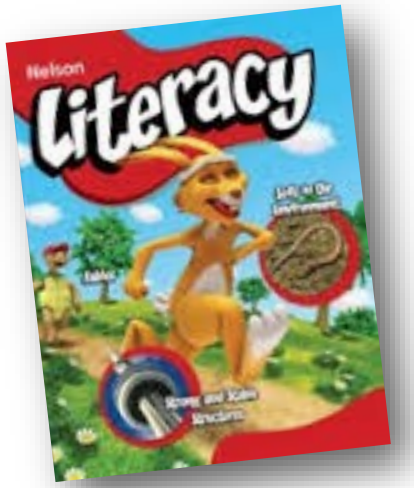
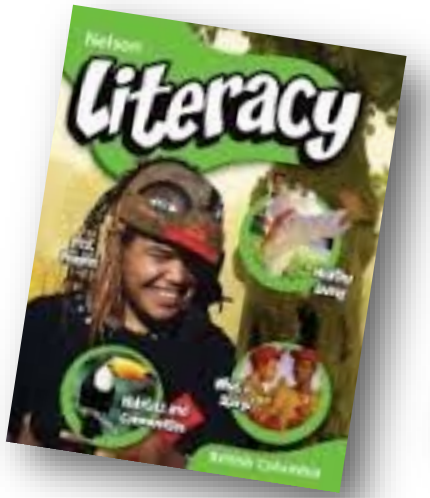
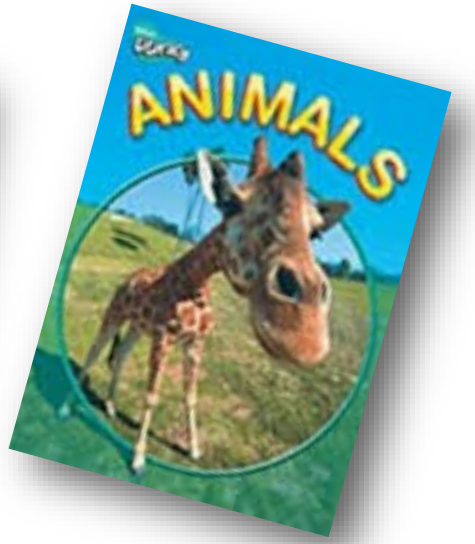






How can late primary and early intermediate teachers explicitly teach students to make webs that show main ideas?

A series of lessons by Curriculum support Teachers Carol Walters & Debbie Nelson
with technology ideas from Kara Dawson **S. D. #71**, Comox Valley, Vancouver Island.

Why?

Generally speaking, most nonfiction text in grades one, two and three is relatively simple enough that the majority of students are able to *find a way to show that they know what an article is about*. Unfortunately, by the time students move on to grade 4 and beyond, ***our vulnerable students are completely lost when asked an open-ended, basic question like this***. And most other students in the class will produce a great list of details about a topic, but miss all the main ideas.

This kit was created in an effort to address this district-wide issue. After many trials, we found a creative and concrete method of capturing the attention of all students combined with tactile experiences to support their learning.

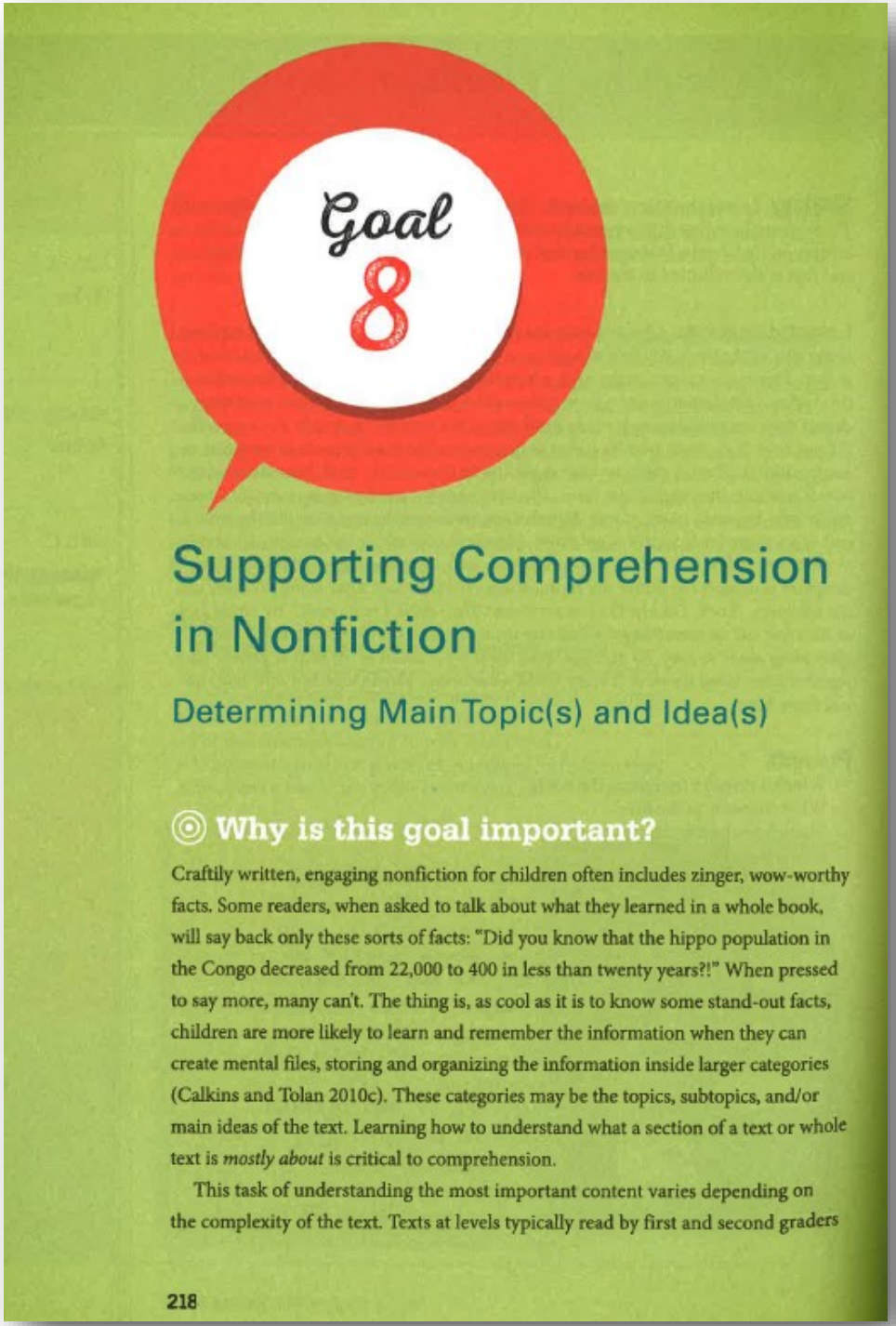
In one grade 2/3 classroom, the teacher commented that she had never seen one particular student manage to do what the others in the class were doing. But these lessons are not just for our vulnerable students. ALL students benefit from explicit instruction. Your most capable will take this information and run with it. They'll be ready to research topics of their own.

Like any primary skill, this one also requires lots of repeated practice. We joke that students should be rolling their eyes at you saying, "Enough already! I know how to do this!" before moving on.

Offered in this kit are also a few suggestions to keep the eye-rolling to a minimum! In other words, we offer a few extra pieces for your most capable students to tackle. Their examples will help others.

p.s. Intentionally, we have NOT asked students to add details to their webs. When they have shown the ability to find all the main ideas, this part may be added. Until then, we use oral language and partner chats as the vehicle to discuss the interesting facts they find as they read.

Carol Walters



Goal 8

Supporting Comprehension in Nonfiction

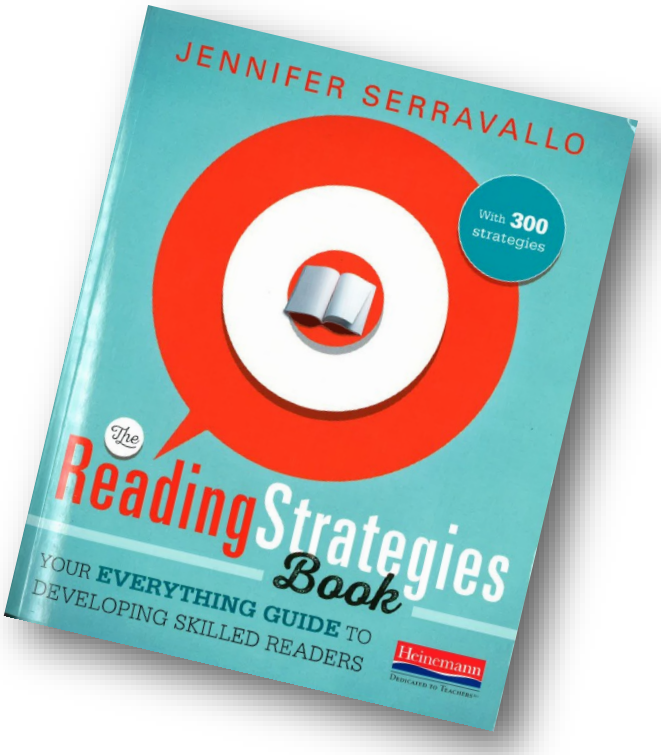
Determining Main Topic(s) and Idea(s)

Why is this goal important?

Craftily written, engaging nonfiction for children often includes zinger, wow-worthy facts. Some readers, when asked to talk about what they learned in a whole book, will say back only these sorts of facts: "Did you know that the hippo population in the Congo decreased from 22,000 to 400 in less than twenty years?!" When pressed to say more, many can't. The thing is, as cool as it is to know some stand-out facts, children are more likely to learn and remember the information when they can create mental files, storing and organizing the information inside larger categories (Calkins and Tolan 2010c). These categories may be the topics, subtopics, and/or main ideas of the text. Learning how to understand what a section of a text or whole text is *mostly about* is critical to comprehension.

This task of understanding the most important content varies depending on the complexity of the text. Texts at levels typically read by first and second graders

218



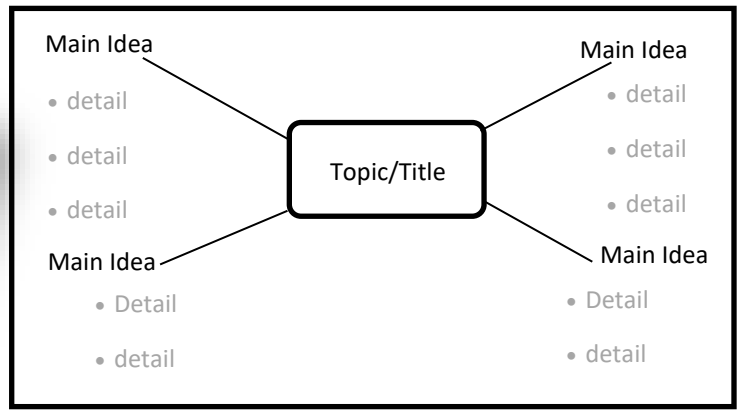
"*The thing is, as cool as it is to know some stand-out facts, children are more likely to learn and remember the information when they can create mental files, storing and organizing the information inside larger categories*."

(Calkins and Tolan 2010c)

But Wait! ... capture the starting place of your students before you launch into this work.

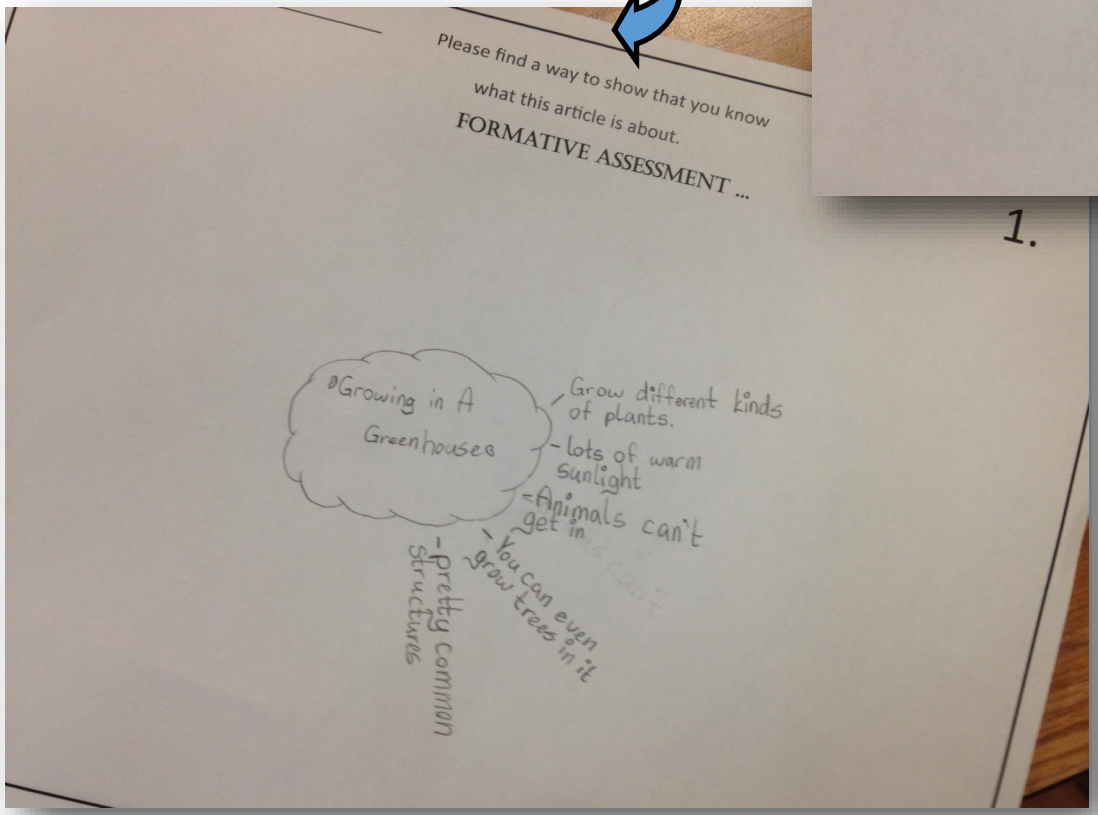
To begin, you'll need a super interesting nonfiction article that is divided into sections with headings or subtitles.

