

TRAIT FOCUS: ORGANIZATION

Lesson Objective

Students organize details into a clear beginning, middle, and ending for an expository paragraph or essay.

A First Step to Organization

Early readers become early writers as soon as they leap from decoding and comprehending written text to actually producing it. This is an important step in their language development—from comprehension to application, the next rung up in Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives.

As early writers begin applying the organizational structures they’ve been exposed to in their reading, they will no doubt already bring an understanding of beginnings, middles, and endings. Even so, they will need to be coached along as they gather their own ideas into a similar structure. It is a good strategy to first begin with a piece of authentic literature as a model, then exercise the student’s reading comprehension, and finally, with the model fresh in their minds, lead them through the organization of their own work.

The book *The Enormous Turnip* by Alexei Tolstoy is an excellent mentor text for utilizing that very strategy. Integrate the following Literature/Writing Connection lesson into your existing curriculum on writing expository paragraphs and essays as a way of bridging the gap between comprehension and application.

Story Overview

Tolstoy retells a timeless European folktale in which a man plants a turnip, encourages it to grow, then gets more than he bargained for. He finds he must recruit the grandmother, who must recruit the granddaughter, who must recruit...

Are there even enough people in the whole village to help him pull that turnip out of the ground?

Putting Things in Order

1. Incorporate the following lesson into the organization step of your expository essay curriculum. After your students have chosen a topic and listed details to include, it is time to organize them into a logical order before writing.
2. Tell your students that every piece of writing has a beginning, middle, and ending. The beginning tells the reader what he or she will be reading about. The middle gives all the information or tells the story. The ending gives final thoughts or wraps up the story.
3. Remind students that expository writing gives information or explains how to do something. Therefore, the beginning should name the topic. The middle should give the steps of how to do the topic or should list all the information about the topic. The ending should give the writer’s final thoughts on the topic.
4. Tell your students they will now see this in action. Read the book aloud, discussing the illustrations and the story’s progression.
5. What is the book’s beginning? (plants turnip) What is the middle? (trying to pull it up) What is the ending? (turnip finally comes out) What were the steps to pulling out the turnip that were covered in the middle? (first grandmother helps, then granddaughter, etc.)
6. Have your students return to their lists of details for their own writing. Keeping the organization of the turnip story in mind, tell them to put a square around the details that should go in the beginning, a circle around those for the middle, and a triangle around those for the ending.
7. Next, have them rewrite their details into a single list down the page, keeping the squares at the top, the circles for the middle, and the triangles for the end. Your writers now have an organizational outline template to use as they begin writing.