



Sentence Combining

DESCRIPTION

This writing activity helps students to understand sentence structure by simplifying and combining sentences drawn from literature. Students develop an appreciation of the craft of sentence writing, as well as a deep understanding of sentence structure. They become better able to interpret sentences that they read, and to craft varied sentences themselves.

LEARNING STRATEGIES Synthesizing

LESSON PLAN STAGE Investigation

SKILLS Reading as a Writer

PREPARATION

- Find at least four model sentences from a piece of literature, preferably from a text that the students are reading or are listening to as a read-aloud. Select sentences that are structurally complex, and that are well-written. They should be interesting in their context, and should sound pleasant. Rewrite half of the sentences, separating them into the individual simple sentences that were combined into the longer complex sentence.

ACTIVITY STEPS

TEACHER NOTES

1 Teacher displays the first set of simple sentences, and tells students that all these ideas can be combined into a single sentence that appears in the book. Teacher models combining these sentences into the original sentence. Then, teacher reads aloud the paragraph of the book that contains this sentence. The class discusses the structure of the sentence.

If students have explicit knowledge of sentence structure, they should identify the parts of the sentence, and the types of sentences.



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ACTIVITY STEPS

TEACHER NOTES

2 Teacher distributes the other sets of simple sentences, and students work alone or in groups to combine each set into the best single sentence they can.

- Remind students that there may be multiple ways to combine these sentences, and encourage them to find the best way. Their final sentence should be clear in meaning, and should sound pleasant
- Circulate as students are working, sitting with each individual or group for approximately five minutes. Ask them how they can combine the sentences, and how they can decide which sentence is best. Discuss the subtle variations in meaning that can result from different orders of sentence elements.

3 Teacher shares and reads the combined sentences that actually appear in the book. Class discusses differences and similarities in these combined sentences and the ones they wrote, and why the author might have chosen to use that structure.

Discuss what these sentences mean, and how they are different from and similar to what the students wrote. Discuss how subtle variations in meaning can result from different ordering of sentence elements, and interpret the meaning of the sentence in the book.

4 Teacher displays a complex sentence from a book, and models breaking this complex sentence down into its component simple sentences.

Think aloud as you complete this task.

5 Teacher distributes complex sentences from the book to the class. Alone or in groups, students work to break each complex sentence down into its component simple sentences, and record the simple sentences.

Circulate as students are working, sitting with groups for approximately five minutes at a time. Ask them about what they are thinking and noticing about writing sentences, and the choices authors make. Help them to think about why the author might have structured the sentence as s/he did.

6 Teacher leads class in a discussion about what they learned about sentence structure and writing craft.

Ask them to think about how they can apply this learning to their own reading and writing.

7 Alone or in groups, in conversation or in writing, students reflect on their learning process.

Students respond to questions including:

- How can understanding sentence structure help you to be a better reader?
- How can understanding sentence structure help you to be a better writer?
- What makes a “good” sentence?