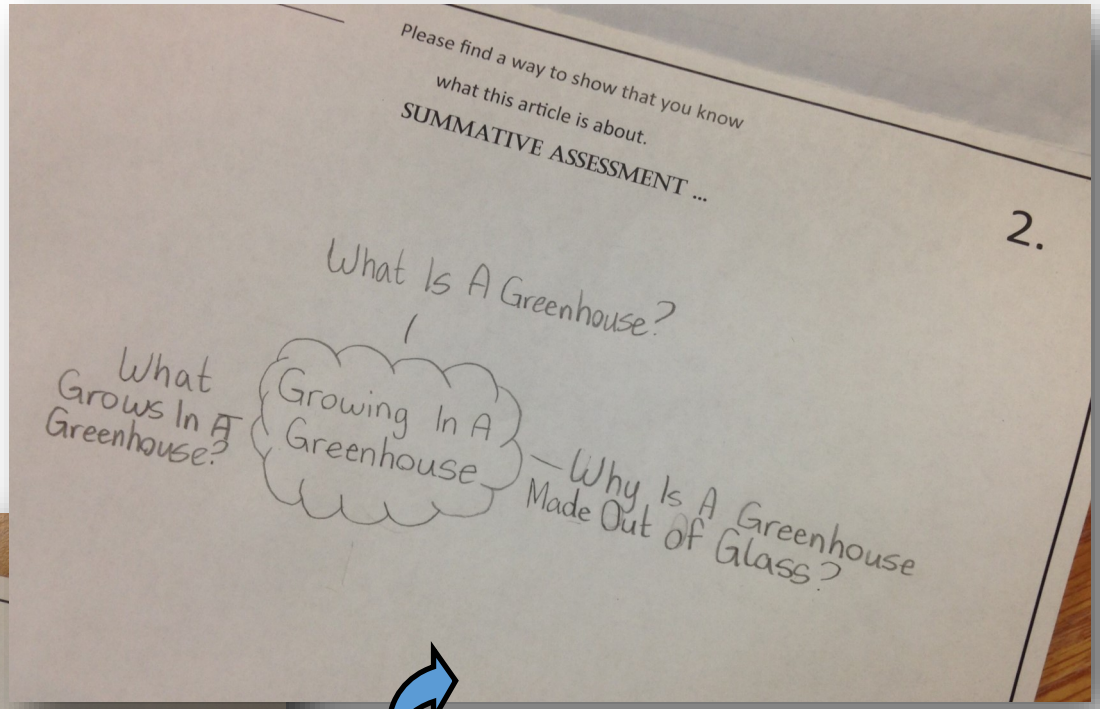
You'll be amazed at the initial attempts students produce when asked to pull out the author's ***main ideas*** from an article. Web-like responses are created, but don't be fooled! Most of your students will place details at the end of each arm. This is an indication that they are focusing on details and missing the author's main ideas. The purpose of this work is to draw their attention toward the sections an author creates when writing nonfiction text. Each section represents a main idea. Main ideas should be written at the end of each arm of a web … not details!



Before Explicit Instruction:

This ***looks like*** a web, but this student has missed all the main ideas and added details at the end of each arm on the web.





After Explicit Instruction:

The 3 main ideas have been identified! This student is ready to handle text as it becomes more challenging with each new grade.

Name: _____

Please find a way to show that you know what this article is about.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT ...

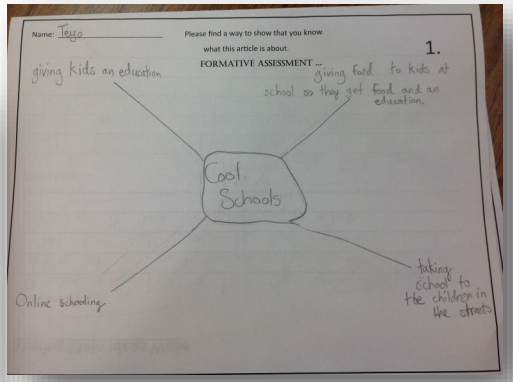
1.

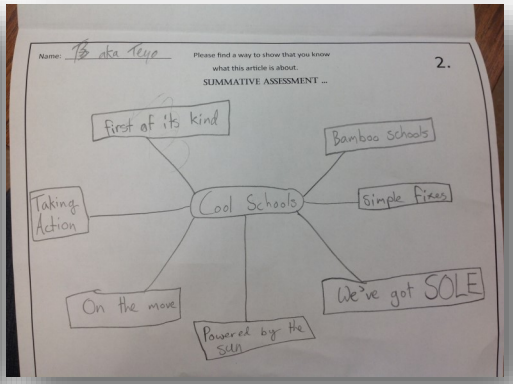
Name: _____

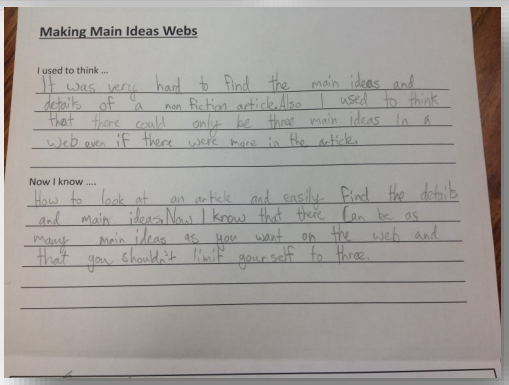
Please find a way to show that you know what this article is about.

2.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT ...

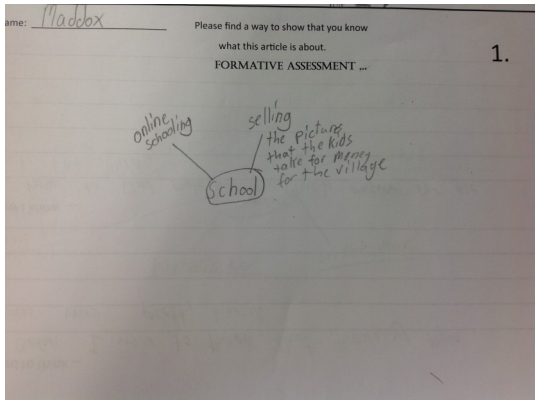


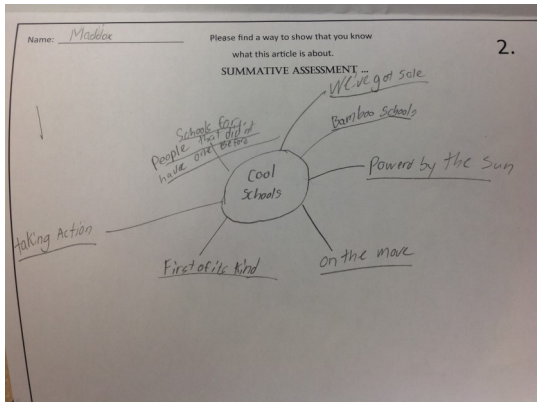


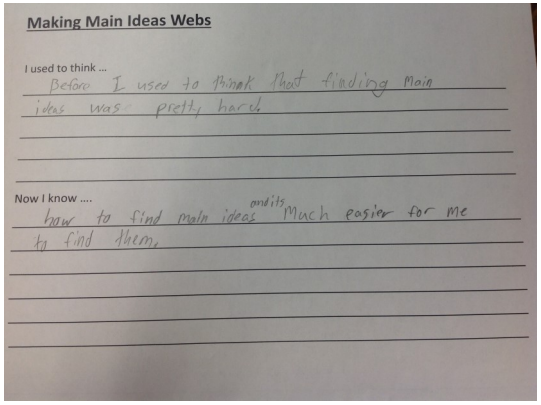


Before & After Explicit Instruction:

In Teyo's reflection, he indicated it was hard to find the main ideas in a nonfiction article. But after a series of lessons in which students were noticing the organization of nonfiction, Teyo stated that he could **easily** find them!

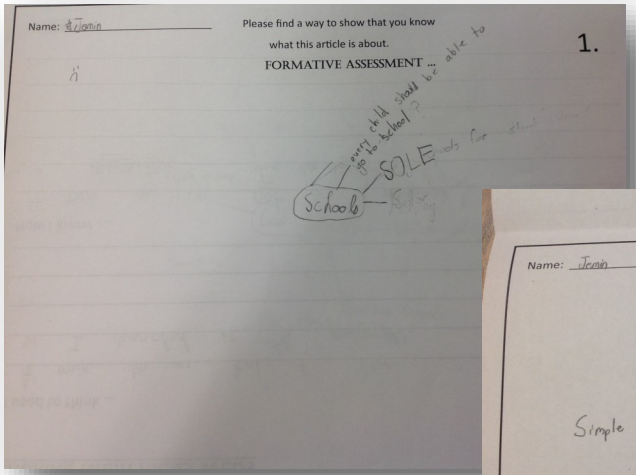






Before & After Explicit Instruction:

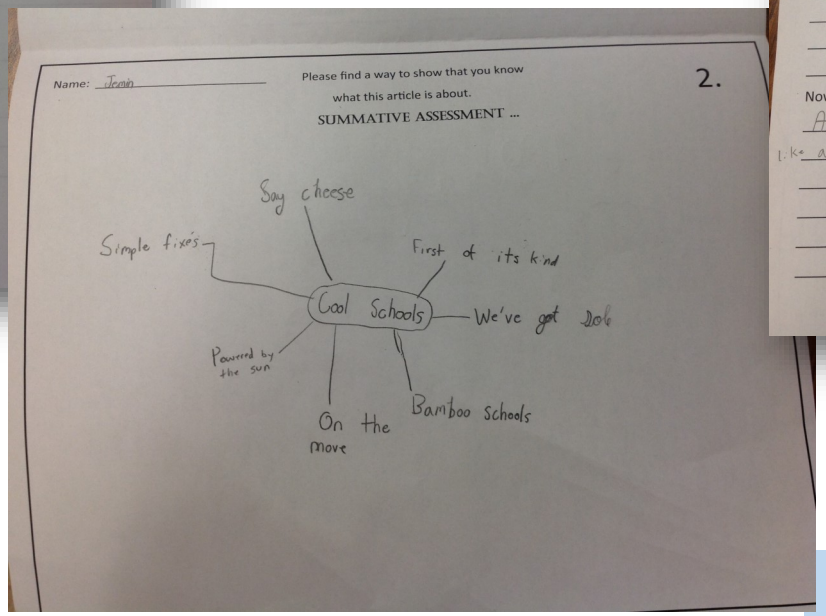
Please notice how Maddox learned to use the headings in the article to identify all the main ideas. In the formative assessment on day one, Maddox was not sure how to locate the main ideas of a nonfiction article.


Name: Jemin

Please find a way to show that you know what this article is about.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT ...

1.


Name: Jemin

Please find a way to show that you know what this article is about.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT ...

2.

Say cheese

Simple fixes

First of its kind

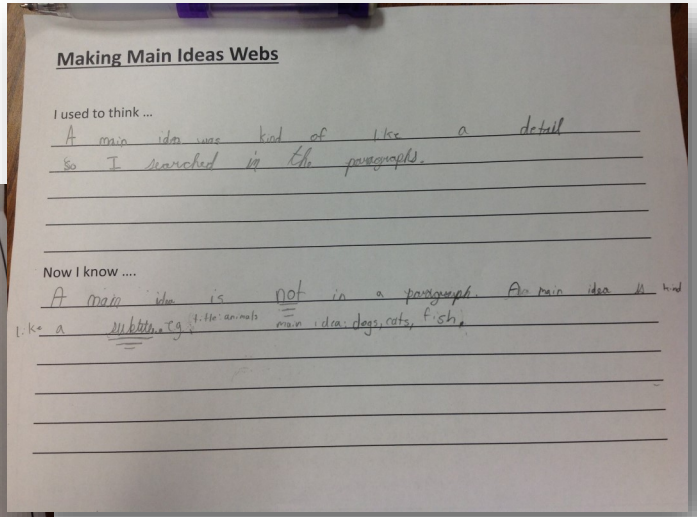
Cool Schools

We've got SOLE

Powered by the sun

Bamboo Schools

On the move


Making Main Ideas Webs

I used to think ...

