. I feel the same sometimes. I have two sisters. And sometimes their ideas seem cool, but then I do something—
- Belinda Yeah! It seems cooler! And then they are like, "Hey! I like that too!"

Why read literature? Inspiration... Escape... Class assignment? While all are valid reasons, literary researcher Miall (2006) contends that literature has staying power because it

"invites us to consider frames for understanding and feeling about the world that are likely to be novel" (p. 3). In other words, stories help us understand the social world in new ways. Miall (2006) labels this process of adopting new perspectives as "to dishabituate." In the opening conversation of this article, Belinda (all names are pseudonyms) recognized that Max—who, despite his brothers' teasing, continued to collect words (instead of "normal" things like stamps or coins)—was, in fact, brave. Then, through her recognition of Max's bravery, Belinda reframed her experiences and defined herself as brave. This empathy with Max, which transcended gender, ethnicity, and reality, was likely affirming for her self-concept. She also gained understanding about how her teacher experienced a similar situation. It is important

Erin McTigue is an associate professor at Texas A&M University; College Station, USA; e-mail emctigue@tamu.edu

April Douglass is a clinical assistant professor at Texas A&M University; e-mail awicker@tamu.edu

Katherine L. Wright is a graduate student in Curriculum and Instruction at Texas A&M University; e-mail kel.wright@tamu.edu

Tracey S. Hodges is a graduate student in Curriculum and Instruction at Texas A&M University; e-mail traceyhodges@gmail.com

Amanda D. Franks is a graduate student in Curriculum and Instruction at Texas A&M University; e-mail franksad1@tamu.edu

to note, due to the tone of Belinda's voice, that she obviously drew upon her emotions as much as logic.

We advocate that, in the way informational texts teach readers about science or politics, literature teaches readers about the social world and how to navigate through difficult emotions and inevitable conflicts. Emerging evidence from cognitive psychology indicates that "just as computer simulations have helped us understand perception, learning, and thinking, stories are simulations of a kind that can help readers understand not just the characters in books but human character in general" (Oatley, 2011, p. 63). Returning to the idea of dishabituation, through stories readers can also try out, without personal risk, new reactions and social decisions. Young readers can then use that learning to navigate their current world of peer friendships and classroom conflicts.

Pause and Ponder

- What type of characters (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age) do your students connect with most easily? How can you support students to identify with characters who differ from them?
- How would it impact students' social development to "take the perspective" of spiteful or pathological characters? How can you minimize any potentially negative effects?
- Under what conditions are your students able to consider the perspectives of teachers and peers?
- How can you support transferring social skills gained in reading to "real-life" conflicts?

However, to gain social understanding from fiction, we must consider characters' internal experiences in addition to plot because "just as in real life, the worlds of literary fiction are replete with complicated individuals whose inner lives are rarely easily discerned but warrant exploration" (Kidd & Castano, 2013, p. 377). Unfortunately, because they must guide their students' comprehension while keeping within time constraints, teachers may feel pressured to overemphasize plot events and spend little time on exploring complex characters. Additionally, the most common instructional tool for story comprehension, the story map, depicts comprehension as a sequence of escalating plot events with little attention to characters' thoughts and feelings (Smolkin & McTigue, 2015).

Therefore, it is essential that we provide students with comprehension strategies for stories that emphasize both the structural elements (setting, plot, climax) *and* the characters' internal experiences. To date, there are limited teaching tools for such a goal. Our contribution is the Chart for Multiple Perspectives (CHAMP), an alternate graphic organizer for the traditional story map, which promotes inferential comprehension through the consideration of stories via the lenses of opposing characters.

Chart for Multiple Perspectives (CHAMP)

To create a graphic organizer that more clearly highlights the connection between what characters think and how they feel (i.e., their internal states) and their actions (i.e., their external choices), we started with Emery's (1996) Story Maps with Character Perspectives and Shanahan and Shanahan's (1997) Character Perspective Chart. Then, to place more attention on internal states,

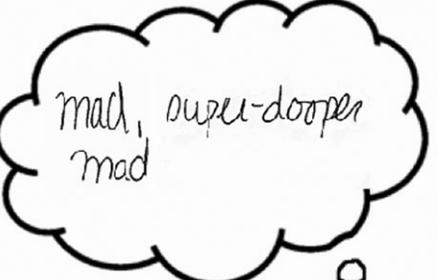
"Literature teaches readers about the social world and how to navigate through difficult emotions."

we borrowed "thought bubbles" from comprehension interventions designed for children on the autism spectrum (Gately, 2008). Each CHAMP graphic organizer focuses on one significant plot event in a story. The CHAMP graphic organizer shown in Figure 1 documents a scene from Henkes's *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* (1996). Although both characters are labeled as being mad, the evidence selected is unique to each character. Certain evidence came directly from the character's behavior (e.g., Lilly drew a mean picture), while other information was inferred from the situation and likely based on experience (e.g., teachers can get mad when a student is distracting others).

