

Understanding concepts through texts



Teaching strategies for reading comprehension

Best for:

- Year level: 4–9
- Phase of learning: surface and deep

Overview

<p>Description</p>	<p>Students establish or deepen their understanding of a concept through connecting to their existing knowledge, reading relevant texts to deepen their understanding, and then synthesising their increased understanding of the concept.</p> <p>A concept is a big, abstract category used to classify sets of objects, events, ideas, characteristics or features, for example ratios, food chains, salutogenesis, democracy, cultural greetings, system, context or point of view. Concepts allow students to generalise over a large group of objects, events, ideas or features and to make distinctions between them. New objects, events, ideas or features can be integrated into familiar concepts or prompt the creation and use of new concepts.</p> <p>The concept and associated words and phrases become important vocabulary items. For example, the concept of food chain is associated with words such as nutrients, energy, ecosystem, producers, consumers and decomposers; the concept of point of view may be associated with vocabulary including narrator, character, focaliser, omniscient, limited, first person, second person and third person.</p>
<p>Learning focus (based on National Literacy Learning Progression)</p>	<p>Comprehension</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • locate information or details embedded in a text (UnT7) • monitor the development of ideas (UnT7) • identify main idea and related detail in moderately complex texts (UnT8) • build meaning by actively linking ideas from several print or digital texts (UnT9) • interpret abstract concepts integrating complex ideas (UnT10) <p>Processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use prior knowledge to read unknown words (UnT8) • connect relevant elements of the text to build meaning (UnT9) <p>Vocabulary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognise how synonyms are used to enhance a text (UnT7) • identify how technical and discipline-specific words develop meaning in texts (UnT8)
<p>Teacher preparation</p>	<p>Know the concept that students need to acquire. Select several texts about the concept and include at least one text with a non-example of the concept, e.g. historical accounts that exemplify democracy versus fascism. The texts may be multimodal or mainly written, depending on the nature of the concept.</p> <p>Consider and highlight (for your own reference) the relevant objects, ideas, events, parts, elements or features that contribute to an understanding of the concept. This supports you to guide and facilitate group work and whole-class discussions.</p>

Suggested implementation

1. Introduce a concept and explain to students that they will be reading texts about the concept.
2. Tap into students' background knowledge by asking them to brainstorm objects, events, ideas, characteristics or features related to the concept. Write or type these on a chart.
3. Ask for non-examples of the concept, that is objects, events, ideas or features that do not represent the concept or represent a different but related concept, for example if exploring point of view, clarify how it is different from character; if exploring ratio, contrast it with percentage. Use the non-examples to challenge and refine understanding of the target concept.
4. Read the texts, highlighting further objects, events, ideas or features. Model this process if necessary.
5. Discuss the initial brainstorming and synthesise the deeper understanding of the concept that has been acquired. The synthesis could be in the form of a definition, short descriptive report or relevant concept web.
6. Encourage students to self-evaluate their understanding of the concept. For example, students may locate consider other relevant texts and decide whether they exemplify the concept.

Variations

- A Read some texts aloud where this may support students. Alternatively, organise students to work in groups and give a different text to each group. Groups can then share their responses with other groups. The jigsaw method would work well here. See the search results for '[The Jigsaw Method](#)' or the *Reading Rockets*, 'Jigsaw' webpage: www.readingrockets.org/strategies/jigsaw.
- B At step 4 above, use a semantic features analysis (see *Rockets*, 'Semantic Features Analysis' webpage: www.readingrockets.org/strategies/semantic_feature_analysis) or a relevant form of concept web to consolidate and deepen understanding of the concept.
- C Introduce students to other ways of visualising concepts and vocabulary, especially:
- Frayer charts
 - NSW Department of Education 'Frayer diagram' webpage: <https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningActivity/Card/553>
 - Winsconin Department of Public Instruction 'Frayer model' webpage: https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/ela/bank/6-12_L.VAU_Frayer_Model.pdf
 - Concept definition map, see the Scholastic webpage 'Using a concept definition map': <http://teacher.scholastic.com/reading/bestpractices/vocabulary/pdf/concept.pdf>.



