



Transactional Writing: Explanation

LEVEL 1i 1ii 1iii 2 3 4 5

How Were Mummies Made?

THE LEARNING CONTEXT

The motivation for this piece of work was a social studies unit on ancient Egypt.

The students had been introduced to written explanations as part of two previous science units, using the Sunshine science book *How Taps Work*, and the unit “Why Did the Popcorn Dance?” from “Describe, Explain, Argue” (MoE). From the work on “how taps work”, the students ascertained how an explanation is constructed, putting forward the criteria they recognised:

- objective ideas, used to support explanations, using specific detail
- passive voice to explain what happened
- time-relationship words to link ideas.

They then referred to these criteria as they worked through the popcorn unit.

During the unit on ancient Egypt, they read various texts explaining how and why mummies and pyramids were made. They either read independently or as shared texts to revise their ideas about the criteria for written explanations.

Towards the end of the unit, they were given questions such as “Why did the Egyptians cover the body with natron?” Each student had a different question and was given a short time to prepare a verbal explanation to the class. The class discussed the clarity of the explanations, and suggested how they could be improved.

The students then had to take on the role of archaeologists returning from a dig and writing a paper to explain how mummies were made. They had to present these to an audience.

They revisited the criteria for written explanations, and then wrote their first drafts. After this, they shared their work with a partner, discussing coverage of criteria and clarity of information, and then reworked their writing. They were also expected to check punctuation and spelling.

The teacher roved during writing time, reinforcing ideas and conferencing with individual students as they completed their work. The students then shared their work with the class.

Teacher-student conversations

After Jay had written his first draft, he discussed it with a partner and then the teacher conferenced with him. The emphasis was on using the passive voice.

Teacher: How did your time with your partner go?

Jay: It was pretty useful. He liked my explanation.

Teacher: Did he make any suggestions to improve your work?
I see you’re making quite a lot of changes.

Jay: Yeah - he reminded me about changing it around.

Teacher: What do you mean?

Jay: You know, like when I said “they placed the body” I’ve changed it around to say “the body was placed”.

Teacher: Yes, I see you’ve made a similar change in several places. Do you think that makes a difference to your explanation?

Jay: I do think it sounds better like that.

Teacher: We call that the passive voice. It’s common in writing like this, where we need to know *what* happened, but not necessarily *who* made it happen.

INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

Opportunities should be sought in classroom reading programmes for students to respond to written and visual texts, identifying how processes, occurrences and phenomena can be explained. Shared reading and guided reading programme will give opportunity for discussing topic-related vocabulary, specific language features, precise criteria and diagrams, which may be transferred to student writing and drawing.

WHERE TO NEXT?

To move Jay towards the next learning step, the teacher might help him to focus on:

Sentences

- experimenting with sentence structure, to encourage fluency with grammatical accuracy.

Language features

- encouraging confidence in making verbs more precise.

Punctuation

- introducing appropriate punctuation, which may include parentheses, dashes, and colons.

This could be done by:

- modelling texts with examples of the explanation language features
- conferencing and giving feedback in reading and writing programmes.



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CURRICULUM LINKS

English in the New Zealand Curriculum

Level 4: Writing Functions

Transactional Writing: Students should write instructions, explanations, and factual accounts, and express and explain a point of view, in a range of authentic contexts, organising and linking ideas logically and making language choices appropriate to the audience.

Levels 3 and 4: 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

REFERENCES

Dobson, Philip (1994). *How Taps Work*. Sunshine Books. Auckland: Applecross.

Ministry of Education (1996). Describe, Explain, Argue: Teaching and Learning transactional Writing from Level 1- Level 4. Christchurch: User Friendly Resources.

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



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WHAT THE WORK SHOWS: Jay has explained a process with some clarity, paying particular attention to detail. His language choices indicate a good awareness of his audience.

Student's second draft

Deeper features

Ideas

Supports explanation with objective ideas. These are supported with specific detail.

Structure

Sequences explanation logically (introduction, conclusion) with confidence.

Organises ideas into paragraphs and makes logical links between them.

Uses a range of time-relationship words to link ideas.

Sentences

Uses a variety of structures, beginnings and lengths.

Vocabulary

Uses precise topic-appropriate words.

Language features

Uses passive voice.

How were mummies made?

The Egyptians believed that there was an after life after death and they thought you needed your body to go. So they mummified the body.

Firstly the body was placed on a table and got the embalmer to cut a slit in either side of the body, which was to take out the internal organs such as stomach, liver intestines and brain which was removed by a large steel hook through the nose. These were removed because they hold moisture which causes rotting. But the heart was left in because they thought it controlled the body.

Once the body was empty Linen was put in to cover the inside of the body to suck up all the moisture. Now they covered the body with salt called natron and left for forty days to dry. next the linen was removed and the body was filled with sand sawdust and spices. So the body would keep its shape.

Now the wrapping started which required up to 140m of linen. first the neck and head were wrapped with thin strips of linen. Then the fingers and toes. Next the main body parts were wrapped. Amulets were placed between the wrapping to ward of evil.

Once the body was fully wrapped they put the book of spells in the dead persons hands. Which was because they thought he would need it in the after life.

Last the body was placed in a tomb to rest till it was ready for the afterlife.

Mummification was a very expensive process so only the wealthy could have it done.

Surface features

Grammar

Uses most grammatical conventions accurately; some errors in sentence construction.

Makes deliberate effort, in editing, to change to passive voice for effect.

Spelling

Spells most key content words and high-frequency words correctly.

Punctuation

Uses capital, full stops and commas with some consistency.



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How Were Mummies Made?

Student's second draft

Thursday August 29th

How were mummies made?

The Egyptians believed that there was an after life after death and they thought you needed your body to go. So they mummified the body.

Firstly ^{the body was} they placed the body on a table and got the embalmer to cut a slit in either side of the body. ^{which} This was to take out the internal organs such as stomach, liver intestines and brain which was removed by a large steel hook through the nose. These were removed because they hold moisture which causes rotting. But they ^{the} left the heart ^{was left} in because they thought ^{it} the heart controlled the body.



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Once the body was empty ^{linen was put} they ~~put~~ ^{it in} linen to cover the inside of the body to suck up all the moisture, ^{the linen was} next they removed ^{filled} (the linen) and (filled) the body with sand and spices. So the body would keep its shape.

Now ^{the} they started the wrapping ^{which} required up to 100 m of linen. first they wrapped the ^(neck and head) with thin strips of linen. Then the fingers and toes. Next they wrapped the ^(main body parts). They placed amulets ^{between} the wrapping to ward off evil.

Once the body was fully wrapped they put the book of spells in the dead persons hands. Which was because they

(continued over)



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Last they ^{body was} placed the ~~body~~ in a tomb
to rest till it ^{was} ready for the afterlife.

Mummification was a very expensive
process so only the wealthy could
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* Now they covered the body with
salt called natron and left for forty days
to dry.