20 Strategies to Teach Text Structure

As early as third grade, students are expected to recognize expository text structures such as the following: sequence, description, compare-contrast, cause-effect, and problem-solution. The ability to identify and analyze these text structures in reading helps make expository text easier to understand. Students should also use these text structures to organize their own writing. The following research-based teaching strategies can be applied in teaching students to use text structure:

1. Discuss with students that writers use text structures to organize information. Introduce the concept to them, and reinforce it every time students read and write.

2. Introduce and work on text structures in this order: description, sequence, problem and solution, cause and effect, and compare and contrast.

3. Skim and scan to predict text structure(s). Make predicting possible text structures a part of every pre-reading activity.

4. Teach the signal words for each text structure. Prior to reading, skim and scan passages and make predictions about text structure. During reading, analyze text and revise predictions about structure.

5. Teach and model the use of graphic organizers to go with each text structure. Identify text structures in advance and provide appropriate advanced organizer. For example, the teacher models charting the structure of specific paragraphs while reading and also provides practice in using the graphic organizer to write different text types.

6. Scaffold instruction using the gradual release of responsibility model. Spend quality instructional time in each phase of the model when teaching text structure strategies. For example, the teacher uses a think aloud to model for *demonstration.* The teacher then invites students to participate for *shared demonstration.* Then students practice with teacher support for *guided practice.* Finally, students apply the skills and strategies they have learned for *independent practice.*

7. Provide explicit instruction. For example, the teacher shows students specifically how and when to use strategies such as attending to signal words while reading different content areas or using signal words when writing expository text.

8. Model a think-aloud strategy. The teacher reads aloud a paragraph, pausing at appropriate points to share her own comprehension strategies and understanding of the text. Next the teacher might move to a shared-reading strategy, encouraged students to talk aloud as they engage in the process with the teacher. For example, the teacher asks students to talk about the clues they use to try to identify the text structure.

9. Ask focusing questions targeting text structure. Teachers can use focusing questions as a means of scaffolding the use of strategies or assisting students in the think-aloud process. For example, the teacher asks a student which signal word might be best to show a particular relationship among ideas in a text structure.

10. Use and create non-linguistic representations. For example, during reading the teacher models the drawing of a series of pictures to represent a sequence described in the passage.

Shared by: **Kristi Orcutt**, Reading & Writing Consultant, kristio@essdack.org

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11. Create and provide pattern guides and teacher-made organizers that reflect that structure of the original text. These tools help students focus on the key elements of the reading selection.

12. Present students with a *completed* graphic organizer as a pre-reading strategy. Have students write a probable paragraph using a predicted text structure prior to reading. After reading, compare students' probable passages and the original text.

13. Write using the text structures. While students watch, the teacher models writing a paragraph using a particular text structure and describes her actions as she is writing. Then students write their own paragraphs using text structure/ paragraph frames as templates.

14. Make the connection between reading and writing. When students read an example of a particular text structure, have them write using that same text structure. Writing can be done as a pre-reading or post-reading strategy.

15. Rewrite a paragraph or passage using a different text structure than the original. Compare the two and analyze why the author might have chosen the original pattern.

16. Read and analyze a variety of text, both single-structure passages and multi-structure passages. Use every opportunity that students read as an opportunity to teach text structure.

17. Have a text structure treasure hunt with a newspaper, classroom magazine, nonfiction book, textbook chapter, or students' independent reading material.

18. Use summary frame questions to guide students' comprehension before, during, and after reading. Each organizational structure suggests questions which readers should consider *as they are reading* and be able to answer *once they've finished reading* the passage.

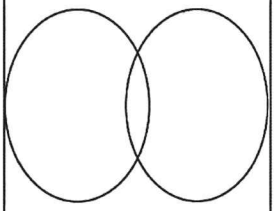
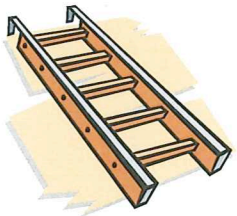
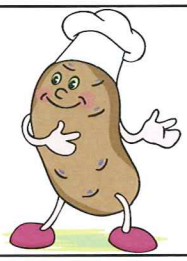
19. Use text coding strategies – highlighters, Post-It Notes, etc. – targeting text structures. Remember to model these strategies in advance and be consistent in your procedures (same color each time, etc.). For additional coding ideas, visit the Text Mapping site: http://www.textmapping.org/overview.html

20. Use text structure sorts to compare different paragraphs on a single topic. Begin by analyzing and sorting only one text structure at a time, then add another and so on.

Remember: Identifying patterns of organization is NOT the ultimate goal of text structure teaching. This ability is only beneficial as students internalize knowledge about text structure and subsequently use it to enhance their comprehension. Teach students to use text structures to improve their reading comprehension and writing organization.

