

TEXT STRUCTURES
AND **FABLES**

GRADES
3-12

To my parents, who embody fairness, humility, and wisdom

—Gretchen

To my grandma, who embodied generosity, acceptance, and strength

—Jayne

TEXT STRUCTURES AND FABLES

GRADES
3-12

Teaching Students to Write
About What They Read

Gretchen Bernabei
Jayne Hover





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resources.corwin.com/textstructuresandfables
for downloadable text structures, fables, and other
resources related to *Text Structures and Fables*.

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Introduction

Tell me are we in danger?
If we like to fight
Like children
You're wrong, I'm right.

—Matilde Bernabei (2020)

Looking around our communities, it's hard to miss the cultural and political polarization that is creating lines in the sand and turning opponents into enemies. Many of my friends and family express sadness that we have forgotten how to hear each other.

We believe that hearing is not really the weakness. The problem lies with the invisibility of the mental reactions of a listener or reader. We suspect that most students (and many adults) have no idea of the power of their words; often, they are completely floored to hear that someone else absorbed their words with pleasure, with pain, or with any additional thought.

In Texas, the curriculum standards (known as the TEKS) were rewritten and approved in 2017 to go into effect in 2020. One of the most important yet formerly neglected major strands in this new set of standards is Strand 1, which prominently features “listening and speaking.” The art of listening mirrors the art of reading. Real listening is not a passive activity, and neither is real reading. Furthermore, real listening is not the same as compliant silence. But so many teachers express frustration when trying to figure out how to incorporate listening into a room full of boisterous youngsters whose listening skills are hardly fully formed.

The aim of this book is to help students learn to consider their listener and to articulate their mental reactions to what they hear or read.

Its other aim is to equip teachers with manageable activities to help develop students' abilities to share aloud and in writing those thoughts that are their own as well as responses to whatever they may have heard or read and to hear—really hear—the thoughts of others. There has rarely been a more urgent need than now.

About Fables

On every school campus in this world, educators know their moral imperative: to develop students' literacy and citizenship skills. One of the world's earliest genres presents right and wrong with short and elegant simplicity: fables.

Nonetheless, I've stayed away from fables as teaching tools until now, probably because of their sledgehammer preaching. “If you lie, people won't believe you when you tell the truth.” Yeah, yeah, got that. Mark Twain would argue that if people knew you had lied, you didn't do it well. The industrious ant survived while the musical grasshopper played all summer. So, music is never as valuable as food production? There go the arts. Slow and steady wins the race? Hardly ever, when other humans

are involved. I have so often passed up the blunt force of that sledgehammer moral, choosing something besides fables as a classroom tool for character development.

But this year, I gave fables another look. Those three were the only fables I remembered clearly, but Jayne Hover brought me 147 others. We read through them, marveling at their charm, chuckling at the characters, discussing the morals, and seeing often-contradictory thoughts from multiple points of view. Isn't this what we want our students to do? To be more thorough, more exploratory thinkers than just "you're wrong—I'm right"?

What one side defines as a "moral value" may not be what the other side believes. In fact, maybe there are more than two sides. Perhaps our real senses lie in the vast area of the ambiguous, of the conditional, of the situational. So, to help our students navigate, we need better tools than a sledgehammer. And if they can chuckle and marvel as they read, they will have more to say. Fables are the perfect texts for this.

In addition to the treasury of fables, you can use the lessons to guide your students through five different concrete ways to write responses to readings (in this case, the fables). These include the following:

1. Writing basic responses to the reading
2. Writing fiction inspired by the text
3. Writing essays about the moral
4. Answering open-ended questions about the text
5. Using nontraditional formats to show you read it

Some teacher guides say, "Have students develop this thought"—leaving the teacher wondering *how*. The pages here will actually show you how to lead students through the thought processes, one step at a time.

How Do I Use This Book?

What's Your Instructional Wish?

I wish students would interact with a text on their own. (Use Part I.)

