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Supporting Oral Language in the Classroom: **Educator Toolkit**

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INTRODUCTION

Oral language is a crucial part of everyday interactions in a child's life. Oral language encompasses a variety of skills across five main areas: phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, and semantics.

To learn more about oral language skills, click here to access the LD@school article Oral Language Skills and Learning Disabilities: A Review for Educators : https://www.ldatschool.ca/oral-language-skills/

The importance of oral language skills to early literacy is briefly described in the Ontario Human Rights Commission Right to Read report, where it was highlighted that,

> "A comprehensive approach to early literacy recognizes that instruction that focuses on word-reading skills, oral language development, vocabulary and knowledge development, and writing are all important components of literacy."
> (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2022, p. 5)

This toolkit provides strategies to support each strand of language comprehension in the classroom. Each section includes detailed descriptions including the type of activity (teacher or child-directed), when that activity can be used (before, during, or after reading), and examples for younger and older students. Specific activities and templates are provided.

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TOOLKIT LEGEND

For each strategy the following images are included to provide details about the type of activity (teacher or child-directed), the age (younger or older students), and when that activity might be used (before, during or after reading).

= teacher directed activities

= child directed activities

= activity for younger elementary school- aged children

= performance expected for older elementary – high school-aged children

B = before reading strategy

D = during reading strategy

A = after reading strategy

* Many of the activities described support multiple strains in the language comprehension branch of Scarborough's Reading Rope (Scarborough, 2001)

Choosing Reading Strategies to Support Oral Language Development

Use the chart below to choose the appropriate activity to support the development of oral language skills during reading exercises.

	Before Reading Strategies	During Reading Strategies	After Reading Strategies
Probing Questions for Students	***Why am I reading this? What do I already know? What do I think I will learn?***	***What was that part about? What does that word mean?***	***What do I think of what I read? What happened in the text?***
General Purpose	Purpose & Overview	Summarize so far & monitor comprehension	Reflect & summarize what was learned
Background Knowledge	Activate prior knowledge about topic that will help with understanding • brainstorm about topic • use probing questions • ***Semantic organizers***	***Semantic organizers***	***Semantic organizers***
Vocabulary Knowledge	• Pre-teach and review vocabulary • ***Semantic organizers*** (e.g., semantic mapping)	While reading have children mark unfamiliar words • Decode together • Look at root of word (think about prefix/suffix) ***Semantic organizers*** (e.g., concept/word mapping)	• ***Semantic organizers*** (e.g., semantic feature analysis) to explore related vocabulary
Language Structures	• ***Teacher talk***	• ***Teacher talk*** • ***Talk moves***	• ***Teacher talk*** • ***Talk moves***

Verbal Reasoning	• **Predict:** *"I think this text is going to be about…"*
	• Hypotheses to test as read
	• Use title/cover and key vocabulary
	• **Think aloud**
		• Inference instruction (e.g., **INFER strategy**)
		• Integrate background knowledge (information from text, information from you, inference)
		• **Periodic summaries**
		• **Think aloud**
			• **Think aloud**
			• Use graphic organizers to **summarize** important information
			  • **KWL**
			  • **Concept maps**
			  • **Venn diagrams**

Literacy Knowledge	• Discuss features of text (e.g., title, headings, layout, tables, graphs) & overview (what is the text about?)
	• Discuss the **structure** of the text and what to expect while reading
	  • Compare/contrast
	  • Cause/effect
	  • Problem/solution
	  • Timeframe/timelines
		• Oral summaries: on the fly comprehension checks
		• **Visual summaries:**
		  • Compare/contrast: **Venn diagram**
		  • Cause/effect and problem/solution: **hierarchical**
		  • Time order: **timeline**
		  • Description: **webs**
			• Sequence and summarize (based on text type)
			  • **Storylines/story mapping**
			  • **Flow charts**
			  • **Cause-effect charts**

Graphic and Semantic Organizers

One approach to support background knowledge and vocabulary instruction is to use **graphic and semantic organizers**, where students represent graphically (write or draw) the meanings and relationships of ideas and words in text.

Research has shown using semantic organizers supports improvements in reading comprehension (Kim et al., 2004; National Reading Panel, 2000). Some examples of semantic organizers include semantic mapping, word mapping, and semantic feature analysis.