Shared by: **Kristi Orcutt**, Reading & Writing Consultant, kristio@essdack.org

Text Structure Signal Questions & Signal Words

Cause and Effect	Compare and Contrast	Sequence	Problem and Solution	Description
				
Cause is why something happened. Effect is what happened. (Sometimes the effect is listed first.)	**Shows how two or more things are alike and/or how they are different.**	**Describes items or events in order or tells the steps to follow to do something or make something.**	**Tells about a problem (and sometimes says why there is a problem) then gives one or more possible solutions.**	**A topic, idea, person, place, or thing is described by listing its features, characteristics, or examples.**
Signal Questions				
What happened? Why did it happen? What caused it to happen?	What things are being compared? In what ways are they alike? In what ways are they different?	What items, events, or steps are listed? Do they have to happen in this order? Do they always happen in this order?	What is the problem? Why is this a problem? Is anything being done to try to solve the problem? What can be done to solve the problem?	What specific topic, person, idea, or thing is being described? How is it being described (what does it look like, how does it work, what does it do, etc.)? What is important to remember about it?
Signal Words				
So Because Since Therefore If…then This led to Reason why As a result May be due to Effect of Consequently For this reason	Same as Similar Alike As well as Not only…but also Both Instead of Either…or On the other hand Different from As opposed to	First Second Next Then Before After Finally Following Not long after Now Soon	Question is… Dilemma is… The puzzle is… To solve this… One answer is… One reason for the problem is…	For instance Such as… To begin with An example To illustrate Characteristics *Look for the topic word (or a synonym or pronoun) to be repeated

Shared by: Laurie Thisius, USD 268

Cause and Effect

Cause is why something happened. Effect is what happened. (Sometimes the effect is listed first.)

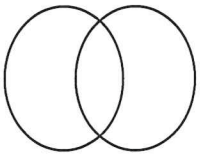
Signal Questions

What happened?
Why did it happen?
What caused it to happen?

Signal Words

so because since therefore
if...then this led to reason why
as a result may be due to effect
of consequently
for this reason

Compare and Contrast



Shows how two or more things are alike and/or how they are different.

Signal Questions

What things are being compared?
In what ways are they alike?
In what ways are they different?

Signal Words

same as similar alike as well as
not only...but also both instead of
either...or on the other hand
different from as opposed to

Sequence

Describes items or events in order or tells the steps to follow to do something or make something.

Signal Questions

What items, events, or steps are listed?
Do they have to happen in this order?
Do they always happen in this order?

Signal Words

first second next then before
after finally following
not long after now soon

Text Structure Flip Cards / O-Ring Cards

Shared by Annette Weems, Peabody-Burns Elementary, USD 398

Problem and Solution

Tells about a problem (and sometimes says why there is a problem) then gives one or more possible solutions.

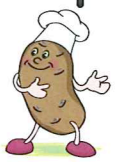
Signal Questions

What is the problem?
Why is this a problem?
Is anything being done to try to solve the problem?
What can be done to solve the problem?

Signal Words

question is... dilemma is...
the puzzle is... to solve this...
one answer is... one reason for the...

Description



A topic, idea, person, place, or thing is described by listing its features, characteristics, or examples.

Signal Questions

What specific topic, person, idea, or thing is being described?
How is it being described (what does it look like, how does it work, what does it do, etc)?
What is important to remember about it?

Signal Words

for instance such as... to begin with
an example to illusframestrate characteristics

Text Structure Flip Cards / O-Ring Cards

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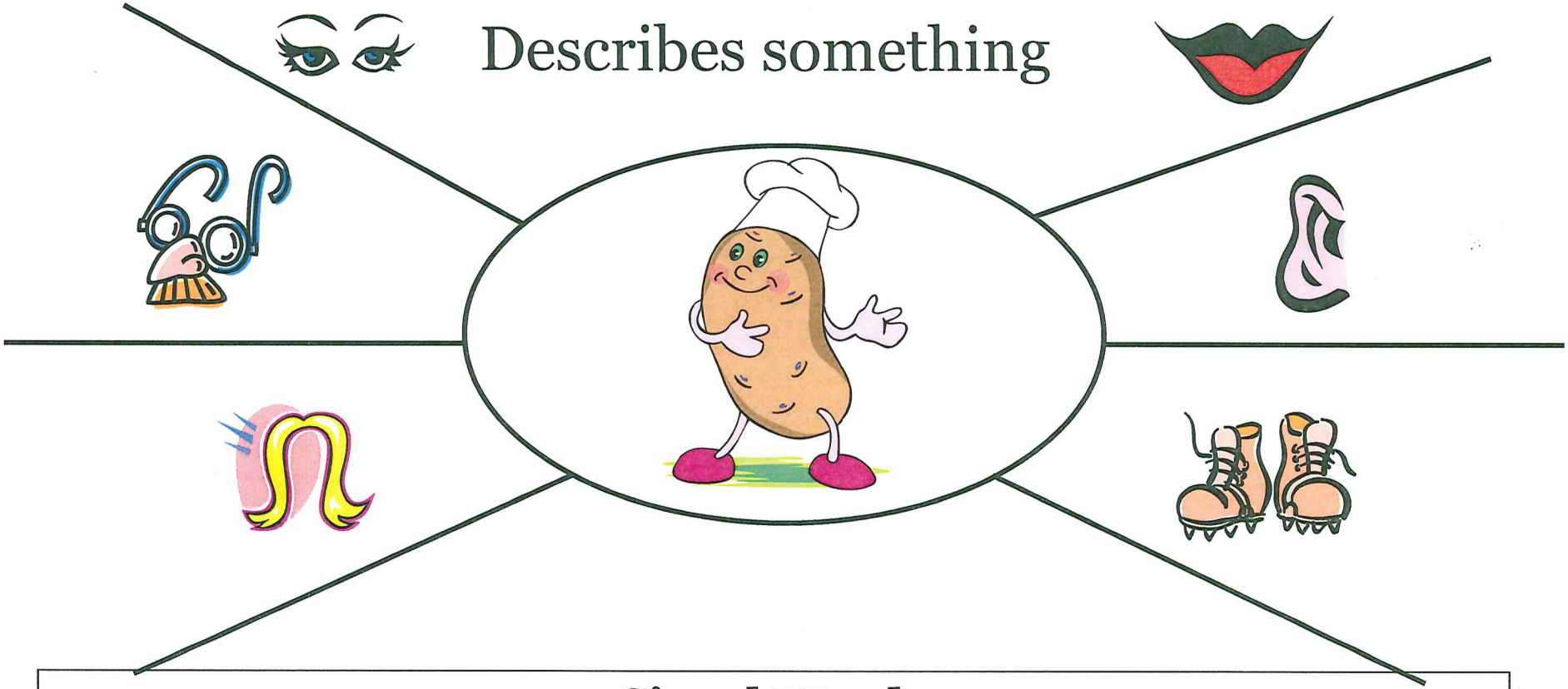
Description

