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Using FIG in Language Arts

OBJECTIVES

- To provide students with an opportunity to practice FIG problem-solving steps on decisions facing characters in literary works
- To provide students with an opportunity to empathize with characters who have experiences and points of view different from their own
- To begin to help students identify "critical points in a story" when characters face a decision to make or a problem to solve
- To introduce and practice FIG methods that can be used in language arts in an ongoing way

MATERIALS

Copies of the following worksheets:

- "FIG TESPN Literature Discussion Guide" (3.27.1)
- "Using FIG to Plan Your Story" (3.27.2)
- "Respond and Revise" (3.27.3)
- "Problem Journal" (3.27.4)
- "Character Choices" (3.27.5)
- "Reading for Problem-Solving" Take-Home (3.27.6)

PREPARATION

Select a short story or a story from the language arts text or a trade book and mark it at a critical point in the story. Identify a "critical point in the story" when the reader has enough information to identify the problem but before the character makes a decision about how to solve it. Plan either to stop at this point if reading aloud or to instruct students to stop reading at this specific point.

A list of stories that have successfully been used in third-grade classrooms. An example of a critical point in the story can be found in the "Tips for Teachers" section of this topic.

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. Conduct a Sharing Circle as part of a language arts lesson.

Ask a question related to the book you are or will be reading. For example, if you are beginning a story, you could briefly introduce the main character and what the story is about, and then ask the children

to share one thing they would like to learn more about or what kind of feelings they think the character might have in this situation.

If you are reading a book aloud in sections, tell children to imagine they could meet one of the characters in the story. Ask:

Who would you most like to meet?

If you could ask or say something to one of the characters in our story, who would you choose and what would you say?

Let the class know that you are going to read the story until characters face a critical point where they have to make a decision or solve a problem. Ask the students to keep the following questions in mind as they hear the story:

How is the character feeling?

What is the problem the character is facing?

2. Go through the story to the identified critical point.

Either read aloud or give students specific instructions regarding where to stop reading. Students can read aloud, read in small groups, or read individually.

3. Lead the class in a discussion.

Use the "FIG TESPN Literature Discussion Guide" (Worksheet 3.27.1) to help the class consider the problem faced by the character. Depending on the maturity of the group, you can distribute copies of the worksheet to familiarize them with the process, which can be used repeatedly in various subject areas.

Use the FIG steps as follows, naming the character where appropriate.

F: Feelings

How is the character feeling? Think of as many feeling words as you can.

I: Identify the problem

What is the problem that the character faces? Describe what is happening as clearly as you can.

G: Goal

What is the character's goal? What does that character want to have happen?

What are some things the character might do to solve this problem?

Return to the story. Compare and contrast students' ideas with what the character chooses to do.

4. Conduct additional practice activities for creative writing and careful reading in everyday lessons.

- a. Incorporate "Using FIG to Plan Your Story" (Worksheet 3.27.2) within creative writing assignments. The worksheet helps students use FIG to storyboard the feelings and identify a problem and a goal for a character they plan to write about.
- b. After students write a story, distribute "Respond and Revise" (Worksheet 3.27.3) and have the students work in pairs or small groups to read and provide feedback to the author. Again, FIG provides a framework for problem solving and constructive criticism as a guide for providing feedback on the author's work.
- c. To vary the way students practice applying FIG steps to think about the point of view of a character in a story, use the "Problem Journal" handout (Worksheet 3.27.4). This handout is designed to be folded into a four-sided booklet. Students are asked to pretend that they are the character in the story and to write what they think the character would write if this was the character's own journal or home diary. The Problem Journal has a cover page, a page with a blank feeling face for students to draw the character's feelings, a page to write the problem or what happened, and then a page to write about what the character wants.
- d. Distribute a copy of "Character Choices" (Worksheet 3.27.5). Assign the reading of another section of the story or a new story and have students complete the worksheet for a new character, specifying the point in the story where they should end their reading. An alternative assignment is to assign a new reading and ask students to identify a critical point in the story when the character is faced with a problem to solve or a decision to make. Ask students to complete the journal as if they were in the shoes of the focal character.

5. Introduce a Reflective Summary.

As outlined in the Introduction, ask students to reflect on the question "What did you learn from today's lesson?" Reinforce key themes, then go over any follow-up work.

6. Follow up.

The following steps will help make sure that the students have a chance to continue working with the new concepts.

