First-Grade Classroom, 1968

Class, please open your books to page 21. We’ll do the examples together, then you’ll do three pages by yourselves. Look at the picture. What is the first sound you hear in bug? That’s right, and what letter makes that sound? That’s right. Write a B on the blank. Jill, I know this is easy for you, but please don’t work ahead. Next picture. What is the first sound you hear in duck? That’s right . . .

Over the years, notions of ideal early reading instruction have evolved tremendously. Traditionally, many early childhood teachers spent lots of time teaching children strategies for decoding text but little time teaching strategies for comprehending. The focus was on ensuring that children would be able to recognize and identify words and read them with an emerging fluency. Although children were encouraged to read actual text, the language in their readers was usually whirled down and controlled, rendering the content and structure menial. And, although children may have listened to stories read aloud, in many classrooms the readings were rarely accompanied by in-depth comprehension instruction.
Today's early childhood teachers are cognizant of the fact that although decoding is ultimately important to comprehending, learning to read requires much more than learning to decode. Today's teachers take steps to ensure that along with decoding strategies, their young students develop strategies for comprehension. In kindergarten and first-grade classrooms, a great deal of comprehension strategy instruction occurs through listening experiences; over time, children become progressively more able to apply these strategies to their independent reading.

What Are the Strategies?

Researchers in the field of reading feel confident that they have identified the most important comprehension strategies (Pressley 2001). Although different scholars categorize particular elements of the strategies in different ways, most converge on a similar set of ideas. Figure 2–1 provides a brief description of ten strategies that are commonly referred to in the professional literature as being facilitative of comprehension. You may find it helpful to photocopy this form and take it into your classroom for quick reference. Figure 2–2 provides a list of the same strategies for children to refer to. This form may be enlarged to chart size and posted on the classroom wall. On the following pages, we will examine each strategy in detail, considering the ways in which each fosters children's construction of meaning.

As you read, please keep in mind two ideas. First, most strategies operate simultaneously during any given reading event. Readers naturally use the strategies because they need them to make meaning and to achieve their reading goals. Although during lessons, you may focus on one particular strategy in order to highlight it and help your students understand it better, readers actually use most of the strategies at once. Ultimately, that is what we must help children learn to do.

Second, many studies on comprehension have occurred with older children or adults. Although researchers have looked at varied aspects of young children’s comprehension, by no means have we finished learning about the ways in which comprehension develops in early childhood. As you continue to read about comprehension instruction, and to apply instructional techniques related to comprehension, be sure to continue learning from your students and to tailor what you do to meet their particular needs.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>What It Involves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Predicting and Inferring | • Drawing on prior knowledge to make hypotheses (or predictions) and assumptions (or inferences)  
<p>|                         | • Confirming and revising hypotheses and inferences                           |
| Purpose Setting        | • Formulating goals                                                            |
|                         | • Taking appropriate stances                                                  |
|                         | • Overviewing and reading selectively to meet goals                           |
|                         | • Evaluating whether goals are achieved                                       |
| Retelling              | • Summarizing                                                                  |
|                         | • Synthesizing                                                                 |
|                         | • Rethinking                                                                   |
|                         | • Reviewing                                                                    |
| Questioning            | • Asking who, what, when, where, why, and how questions                        |
|                         | • Asking where the answers to questions can be found                            |
|                         | • Reading selectively to find answers to questions                             |
| Monitoring             | • Tracking comprehension                                                       |
|                         | • Revising understandings as new information is encountered                    |
|                         | • Using fix-up strategies to clarify confusions                               |
|                         | • Thinking about word meanings                                                |
| Visualizing            | • Mentally representing book ideas using all of the senses                    |
| Connecting             | • Activating prior knowledge before, during, and after reading                 |
|                         | • Making personal connections                                                  |
|                         | • Making connections between texts                                            |
|                         | • Considering changes in knowledge that come as a result of reading            |
| Deciding What's Important | • Using reader purpose to determine important ideas and themes                  |
|                         | • Using text format, sequence, and features to help make decisions about what is important |
| Evaluating             | • Critiquing and establishing opinions                                         |
|                         | • Considering merit of content; considering author uses of language           |
|                         | • Considering author intents and viewpoints                                    |
|                         | • Preparing to apply new information                                          |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Ask yourself . . .</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predict and Infer</td>
<td>• What might I learn/learn next? What might happen/happen next?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What does this probably mean?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Was my prediction or inference confirmed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set a Purpose</td>
<td>• Why am I reading this book?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What do I want to get from it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How will I meet these goals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Have I met my goals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retell</td>
<td>• What was this text about, mainly?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What have I learned?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What is a good way to rethink this text?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask Questions</td>
<td>• What questions do I have as I read this text?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Where will I find the answers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor</td>
<td>• What have I just read about?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Which parts are confusing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• If parts are confusing, what fix-up strategies could I use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualize</td>
<td>• What pictures, smells, sounds, tastes, and touches come to mind as I read this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect</td>
<td>• What does this remind me of?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Have I seen something similar in other books?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What part of my thinking has changed after reading this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decide What’s Important</td>
<td>• What are my goals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Based on my goals, what is important?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What does the author think is important? How do I know?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate</td>
<td>• What do I think about this text? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Why did the author write it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How can I use this information?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2–2