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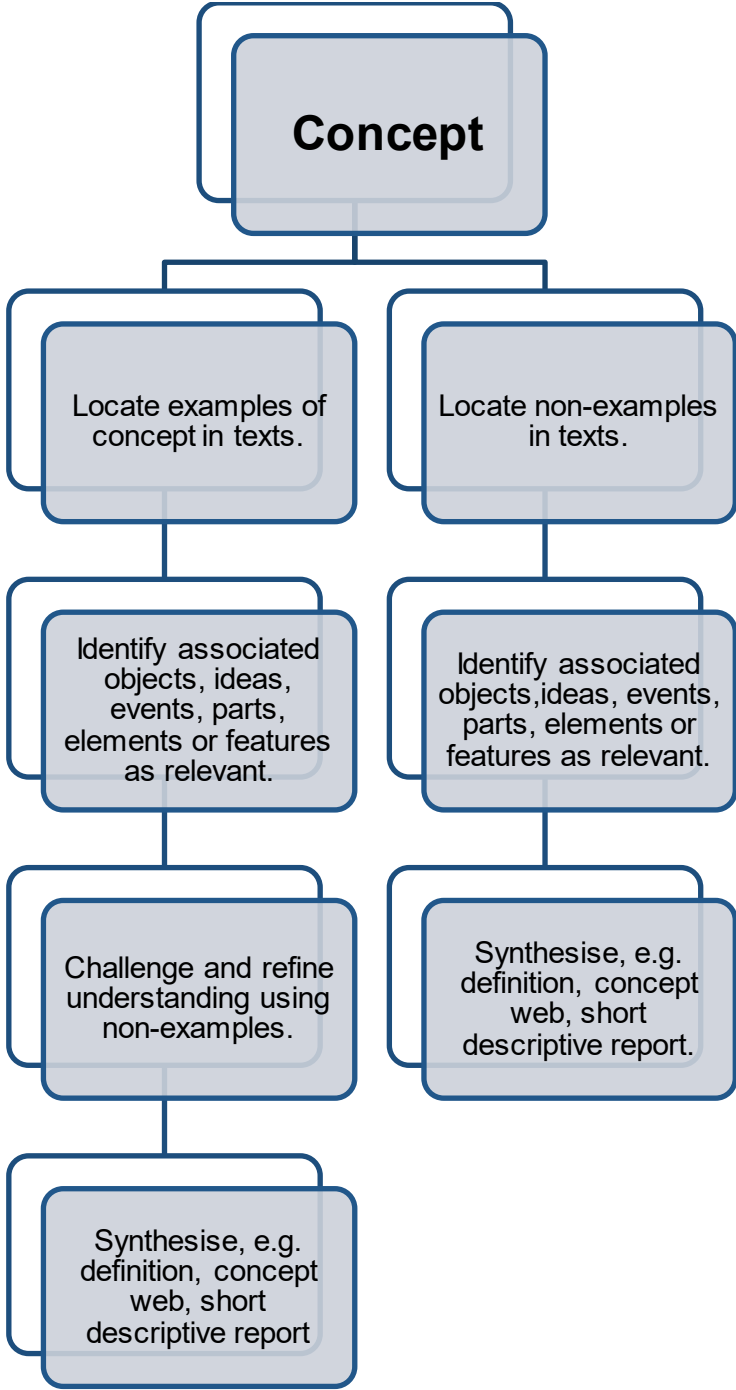
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Appendix 1: A process for understanding concepts through texts



