Writing: Informative Text

Introduce the Text Type

Talk with students about informative text and say: *We read informative text almost every day. Informative text includes things like news articles, research and lab reports, manuals, and textbooks. When we write about informative texts, we extend our learning. Informative writing helps us apply what we've learned to create new ideas, increase our understanding of source texts, and explain key connections.*

Determine Features

Have available several samples of informative writing such as news articles, travel brochures, fact sheets, and so on. Allow time for students to examine the samples. Then say: *These samples of informative text are each written to provide information about a topic. Even though these texts are different, they have some features in common. I notice that all of them have a structure that groups related information logically.* Begin a list—Features of Informative Text—and add to the list: structure that groups related information logically.

Ask students what other features they notice in the samples. Have them turn and talk to discuss with partners. Then add their ideas to the features list. The list might include:

- structure that groups information logically
- headings, illustrations, and multimedia
- an opening that captures the reader's attention
- facts, definitions, and other information to explain the topic
- domain-specific and technical terms that relate to the topic
- a strong ending that leaves readers with a sense of completion and closure

Introduce the Assignment

Introduce with a prompt *After reading a topical text, answer the question: What does the author really want me to know about this topic?*

Let's use America in the Time of Pocahontas: The Story of Our Nation from Coast to Coast, from 1590 to 1754 *as the topical text. I can predict by the title (and the subtitle) that the topic is U.S. history. The author used Pocahontas as a starting point, but the subtitle tells me that the book will have a broader focus. What does the author really want me to know? In order to figure that out, I can categorize the information—including facts, definitions, quotations, and so on—to help me understand the author's topic.*

Model sorting information from the section titled "The Mayflower Arrives" (pp. 18–19) using a web-type graphic organizer. Include information embedded in text features and graphics. Then have students work in pairs or small groups to examine a different section of the text, listing facts, details, and ideas as they read the section together.

When students have completed the webs, ask volunteers to identify key categories and ideas that seem important. Ask: *How do your categories connect to and reflect the key ideas in the text?*

Model the Writing

Begin a model informative summary that demonstrates a strong opening and one key idea contained in the text.

Say: *I am going to focus my summary on the section of the text that begins on page 18: "The Mayflower Arrives." I am writing a summary, so I want to include big ideas— the same big ideas used in the text—to provide a focus for the writing:*

Most of us know that the Pilgrims came to America in 1620 to find religious freedom. They established self government.

Notice that I provided two big ideas from the text. Those are the ideas I will develop in my writing. It's important to group information logically when writing informative texts because a logical structure helps the reader understand your ideas. The structure of informative writing should be preplanned so that the ideas are presented with clarity and coherence.

My focus is on the Pilgrim's desire for religious freedom and on the fact that they established self-government. I am going to create a subheading for each of these two main sections. One heading will be "Religious Freedom," and the other will be "Self-government." Then, under each heading, I will write a paragraph that has a strong topic sentence, and I will provide details such as facts and direct quotes from the text.

Give students a few moments to work on their webs. Then bring students together and briefly discuss some of the facts they have added to their webs. Following that discussion, think aloud as you create a conclusion.

> Most of us know that the Pilgrims came to America in 1620 to find religious freedom. They established self-government.
>
> Religious Freedom
> The Pilgrims left England in order to practice religious freedom. English citizens were required to be members of the Church of England, but not everybody agreed with the church. The Pilgrims were part of a group called Puritans that did not agree with the church. According to page 18 in the book ...

> The Mayflower arrived in America in 1620, filled with Pilgrims set on finding religious freedom. The Pilgrims also created documents to support their self-government. These ideas—religious freedom and self-government—continue to be important in the United States to this day.

Support Writers

Display your modeled writing alongside the features list. Then instruct students to begin informative summaries of their own based on the key ideas they identified while completing their webs.

Students should develop their summaries with facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, and/or other information from the text or another source they have used for research. As students work on their informative summaries, circulate to assist them. Share strong examples with the class.