Predicting and Inferring

TEACHER: [Showing the cover of a book about the solar system] Do you think this book is fiction or nonfiction?

CHILDREN: Nonfiction . . . It has real pictures, so it looks like it's about real planets.

TEACHER: What do you think you'll learn from this book?

Predicting is a strategy that we hear about all the time, but why is it so significant to comprehending text? Why is it a recommended part of reading instruction? One central reason is that in order to predict, readers must activate their prior knowledge and use it to think about what they are about to read. In this way, predicting helps readers connect what they are reading with what they know already and bring meaning to text in order to get meaning from it (see Chapter 1).

As the example illustrates, predicting lessons often begin with children activating their thinking about content and genre. Before opening a book, teachers ask them to discuss possibilities for the content based on the title, author, and cover picture. If the book appears to be a genre of fiction, they may ask, “What do you think will happen in this story?” If it appears to be a genre of nonfiction, they may ask, “What do you know about [content of book]?” and “What do you think you’ll learn?” The background knowledge used for predicting comes not only from the reader’s previous experience but also from meaning that is built during the reading. Throughout a text, readers continually generate new predictions.

Effective comprehenders monitor their predictions as they read. When predictions are incorrect, they recognize this and revise their thinking. Consider the following example, in which Christian Bush uses The Chick and the Duckling (Ginsburg 1988) to support the prediction and revision process in her first-grade classroom. Before reading, she asks the children to “look at the pictures and think about what [the book] could be about.” Based on a picture of a chick holding one end of a worm and a duckling holding the other, Amelia predicts that the book will contain a moral message “about not fighting over food.” During the reading, Christian asks the children to reflect on their predictions:

AMELIA: I said that they were fighting.

CHRISTIAN: Think about the word fighting. Were they fighting?

AMELIA: Tugging.
To understand the story, it was important for Amelia to recognize that the creatures were indeed not fighting. In fact, they were doing something more like sharing. By helping students learn to make and revise predictions, teachers help them stay focused on the reading and guide them in using what they know so far to support the construction of new meaning.

**Inferring** is a strategy that is related to predicting in that it involves using background knowledge to make decisions about text. While a prediction is a smart guess about what might happen or about what might be learned, an inference is an assumption, or a supplying of information that is not explicitly stated in the text—something more like reading between the lines. When readers infer, they consider questions such as What is this character probably thinking? What might the author mean by this? and What will probably happen next? (This final question illustrates that a prediction is actually a type of inference.) As with predictions, readers revise their meaning when they find they have been incorrect.

Think about the inferring that happens just before Christian and her students read *The Lemon Drop Jar* (Widman 1991), a story about a girl whose great aunt shares a special family story:

**CHRISTIAN:** [showing the cover] What do you think this book is going to be about?

**CHILDREN:** A little girl and her grandma.

**CHRISTIAN:** Why do you think this is her grandma?

Christian’s students infer that the older person on the cover is the girl’s grandma “because she has gray hair” and because the child “would know better than to walk into someone else’s house.” Inferring is a strategy that compels readers to consider text in terms of their background knowledge and to create unique meanings by supplying information that is not (or not yet) provided by the author.

### Purpose Setting

To consider the nature of the next strategy, *purpose setting*, please take a moment to walk through a simple exercise:

- Read the following nonfiction passage, entitled “The Garden Net.” The passage is about a bird that becomes entangled in a net used to keep wild animals from a garden.
- Make it your purpose to track the experience of the bird. To organize your thinking, jot down four key experiences that you might retell to someone who hasn’t read the passage.
The small dark bird became entangled in a deadly synthetic web. It wrestled, doomed to spend the close of its life as an easy target. Out of the desert sand slithered a determined assassin, moving toward the trapped bird with stealthy ease. Less than a yard separated the two, an unknowing victim and a cunning predator. A lightning strike to the head with vise-grip jaws was enough to overcome the struggling prey. The frantic flutter of small wings soon slowed to a lifeless wave. The snake turned urgently with its prize, disappearing into the thorns of the desert.

