

Teaching the 5-Finger Retelling Strategy

Retelling is a strategy in which the students repeat a story in their own words, either in writing or orally, immediately after reading or hearing it. By retelling the story in their own words, students are able to make connections to things they know and understand. Making connections to their own schema (things they know and understand) is critical for comprehension.

We will use the 5-Finger Retell when reading narrative text—that is a selection written as a story, whether fact or fiction. The 5-Finger Retell helps student to analyze the story by organizing into the grammar components of setting, characters, problem, events, and solution or ending (Pressley, n.d.). These instructions will help you remind the students of strategies to use **before**, **during**, and **after** reading.

Don't worry! You will not be introducing anything new. I use this technique in our classroom. However, repetition helps to reinforce strategies and increases student retention.

If I would like you to focus on listening comprehension, I will have you read the story out loud to the student(s). If the focus is on reading comprehension, you will direct the student(s) to read the story silently.

1. Tell me what we are going to do.

- You might say something like, "Today we are going to use the 5-Finger Retelling Strategy. Can anyone remember what the steps are?" "Let's start with the thumb. You can look at our poster." (I will have a 5-Finger Retelling poster for you to reference.)
- After starting with the thumb, go through each of the fingers and then ask, "What is the heart of the story?" Students should respond, "The main idea," or "The theme."
- Tell the students that we use this strategy to help us remember the important information about the story—where it takes place, who it is about, what important things happen, and what the theme or main idea is.
- Ask them to repeat back to you the reasons we use this strategy.
- Tell them that after you/they read the story, they are going to retell it in their own words and they need to remember to include (hold up your fist and have them do the same then lift): thumb-setting, pointer-characters, tall finger-problem/challenge, ring finger-events or episodes, little finger-solution and ending to the story, and finally the _____ (students should respond, "theme.")

2. Show me how to do it.

Model what it is we want the student(s) to do. Demonstrate by talking through the steps as you do them (thinking aloud). I will have a very short story for you to read aloud as an example. Then you will begin to show them how to fill out the 5-Finger Retelling organizer.

- Tell yourself out loud that you are going to take a picture walk and make some predictions about the story.
- Remind yourself out loud that you are going to look for the setting, the characters, the problem, remember the events, and how the problem is solved and the story ends. Ask yourself out loud what the theme of the story is going to be.
- Make some predictions and explain why you think they way you do.
- Read aloud the very short story.
- Use the document camera to display the 5-Finger Organizer (or use a sample sheet if working 1 on 1).
- Explain that organizer will help them outline the story.
- Explain that after they outline the story, they will write the story in their own words as if they are retelling it to a friend who has never heard it before.
- Fill in the top information and first two elements—setting and characters as you explain what you are doing.

3. Help me do it.

We call this guided practice. Have the student(s) repeat the steps with you and practice with a section of text. At this point you are making sure they understand the process and will be able to do it on their own. You are going to work with the student(s) to finish a sample 5-Finger Retelling Organizer.

- Ask the students to tell you what the problem or challenge was in the story and then briefly summarize it in one short sentence on the organizer.
- Ask a student to list one of the events that happened on the organizer on the document camera (or sample sheet if working 1 on 1).
- Ask other students to fill on additional events in the sample form.
- Ask if we have covered all the events.
- Ask the students to tell you how the problem was solved.
- Summarize how the story ended.
- Display the completed sample Story Sheet and explain that this is an example of how to retell a story to a friend who has never heard it before, using your own words.

4. Let me do it.

This is often referred to as independent practice. Once the students have demonstrated that they understand how and when to apply the strategy, we let them do it. This is where the students work without your help and practice using the strategy. Independent practice does not necessarily mean that they work alone. I will let you know if we are focusing on listening or reading comprehension and if the students are to work alone, with a partner, or in a small group.

- Pass out the 5-Finger Retelling Organizer and Story Sheet.
- Remind them that they will complete the organizer and write their own version of the story as if they are retelling it to a friend who has never heard it before.
- **Before Reading** have them take a picture walk and make their own predictions.
- Remind them that **During Reading** they will focus on the setting, characters, problem, events, solution/ending, and what the theme is.
- Read the story to the students (if we are focusing on listening comprehension) OR have the student(s) read silently (if the goal is reading comprehension).
- **After Reading** have them complete the organizer and write their retelling.
- They should spend no more than 3 to 5 minutes completing the organizer.
- Give them about 10 minutes to write their retelling of the story.

5. Check my understanding.

As students work independently, frequently check to make sure they are correctly applying the strategy. You may find that they need you to review the steps, or reteach part of the strategy so they better understand it. They will also be doing a self-check by using the 5-Finger Retelling Checklist.

- If a student seems stuck on an element, give him/her a few prompts to help.
- After students have completed the assignment, pass out the Retelling Checklist (Canter, 2008).
- Go through each element and ask them to check their story to see if they have included this element. Tell them to put a check mark in the Yes column if they have it in their story, or check No if they forgot that part.
- Read, "When I composed/retold on my own, I included (Canter)" and have the list all the things they remembered to do.
- Read, "The next time if compose/retell, I need to remember to include the following things (Canter)" and ask them to write down the things they forgot to include.
- Collect all their papers and turn them in to me.

References:

Canter (2008). Retelling checklist, *Foundations of Reading and Literacy & Teaching Reading in the Elementary Grades*, p. 128. Los Angeles, CA: Laureate Education, Inc.

Pressley, M. (n.d.). Comprehension instruction: What works. ReadingRockets.org. Retrieved Feb. 11, 2014 from <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/68>

Richardson, J. (2009). *The Next Step in Guided Reading*. New York, NY: Scholastic. Inc.