A main idea was kind of like a detail so I searched in the paragraphs.

Now I know ....

A main idea is not in a paragraph. A main idea is kind of like a subject. e.g. the animals main idea: dogs, cats, fish.


COOL Schools

Everyday people have a part to play in the fight to get every child into school. They're doing exciting work to provide quality education to children around the world.

First of Its Kind

The Onion Lake Cree Nation wanted to improve the quality of the education its children were getting. In 2003, it set up the Khow Wacistan Cree Immersion School, which is the first school of its kind in Saskatchewan. Children learn in the Cree language from nursery school to grade 4.

At the school, Indigenous knowledge is at the centre of what children learn. Teachers use ceremonies and cultural activities to teach the children. During an assembly, for example, they sit in a circle on the floor to take part in a sweetgrass ceremony.

Learning also happens outside of the classroom. For example, to learn about water safety, the students go to a nearby pond.

Bamboo Schools

In 2001, a man named Uttam Sanjel used his own money to start the first Samata School in Nepal. The school was made from bamboo poles. Samata has become one of the biggest chain of private schools in Nepal. Of the 38 000 students, three quarters are girls.

It costs a student about $1.00 Canadian per month to attend. This fee is very low compared to Nepal's other private schools. Uttam founded the Samata Schools because he believes it's important that every child—rich or poor—receives a quality education. Many past students have become teachers, doctors, and journalists.

Young children go to a bamboo school in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Uttam Sanjel started the Samata Schools to provide education at a low cost.

On the Move!

At the age of 16, Efren Peñaflorida wanted to help the street children in the slums of Cavite City. This area of the Philippines is home to many of the 250 000 street children in the country. They don't have the money to go to school so Efren decided to take school to them! He packed a backpack with books and supplies and gave them out to the children. Later, that backpack changed to a pushcart filled with books, a chalkboard, other supplies, and tables and chairs to seat the children for lessons. The children loved it! Since 2008, Efren and about 1200 teen volunteers have helped more than 1800 street children to learn basic English, math, and science. The goal is to get the children off the streets and into regular schools.

The pushcarts are working so they are being used all across the Philippines. "The idea is very simple," says Efren. "Take kids what they need."


We've Got SOLE!

Professor Sugata Mitra had a dream. His dream was to build a school in the cloud where any child could get information and help from adults online. What's the cloud? It's just another way of storing and accessing data and programs over the Internet.

In December 2013, Professor Mitra's dream came true when the first school in the cloud lab opened in a high school in Killingworth, England. Since then five labs in India and two more in the United Kingdom have opened. These labs are called SOLEs (Self-Organized Learning Environments).

Children taking part in a SOLE at Pragat Shikshan Sansthu, a school in Phulwa, India.

Anyone can form a SOLE. All you need is a computer, Internet access, and students wanting to learn. An educator (teacher, parent, community leader) asks a question and students get together in small groups to find the answer using the Internet. If students need help, they can ask a "granny." Grannies are volunteers (men, women, and real grandmothers and grandfathers) from around the world who connect to students through Skype.

SOLEs can be set up in a variety of ways. In countries like England, these labs are run after school. In developing countries like India or Colombia, these labs can be one of the main ways to educate children.

The idea for the School in Cloud labs came out of Professor Mitra's "hole-in-the-wall" experiment. Professor Mitra put a computer in the wall in a slum in New Delhi. Soon street children were playing games on it. Inspired, the children taught themselves how their machines worked. The idea of SOLEs was born.

Powered by the Sun!

In some parts of Africa there is a problem getting reliable electricity to power schools and the computers. Companies like Ambit Technology and Dell are working with departments of education to bring digital learning to schools all across the country using mobile classrooms.

These classrooms get their power from the sun. Inside what looks like a shipping container is a working classroom with tables and chairs, computers, e-books, and Internet access. The classroom is delivered by truck to a school where the solar panels are installed. In just a short time, the classroom is up and running.

Simple Fixes

Sometimes simple fixes have a big impact!

In some parts of Kenya, families are struggling to feed their children because of drought. To help out, the government provides children with a meal at school. For many, this meal is the only one they will get for the day. "If we see the smoke rising in the morning we know that food is being cooked and we then come to school," says 13-year-old Thoreen. What are the results? There's an increase in the number of children going to school.

Amu Mishih-ul-Arafa, 17, says the mobile learning center she took helped her to learn to read.

Mobile technology is beginning to change the way kids and teens in developing countries learn. They can use cellphones to read books, talk to other students, and even create content. And this can be done both inside and outside the classroom.

Think About It!

What would you design to help give children better access to learning in remote areas?

Taking Action

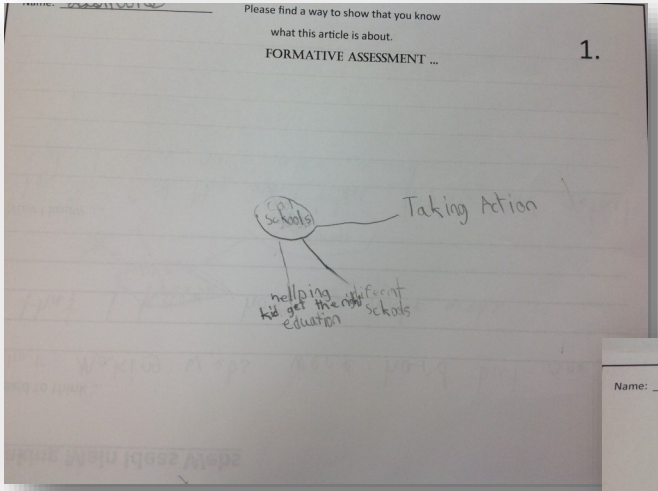
Say Cheese!

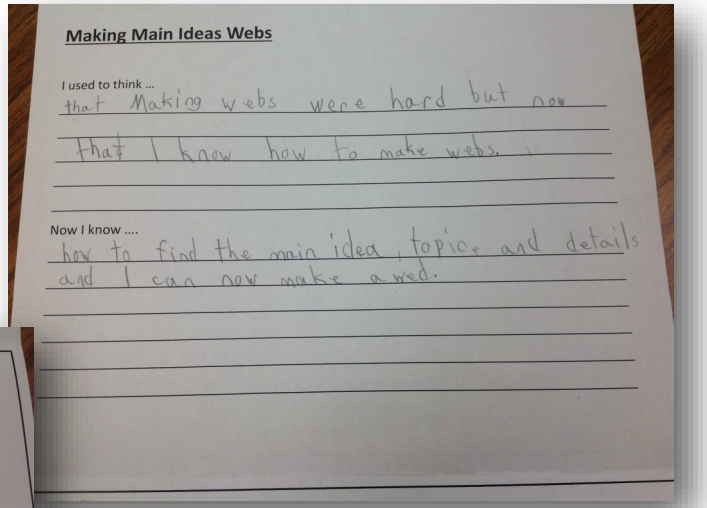
Cloudhead is an art, technology, and education organization in Argentina. Its goal is to help students develop job skills. One way is through technology. Cloudhead accepts donations of used digital cameras from people around the world and gives them to children living in small villages in northwest Argentina. Volunteers teach the children how to take photos of their friends, family, and daily activities. They also teach them how to edit their photos and videos on a computer.

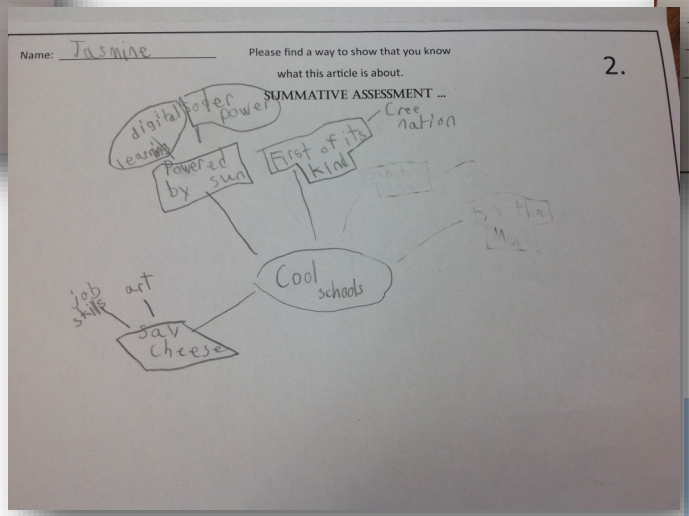
Children then get to see their photos helping their communities. Cloudhead puts the photos online for people to buy. The money is used to pay for building gardens and digging wells in the villages. Each year, Cloudhead hosts exhibitions of the children's photography and video work.

Before & After Explicit Instruction:

Jemin used to search within each paragraph for the main idea. Now Jemin knows to pay attention to each heading. Did you notice the : (sad face notation on the formative assessment on day 1?

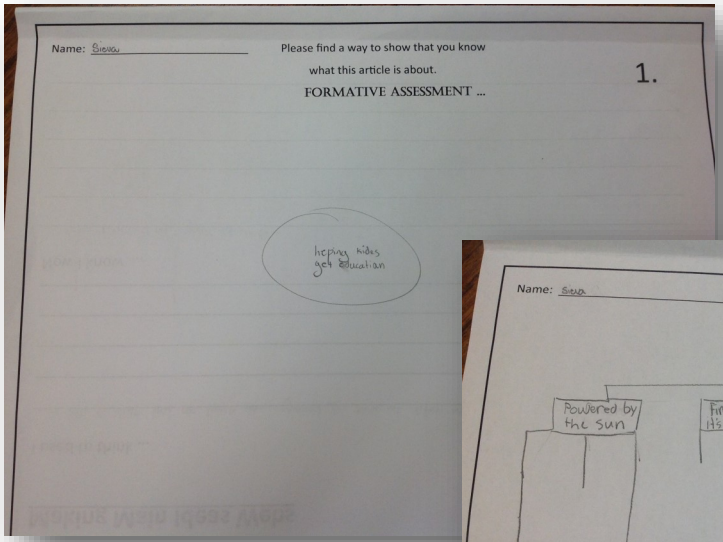


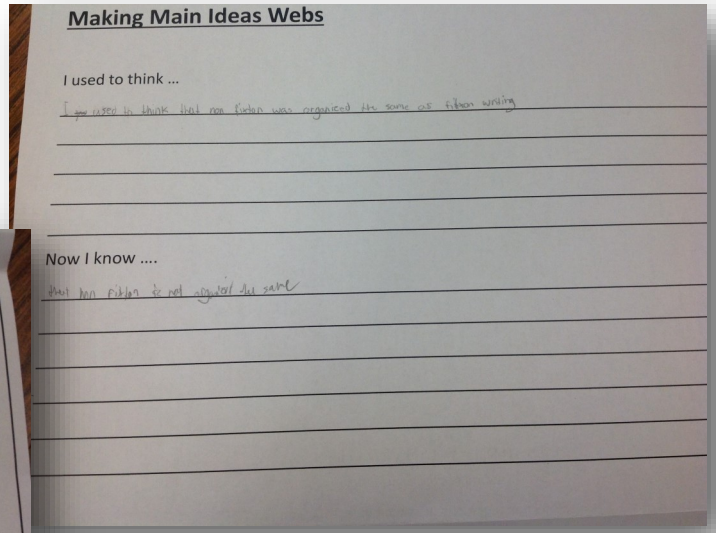


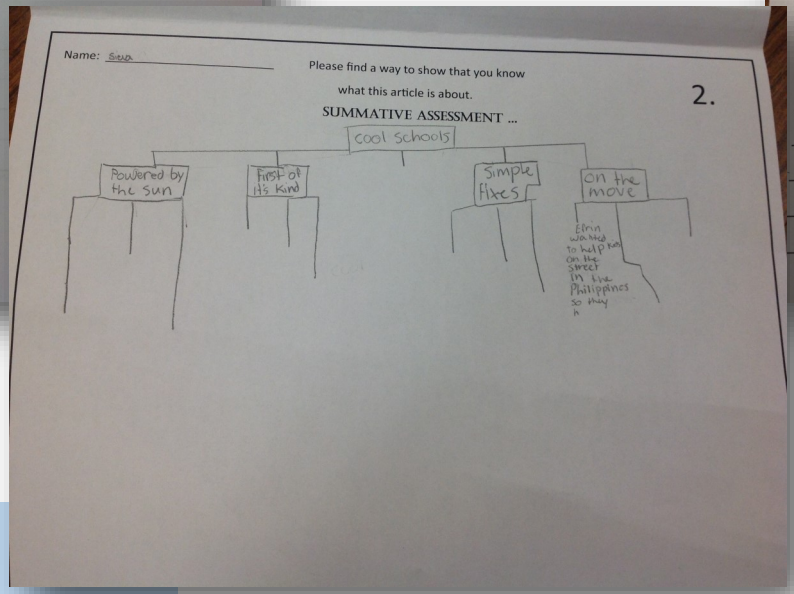


Before & After Explicit Instruction:

Jasmine has also learned how nonfiction text is organized. She was able to show her understanding of ***topic, main ideas,*** *and a few* ***details.***







Before & After Explicit Instruction:

Before this series of lessons, Sieva wasn't sure that nonfiction and fiction were organized differently. But now she does and she even showed a preference for Power Notes rather than making a web.

