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Night and Day

THE LEARNING CONTEXT

This teacher used *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle to prompt class discussions on caterpillars and butterflies. She asked the students to explain, first orally to a partner and then in writing, how a caterpillar turns into a butterfly.

The teacher modelled and discussed writing an explanation. She drew out the need for explanations to be clear and to contain key topic-related words. She discussed the formation of some of the letters with the class.

To help her class explore and write about the science topic Night and Day, the teacher repeated the process that she had used to generate the butterfly explanations. She stimulated discussion, encouraged the students to give explanations orally to a partner, and then asked them to record their explanations in writing.

The teacher developed the students' understanding of the topic through a variety of practical activities. She also provided a collection of reference books and put up a display of stars, with key topic-related words, to increase the students' vocabulary. The activities encouraged much classroom discussion, during which the teacher encouraged the students to explain in "knee-to-knee" discussions with each other what they were learning.

When the teacher was satisfied that the students' understanding had developed sufficiently, she asked them to record written explanations of night and day. She reminded them that their explanations had to be as clear as possible and to contain some key topic-related words, and she encouraged them to focus on forming letters correctly. The teacher asked Liam to read his completed first draft to her. After he had read it, he explained his attempts at punctuation.

Teacher-student conversations

After the first draft

Liam: Do you know what this bubble is for? [Points to the bubble after the second "san".]

Teacher: Is it a full stop?

Liam: No! It's a little bubble to give you time off to have a little breath.

Teacher: I'm pleased you're remembering that we give readers time to take a breath. We call it a comma and write it down here. [Shows correct positioning.] You've explained why we have day and night very well. I like the way you've used the word "orbits". Can you find it on our star words?

Liam: Yes. [Identifies the correct word.] I showed how it orbits in my picture. I couldn't make the earth go around, so I drew the arrows.

INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

Classroom reading programmes provide opportunities for students to identify how phenomena can be explained in written and visual texts. Teachers could expose their students to basic explanation texts (for example, the SAILS and TWIG series of junior readers). The students could discuss the vocabulary, language features, and diagrams contained in such texts and practise them in their own writing. In addition, teachers could encourage their students to explain phenomena from a wide range of fiction and non-fiction texts, using questions such as "Why have the leaves turned colour?", "How do you go fishing?", and "Why and how do you collect things?"

WHERE TO NEXT?

To move Liam towards the next learning step, the teacher could help him to focus on:

- ideas: supporting ideas with some simple details or comments;
- structure: sequencing ideas;
- punctuation: understanding the use of capital letters, full stops, and commas;
- layout: forming letters correctly.

The teacher could do this by:

- modelling texts that include examples of the language features of explanations;
- giving specific feedback related to these teaching points during conference times;
- leading class and individual discussions, using questions that promote further thinking about explanations.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Level 1: Writing Functions: Transactional Writing

Students should write instructions and recount events in authentic contexts.

Levels 1 and 2: Reading and Writing Processes

Exploring Language: Students should explore choices made by writers, and identify and use the common conventions of writing and organisation of text which affect understanding.

Thinking Critically: Students should identify and express meanings in written texts, drawing on personal background, knowledge, and experience.

Processing Information: Students should identify, retrieve, record, and present coherent information, using more than one source and type of technology, and describing the process used.

English in the New Zealand Curriculum, pages 35–36

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Night and Day

STUDENT'S FIRST DRAFT

I wonder why
we have night and day?

Day and nit cae fom
the Eof and the
san. And the Eof
ods and the san
the Eof eoe and.
When we foa
the san it is day
and when we
foa the moon
it is nit.





Transactional Writing: Explanation

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What the Work Shows

Liam has attempted to explain a personally significant phenomenon to his audience. The content demonstrates a developing level of understanding in science as he tries to make sense of his world. His understanding is clearly expressed.

STUDENT'S FIRST DRAFT

DEEPER FEATURES

Ideas

Forms and writes a simple idea as an explanation.

Sentences

Uses simple and complex sentences.

Vocabulary

Uses some high-frequency words and some key topic-related words.

Language features

Uses simple verbs that precisely denote actions.

Uses the present tense.

I wonder why we have night and day?

Day and nit cas fom the Eof and the san. And the Eaf ods ard the san^othe Eof gos ard. When we fas thesan it is day and when we fas the moon it is nit.

SURFACE FEATURES

Grammar

Writes sentences that make sense.

Punctuation

With support, understands and uses capital letters and full stops.

Attempts a comma.

Spelling

Spells some high-frequency words correctly.

Identifies dominant sounds in words and records some of these accurately.

Day and night comes from the earth and the sun. And the earth orbits around the sun, the earth goes around. When we face the sun it is day and when we face the moon it is night.

REFERENCES

Carle, Eric (1974). *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. London: Picture Puffins.

The first page of this exemplar has been slightly shortened to fit. To see the fuller version, go to www.tki.org.nz/r/assessment/exemplars/eng/