Primary Examples: Information and Explanation

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| **Learning Objective** | **Text Example** | **Commentary** |
| How choice of noun phrases can convey information precisely and create text cohesion | **Dandelions** bloom like little suns. But the flowers don’t last long – they fold up like furled umbrellas pointing at the sky. Then each rolled umbrella opens into a puff of down: a hundred fluffy parachutes, each carrying a small brown seed. Just one blow and you can set them flying. (From *Outside Your Window: A first book of nature* by Nicola Davies) | All the underlined noun phrases in the example provide descriptive synonyms for the topic noun ‘dandelions’. Using synonyms is one important way of ensuring text cohesion. |
| How determiners and pronouns can be used to refer back to ideas and create text cohesion | Dandelions bloom like little suns. But the flowers don’t last long – they fold up like furled umbrellas pointing at the sky. Then each rolled umbrella opens into a puff of down: a hundred fluffy parachutes, each carrying a small brown seed. Just one blow and you can set them flying. (From *Outside Your Window: A first book of nature* by Nicola Davies) | Using pronouns that refer back to nouns and ‘agree’ with them in terms of number, is another way of ensuring text cohesion. Determiners are words which come at the beginning of a noun phrase and help to specify what is being referred to e.g. **a** flower/**the** flowers/**each** flower/**my** flowers/**these** flowers/**most** flowers |
| How choice of verbs can emphasise key ideas in an information or explanation text | Male kangaroos push, pull and wrestle with their arms, and may kick out with their great feet, using their strong tail for support. They are battling for females at breeding time.  (From *Children’s A-Z Encyclopedia*, Miles Kelley) | The verb choices in the main clauses carry a good deal of the meaning in the text, as well as giving a strong visual image of how kangaroos fight with each other. In a verb phrase, the finite verb is the first one. Choices of verb from the same lexical field also provides text cohesion. |
| How adverbials are used to add precise detail in an information or explanation text | Male kangaroos **push, pull** and **wrestle** with their arms, and **may** kick out with their great feet, using their strong tail for support. They **are battling** for females at breeding time.  (From *Children’s A-Z Encyclopedia*, Miles Kelley)  Red kangaroos are the largest marsupial and **can grow** up to two metres.  In one leap they **can jump** 3m high and 7.6m long.  On land kangaroos only ever **move** their hind legs together. However, in water they **kick** each leg independently to swim.  (From *onekindplanet.org*) | ‘Adverbial’ is an umbrella term covering single adverbs, phrases and clauses. Much of the adverbial detail in these texts is provided by prepositional phrases: ‘with their arms’, ‘with their great feet’, ‘for females’, ‘at breeding time’. ‘Out’ is an adverb (you can test this by substituting another adverb, perhaps with the more familiar *–ly* ending e.g. *violently* or *viciously).* ‘Using their strong tail...’ is a non-finite subordinate clause incorporating a prepositional phrase ‘for support’. This ‘layering’ of grammatical structures and the fact that they can be labelled differently, can be confusing for children: try to focus on the function of adverbials in a sentence, which is to provide additional information about how, where, when, why or how much something is happening. |
| How similes can create strong visual images in information and explanation texts | Eyes like blackcurrants bulge into headlamps. His fierce jutting mouth has teeth like a sawblade.  The seagulls are waiting. Beaks snap like scissors through wriggling water.  He spills the new life carried deep in his belly, then sinks through the sea like a used silver wrapper. (From *Think of an Eel* by Karen Wallace) | In these examples, similes are used to provide both adjectival detail, post-modifying nouns (eyes, teeth) to show what the eel looks like and adverbial detail, post-modifying verbs (snap, sinks) to show how the eel moves. |
| How single-clause sentences can be used to draw attention to interesting facts | 1. Neutron stars can spin at a rate of 600 rotations per second. 2. All of space is completely silent. 3. There is an uncountable number of stars in the known universe. 4. The Apollo astronauts’ footprints on the moon will probably stay there for at least 100 million years. 5. 99% of our solar system’s mass is the sun. (From www.mashable.com) | Children who know verbs as ‘doing words’ might need support to see ‘be’ and ‘have’ verbs finite verbs – here, ‘is’. These are common in factual statements, as are modal verbs (can, will, may, might etc.) to express degrees of certainty. Single-clause sentences are not always short, but they do present a single idea and are therefore useful for focusing attention on important facts. |
| How short sentences can summarise key points of information and act as ‘signposts’ for the reader | Penguins are flightless birds. While other birds have wings for flying, penguins have flippers to help them swim in the water. Emperor Penguins can stay underwater for around 20 minutes at a time and can drink seawater. They eat a range of fish and other sealife that they catch under water and their black and white coats act as camouflage while swimming. Penguins are well adapted for life in the sea.  (From www.sciencekids.co.nz) | Short sentences are useful for summarising information and ‘keeping the reader on track’. In the example, short sentences are used to ‘top and tail’ a paragraph of information and clarify the topic being addressed. Both examples are also single-clause sentences. |
| How subordinate clauses provide explanatory detail | When a house was built, its walls would be covered with plaster and the inside was often painted, either with patterns or scenes from nature. Inside the house were cool, as the small windows let in only a little light. Wealthy families had large houses. Beyond the hall would be bedrooms and private apartments, and stairs to the roof. The kitchen was some distance from the living rooms, to keep smells away. The Egyptians held parties in their homes, which the children enjoyed as much as their parents. (From *Ancient Egypt*, Eyewitness Guide) | The four underlined clauses indicate two finite subordinate clauses that start with a subordinating conjunction (when...as...); a relative clause (which...) and a non-finite clause (to...). It is useful for teachers to know these three different ways of forming a subordinate clause, not just to achieve sentence variety but because they have different functions. In the text example, three of the clauses provide additional explanatory detail – they could be removed without damaging the sense of the sentences. But the first example (‘When a house was built’) is essential explanatory information and cannot be left out – the rest of the sentence would not make sense without it. |
| How prepositional phrases are used in a non-chronological report to show spatial relationships | Wealthy families had large houses. Beyond the hall would be bedrooms and private apartments, and stairs to the roof. The kitchen was some distance from the living rooms, to keep smells away. (From *Ancient Egypt*, Eyewitness Guide) | Prepositional phrases always include a noun, noun phrase or pronoun e.g. ‘**beyond** the hall’; ‘**beneath** London’; ‘**over** it’. Prepositions indicating where things are placed include: *under, inside, across, against, throughout, between, underneath, toward, beside, within, at the back of, on top of.* Building a range can help children’s precision with explanations. |