Recognize the Problem-and-Solution Text Structure

1. Focus

Explain Problem-and-Solution Text Structure

**Say:** All stories include a problem-solution text structure. However, in the case of historical fiction stories, setting up the problem requires an additional step. The author must include the historical background information that sets up the problem.

Model Setting Up a Problem in Historical Fiction

Read (or reread) pages 18–20 from “Building the Transcontinental Railroad: Blasting Through the Sierra Nevadas.” Note: You may want to use the interactive whiteboard resources to display the pages so that students may read along.

**Say:** The authors develop the problem over these three pages. Chang and Wen’s work is so hard that they are suffering. When Wen says, “We are going to be chopping at the same piece of rock for the rest of our lives,” we learn that the tunneling is not going well. The story takes place in March of 1867, and the author has created a problem that makes sense in this time period. Power tools did not exist yet in 1867. That explains why the workers are having such a hard time digging a tunnel and why they have no heat or light. This particular problem is only relevant in a historical fiction story.

Practice Identifying the Problem and Solution in Historical Fiction

Read page 23 and ask students to listen for an event in which someone tries to solve the problem.

**Say:** Mr. Howden has tried to blast through the rock. The rock did break up, but men were trapped. The problem is not solved yet.

Create a Class Anchor Chart about Historical Background Information, Problems, and Solutions

**Say:** Let’s create a chart identifying the problem and the events that lead to the solution of the problem.

On chart paper, work with students to list the main problem in the story and the historical background for it.
Historical Background that Sets Up the Problem

The story takes place before power tools were invented and explosives were widely used.

Story Conflict: Digging through the mountains is difficult and is taking too long. Workers are suffering because of the hard work. The train company is worried about the deadline.

Events Leading to a Solution

James Howden uses chemicals to blast through the rock. Men are trapped. Howden makes a better fuse. Howden orders Wen to take the crate of explosives into the tunnel. Chang figures out how to wrap the explosives in a tube and add a fuse to allow more time for the worker to run before it explodes. Chang shows Howden his idea. Chang tries out his idea and escapes unharmed.

Solution: Workers use Chang’s explosives within a tube to blast through the mountain. The railroad project will continue on time.

Sample Historical Fiction Problem-and-Solution Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We learned that a historical fiction story includes problems and solutions, like any other work of fiction. Problems create an interesting plot and make readers care about your characters and want to keep reading. You can help your audience understand your story’s problems and solutions by using signal words and descriptive phrases. However, to fully explain the problems, you’ll need to supply historical background information to set up your story problem.

Encourage students to use the Historical Fiction Problem-and-Solution chart to explore story problem ideas for their historical fiction stories during independent writing time. During student conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Invite two or three students to share the story problems they have developed and the events that will lead to a resolution.

2. Rehearse

Practice Identifying the Problem and Solution in Historical Fiction

Turn and talk. Ask students to work with a partner to discuss historical fiction story ideas they have been working on. Have them discuss the problems and the solutions and the historical background information that sets up the problems. If your class includes English learners or other students who would benefit from vocabulary and oral language development to comprehend the narrative, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

Share Problems, Solutions, and Historical Background Information

Bring students together and invite volunteers to share the problems, solutions, and historical background information they discussed with their partners. Ask the class if the problems and solutions fit the historical period.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Invite beginning ELs to draw pictures of a problem and a solution. Work with students one on one and ask them to tell you about their drawings. Write captions for each picture.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair students with fluent English speakers during the turn-and-talk activity. Provide sentence frames to help students talk about their problems and solutions. For example:

The historical background is ______.
The problem is ______.
One solution could be ______.

All Levels

If you have students whose first language is Spanish, share the following English/Spanish cognates to help them understand the lesson focus: information/la información; problem/el problema; solution/la solución.