The target event is written in the center circle, to which two thought bubbles are connected. The student describes in the thought bubbles what each character is thinking or feeling. Next, in the boxes, the student provides evidence from either text or illustrations to explain these inferences. By completing a sequence of CHAMP graphic organizers while reading, not only do students construct a sequence of plot events, they simultaneously focus on the deeper understanding of the characters driving the plot. In our instruction, the intervention teacher selected three key plot events that roughly (1) introduced the main conflict, (2) escalated the conflict, and (3) resolved the conflict.

The CHAMP graphic organizer can also be used for various levels

Figure 1 CHAMP Graphic Organizer Completed From *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*

What Lilly is thinking or feeling	What Mr. Slinger is thinking or feeling
	
<p>I know Lilly is thinking or feeling this because:</p> <p><i>Alew a mean picture, ratched out of class, doesn't want to be a teacher</i></p>	<p>I know Mr. Slinger is thinking or feeling this because:</p> <p><i>because she was being distracting</i></p>
	

of learners. For students who are still learning about basic story structure, these graphic organizers can supplement a traditional story map. Additionally, as students' skills develop, CHAMP graphic organizers can be distributed without the plot events identified. Students themselves can determine which plot events are most critical.

Why the Current Focus on Literature and Perspective-Taking?

Before proceeding further, we briefly present the status of literature in elementary classes and build a case for increased attention on literature.

Literature in Elementary Classrooms: Thriving or Endangered Species?

According to Shanahan (2012), a well-circulated urban legend regarding the Common Core State Standards (CCSS;

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) is that schools must abandon literature in favor of informational texts. As written, the standards advocate for an even balance of informational text and literature in the elementary grades. Specific standards reveal a close match between our instructional recommendations and the English language arts CCSS. For example, in grade 2, students are expected to "describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges" (RL.2.3). The analogous expectation in grade 3 links internal states to the plot: "Describe characters in a story...and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events" (RL.3.3). Then, in grade 4, students must provide evidence: "Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text" (RL.4.3).

However, prior to the CCSS, the picture storybook had lost privileged status

in many elementary classrooms. Since the report of the National Reading Panel (NRP) in 2000, the recommended reading curriculum emphasized that students are reading within a precise instructional range. In practice, this often resulted in selections from leveled anthologies or bins filled with decodable readers classified as "easy," "just right," and "too hard." Unfortunately, such overly structured reading curricula left limited time for picture book reading (Serafini, 2011) because picture books' *quantitative* readability levels are generally not "just right" for elementary readers. For example, due to rich (i.e., nondecodable) vocabulary and complex sentences, 50 years of Caldecott winners have an average readability score of approximately fifth grade (Chamberlain & Leal, 1999). However, as Allington (2005) and others have clarified, the NRP report did not recommend *exclusive* use of decodable texts because "basically no studies existed in which decodable texts had been isolated as a variable to estimate their impact on reading acquisition. None" (p. 465). As a potential correction, the CCSS recommend that students should not be frequently frustrated but should have regular opportunities to experience more sophisticated reading (Shanahan, 2012). Although dependent on interpretation and local implementation, the CCSS may provide more room for authentic literature.

However, adding to the problem of literature's declining status in the elementary reading curriculum is the fact that the empirical work on comprehending children's literature has typically been restricted to traditional plot elements rather than layered interpretation (Sipe, 2000; Smolkin & McTigue, 2015). Meanwhile, in English departments, scholars focus on how an idealized reader interprets literature rather than how regular

“In short, the stereotype of the antisocial bookworm is being debunked.”

readers experience fiction (Miall, 2006). Additionally, both groups have not incorporated recent findings from psychology regarding the connection between fiction and readers’ emotional development (see Oatley, 2011, for an overview). Therefore, empirically establishing that literature has essential roles in the elementary classroom—and in child development—can help reassert its status.

Why Is Comprehension Instruction via Perspective-Taking Important?

Understanding literature and understanding people draw from many of the same skills, particularly due to perspective-taking, more precisely termed as *theory of mind* (Pelletier & Astington, 2004). Consequently, readers both use real-life experiences to understand story characters and use insight from the imagined world of story characters to better navigate their real world. For example, adults who frequently read fiction show stronger empathy than readers of nonfiction (Mar, Oatley, & Peterson, 2009). Even more surprisingly, interventions requiring adults to read literature can improve empathy skills (Djikic, Oatley, & Moldoveanu, 2013). In short, the stereotype of the antisocial bookworm is being debunked (Mar, Oatley, Hirsh, dela Paz, & Peterson, 2006).

Unfortunately, limited research has explored how literature can help develop *children’s* social skills, although

Lobron and Selman (2007) advocate that perspective-coordination taught through literature provides a foundation for social awareness. This idea shares features with bibliotherapy (e.g., Pehrsson, 2005), when stories are used to help children cope during traumatic events such as losing a parent. Bibliotherapy usually addresses a crisis, however. In contrast, we advocate that fiction can also be used proactively as a training ground to practice perspective-taking and conflict analysis. Ideally, students can use insight from fiction to build interpersonal skills that allow them to resolve, rather than escalate, conflicts.

