Read Aloud a Mentor Historical Fiction Story 2

1. Focus

Introduce the Mentor Historical Fiction Story

Say: Today I’m going to read you a historical fiction story, “Building the Transcontinental Railroad: Blasting Through the Sierra Nevadas.”

Ask: What does the title tell you? What can you predict about the setting, the themes, and the historical period that might be part of this story? Do you have any idea who the characters might be? Allow students to share their predictions.

If your class includes English learners or other students who would benefit from vocabulary and oral language development to comprehend the narrative, use “Make the Mentor Text Comprehensible for ELs.”

Read Aloud the Mentor Historical Fiction Story

Read aloud the text, stopping at some or all of the places indicated (or at other points you choose) to highlight key features of a historical fiction story:

1. Dialogue sounds realistic for the characters’ situation and setting.
2. Historical fiction can be told in either first or third person point of view; has at least one main character who deals with a conflict.
3. At least one main character deals with a conflict.

Dialogue

Page 19, after third paragraph. Say: Dialogue helps me understand what characters are like. I really understand the hardships faced by the Chinese railroad workers when I read Wen’s comments to Chang. He says he is freezing, and the authors say that his teeth are chattering as he speaks. I understand the men’s feeling of hopelessness when Wen comments that at this rate they’ll be “chopping at the same piece of rock for the rest of our lives.”

Conflict

After reading page 20. Say: After reading this page, I now have a better idea of what the story conflict is. It is taking a long time to build the tunnel. Meanwhile, Chang, Wen, and the other workers suffer because of the working conditions and the hard labor they have to do. Sometimes in a story the conflict is between characters. Sometimes it is a problem that a character has within himself or herself. And sometimes the conflict is between the characters and nature. The conflict in this story seems to be between the characters and nature, and it’s definitely related to the historical period because today workers don’t have a problem blasting through rock to build roads and train tracks.

Point of View

Page 20, after second paragraph. Say: I know this historical fiction story is being told in the third person when I read the first paragraph. Chang is the
main character, but the narrator uses his name instead of the pronoun I. This narrator is not a character in the story. The third person narrator knows about all the characters’ words and actions, not just his own. This is one advantage of a third person point of view. It lets the writers give me general information about the characters and their situation, such as “Workers on the West Coast . . . would build a train track headed east.”

Conflict

Page 23, after fifth paragraph. **Say:** I just read that an engineer for the railroad company has tried a way to solve the problem of building a tunnel through the Sierra Nevada Mountains. He has tried to blast through the rock. But this didn’t work well and it seems that some men were trapped by the blast. Stories include different events that tell how characters try to solve the conflict. The events continue until finally they find a solution. I expect that Chang might have something to do with the solution, since he is one of the main characters.

2. Rehearse

**Respond Orally to the Mentor Historical Fiction Story**

After reading, invite students to discuss their own ideas about and reactions to the story by asking such questions as:

• *What did you visualize as you listened to the part of the story that describes Chang and Wen rescuing the three men trapped inside the tunnel?*

• *How would you feel if you were digging the tunnel?*

Model the following sentence frames to supports ELs and struggling students:

• *I visualized ______.*

• *If I were working on the Transcontinental Railroad, I would feel ______.*

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

**Say:** As you work on your own historical fiction story, keep in mind that the dialogue must sound authentic to the character, the time period, and the setting. You can tell your story through the first person or the third person point of view. You need to have a conflict that carries the story along as the characters try to solve the conflict.

Ask students to write a paragraph describing what they visualize based on the details provided in the mentor text. Encourage them to visualize using multiple senses, recreating the sights, sounds, smells, and other sensory details the story evoked.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to share what they visualized.

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**Make the Mentor Text Comprehensible for ELs**

**Beginning**

Use the illustrations in the text to teach vocabulary related to the story, for example, workers, train, tracks, railroad, mountain, rocks, and tunnel. Label the photos with self-stick notes.

**Intermediate**

Use the pictures in the text as you give students an overview of the story. **Say:** This historical fiction story is about men from China. The men helped build the first railroad across the United States. The men worked hard. They had to dig through mountains. First, they used tools to dig through rocks by hand. Then they used explosives. They blasted the rocks.

**Advanced**

Involving students in a discussion of building railroad tracks through a mountain. Show students a map of the United States and the route of the Transcontinental Railroad. **Ask:** Have you ever ridden a train through a tunnel? What was it like? What do you know about building a railroad through a mountain? What do you know about the Transcontinental Railroad?

**All Levels**

If you have students whose first language is Spanish, share the following English/Spanish cognates to help them understand the lesson focus: explosives/los explosivos; rock/la roca; tunnel/el túnel.