

The Story Play Unit of Study (Chapter 4) in *A Quick Guide to Boosting English Acquisition in Choice Time* teaches children to retell, interpret, and revise their favorite stories in choice time workshop stations. Using favorite read alouds, independent reading books, and stories from their own lives, children develop higher level comprehension skills and revision strategies through drama, art, and construction materials. The following minilessons provide suggested teaching points that support the four broad categories discussed in the book:

- retelling favorite stories in stations
- retelling with detail
- retelling with a focus on story elements
- retelling in multiple modalities

We hope you find them useful!

Story Play Minilessons

Retelling Favorite Stories in Stations

As we listen to conversations around us and to the stories that people tell, it is evident that retelling plays a vital part in comprehension, communicating with others, and understanding the world. Retelling is frequently the way we check in on kids' comprehension as we are assessing their reading. When children are making meaning by retelling through art, drama, and construction, they are engaging in thinking that will deepen their understanding of the books they read and the stories they write.

- *We can remember the stories we love by retelling them in our stations. We can act them out in drama and re-create them in blocks and in art.*

This minilesson teaches children to retell their favorite books. Hearing repeated readings of a story is an important scaffold for English language learners (ELLs). Carefully selected emergent storybooks provide clear pictures that support the story and the retelling. (See Figure 4.2.)

- *We can choose a story and then plan to retell it by thinking about what happened in the beginning, in the middle, and at the end.*

Kids often retell by telling what happened last in the story. This minilesson teaches children that sequencing events is an important strategy in telling a story that makes sense. You may want to repeat this lesson a few times using different stations to highlight your teaching point. It's important to scaffold the lesson with copies of illustrations from an emergent storybook placed on a large graphic organizer that has sections for the beginning, middle, and end.

- *We can plan our work in the stations by asking, "What is our favorite or the most important scene? Why is it our favorite or the most important scene?"*

This lesson teaches students how to determine importance in a story just like they do when they read and write their own Small Moment or focused personal narratives. Anthony and Sean loved the first scene in *Corduroy* (Freeman 1968), when Lisa's mom tells her that they can't afford to buy Corduroy that day, so the boys built the scene in the block station, making toy shelves and other items in the toy store, and then acted out this scene. (See Figure 4.3.)

- *We can plan for how our drama projects will go by deciding who will act out each part.*

After children have chosen a scene to act out in the drama station, encourage them to decide who will act out each part and why. Angel said that he wanted to be the little billy goat because he had an older brother who took care of him. He said that he knew how a little brother would act. Angel was using his prior experiences to connect and empathize with the character, which leads to deeper comprehension. This is equally important when creating a block structure or a mural on large butcher paper. Teaching children to plan for their work collaboratively is an important habit of mind that carries across all parts of the day.

Retelling with Detail

This part of the unit gives children strategies to make their retellings richer and more complex.

- *We can step back from our work, make a picture in our mind, and think, “How can I make this better?”*

In this minilesson, we teach children to close their eyes and envision how they might make their work better by making a movie in their mind about their project. We might ask children to consider whether the movie in their mind looks the same as their project and what they could add to their project to make it match their mind picture. When modeling this minilesson, display a visual that illustrates “the movie in my mind,” which will serve as a scaffold for ELLs and connect this concept to the work children are doing in writing workshop.

- *We can make our projects better by asking, “What do you think I can add to my work?”*

Often others can provide feedback and ideas to make our work better in ways that we have not imagined. This minilesson teaches children how to collaborate and to seek ideas and opinions from others. We might role-play with a student in this minilesson, using gestures and facial expressions while asking for feedback.

- *Another way we can make projects better is by referring back to the book to see what other details to add.*

Rereading is an important habit in writing workshop and reading workshop. In this minilesson, we ask children to refer back to their books to see what other details can be added. Although we have distinct stations in choice time workshop, we want to teach children that they can use materials from any station to make their work better. When Samuel and Cahle reread *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* (Galdone 1981), they noticed that the troll had a chain around his waist.