Take-Home

Distribute the "Reading for Problem Solving" Take-Home (Worksheet 3.27.6). Let the children know that you are sharing the same questions used during this topic with their parents and guardians to use when

they read at home. Parents and guardians are encouraged to read with their children and use the same problem-solving discussion questions when a character in the story is faced with a problem to solve or decision to make.

An alternative assignment is to send home a cover letter to parents or guardians with a copy of the FIG TESPN Literature Discussion Guide or Character Choices worksheet and ask them to fill the worksheet out with their child as they read a story together. They can also model the problem-solving steps by sharing with their child a story that they are reading that may be of interest to and appropriate for their child.

Plans to Promote Transfer and Generalization of Skill

Continue using the worksheets from this lesson and from the additional practice activities as an ongoing part of language arts lessons and assignments. Multiple and varied opportunities to practice using problem-solving steps will help your students internalize these skills.

Academic Activities

Continue to look for critical points in situations when a decision needs to be made or a problem solved in other academic topics such as math, health, or science. Take time to identify this point and ask, "How is the person feeling?" (Or, "How are you feeling?") "What is the problem? What is the goal?" Brainstorm different ideas about how the problem will be solved, as time allows, before moving on to find out how another person decides to solve a problem or how the children engage in solving the problem themselves.

Real-Life Activities

1. Look for opportunities to point out to children times when they or the class are facing a critical point. Stopping to point out that a problem or decision-making situation is occurring is the most powerful way to illustrate that the critical thinking and problem-solving skills they are learning in the classroom and practicing in academic subject areas can also be applied in daily life.
2. The Problem Journal can be used in real-life situations as a way to share a point of view with another person or as a personal journal to help children clarify their thinking about a problem. Teachers can use the Problem Journal to provide students with constructive criticism in an unobtrusive way. This also provides adult modeling of the use of FIG to help solve a problem or make things better.

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

1. The FIG steps can also be used to promote literacy and critical thinking about characters in other media, such as television shows, videos, and movies.
2. In some stories, there may be more than one character with a significant point of view at the place you choose to stop reading. In this case, you can assign different members of the class different characters to focus on in developing a FIG. Discuss the similarities and differences in how each character perceives the same situation.

If the situation chosen involves a problem of bullying, assign students to develop a FIG for the victim, the bully, and any bystanders who may be present.

3. Examples of "critical points" in stories used in third grade are as follows.

Bullying

The Recess Queen, by Alexis O'Neill and Laura Huliska-Beith

A critical point in the story takes place when Queen Jean catches up with Katie Sue after charging after her on the playground and lets her know that no one swings or kicks or bounces until after she (Queen Jean) does. Stop after "and she figured that would set the record straight." Develop a FIG from the point of view of Katie Sue, Queen Jean, and the other children who were bystanders.

Internal Conflict and Survival

The Sign of the Beaver, by Elizabeth George Speare

A critical point in this story comes when a thirteen-year-old boy named Matt talks with some American Indians (a friend named Attean, in particular), who ask him to join their clan rather than stay to guard his family's cabin in the wilderness. Matt has been left by his father to guard their newly built cabin while he goes to get the family. Dad is gone longer than expected, and Matt meets Attean, who teaches him to survive in the woods and talks about his way of life and problems facing his Beaver Clan. At this critical moment, many points of view can be assigned for developing FIG. The concept of an internal conflict can be introduced by having students do a FIG for the side of Matt that would like to go away with the Indians and the side of Matt that would like to stay and guard his family's cabin. FIG statements can also be generated from the points of view of Attean and of the father if he learns that Matt chooses to leave.

Hatchet, by Gary Paulsen

A critical point in this story occurs when Brian, who is troubled by his parents' divorce, is in a plane crash while on the way to visit

his father. Stop at the point when he is trying to decide if he should or should not dive to the bottom of the lake where the crashed plane and dead pilot are. Again, students can develop a FIG for two points of view, using the voice of Brian. What are the feelings, problem, and goal he might have, considering both options?

Friend Trouble

Ruby the Copycat, by Peggy Rathmann

A critical point to stop in this book is when Ruby stands behind her new friend, Angela, and recites a poem that is very similar to one that Angela wrote and just read to the class. The teacher, Miss Hart, says about Ruby's poem, "What a coincidence." At this point in the story, Ruby has copied what Angela does many times. Students can develop a FIG that considers the points of view of Angela, Ruby, and the teacher.