Now that you have read with a focus on the bird’s experience, think about what might have happened if you had read the piece with a different purpose in mind. For example, if you had focused on the setting of the piece or the author’s use of metaphor, how would the meaning you constructed have been different? Depending on your purpose, it is likely that you would have noticed different things. This exercise is intended to illustrate that a reader’s purpose influences what he pays attention to and puts energy into and, therefore, the meaning that is made. Setting a purpose helps readers be efficient in their focus and achieve the specific goals they desire.

You can help children develop this strategy by first providing opportunities for them to discover that reading serves many purposes: we may read for pleasure, to find a specific piece of information, to learn how to do something, or to satisfy a curiosity. Second, regularly encourage them to set purposes as they read.

Children need to learn to set their own purposes, and even at an early age, they are very capable of doing so. Meaningful purpose setting is most likely to develop when reading occurs in meaningful contexts—in settings in which children have good reasons to read. For example, when Christian’s students were working in groups to write fact-based scripts, purpose setting became essential. Max’s group had decided to write a script about ocean creatures. Early on, the four boys set off browsing through a collection of nonfiction books and talking about all of the information. There was so much information that they struggled with what to actually write down. Eventually, they narrowed their focus to finding interesting information about sharks. The joint purpose helped them read more efficiently and develop a cohesive script.

Through this experience, Max and his peers were developing an important understanding about reading nonfiction. While stories are usually read straight through, nonfiction is usually read selectively.
depending on the reader’s purpose. As the group worked, they focused not on all the information, but only on pulling out interesting information about sharks: Sharks can bite. Sharks can tip over large boats and small boats and little fishing boats. Whale sharks are the biggest sharks in the world. They weigh one hundred pounds. Because they relied on pictures for some of their ideas, some of the information was inaccurate, but Christian wasn’t worried; she was happy to see these emergent readers purposefully gathering information from several texts and working it into a single script. Other conventions could wait until later.

It is okay to sometimes set purposes for children. For example, as part of a science inquiry, you might want them to listen for the physical characteristics of insects. As part of an author study, you might want them to reflect on an author’s description of various settings. Or, you may simply wish for your students to note how wonderful it is just to sit back and enjoy a good story. When you set the purpose, let children know exactly what it is, and model your reasoning behind it. For example, “If we focus on the body parts of these insects, we’ll be able to construct accurate clay models for the science fair.” Or, “Please listen carefully to this description of the setting, because it will help you understand why women did not vote in those times.” Being clear with your purpose will help your students learn to focus on particular aspects of the reading and read (or listen) for particular information.

Retelling

RONNIE: Once upon a time, Jack mama didn’t have no money.

MIA: Jack’s mom told him to take the cow.

DANITRA: He met a funny little man along the way.

FREDA: The little man gave him some beans.

ANTOINE: Then Jack went home to his mom. His mom threw out the beans . . .

Most young schoolchildren have opportunities to engage in retellings of some sort. They use puppets to dramatize The Three Little Pigs, costumes to reenact Lon Po Po, pictures to retell The Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly, or voices to retell Rumpelstiltskin. Retelling good stories is fun for children, but why is it such a valuable comprehension strategy?

The children in the vignette (Barb Huston’s kindergarten students) are retelling Jack and the Beanstalk. To re-create the story, a flurry of comprehension activity must take place. First, each child
must decide which parts are important to retell. Deciding what is important is a key part of comprehending because it focuses readers on sorting out what matters most in achieving their goals. Second, each child must listen to what has been told so far so that the retelling proceeds in a logical sequence. Sequencing helps readers rethink information in a logical order. Third, to be certain that important parts are not skipped, repeated, or misunderstood, the children must monitor their comprehension. The act of retelling brings ideas to a conscious place where children can actively monitor whether they make sense. Most important, retelling involves children in carefully thinking about and rethinking what has been read.