Describes something



Signal Words		
for example	characteristics are	for instance
to begin with	also	in fact
in addition	such as	to illustrate
most important	another	furthermore
in front	beside	near
about	is	are
has	have	does

(Adapted from Tompkins, 2006)
Shared by Becky Cox, Valley Center

Description

Describes something

looks like

tastes like

smells like

sounds like

feels like

examples are

Signal Words		
for example	characteristics are	for instance
to begin with	also	in fact
in addition	such as	to illustrate
most important	another	furthermore
in front	beside	near
about	is	are
has	have	does

(Adapted from Tompkins, 2006)
Shared by Becky Cox, Valley Center

Sequence

Provides a series or steps

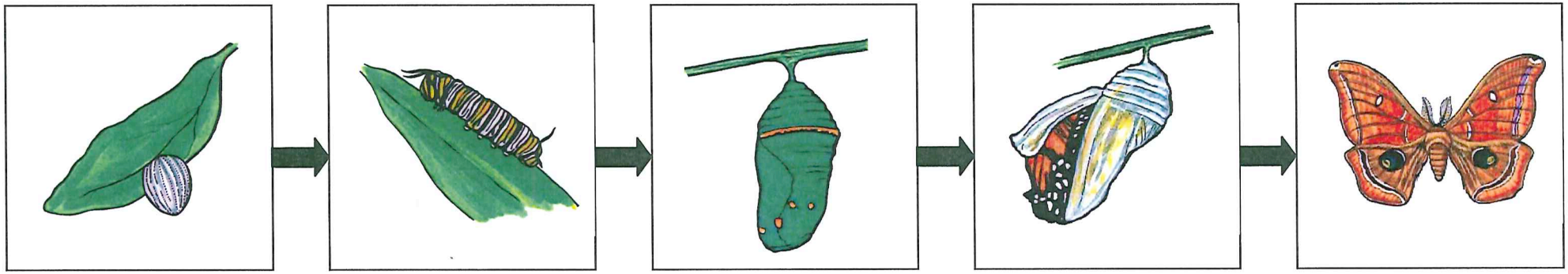
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Signal Words		
first	second	before
on (date)	not long after	after that
next	at the same time	finally
then		

(Adapted from Tompkins, 2006)
Shared by Becky Cox, Valley Center

Sequence

Provides a series or steps



Signal Words

first	**second**	**before**
on (date)	**not long after**	**after that**
next	**at the same time**	**finally**
then		

(Adapted from Tompkins, 2006)
Shared by Becky Cox, Valley Center

Problem and Solution

Identifies a problem and a solution to the problem

Problem → **Solution**

Signal Words

the problem is	**the dilemma is**
the puzzle is	**the question is**
solve	**a solution**
question...answer	**one answer is**
one reason for the problem	

Adapted from Tompkins (2006)
Shared by Becky Cox, Valley Center

Problem and Solution

Identifies a problem and a solution to the problem

Problem → **Evidence** → **Possible Solutions** → **Result(s)**

Problem	Evidence	Possible Solutions	Result(s)
because since the problem is the puzzle is the dilemma is the question is	as a consequence this led to so that nevertheless accordingly one reason for the problem	if so perhaps possibly	a solution is solutions are this resulted in one answer is therefore

