Title: Mentor Sentences

The Basics

What? A protocol for ensuring students determine sentence-level meaning of key sentences in complex, grade-level texts

When? After the first reading of a complex text

Why? Helps students break down key sentences with sophisticated syntax to better understand the structure of academic language

Student Outcomes

This strategy helps students read complex, grade-level texts and improve their language skills, including understanding and using grade-level vocabulary and syntax.

How to Implement

1. Select a sentence from a complex text. It should connect to the unit focus and/or be important to the meaning of the text. It should also have sophisticated syntax and/or academic vocabulary. Consider:
    a. Would more work with this sentence support students in understanding the text and the big ideas of the unit?
    b. Does this sentence model grade-level language use? For example, the sentence models what you want to see in your students' writing or the sentence allows you to address grade-level language standards.
2. Prompt students to reread the selection of the text prior to analyzing the sentence, as needed.
3. Engage students in the following mentor sentence analysis protocol.
    a. **What does this sentence mean?** Display the mentor sentence. Prompt students to express understanding of the sentence. Note where students understand or misunderstand the sentence. Use this information to guide the next steps of the analysis.
    b. **What do I notice about this sentence?** Display the mentor sentence. Prompt students to share what they notice about the sentence. As needed, provide guiding questions to support students in identifying important components of the sentence (e.g., What are the parts of this sentence? What do you notice about the punctuation? What is the meaning of this phrase? Who is doing what in this sentence?)
    c. **What do I know this sentence means?** Display the mentor sentence and question words: who/what, did what, when, where, why, how. Direct students to use the sentence, as well as unit texts, to answer the questions. Then ask students to write a summary of the ideas from the sentence and unit text.
    d. **What is the structure of this sentence?** Display the mentor sentence. Prompt students to make connections between the sentence structure and its meaning. Display a sentence that follows the same structure as the mentor sentence. Prompt students to make connections between the structures of both sentences. Guide the class to create sentence frames that model the structure of the mentor sentence.
    e. **Can I write a quality sentence?** Ask students a text-dependent question and direct them to respond in writing using a sentence frame created in the previous step.
4. Monitor and provide descriptive feedback and support as students work. For example, as they write, prompt them as needed by orally reminding them of different steps in the analysis. For example: "Remember, the sentence frame we constructed. How would you structure your thoughts to follow this frame?"

Resources for Additional Information

- Theory of sentence composing from Don and Jenny Killgallon
- Overview of the different practices used in sentence composing
- Blog of mentor sentences for imitation and creation based off the work of Jeff Anderson
- Example of how to use in lessons