

Teaching a Revision Strategy: Zooming In

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Background

The revision strategy Silvia is teaching her students goes by many names: Barry Lane, author of *After THE END*, calls it “exploding a moment” and “snapshots”; other sources refer to it as “adding detail” or “slowing the action.” Silvia intentionally declines to name the strategy, preferring to allow her students to do so. Silvia believes that once the students have come up with their own name for a strategy, it becomes part of the culture of the class, and the students are more likely to use it in their own writing and suggest it to each other during conferences. In previous years, Silvia’s students have named the strategy “zooming in.”

In introducing the strategy to her students, Silvia uses authentic examples from children’s literature, her own writing, and writing by her former students. She also provides opportunities for students to learn in different modes — by drawing, talking to peers, moving their bodies, etc.

Instruction and Activities

Day One

Silvia introduces the strategy on the first day using excerpts from familiar children’s books and her own writing to illustrate how a writer can move closer in on the action. Each student has a handout with the passages on it, and Silvia also has it up on the overhead projector. As she reads the passages, Silvia asks the students to visualize what the characters are doing and then discuss with their neighbors what they see. She specifically asks them not to think of the illustrations from the books.

Silvia begins with an excerpt from *The Polar Express* by Chris Van Allsburg. After the students talk among themselves, Silvia has some of them share what their group saw in their minds while reading the passages. Silvia asks questions about how much action they could see from the beginning of the passage to the point where the conductor removes a watch from his pocket. She asks one student to stand and demonstrate which part of the conductor’s body he was able to see when the conductor was holding his pocket watch.

As Silvia repeats the exercise with other passages, she reinforces what the students are describing: that the author keeps moving closer and closer to what is being described. (The additional excerpts are from *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan, and a piece of Silvia’s writing.) Silvia then shares several illustrations of the scene from her story, done by one of her former students. The illustrations clearly show how the scene starts far away and then moves closer in.

Next, Silvia has the students divide a blank piece of paper into three sections. On the overhead projector, Silvia shows the students an illustration from the familiar children’s book *Too Many Tamales* by Gary Soto. (In the illustration, a mother and daughter are sitting next to each other in front of a Christmas tree.) Silvia starts with the full illustration, and the students write a description in the first section. Then Silvia covers half of the illustration, and the students write a description of what they see. Finally, Silvia covers all but the mother’s hand, and the students write their descriptions.

The lesson ends with the students sharing their descriptions with their neighbors.

Day Two

After reviewing what the students learned the previous day, Silvia begins with an excerpt from the book *Charlotte's Web* by E. B. White. She provides students with another handout to use to illustrate the passage. The passage is divided into three stages, starting with a view of the barn door and moving in to a close-up of Charlotte. She asks students to draw a picture of each stage.

After the students have finished, Silvia has them move around the classroom to look at each other's drawings, noticing how the pictures "zoom in" from one stage to the next.

Next, Silvia reads a story written by a sixth-grade student she had the previous year. After reading the story, Silvia displays a paragraph on the overhead projector, in which the author "zoomed in" on the action. Silvia describes a writing conference she had with the student about the piece. The student said she wanted to use a "zoom in," and they brainstormed places in the story where a "zoom in" would add interest to the story.

Silvia asks the students to go to a story in their writer's notebooks and find a place where they can "zoom in." (The students have been instructed to write on only the right-hand page of their notebooks so that they have room on the facing page to add revisions or try new strategies.) She suggests that the students talk to a partner about where they might "zoom in" before they start writing.

After the students have tried the strategy, Silvia asks some of them to read their revised work. Then the class discusses how the writer "zoomed in" on the action.

Finally, the students begin to think about what they will name the strategy. They make several suggestions, but Silvia tables the discussion until later in the week, giving the students more time to think about it and practice using the strategy.

The Polar Express

By Chris Van Allsburg

“A conductor stood at the open door of one of the cars. He took a large pocket watch from his vest, then looked up at the window.”

Esperanza Rising

By Pam Muñoz Ryan

“I looked out the window to see six men, their faces covered with handkerchiefs, and they all held rifles.”

“Josephina spread a blanket on the ground then unwrapped a bundle of burritos, avocado, and grapes.”

“The Bees”

By Silvia Edgerton

“Poncho stood in the open alfalfa field next to the 16 white wooden boxes. The boxes were stacked in pyramid form. Slowly Poncho opened one box and pulled a long column. The honey slid gently down the side of the column like molten lava until it landed on the ground.”

Charlotte's Web
By E.B. White

<p>“Stretched across the upper part of the doorway was a big spider web,</p>	<p>and hanging down from the top of the web, head down, was a large grey spider. She was about the size of a gumdrop.</p>	<p>She had eight legs, and she was waving one of them at Wilbur in friendly greeting.”</p>