Adapted with permission from Hailey & Winkler (2005)
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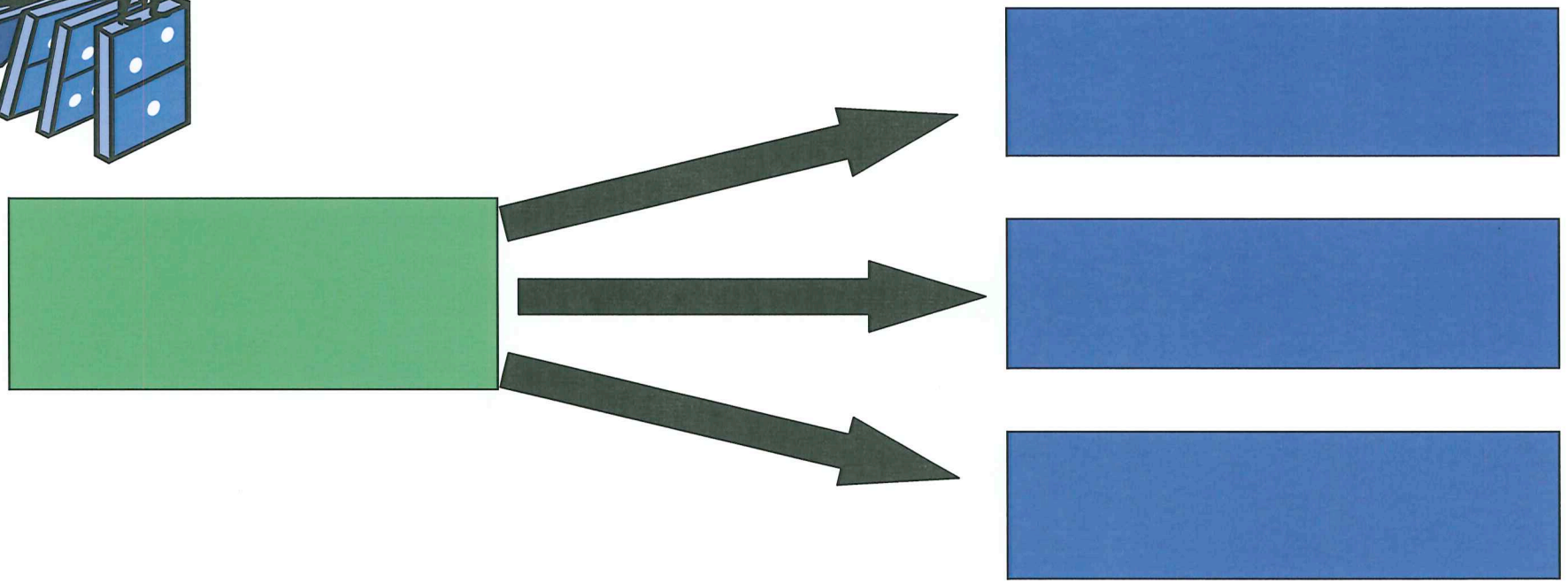
Cause and Effect

