



Transactional Writing: Explanation

LEVEL 1i 1ii 1iii 2 **3** 4 5

What Happens When You Are Asleep?

THE LEARNING CONTEXT

The class focused on explanation writing for five weeks. They began by writing several very simple “how to” explanations, such as how to make a sandwich or a cup of tea. The primary focus was to give students opportunities to get ideas ordered into sequence, and to use “connectives” such as “firstly”, “then”, “next”.

The teacher also wished to emphasise that each paragraph would contain one main idea. They used picture sequencing to reinforce this.

They then studied the life cycle of the monarch butterfly, reading the *School Journal* article “The Monarch Butterfly” (1.5.78) before moving on to study features of a “Why?” explanation based on the article “What Does a Starfish Have For Lunch?” (1.2.99). As the students “unpacked” the features of each explanation, they were able to develop criteria for explanation writing.

For the topic “What happens when we are asleep?” the class read “Sleep Tight” (2.1.99). After this they looked for topic-related vocabulary, drawing up a list which was written and defined on the board. The criteria for writing an explanation were revisited.

The students shared experiences about what different family members do, and what they say they do, when they are asleep.

They were reminded that they should:

- have one main idea in each paragraph
- focus on the audience - their classmates
- use subject-specific vocabulary
- remember the “connectives”.

Mari drafted her piece, and then edited and proofread it.

Teacher-student conversations

After the first draft:

Teacher: It's obvious this is written for an audience. That's great. I'm just not sure about the beginning paragraph. It may be a bit informal. What do you think? Have a think about the explanations we've read together.

Mari: I could just ask the question and leave the rest out. It's a bit like a story.

[She decided to begin with the question “What happens when you are asleep?”]

Teacher: Do you feel this meets the criteria we set? Have you got one main idea for each paragraph?

Mari: I'm happy with it. I like my ending.

INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

The class shared their own writing as reading models. Students frequently shared ideas and asked for peer feedback. Reading groups were reading a variety of non-fiction articles in guided reading. This was integrated into the writing by using facts and

relevant references to write explanations. *School Journal* articles provided invaluable support in small groups - focusing on and discussing layout, sequencing ideas into paragraphs, and the use of connectors. Specific vocabulary was introduced and they discussed definitions from the reading.

WHERE TO NEXT?

To move Mari towards the next learning step, the teacher might help her to focus on:

Ideas

- encouraging greater support of ideas with precise detail or comment.

Sentences

- encouraging greater variety, including shorter sentences.

Vocabulary

- choosing more precise words.

This could be done by:

- modelling of writing using these strategies, and discussion about the process
- exploring models which exemplify the strategies to be developed
- giving feedback against the criteria that have been set with Mari.

CURRICULUM LINKS

English in the New Zealand Curriculum

Level 1: Writing Functions

Transactional Writing: Students should write instructions, explanations, and factual accounts, and express personal viewpoints, in a range of authentic contexts, sequencing ideas logically

Levels 1 and 2: Reading and Writing Processes

Exploring Language: Students should identify, discuss, and use the conventions, structures, and language features of different texts, and discuss how they relate to the topic.

Thinking Critically: Students should discuss and convey meanings in written texts, exploring relevant experiences and other points of view.

Processing Information: Students should gather, select, record, interpret and present coherent, structured information from a variety of sources, using different technologies and explaining the processes used.

English in the New Zealand Curriculum, pages 35-36

REFERENCE

Ministry of Education (1994). *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.



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WHAT THE WORK SHOWS: Mari has identified her audience carefully, and attempted to craft her explanation so they clearly understand it. She engages them by speaking directly to them and including lots of interesting detail.

Student's second draft

Deeper features

Impact

Explains a phenomenon with reasonable clarity and logic.

Shows awareness of audience through content and language choices – "if you're like my mother".

Structure

Attempts to group, prioritise and organise ideas.

Uses simple time-relationship words.

Links ideas in paragraphs.

Language features

Begins to use some explanation language features: simple action verbs, present tense.

What Happens When You Are Asleep?

Firstly some people may grind Their teeth, suck their thumbs, sleep walk, sleep talk, snore, and pedal their legs. It's all very embarrassing but you don't have to worry because it's all a part of life and every one does one or two of them. They will grow out of it.

Secondly your body slows down, your mouth stops making saliva, your heart beats slower, and your breathing slows downs.

As well as that when you sleep you can hear what is going on around you. You would be able to hear the alarm clock or, if you're like my mother, a baby crying. If you hear anything unusual you would instantly wake up.

Finally while you are sleeping you also dream. Dreaming is when you have a long vision in your head while you are asleep. Nobody knows what their dreams mean. Some people sit with tape recorders and notebooks on their bedside tables. I don't think our dreams mean anything. They are just there to keep us busy while we are asleep. This is what happens when we are asleep.

Surface features

Grammar

Uses most grammatical conventions correctly.

Punctuation

Punctuates with increasing independence: capital letters, full stops, commas.

Spelling

Spells most high-frequency words correctly.

Demonstrates good understanding of all basic sounds and patterns in written English.



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What Happens When You Are Asleep?

Student's second draft

10/9/02 What happens when you are asleep?

Me and my family were sharing embarrassing moments yesterday. My sister said that once they started sleep walking outside? That made me wonder what happens when you are asleep?

Firstly some people may grind their teeth, suck their thumbs, sleep walk, sleep talk, snore and pedal their legs. It's all very embarrassing but not very worrisome you don't have to worry because it's all a part of life and every one does one or two of them.

Secondly ~~it's well as that~~ your body slows down, your mouth stops making saliva, your heart beats slower and your breathing slows down.

As well as that when you sleep you can hear what is going on around you. You would be able to hear the alarm clock or, if you're like my mother, a baby crying. If you hear anything unusual you would instantly wake up.