Perspective-taking skills also directly support literacy development, particularly higher order comprehension and motivation. Accordingly, Chall’s (1983) Stage Four of literacy development is *reading for multiple viewpoints* in literature and informational texts. Inferenceal comprehension clearly demands using knowledge beyond the text to understand characters’ actions and motives. Beyond that, critical literacy then requires readers to consider questions such as “What view of the world is put forth by the ideas in this text? What views are not?” (Cervetti, Pardales, & Damico, 2001). Such challenging questions demand that readers consider others’ goals, particularly the author’s. A recent meta-analysis shows that even simply instructing readers to take alternate perspectives while reading narratives can improve comprehension (Yeh & McTigue, 2013).

Finally, because engagement for reading is an emotional state, reading instruction should consider both cognitive skills and emotions to build motivation (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Therefore, if we can help students connect with characters through

perspective-taking and empathy, it provides motivation to persist. Simply put, students will want to know what happens in the end!

What Theories Support This Intervention?

While many theories influence this work, primarily we drew from Miall and Kuiken’s (2002) reader response theory, which argues that prevalent cognitive models of comprehension (e.g., construction-integration theories) do not fully explain the role of emotion in fiction comprehension. However, as this theory has been predominantly applied to adults, we consulted stage models of development—specifically, Selman’s (2003) Developmental Model of Perspective-Taking—to create appropriate expectations.

How Do We Teach Comprehension via Perspective-Taking With Literary Texts?

Selecting the Literature for Perspective-Taking

As this intervention’s success is fully contingent on the texts, we reviewed hundreds of books and ultimately developed five guiding questions for literature selection (see Table 1) that work well with the CHAMP graphic organizer. Toward the goal of scaffolding, we sequenced the lessons to start with more simplistic stories, such as the traditional fable *The Three Little Pigs* (Marshall, 1989), then transition to more sophisticated texts such as *Verdi* (Cannon, 2006). As can be seen in Belinda’s two CHAMP graphic organizers (Figures 2 and 3), the simpler tales were easier to deconstruct. In *The Three Little Pigs*, the evidence was often physical, such as the boiling water. In *Verdi*, the evidence provided was more subtle. While Belinda’s

Table 1 Guiding Questions for Book Selection

Guiding Question	Explanation	Example or Nonexample
Is the plot driven by an interpersonal conflict?	The main conflict must be between two characters, and the plot events must derive directly from that conflict. We started with traditional tales and moved to more complex plots.	The plot of <i>Tortoise and the Hare</i> surrounds the conflict of Tortoise and Hare both intending to win a race.
Are characters relatable and well developed?	Based on Horning (2010), we looked for a range of emotions and for each major character having a few consistent personality traits.	Lilly in Henkes's <i>Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse</i> expressed many emotions and even demonstrated slightly contradictory behaviors.
Is inferential reasoning required for determining character motives?	The text provides multiple clues about characters' motivations but does not explicitly state their feelings.	A nonexample is Judith Viorst's <i>Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, Very Bad Day</i> because Alexander says exactly how he feels.
Does the book contain quality illustrations that support comprehension?	Based on interventions with children on the autism spectrum (Gately, 2008), we primarily analyzed the extent that characters' facial features and bodies revealed information about their thoughts and feelings.	Students particularly appreciated <i>Leonardo the Terrible Monster</i> by Mo Willems for the characters' expressions and the way that the words' colors and shapes reflected the characters' moods.
Is the story engaging and appropriate for the grade level?	While this criteria is highly subjective, we looked for texts that evoke a major theme about life that students could relate to (e.g., acceptance into a group, fear of trying something new). Additionally, we sought out humorous texts.	<i>Hugless Douglas</i> by David Melling was a favorite for the humor, the illustration style, and the relatable theme that Douglas only wanted a hug!

inferences about the characters' feelings are accurate to the story, she has more difficulty identifying clear evidence in *Verdi*. Additionally, we used one text with a deliberate perspective switch: *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* (Scieszka, 1989), which is told from the Wolf's point of view. This book was interesting because the Wolf is a compelling yet potentially unreliable narrator. However, students tended to be fully convinced of his version of the story. For example, when we asked David if he believed the Wolf, he confidently said, "Yes, because he seems nicer than the pigs."

Following the intervention, we asked the participating students to revisit the whole set of texts and provide input as to which books we should continue to use or not. We also conducted interviews about their favorite texts. Based on students' input, we compiled a Top 10 list and summarized their rationales (see Table 2).

Why So Many Animal Characters?

As is evident in our Top 10 list, the majority of the texts feature animal characters.

This was not our original intent. We purposefully worked to locate books with diverse *people* characters. For example, we prioritized Juanita Havill's *Jamaica*

Figure 2 CHAMP Graphic Organizer Completed From *The Three Little Pigs*

The graphic organizer consists of a central circle and two side boxes. The central circle contains the text: "The pig with the bricks outsmarted the wolf ...". To the left is a box for the pig's perspective, and to the right is a box for the wolf's perspective. Each box has a thought bubble above it and a rationale box below it.