Semantic mapping

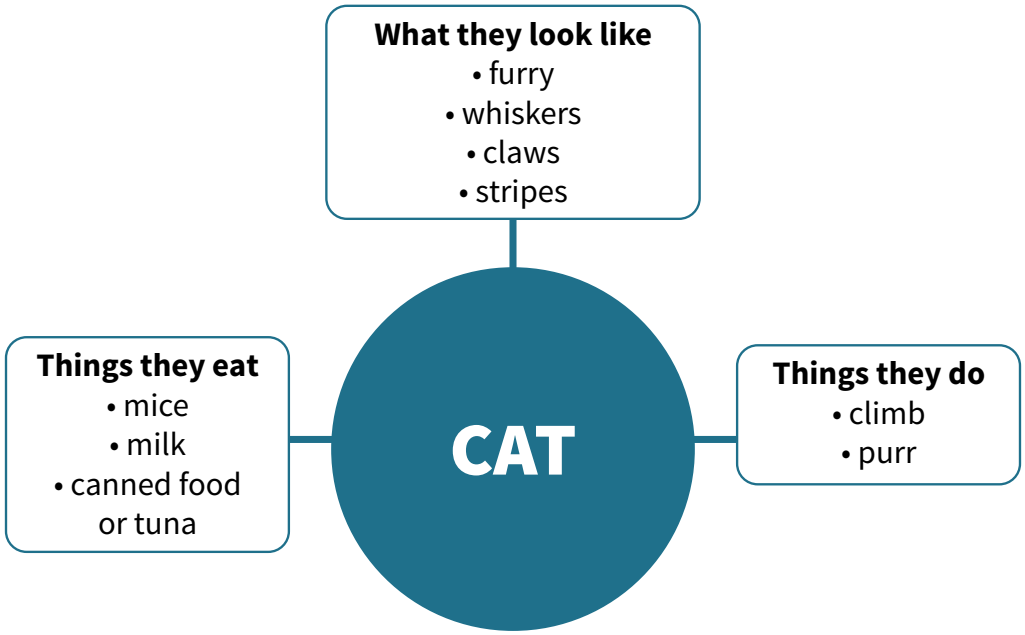
A relationship map or web used to make predictions about how vocabulary or concepts are connected.

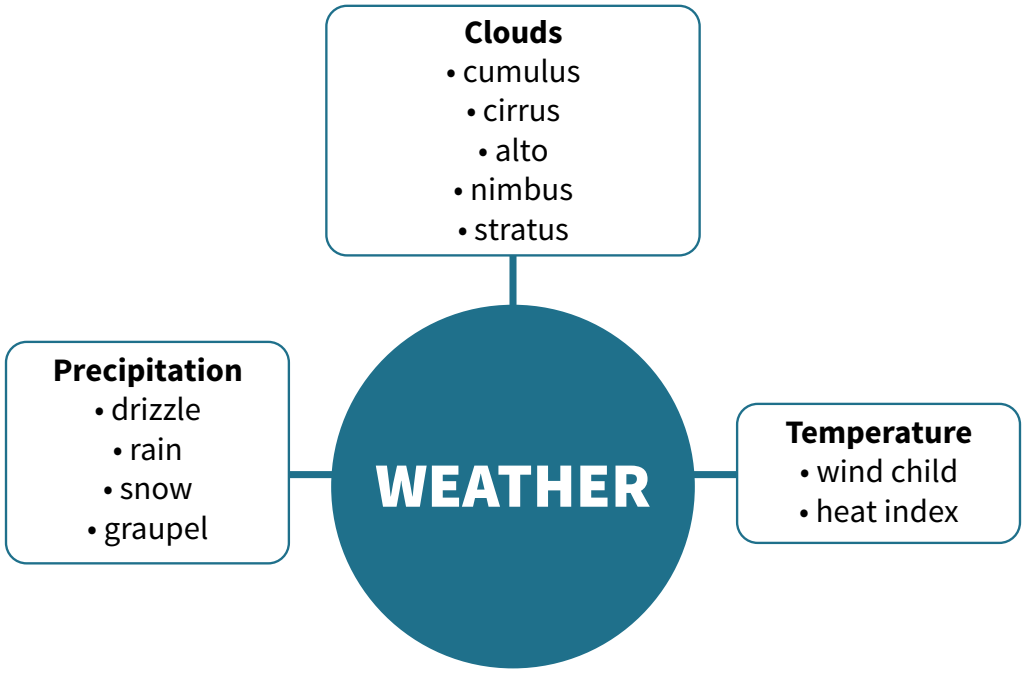
Steps to creating a semantic map

(adapted from Toms-Bronowski, 1982; Vaughn & Edmonds, 2006):

1. Select a word or topic that is central to a story you will be reading or a topic for future discussion.
2. Write the word on the board or chart.
3. Ask class to think of as many words as they can that relate to the word.
4. In small groups or as a whole class have students sort the brainstorm list into categories and label the categories (reviewing together).

Example Semantic Maps:





Blank Mind Map Template - Click HERE

Concept/definition word mapping

Extends the understanding of concepts encouraging students to think of how they are defined and their characteristics.

