

READING WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES

Expanding Academic Language Video Transcript

Miroslaba Velo:

We call these transitions. These are some examples of transitions that you can use today when you write your paragraph. Talk to your partner about what you notice on this blue sheet.

I started to realize that a lot of the students didn't have a variety of academic language for transition starters.

Student:

When you start the paragraph, we use this one, which is that one, right?

Student:

Farther, more.

Velo:

I kept reading "For example," "In conclusion." And that's all they would use, and I just wanted to give them something else that they can refer to so they can expand their academic vocabulary. Just by providing this their writing is going to improve so much more.

Student:

First treaty between Cherokee and the United States established peaceful relations.

Velo:

Okay, so the word "treaty." Treaty is an agreement. So in 1785, there were agreements between the Cherokee and...

With students whose English is not their primary language, really the first layer is just the basic vocabulary. And then I think after that step is comprehension. Are kids able to comprehend at a sentence level? Paragraph level? Even a section level.

And what do we know about this agreement? It's, what? Is it...? It's peaceful.

Then you can ask students to start looking for the argument or the claims, and then the evidence. You will not be able to get to that until the kids understand vocab and can summarize what they're reading.

Student:

However, the federal government could only buy land through treaty.

Velo:

Okay, key word here, "ceded." You might not know what this means. Ceded means "to give."

I think in the timeline, you can see that I was trying to do that layer process. I'm defining vocab word that I think are key for them to understand. So for example, "ceded" – for them to understand that this is giving or taking away. It may seem simple to us, but for a student whose English is not their first language, they might not know what it means.

Student:

Chickasaw, Seminole, Choctaw, and Cherokee.

Velo:

Okay, so here's the word "civilized" again, and I'm going to give you the definition of civilization. In that time, to be civilized would mean to be able to write, to be Christians.

I don't try to define everything and that's why I like to do context clues so that they can try to understand what they're reading.

Evan:

While I'm reading, I just try to circle the words that I don't know. I try to figure out the meaning of that word from the, like, the sentence before that word or something that came after.

Velo:

I'm trying to make sure that they comprehend what they're reading. So on some of the dates where there's more information, I try to have them kind of summarize on the side what it is that it's saying.

Seena, can you read the same year what happened to Georgia?

Seena:

Georgia, it states power over Cherokee Nation and nullified...

Velo:

It's a difficult process because there's 30-plus kids and there's one of you, and that's why I still have them talk with each other.

Okay, so talk to a partner. What does this mean right here?

Evan:

It's not okay for Cherokees to stay in Georgia. Remove them.

Student:

Yeah, remove them.

Velo:

And that way they're not put on the spot, but they have a chance to practice. It reduces their anxiety to speak in the class and they feel much more comfortable.

I see that some groups had a hard time understanding this date. This relationship where we've been peaceful, we respect each other, has it changed now here? How so?

Student:

It's getting bad.

Velo:

Okay, getting bad for who?

Student:

The Cherokees.

Velo:

Okay, so the Cherokee...

I also wanted them to see that as time passed, the relationship between the Native Americans and the Americans was also evolving. I think it's hard when you give a student, "Here's the timeline, read through it," and that's it. There's so many layers to unfold for them to understand the complexity of history, and that's really what I was trying to do for them.

Student:

And after then, they still had a good relationship.

Student:

Go seize the 4,000 Cherokees, people that...

Velo:

To do what?

Student:

Buy land.

Velo:

English Language Learner class, obviously I want my kids to be able to be better English speakers, be better English writers, and so with those goals, I really try to do some backwards planning. What's my final product going to look like? So therefore, what skills do I need to teach? By the time I get to the end of the year, they're able to write a full research paper. All the thinking and preparation and planning and knowing where you're going, that makes a teacher much more successful in the classroom.