Pig's Perspective:

- Thought bubble: scared
- Rationale box: I know the pig is thinking or feeling this because: why would he put boiling water there... shows he's scared

Wolf's Perspective:

- Thought bubble: hungry; happy to catch the pig
- Rationale box: I know the wolf is thinking or feeling this because: he says "dinnertime" like I'm happy to catch a fish

Figure 3 CHAMP Graphic Organizer Completed From *Verdi*

What Verdi is thinking or feeling	What the green snakes are thinking or feeling
	
I know Verdi is thinking or feeling this because: they're mean to him which means they're rude	I know the green snakes are thinking or feeling this because: pretending to be nice
	

Tag-Along (1990) and John Steptoe's *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale* (1987) because both texts feature

strong female protagonists who are ethnically underrepresented. However, our search proved difficult because many

multicultural texts, appropriate for the other requirements of this intervention, were chapter books. This issue was also noted by Lobron and Selman (2007). They used the chapter book *Felita* by Nicholasa Mohr (1991), an immigration story, for developing social awareness; however, to adapt the intervention to younger children, they observed that appropriate texts for younger children were frequently written with animal characters.

The prevalence of animals as characters can be explained by two key points. First, animal characters allow for the most readers to be able to connect similarly to the characters. Secondly, people characters are not commonly used for children's books reflecting interpersonal conflict because the use of animals allows the author to "eliminate or circumvent several important issues that are otherwise essential in our assessment of character: those of age, gender, and social status" (Nikolajeva & Scott,

Table 2 Top 10 Student-Rated Books for Perspective-Taking

Title	Conflicts	Engagement Factors Reported in Student Interviews
<i>Chrysanthemum</i> by Kevin Henkes	Chrysanthemum vs. Classmates	Students engaged deeply, and they easily related to Chrysanthemum as she coped with being teased for her unique name.
<i>Hugless Douglas</i> by David Melling	Douglas vs. secondary characters	Students enjoyed the interplay between the text and the illustrations. The text worked as an additional visual support for communicating the main themes of the story.
<i>Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse</i> by Kevin Henkes	Lilly vs. Mr. Slinger	Students related to Lilly's interaction with her teacher, first by getting into trouble, then by acting out, and finally by accepting responsibility.
<i>Ruby the Copycat</i> by Peggy Rathmann	Ruby vs. Angela Ruby vs. Miss Hart	Students found that the behavior of one friend mimicking another in order to be "cool" was highly relatable.
<i>Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type</i> by Doreen Cronin	Cows vs. Farmer Brown	Students found the plot and cartoonlike pictures entertaining, and they enjoyed the onomatopoeia-type vocabulary and the interplay between text and illustrations.
<i>Leonardo the Terrible Monster</i> by Mo Willems	Leonardo vs. Sam	Students noticed and were interested in how the author presented the text with different fonts and sizes to match how Leonardo and Sam were feeling.
<i>The Big Orange Splot</i> by Daniel Pinkwater	Mr. Plumbean vs. his neighbors	Students appreciated the psychedelic illustrations and inferred how the colors matched the story (darker colors when Mr. Plumbean was fighting with neighbors and brighter colors when they got along).
<i>Verdi</i> by Janell Cannon	Verdi vs. the older snakes	Students related to the courageousness of Verdi, who stood up to the older snakes when they teased him.
<i>Max's Words</i> by Kate Banks	Max vs. his brothers	Students related to Max, who wanted to be like his older siblings. They were intrigued by his collection of words and enjoyed searching for new vocabulary words throughout.
<i>Duck & Goose</i> by Tad Hills	Duck vs. Goose	Students enjoyed the appealing illustrations and the absurdity of both Duck and Goose, who believed a beach ball was an egg.

2001, p. 92). We suggest that race and ethnicity should be added to this list. For our intervention, the animal characters worked well; the students focused less on surface characteristics and more on the underlying conflict. However, we would recommend using a range of books that ideally has both animal characters and realistic diverse, complex people characters to help transfer readers' learning to the real world.

Lesson Framework and Evidence of Impact

We view the CHAMP graphic organizer as a tool to foster *interaction* about literature. The organizer served as a during-reading activity in a larger lesson cycle: (a) introduce key vocabulary (including emotion vocabulary); (b) read the text and complete the graphic organizer; (c) discuss the text during and after reading; and (d) complete a formative assessment, in the form of a summary/retelling and comprehension questions. As the very goal of this type of instruction is to gain insight and coordinate multiple perspectives, teacher and peer sharing represent the core mode of learning. While we worked in a one-on-one tutoring situation, this framework would be even better suited for small-group instruction, which would allow for richer discussion. (See Take Action! sidebar for examples.)

Using a gradual release approach, in the first lesson, we modeled how to complete the CHAMP graphic organizer. Then, for three weeks (15 lessons), we had the students complete the CHAMP graphic organizer on their own, but we used sticky notes to designate stopping points throughout each story. The discussions were frequently teacher-directed, although we encouraged more student leading as the lesson progressed. After three weeks, we stopped requiring the CHAMP graphic

organizer and let the students read books independently, and we continued to measure their comprehension.