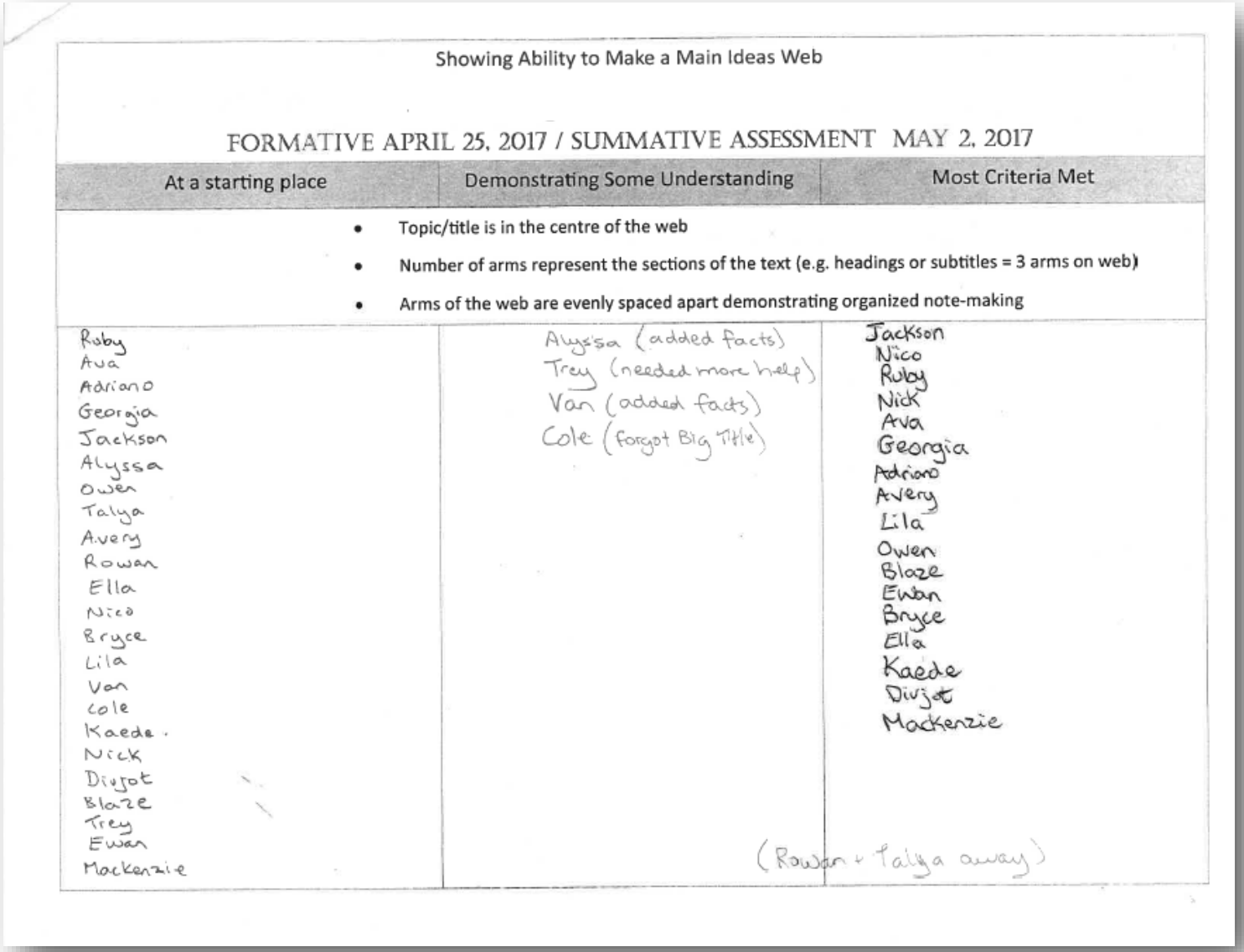
Showing Ability to Make a Main Ideas Web

FORMATIVE / SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Formative Date: Summative Date:

- Topic/title is in the centre of the web
- Number of arms represent the sections of the text (e.g. headings or subtitles = 3 arms on web)
- Arms of the web are evenly spaced apart demonstrating organized note-making

At a starting place	Demonstrating Some Understanding	Most Criteria (above) Met



Showing Ability to Make a Main Ideas Web

FORMATIVE APRIL 25, 2017 / SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT MAY 2, 2017

At a starting place	Demonstrating Some Understanding	Most Criteria Met
• Topic/title is in the centre of the web • Number of arms represent the sections of the text (e.g. headings or subtitles = 3 arms on web) • Arms of the web are evenly spaced apart demonstrating organized note-making		
Ruby Ava Adriano Georgia Jackson Alyssa Owen Talya Avery Rowan Ella Nico Bryce Lila Van cole Kaede Nick Divjot Blaze Trey Ewan Mackenzie	Alyssa (added facts) Trey (needed more help) Van (added facts) Cole (forgot Big Title) (Rowan + Talya away)	Jackson Nico Ruby Nick Ava Georgia Adriano Avery Lila Owen Blaze Ewan Bryce Ella Kaede Divjot Mackenzie

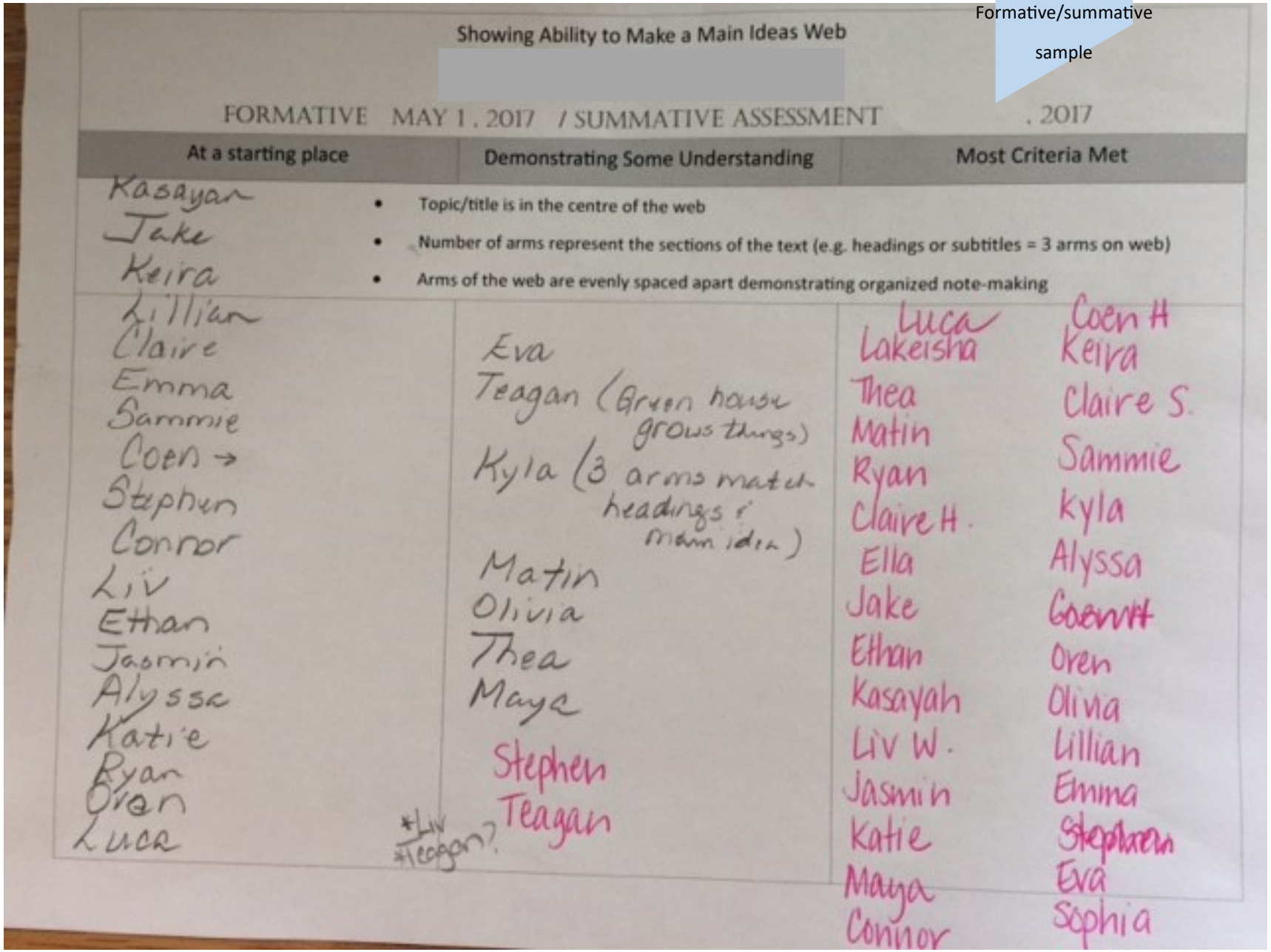
This formative/ summative assessment is typical for most grade 2—5 classes. Most students are, "at a starting place" when we take stock of their ability to find the main ideas in a nonfiction article. After just a few, explicitly taught lessons, ***all*** students show significant gains.

The pink font shows a summative assessment. Progress is clear!

Grades 4 & 5

Formative/summative

sample



Showing Ability to Make a Main Ideas Web

FORMATIVE MAY 1 . 2017 / SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT . 2017

At a starting place	Demonstrating Some Understanding	Most Criteria Met
Kasayan Jake Keira Lillian Claire Emma Sammie Coen → Stephen Connor Liv Ethan Jasmin Alyssa Katie Ryan Oren Luca	Eva Teagan (Green house grows things) Kyla (3 arms match headings & main idea) Matin Olivia Thea Maya Stephen Teagan *Liv #Teagan?	Luca Lakeisha Thea Matin Ryan Claire H. Ella Jake Ethan Kasayah Liv W. Jasmin Katie Maya Connor Coen H Keira Claire S. Sammie kyla Alyssa Coen H Oren Olivia Lillian Emma Stephen Eva Sophia

- Topic/title is in the centre of the web
- Number of arms represent the sections of the text (e.g. headings or subtitles = 3 arms on web)
- Arms of the web are evenly spaced apart demonstrating organized note-making

"How many arms do you put on a web?" When most primary students are asked this question, you usually hear a variety of numbers offered as a response (3! 6! 7, 8, 9! … as many as you want!). But does anyone offer an answer that connects with the text? The organization of nonfiction text is so important, yet quite often we jump to the content or information, because we want our students to learn it. But when we back up a bit and ask students what they notice, think and wonder about how the information is organized on a page, we prepare them for reading skills that will transfer to any text at all. **Ask questions such as:**

"How many arms are there on a web?"

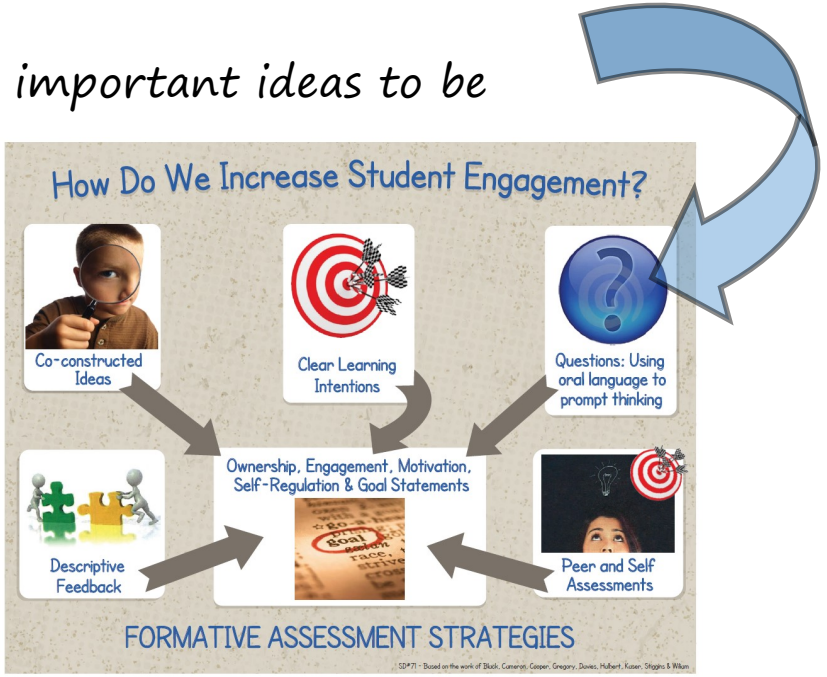
"What do we notice, think and wonder about how this text is organized?"

