

Teacher Commentary – Strategy: Determine Importance

Sample Lesson: Finding Important Information

Grade 2, Melody Blackwell, Teacher, Watkins Nance Elementary School, Richland One School District, Columbia, SC

Joanne Durham, Interviewer (I); Melody Blackwell, Teacher (T)

Segment	Transcript
<b>LESSON INTRODUCTION</b>	<p>I: So thank you, Melody, for sharing your lesson with us, your first graders, here at Watkins Nance Elementary. This lesson today on determining importance was in the context of your study of famous Americans. Tell us a little about what you've been doing with famous Americans.</p> <p>T: We started out in social studies talking about famous Americans, so we talked about those who made a significant impact on our country. They started with George Washington, Rosa Parks, Susan B. Anthony, and Benjamin Franklin.</p> <p>I: And they've been learning about these people, and what made them famous?</p> <p>T: What made them famous.</p> <p>I: So in beginning – and this is the first lesson you've done on determining importance?</p> <p>T: Yes, it is.</p> <p>I: So why did you feel like using these biographies would be helpful for beginning to tackle that very important strategy?</p> <p>T: Because they found that everything they read about that person we were studying was important. So then we had to come up with – OK, this was an excellent lesson, because there's so much that you can learn about that person, but all of it is not the important information that made them famous. So this really channeled in on where they can actually pinpoint why is this person famous? Is he famous because he was born? No. He was famous because of what he did, what he contributed to our country.</p>
<b>CONNECT AND ENGAGE</b>	<p>I: So then in introducing the lesson, your Connect and Engage, talk about some of the things you did and why you did them.</p> <p>T: First, to get them into it. You heard them when we started off, George Washington, George Washington- that's not his last name. So it had them starting to think, there's more than one person named George Washington, and the reason for him being George Washington Carver, what made him so famous, and giving them a visual so they can actually see what was made from them, and for example that scroll that had 100 things on it, you don't realize that so many other things are made from peanuts. And that's particularly dear to my heart, because my daughter is allergic to peanuts! So when I saw that list, oh my gosh, lotion</p> <p>I: Yes, all these things you don't think about every day, thanks to George Washington Carver. So that definitely piqued their interest. It got them interested in doing it. And then you explained to them that this is what you were going to look at, right?</p> <p>T: The difference between interesting details as opposed to the important information which really made them famous.</p>
<b>MODELING</b>	<p>I: Can you talk about how you chose places to stop and model?</p> <p>T: Actually reading and then looking through and doing it myself as to what are the interesting details and what was the important information. And actually pulling it out. And as we got towards the back, I was really surprised that they were actually really channeling in on the important information, just like that. Others still needed help, but that's where the small group comes into play.</p>