Removing this support let us observe whether the students had internalized the thinking strategies facilitated by the graphic organizer. Using Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris's (2008) skill versus strategy definitions, we aimed to introduce the CHAMP graphic organizer (and the approach of reading for multiple perspectives) as a *strategy*, but our longer-term goal was for this approach to become an internalized *skill*.

Based on Emery's work (1996), we prompted discussion after reading by using general, open-ended question stems that emphasize characters' thoughts and feelings. By varying the underlined components, the same questions can be adapted to most stories (see Table 3). Using consistent question stems helps students internalize the questions; it also makes planning easy and allows teachers to track students' growth over time. Additionally, the subjective questions encourage multiple interpretations and ensure that the discussions are not simple summaries. Rather than focusing on correctness, we aimed for students to use text evidence, make text-to-self or text-to-text

connections, and demonstrate clear communication of ideas, particularly emotions. We tracked progress with a holistic rubric that gave scores of 0–3 points per question.

Through daily monitoring, we observed regular, incremental growth in students' inferential comprehension and greater sophistication of understanding characters' thoughts and feelings (see Hodges et al., 2014). While students' performance varied by story (and by their interest in the story), the overall trend persisted. After 15 lessons, this intervention showed modest evidence of skill development through the comprehension question scores. From qualitative evidence, by the end of the intervention, students approached new texts with a greater focus on characters' motivations (instead of plot events) and were more excited to read stories.

Differentiating Perspective-Taking Instruction

As we worked with each of our students, we adapted instruction for their needs. Supporting strategies emerged: teaching emotional vocabulary, using text evidence, and using picture evidence.

Table 3 Rubric for Inferential Comprehension of Characters' Thoughts and Feelings

Substitute story specifics for the underlined words in question stems.

- (1) Why did the character do an action?
- (2) How did the character feel about an event?
- (3) What did the character think when the event occurred?
- (4) What did the character want from the event?
- (5) In this story, what did the character want most of all?

Score	Criteria
0	The answer is inconsistent with the story.
1	The answer is potentially correct, but the student does not demonstrate perspective-taking (of internal states), provide relevant connections to his or her own life (i.e., text-to-self connections), OR supply text evidence (including from illustrations).
2	The student correctly answers the question, demonstrating or providing ONE of the following: (a) perspective-taking, (b) connections to his or her own life, (c) text evidence.
3	The student correctly answers the question, demonstrating or providing MORE THAN ONE of the following: (a) perspective-taking, (b) connections to his or her own life, (c) text evidence.

“We soon realized the need to nurture students’ emotional vocabulary beyond the primary feelings.”

Teaching Emotional Vocabulary

We soon realized the need to nurture students’ emotional vocabulary beyond the primary feelings of *sad*, *mad*, and *happy*. After we began explicitly teaching emotional vocabulary, students were able to discuss their inferences about characters’ internal states with greater precision and fluency—particularly Belinda, an English learner. Belinda was performing modestly well in comprehension but was not showing growth. However, her intervention teacher observed that Belinda was limited by her vocabulary to describe emotions and would often present a scenario rather than an emotion. For instance, instead of saying *annoyed*, she said, “I’d feel like that if someone was just, like... just throwing things at me on purpose.” Rather than saying *surprised* or *shocked*, she described the character as “feeling like a big bomb went off.” While Belinda was able to convey feelings creatively, her work-around descriptions were also rather effortful. Therefore, we inferred that Belinda’s emotional intelligence was much higher than her emotional vocabulary.

Our instruction took minimal time. We used *Feelings Flash Cards* created by children’s author/illustrator Todd Parr (2010; see Figure 4). Before reading, Belinda’s intervention teacher presented four new emotions and provided a student-friendly definition. Then, as recommended by Nikolajeva (2013),

Belinda and her teacher observed the pictures’ facial cues and body language. Next, the teacher reviewed previously learned emotion words in the manner of Kucan’s (2012) Generating Situations game, in which teacher and student both created scenarios to evoke various words, such as “How would you feel if the principal hung your painting in her office?” and “When do you feel peaceful?”

An excerpt from a conversation about *Leonardo the Terrible Monster* by Mo Willems (2005) shows an example of how Belinda began trying out diverse and specific emotion words, including *shocked*, *frightened*, and *brave*.

Teacher: What is Leonardo thinking or feeling at this point?
 Belinda: He is feeling, like, surprised.
 Teacher: Surprised?
 Belinda: Because he thought he really did it right that time!

But it didn’t work and he, like, feels sad and, like, bad.

Teacher: He feels bad? Yeah. How do you know he is feeling those things?

Belinda: He also feels shocked.

Teacher: Shocked? Wow, good word.

Belinda: Because I can see it. At first he was jumping around, and right away now he is putting his shoulders down, and his face down, his tail down, and he’s like this [makes a frown] with his mouth down.

Teacher: So, you’re looking at what right now for evidence?

Belinda: Um, the picture?

Teacher: Yes! Body language—remember we said that? Good. Okay, so what do you think Sam is feeling or thinking at this point?

Figure 4 Sample of Todd Parr’s *Feelings Flash Cards*



Belinda He [Sam] is also now feeling, that he [Leonardo] didn't scare me...he's thinking, "I am—I am brave," like that, and not frightened.