Revise

Display your model summary along with the features list that you created with students. Say: *Now that you've written your informative summary, it's time to revise and edit. Revising means taking a careful look at the content of our writing. We want to be sure our ideas make sense. One way we can help our facts make sense is to use connecting words to show how they are related. We might also find places in our writing that need more explanation. In that situation, we can add facts and details.*

I'm taking a closer look at the first two sentences of my introduction: Most of us know that the Pilgrims came to America in 1620 to find religious freedom. They established self government. I realize now that I want to revise these sentences. The sentences seem disconnected from each other. I can use a phrase to show how the sentences are related. Because they seem to contradict each other, I am going to show that contradiction with a connecting word.

Model for students the following ways to show contradiction between the two sentences:

- Most of us know that the Pilgrims came to America in 1620 to find religious freedom, <u>but</u> most people don't know that they also established self-government.

- <u>Although</u> most of us know that the Pilgrims came to America in 1620 to find religious freedom, most people don't know that they also established self-government.

- Most of us know that the Pilgrims came to America in 1620 to find religious freedom; <u>however</u>, most people don't know that they also established self-government.

Turn revising over to partners. Have them read each other's work, focusing on providing enough information and showing how facts are connected. Direct them to return to the features list as a checking point for their summaries.

Edit

Let students know that, when we edit, we make sure that our writing will make sense to readers. We look for errors in spelling, capital letters, and so on.

If you have developed an editing checklist for students' use, distribute it now. The checklist will likely include one or more of the following conventions:

- *Complete sentences and sentence variety:* Model how to check sentences for subjects and verbs to ensure that they are complete. In addition, encourage students to use a variety of sentence types—simple, compound, and complex—to help their writing flow smoothly.

- *Verb tense::* Remind students that verb tense reflects whether action took place in the past, takes place in the present, or will take place in the future. In Grade 5 students should be using the past and present tenses effectively, and they should begin using the progressive tenses as well, in order to show that some events <u>were happening</u> over time, <u>are happening</u> over time, or <u>will be happening</u> over time. Model checking verb tense in your own summary, adding a progressive verb if you find an opportunity to do so.

- *Spelling:* Share strategies for spelling, such as word families, spelling rules, using reference sources, and so on.

Share and Reflect

Allow time for students to share their completed summaries. Have them point out what other writers have done well. Be sure to note the strengths in students' writing to reinforce their successful use of strategies. Then have students share their summaries by publishing them on a class wiki.

As students read and write about additional social studies texts, they can add to the wiki to create a classroom collection of social studies knowledge and expertise.

Then ask questions to help guide students' reflection:

- For what purpose do we write informative texts?
- Why is it important to categorize information in informative writing?
- What information from the text did you use to develop your topic? How did you decide which information to include?
- How do you feel about your knowledge of the topic? Can you explain how the writing extended your learning?
- Suppose that a friend asks you for tips on writing informative text. What advice would you give?

Extend Student Thinking

Use these ideas to extend student thinking about informative text and to give them additional practice:

- When students know that a real audience will read what they have written, they will be more invested in the quality of the final product. If publishing on a wiki page is not possible, consider creating a book to share with other classes.
- Have students consider what text features might strengthen informative writing. They might, for example, add headings to emphasize the logical grouping of the information or add bold words in order to emphasize important vocabulary.
- Work with students to think of other opportunities to practice this type of writing, such as creating chapter summaries and oral reports. Remind them that informative writing extends and deepens their learning.
- Have students read various texts related to one topic. Then have them create informative digital presentations to share with the class.
- Direct students to use an idea web to categorize information not only to prepare for writing but any time they need to deepen their understanding of information—such as when they are preparing for social studies tests.
- Have students return to a previously written informative piece to evaluate the opening and closing, making sure there is a logical structure and ensuring that the reasons have been elaborated.
- Give students pieces of informative text—such as science articles, news articles, and history-fair presentations—to evaluate. How do the writers present the information? What makes one text more interesting than another? How could the writer have improved the work? Allow time for students to share their insights.