Steps to word mapping

(adapted from Rupley & Dee Nichols, 2005; Rosenbaum, 2001):

1. Introduce students to what they will learn, why it is important, and what they will be doing.
2. Introduce word map using a large version with concrete examples, with students following on a smaller version
3. Explain each part
4. Model how to organize information using think alouds
5. Once students understand, they can complete it independently, mapping given words and words of their choice

Blank Word Mapping Template - Click HERE

Comparison Different (Antonym)	Comparison Same/Similar (Synonym)
Slow	Quick

Properties (What is it like?)
Moving at high speed

Association (group/category; What is it like?)	New word (page number)	Other forms of word
	Fast	faster fastest

Sentence from book
Johnny ran as fast as he could.

My own sentence
Cheetahs run fast

My example/drawing of it

Comparison Different (Antonym)	Comparison Same/Similar (Synonym)
1) Casual clothes 2) 3) Lever- mechanism also used in machinery	1) Uniform 2) Supplies 3) Magnetic components used in electric motors

Properties (What is it like?)
1) Special protective clothing 2) Supplies 3) Circular, rotating mechanism that transmits torque

Association (group/category; What is it like?)	New word (page number)	Other forms of word
1) Clothing 2) Equipment 3) Machinery component	Gear	Gears Gear-up

Sentence from book
He rotated the gear and the door creaked open.

My own sentence
They packed up their gear and felt prepared for their trip.

My example/drawing of it

Semantic feature analysis

Expands understanding of the relationship of words that are related by class or common features by looking at the ways words within a category are alike and different.

Steps for semantic feature analysis

(adapted from Toms-Bronowski, 1982; Rupley & Dee Nichols, 2005):

1. Select a topic.
2. List in left column words that relate to the topic.
3. List in top row features shared by some of the words in the column.
4. Have students look at the matrix of characteristics/defining features and determine if each word in the column shares the features listed in the row using + for present and - for absent.
5. Encourage students to add their own words and features.
6. Discuss with students the unique features of each word and the relationship between the words and features (as indicated by + and - in grid).

	Features								
	Shape		Colour		Precipitation		Location in Sky		
Cloud Types	**Flat**	**Puffy**	**White**	**Dark**	**Rainy**	**Misty**	**Low**	**Middle**	**High**
Status	+	-	+	+	-	+	+	-	-
Cumulus	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	-	-
Cirrus	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	+

Teacher Talk

The use of complex syntax in the classroom is linked with children's grammar and vocabulary learning (Farrow et al., 2020; Vasilyeva et al., 2006).

Using mental state verbs (e.g., think, know, hope, wonder) leads to more complex syntax than action verbs (e.g., identify, write; Owen Van Horne et al., 2017).

Examples of mental state words:	Example phrases:
Try	Let's **try** to find a match.
Know	I **know** he is going to.
Think	What do you **think** will happen next?
Wonder	I **wonder** what will happen next.
Remember	**Remember** to hang up your coat first.
Understand	If you don't **understand** what to do raise your hand.
Forget	Don't **forget** to write your name.

For struggling learners break up the complex sentences:
e.g., if you say "I wonder if this will fall now"

- Then say and gesture: "I'm wondering" and "this might fall"
- Using support of gestures (pointing) and pictures can support understanding

Seemingly small changes in the way that teachers communicate and present information in their classrooms can have huge impacts for children with developmental language disorder (DLD), a persistent problem learning language. Some easy to implement changes can be represented by the acronym S.M.A.R.T (adapted from Mentrasti, 2019).

S **SLOW DOWN**
Slowing down your rate of speech can help provide children with DLD more time to process what you are saying. If you speak too quickly, these children are more likely to miss important information.

M **(E)MPHASIZE**
Emphasizing key points in your message will help cue children with DLD to the most critical words in your instructions.

A **ADD VISUALS**
Adding visual cues in the form of gestures or pictures can provide children with DLD hints to help them understand your messages.

R **REPEAT INSTRUCTIONS**
Repeating instructions two or three times has been shown to be highly beneficial for children with DLD.

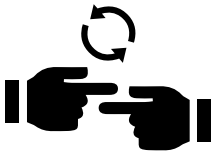
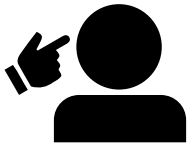
T **TIME TO RESPOND**
Children with DLD often need extra time not only to process messages, but also to craft a response. Providing more time to give an answer can allow them to better formulate and deliver an answer.

For more information, click here to access the LD@school article Oral Language Skills and Learning Disabilities: A Review for Educators https://www.ldatschool.ca/oral-language-skills/.