They were acting out the story in dramatic play, but they used materials in the art station to make the chain. This minilesson should be done in the stations so that ELLs can see and touch the materials.

Retelling with a Focus on Story Elements

It's such a joy to watch children as they retell stories—Juan taking on the roll of the protective big brother billy goat, Anthony and Sean building the setting for *Corduroy* in the blocks and thoughtfully adding the details that they noticed in the department store. While kids are engaged in this work, we name the story elements for them, and they are gaining a real understanding of how a character acts, how a setting changes, and what problems and solutions may occur in the stories they read and write.

- *When we retell stories in the stations, we can make the stories come alive by changing our voices to match the feelings of the characters.*

When Anna was the troll, she literally bellowed, “Who’s that walking over my bridge?” Anna had heard *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* (Galdone 1981) read aloud multiple times and had heard her teacher model how the troll would speak; as a result, she demonstrated her understanding of the character with her own voice. In this lesson we teach children to change their voices and actions to match the characters’ feelings and intentions. Again, use gestures, facial expressions, and body language to support ELLs.

- *Another way we can retell a story in stations is to re-create the setting to show where the story takes place.*

While children tend to easily understand the concept of characters as a story element, the idea of a setting is more abstract and sometimes difficult to understand. When Anthony and Sean

were building the shelves of the store where Corduroy lived, we were able to name their work as building the setting and talk about the setting as an important element of stories. When dramatizing favorite stories from books, children can name the setting and then think about how they could create it in different stations. When the setting becomes a tangible artifact, the concept is more accessible for an English language learner. (See Figure 4.3.)

- *We can retell the important parts of a story by including the problem the character encounters and the way the character resolves it.*

We teach this minilesson to help children understand that in stories, something happens to the character. When children are beginning to write personal narrative stories, often nothing happens. They write, “This is me. This is my mom. I love my mom.” Sometimes we notice children doing the same thing in the stations. They might have created a scene, but then when asked about it, they will often say, “These are the goats. This is the bridge.” In this minilesson, we teach students that one way to make something happen in their stories is to include the problem the character gets into and what the character does about it.

Retelling in Multiple Modalities

Publication is an essential part of the work that we do. We want to share our endeavors with an audience, to revel in our accomplishments, and to document our thinking and collaboration. Publication rituals are just as important in choice time workshop as they are in reading and writing workshops.

- *After we work on a project for a long time, we can look back and wonder if we can envision it differently. We can ask, “What if the character acted differently?”*

This is the minilesson that we taught when we conferred with Anna, Cahle, Brianna, and Samuel about the troll being kind instead of mean. We used their idea to demonstrate for the other children that what a character thinks, says, and does determine how our story goes.

- *When we envision our project in new ways, we can ask, “If the character acted differently, would the ending be different?”*

Once children have practiced changing how the character acts, they soon realize that this may change the ending of the story. Anna, Cahle, and Brianna, and Samuel changed the ending of the billy goats story so that the goats ate some grass and played hide-and-seek with the kind troll. This is a powerful minilesson because it encourages kids to consider multiple perspectives.

- *When we think about our project, we can ask, “How would it look in another station?”*

When a child writes over and over about the same topic (trips to the park are a popular one), encourage them to revise their writing by using another genre: a poem about the park, an all-about book about the park, and so on. Teaching children to tell their story in another sign system parallels this type of revision. After Sean and Anthony built the setting for *Corduroy* in the block station, we encouraged them to retell the story in the drama station, and then they painted scenes from *Corduroy* in the art station.

- *When we publish our projects, we can ask, “What kind of writing can I do to help the audience understand the story better?”*

We can teach kids to put the finishing touches on their published projects through different kinds of writing. Students can make labels or signs for a final project or write an explanation or how-to book to teach others how the project was constructed so others can re-create it.