

STRATEGY: Pronoun Boxes

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.

From an article by Dale D. Johnson, *Developing Comprehension of Anaphoric Relationships* in the book: Reading, Thinking, and Concept Development; Theodore L. Harris and Eric J. Cooper Editors

PURPOSE

Provides explicit teaching and practice in the acquisition of the habit of immediately identifying the antecedents of pronouns as one reads narrative and expository texts.

SKILLS ADDRESSED

- Comprehension
- Increased awareness of the connection between the correct identification of pronoun antecedents and comprehension of texts.

PREREQUISITES

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

STEPS INVOLVED

Preparation

1. Choose or create a well-written paragraph, about--6-8 lines is usually effective--** from a text that is familiar to students. Students need to know the general content of the text so that they focus on the identification of pronouns and not have to focus on basic understanding of the story or chapter chosen.

***Note: The text can be longer if the rhythm of the recitation/demonstration flows and students' attention remains high. The idea is that students should take in the whole text. The whole excerpt should be a length that makes it fairly easy to remember after three recitation/performances.*

The text chosen should have 7-9 pronouns (try for about 3-5 different ones) referring to at least two or three characters--persons or animals--in a narrative or expository text. Begin with a text where the pronoun antecedents are relatively easy to identify and work up to a text with complicated anaphoric connections.

2. Using a sheet of chart paper or make a chart by taping together a few sheets of large sheets of newsprint used for drawing. To provide context for the excerpt, write at the top, a brief explanation of the background of the story from which the paragraph was taken.
3. Write the lines from the chosen text on the chart paper, leaving a large space between each line.
4. Draw a rectangular box above each pronoun.
5. For elementary grades, on a second sheet of chart paper, write the recitation: Pronouns and Their Antecedents. For secondary grades, write the list of pronouns to be memorized--categorized by type e.g. personal, demonstrative, interrogative etc.

Pronouns and Their Antecedents Recitation

Nouns are the names of people, places, and things.

Boy, girl, house (pause)

Game, store, book (pause)

Morning, zoo, and chil-dren.

Pronouns are the words that we use in place of nouns:

(children point to appropriate people or objects for each pronoun)

I, you--- he, she, it (pause) we and they (pause)

Me, her, him (pause) us, them, and their (pause)

*My and mine (pause) ours and yours (pause) and his and hers—
and his and hers*

Whenever I see a pronoun, I'll look for its ante-ce-dent!

I'll look for its ante-ce-dent!

The Lessons

1. Within the context of an ongoing study of the parts of speech, explain the meaning of nouns and pronouns, using many examples.
2. Extended practice for many days of timed circling of all pronouns on a page of text.
3. Over a period of time demonstrate anaphoric patterns using at least 25 examples from well-known texts.
4. For elementary grades, lead the class in the recitation: Pronouns and Their Antecedents (personal pronouns) using a rhythmic approach that includes pointing to people or objects in the room that each pronoun could represent. For secondary grades, test the quick recitation of the list of pronouns that was to be memorized.
These charts should be learned prior to proceeding to the Pronoun Boxes chart. The purpose here is for students to acquire the habit of good readers --the immediate recognition of pronouns and their antecedents.
5. Begin a performance. (you are on stage and the curtain goes up). The bottom half of the *Pronoun Boxes* chart is taped up to cover the top half.
Teacher and students read the introductory lines together. Then the teacher alone reads the lines of text from the chart adding the antecedent of the pronoun as she gets to each of the pronoun boxes. Model the smoothness and the rhythmic space --the pauses--needed when interjecting the antecedents as you point to the boxes.
Example: "Ms. Harris saw them"- (pause) (points to box above the word them)- "Loritha and Koya" approaching. "Loritha,, she" (pause)--(points to box above the word , she)—"Ms. Harris—said when they"--(points to box above the word, they)—"Loritha and Koya—approached her" (points to box above the word, her)—"Ms. Harris". "We" (points to box above the word we)—"Ms. Harris and Dawn--- tried to get in touch with you" etc.
6. Model this exact same procedure as a "staged" performance for three days with the same text. Provide **absolutely no discussion** after the modeling for two days. At the end of the third day of modeling, teacher and students discuss and check the choice of antecedents, and together draw pictures and write the initials of the speakers in each pronoun box.

7. Model the exact same procedure with a second text selection on a large chart for three days---**no discussion of the process until at the end of modeling on the third day**. After modeling it for three days using a third text selection on a large chart, begin to have the students practice, with your assistance, as well as independently, using the large class charts.
8. The next step is for students to begin to create their own Pronoun Boxes on regular paper at their desks. They are assisted in identifying the type of text excerpts that are effective for this strategy. Then, working alone or in pairs they can choose text from their readers, other textbooks, or trade books to write out and draw boxes over the pronouns and then add pictures and initials of the speaker in each box.
9. Student completion of Pronoun Boxes becomes a daily routine until the immediate identification of antecedents as one reads becomes a habit.

PRONOUN BOXES

Koya Delaney and the Good Girl Blues
HM Imagine Pages 94-95

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."