In summary, after introducing emotional vocabulary, Belinda's comprehension question scores improved and she was able to communicate her ideas more succinctly.

Using Text Evidence

David, an African American boy, struggled with both fluency and comprehension but displayed a vivid imagination and demonstrated great insights during the reading process. However, he frequently had difficulty answering comprehension questions at the end of the story and usually provided a single-word answer. After a few lessons, his teacher noted his strengths and explained that, as a next step, David would now be responsible for proving each answer with text evidence (including from illustrations). The intervention teacher indicated that even a "correct" answer was incomplete without evidence to back it up. She modeled how to do this in multiple ways, then prompted David after reading. This proved useful right away and helped David expand from one-word answers to multiple sentences.

Teacher [after reading *Verdi* by Janell Cannon] How did the green snakes feel about Verdi when he asked them to play?

David He felt happy. Happy! And you know it!

Teachers Why do you say that they felt happy?

David They were laughing and playing. I hope that Verdi

don't fall again like he did last time.

Teacher Great, you gave two pieces of evidence—*laughing* and *playing* to prove *happy*.

After adding this strategy, the quality of David's responses improved and, in turn, his understanding of the story became more thorough and critical. It helped focus the connections he made and allowed him to see the causal connections in the text.

Using Picture Evidence

Illustrations were central to discerning characters' thoughts and feelings, and we used illustrations in multiple ways. First, we always cued students to find evidence by asking, "Is there anything in these *pictures* or *words* that tells you how the character is feeling?" Additionally, because we taught emotional vocabulary through analyzing the pictures on *Feelings Flash Cards* (Parr, 2010), students were primed to examine the illustrations in a similar manner.

We observed students regularly doing this. Most commonly, students frequently used *facial clues* as evidence. For example, while reading *Too Many Toys* (Shannon, 2008), Belinda observed how the boy felt: "I know because on the picture, he is shocked 'cause his mouth is so big and eyes popping OUT. Like, 'What are you saying, woman?' He is shocked!" Then she used *body language* to give evidence for his mom feeling tired: "She's kind of flopped down on the floor all flat. Like, sometimes when

I am exhausted, I just fall down and go to sleep sometimes like that. She is tired and just wants to go to sleep and not deal with toys."

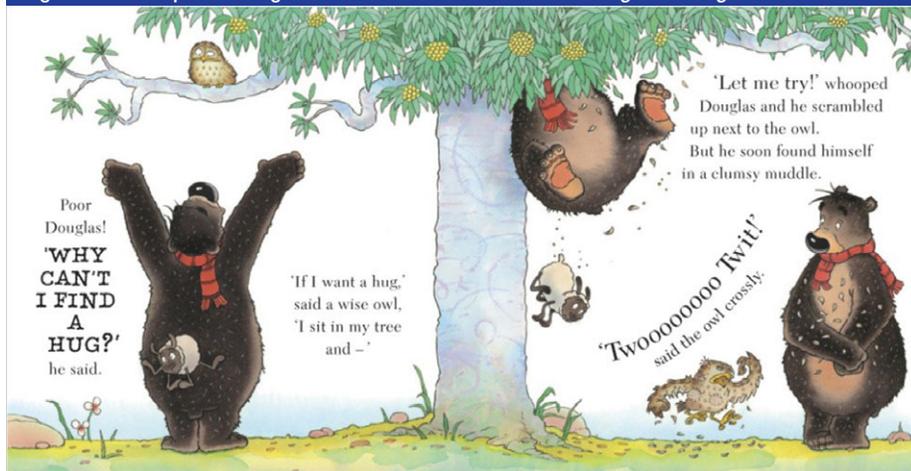
The students also noted aspects of the *illustration design* that gave more indirect clues about characters' states of mind. For example, in *Leonardo the Terrible Monster* (Willems, 2005), the boy Leonardo targets is already the nervous sort. Ariel (also an English learner) explained that the boy looked scared because he was presented so small. She said, "They should have drawn him bigger. Not hiding in the corner."

One less expected aspect of illustrations that the students cued into was what we called *integrated word art*, meaning when the font and arrangement of the words also communicated meaning and emotion. David was the first student to point this out to us, referring to why he liked *Hugless Douglas* (Melling, 2010). He told his teacher, "Because I like big words and silly words!" and then pointed out examples of how the text and pictures were mixed together in the page (see Figure 5). For example, the owl's anger can be seen in how his loud words jump up the page.

Extensions

While perspective-taking for comprehension is uniquely suited to stories, the benefits of understanding multiple perspectives and critical literacy is not limited to fiction. Reading in content area classes frequently requires readers to consider opposing arguments and motivations, and the CHAMP graphic organizer is easily

"Illustrations were central to discerning characters' thoughts and feelings, and we used illustrations in multiple ways."