Presents cause and effect relationships



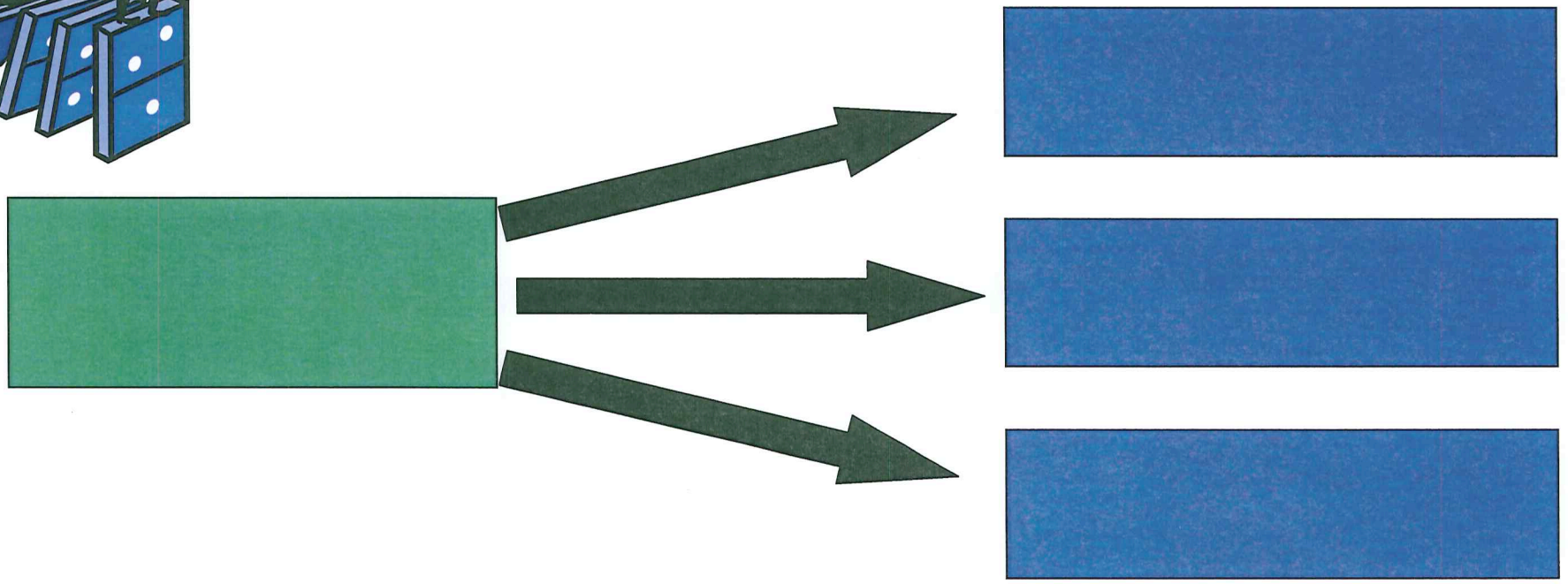
Signal Words

because	if...then	as a result
therefore	since	consequently
this leads to	so that	nevertheless
accordingly	because of	in order to
may be due to	effects of	thus
for this reason		

(Adapted from Tompkins, 2006)

Cause and Effect

Presents cause and effect relationships



Signal Words

because	if...then	as a result
therefore	since	consequently
this leads to	so that	nevertheless
accordingly	because of	in order to
may be due to	effects of	thus
for this reason		

(Adapted from Tompkins, 2006)
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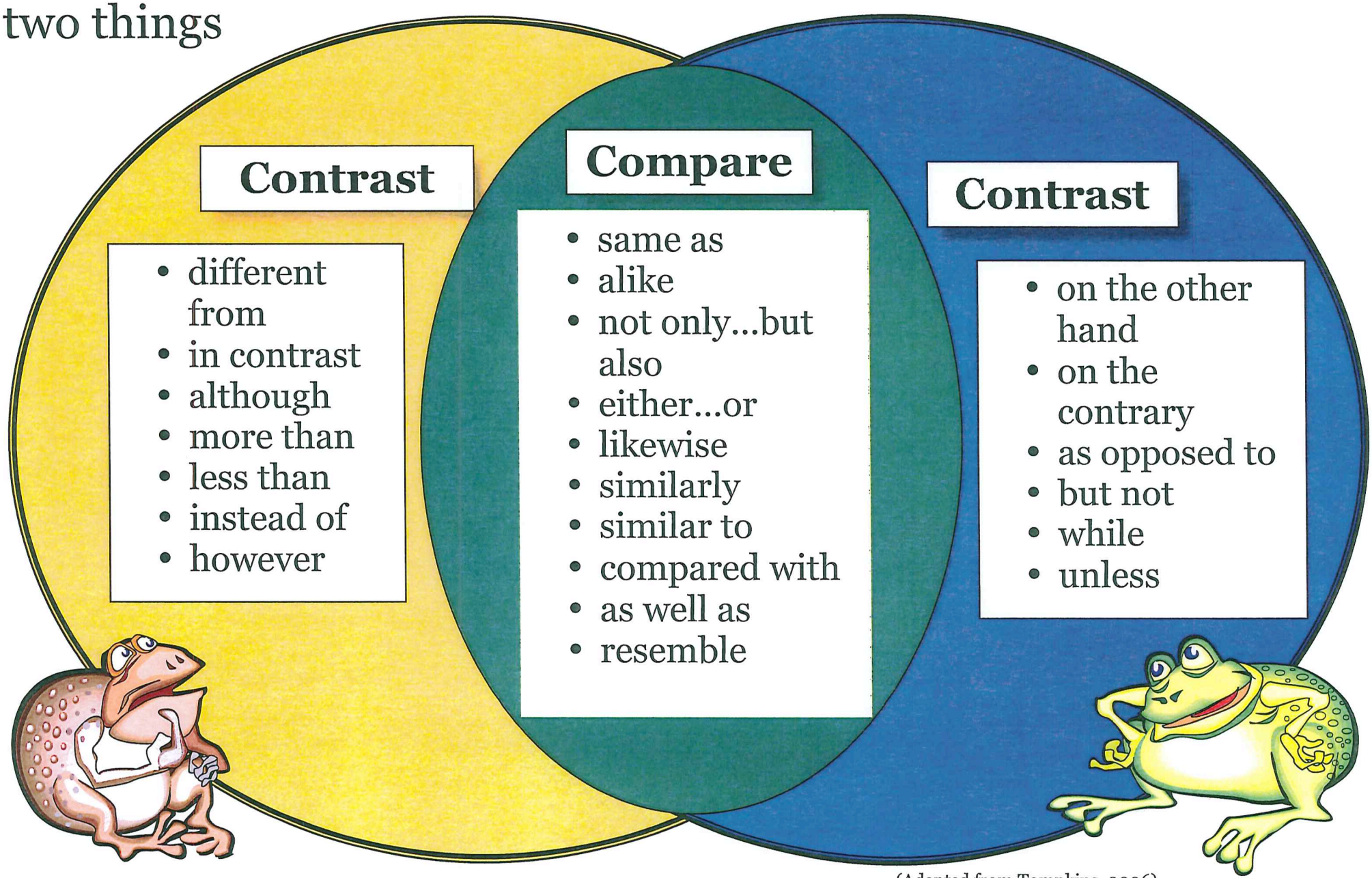
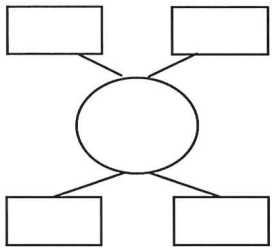
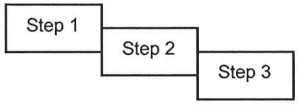
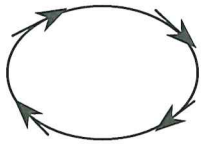
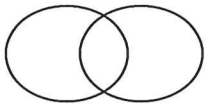
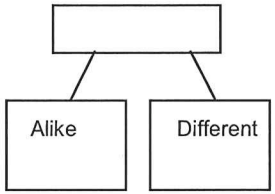
Comparison and Contrast

