Take Risks to Create Voice in an Informational Text

1. Focus

Explain Using a Story to Create Voice in an Informational Text

Say: Sometimes writers of research reports and other informational texts decide to introduce their topics in a way that could be called risky, with a fictional story example instead of a straight factual opening. The risk is that you might confuse readers about what is real and what is imagined. However, if you use a story carefully, you can benefit by drawing readers in with a strong voice and an interesting story. Today we’re going to discuss an example of an historical fiction story line that introduces an informational text about events that occurred thousands of years ago.

Model How Writers Use a Story to Create Voice in an Informational Text

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Ask students to listen for elements of storytelling as you read the text aloud.

The year is 200 c.e. In Capua, Italy, a town 130 miles (209 kilometers) south of Rome, General Marcus Avellinus is having dinner at home, surrounded by friends and family.

“I want to show you something I bought at the marketplace in Rome,” the general tells them. He holds up a thin, shimmering, bright red material. No one at the dinner has ever seen a cloth like this before. They all stare at it in amazement.

Modeling Text

Say: This is part of the introduction to the research report about the Silk Road. The writer sets the story at a time and place when a Roman general might have brought Chinese silk to Italy for the first time. The story shows how remarkable it must have been for people in Europe to discover this new fabric as a result of their travels. It uses elements of writing that are more often used in fiction, such as imagined characters and dialogue, to tell a story. I can see that the writer is taking a risk by telling this story instead of starting in with facts about the history of the Silk Road. However, this story really grabs my attention and presents a strong, creative voice so that I want to keep reading.
**2. Rehearse**

**Practice Using a Story to Introduce an Informational Text**

Display the practice text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

Ivory, metalwork, horses, and more came from Europe and the Middle East. Tea, paper, and ceramics came from the East. Spices, furs, jade, gold, and silver came from both directions to be traded. By far the most important commodity was silk.

**Practice Text**

Ask students to create a short fictional scene based on one or two details of this excerpt. Invite them to imagine that they are introducing readers to the information with a few lines of historical fiction. Say that they may invent a scene and even characters that could have existed. For example, they could imagine how traders in both Europe and the East would treat the valuable materials that the text describes. Students should write down their sentences and be prepared to read and explain them to the class.

**Share Practice Sentences**

Bring students together and invite them to read aloud their sentences. Ask them to explain how they used the elements of storytelling to establish the writer’s voice and set up the information. Record sample student sentences and post as models for students to use. Use the following questions to encourage discussion:

- How did you select the details and characters you used in your story?
- How does your story illustrate the topic in a way that facts might not?

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**3. Independent Writing and Conferring**

**Say:** We just learned that writers of research reports can use a story to introduce their topics. Although this can be risky, a writer may choose this strategy to help readers understand the importance of an informational topic. As you write, consider using this strategy to establish a strong voice and help your audience connect to your topic.

Encourage students to keep this and other recent mini-lessons in mind as they draft or revise their reports. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of author’s craft strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

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**4. Share**

Bring the class together. Invite volunteers to report on their progress and to discuss author’s craft elements they have been incorporating into their writing.

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**Strategies to Support ELs**

**Beginning and Intermediate**

Beginning and intermediate ELs are not ready to work on this skill. While other students work on the practice activity or write independently, meet one on one with students to support developmentally appropriate skills based on their independent writing and language level. For example, you may want to work with students’ identification of story elements that are sometimes used in research reports, such as dialogue in quotation marks or descriptive language.

**Advanced**

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the practice activity. Model generating oral sentences that create a story about an informational topic using the following sentence frames. Display the sentences on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Then ask students to generate additional sentences of their own using the same or similar sentence frames.

*Imagine that _______.
A person living at that time might have seen _____.*

**All Levels**

If you have students whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: *historical/histórico(a); introduction/la introducción.*