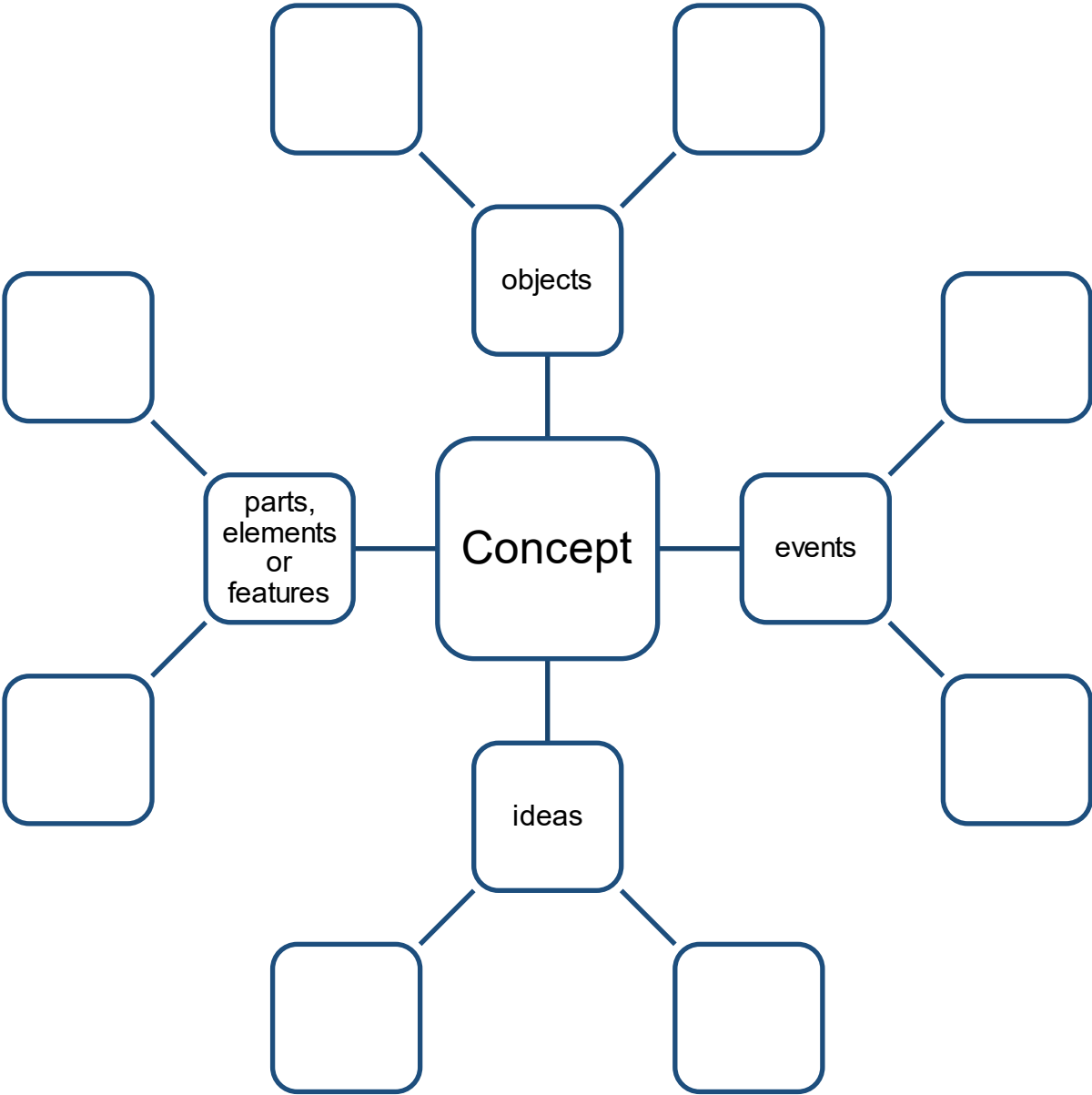
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Appendix 2: Example of a concept web

When students produce their own concept web, they need only use the relevant headings from objects, events, ideas, characteristics and features.



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