Compares and contrasts the similarities and differences between two things



(Adapted from Tompkins, 2006)

Text Structures

Structure	Definition	Signal Words	Graphic Organizers	Summary Questions	Paragraph Frames
Description	The author explains a topic, idea, person, place, or thing by listing characteristics, features, and examples. Focus is on one thing and its components.	For example Characteristics are Such as Looks like Consists of For instance Most important *Look for topic word (or synonym) to be repeated throughout the text.	Concept Map 	What specific person, place, thing, event, or concept is being described? How is the topic described? (How does it work? What does it do? What does it look like? Etc.) What are the most important attributes or characteristics? How can the topic be classified? (For example, a robin can be classified as a type of bird.)	A _____ is a type of _____. It is made up of _____ and looks like _____. Some _____ have _____ such as _____. For example, _____. Now you can recognize the _____.
Sequence	The author lists items or events in numerical or chronological order. Describes the order of events or how to do or make something.	First, second, third Next Then, after Before, prior to Not long after While, meanwhile Simultaneously At the same time Following Finally At last In the end On (date) At (time) Directions	Timeline 1 2 3 4 5 Steps/Directions  Cycle/Circle 	What sequence of events is being described? What are the major events or incidents that occur? What are the steps, directions, or procedures to follow? (What must be done first, second, etc.?) What is the beginning event? What other events or steps are included? What is the final outcome, event, or step?	Here is how a _____ is made. First, _____. Next, _____. Then, _____. Finally, _____. On (date) _____ happened. Prior to that _____ was _____. Then _____. After that _____. In the end, _____.
Compare and Contrast	The author explains how two or more things are alike and/or how they are different.	Differs from Similar to In contrast Alike Same as As well as On the other hand Both Either , or Not only, but also Yet, although, but, However On the other hand * Also look for "-est" words: best, fewest, tallest, etc.	Venn Diagram  T-Chart  	What items are being compared? What is it about them that is being compared? What characteristics of items form the basis of the comparison? What characteristics do they have in common; how are these items alike? In what way are these items different?	_____ and _____ are alike in several ways. Both _____ and _____ have similar _____. Both also _____ as well as _____. On the other hand, there are some differences as well. One way they differ is _____. Another difference is _____. Although they share _____, only _____ is the _____-est.

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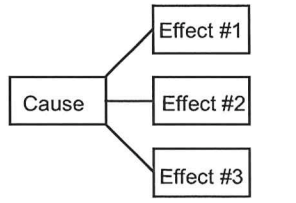
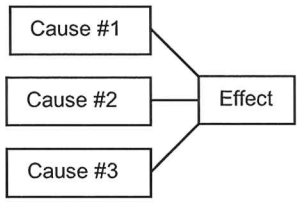
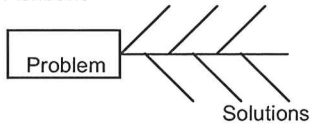
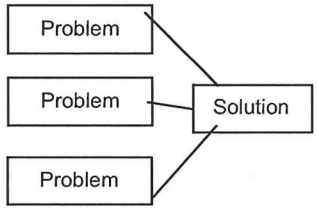
Text Structures

Structure	Description	Signal Words	Graphic Organizers	Summary Questions	Paragraph Frames
Cause and Effect	The author lists one or more causes or events and the resulting consequences or effects. Effect = What happened? Cause = What made it happen? Purpose is to explain why or how something happened, exists, or works. *Often there will be an "if/then" pattern	Reasons why Reasons for If...then As a result of Therefore Because of So Since In order to Leads or leads to Effects of Caused by Result Outcome Impact Influenced by Brought about by	 	What happened? Why did it happen? What was the reason for...? What was the effect(s) of the event? What happened as a result of....? What were the results or outcomes caused by the event? In what ways did prior event(s) cause or influence the main event? Will this result always happen from these causes?	The reason why _____ happened was because of _____. If _____, then _____. In order to _____, _____. Since _____, _____. Finally, due to _____, _____. This explains why _____.
Problem and Solution	The author states a problem and lists one or more possible solutions to the problem. May also include the pros and cons for the solutions.	Problem is... Dilemma is... Puzzle is... Solved Question Answer Because Since This led to The main difficulty One possible solution is... One challenge... Therefore, This led to, so that If...then, thus	Fishbone  	What is the problem(s)? Who had the problem? What is causing the problem? Why is this a problem? What is wrong and how can it be taken care of? What solutions are recommended or attempted? What can be improved, changed, fixed, or remedied? What are the pros and cons of the solutions offered?	_____ had/is a problem because _____. One possible solution is _____. This answer is good because _____. Therefore, _____. As a result, _____.