Retelling and rethinking are especially important for nonfiction because they help children tune into text and understand its content better. Consider the importance of retelling and rethinking in the following example from a second-grade classroom. The teacher, Angel, is modeling her way of rethinking during reading:

I’m going to rethink this to be sure I understand what we’ve read: The sap moves through the tree. If a branch breaks, sap comes out. Some saps protect the tree from insects [closes book and looks at students]. When I stop to retell like that, even if I don’t retell out loud, it helps me to think back through what I’ve read and to be sure I understand it. When you are reading by yourselves, or with partners, this is a good strategy to use.

Angel is modeling a retelling strategy and, at the same time, making sure that her students understand what she is doing and why. She wants them to be consciously aware that retelling during and after reading helps readers rethink text and therefore understand it more fully.

Summarizing and synthesizing are terms that are directly connected with retelling; the three terms often show up together in the comprehension literature. Ellin Keene and Susan Zimmerman, in their groundbreaking book Mosaic of Thought (1997), make an interesting distinction between summary and synthesis. Summary is “a succinct retelling of key points in the text” (171). “Synthesis is a more personal composite of what the piece was about” (170)—more a description of the gist of the piece than a detailed retelling of main points. As part of retelling experiences, children should be supported in developing competencies in both summary and synthesis.
Questioning

As Barb Huston reads aloud, Jevon (her kindergarten student) pipes in with a question: “Mrs. Huston, how the lady swallowed a cow? A cow’s too big.”

Proficient listeners and readers are always generating questions as they read. They ask, What’s happening here? How do these ideas fit together? Why did this happen? What are the important ideas? Questioning is an important strategy because it helps children

- move deeply into text
- think more about what they read
- organize their thinking
- frame the pursuit of new understandings
- locate specific information
- think about unstated ideas such as themes, author goals and intents, and underlying meanings

You can teach questioning by regularly drawing attention to both your students’ and your own wonderings and by thinking aloud about how these may be addressed. For example, as Barb is reading aloud to her class one day, Jevon notices that the boy on the cover of the book has not yet shown up in the story. Because Jevon has listened to many books that introduce the characters right away, he raises his hand to express his wondering:

JEVON: Mrs. Huston, why don’t they got that little boy up there?

BARB: Which one?

JEVON: That boy on the cover.

BARB: Ah, just wait. Make that your purpose, Jevon.

Barb uses this opportunity to provide a scaffold for Jevon to learn how to answer his own question. Instead of giving an answer, she suggests that he use his question to frame his thinking as he listens further. Later, she will check back with Jevon to see that his question has been answered.

In another example of questioning, Barb is reading aloud The Seven Silly Eaters (Hoberman 1998). In this story, the mother character becomes overwhelmed because of all the different foods she must prepare to satisfy the picky eaters in her family. As conversation ensues, Diamond generates a question that is qualitatively different from Jevon’s:
SHAUN: The mom getting too tired.
DIAMOND: And she going to be a old lady. Why can’t she take them to her mama house?
JAMAL: They’d drive the grandma crazy.

Diamond’s question is different from Jevon’s in a way that is important for children and teachers to understand. Jevon’s question can be answered by reading further into the text. Diamond’s is one whose answer requires that she infer, or draw information from the text and her own background knowledge (as Jamal has done in responding to her). Part of helping children become proficient questioners involves helping them learn to consider where the answers to different types of questions might be found. The Teacher Talk box offers some typical prompts that are helpful in teaching question-answer relationships.

**Teacher Talk: Question-Answer Relationships**
- Where could we find the answer?
- Is the answer in the text?
- Does the answer require putting together different parts of the text?
- Does the answer require you to use your background knowledge or knowledge about the world? (based on Raphael 1986)

Often, a reader’s questions come in a subtle form, not necessarily being consciously articulated. But bringing questions to a conscious level is a way to be sure that children learn to get them answered. Children need to learn that when they have questions while reading, they can do something about them, and they need to learn that the answers to different kinds of questions are found in different places.

**Monitoring**

Seven-year-old Jay is reading aloud a report he has written about his family.

JAY: [reading] “My grandma reminded me of my grandma.”

JAKE: That doesn’t make any sense.

CAYLA: You have two grandmas?

Effective comprehenders *monitor* their comprehension as they listen to and read text. This means that they actively consider the meaning of what they are reading; when something doesn’t make sense, they
recognize it and either revise their thinking or use fix-up strategies to get back on track. In the example, Jake and Cayla are monitoring their understandings as they listen to Jay’s reading. When something seems incomprehensible, they know they can do something about it. Monitoring requires that children have a strong disposition for comprehension, that they expect text to make sense and know to take action when it doesn’t.

