

## **STRATEGY: *Essential Summaries* ©**

*An Intensified Teaching Strategy Designed to Help Underprepared Students Accelerate their Mastery of Academic Vocabulary and Background Knowledge*

### **BACKGROUND**

*Essential Summaries* is pre-reading explicit teaching strategy designed as a support for successful comprehension of content area texts by accelerating the building of essential vocabulary, concepts, and background knowledge.

Many important summaries can be taught using this strategy. It is not time consuming to implement and is powerful in its impact. Teachers can identify a summary for each major concept and bank of information to be taught for the school year. Using the entire *Essential Summaries* strategy, underperforming students would certainly have the advantage of added support for development of excellent comprehension skills

### **SKILLS ADDRESSED**

1. Reading comprehension of content area texts
2. Heightened understanding of the concept of summarization

### **PREREQUISITES**

1. Some minimal background in the subject of the text to be read. (Building a strong background in the subject--including vocabulary knowledge are components of the *Essential Summaries* strategy.)

### **STEPS INVOLVED**

1. Beginning weeks before the formal study of a unit, students participate in fun and engaging activities related to the core and deep ideas of the subject to be studied---activities that result in exciting their curiosity and stimulating their intellect. For example, prior to the study of the U.S. Constitution, students are involved in the use of music, poems, poignant stories and non-fiction accounts connected to the exploration of *human freedom* as it manifests itself in students' lives and in the history of their various cultural heritages.
2. The teacher identifies three summaries of approximately one-two paragraphs (see examples below) of important concepts and information of a specific topic in a chapter, unit or section of a text to be read. For example: three summaries on the subject of *oceans*. These summaries are often found in textbook Teachers' Guides or student texts at the beginning or end of chapters and units. Appropriate summaries are also found in district and state subject area curriculum guides.
3. The summaries are quickly edited so that they contain only essential information, and their length and rhythmic flow make them memorable when read aloud.
4. The summaries are written on separate charts-- #1, #2, #3.
5. The teacher identifies all vocabulary that students will need to know for the text selection. He prepares to introduce these words to students for study.
6. **Without** referring students to the specific chapter or unit in their textbook--**(you want the text to be fresh and engaging for students when you distribute it for the first time after all the pre-reading lessons)**, gradually,

over a period of time, the teacher introduces the subject of the text, telling students how they will soon be studying and reading about this subject. Using various media and resources--books, video, pictures, interviews, music, photographs, poetry etc., he connects the subject to students' knowledge and interests. He uses teaching strategies such as *Dancing Definitions*, *Synonym Triplets*, and other explicit approaches to teach to mastery some of the most important words and concepts. *All of the above is accomplished using only clusters of minutes of time over a period of weeks.*

7. After this period of student engagement with the subject to be studied and increased vocabulary and background knowledge, the first performance of *Essential Summaries* is scheduled.

8. With the chart of the first summary taped to the board and with the bottom half taped up to cover the top half, the teacher begins the performance--(the curtain goes up). He reminds students of how they have been exploring the subject through vocabulary, pictures, videos, books, discussions etc. Then, he announces that he has something that he wants to read to them. With some drama (not too much), he uncovers the chart.

Modeling the voice expression of an engaging reader, but with a much slower pace and with deliberation and emphasis on certain words, the teacher reads the summary to the class. (the students do not read along). He is on stage in a dramatic performance. His performance is dignified. It is not at all supposed to be humorous or overly rhythmic or dramatic. It does not take away from a focus on the meaning of the summary. His use of subtle rhythm in his enunciation and emphasis makes the reading memorable.

After reading it once, he pauses a few seconds as he reflects on the chart and makes some gesture of finality-of his completing his recitation (the performance is over). Then he turns up the chart to hide the text (or removes the chart from the board where it was taped) and with **NO DISCUSSION** of the chart he just read, he goes on to another classroom activity.

9. The following day--Day 2-- the performance begins again. The curtain goes up. The teacher gives his same brief introductory statements reminding the students how they have been studying this subject using pictures, books, videos, etc.. He then pulls the chart down and reads it as he did the previous day (with the same deliberate, but excellent voice expression). After the reading, again, he pauses and makes some gesture--some acknowledgment that he is finished- as he looks at the chart (end of the performance). Then **WITH NO DISCUSSION**, he just covers the chart again and goes on to another activity.

10. On the third day, in spite of friendly protests by the students!, the teacher repeats the performance—the introduction and chart reading of the previous two days. (they really want the teacher to read it again). Students will, no doubt chime in, having memorized the selection and some specific parts where the teacher has enunciated strongly or done some other memorable inflection or action.

11. After this third reading of the same chart, the teacher engages students in a discussion of the essential information and concepts in the passage. The discussion refers students to the larger textbook selection on the subject. Students are reminded that they are to look for these essential points in the text as they read.

12. Teacher guides students in analysis of the text and reading the text using one or more of the comprehension strategies taught.

### **RELATED LEARNING PRINCIPLES**

1. The use of rhythm, recitation, and repetition to aid memory and reveal and internalize patterns.
2. Novelty and ritual aid in learning and retention.
3. Some children of certain cultures tend to respond more to things in terms of the whole as opposed to isolated parts.
4. Many underperforming students do not have the background knowledge that the curriculum expects---the type of background knowledge that other students have gradually learned since they were very young children. This need for increased background knowledge in the subject of the curriculum is a major factor in poor reading comprehension.

### **Some Examples of Essential Summaries *Recitations to Accelerate the Building of Academic Background Knowledge***

**The summaries below were taken from common curriculum guides or textbooks, with only slight adaptations.**

### **OCEANS**

#### ***Recitations***

#### *Days 1, 2, and 3*

Oceans cover three-fourths of the earth's surface, but compared with the mass and volume of the whole earth, they are really only thin films on parts of the outer surface. The four largest oceans (Atlantic, Pacific, Indian, and Arctic) are connected, though each has its own features of water circulation, climate, and marine life. The ocean bottoms are punctuated by mountain ranges, active and extinct volcanoes, and deep trenches.

#### *Days 4, 5 and 6*

The ocean tides are caused mainly by the gravitational pull of the moon on the earth. The gravitational attraction of the sun also affects tides and is especially strong when the sun, moon, and earth are aligned in one plane. The sun-earth and earth-moon revolutions are not synchronized, but each is regular in its timing. Tides that are very high or low can be predicted by calculating the times at which the sun and moon together will exert the strongest and weakest effects on the earth.

*Days 7, 8, and 9*

Waters circulate primarily because of winds and solar heating. The direction that these currents follow is caused by the earth's rotation. As the earth rotates, its ocean waters circulate past the continents in patterns that determine global climatic conditions because air that passes over oceans often is warmer or cooler than air that passes over continental surfaces.

A Background Summary for Studying *Air Pressure* (Day 1)

A gas is a substance such as air that is neither a solid nor a liquid at ordinary temperatures. The molecules of a gas are in constant motion. When a gas is compressed, its molecules are contained in a smaller area. They collide more frequently with the walls of the container, so the pressure increases. The greater the force, the greater the pressure. The greater the pressure in a gas, the smaller its volume.

A Background Summary for Studying *Animal Life Primary Grades* (Day 1)

There are more than a million different, named animals in the world, but scientists think that there could be four times as many that have not yet been discovered. Animals have certain things in common—they breathe, feed, grow, and have babies—but they also have many differences. To help people talk about and study animals, they have been divided into six groups.