

## Signposts: Text Features for Deeper Understanding

As you help students learn to read literature, it is important to encourage them to participate in close reading so that they may reach a deeper understanding of the text. Students have certainly been taught to pay attention to text features such as the importance of titles, characters' names, setting, and the opening lines. There are additional text features, sometimes referred to as "signposts," that can help students read literary texts with deeper understanding. These signposts are simply signals to alert students to pay attention to what they are reading and then stop to note what that signal might mean. As student become more aware of these signposts, there is an increase in the use of comprehension processes such as visualizing, predicting, summarizing, clarifying, questioning, inferring, and making connections. Provide students with the chart on the 3<sup>rd</sup> page of this handout , as well as a Notice and Note Reading Log for recording their thoughts about their reading.

### Signposts must meet the following criteria:

- The feature must be noticeable, having some characteristic that causes it to stand out from the surrounding text.
- The feature is evident across the majority of books.
- The feature offers something to readers who notice and then reflect on it to help them better understand their own response, their own reading experience, and their own interpretation of the text.

### Six Types of Signposts in Literary Texts:

1. Contrasts and Contradictions
2. Aha Moment
3. Tough Questions
4. Words of the Wiser
5. Again and Again
6. Memory Moment

### Anchor Questions

To develop independent readers, the students must have a repertoire of a few useful questions which they apply while reading any text. Students must take ownership of these questions. We want students to develop reading habits and behaviors.

1. **Contrasts and Contradictions:** Why would the character act (feel) this way?
2. **Aha Moment:** How might this change things?
3. **Tough Questions:** What does this question make me wonder about?
4. **Words of the Wiser:** What's the life lesson and how might it affect the character?
5. **Again and Again:** Why might the author bring this up again and again?
6. **Memory Moment:** Why might this memory be important?

## **Signpost Lesson Example**

When teaching the signposts, think about starting with Contrasts and Contradictions and progressing down the list to end with Memory Moment. But do what makes sense with what is being taught.

1. Explain the signpost and the anchor questions.
2. Demonstrate by reading aloud a text for which the students have a copy. Point out what you saw that caused you to pause, ask the anchor question, and share your thoughts.
3. Continue reading, stopping at the next instance and asking students to talk in pairs about the anchor question. Share some responses with the class.
4. Continue reading asking students to identify the signpost and discuss the anchor question.
5. Finish reading and ask students to identify the most significant example of the signpost for the entire text, discuss the anchor question, and report to the class.
6. Ask students to watch for this signpost while reading independently, marking those that they find, and recording a response to the anchor question.

## **Assessment**

You can assess their growth by listen to their talk over time and reading their Note and Notice/Signpost Reading Logs while asking yourself if they...

- Identify the scene that made them think of a signpost?
- Explain why they think that scene represents that signpost?
- Move to the anchor questions with or without prompting?
- Offer more than one speculative answer to the anchor question?
- Remain open to other speculative answers suggested by classmates?
- Use evidence from the text to support their answers?
- Connect this signpost to others in other parts of this novel?

## **In Conclusion**

The goal is not to search for and collect signposts as in a scavenger hunt, but to be alert for significant moments in the text. We want to foster readers who pay close attention, reflect, and who are willing to consider other responses to a text. The lessons in the book target literary text, but with modifications they can also be used with expository texts.

Signpost and Definitions	Clues to the Signpost	What Literary Element it Helps Us Understand	Anchor Questions
<p><b>Contrasts and Contradictions</b> A sharp contrast between what we would expect and what we observe the character doing; behavior contradicts previous behavior or well-established patterns. Also contrasts between characters or situations.</p>	<p>A character behaves or thinks in a way we don't expect, or an element of a setting is something we would not expect</p>	<p>Character development Internal conflict Theme Relationship between setting and plot</p>	<p>Why would the character act or feel this way? How do the contrasts between characters help us understand them? How might contrasts between situations help us predict plot or conflict?</p>
<p><b>Again and Again</b> Events, images, or particular words that recur over a portion of the novel</p>	<p>A word is repeated, sometimes used in an odd way, over and over in the story An image reappears several times during the course of the book</p>	<p>Plot Setting Symbolism Theme Character development Conflict</p>	<p>Why might the author bring this up again and again?</p>
<p><b>Memory Moment</b> A recollection by a character that interrupts the forward progress of the story</p>	<p>The ongoing flow of the narrative is interrupted by a memory that comes to the character, often taking several paragraphs to recount before we are returned to events of the present moment.</p>	<p>Character development Plot Theme Relationship between character and plot</p>	<p>Why might this memory be important?</p>
<p><b>Aha Moment</b> A character's realization of something that shifts his actions or understanding of himself, others, or the world around him.</p>	<p>Phrases usually expressing suddenness, like: "Suddenly I understood..." "It came to me in a flash that..." "The realization hit me like a lightning bolt..." "In an instant I knew..."</p>	<p>Character development Internal conflict Plot</p>	<p>How might this change things?</p>
<p><b>Tough Questions</b> Questions a character raises that reveal his/her inner struggles</p>	<p>Phrases expressing serious doubt or confusion: "What could I possibly do to...?" "I couldn't imagine how I could cope with..." "How could I ever understand why she...?" "Never had I been so confused about..."</p>	<p>Internal conflict Theme Character development</p>	<p>What does this question make me wonder about?</p>
<p><b>Words of the Wiser</b> The advice or insight a wiser character--usually older--offers about life to the main character</p>	<p>The main character and another are usually off by themselves in a quiet, serious moment, and the wiser figure shares his wisdom or advice in an effort to help the main character with a problem or a decision.</p>	<p>Theme Internal conflict Relationship between character and plot</p>	<p>What the life lesson, and how might it affect the character?</p>