To teach monitoring, many teachers read aloud to children in whole-class settings, thinking aloud about the meaning they are constructing. When something unexpected arises, they show students how readers sometimes revise their thinking to accommodate the new information. For example, “Oh, I had thought that bats were in the bird family because they fly, but I see here that bats are really mammals.” When something confusing arises, they pause to model and think aloud about ways to use fix-up strategies to get back on track. For example, “When I was reading this part, I didn’t understand it, so I went back to the glossary to find echolocation,” or “The first time I read this sentence, it didn’t make sense, so I went back and reread the paragraph. Sometimes rereading can clear up a confusion.” In addition to the modeling, as students read independently and in small groups, teachers support them in developing independence in using monitoring and fix-up strategies. Figure 2–3 lists ten key fix-up strategies that can be modeled and supported in early childhood classrooms.

Visualizing

Christian has just read the poem “Morning Grasses” (George 1997) to her students. Their eyes are closed as they try to visualize the scene the author has portrayed:

CHRISTIAN: Open your eyes and tell what you saw in your head.

JAKE: The grass was frozen. There was little footprints on there, but the grass came up really slow.

Visualizing is a strategy that children use to transport themselves into the worlds of texts. When children visualize, they make pictures in their heads, or create mental images and contexts that are an interlacing of what they have heard or read and what they have experienced in the world. Visualizing involves mentally imagining not only the sights but also the sounds, smells, tastes, physical sensations, and emotions...
Fix-Up Strategies

When I get confused, I can . . .

• Reread to see if the confusion is clarified.

• Read on to see if the confusion is clarified.

• Read the confusing part aloud.

• Read more slowly.

• Check punctuation to see if that clarifies.

• Look carefully at the illustrations.

• Think about whether the text structure or format gives any clues.

• Identify any confusing words. Does the surrounding text help? Is this a creative or figurative use of language? Look for a definition somewhere in the book.

• Talk out the confusion with a friend. Retell the main points and try to identify the specific confusion. Consider whether my purpose will be met if I move on.

• Ask someone for help.
evoked by a reading (Keene and Zimmerman 1997). Consider the language Christian uses in supporting this broad view of visualization: “Keep your eyes closed and look around you. What do you see? Think about what you see . . . smell . . . hear . . . if you feel anything.” Christian’s cues are aimed at helping her students learn to take the time to experience and fully live through the text. Visualization is an important strategy because it helps readers and listeners round out what the author has to say and deeply experience it from their own perspectives.

To get a feel for how you use visualization, read the following passage from *Why Frogs Are Wet* (Hawes 1968, 28–29) and take the time to visualize what is happening. Remember that visualization involves using all of the senses.

A frog’s tongue is different from ours. It is attached to the front of its mouth. It folds back toward its throat. As a frog jumps for an insect, its tongue flips forward. The far end of the tongue has a sticky surface. This sticky end wraps around the insect. The insect sticks to the tongue, and the tongue swings back into the frog’s mouth. The frog throws the insect down its throat. All this takes less than a tenth of a second.

When I read this passage with students, we talk about what we would see, hear, and feel if we could have a close-up view of this event. We use movement, too: we curl up an arm to represent a frog’s tongue and then flip it forward to wrap around the insect before tossing it back down our throats. Such mental and physical activity helps children create a visual, moving picture of what has been read and therefore understand it more thoroughly.

**Connecting**

Connecting is a strategy that involves making (1) personal connections with texts and (2) connections between texts. Connections may happen before, during, and after reading.

**Personal Connections**

*Personal connections* happen when readers link their own knowledge, understandings, and experiences with what they read—and use this linking to construct meaning. When Christian read her students *The Lemon Drop Jar* (Widman 1992), she knew from experience that many of them would make some interesting personal connections. In this story, a young girl visits her Great Aunt Emma, who tells of the special significance behind a treasured lemon drop jar. After reading,
Christian and the children discussed different family traditions that
people around the country and world have and also the traditions that
the children had experienced in their own lives. Christian told the
students that to enrich their understandings of the piece, they could
write about any personal connections they had made. After discussing
and writing about their ideas, Samantha and Cayla told the children
in their literature circles about their connections:

Samantha: A very, very long time ago, I went to my Aunt
Jeanette’s. She gave me a [glass] rabbit to play
with. My mom put it up very high. I climbed
up on my chair and got it down and nothing
broke. My mom said to put it back. Then,
when I was older, my brother asked to see it
and I started crying because I was the one who
did it with my Aunt Jeanette.