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Text Structure Paragraphs

1. All crocodilians are reptiles with long snouts, long tails, four short legs, tough skin, and sharp teeth. Members of the crocodilian family include alligators, crocodiles, caimans, and gavials. Crocodilians live in warm weather throughout the year and they spend part of their time in the water and part of their time on land. Almost all crocodilians grow to be very large, with the largest more than twenty feet long. There are two kinds of alligators, 14 kinds of crocodiles, eight kinds of caimans, and one kind of gavial.

*Overall Text Structure:*_____. *Underline signal words.*

1. All crocodilians are reptiles with long snouts, long tails, four short legs, tough skin, and sharp teeth. Members of the crocodilian family include alligators, crocodiles, caimans, and gavials. Crocodilians live in warm weather throughout the year and they spend part of their time in the water and part of their time on land. Almost all crocodilians grow to be very large, with the largest more than twenty feet long. There are two kinds of alligators, 14 kinds of crocodiles, eight kinds of caimans, and one kind of gavial.

*Overall Text Structure:*_____. *Underline signal words.*

From: *Making Nonfiction Texts Come Alive* by Kathy Pike and Jean Mumper (Pearson, 2004) ISBN 0-205-36609-0

Text Structure Paragraphs

2. Recently, scientists have gained an understanding of a crocodile's reproductive activity. Crocodiles mate in the water, where the buoyancy keeps them from crushing each other. Prior to mating, there are stylized postures, jumping, submerged bubble blowing, and snout contact. After mating, hard-shelled eggs are laid in a nest, in a hole scooped in the sand. When it is time to hatch, the infant crocodiles begin a loud chirping sound that leads the female to the nest, which she excavates. Finally, when all the babies are accounted for, the mother crocodile transports them to the shallow water where they will remain under adult protection for weeks or months.

Overall Text Type:_____. Underline signal words.

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Overall Text Structure:_____. Underline signal words.

From: *Making Nonfiction Texts Come Alive* by Kathy Pike and Jean Mumper (Pearson, 2004) ISBN 0-205-36609-0

Text Structure Paragraphs

3. On the river banks of the Nile River, home to some crocodiles, there are many kinds of birds, sometimes called crocodile birds because they are always hopping around crocodiles. The big crocodiles and the birds are useful to each other for several reasons. The birds eat flies and leeches that they find on the crocodiles' skin and mouths. In this way, the birds get a good mean and the crocodiles get rid of the leeches and flies. Sometimes an enemy frightens the birds who scream and fly away. As a result of the noise, the birds give the crocodiles a warning of danger.

Overall Text Structure:_____. Underline signal words.

3. On the river banks of the Nile River, home to some crocodiles, there are many kinds of birds, sometimes called crocodile birds because they are always hopping around crocodiles. The big crocodiles and the birds are useful to each other for several reasons. The birds eat flies and leeches that they find on the crocodiles' skin and mouths. In this way, the birds get a good mean and the crocodiles get rid of the leeches and flies. Sometimes an enemy frightens the birds who scream and fly away. As a result of the noise, the birds give the crocodiles a warning of danger.

Overall Text Structure:_____. Underline signal words.

From: *Making Nonfiction Texts Come Alive* by Kathy Pike and Jean Mumper (Pearson, 2004) ISBN 0-205-36609-0

Text Structure Paragraphs

4. In most parts of the world there are not as many crocodiles as there used to be. This is a problem because crocodiles are becoming endangered and also crocodile are necessary to the balance of nature. Many crocodiles have died because people dried up the swamps and marshes where the crocodiles live. Poachers have also contributed to the dilemma as crocodiles have been desired for their strong, smooth, leathery skins. In order to preserve these mighty creatures, people must take care of the crocodiles' environment and help put a stop to the needless shooting of these animals.

Overall Text Structure:_____. Underline signal words.

4. In most parts of the world there are not as many crocodiles as there used to be. This is a problem because crocodiles are becoming endangered and also crocodile are necessary to the balance of nature. Many crocodiles have died because people dried up the swamps and marshes where the crocodiles live. Poachers have also contributed to the dilemma as crocodiles have been desired for their strong, smooth, leathery skins. In order to preserve these mighty creatures, people must take care of the crocodiles' environment and help put a stop to the needless shooting of these animals.

Overall Text Structure:_____. Underline signal words.

From: *Making Nonfiction Texts Come Alive* by Kathy Pike and Jean Mumper (Pearson, 2004) ISBN 0-205-36609-0

Text Structure Paragraphs

5. Alligators and crocodiles, along with their relatives the caimans and the gavials, are very much alike. These crocodilians are reptiles with long snouts, long tails, four short legs, tough skin, and sharp teeth. There are some differences, however. Gavials have the longest snout and the most teeth. Some people say that alligators and crocodiles differ in the shape of their snouts and the positioning of their teeth. Zookeepers say that crocodiles move faster than alligators and have nastier dispositions.