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	I: Tomorrow when you'll help them a little bit more.
<b>GUIDED PRACTICE</b>	<p>When you paired the kids up, I noticed that when they were still on the rug and they were looking for what was important, every group was able to read this text, which is not the easiest text in the world. So were the partners put together specifically so that there would be somebody who could read, or you just knew there would be somebody who could do that?</p> <p>T: Yes, and that's why I was left with the two who were kind of on the same reading level, so that's why it was so rewarding to see the other student, who was a higher level reader, go around and assist the other student. He knew he needed a little assistance with the reading part. They kind of know who they're able to help and each role, to help them out with each role.</p> <p>I: So you hadn't actually set them up?</p> <p>T: No</p> <p>I: But there are enough of them who are going to be able to do it that you knew it wouldn't be a problem.</p> <p>I: As you were going around listening to the kids, you found some of them were getting it, but for those who weren't, what kind of things did you talk to them about?</p> <p>T: Well they were still focusing on when he was born. So I asked them, OK, when he was born, was that really why he was famous? Is that important information we really want to know? And they were like, well, no. So I had them start thinking about what is the important thing, why are we talking about George Washington Carver? And that was the key thing. When he died and when he was born, those were the two that they were channeling in on, but then they realized, no that's not the reason why we actually are learning about George Washington Carver, so it channeled their brain to go into a different direction.</p>
<b>INDEPENDENT PRACTICE</b>	<p>I: Why did you choose to have them do the drawing and writing for independent part?</p> <p>T: To check if they understand – so a small assessment for me, so when I get ready to do my small group, I know what I need to work with on that student. It allowed me to see who was actually looking on the chart and who was actually thinking about what was important and what were the little interesting details and getting them to share their thoughts about what was important about GWC.</p> <p>I: As you went around, did you find that they had already chosen a place that they thought was important?</p> <p>T: That's why I pulled this one out. This one he had something else that wasn't related and he couldn't read it to me. So I said let's talk about GWC again, and he really couldn't tell me what was important about GWC, so I took him over to our chart that we created in our lesson, and I read it all for him, because he's one of my students who needs a little assistance with reading. He was able to say, Oh, I have something now. So as I was reading it, he was able to pick his important information and put it on paper.</p> <p>I: Great. So the chart – it's nice when what we chart in the lesson you can actually use to show them how this can help you in your continuing</p> <p>T: writing.</p> <p>T: And this is another one where he got stuck on the interesting detail of what year he went to school, and what year, and then we talked about is that why he was famous, the year he went to school? And he said, no. And then he erased that and kept the first part.</p> <p>I: So sometimes that's a way of letting them work and having the conversation afterwards.</p>

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<p><b>ANALYZING STUDENT WORK</b></p>	<p>I: It looks like from their work that most of them were able to come up with things that were important. Talk about this child because she actually added a little bit of her own</p> <p>T: (reads) He showed farmers how to use peanuts and sweet potatoes. He taught them about other crops to help the soil. He was an inventor.” She was referring back to prior knowledge from someone else we learned about, and she’s saying, Oh, he was an inventor too, he actually invented ways we can use peanuts.</p> <p>I: So that was probably the most sophisticated one, because she actually took it into her own words and something else – but most of the rest did get into – “he studied plants,” “he made peanuts” – well, we might need a little work on that one. He taught students about plants and taught students about farming plants, so they were able to pick out pretty much what was important there. He taught students about plants and farming.</p> <p>I: I love these with the “wow” in the drawing. It says “George Washington Carver studied plants.” Is this them thinking about the different things he made from them, you think?</p> <p>I: Any others that you could tell us a bit more about what was happening as they were writing or anything you did to support them?</p> <p>T: Now with this one, she was able to verbally tell me more so than actually – she would write something different by the time I got back to her. So when she shared, she shared a little bit more than what she has on her paper. So she’s still at the verbal stage where she can tell you about it, but putting it on paper is where we’re still working.</p> <p>I: So that’s good to know as you’re conferring, you see that the thinking is there, but the ability to get it down isn’t necessarily.</p> <p>I: “He made 100 things.” So that stuck with him. I guess with a child like this, what are you thinking next steps?</p> <p>T: Just getting with her, talking even more. She’d probably tell me a little bit more than what she actually wrote down. Getting her to elaborate a bit more and going to the text or to the board to help her out with the charts.</p> <p>T: (reading) They helped make the soil fertile again.</p> <p>I: I think probably some of them didn’t really understand what making the soil fertile again meant, right, so that again I suppose you could build off of what they could to go on to a deeper understanding of why he was so important.</p> <p>I: “He taught for 47 years.” And I think this is a case where interesting and important kind of overlap, don’t you?</p> <p>T: Because at first I think he was thinking, the number of years was significant to him – oh, that’s important information to me. That wasn’t actually one of my key points to stop, but that’s something he shared during our lesson so I added it to the board as well, because it is something that is important.</p> <p>I: Certainly for us as teachers we think that if you teach for 47 years, but I think that is one of those places where it overlaps, and it depends on how he’s thinking about it. I mean teaching for 47 years he was able to make a lot of contributions and do a lot of the research that he did, so really it was important, but it also probably just fascinated the child. And we don’t want to kill that curiosity. I think that’s what’s hard about this, and why I liked it when you said, so what are some of those interesting details, because of course they’re intrigued by the cheese and the ink and we don’t want to lose that.</p> <p>T: Right.</p>
<p><b>SHARING AND CLOSURE</b></p>	<p>I: So when you got to sharing, talk about what you’ve been working with them on in sharing and how they did that today.</p> <p>T: Actually we’ve been working on how to work together, and taking turns was important, and giving them the role of selecting and the one who decides who goes next and the politeness behind it, and they enjoy doing it. They prefer calling on the</p>