I wish students knew what it was like to be the author. (Use Part I.)

I'd like to give them more practice at answering questions about a text. (Use Part II.)

I'd like to give them some non-test prep for showing more deep understanding of a text. (Use Part III.)

How Else Can I Use This Book?

You can use the response lessons with any texts in any genre. You can also give students a list similar to the one below and allow them to choose how to respond.

Use text evidence from a fable to answer any of the following:

Why is honesty important to you personally?

Who's more helpful, the lion or the mouse?

Compare/contrast how greed is shown in two different fables.

Write a sequel to this fable.

Do you agree with this moral? What current event can illustrate your thoughts?

How does the author show that the fox is wise?

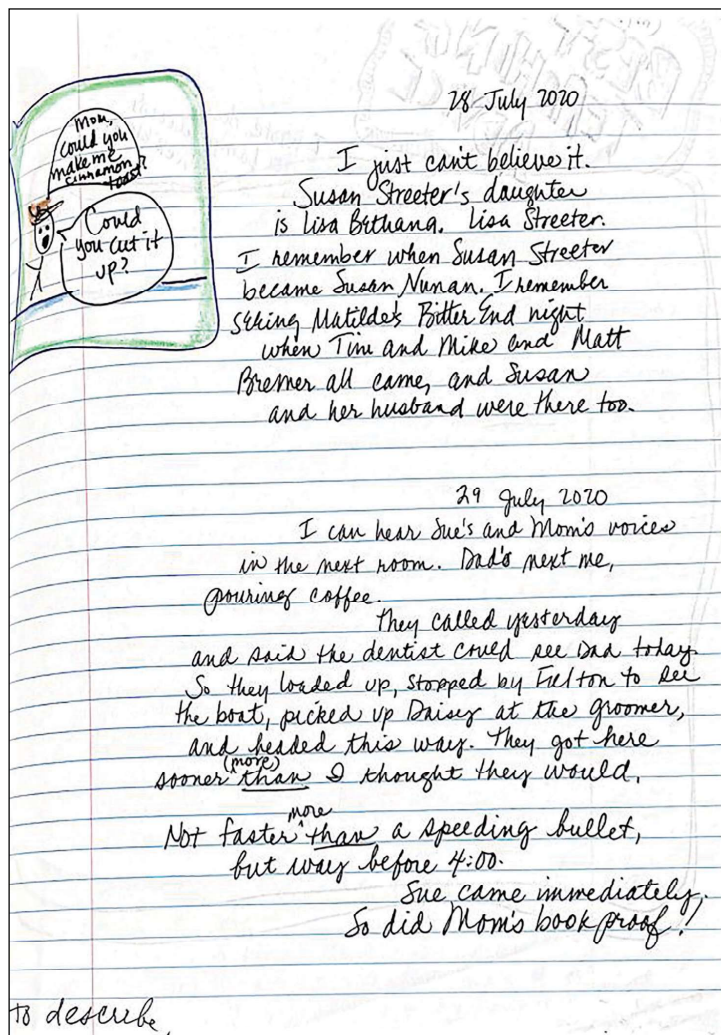
There are so many fables. Whatever theme you are working with, there are plenty of fables to pair. And when you give students a solid, strong pathway to learn how to respond, they will gradually answer any of the above questions with clarity and precision.

Students can practice with fables and then apply the processes to poems, excerpts from stories, nonfiction articles, speeches—anything. What could be more satisfying than using literature to help students articulate their developing citizenship?

What Do These Lessons Look Like in My Classroom?

Most of our work begins in our classroom journals. If you thumbed through a student journal in my classroom, you would see pages as varied as those shown here.

A self-generated routine journal entry (no prompt, no topic)



Notes on a craft lesson for “ba-da-bing” sentences, with a before and after sentence

6/2/21

Before
I had to call the help desk.

Ba - da - bing

I sat at the table, reading the screens that told me I wasn't logged in and finally, in desperation, I grabbed my phone. I knew it was time to ask a human being for some help.

