

PRONOUN BOXES

*Including “Pronoun-Like” Possessive and Demonstrative Adjectives
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Pronoun Boxes employs explicit lessons and practice aimed at the accelerated acquisition of the habit of immediately identifying the antecedents of pronouns and the nouns that some adjectives describe as one reads narrative and expository texts.

Summary

An often overlooked factor in students’ poor reading comprehension is incorrect or incomplete reasoning and reflection connected with anaphoric (see “Background Notes” at the end of this paper) relationships of various kinds. **Pronoun Boxes** focuses on types of anaphora associated with pronouns and some adjectives. Its intensified culture-centered approach provides explicit teaching and practice aimed (rhythmic repetitive, teacher modeling) at the accelerated acquisition of the habit of immediately identifying the antecedents of pronouns and the nouns that some adjectives describe as one reads narrative and expository texts.

Statement of Purpose to Students

“Today I want to demonstrate a way of thinking that will help you develop the habit of reflecting on the antecedents of pronouns as you read and the nouns that some adjectives describe. As you acquire this habit, you will have better reading comprehension—the end goal of all reading.”

Skills Addressed

- Reading comprehension
- Increased awareness of the connection between the correct identification of pronoun antecedents and some “pronoun-like adjectives” and the comprehension of texts.

Prerequisites

- Understanding of pronouns and adjectives and their functions as parts of speech.
- In-class experiences of demonstrations and discussions of many examples of how authors use anaphora, especially, pronouns.

Related Cultural and Brain/Mind Learning Principles

Novelty and Attention

Effective teachers of African American students provide a rich balance of novelty and ritual to gain and keep students’ attentiveness
Caine and Caine. [Making Connections: Teaching and the Human Brain](#)

Rhythm, Recitation and Repetition

The use of these three *Touching the Spirit* Teaching and Learning Patterns are essential African American cultural learning principles
Mann, A. [Touching the Spirit](#)

Teacher Modeling of Skills and Processes

Mann, A. Touching the Spirit

“The brain seeks patterns--it is designed to perceive and generate patterns.

Caine and CAine Making Connections: Teaching and the Human Brain

“Wholes taught before parts are recalled better. Our mind recalls best with context, a global understanding, and complete pictures to remember.” Jensen, Teaching with the Brain in Mind

Steps Involved

(View the Video Demonstration)

1. Select an excerpt from a text familiar to students that includes at least five pronouns or possessive or demonstrative adjectives and at least two characters who speak (see examples below);
2. Use examples from familiar books to teach students the meanings and functions of nouns, pronouns, and antecedents.
3. Teach students to quickly recognize pronouns in texts using the recitation “Pronoun Definitive Statement” and drills using dry erase board and flash cards. (See “Pronoun Definitive Statement” below)
4. Students observe the teacher in her performance on Day 1 and Day 2. On Day 3 they take part in the “Pronoun Boxes” performance.
5. After the series of three teacher performances students lead “Pronoun Boxes” performances.
6. Students practice “Pronoun Boxes” in small groups.
7. Students complete independent work activities

EXPLANATORY NOTES

1. “Pronoun Boxes” is a *Touching the Spirit* one-two minute academic performance teaching strategy
2. Use the same text for three performances
For example:
Monday 9:15—9:16 (one minute)
Tuesday 9:15—9:16 (one minute)
Thursday 9:15—9:16 (one minute)
3. The teacher is an actor on stage. She is not interacting with the “audience”. There is no discussion until after the third performance.
4. Curtain goes up
5. She reads with deliberate pacing, demonstrating reflective thinking about the pronoun antecedents when she comes to each box.
6. She indicates the end of the performance with a nod of head and “um-mm-mm”.
7. The curtain goes down
8. During the third performance, students join in.
9. Teacher leads a discussion afterwards.
10. Students practice with independent work and using teacher’s charts in small groups.
11. The next week teacher begins again with another text and three performances of that text.

Pronouns and Their Antecedents Recitation Chart

All Students

Nouns are words that name
people, places,
and things--- or qualities.
Pronouns are words

that are used instead of nouns.
I, you, he, she, it.
We, they-- them, and us.
Her, and him
Mine and theirs
ours and yours
and his and hers—and his and hers

Whenever I see a pronoun,
I'll look for its antecedent!
I'll look for its antecedent!

One Outspoken Child:

What's an antecedent?

All Students

An antecedent is the noun
that the pronoun replaced.

The Possessive and Demonstrative Adjectives recitation below is begun in 2nd grade and above after students have memorized the above recitation for pronouns and their antecedents

Possessive and Demonstrative Adjectives Recitation Chart

Possessive Adjectives
describe nouns.
They show ownership.
My, your, her, his,
its, our, and their

Demonstrative Adjectives
demonstrate or point out.
This, that, these, those

Examples

“Loritha is one of the girls on a jump rope team. Ms. Harris is the coach of the team. Dawn is another girl on the team. Koya is Loritha’s little sister. Loritha and Koya are walking toward the school gym, coming to a jump rope contest that includes Loritha’s team.”



Ms. Harris saw them approaching.

“Loritha,” she said when they reached her.

“ We tried to get in touch with you this morning.

Dawn called several times, but your line was busy.”

Background Notes

Anaphora: ə náfəərə Anaphora is a reference to a word or phrase used earlier, especially to avoid repeating the word or phrase by replacing it with something else such as a pronoun.

*Readers must deal with anaphoric relationships in everything they read... In the sentence, "Eric yanked the door open and he stormed into the room, "he" is the anaphoric term for the antecedent, Eric. In "The puma gracefully leaped from the tree. The sleek cat was a natural predator," sleek cat is the backward reference replacement for puma. In "We ducked when they shouted 'Fore!' This can, at times, be a dangerous game," This is the anaphoric term for the unstated antecedent, golf. In "They were really wild today. My class was just about out of control," the forward reference term They is encountered before the word class to which it refers. While there are many kinds of anaphora, the most familiar are the pronouns. Dale D. Johnson, *Developing Comprehension of Anaphoric Relationships in the: Reading, Thinking, and Concept Development*; Eds. Theodore L. Harris and Eric J. Cooper.*

******Some words can function as pronouns and adjectives. For example, in the phrase, "that girl" "that" is an adjective, but in the phrase, "That is his name", "That" is a pronoun. Because the purpose of the *Pronoun Boxes* strategy is to help students become more aware of anaphora, the only adjectives used in this strategy are what will be called "pronoun-like adjectives", not the more concrete, highly descriptive adjectives.

Here are some examples of "pronoun-like adjectives" that can be included in this strategy: possessive adjectives (probably the most commonly used for this strategy) "my", "her", and "their"; demonstrative adjectives "this", "that", "these", "those"; and interrogative adjectives "which" and "what".

Similar to pronouns, these adjectives sometimes cause poor reading comprehension if the nouns that they describe are not correctly identified.

e.g. In the phrase, "That girl" the reader needs to determine which girl the adjective "that" is describing.