Talk Moves

Talk moves are sentence starter phrases that help students speak, listen, and expand on each other's ideas, increasing verbal participation in class. One potential expansion on the starter phrases alone is to add corresponding hand signals. These hand signals help you to quickly identify who is engaged within the discussion. These signals also support facilitation of discussions, as you can quickly see who has information they would like to add, who agrees with what has been said and who disagrees.

Classroom Talk moves may include:
(Adapted from Smekens Education Solutions Inc., 2018)

Feedback	Hand Signal	Sentence starter phrase
Repeating another student's point		"I can summarize"
Adding on		"I would like to add to that", "Adding onto what __ said __"
Clarifying		"Let me see if I understand what you are saying __", "Can you say more about that?"
Agree		"I agree with__"
Disagree		"I respectfully disagree because__"

To view more examples of Talk Moves go to:
https://www.smekenseducation.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Talk_Moves_SMEKENS.pdf

See https://www.smekenseducation.com/require-students-to-listen-during-conversations-with-talk-moves/ for more videos describing talk moves and handouts.

Inferences

One method of inference instruction outlined by Fritschmann et al., 2007 uses the mnemonic **INFER:**

I Interact with the passage and questions

- *Preview passage*
- *Read questions*
- *Identify if questions are 1) fact questions or 2) "think and see" (inferential) questions (i.e., purpose, main idea/summarization, prediction or clarification questions)*

N Note what you know

- *Active related background knowledge or experiences*
- *<u>Underline</u> key words in questions*

F Find the clues

- *Carefully read passage*
- *<u>Underline</u> clues related to keywords in questions*
- *Create tentative answers to the questions*

E Explore more details

- *Look for additional clues that support tentative answers*

R Return to the question

- *Check that an answer has been selected for each question*

One way to explicitly help students activate their background knowledge is to use a chart like below where students think about information they know and practice integrating it with information from the text:

Information from text	Information from you
Billy was crying. His whole day was spoiled. All his work had been broken by the **wave**. His mother came to stop him crying. But she accidentally stepped on the only **tower** that was left. Billy cried even more.	Beaches have sand and waves
Inference	
Billy was making sandcastles at the beach. The water washed them away.	

Blank Inference Chart Template - Click HERE

Comprehension Monitoring BDA

(Neufeld, 2005):

Question asking and answering

- Teach students how to students how to **use question asking and answering** to support their comprehension

Before reading:

- **Clarify purpose** for reading:
  - *Why am I reading this?*
  - *What do I already know?*
  - *What do I think I will learn?*
- **Overview text:**
  - *What is it about?*
- **Make predictions:**
  - *I think this text is going to be about…*
  - *In this chapter I think I will learn…*

During & After reading:

- *What was that part about?*
- *What does that word mean?*
- Check for understanding
  - *Is what I read clear?*
  - *Can I answer who, what, when, where, and why questions about the text?*
  - *What happened in the story?*

Periodic summaries DA

- Summarize main idea: stop and restate the main ideas/points
  - Oral, written or visual summaries
    - KWL chart (3 columns: What I ***know***, What I ***want*** to learn, What I ***learned***)
    - Conceptual organizers
    - Venn diagrams

Think Alouds B D A

- Model your thinking, this can be before reading, during reading or after reading
- This is especially important at points that may be confusing for the student, such as new words or strange sentence construction

An example of a think aloud modelled by the teacher:

"I wonder who this book is going to be about?" I haven't read this book before, so I don't know for sure who it is about. But I can use hints from the cover to guess who the book might be about. There is a picture of a bear and a bird on the cover, so maybe the book is about the bird or the bear, or maybe about both. But, I'd have to read the book to find out if I made a good guess or not"

(Van Kleeck & Schwarz, 2011, p. 34)

Fix up strategies (when don't understand) D A

- Re-read part or all of text
- Look ahead
- Stop and relate information to what already know about topic
- Seek help

Blank KWL Chart Template - Click HERE

Blank Conceptual Organizers Template - Click HERE

Blank Venn Diagrams Template - Click HERE

Before reading:

Discuss features of text (e.g., title, headings, layout, tables, graphs)

Explicitly teach text structure, this differs based on the type of text:

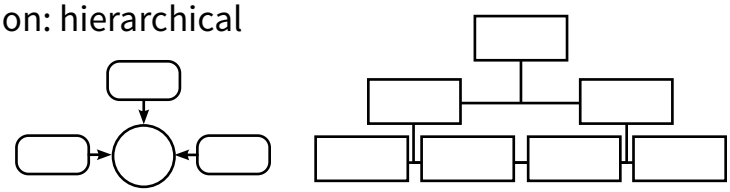
- For **narratives** discuss **story grammar** structure: character, setting, problem, action, ending/resolution
- For **expository texts** discuss the structure of the text (how text is organized) and what to expect while reading (e.g., keywords associated with that text structure)
  - Compare/contrast
    - *However, but, not only, similarly, unless*
  - Cause/effect & problem/solution
    - *Because, since, as a result of, if/then, therefore*
  - Timeframe/timelines
    - *On __, before, after, soon, later, following*