A three-things response to “The Ant and the Grasshopper”

My Response to: The Ants and the Grasshopper

Zinnia Briscoe

Three things I noticed

1. The grasshopper seemed lazy.
2. The ants were hard workers.
3. The ants were surprised that the grasshopper didn't get food for the winter.

Three Things I wondered

1. Why didn't the grasshopper get food for the winter?
2. Why didn't the ants just give him some when it was time?
3. What will happen to the grasshopper (food?) later?

Significant Vocabulary

1. Humbly	4. Fiddle
2. Idleness	5. Begged
3. Disgust	6. Stored

Best Line, Illustrated

"I was so busy making music that before I knew it the summer was gone!"

Create or choose a question.

- Write some questions to show understanding of the characters, plot, themes, or vocabulary used in the fable

These questions stems range from basic to more complex understanding:

1. What happens in this fable? (Retell the story.)
2. What is this fable mostly about?
3. How do you think _____ feels at the beginning and/or end?
4. What is the conflict or problem in the fable? (How is it solved?)
5. Who is more _____ (helpful, nicer), _____ or _____?
6. How does _____ change during this story?
7. Why does _____ do/think/say/believe/want _____?
8. What's one word you would use to describe the _____ (character)?
9. What lesson does _____ learn in the fable?
10. What does the moral mean?
11. In sentence _____, what does the word or phrase _____ suggest?
12. How are _____ and _____ alike/different?
13. Why does _____ become _____ (upset, happy...) when _____?
14. What does _____ (character) mean when he says _____?
15. What can the reader tell (conclude) from the action in sentence(s) _____?
16. What does _____'s reaction when he learns _____ show about his character?
17. How do the actions of _____ and/or _____ support the theme/moral?
18. Write a summary using 3 details from the fable.
19. What causes _____ to realize _____?
20. Which sentence expresses a turning point in the fable?
21. Why does _____ agree to _____?
22. What is _____'s attitude about _____?
23. What argument does _____ (character) make to support his behavior/position/opinion?
24. What challenge(s) does _____ face?
25. What does _____ represent in the fable?
26. On which persuasive technique does _____ (character) rely?

Explaining a Change

how _____
changes
in the story

at the
beginning
(with evidence)

at the
end
(with evidence)

another
way to
describe
the change

How else
can we
describe
this change?

What does
this mean?

So your
answer is...

The Wolf and the Goat
A hungry Wolf spied a Goat browsing at the top of a steep cliff where he could not possibly get at her. "That is a very dangerous place for you," he called out, pretending to be very anxious about the Goat's safety. "What if you should fall! Please listen to me and come down! Here you can get what you want of the finest, tenderest grass in the country." The Goat looked over the edge of the cliff. "How very, very anxious you are about me," she said, "and how generous you are with your grass! I know you! It's your own appetite you are thinking of, not mine!"

Moral: An invitation prompted by selfishness is not to be accepted.

#9. What lesson does the Goat learn in the Fable?

Why does the goat believe the Wolf is only thinking of his own appetite?
- Mrs. Peyton

19. What causes the goat to realize he should not come?

What is the goat's attitude about the wolf's offer?
- Sherry Simper

23. What argument does the wolf make to support his position?
Kat

A template for the four steps of composing something for a reader, kept in the back glossary section of the journal

Topic _____

Structure _____

My Kernel Essay

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

I heard this. 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 37

The two heads give you an outside view that helps you see what happens between the reader and the writer, and that impact continues to have a life when we react to what we read. Here's an example: Recently, a group of teachers read a poem by Sheila Black called "Possums" (2017). Afterward, they wrote their own poems using a similar thought and structure.

C. E. Price, one of the teachers in the group, wrote the poem "Stir Crazy." After his peers read his poem, they used the question stems to create one question each.