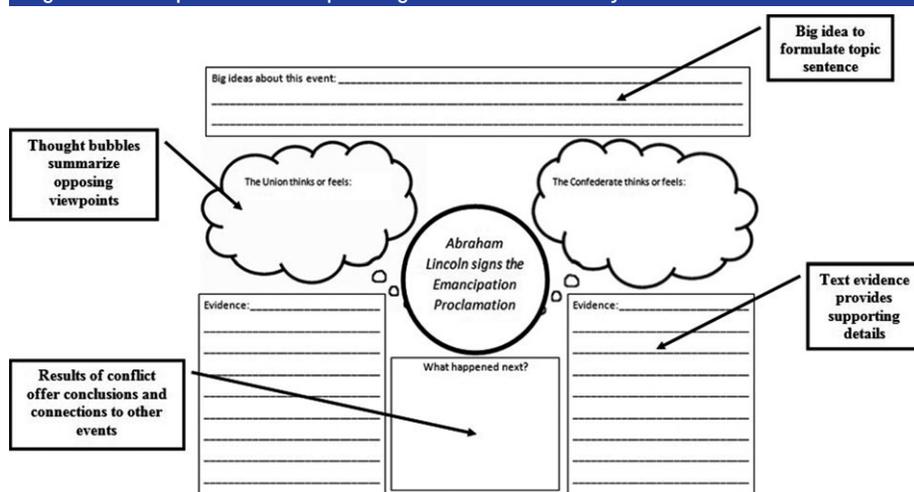
Figure 5 Sample of Integrated Illustration and Text From *Hugless Douglas*

adapted to this purpose. For example, history frequently uses timelines and flow charts to organize classroom content. Incorporating perspective-taking graphic organizers facilitates connections between historical figures. A graphic organizer structured like a character thinking map helps students to describe two sides of a debate and provide evidence for both arguments, such as Lincoln's signing of the Emancipation Proclamation (see Figure 6).

Final Thoughts

We encourage teachers to approach narrative comprehension instruction from the perspective of multiple characters. Having students consider how opposing characters are feeling and what they are thinking can result in lively and productive discussions. Then, teachers should challenge students to make connections between the characters' internal states and their actions in the plot. This approach can be integrated into

Figure 6 Sample CHAMP Graphic Organizer Used in History



an ongoing reading curriculum, introduced through class read-alouds, or incorporated into select content area reading. Graphic organizers, specifically CHAMP, can help make the process more visible.

While challenging for elementary students, this pathway helps students to become emotionally engaged and invested in the fate of characters in the texts they read. Additionally, the skills honed by perspective-taking practice transcend story reading and support reading in other areas of school. The positive impacts can be both social (e.g., fostering perspective-taking to resolve peer conflicts) and academic (e.g., helping students understand multiple sides of a scientific debate).

REFERENCES

- Afflerbach, P., Pearson, P.D., & Paris, S.G. (2008). Clarifying differences between reading skills and reading strategies. *The Reading Teacher*, 61(5), 364–373.
- Allington, R. (2005). Ideology is still trumping evidence. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 86(6), 462–468.
- Cervetti, G., Pardales, M.J., & Damico, J.S. (2001). A tale of differences: Comparing the traditions, perspectives, and educational goals of critical reading and critical literacy. *Reading Online*, 4(9), 80–90.
- Chall, J.S. (1983). *Stages of reading development*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Chamberlain, J., & Leal, D. (1999). Caldecott Medal books and readability levels: Not just "picture" books. *The Reading Teacher*, 52(8), 898–902.
- Djikic, M., Oatley, K., & Moldoveanu, M.C. (2013). Reading other minds: Effects of literature on empathy. *Scientific Study of Literature*, 3(1), 28–47.
- Emery, D.W. (1996). Helping readers comprehend stories from the characters' perspectives. *The Reading Teacher*, 49(7), 534–541.
- Gately, S.E. (2008). Facilitating reading comprehension for students on the autism spectrum. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 40(3), 40–45.
- Guthrie, J.T., & Wigfield, A. (2000). Engagement and motivation in reading. In M.L. Kamil, P.B. Mosenthal, P.D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (Vol. 3, pp. 403–424). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Hodges, T.S., McTigue, E.M., Wright, K.L., Franks, A.D., Douglass, A.G., & Scott, C. (2014). *Comprehending texts through multiple perspectives*. Presented at American Educational Research Association (AERA), Philadelphia, PA.

