Picture this—a student giving you a big shoulder shrug when asked to retell what he just read. If you’ve taught longer than one week, this is an image that you can easily visualize. Asking students to recall what they have read and retell it in their own words can often be a daunting task. Teachers trying to offer support will say, “Just visualize it!” But after a lengthy and uncomfortable pause, teachers realize the DVD player may not be turning inside the student’s head. The student sits, unable to speak, or mutters, “I don’t know.” The teacher is left to wonder if the student has learned something from the text but just can’t remember the details well enough to retell them or if the learner has not comprehended anything from the text and is therefore unable to retell it.

What’s Involved in Being Able to Successfully Retell?

Let’s consider what must happen in the reader’s mind in order to be able to offer a full and accurate retell. To retell a story or share the salient factors of an informational text, the reader has to do the following (Benson & Cummins, 2000):

- grasp the meaning by understanding the language
- apply the appropriate decoding strategies
- recognize the text sequence
- infer, coconstruct, and analyze what the author intended

Students can be aided in developing their comprehension of a text as teachers model for them how to apply and regulate these strategies, which also include constructing mental images from text cues and creating graphic representations of the text structure as supports to getting the big picture of what the text is about (Wood, Lapp, Flood, & Taylor, 2008). Once completed, a graphic serves as a visual outline of cues that can be used to support remembering and retelling.

Focusing on One Instructional Routine:

Text Mapping Plus

Mapping a story, which involves creating a graphic representation that shows the order as well as the characters and main events, is one instructional routine that can help students to improve and expand their comprehension and oral retells (Baumann & Bergeron, 1993). As students create their own illustrations as a part of the map, they are able to visualize and chronicle the parts or relationships of a story or text.
Find More Real-Time Teaching Online

To find supplemental material that accompanies the Real-Time Teaching Department, please visit this issue of the *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* online at www.reading.org/General/Publications/Journals/JAAL.aspx.

In our own teaching, we have found that students who create their own graphics improve their understanding of what they read, remember the salient features of texts, and are more confident in their retellings. We also found that by adding relational words to their maps their retells are fuller, more accurate, and they exhibit even greater confidence in their retellings, even when probed. This finding is important because it crosses both narrative stories and recounts of nonfiction or content-based texts. We believe that the combination of relational words and student-created graphics provides familiarity and the language cues students need to support their remembering, connecting, and sharing information. For this reason we now call story mapping *text mapping plus*.

**What Does Text Mapping Plus Look Like?**

Text mapping plus is most often used with a page that has a centered graphic with connected boxes on it. See Figure 1a for a generic blank text mapping plus sample and Figure 1b for a personalized sample that was completed by a student who was studying the effects of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. As you see, this began as a standard graphic organizer with multiple boxes allowing students to write brief scenes with graphics, headlines, or topics. At the top of the page there is a line provided for students to write in the

---

**Figure 1a  Sample Text Mapping Plus (Blank Example)**

Title:

What?  When?  Where?

Other Interesting Facts?  Today?
article headline, book title, or chapter number or title. This is the standard template used for text mapping plus, although it can be adjusted to accommodate the type or length of text it is used with. The structure of the map should accommodate the information in the text. Students write and draw important words, events, or main ideas in sequence onto the map. When retelling what they have read, they use these illustrations and connecting words to assist with their retells. What makes this unique is that the students have been taught to include visuals and connecting words to support their remembering and making connections among the information chunks.

**How Is Text Mapping Plus Taught?**

Before using text mapping plus, the teacher reviews the components of a retelling of a narrative story: character, setting, plot, conflict, and resolution (academic language). A retelling of an expository text needs to include the main idea and important details. We regularly remind students,

> While we are reading, we visualize what is in the story. We see images in our minds. If we can add some of these images to our map, they will help us to remember what we’ve read. When we retell, we use the images, both on the paper and in our minds, to help us.

As students become increasingly skilled at retelling using illustrations, we invite them to add the relational words.