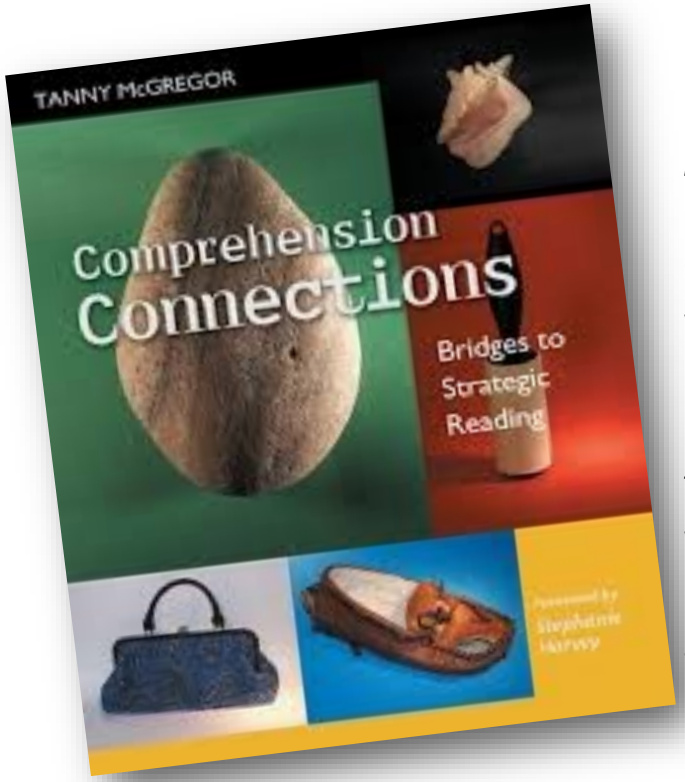
"How do writers of nonfiction text help their readers to figure out the main ideas?"

"Do you think writers of nonfiction text want their important ideas to be understood by their readers?"

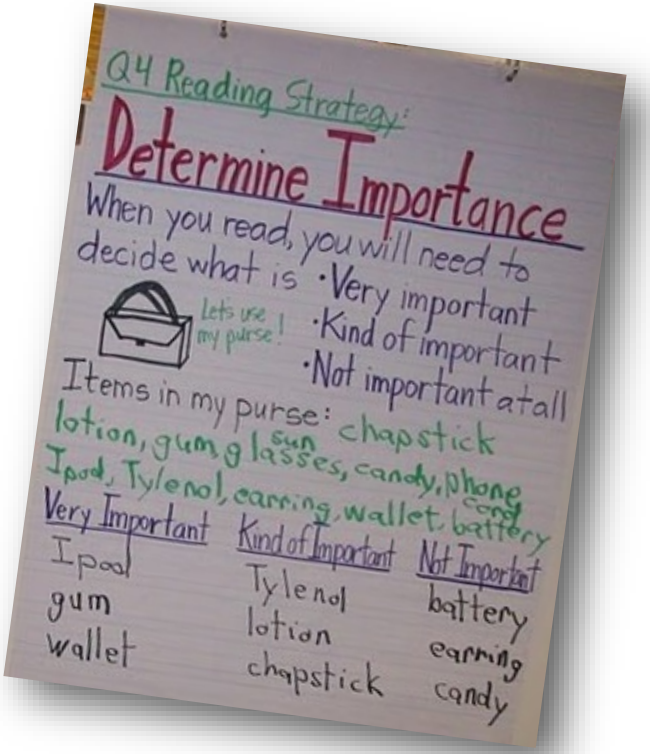
How do they make sure this happens?"

"What do writers do to make sure their important ideas are jumping off the page?"





In Tanny McGregor's book, Comprehension Connections there are lots of amazing lessons to launch this ***'determining importance'*** work.



On page 78 Tanny McGregor offers a wonderful lesson about going for a jog, but not knowing what items to bring from her purse. When items are shared, there tends to be lots of wonderful discussion about what to bring and what to leave at home. Keys for example tend to be a hot topic. Some children say, "You don't run with keys! They're bulky and make lots of noise." Others respond by saying that the jogger may have driven to their jogging site and will need to lock their car and get back into it. They will also need their keys to drive back home!"

The other fabulous lesson Tanny offers on page 80 requires cooked spaghetti, water, a colander, and a pot. **You know kids are going to love it when the list of ingredients includes spaghetti!** The idea is to talk about nonfiction text and **ask** if it's possible to remember every single bit of information an author writes about? When the spaghetti and water are poured through a strainer or colander, the water pours away and the main part is left! A tactile lesson like this will help students to understand the connection to reading and how it's just like that; we pour away all the parts that don't really matter and stick with the important stuff.

When reading nonfiction, does an author expect us to remember everything? We use pasta as an analogy.

When we read nonfiction, we need to let some of the author's message go. We remember the main ideas and many of the details, but some … we let go!

Do authors dump all their information in one spot

when writing nonfiction text? This is messy! Dumping everything in one spot would be difficult to understand!

Instead of dumping all their information into one big pile, what do authors of nonfiction do? How do we know what each pile, or section of text, is about?

Each pile has a heading that explains what all the details will be about.

'The Queen' is our topic.

Each heading tells us a main idea about the Queen

The Monarch

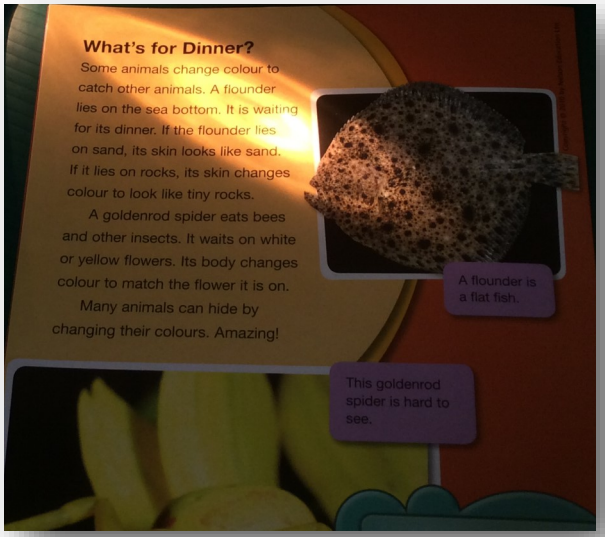
The role of Monarch

Canada's Government

"How do writers of nonfiction text help their readers to figure out the main ideas?"

In a darkened room, invite students to shine a flash light on the parts of the page in which the author is helping us to find the main ideas. There are many parts of nonfiction text that alert us to the author's ideas, so there will be lots of places to shine a flashlight. Accept all answers because there will be lots of correct options: pictures are a valuable source of main idea information, labels and picture captions also help us determine importance. But when setting up a main ideas web, many of our students are confused with all these options. Narrowing it down can be a relief to students who don't know what they're supposed to do.

After they've shone a light on just about everything on the page, ask students to narrow this long list. Giving clues is often a great way to get students to arrive at the answer we're looking for. Count up how many headings there are on the page they're looking at and say, ***"Does anyone notice something that's really important. I see 3 of these on this page."*** Headings are usually in a larger font than all the other text and they are usually in bold. Once students have noticed these 3 headings, explain that authors use headings to make their main ideas stand out and alert us to their main ideas. **And it's these heading that are used to make a main ideas web. So we really want students to notice them.** We can nudge them to notice this nonfiction text feature using another strategy from Tanny McGregor.



Accept all answers because there will be a lot of light shining ***on everything*** in the text!

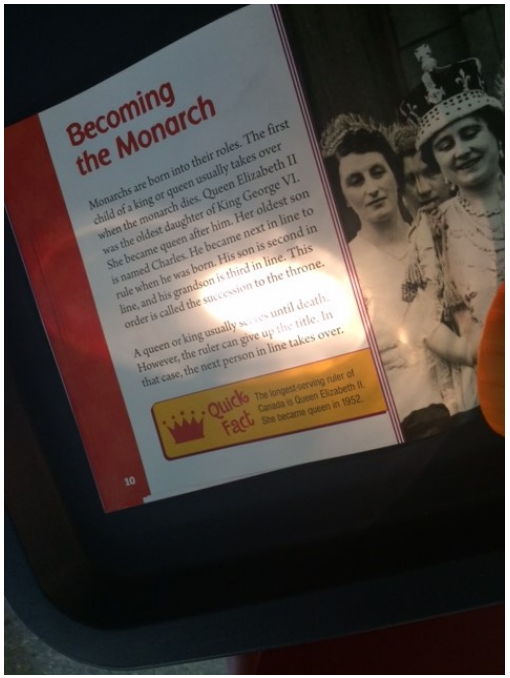
Then start to narrow it down.

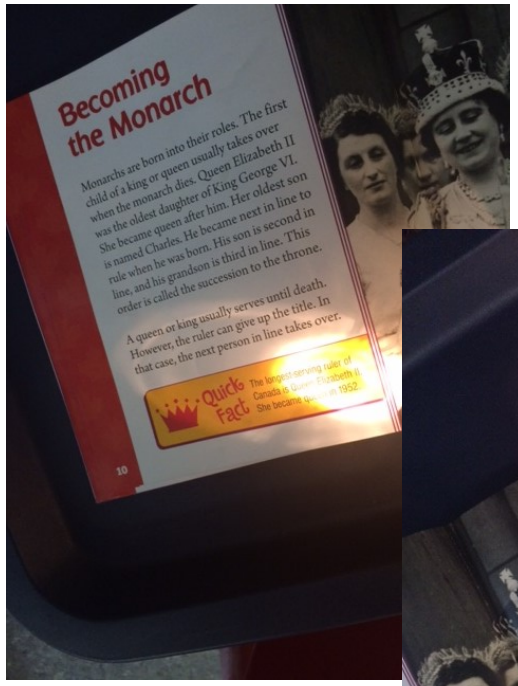
"What might be an author's most important ways

of sharing main ideas?"

The pictures?

The paragraphs?



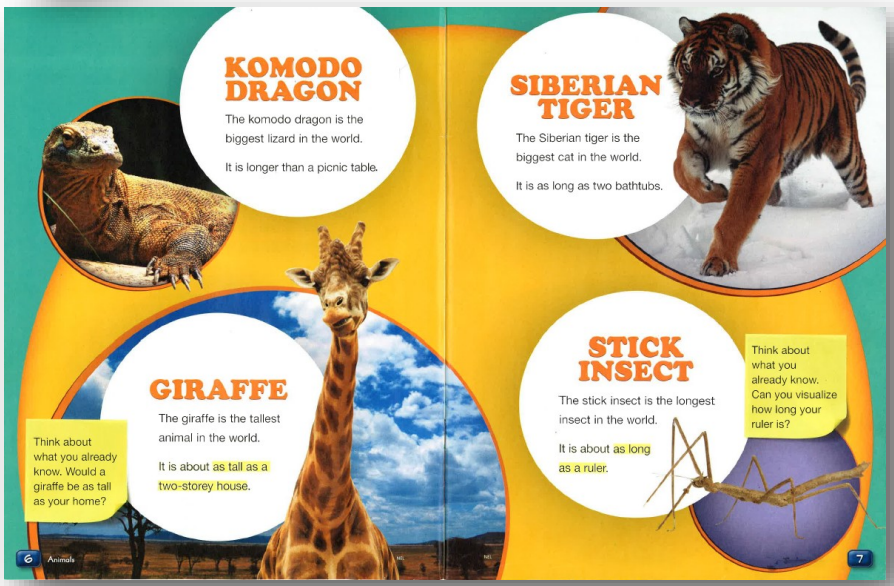


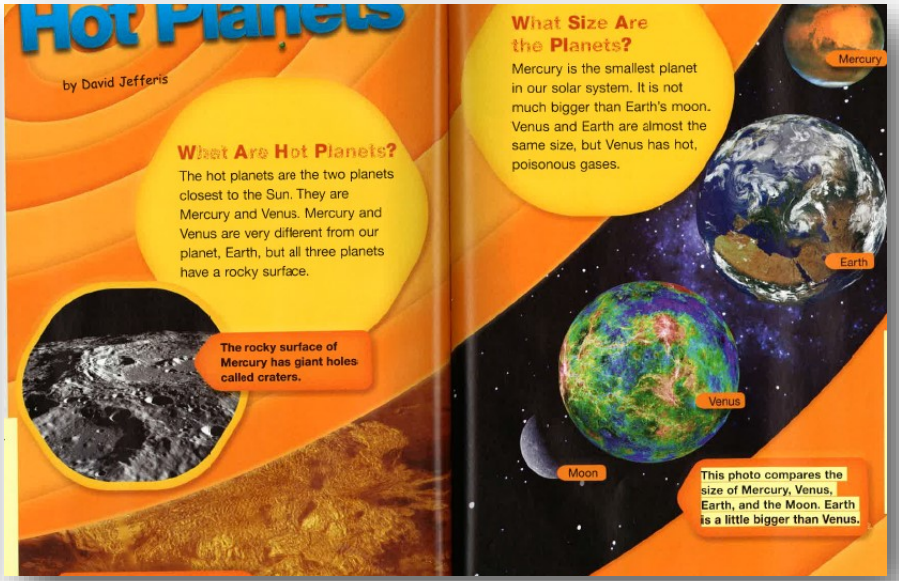
The sidebars?