Cayla: My grandpa died, and when I see his picture, it
reminds me of when he always gave me one
dollar every time I go to his house.

Personal connections enhance children’s understandings of text by
helping them relate to events and settings and tuning them in to the
joys and tensions of characters. By supporting children in making
personal connections, we help them more deeply understand what
they read.

Connections Between Texts

Connections between texts happen when children make associations
between any two pieces of written language—and use these associa-
tions to build their overall schema for the world. Throughout the
year, with The Lemon Drop Jar and other books (fiction and nonfic-
tion), Christian’s students explored connections between texts as well.
By exploring connections between a number of books about families,
the children gained a strong sense of what makes a family, what fami-
lies do together, the different traditions that families share, and so on.
In this way, focusing on connections between texts enabled them to
develop their schema, or worldview, for the concept of family.

In fact, the students learned about many topics with the help of
making connections between texts. They read a number of texts about
insects, animals, friendship, and famous people. They studied differ-
et genres this way, too, such as stories, poetry, autobiographies, and
biographies. Teachers support their students in developing their
schemas for all kinds of things by supporting their between-text connections.

**Deciding What's Important**

*Deciding what's important* is our next strategy. Books contain many interesting things for children to pay attention to—captivating illustrations, interesting words, funny characters, suspenseful story lines, remarkable human feats, fascinating facts, and so on—but there are times when a reader has a specific purpose in mind, and paying attention to certain ideas or points (rather than those that seem most interesting at the moment) is beneficial. For example, in the earlier example from Christian’s classroom, Max and his peers were seeking interesting information about sharks, but the books also contained information about numerous other aquatic creatures. In that scenario, the children were successful because they developed a strategy for narrowing their focus to what was important in reaching their goals.

How does deciding what’s important work? First, readers’ *goals* and *purposes* always influence their decisions about what is important. Max’s group’s goal was to present interesting facts about sharks. This determined the focus of the children’s reading. If their goal had been, say, to present interesting real-life stories about sharks, they would have focused their attention differently.

Text *structure* helps children decide what’s important, too. When deciding what is important in stories, for example, young children learn to draw from their familiarity with typical story features. They may look for the beginning, middle, and ending; the major plot episodes; or the characters, setting, problem, and resolution. Thinking about story structure helps them think about what’s important. In deciding what is important with nonfiction, readers use different text structures. Nonfiction is often organized in terms of description, cause and effect, comparison, time order, or problem resolution. Figure 2–4 shows some graphic organizers that support children in organizing ideas from nonfiction. With guidance, young children can use these structures to help sort out the most important ideas.

Finally, examining text *features* helps children make decisions about what is important. For example, authors often signal importance with headings, fonts, graphics, illustrations, summary statements, marginal notes, and cue words (such as *first, next, in conclusion, and most important*). When children learn strategies for deciding what’s important, their reading becomes focused and efficient.
Figure 2-4  Graphic Organizers for Nonfiction
Evaluating

Evaluating is our final strategy. Evaluating involves all kinds of cognitive activities, including the following:

- critiquing
- establishing opinions
- considering author intents and viewpoints
- preparing to use and apply new information gained from reading

Because of the broad nature of this strategy, a series of questions to discuss with and model for students will offer the most efficient way to describe it. The Teacher Talk box provides examples.

Teacher Talk: Evaluating Text

- What do you think about this piece? Why? What makes you like it/not like it?
- What do you think of the illustrations? How do they help you understand this text?
- Why do you think the author wrote this? Who should read this? Why?
- What do we know about the author? Do you think that being (in a wheelchair, a woman, Native American) makes a difference in what this author has to say?
- Do you agree with this author’s views?
- Are people from parallel cultures (boys and girls, men and women, people of color) presented realistically or in stereotypical roles?
- Fiction: Do the characters seem real? Is this how (kids, adults, grandmothers) really act/sound? Could this really happen?
- Nonfiction: Is this easy to understand? Why? Does it make sense? Why? What do you think of the examples?
- How can you use this information?
- What do you think of the way the author uses language (such as imagery, alliteration, or rhyme)?

As you can see, evaluation encompasses a diverse range of thinking. As with all of the strategies, the best ways to teach evaluation are to highlight and support student uses of the strategy and to model and think aloud about your own uses as they become relevant to your meaning making.