During reading:

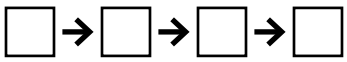
- **Oral summaries:** on the fly comprehension checks

- **Visual summaries:**
  - Compare/contrast: Venn diagram
    Blank Venn Diagram Template
    Blank Comparison Chart Template

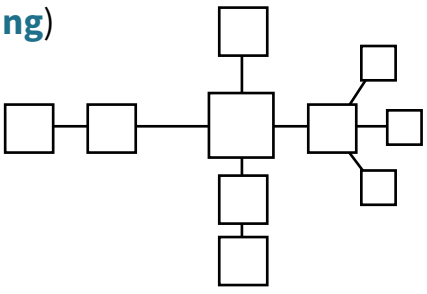
  - Cause/effect and problem/solution: hierarchical
    Conceptual Organizer Template



  - Time order: timeline
    Sequential Organizer Template



  - Description: webs (i.e., **semantic mapping**)



After reading:

- Sequence and summarize (based on story type)
  - Storylines or story mapping (see below)
  - Flow charts
  - Cause-effect charts

Story Mapping Example:

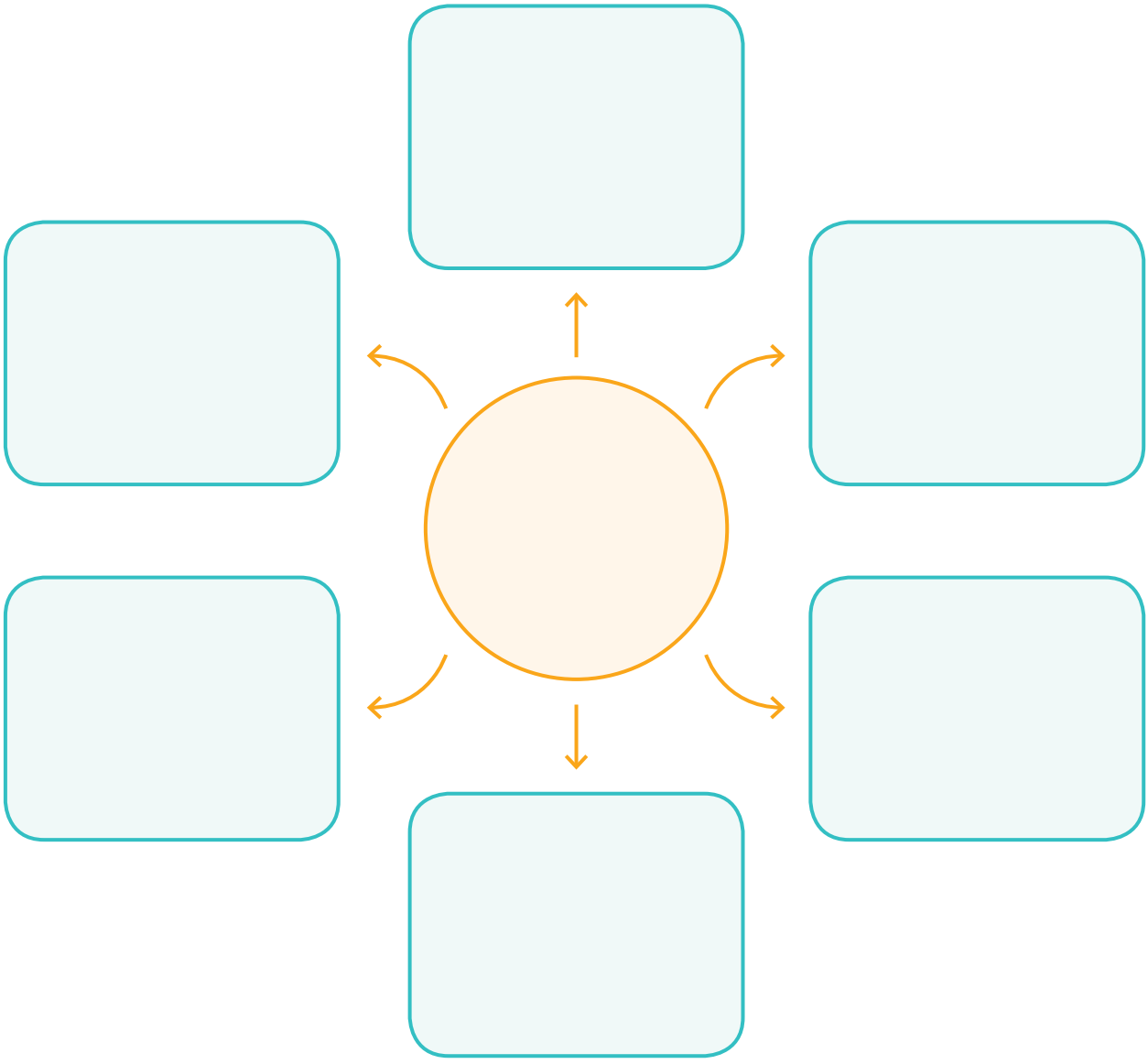
Setting/Time: Woods, in bears' house		
Main Character(s): Goldilocks, Mama bear, Papa bear, and Baby bear		
Episode(s):		
Problem	**Solution**	**Outcome**
Goldilocks thought the chair was too hard	She tried another chair	She broke the chair when she sat on it
Reaction: Papa and Mama bear were very angry when they got home, Baby bear was sad that his chair was broken		
Theme (Main idea): (1) Respect the privacy and property of others, (2) How your actions can hurt others		