A text mapping plus lesson should include three components: modeling, guidance, and individual practice. During all three components, the teacher reviews both academic and content words. These words may include features of texts as mentioned previously, such as characters, setting, headings, captions, and so on. The targeted words may also include relational and sequence words such as *first, next, then, currently, and finally*. While modeling, the teacher thinks aloud and demonstrates what active readers do while reading. Active readers are constantly thinking about what they are reading and asking themselves questions such as the following:

- What connections do I have to the text?
- Is this new information to me?

As part of the modeling phase, the teacher thinks aloud as he or she draws the illustrations on the map, identifies relational words, and provides an oral retell.

During the second part, the teacher and students work on a new text together. The students practice as the teacher guides. In the third part of the lesson, the students work on a text independently. As students finish creating their text maps, they can partner talk and share retells with one another.

Finally, students can share their retells with the class. As an assessment tool, text mapping plus allows the teacher to observe and listen to students give oral retells and look at the students’ drawings to check for omissions or gaps in content information. The teacher can ask herself, Are the retells limited to only the illustrations on the page, or are the students using the illustrations to assist and expand their retells?

**Text Mapping in Action**

Kelly Johnson regularly uses text mapping plus with her students. Employing a gradual release of responsibility model for introducing text mapping, including teacher modeling of good retelling skills and how to
use a text map, Kelly has significantly improved her students’ performance. In terms of achievement data, 88% of her students progressed at least one full year on the state achievement test. This compares with 67% district wide. Although 18% of her students scored ‘far below basic’ on their eighth-grade test, none of them scored in the lowest category of performance on their ninth-grade test. Kelly discusses her experiences with story mapping:

At the start of the year, I selected several high-interest nonfiction articles to read with students as a way to support their reading of content texts. I used think-alouds to model my thinking about the important information in the text. As a class, we took time to carefully examine pictures, captions, maps, and vocabulary words. After reading each text, we completed a text map using pictures, words, and sentences. Once the text map was complete, the students and I used it to retell what we had read. At first many students simply read the sentences directly word for word from our text map.

Over time, and with a lot of practice with high-interest nonfiction texts, my students and I read the text together just as before. But then I asked them to complete the text map using pictures or illustrations only. They were hesitant at first, but with a little encouragement they were able to finish their text maps. When I asked them to retell in their groups, I heard great detail about what we had read. For example, Russell, a student who has struggled with school, explained each of his drawings, using much of the newly introduced vocabulary from the article. On that day, I used Russell’s retell to model how to add the relational words.

Over time, students read texts on their own, with little help from me. They created text maps for each of these texts using pictures and relational words. Jasmine was glad she could add the words at the end because, as she said, “they help me remember and to sound like a professional.” When she had finished reading the first section of the text, she began her text map. The pictures were very elaborate. Once she had finished the article and the text map, I listened to her retell to her group. I was so impressed by the rich content vocabulary she used in her retell. She meticulously reviewed each frame of the map explaining with great delight what her drawings represented and provided a wonderful retell of the article.

I have found this instructional routine to be beneficial for all students. I believe that by introducing students to habits they can use, such as text mapping plus, we are providing them with tools to help them make sense of what they are reading by organizing the information in a logical sequence, creating images to remind them of important details, and finally by putting the information into their own words. They then are able to add the academic connecting words they use for retelling and remembering.

Text Mapping Plus Builds Oral Language and Comprehension With Ease

As teachers, we have found that this instructional routine enriches the oral language and comprehension of all students but especially those who are learning English as an additive language because it offers them the cues they need to understand, remember, and share what they are learning. Text mapping plus supports students’ comprehension as they develop an understanding that texts have organized formats that can be predicted. By using these formats students can better understand and retell the information being read. For optimal support students can draw pictures, write short summaries, short phrases, or sentences as ways to comprehend the information and the format of the text.

References


Lapp teaches at San Diego State University, California, USA; e-mail lapp@mail.sdsu.edu.

Fisher teaches at San Diego State University; e-mail dfisher@mail.sdsu.edu. Johnson teaches at San Diego State University; e-mail kjohnson@hshmc.org. All three also teach English at Health Sciences High and Middle College, San Diego, California, USA.

The department editors welcome reader comments. Douglas Fisher teaches at San Diego State University, California, USA; e-mail dfisher@mail.sdsu.edu. Diane Lapp teaches at San Diego State University, California, USA; e-mail lapp@mail.sdsu.edu.