- Horning, K.T. (2010). *From cover to cover (revised edition): Evaluating and reviewing children's books*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Kidd, D.C., & Castano, E. (2013). Reading literary fiction improves theory of mind. *Science*, 342(6156), 377–380.
- Kucan, L. (2012). What is most important to know about vocabulary? *The Reading Teacher*, 65(6), 360–366.
- Lobron, A., & Selman, R. (2007). The interdependence of social awareness and literacy instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 60(6), 528–537.
- Mar, R.A., Oatley, K., Hirsh, J., dela Paz, J., & Peterson, J.B. (2006). Bookworms versus nerds: Exposure to fiction versus non-fiction, divergent associations with social ability, and the simulation of fictional social worlds. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 40(5), 694–712.
- Mar, R.A., Oatley, K., & Peterson, J.B. (2009). Exploring the link between reading fiction and empathy: Ruling out individual differences and examining outcomes. *Communications*, 34(4), 407–428.
- Miall, D.S. (2006). *Literary reading: Empirical and theoretical studies*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Miall, D.S., & Kuiken, D. (2002). A feeling for fiction: Becoming what we behold. *Poetics*, 30(4), 221–241.
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Common Core State Standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects*. Washington, DC: Authors.
- Nikolajeva, M. (2013). Picture books and emotional literacy. *The Reading Teacher*, 67(4), 249–254.
- Nikolajeva, M., & Scott, C. (2001). *How picture-books work*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Oatley, K. (2011). In the minds of others. *Scientific American Mind*, 22(5), 62–67.
- Pelletier, J., & Astington, J.W. (2004). Action, consciousness and theory of mind: Children's ability to coordinate story characters' actions and thoughts. *Early Education and Development*, 15(1), 5–22.
- Pehrsson, D.E. (2005). Fictive bibliotherapy and therapeutic storytelling with children who hurt. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 1(3–4), 273–286.
- Serafini, F. (2011). Creating space for children's literature. *The Reading Teacher*, 65(1), 30–34.
- Selman, R.L. (2003). *Promotion of social awareness: Powerful lessons for the partnership of developmental theory and classroom practice*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Shanahan, T., & Shanahan, S. (1997). Character perspective charting: Helping children to develop a more complete conception of story. *The Reading Teacher*, 50(8), 668–677.

TAKE ACTION!

Step	Description	Example
Step 1: Identify appropriate picture books.	Select engaging picture books with plots driven by interpersonal conflicts.	<i>Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse</i> by Kevin Henkes (1996)
Step 2: Identify stopping points.	Prior to instruction, identify two to three conflicts in the text that can serve as stopping points for discussion of character perspective.	Lilly ignores her teacher's instructions to not play with her new purse during class.
Step 3: While reading, pause at stopping points and ask probing questions about characters' feelings.	Pause at the stopping points and ask students what they believe characters are thinking or feeling at that moment. Be sure to discuss both sides of the conflict and have children justify their responses with evidence from the text and illustrations.	What is Mr. Slinger thinking or feeling when Lilly doesn't follow his instructions? How do you know? What is Lilly thinking or feeling when Mr. Slinger takes her purse away? How do you know?
Step 4: Fill in CHAMP graphic organizer.	Transcribe character thoughts or feelings into thought bubbles and text evidence into boxes.	
Step 5: Allow for further discussion between the students and teacher as necessary.	During or after completing the graphic organizer, students may want to engage in additional conversations about the characters, their motives, and the sequence of plot events. Teachers can encourage these discussions to promote deeper comprehension and further perspective-taking.	The students may relate the incident of Lilly and Mr. Slinger to a time they got in trouble during class. Help students use this analysis to make predictions.

- Shanahan, T. (2012). The Common Core ate my baby and other urban legends. *Educational Leadership*, 70(4), 10–16.
- Sipe, L.R. (2000). The construction of literary understanding by first and second graders in oral response to picture storybook read-alouds. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 35(2), 252–275.
- Smolkin, L., & McTigue, E. (2015). The elementary classroom: Improving comprehension of fictional texts. In S. Parris, & K. Headley (Eds.), *Comprehension instruction: Research based best practices* (3rd ed.) (pp. 224–237). New York: Guilford Publishing.
- Yeh, Y., & McTigue, E.M. (2013). *Perspective taking while reading - what perspectives shall be taken? A meta-analysis*. Presented at the Society for the Scientific Study of Reading (SSSR), Hong Kong.
- Banks, K. (2006). *Max's words*. New York, NY: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.
- Cannon, J. (2006). *Verdi* (7th ed.). Barcelona, Spain: Juventud.
- Cronin, D. (2000). *Click, clack, moo: Cows that type*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.
- Havill, J. (1990). *Jamaica tag-along*. New York, NY: HMH Books for Young Readers.
- Henkes, K. (1991). *Chrysanthemum*. New York, NY: Greenwillow Books.
- Henkes, K. (1996). *Lilly's purple plastic purse*. New York, NY: Greenwillow Books.
- Hills, T. (2006). *Duck & Goose*. New York, NY: Schwartz & Wade Books.
- Marshall, J. (1989). *The three little pigs*. New York, NY: Penguin Publishers.
- Melling, D. (2010). *Hugless Douglas*. Wilton, CT: Tiger Tales.
- Mohr, N. (1991). *Felita*. New York, NY: Bantam.
- Parr, T. (2010). *Feelings flash cards*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.
- Pinkwater, D.M. (1977). *The big orange splot*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Rathmann, P. (1991). *Ruby the copycat*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Scieszka, J. (1989). *The true story of the three little pigs*. New York, NY: Viking Kestrel.
- Shannon, D. (2008). *Too many toys*. New York, NY: Blue Sky Press.
- Stepoe, J. (1987). *Mufaro's beautiful daughters: An African tale*. New York, NY: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books.
- Viorst, J. (1972). *Alexander and the terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day*. New York, NY: Atheneum.
- Willems, M. (2005). *Leonardo the terrible monster*. New York, NY: Hyperion Books for Children.

Copyright of Reading Teacher is the property of Wiley-Blackwell and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.