Blank Story Mapping Template - Click HERE

Additional free graphic and visual organizers available online:

https://thinkport.org/graphic-organizers.html
https://my.hrw.com/nsmedia/intgos/html/igo.htm
https://www.hmhco.com/blog/free-graphic-organizer-templates

Mind Map



Notes:

Word Mapping

Comparison Different (Antonym)	Comparison Same/Similar (Synonym)

Properties (What is it like?)

Association (group/category; What is it like?)	New word (page number)	Other forms of word

Sentence from book

My own sentence

	My example/drawing of it	

Inference Chart

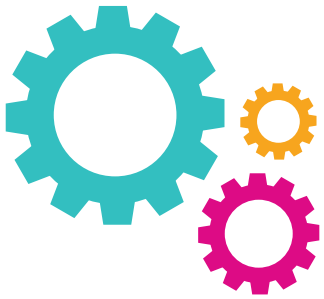
Information from text	Information from you
Inference	

Information from text	Information from you
Inference	

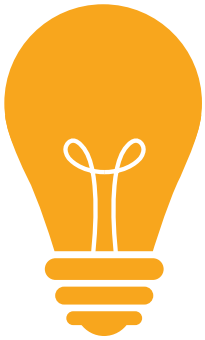
KWL Strategy

What I KNOW

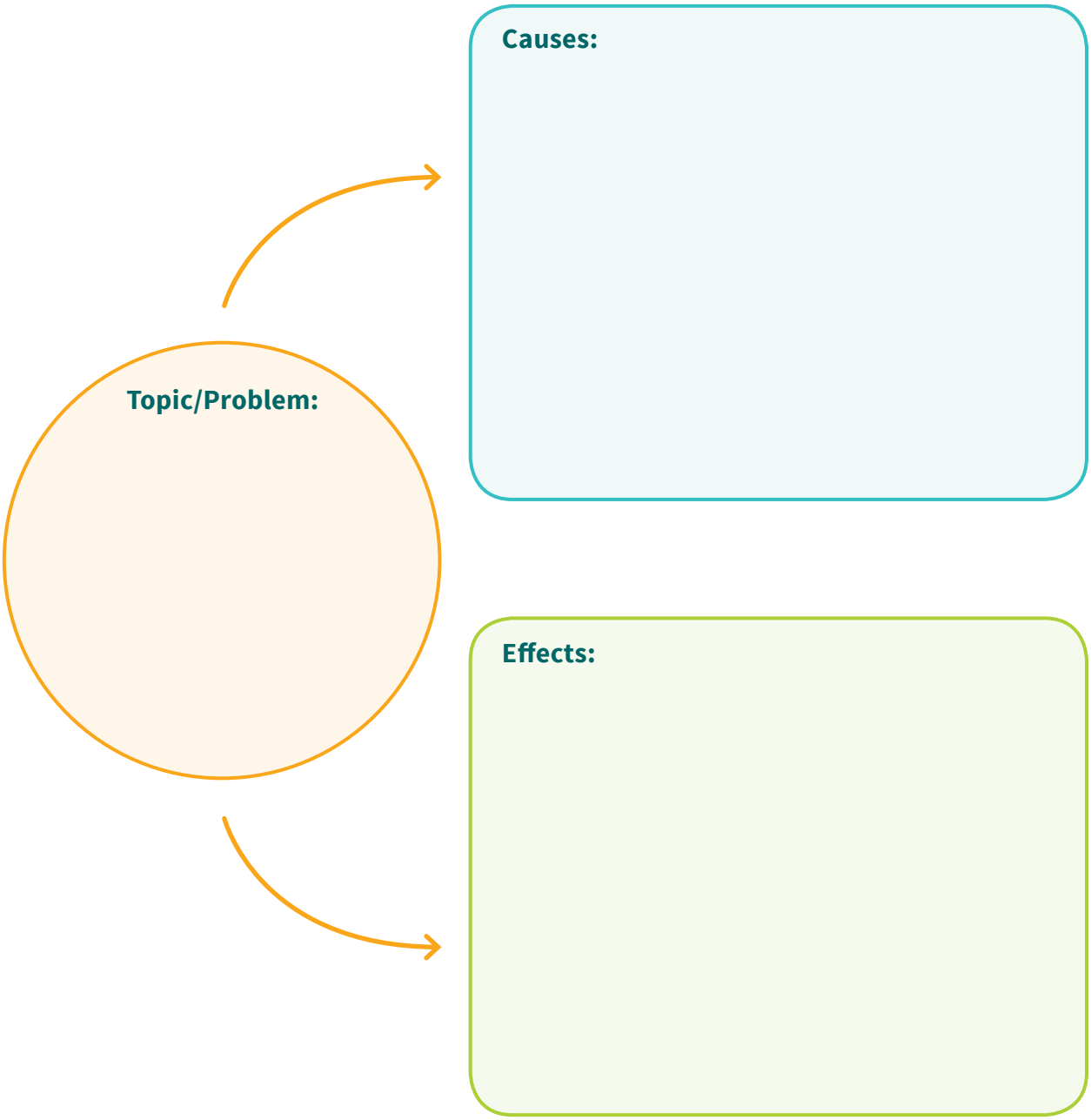
What I WANT to know



What I LEARNED



Conceptual Organizer



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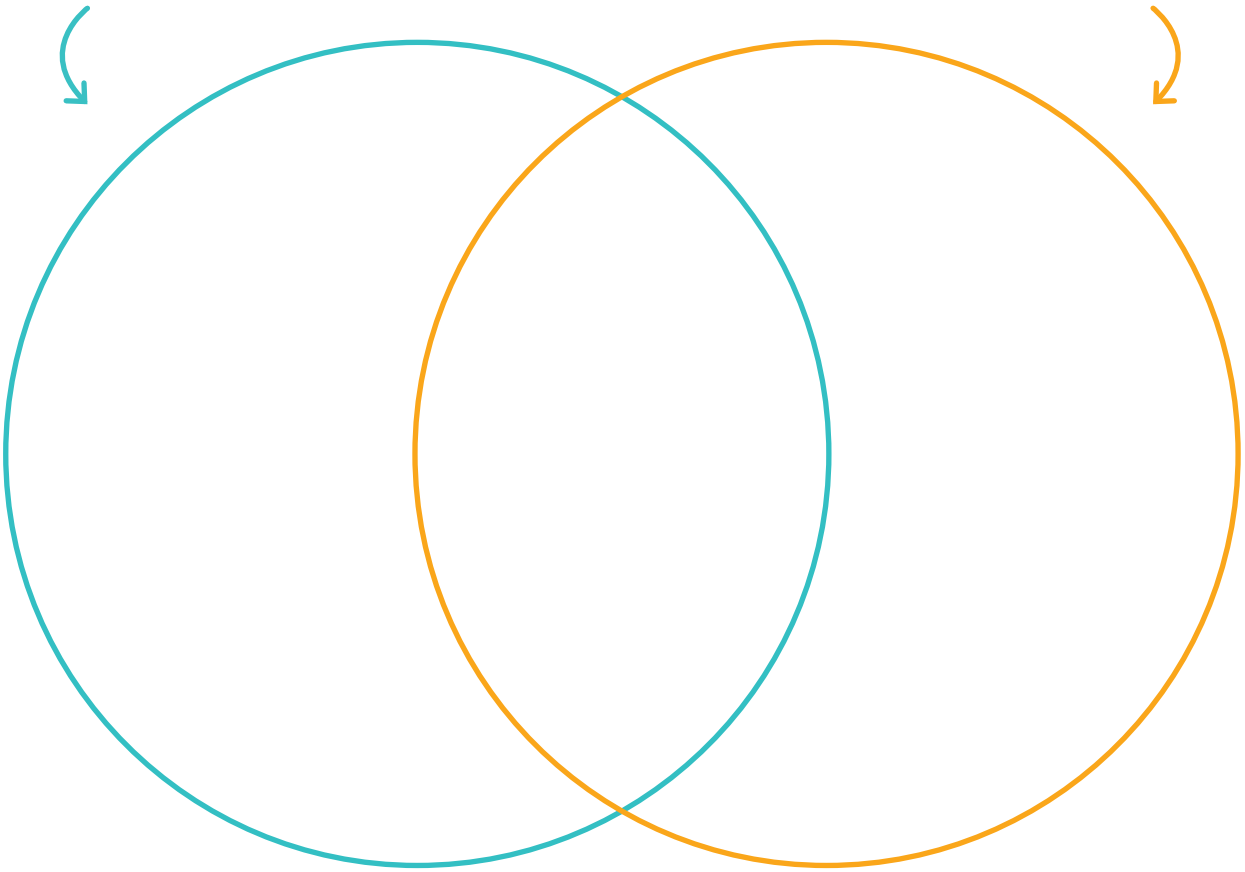
Venn Diagram

