



# GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS AND HOW TO USE THEM

*“A graphic organizer is a visual diagram that shows the relationships among a number of ideas. Use graphic organizers to help students see the important interrelationships in the information they are reading or to become aware of the way authors have structured a text. These insights help students with their own writing as well as reading.”*

(Fountas & Pinnell, *Guiding Readers and Writers, Grades 3–6: Teaching for Comprehension, Genre, and Content Literacy*, Heinemann, 2001, p. 441.)

Graphic organizers can be very useful in helping readers access and organize information. They can support readers' understanding of texts by helping them record, reflect on, and expand their thinking. They are best used as tools to support discussion. The true purpose of an organizer is to support thinking.

As useful as they are, we offer some cautions in using graphic organizers. When assigned as “worksheets,” they are tedious and ineffective and they should not be overused. None of us would want to complete a diagram on everything we read! Also, be sure that the graphic organizer you use is appropriate for your particular students. Students need many opportunities to talk about texts before completing a graphic organizer independently.

Young children can help prepare simple graphic organizers through shared and interactive writing. For example, they can generate words to describe a character while you make a “web” on a piece of chart paper. They can compare two versions of the same folktale as you write their comments in two columns on a chart. When you have finished an activity like this, you have created a graphic organizer before their eyes. Referring to these charts over several days will help students remember how they analyzed a text. Children who have many experiences like these will be ready to use graphic organizers extensively in upper elementary grades and middle school.

## **For every type of graphic organizer you use:**

- Select it carefully to serve your goals for comprehending.
- Use the form first with the whole group or a small group—demonstrate it on a chart or with a projected image.
- Demonstrate the form several times before expecting students to use it independently.
- Have students work in pairs before expecting them to fill out an organizer independently.
- Be sure there is discussion based on the graphic organizer so that students can see how it helps them (that it's not simply an assignment).

In this collection are graphic organizers that support your students' thinking in the following areas.

## **Recording, Remembering, and Reflecting on One's Thinking**

### **Tools to help readers:**

- Record their responses to particular aspects of a text (language, character, story problem, etc.) for later discussion or writing.
- Record interesting information and thinking while reading a text that will help them remember details that serve as evidence for thinking.

## **Making Connections Across Texts**

### **Tools to help readers:**

- Notice elements (topics, language, themes) that are similar across texts.
- Use information from one text to understand another text.
- Connect characters by trait across texts.

## **Analyzing Texts to Notice Structure**

### **Tools to help readers:**

- Understand the organization of fiction—beginning, middle, and end.
- Understand the rising and falling action of fiction.
- Represent the way events and information are presented in both fiction and nonfiction.
- Notice, understand, and learn from the underlying structures in nonfiction: comparison/contrast, temporal sequence, problem/solution, description, cause/effect.

## **Thinking Analytically About Literary Elements in Fiction**

### **Tools to help readers:**

- Notice and use character traits to infer characters' motives, feelings, beliefs, and reasons for actions.
- Understand the setting, its characteristics, and its influence on the story.
- Understand the development of the plot.
- Understand the problem and solution.

## **Analyzing Texts to Notice the Writer's Craft**

### **Tools to help readers:**

- Notice the language that writers use and record responses to it.
- Notice how writers begin and end their stories.
- Notice language that evokes sensory images.
- Notice how writers show movement through time or gaps in time.
- Notice and record how writers reveal characters.

## **Noticing and Learning New Vocabulary**

### **Tools to help readers:**

- Notice and record new and interesting words during or after reading.
- Notice and record new meanings for known words during or after reading.
- Notice and record evidence within the text that helps define new words.