Smart Strategies For Understanding Text

Informational Text:

The topics for informational text are varied and often unfamiliar to students. Readers will find elections are taken from historical events, technology, diverse cultures, various sciences, medicine, animals, and important people.

5WH has proven to be helpful for identifying key details and directing readers focus to important understandings. This strategy guides students to ask pertinent questions when reading, find evidence, and analyze the information to support meaning making. The 5Ws are: **Who, What, When, Where, Why**. The **H is How.** Teach students to convert titles and headings to a question using 5WH.

Before attempting to convert a title to a 5WH question, students must search for clues in the form of photos, illustrations, and text features. For example, the title of a STAAR selection entitled *The Story Behind the Crunch* is meaningless unless students example the two photographs and and a text box. The photos show potatoes and potato chips, and the text box is a recipe for making potato chips at home.

Knowing that the selection is about potato chips enables the reader to convert the misdirective title to one that makes sense: *The Story Behind The Potato Chip.*

COACHING TIPS AND INSTRUCTIONAL MOVES

Nonfiction

· Begin by having students look for clues in the title, graphics, and text features before the text is read. Most STAAR selection titles are vague or misleading.
· Apply **WHAT** or **WHO** for changing the title to a question. The other Ws or H typically do not sound right or make sense.
· For people, animals, and insects the **WHO** question typically works well; whereas for other topics **WHAT** seems to work most often.
· Nonfiction requires identifying, cumulating(collecting) holding on to key details. Teach short note taking. I am not a big fan of underlining because the underlined words are not the students words. Trying to hold on to something that is written in language the reader may not use often results in forgetting or confusion.
· Teach students that when the topic of the selection involves something that happened in the past, that they must notice and note **HOW or WHY** the event happened; or, if it was an invention why it came about. There will be a question asking about that on the test.
· When the topic centers on a culture, people, or animals, the reader must notice and note the reasons why the people or animals acted or did things that way. What was important about the traditions, actions or behaviors.
· If the topic involves science, technology, or medicine, students must notice and note the reasons why that something was important and how did it benefit society.
· Teach that when reading nonfiction the reader's job is to locate and **hold on to** the Jump Out details and avoid holding on to details that do not answer the 5WH question.

Fiction

- Reading fiction requires analyzing the character. To analyze the character, readers must notice and think about character **actions, interactions, feelings, motives, and change.** Each of these clues reveal something about character traits or character motives or problem solves.
- Setting can be very important. Readers must notice and note if the setting influences the character or reveals if it causes a part or all of the problem.
- Fiction also requires anticipating/predicting/inferring the hidden meaning behind each of the clues listed above that authors purposefully build into fictional works.

More Coaching Tips

- Teach that STAAR Questions are not presented in the same sequence as the text is written.
- Teach that STAAR Questions and answer choices often use language that is unfamiliar. Students must be taught directly and explicitly what the question is asking.
- When a STAAR Question asks the reader to determine what a section or the entire selection is mostly about, this means synthesizing the important details.
- More often that is considered, a verb in the answer will be the clue to the correct response.
- To untangled key details from the morass of details in each paragraph teach students to ask the 5WH questions **for each paragraph in the selection** and then **generalize** these details into a concept or idea the links the details together. **This move is critical for text that does not have headings.**

Example of Collecting(Cumulating) the Key Details

- Begin by modeling how to **synthesize information by collecting the key details made apparent by answering the 5WH question for each paragraph. Then teach how to make a generalization from these details.**

Question 20 for *The Story Behind The Crunch* asks readers, "What is the section entitled 'An Accidental Success' mainly about?(potato chips were not invented on purpose. It was an accident explained in the section made up of three paragraphs.

· Potato Chips were not invented on purpose.
· A dissatisfied man sent potatoes that were too cut thick back to the kitchen twice. The chef cut the third batch paper thin thinking the man would not like them. The man was pleased with thinly sliced and tasty new dish.
· Potato chips became popular and placed on restaurant menus.

To teach students how to generalize and correctly answer the question above, students must know that they must cumulate the key details from each paragraph. They must understand that potato chips did not exist before the chef, George Crum, cut the potato wickedly thin to teach the dissatisfied customer a lesson. They must gather the facts and reach the understanding that the section was mostly about how potato chips were invented.

Modeling The Process

- **Begin by modeling the pre-reading protocol:** Search the selection for clues. The titles for STAAR selections often do not help the reader. Most titles are vague, at best, and often mis-

leading. For example, *A Remarkable Road Trip* details how the first cross country trip by automobile was made. The title often only takes on meaning after reading the selection. The reader must first scan the text searching for details- names, dates, setting, and text features such as captions, photographs, and other text features.

- The next step is to notice is to change the title into a 5WH question.
- Then it becomes easier for the reader to notice and name the "Jump Out" that identifies what the selection is about.
- Determine if the selection takes place in the past, or if the content addresses current events.
- Historical selections typically include sections that describe the reasons for how or why the invention or event was created. There will likely be a **STAAR Question for for why or how something was invented.**
- If the topic is historical, search for reasons the event or invention was important; or, how the invention proved to be beneficial changing and improving the way people lived or generally benefitted.
- Notice and note the evolution of how the invention happened. For example, the selection tracing the invention of the potato chip discussed how the chip started in a restaurant, then found its way into to general stores, and finally how the packaging evolved to what we know today.
- **A STAAR question was asked about each event noted above.**
- Teach students to cumulate the Jump Out ideas for each section. There generally are important details for each paragraph in the section that must be synthesized to respond to a question.

Introduce STAAR Questions

When students are ready, introduce STAAR questions and answer choices and Teach:

· Questions do not follow the chronology of the selection.

· Inform students that if a question asks about which sentence among the answer choices is best- that all the sentences in the answer choices are found in the selection.

· Verbs are important to notice and note often differentiating between the two good choices.