Prejudice and Stereotyping

Felita, by Nicholas Mohr

Felita is a girl from a biracial family that has moved to a new neighborhood because the parents value a good education for their children. One critical point in the story occurs when Felita has been the victim of discrimination and racial slurs and tells her mother that she wants to return to their old neighborhood. Develop a FIG from the point of view of the mother, Felita, and the other children.

Molly's Pilgrim, by Barbara Cohen

A critical point in this story is when Molly tells her mother that other children are making fun of her because she is different. Develop a FIG from the point of view of the mother, Molly, and the other children.

Problem Solving

Holes, by Louis Sachar

Stanley is an unlucky boy from a family with a history of bad luck who ends up at a juvenile detention center for an unlikely crime. A critical point in the story is when Stanley finds a gold tube while working on the 5' x 5' hole that each boy at the camp must dig each day. When he arrived at the camp he was told that they were digging holes all day to build character. They were also told that if they ever found anything interesting and gave it to the warden, they would be given a day off. To maintain his social status in the group of boys, Stanley allowed another boy (called X-Ray) to claim the find and get the day off. In addition, the warden appeared for the first time and treated the boys better than on any other day but had them change their routine to work together in the area where she thought X-Ray had found the gold tube. Stop right before you get to the end of chapter 15, where the warden calls a halt for the day and says that since it has taken this long to find

the tube, she can wait another day. Do a FIG for Stanley. It is possible at this point to do one for the immediate situation and for the general situation he finds himself in.

Be a Perfect Person in Just Three Days! by Stephen Manes

Milo finds a book called *Be a Perfect Person in Just Three Days!* when it falls off the top shelf in the library. He decides that it is worth a try, but what the book tells him to do on the first day is to wear a stalk of broccoli around his neck for the first twenty-four hours. Do a FIG from Milo's point of view when he reads about his first assignment.

Student _____ Date _____

The character I am thinking about is named _____.

F: Find the FEELINGS

How is _____ feeling? Think of as many feelings words as you can.

I: IDENTIFY the problem

What is the problem that _____ faces? Describe what is happening as clearly as you can.

G: Guide yourself with a GOAL

What is _____ 's GOAL? What does _____ want to have happen?

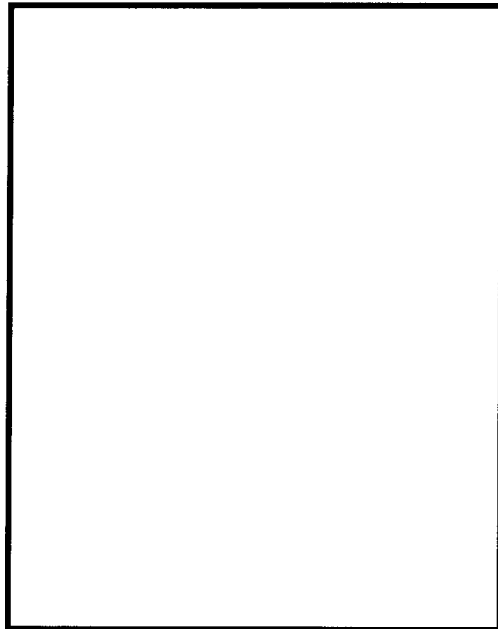
What are some things that you might do to solve this problem?

Now go back to this problem and continue reading to find out what happens.