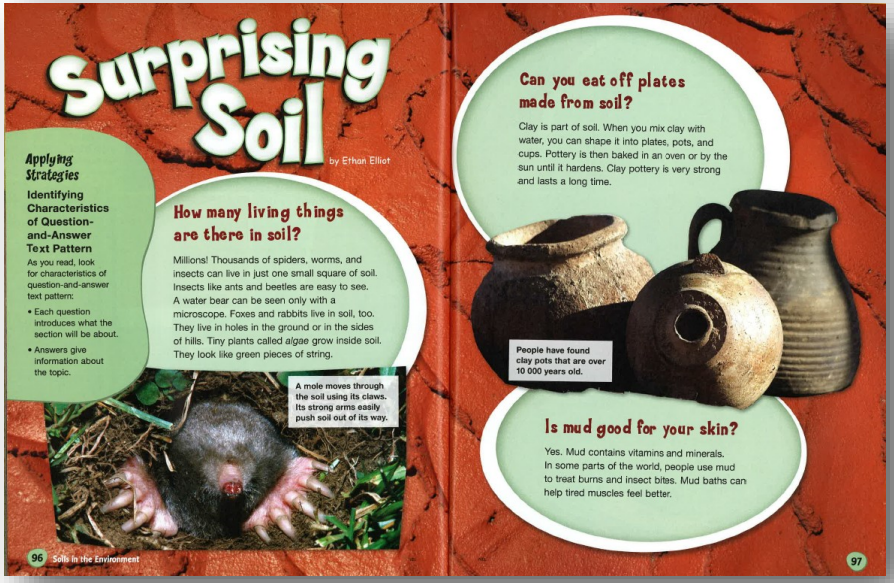
The picture captions?

Nelson Literacy

Some text just lends itself to shine a flashlight on it! Notice the round circles in which headings have been offered center stage!





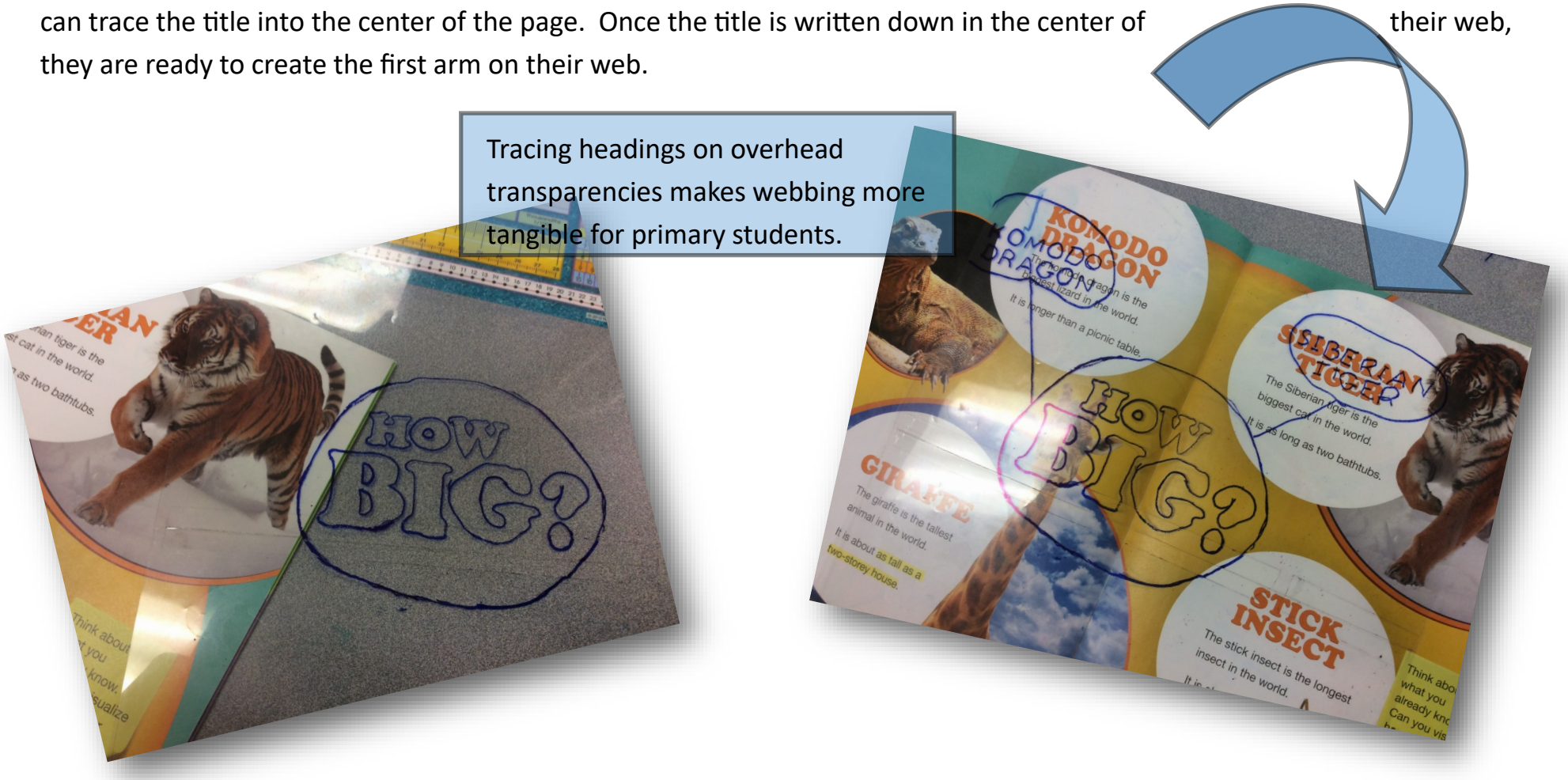


Using Overhead Transparencies

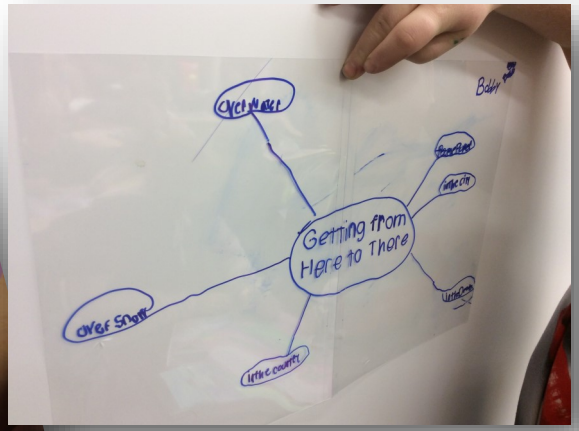
Late primary students are usually familiar enough with webs to know that the topic or title goes in the center. If we gather up a box of those old, overhead transparencies, and tape two of them together, we have an 11 x 17 page that can be placed over top of most text.

Any nonfiction text will do as long as it is organized around headings. Some nonfiction text leaves them out. These text samples can be useful later for those students ready for a challenge, but to start we need articles with headings.

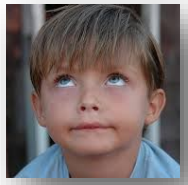
The following photos demonstrate this transparency strategy. Students love putting a transparency over top of the text. They can trace the title into the center of the page. Once the title is written down in the center of their web, they are ready to create the first arm on their web.

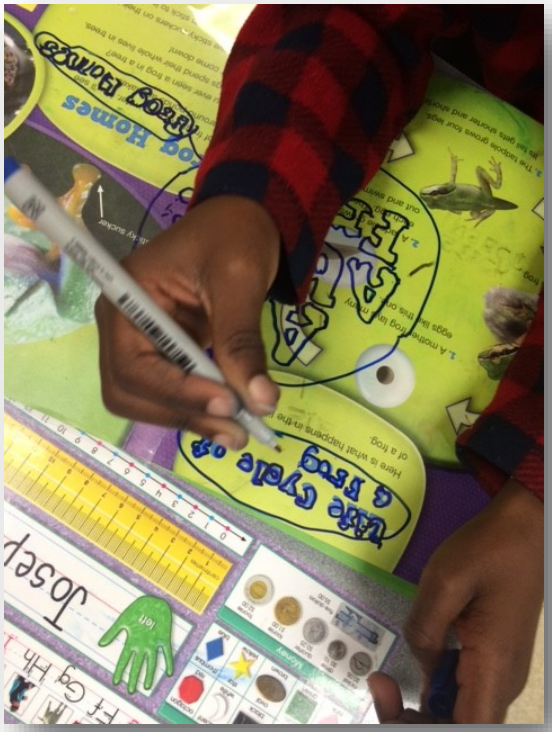


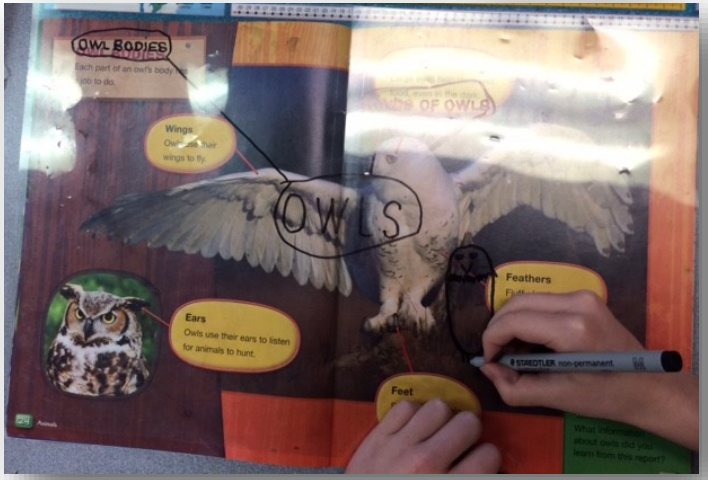
Tracing headings on overhead transparencies makes webbing more tangible for primary students.

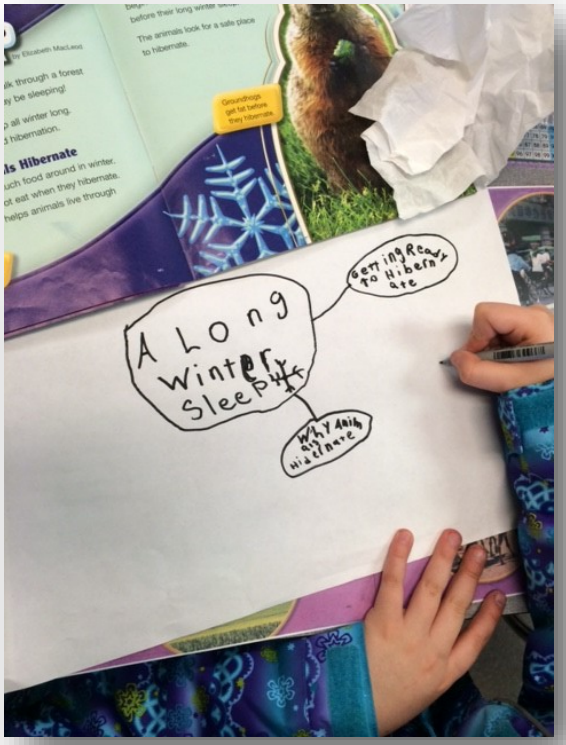


Offer students lots and lots of practice with a variety of nonfiction articles. We want them to get to the stage where they are rolling their eyes at us saying, "Enough already! I know how to do this!"