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	<p>students instead of me doing it all the time. So giving them that independence, and they did really well. They enjoy it.</p> <p>I: And the language that you taught them was</p> <p>T: “Would you like to share?” And the student will respond, “Yes, I would like to share, thank you.” And then they will find the next person and say, “Would you like to share?” and then it goes forth the same way.</p> <p>I: And some of them called on somebody who doesn’t want to share</p> <p>T: They say, “No would not like to share, thank you.”</p>
<p><b>FINAL REFLECTIONS</b></p>	<p>I: Talk a little about that, about changes you’ve seen over time in their working together.</p> <p>T: They are realizing that they can help each other in different ways. One person may not be able to help as far as reading, but they have strengths in other things. Somebody may be excellent at drawing, so when you’re coming together, you’re teaching one person and that person is teaching you how to do something. So it’s about that “Two heads are better than one” sort of thing. And they actually love it. They know exactly who to go to when they are going to share or work together as a partner and they don’t mind working with others.</p> <p>I: I thought it was very sweet at one point, I’m not sure we caught it on tape but talk about that –</p> <p>T: I saw that – oh wow. He noticed that a student in the front didn’t have a book, and he wasn’t doing anything, and he just politely got up and walked to the other side of the room without me even having to say anything.</p> <p>I: I thought that was really sweet and he helped him through the whole thing, really talked with him, and brought him back into the lesson. So it’s nice to know we have all those other little teachers in the classroom with us.</p> <p>T: Exactly.</p> <p>I: Anything else about the lesson that you want to say?</p> <p>T: With it being the first time doing the lesson, it was challenging. But it was rewarding too because you saw that some of them were actually picking up on the difference between interesting details and important information. So that was an aha for me.</p> <p>I: And maybe being able to kind of tease out the why, why is this important, so that the ones who aren’t getting it begin to understand more what the difference actually is.</p> <p>I: And in a way the first time you’re doing it, it’s almost an assessment of where you are, so you know where you’re going next.</p>
<p><b>SMALL GROUP FOLLOW-UP: LESSON INTRODUCTION</b></p>	<p>I: Today you did the small group lesson with the children – with a small group – while the other kids were trying to continue to think about what was important about Susan B. Anthony on their own. So talk about the purpose of pulling a small group like this?</p> <p>T: The purpose of pulling the small group is really to focus in on the boys and girls who were having difficulty between the two concepts of important information as well as interesting details, and really helping them to see it in a smaller setting, whereas in a bigger setting they kind of go with the flow of everybody else. Then you can actually see what they’re doing and what they’re thinking through what they’re saying.</p> <p>I: So while most of the time you would do a guided reading group that was more focused on how they were putting words together and building up their levels of reading, this is a different kind of small group.</p> <p>T: Today we’re really focused on a strategy, determining importance, as they are reading</p>