Overall Text Structure:_____. Underline signal words.

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Overall Text Structure:_____. Underline signal words.

From: *Making Nonfiction Texts Come Alive* by Kathy Pike and Jean Mumper (Pearson, 2004) ISBN 0-205-36609-0

Text Structure Paragraphs

KEY #1

1. All crocodilians are reptiles with long snouts, long tails, four short legs, tough skin, and sharp teeth. Members of the crocodilian family include alligators, crocodiles, caimans, and gavials. Crocodilians live in warm weather throughout the year and they spend part of their time in the water and part of their time on land. Almost all crocodilians grow to be very large, with the largest more than twenty feet long. There are two kinds of alligators, 14 kinds of crocodiles, eight kinds of caimans, and one kind of gavial.

Overall Text Structure: ***DESCRIPTIVE****. Underline signal words (the features are, some characteristics are, for example, etc.)*

1. All crocodilians are reptiles with long snouts, long tails, four short legs, tough skin, and sharp teeth. Members of the crocodilian family include alligators, crocodiles, caimans, and gavials. Crocodilians live in warm weather throughout the year and they spend part of their time in the water and part of their time on land. Almost all crocodilians grow to be very large, with the largest more than twenty feet long. There are two kinds of alligators, 14 kinds of crocodiles, eight kinds of caimans, and one kind of gavial.

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Text Structure Paragraphs

KEY #2

2. Recently, scientists have gained an understanding of a crocodile's reproductive activity. Crocodiles mate in the water, where the buoyancy keeps them from crushing each other. Prior to mating, there are stylized postures, jumping, submerged bubble blowing, and snout contact. After mating, hard-shelled eggs are laid in a nest, in a hole scooped in the sand. When it is time to hatch, the infant crocodiles begin a loud chirping sound that leads the female to the nest, which she excavates. Finally, when all the babies are accounted for, the mother crocodile transports them to the shallow water where they will remain under adult protection for weeks or months.

Overall Text Structure: ***SEQUENCE****. Underline signal words.*

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Text Structure Paragraphs

KEY #3

3. On the river banks of the Nile River, home to some crocodiles, there are many kinds of birds, sometimes called crocodile birds because they are always hopping around crocodiles. The big crocodiles and the birds are useful to each other for several reasons. The birds eat flies and leeches that they find on the crocodiles' skin and mouths. In this way, the birds get a good meal and the crocodiles get rid of the leeches and flies. Sometimes an enemy frightens the birds who scream and fly away. As a result of the noise, the birds give the crocodiles a warning of danger.

Overall Text Structure: ***CAUSE AND EFFECT****. Underline signal words.*

3. On the river banks of the Nile River, home to some crocodiles, there are many kinds of birds, sometimes called crocodile birds because they are always hopping around crocodiles. The big crocodiles and the birds are useful to each other for several reasons. The birds eat flies and leeches that they find on the crocodiles' skin and mouths. In this way, the birds get a good meal and the crocodiles get rid of the leeches and flies. Sometimes an enemy frightens the birds who scream and fly away. As a result of the noise, the birds give the crocodiles a warning of danger.

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Text Structure Paragraphs

KEY #4

4. In most parts of the world there are not as many crocodiles as there used to be. This is a problem because crocodiles are becoming endangered and also crocodile are necessary to the balance of nature. Many crocodiles have died because people dried up the swamps and marshes where the crocodiles live. Poachers have also contributed to the dilemma as crocodiles have been desired for their strong, smooth, leathery skins. In order to preserve these mighty creatures, people must take care of the crocodiles' environment and help put a stop to the needless shooting of these animals.

Overall Text Structure: ***PROBLEM SOLUTION****. Underline signal words.*

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Text Structure Paragraphs

KEY #5

5. Alligators and crocodiles, along with their relatives the caimans and the gavials, are very much alike. These crocodilians are reptiles with long snouts, long tails, four short legs, tough skin, and sharp teeth. There are some differences, however. Gavials have the longest snout and the most teeth. Some people say that alligators and crocodiles differ in the shape of their snouts and the positioning of their teeth. Zookeepers say that crocodiles move faster than alligators and have nastier dispositions.

Overall Text Structure: ***COMPARISON AND CONTRAST*** *Underline signal words.*

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2. Recently, scientists have gained an understanding of a crocodile's reproductive activity. Crocodiles mate in the water, where the buoyancy keeps them from crushing each other. Prior to mating, there are stylized postures, jumping, submerged bubble blowing, and snout contact. After mating, hard-shelled eggs are laid in a nest, in a hole scooped in the sand. When it is time to hatch, the infant crocodiles begin a loud chirping sound that leads the female to the nest, which she excavates. Finally, when all the babies are accounted for, the mother crocodile transports them to the shallow water where they will remain under adult protection for weeks or months.

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Text Structure Paragraphs

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