A: _____ **Vs.** **B:** _____



Notes:

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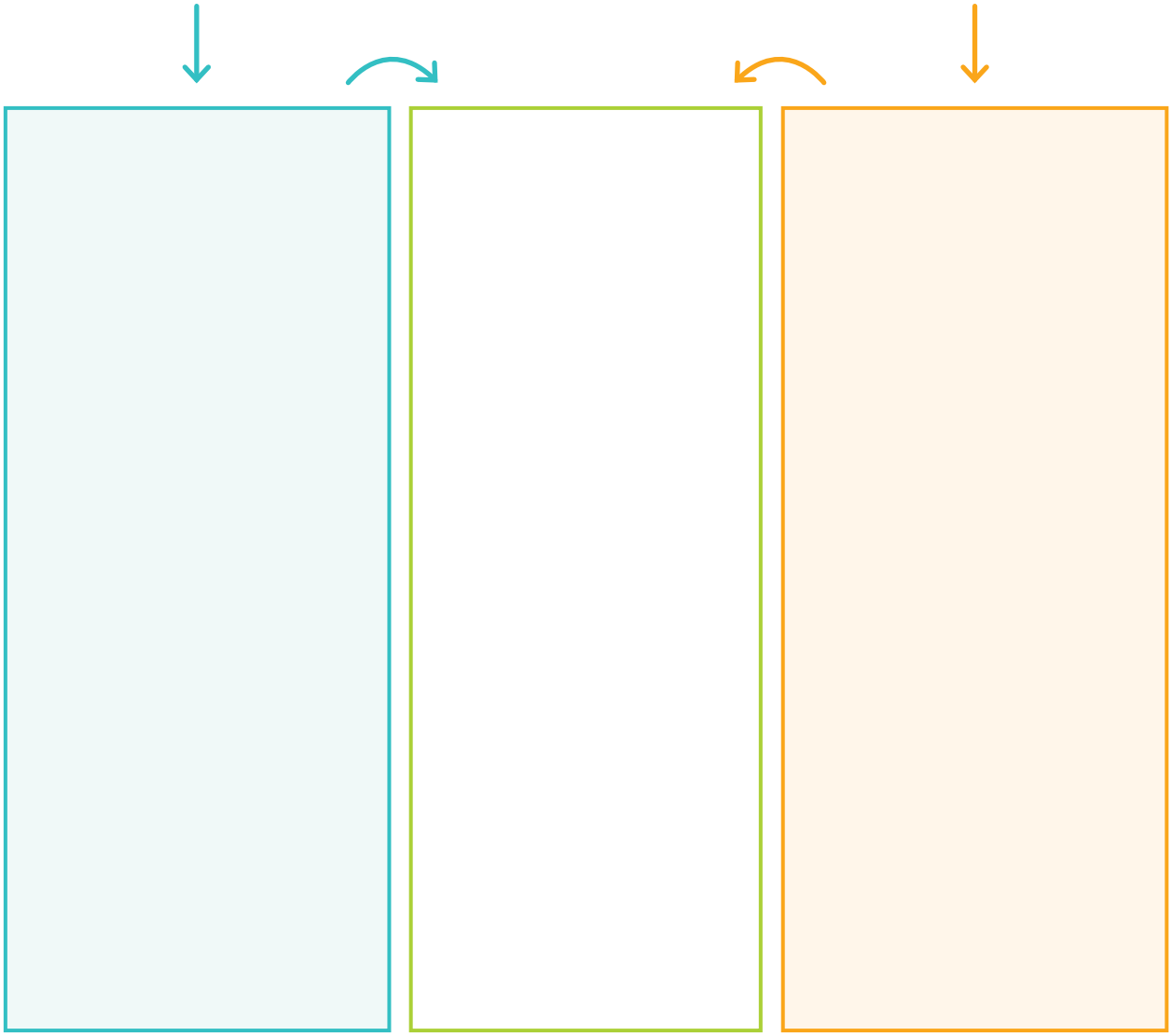
Comparison Chart

A: **Vs.** **B:**



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Sequential Organizer

First:

Next:

Then:

Lastly:

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Story Mapping

Setting/Time:		
Main Character(s):		
Episode(s):		
Problem	**Solution**	**Outcome**
Reaction:		
Theme (Main idea):		