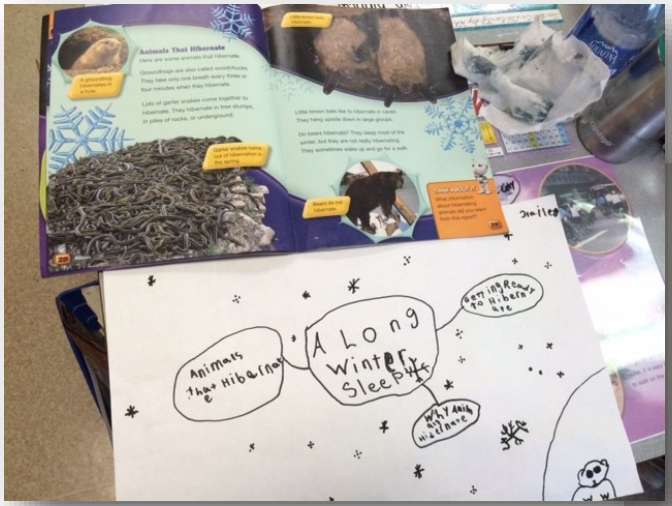


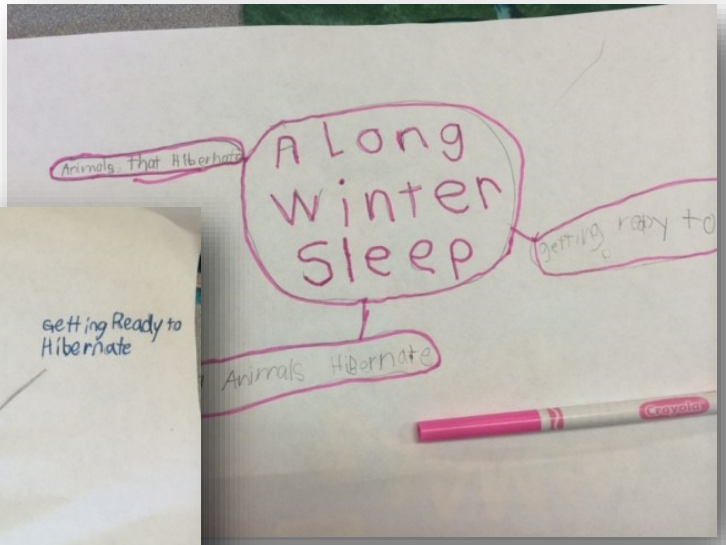


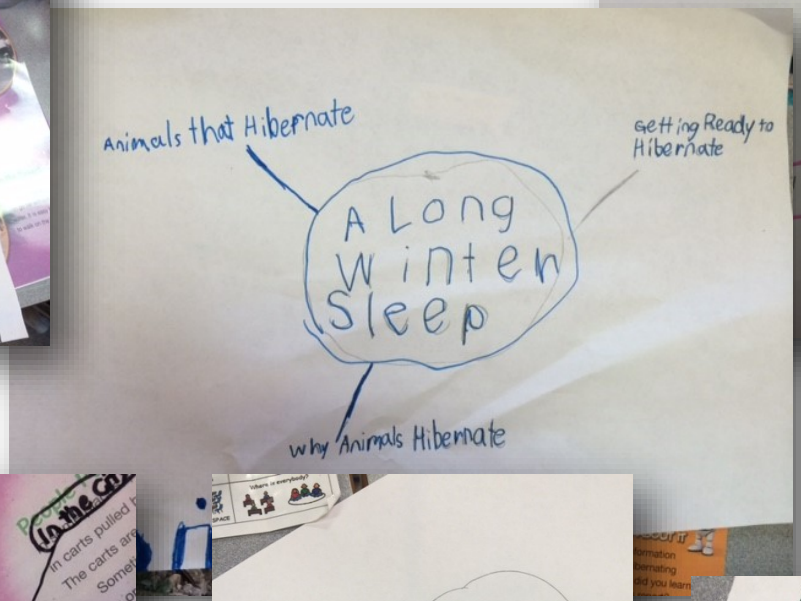


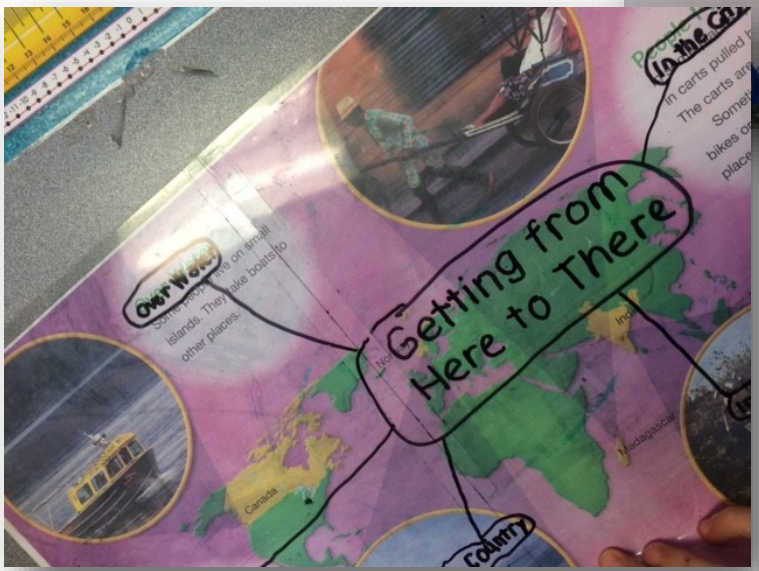
"Would you like paper or plastic today?"

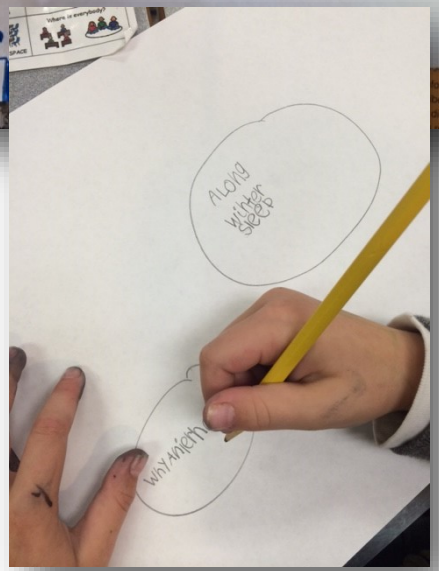
Normally this is a question we get asked in the grocery store, but following the gradual release of responsibility, many students are now ready to try making their webs on paper rather than plastic.

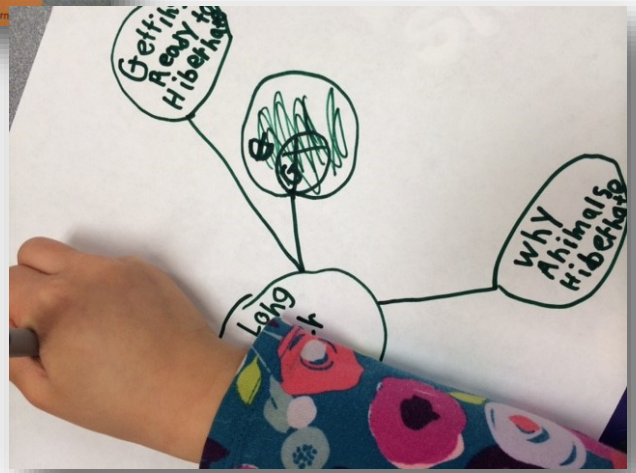












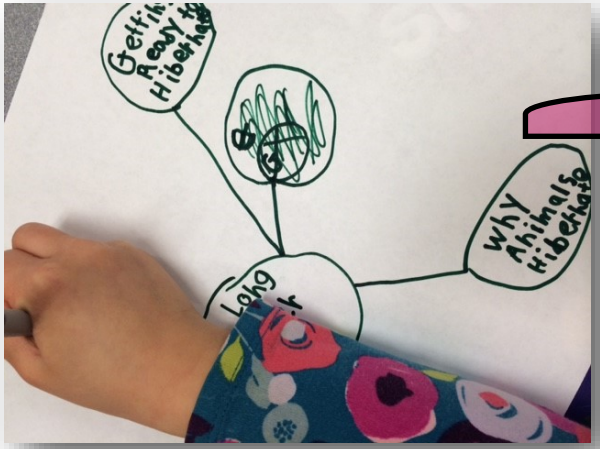
After Lots of Continued Practice … Turn it into a Question!

After lots of continued practice, using a variety of different nonfiction text, all students can feel sturdy with this skill. **Our most capable students will quickly run with this and be ready for a nudge forward**. An Adrienne Gear strategy is a perfect addition.

On page 93, Adrienne Gear offers a strategy called, '***Turning it Into a Question'***. For students who are ready for another piece, each heading they have been 'copying' onto their transparency or paper web, can be converted into a question. Quick modelling of this strategy is usually sufficient for these students.

Often, our impulse is to get our most capable students adding details to their web. Turning it into a Question offers a solution to move them forward a bit without rushing the development of skills.

Within a very short period some students are ready for yet another nudge forward. If we simply invite them to find a partner who is at the same stage, we can suggest that they buddy read the paragraphs(s) located below the heading in their text. They can compare the questions they wrote about the heading, read the paragraph(s) and see if the information answered their question. If it didn't, their job will be to rewrite the question for their heading to make it fit the text.

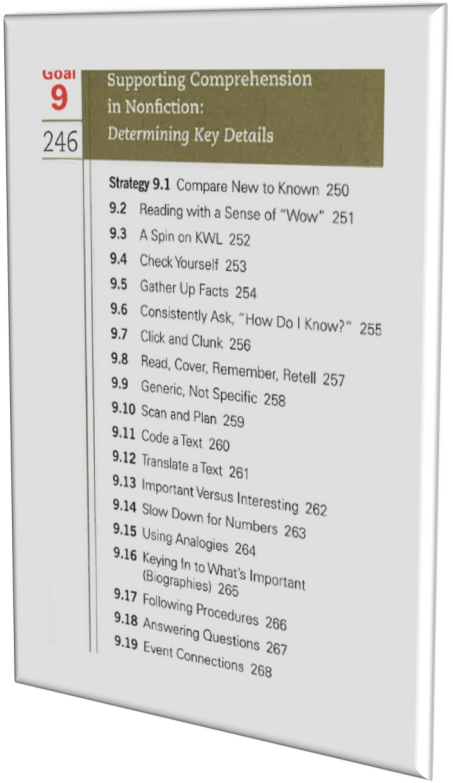


Sophia is setting up her web using the headings from the text. She is now ready to turn each heading into a question. Instead of her heading being, "Why animals Hibernate," it can be written as, "Why do Animals Hibernate?"

And even more Strategies to

Teach Main Ideas S L O W L Y!

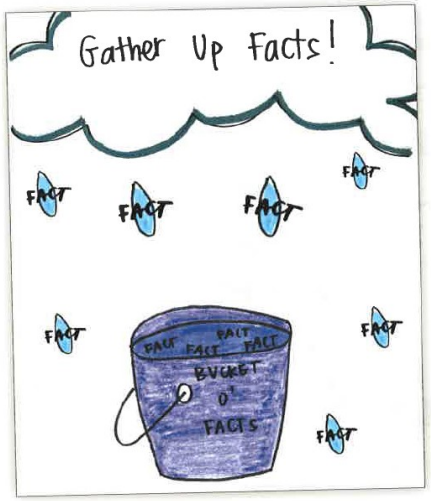
Many new resources are really well organized with quick grab and go strategies. Jennifer Serravallo's book, The Reading Strategies Book has a fabulous table of contents and one-page, quick-to-read, quick to use, solid strategies.



Goal 9 246 Supporting Comprehension in Nonfiction: Determining Key Details

Strategy 9.1 Compare New to Known 250
9.2 Reading with a Sense of "Wow" 251
9.3 A Spin on KWL 252
9.4 Check Yourself 253
9.5 Gather Up Facts 254
9.6 Consistently Ask, "How Do I Know?" 255
9.7 Click and Clunk 256
9.8 Read, Cover, Remember, Retell 257
9.9 Generic, Not Specific 258
9.10 Scan and Plan 259
9.11 Code a Text 260
9.12 Translate a Text 261
9.13 Important Versus Interesting 262
9.14 Slow Down for Numbers 263
9.15 Using Analogies 264
9.16 Keying In to What's Important (Biographies) 265
9.17 Following Procedures 266
9.18 Answering Questions 267
9.19 Event Connections 268

Goal 9 which starts on page 246, contains a series of lessons about **Supporting Comprehension in Nonfiction: Determining Key Details**. Her language is a bit different than other texts, which is unfortunate, but this section isn't about gathering details. Rather she calls them, 'Key Details' which means they are facts that support each main idea.



There are several great lessons within this section, but using a bucket to gather up facts, is kid-friendly through and through. With this strategy students gather interesting facts from the nonfiction text the are reading or hearing.