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	<p>I: Talk to us about how you came up, by looking at what they did yesterday and what you know about them, talk about how you decided who to put in this group.</p> <p>T: Actually this is not normal group that I have them in, because I normally have them in a guided reading group and 3 of them are in a different group. But as I was looking at the strategy I was introducing, I noticed that as they went to do their independent work, several students needed a little more assistance. For example, this student drew her picture, and she wrote a little bit of words, but you really couldn't tell exactly what she was thinking, because she had to verbally tell you what it is that she was thinking, so I decided to pull her so that I could see what her process was in a smaller group.</p> <p>T: She's a new student, so just actually building her confidence as a reader and a learner, I thought she would fit well with this group as well.</p> <p>I: And she needed some support, right. She wrote, "GWC studied about plants" but you knew from conferring with her yesterday that that didn't come about without a lot of support.</p> <p>T: Right. And then these two, they actually didn't have anything on their paper, so I had to take them over to our anchor chart and point out the important information and help them gather the information point that they wanted to put on their paper. So I knew that they really needed the small group setting so we could focus in on the difference between the two.</p> <p>I: And then these two kids over here –</p> <p>T: Well, these two, they could have gone in this group, but they understood it a little bit better, they were able to pick one from important information and one from interesting details, but now let's chime in on just what's the important information.</p> <p>I: But then you would have had 7 kids in the group, which sort of defeats the purpose of a small group, so sometimes we have to make those choices.</p> <p>I: So then you knew that this group didn't necessarily have to be – it's a flexible group.</p>
	<p>I: So then how did you decide what you were going to actually do in the group?</p> <p>T: This group, I knew they needed a lot of help when it comes to reading the text, and I didn't want to just give them a book and say for them to find the important information, because it was going to be a little overwhelming for them. So I decided to pull out some of the sentences, information from the book, to make it a little more kid-friendly and make them want to tackle the task of finding important information as well as the interesting details.</p> <p>I: And it makes it a little more visual, too, right?</p> <p>T: And hands where they can actually move it from place to place.</p> <p>I: Tactile, OK.</p> <p>I: So the technique you might use in small group might not be identical to what you'd be doing otherwise.</p> <p>T: Right.</p>
<p><b>SMALL GROUP FOLLOW-UP: LESSON REFLECTION</b></p>	<p>I: What did you learn about them in the group?</p> <p>T: Knowing that this is a difficult strategy, I know I will have to do a lot of small group with this group, just to help them understand. Today my agenda was to help them understand that there are some important information, as well as some interesting details. They're still working on, when they go into a text, finding the information that's important and the information that's interesting. But, it takes time. It takes time.</p> <p>I: Were there any things that you thought – a lot of times we figure this out as we're teaching – were there some things that you did that you thought helped them, or were there some things that you thought you wouldn't do again the same way as you were learning from what you did?</p>

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	<p>T: Probably when I was looking here as to their work, keeping in mind the characteristics of each student too. That dynamics really makes a big difference. Not having somebody who's going to take over the whole – kind of melding them together where they have some similarities in some way.</p> <p>I: OK, so the personality parts, when you have one who's going to be real dominant. Or other ways to figure out how to handle that in terms of who gets a turn or how that works, because that child needs to be in a group at some point.</p> <p>T: Some are a little timid, and don't want to say much, but I guess depending on what group they're in – and since I switched them up –</p> <p>I: That's true, if they're not used to being in a group with certain kids, they may not be as comfortable. Could you hand the slip to a particular child so then they know it's their turn to kind of –</p> <p>T: Well, we kind of did it together, but it's getting them to participate.</p> <hr/> <p>I: So what do you think the benefits are of meeting with them in small group?</p> <p>T: I could tell that even though they may not have the concept down, they could start giving that terminology of important information, and I could hear them start to say, no no no, that's the important information, that's the interesting detail. So I can see that it's beginning to click.</p> <p>I: What about the small group helps them to begin to move there – what characteristics of it do you think make it helpful?</p> <p>T: Just being in a smaller setting, having them work hands on with something, with a concept, helps them to get better at what they're doing.</p> <p>I: And getting more of your attention too, right? Ongoing, instead of in the big group where you can't get to everybody all the time.</p> <p>I: So what do you think you'll do next?</p> <p>T: I think I will do more hands on pulling the information out of the text.</p> <p>I: And the talk I think is super important, being able to explain why, because you know, they have to start thinking about, is this what made her famous?</p>