Stir Crazy

I have a buddy who over stirs.
 Twirl, twirl, twirl
 Clinkety, clinkety, clink
 Stirring and stirring as his coffee is whirling –
 The spoon might grind a hole in his mug I think!
 Nerves you may ask? I have to deny –
 for I have seen this man perform under fire –
 cool as an arctic breeze – no shaking of his knees.
 So no, not nerves – just a compulsion to stir,
 His spoon will probably continue to whirl – long after his exit from this world.

C. E. Price

8. What is one word you would use to describe the speaker?
 Jessica Castro

11. Who is the speaker or the buddy?
 - Maria Lora

14. The spoon will probably continue to whirl. What does this suggest?
 Estrella

15. What does the speaker's attitude about stirring suggest?
 Belinda

20. What sentence expresses a turning point in the poem?
 Nelda

6. How does the author's attitude toward the buddy change in the poem?
 John Clark

11. In line 8, what does the simile suggest?
 - Lisa Castellano

7. Why does the buddy have a compulsion to stir?
 - Laura

24. What character does the author of the poem face?
 - Dina

Questions for "Star Crazy"

11. In line 8, what does the simile suggest?

Create or choose a question.

- Write some questions to show understanding of the characters, plot, themes, or vocabulary used in the fable.

These questions stems range from basic to more complex understanding.

1. What happens in this fable? (Retell the story.)
2. What is this fable mostly about?
3. How do you think _____ feels at the beginning and/or end?
4. What is the conflict or problem in the fable? (How is it solved?)
5. Who is more _____ (helpful, nicer), _____ or _____?
6. How does _____ change during this story?
7. Why does _____ do/think/say/believe/want _____?
8. What's one word you would use to describe the _____ (character)?
9. What lesson does _____ learn in the fable?
10. What does the moral mean?
11. In sentence _____, what does the word or phrase _____ suggest?
12. How are _____ and _____ alike/different?
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14. What does _____ (character) mean when he says _____?
15. What can the reader tell (conclude) from the action in sentence(s) _____?
16. What does _____'s reaction when he learns _____ show about his character?
17. How do the actions of _____ and/or _____ support the theme/moral?
18. Write a summary using 3 details from the fable.
19. What causes _____ to realize _____?
20. Which sentence expresses a turning point in the fable?
21. Why does _____ agree to _____?
22. What is _____'s attitude about _____?
23. What argument does _____ (character) make to support his behavior/position/opinion?
24. What challenge(s) does _____ face?
25. What does _____ represent in the fable?
26. On which persuasive technique does _____ (character) rely?

RACE

Restate the Question	Answer	Cite evidence from the text	Explain what the evidence means
----------------------	--------	-----------------------------	---------------------------------

In line 8, what does the simile suggest?

~~He stays~~

"Cool as an arctic breeze" suggests the stillness and deadly calm that his buddy can turn on. ^{This means,} He is in full control of his nerves, because when "under fire," he is still and calm, to an extreme "arctic" degree. That means he isn't ruled by his nerves.

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Then each person chose a question and a structure. They wrote and shared their answers. As the poet listened, he experienced firsthand the impact of so many of his choices.

We hope the lessons in this book help you and your students make new discoveries about the impact of what we read as well as what we write.

The Book's Three Sections

Part I: Building Strong Readers and Writers

In the first months of school, these foundational routine practices build the skills that students will need when it's time for assessment. These lessons give ownership to the students, providing practice for students to articulate their own thoughts without prompts or questions from a teacher or a test.

Part II: Assessing Strong Readers and Writers

In order to shape students' facility at crafting a high-quality answer to a constructed response question (whether short or extended), we give students practice in both writing the questions as well as writing the answers. As always, the students choose not only their content but also the structure that brings out their best understanding of what they've read.

Part III: Using Nontraditional Formats

Frequently, teachers need to see visible evidence that students have grasped a concept or completed some reading. This evidence can take many different forms, and we share here our favorite five formats for students to show they did their reading without a single worksheet. Though ELAR teachers love to use these, they are also especially useful among content-area teachers.