Student _____ Date _____

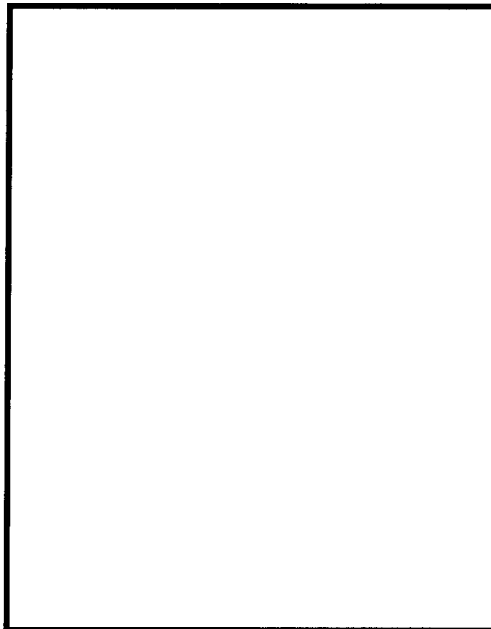
Main character in my story _____

FEELINGS



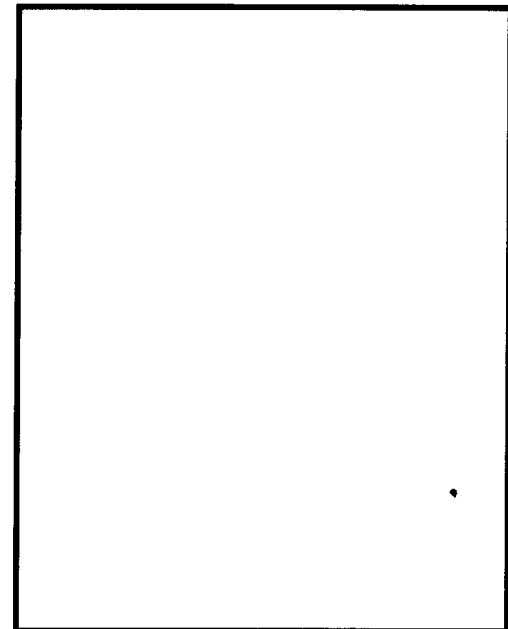
How is the character feeling?

IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM



What is the problem?

GOAL



What does the character want to have happen?

Author's name _____ **Reviewer's name** _____

Reviewer

1. How did you feel about what you read?

2. In one or two sentences, tell what the writing is about.

3. What was the author's goal for this piece of writing?

4. What could be added to help you understand the writing better? Think about what was expected for this assignment.

5. Plan some changes that you might make in this writing and write them down.

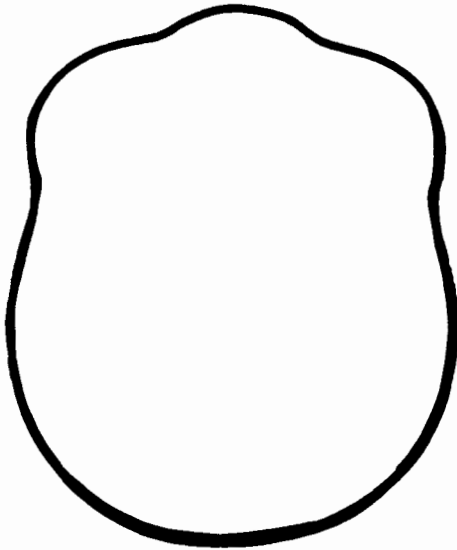
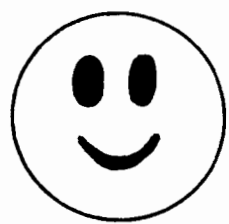
6. Now hand this work back to its author.

Author

After your writing has been reviewed, think about how you could make it even better. Write down improvements you will make. Now rewrite your paragraph on the back of this page, including these new ideas.

Problem

Feeling

	
<p>I want . . .</p> 	<p>PROBLEM JOURNAL</p> <p>Name _____</p>

Student _____ **Date** _____

My character _____

1. How was the character feeling?

2. What was the problem?

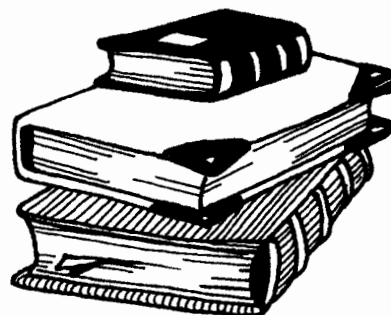
3. What did the character want?

4. How was the problem solved?

5. How else could the problem have been solved?

Reading for Problem Solving

Our class is learning about how to solve problems and make decisions. You can help your child practice these important skills at home while reading stories.



Before starting a story, ask your child to keep the following question in mind:

How do the people in the story feel, and what makes them feel that way?

As you read, stop at times to ask:

What do you think _____ is feeling?

What is the problem or decision _____ is facing?

What is _____'s goal? What does _____ want to have happen?

What ideas do you have about how _____ might solve this problem?

Say: Now let's go back to the story and see what _____ decides to do.

After finishing the story, ask:

What was the solution that _____ chose to solve the problem? How well did it work?

Now that you've learned what happened, would you have handled this situation any differently? If so, what would you have done?

Your child may be asked in class to share what happened when you practiced this activity.

Thank you!

(Teacher signature)

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(Please sign and return this bottom section.)

Reading 3.27.6

Student _____ **Date** _____

We used these questions. Yes No

Comments:

(Signature of parent or guardian)