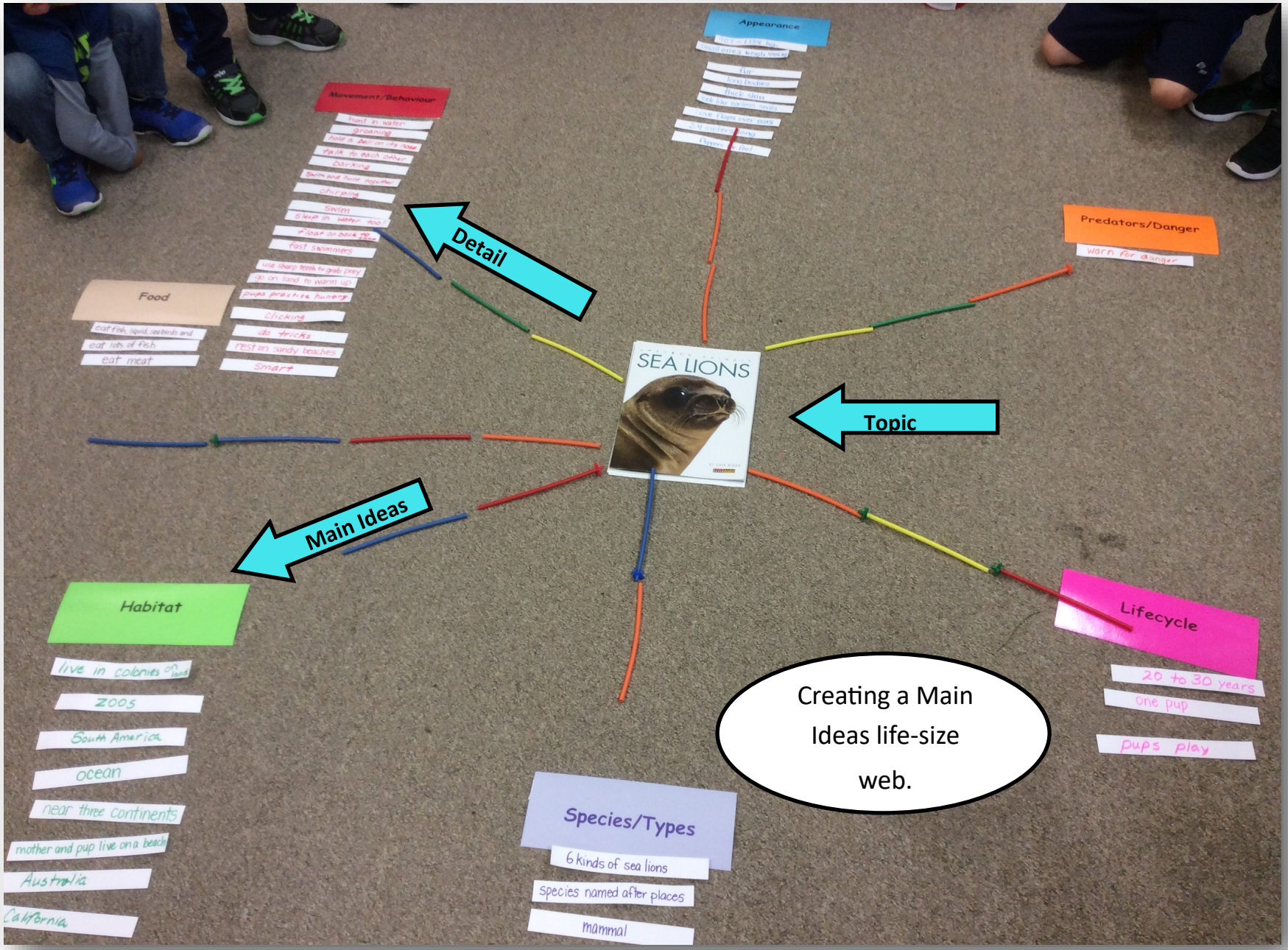
Having students sort these facts and create their own headings, becomes another great way to reinforce these determining importance skills.

In kindergarten and grade one classes, this work can all be done orally with the teacher scribing facts.

Take your time explicitly teaching and luring student attention to the main ideas. But once it's fully understood, it's time to introduce students to all the interesting facts about a topic.

The following pages offer a few ideas about next steps.

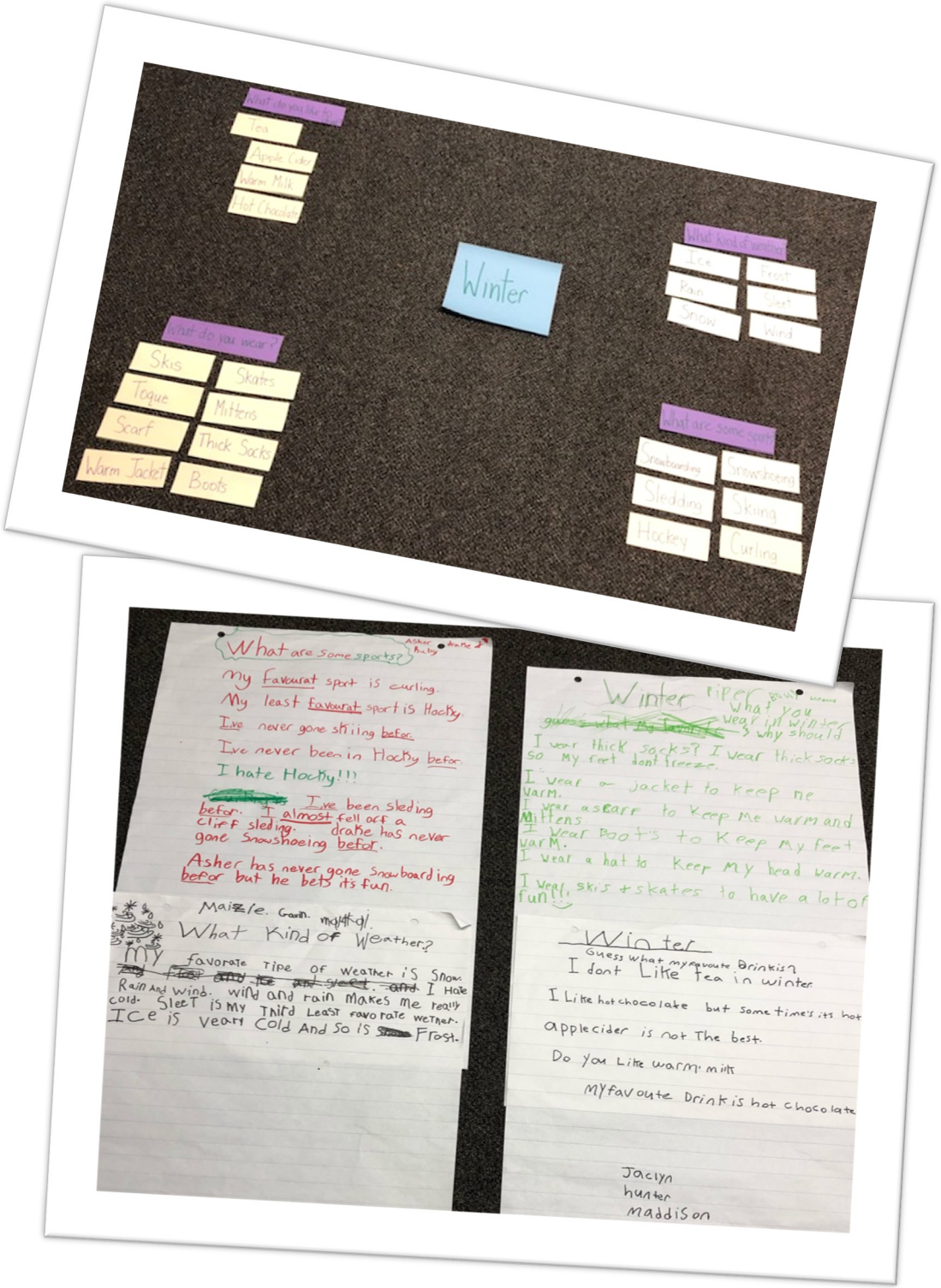
A huge web was created on the carpet of this k/1 class. Students gathered facts from the text as it was read aloud to them. The teacher scribed each fact. Next the facts were sorted so **all the details were organized under headings**! Our book about sea lions was placed in the center of our web to show our topic!



Next Steps:

If they're ready for details try this …

- In her grades 3 and 4 classroom, Krista Jernslet handed out paper strips that contained lots of details. Her students walked around the room reading all the strips that classmates had.
- Their first job was to determine the topic (Winter).
- Once they figured out the web was about winter, they needed to determine the main ideas.
- With main ideas established, they sorted their fact strips under the appropriate heading and made a BIG WEB on the carpet.
- But WAIT, there's MORE!!!!
- From there, students were placed in groups and wrote a paragraph about one section of the web (winter sips, winter clothes, winter sports, and winter weather.
- Paragraphs were placed together so they could see this process within a single afternoon!



Texts Get More Complex

"Bear in mind that as texts get more complex, this task of supporting an idea (or topic) with related details becomes more challenging. **In first and second grade level books, the text is often very cohesive and it would be hard to find a detail that strays from the main topic of the book. As texts get more complex, the density of information increases, meaning there is more information on every page.** In books at these levels, not all of the details align to the main idea. And by four or fifth grade, the texts are often complex enough to have multiple main ideas, a greater increase in words on each page, and even text features that add extra information to complement the information in the main text, meaning the reader needs to sort through even more facts from a variety of locations within the book."

Serravallo p. 247

All of this adds up to the importance of teaching these skills

really well at the late primary level. If we don't, we are guaranteed

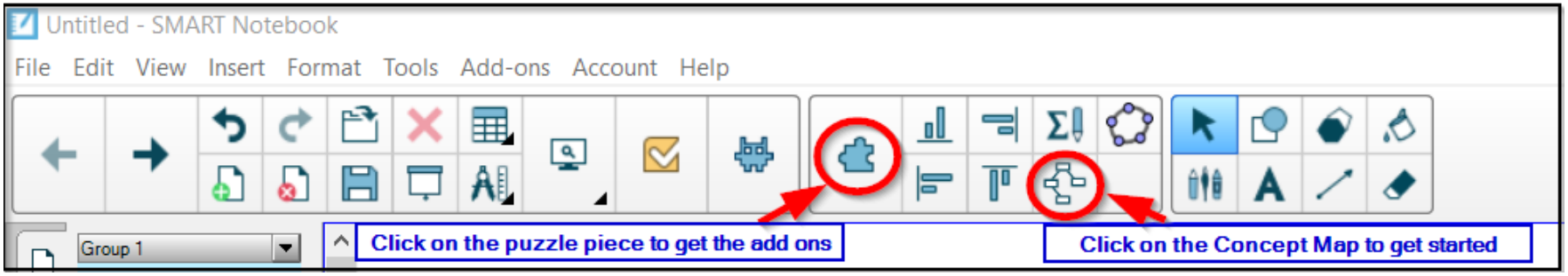
to lose our vulnerable students to perhaps a lifetime of struggles with text.

Using Some Technology for our Lessons

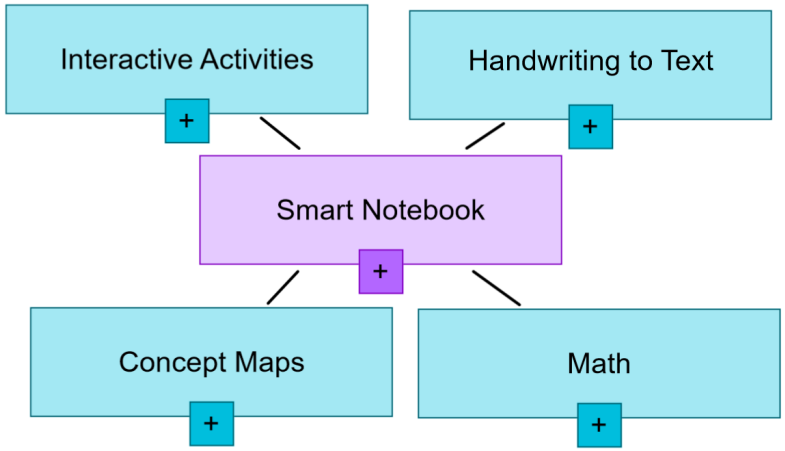
Smart Notebook:

Smart Notebook is on all the teacher computers in our district elementary schools and is on the computers in most of our computer labs. It has a built in feature to help you create concept maps. To do this:

1. Open **Smart Notebook**
2. Click on the puzzle piece at the top to open up the **Add-Ons**
3. Click on the **Concept Map** icon



4. When the new box opens up, double click in it and then type what your subject is in the box. This will be the middle box.
5. Double click on the **+** at the bottom of it to create more pieces for your web.
6. The new web pieces will connect from the card that has the **+** on it.
7. You can click and drag to move the web pieces around on your page.



Ipad/Tablet Apps:

Popplet: This app can be used to organize your ideas into a colourful web and you can add or draw pictures in it. This app is very kid-friendly. There is a free version that you can use to make one web at a time or you can purchase the app and make and save as many webs as you wish. This app (program) is also available online and the online version works the same way.

Kidspiration Maps: This is a wonderful app that can be purchased for computers or ipads which leads students through creating a web and then helps them change their web from a thought map to actual paragraphs. It is full of visual cues and activities to help students learn . There is also the Inspiration Maps app for older students.

There are many other apps that will do mind mapping and most of them are excellent. If you decide to use ipad apps with students, please check the approved apps list to make sure that they are safe or fill out a vetting form to have the apps approved (http://www.learn71.ca/apple/).